

North of Mancos

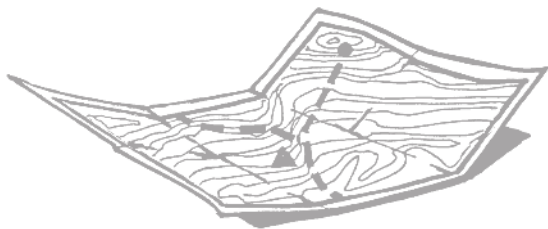
Haycamp Mesa and the Western La Plata Mountains offer hiking in the lush backcountry around the headwaters of the Mancos River on the south, and the near-vertical valleys that feed the Dolores River to the North. The trail system feeds into the Colorado Trail and includes many well-maintained branches and approaches to the 400-mile cross-state trail.



Indian Ridge Trail/ Colorado Trail (FST 520)

Starting elevation: 11,620 ft (Sharkstooth Trail)
Highest elevation: 12,150 ft
Ending elevation: 11,800 ft (Grindstone Lake Trail)
Trail length one-way: 4.25 mi
Maps: See Map 2, SJNF, USGS 7 1/2' maps: La Plata
Difficulty: Moderate

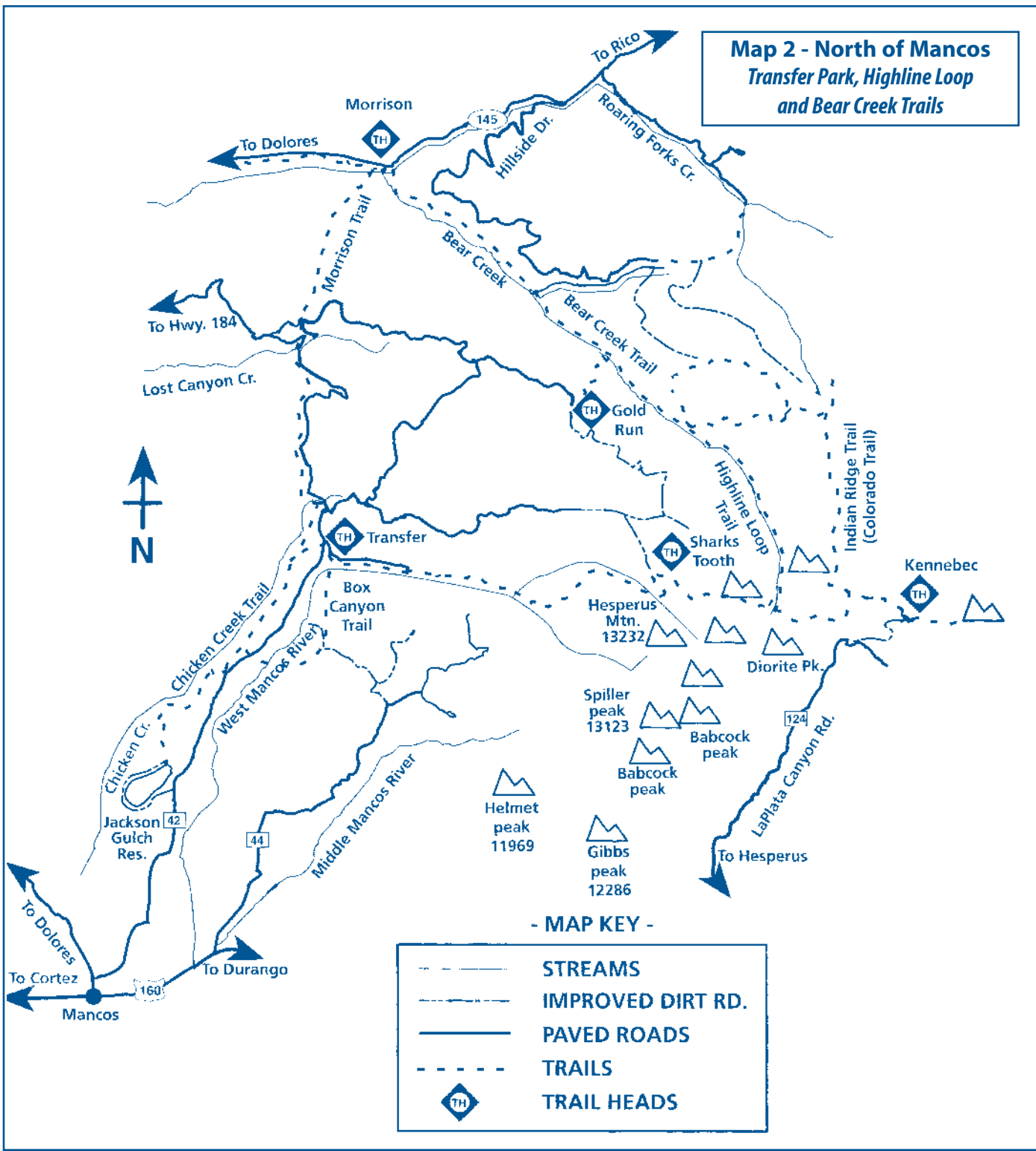
The portion of Indian Ridge Trail described here is useful in negotiating a loop hike involving Sharkstooth, Bear Creek and Grindstone Creek trails. Indian Ridge is a portion of the Colorado Trail that extends both north and south from the La Platas. Indian Ridge is not easily accessible from roads, but is well tied-in to the rest of the area hiking trails. The quickest approach starts at the Kennebec Trailhead at the north end of La Plata Canyon. Follow Sharkstooth Trail west for a mile, and then turn north onto the Indian Ridge Trail. The trail climbs for about 3/4 mile, then holds onto 12,000 ft of elevation for two miles. The views into the Animas River valley and the Montolores area are spectacular. The trail descends to about 11,800 ft and then runs for about a mile to the top of the Grindstone Creek Trail. (See Bear Creek for loop options)



Bear Creek Trail (FST 607)

Starting elevation: 7,960 ft (Bear Creek Trailhead)
Ending elevation: 11,200 ft (junction with Sharkstooth Trail)
Trail length one-way: 12.5 mi
Maps: See Map 2, SJNF, USGS 7 1/2' maps: Wallace Ranch, Orphan Butte, La Plata
Difficulty: Moderate
From Dolores on Highway 145, travel east for 22 miles. The trailhead is clearly marked on the highway, and begins approximately 1/4 mile east (upstream) from the confluence of Bear Creek and the Dolores River. The trail traverses the entire length of Bear Creek, all the way to the headwaters where it intersects the Sharkstooth Trail. The following trails intersect Bear Creek Trail and provide alternative access points:
Little Bear Creek Trail #609 – branches off the Bear Creek Trail at mile four and is a 2.6-mile climb to the Little Bear Creek Trailhead access, which is via Hillside Drive (FDR #436). Many portions of the Little Bear Trail may be difficult to find and can be quite steep.
Gold Run Trail #618 – branches off at mile six. This is a fairly steep trail but has several switchbacks and is designed to accommodate pack animals. Trail length is 2.5 miles to the Gold Run Trailhead, which is accessed via the West Mancos Road (FDR #561). There is a well-established trailhead with parking, pit toilets and a corral. This is a day-use area only.
Grindstone #608/Loop #658 Trails – both these trails branch off at mile 7.75 and end at the Grindstone Trailhead via Hillside Drive (FDR #436). The upper portion of Bear Creek Trail, from Grindstone Creek (mile 7.75) to the junction with Sharkstooth Trail forms the lower portion of the Highline Loop National Recreation Trail (#520). To continue on this route you will go east once you are on the Sharkstooth Trail #620 to the junction with the Indian Ridge Trail #520. To complete a loop back down to Bear Creek you can drop back down via the Loop or Grindstone Trail.

Map 2 - North of Mancos
Transfer Park, Highline Loop
and Bear Creek Trails



- MAP KEY -

	STREAMS
	IMPROVED DIRT RD.
	PAVED ROADS
	TRAILS
	TRAIL HEADS

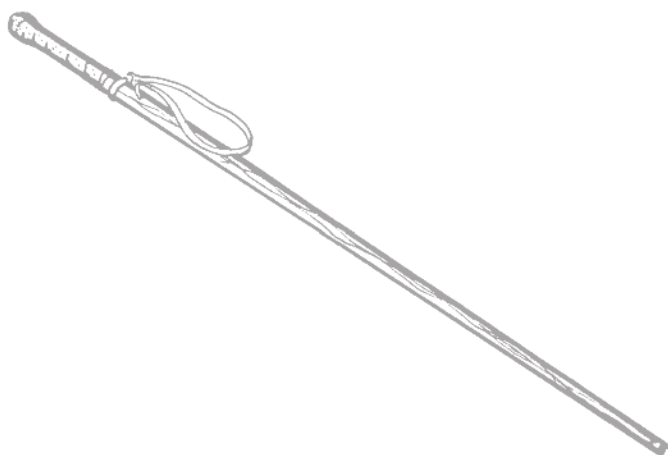


Sharktooth Trail (FST 620)

Starting elevation: 10,900 ft
 Highest elevation: 11,990 ft
 Ending elevation: 11,625 ft (Kennebec Pass Trailhead)
 Trail length one-way: 6.8 mi
 Maps: See Map 2, SJNF, USGS 71/2' maps: La Plata
 Difficulty: Moderate to difficult

Take West Mancos Road #561 to Spruce Mill Road #360, about 2 miles past Transfer. Continue another 6 miles to FDR# 346, than another mile to the Sharktooth Trailhead. When the roads are bad it is easier to start the hike from Twin Lakes. The trail climbs immediately to the pass between Sharktooth and Centennial peaks. There is a short loop hike to Windy Williams Mine interpretive site on the way to the pass. The trail then drops to meet the end of the Bear Creek Trail at 11,200 ft, then climbs again to the divide north of Diorite Peak. The trail circles to the north, up a creek bed, around a small lake (Taylor Lake), then ends at Kennebec Pass, which can be accessed via La Plata County Road #124.

See the Bear Creek Trail and Indian Ridge Trail for additional information on loop hikes using the Sharktooth Trail.



Owens Basin Trail (FST 746)

Owens Basin Trail (FST 746)
 Starting elevation: 9284 ft
 Ending elevation: 1100 ft
 Trail length one-way: 3.5 mi
 Maps: See Map 2, SJNF, USGS 71/2' maps: Rampart Hills & La Plata
 Difficulty: Moderate to difficult

This is a short hike, but very scenic and offers no other loops unless you wish to take off cross-country. It does, however, take you on a breath-taking hike above tree line behind the magnificent La Plata Mountains and past historical structures that are remnants of a once busy mining community.

To access the Owens Basin Trailhead from Mancos, go east for 2.5 miles, turn left (north) on the Echo Basin Road, (County Road 44), and continue to the Forest Boundary where the road now becomes #566. Stay on the northern portion of #566, as it becomes a loop around Burnt Ridge. Turn off on 566A and follow this road down to the parking lot, which is adjacent to the West Mancos River.

The first 100 yards of the trail begins on the south side of the river. The trail then crosses the river where it joins up with the West Mancos Trail #621. **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CROSS THE RIVER DURING SPRING RUNOFF!** The two trails split after 1/2 mile, with the West Mancos Trail heading towards the North Fork of the West Mancos River and the Owens Basin Trail heading up the South Fork.

The trail turns into an old mining road as it works its way up towards Owens Basin, which is nestled between Spiller, Babcock, Mount Moss and the fabulous Hesperus Peak. There is an old miners cabin and other mining structures to inspect as you enjoy a steady climb up the Basin. The trail ends in a slide rock area. Going back down is much easier and you can enjoy the view the second time-around, as you won't be gasping for oxygen.