

Ride Name: Cave Basin

Ride Area: Vallecito Lake

Ride Distance: about 10-12 miles round trip

Useful maps: Southwest Colorado Trails, Recreation Topo Map

Difficulty Easy, after a fairly long drive up to the trailhead

Summary of Ride:

This is an easy trail, maybe 5-6 miles long to an lookout point, that takes you into a high altitude basin with sweeping views. There is one boggy area that has been improved with gravel over the years but can still be a little deep, other than that there are no other hazardous areas on the trail. There are numerous places to ride off trail once in the basin as well. It is very exposed country, so this one is best left to a day with little chance of thunderstorms. It is a long haul to get to the trail with a starting elevation of about 11,400 feet. It's well worth the effort to ride this scenic trail with some of the best high mountain views in the region. August is especially beautiful when the wildflowers peak. Elk and deer are often seen, as well as grouse and the occasional group of ptarmigans.

There is a beautiful overlook that is pictured, looking down into Emerald Lake, but it is difficult to find. If you have a GPS, the coordinates for the overlook are:

Lat: 037° 33' 11.50 " N

Long: 107°28' 02.88" W

Driving Directions:

This trail is located near the end of Middle Mountain road, which is on the east side of Vallecito Lake. From Main Avenue in Durango head north and turn on 15th Street right a few blocks to Florida Road, (CR 240). Stay on Florida Road for 16 miles. Follow signs to Vallecito Lake, turning left on CR 501. Stay on the west side of the lake, do not cross the dam, and stay on 501. Go past the Vallecito work station and bear right, it is still Co Rd 501, to Middle Mountain Rd (Co Rd 2274)... Turn left on Middle Mountain Road. This is a long winding road that ascends to the trailhead, about eight miles. It isn't an obvious trail head, so you need to be looking for it. There is a sign on the left by the road, as well as a Weminuche Wilderness sign. There are some places to pull off and park. Not really a parking lot, but you could get a few horse trailers parked there. About 1/4 to 1/2 mile further, there is a parking area with a fence around part of it. It's not a great place to camp, but there are some very nice meadows to camp in a little over 4 miles up Middle Mountain Road, for out-of-area riders wanting to camp. There are numerous backcountry campsites for those wanting to pack in.



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Map to trailhead from Vallecito:

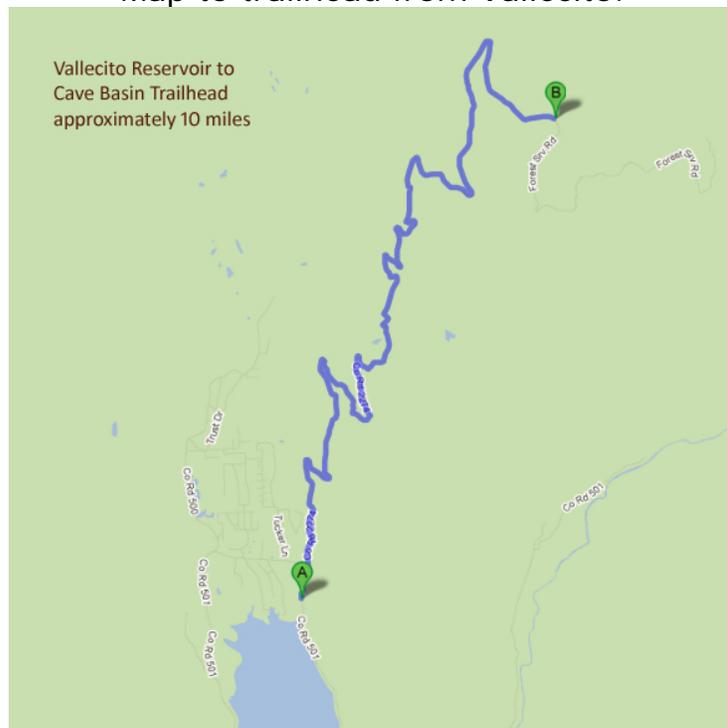


Photo of the parking area:



The ride:





