

## The Weehawken Trail by Dave Cooper



*The head of the Weehawken drainage. Potosi is on the left, Teakettle at center.jpg*

Yankee Boy Basin, surrounded by the rugged peaks of Mount Sneffels, Potosi Peak, Teakettle Mountain and Gilpin Peak and home to perhaps the best wildflower display in the State, is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the San Juan Mountains. Neighboring Weehawken Creek Basin, on the other hand, sees little foot traffic in its upper reaches.

I've been fascinated by the Weehawken drainage ever since crossing the saddle between Potosi Peak and Teakettle Mountain to access the north couloir on Potosi Peak (described in my book "Colorado Snow Climbs - A Guide for All Seasons"). On that occasion we only descended a few hundred feet into the basin in order to reach the start of the couloir, but the spectacular terrain surrounding this remote basin demanded a return trip. This autumn we had an opportunity to hike the trail and explore the area in more detail.

While the lower section of the trail into the Weehawken Creek drainage is quite popular, most hikers either turn off to visit the Alpine Mine or turn around at the end of the maintained trail. For the slightly more adventurous, though, an old trail, rough in places,

**Getting to the Trailhead:** From the southern end of the town of Ouray, drive south on US550 for 0.3 mile and turn right onto the Camp Bird Mine road. Cross the upper bridge over the Box Canyon at mile 0.4 and continue on the good dirt road up Canyon Creek to mile 2.6. The signed trailhead will be on your right at a small parking area.

**Hike Statistics:** The established trail (including the side trip to the Weehawken Mine) gains 2700 feet in 3.3 miles one way, ending at the sign in the meadow at 10,810 feet. Continuing on the abandoned trail to the grassy knoll adds 650 feet of elevation and 0.6 mile each way.

**Difficulty:** A moderately strenuous trail hike. A few sections of the trail are somewhat exposed and require care when crossing, since the footing may be loose. Beyond the maintained trail expect more primitive hiking that occasionally requires careful observation to stay on the trail.

**USGS Quad:** Ironton, CO, Ouray, CO.

continues to treeline and provides access to the broad, rolling terrain of the upper basin. When the first frosts of the season force the grasses and wildflowers of the basin into their fall colors, this upper basin is quite spectacular. On our visit the dark clouds occasionally separated to let through shafts of sunlight, which raced across the rich yellows, oranges and rusts of the vegetation, contrasting sharply with the rugged volcanic landscape.



*Dramatic light in this Weehawken panorama.jpg*

### **Hike Description**

A quick look at the map will tell you immediately that this trail is steep. Much of the elevation gain occurs in the first mile - 1000 feet to be precise. However the well-constructed switchbacks make the walking quite reasonable. At the top of the switchbacks you are on a broad ridge, well above the creek and above some of the cliff bands barring access along the creek itself.

*Hiker on the Weehawken Trail.jpg*



At mile 1.2 a signed trail junction is reached, the right branch going to the Alpine Mine. We stay straight here. Above this junction the trail becomes noticeably rougher, and a few spots require care where the now-narrow trail becomes slippery (gravel over rock slabs) and somewhat exposed. Cross several minor drainages (dry at this time of year), following cairns to regain the trail on the far side of each of these crossings.

At mile 1.9 a trail descends to the left to the abandoned Weehawken Mine. Not much is left of the mine buildings, but a few artifacts can still be seen.

*Room with a view-an artifact at the old Weehawken Mine.jpg*

From the mine, return to the main trail and continue northwest as the trail gradually contours to meet the creek. Soon you will reach an area where the trail crosses what seems an endless succession of washes, again marked by cairns. Eventually the trail turns the corner and provides views towards the head of the drainage, before ending at a small clearing



marked by a sign for Weehawken Creek (mile 3.3). This is the traditional turnaround point, but the best views await further up the drainage. To reach this point it is necessary to pick up an old trail that starts 100 feet before the sign. The trail, faint at first, heads northwest along a drainage channel for another 100 feet before exiting to the left at a marked point. Continue along this primitive but well-marked trail as it wanders through trees to the north of the creek. Progress is slow along this section, but eventually at mile 3.9 the trail brings you out on a grassy knoll providing excellent views. This point is the end of the hike, though you will certainly be tempted to explore further, as we did. This would be an excellent spot to camp, allowing for more leisurely exploration and perhaps an ascent of one or more of the surrounding peaks such as Whitehouse Mountain.

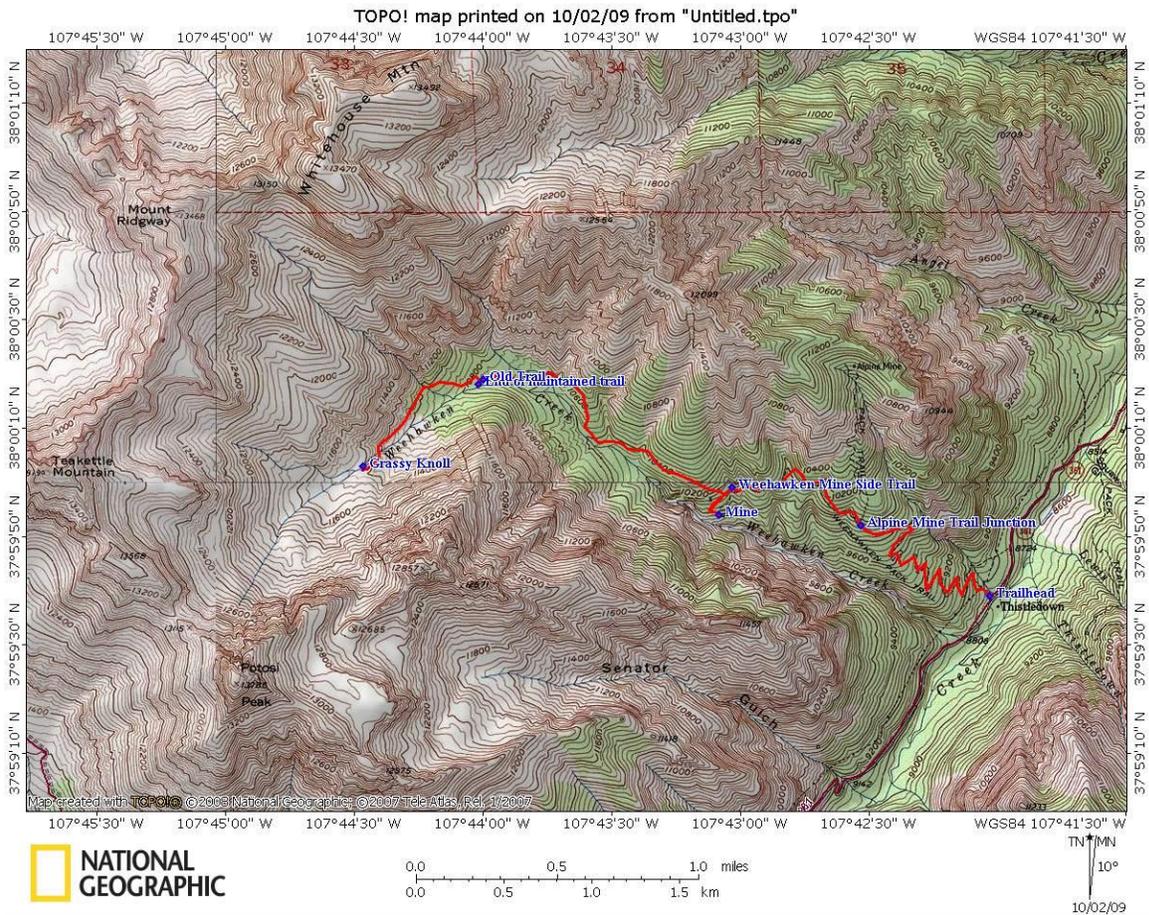
*Fall colors and rugged peaks.jpg*



*Scenic views in Weehawken-2.jpg*



*Dramatic light over the San Juans on the hike out.jpg*



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)  
 Trailhead, 37,59,39,-107,42,2,8481 feet  
 Alpine Mine Trail Junction, 37,59,52,-107,42,32,9898 feet  
 Weehawken Mine Side Trail, 37,59,59,-107,43,2,10154 feet  
 Mine, 37,59,54,-107,43,5,10069 feet  
 End of maintained trail, 38,0,18,-107,44,1,10810 feet  
 Old Trail, 38,0,19,-107,44,0,10807 feet  
 Grassy Knoll, 38,0,3,-107,44,28,11453 feet

