

Salmon Lake

by Dave Cooper



Salmon Lake

With limited trailhead access on the east side of the Gore Range, hikes in this area tend to be long. This week's outing is no exception; an extended but pleasant walk along the Gore Range Trail to access a high mountain lake surrounded by rugged peaks typical of the Gores.

Due to the gentle nature of the Gore Range Trail, this may qualify as one of the easier 16 mile mountain hikes you've ever taken.

If you have time, you may also want to visit the nearby Willow Lakes.

Getting to the Trailhead: From the Silverthorne exit (Exit 205) off I-70, go north and almost immediately turn left (southwest) on Wildernest Road. Go 0.2 miles to Adams Road. Turn right (north) and almost immediately make a left (west) onto Buffalo Mountain Drive. Follow Buffalo Mountain Drive for 0.8 miles to its intersection with Lakeview Drive. Turn right (north) on Lakeview Drive and drive 0.4 miles to Aspen Drive. Turn left on Aspen Drive and continue 0.1 miles to the Mesa Cortina Trailhead Parking area. Note that this trailhead is in a residential area. Please be considerate of the local residents. It would be a shame to lose access to this trailhead.

Hike Statistics: Trailhead to Salmon Lake (11,188 feet): 3100 feet of total elevation gain in 15.8 miles round trip.

Difficulty: An easy but long trail hike.

USGS Quad: Willow Lakes, CO; Dillon, CO

Hike Description

From the trailhead, hike northwest along the Mesa Cortina Trail, crossing an open meadow after 0.1 miles. Make sure to stay on the main trail in this meadow, not taking a branch trail to the left. After 2.6 miles the Mesa Cortina Trail intersects the Gore Range Trail (signed, No. 60) immediately after crossing South Willow Creek. Turn right (north) onto the Gore Range Trail and follow this historic trail as it gently undulates through the forest, crossing several drainages before reaching another signed trail junction 5.8 miles from the trailhead. Shortly before this junction you should catch a few tantalizing glimpses of one of the more impressive peaks in the area, East Thorn Peak (13,333 feet), which rises west of Salmon Lake.

East Thorn Peak on the approach



Mushrooms

Leave the Gore Range Trail here and turn left on the Willow Lakes Trail (No. 36). Note that the USGS map doesn't show this trail junction in the correct spot. After 1.6 miles on the Willow Lakes Trail you will come to another trail junction. The right fork is signed to Salmon Lake (No. 36.1A), our destination. Follow this trail and arrive at the west end of Salmon Lake in a further 0.5 miles.



Salmon Lake framed by the rugged east ridge of Red Peak

