

Ice Lake Basin

by Dave Cooper



Ice Lake Basin

Undeniably one of the most scenic valleys in Colorado's mountains, Ice Lake Basin, located northwest of Silverton, is also one of my personal favorites. Whether it is to scale some of the magnificent peaks surrounding the basin, or just to spend time photographing the area, I never grow tired of visiting this special place.

Getting to the Trailhead: Two miles north-west of Silverton on US 550 take the South Mineral Creek road (CR 7) for 4.5 miles to a parking area on the north side of the road, directly across from the South Mineral Campground (**TRAILHEAD**).

Hike Statistics:

From the trailhead to Ice Lake, the round trip distance is 7.0 miles with 2500 feet elevation gain. If you include Vermillion and Fuller Peaks, the round trip distance from the trailhead is 12.7 miles with 4600 feet of total elevation gain.

Difficulty: A moderate trail hike to Ice Lake. Some moderate scrambling on scree slopes is required to reach the summits of Vermillion and Fuller.

USGS Quad: Ophir, CO



Hike Description

The Ice Lake Trail starts at the west end of the parking area. Follow this excellent trail as it heads up to the lower basin. As the trail leaves the narrow river canyon a little below Lower Ice Lake, you will be treated to spectacular views of some of the peaks encircling the upper basin.

The trail cuts through the cliffs guarding the upper basin - Golden Horn is visible on the skyline.



Wonderful campsites abound in both the lower and upper basin

Continue past the lower lake, continuing on the trail as it wanders through fields of wildflowers before cutting through a cliff band replete with scenic waterfalls.

The trail wanders through fields of wildflowers

Reach the upper basin and Ice Lake after 3.5 miles and take time to admire your surroundings.

The spectacular colors of the surrounding peaks, red, orange, yellow and purple for the most part, are due to the volcanic origins of the area. Unfortunately, this is also responsible for the less-than-ideal quality of the rock. To climb the peaks in this valley it is often necessary to slog up seemingly endless scree slopes.



The peaks here have the reputation of being some of the most challenging in the State, although with careful routefinding the experienced peak-bagger should have little difficulty climbing most of them.

The views from the summits quickly end any grumbling over the loose rock encountered on the way up.



Ice Lake Basin seen from one of the surrounding peaks

Here I will describe routes to a couple of the more moderate summits - Vermillion Peak (13,894 feet) and Fuller Peak (13,761 feet).

Continue on the trail towards Fuller Lake. Shortly before reaching the lake, look for a gentle ridge on the north side of the lake. A sometimes faint but cairned trail leads up this ridge and into the basin formed by Golden Horn, Vermillion and Fuller peaks.



Vermillion and Fuller Peaks - Fuller Peak is to the left of the obvious saddle, Vermillion to the right

Follow the trail southwest as it heads towards the saddle between Fuller and Vermillion peaks. An ice ax may be necessary, since the approach to the saddle holds snow well into the summer. After the snow has melted the climbers trail should be apparent, switchbacking up the slope to the saddle.

To climb Vermillion Peak, head up the peak's southeast ridge on a climbers trail. The trail tends to stay to

the left side of the ridge until reaching a loose, scree gully directly below the summit block.



Vermillion's summit block - the scree gully used to reach the ridge can be seen to the right in this photo.

Carefully ascend the scree gully to the ridge, then scamper up to the summit and enjoy the views.



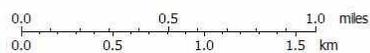
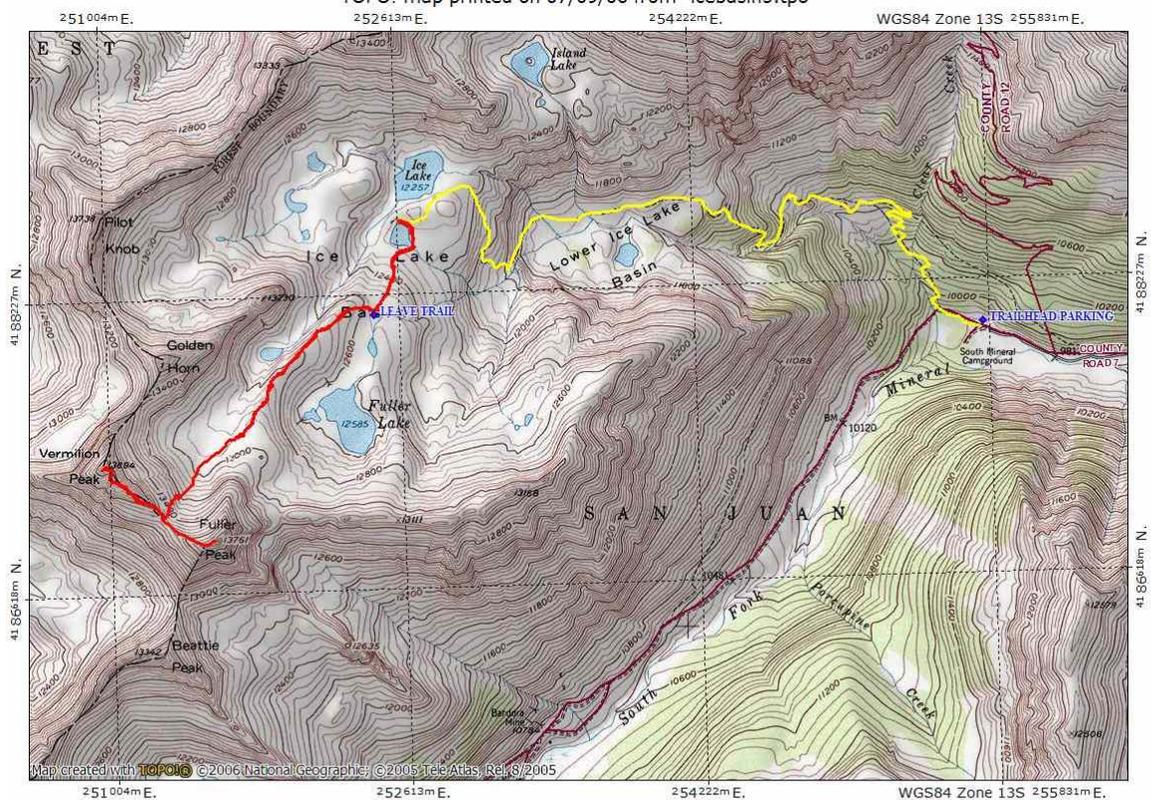
Views of Pilot Knob and Golden Horn taken from Vermillion's slopes

For a climb of Fuller Peak, return to the Vermillion - Fuller saddle and continue up the straightforward ridge to the summit.

Descend by heading back to the saddle and taking the trail down.

If you are interested in climbing some of the other peaks in Ice Lake Basin, see Dave's book "Colorado Scrambles", CMC Press.

TOPO! map printed on 07/09/06 from "icebasin5.tpo"



TN/MN
11°
07/09/06

GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
 TRAILHEAD PARKING: 37,48,24N / 107,46,26W, 9841 feet
 ICE LAKE: 37,48,42N / 107,48,36W, 12283 feet
 LEAVE TRAIL: 37,48,25N / 107,48,42W, 12616 feet
 VERMILLION PEAK: 37,47,57N / 107,49,43W, 13844 feet
 FULLER PEAK: 37,47,45N / 107,49,17W, 13704 feet

