

autumn

Lake City, Colorado



Scenic Drives • Hiking Trails • Recreation Map

The Quaking Aspen

Populus tremuloides

*Nature's first green is gold
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.*
- Robert Frost

When the days get shorter and the temperatures drop, the green chlorophyll in aspen leaves evaporates, leaving vivid colors behind for us to enjoy. Aspens may turn yellow, gold, orange, and more rarely, red. During autumn, with white trunks and gold leaves, a stand of aspens can overwhelm your senses.

Aspens spread underground, with new trees coming up from the root systems just a few inches below the ground. The largest living organisms on the earth (by weight or volume) are aspens. A single colony of trees, all connected to the same massive root system, is able to span hundreds of acres.

The aspen leaf is nearly round, with small toothy edges. The stems of the leaves are flat, which allows them to move freely in even the slightest breeze. When the air moves across the leaves, they clatter and shake, hence the name quaking aspen, or "quakies" as the old-timers sometimes call them.



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Lake City, Colorado

Cure for the Common Crowd



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Mother Nature may seem still and quiet, but her creatures are hard at work during the fall. Local people cut and stack firewood for winter. Animals such as elk and deer move to lower meadows and groves; beavers construct lodges; and bears prepare their winter dens.

These changes are subtle, however; compared to the wondrous transformation of the aspens and cottonwoods around Lake City as they prepare for the coming winter. There are few sights more glorious than the fleeting moments of gold that herald the new season. How lucky you would be, to see such a thing this September.

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Back cover photo by Greg Ochocki.

www.LakeCity.com | 1-800-569-1874

Scenic Drives

For 2-Wheel Drive Vehicles



© Chuck Chewwin, Shot & Hung

Road to Sherman along the Alpine Loop.

Silver Thread National Scenic Byway

Lake City to Creede

This part of the Silver Thread is the most scenic in any season, but the fall colors can be spectacular. Highlights include landmarks such as the Alferd Packer Massacre Site, the Slumgullion Earthflow, Windy Point Overlook, Rio Grande Pyramid Overlook, Bristol Head, and North Clear Creek Falls. Watch for wildlife along the way. Creede offers a fun day-trip destination, with shops, restaurants, and the Creede Repertory Theatre. Check for special events and other information at www.creede.com. For detailed information about the Byway, pick up a copy of the Silver Thread guide from the visitor center in Lake City.

Alpine Loop National Backcountry Byway

Lake City to Capitol City

A part of the Alpine Loop, County Road 20 immediately takes you into another world. Starting at the south end of Bluff Street, a twisting, rocky canyon offers a new vista with every turn of the gravel road. CR 20 follows Henson Creek for the 9 mile trip to Capitol City, a ghost town that once dreamt of being the state capital. Today, we're glad those dreams were dashed; otherwise, we wouldn't have the wilderness treasures that surround Lake City. Along the way, look for remnants of the mining boom of the turn of the last century. For detailed information about historic and natural attractions along the way, pick up a copy of the Alpine Explorer guide at the Visitor Center in Lake City.

Lake City to Sherman

Another part of the Alpine Loop that is accessible by a regular 2-wheel-drive vehicle, the route from Lake City is bursting with color during the foliage season. The Lake Fork of the Gunnison River and Lake San Cristobal offer ample fishing opportunities. Public campgrounds are located along the way, including Wupperman on the far side of the lake, and Williams Creek and Mill Creek Campgrounds further up the road. These sites make nice picnic spots as well. Watch for elk and deer, beavers, migrating birds, bobcats, and other local wildlife. The mining-era ghost town of Sherman is located on a side spur about 13.5 miles from Lake City; just beyond there are trailheads for several scenic hikes.

Cathedral Valley Loop Scenic Drive

For easy solitude, take a day to drive along the Cathedral Valley scenic drive. This 70-mile loop allows access to the La Garita and Powderhorn Wilderness Areas, 8 public campgrounds, and the Mason Family State Wildlife Area. Starting in Lake City, take Highway 149 to the top of Slumgullion Pass. Take a left at Forest Service Road 788 and follow it all the way through Cathedral to Powderhorn. Take a left on Highway 149 and head south back to Lake City. Along the way, you'll find fascinating geology, scenic views, great fall foliage, plus many spots for fishing, hiking, and wildlife viewing. Take your time and bring your camera.

Rio Grande Reservoir Road

The Rio Grande Reservoir Road (also known as Forest Service Road 520) leads from the Silver Thread Byway toward Stony Pass. Many miles of it are easily accessible by 2-wheel-drive vehicles. Make a day of the trip by bringing a picnic lunch, or stay longer at one of the 4 public campgrounds along the way. You can fish at the Rio Grande Reservoir, or hike into the Weminuche Wilderness Area.

For 4-Wheel Drive Vehicles

Wager Gulch Road

From County Road 30, take the Wager Gulch Road (BLM road 3308) to the well-preserved ghost town of Carson. You'll pass through huge groves of golden aspens.

Nellie Creek Road

From County Road 20, take the Nellie Creek side spur to the trailhead for the hike to Uncompahgre Peak. Even if you don't hike, the road in the fall is like a tunnel through the golden leaves.

Round Top Road

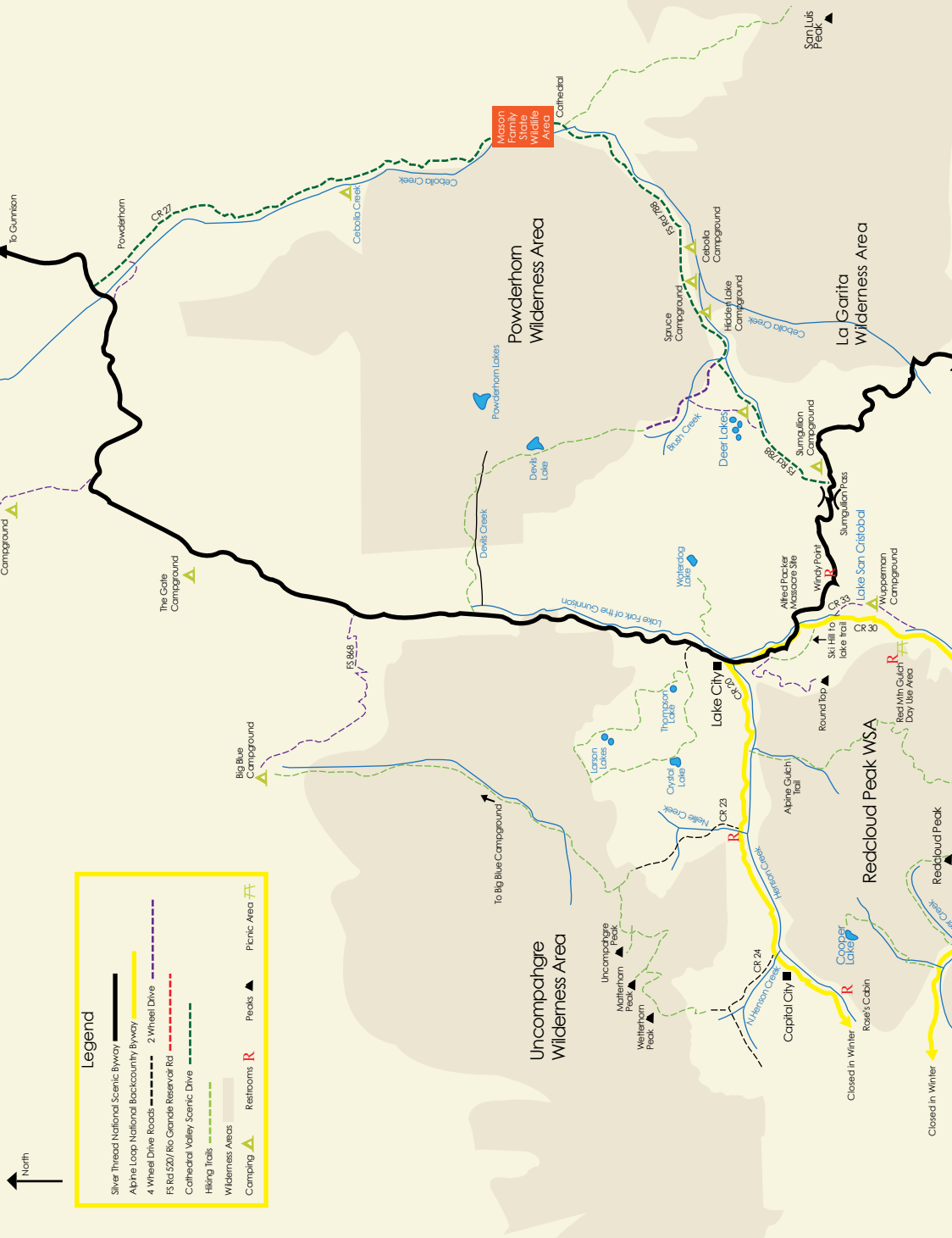
From Lake City, go south on Highway 149 for one mile. Just past the Lake City Ski Hill, take a right turn onto the Round Top Road (BLM Road 3305). This road makes several switchbacks and turns through vast stands of yellow aspens and ends at the top of the mountain. From there, you can hike on several different trails or have a picnic.



© Chuck Chetwin, Shot & Flung

Recreation Map

This map is a guide only. Refer to an official Forest Service or other topographic map for navigation purposes. Not all trails are marked on this map. Map not to scale.





Lake San Cristobal

© Greg Ochocki

Hiking Trails

We recommend the following trails for both their expansive views and the opportunity to walk right among the trees. See the map on pages 6 and 7 for trail locations. There are dozens of other beautiful trails in the vicinity as well. Pick up a copy of the weather-resistant Gunnison Basin map for a detailed layout of the area and inquire with the visitor center for current trail conditions: 1-800-569-1874.



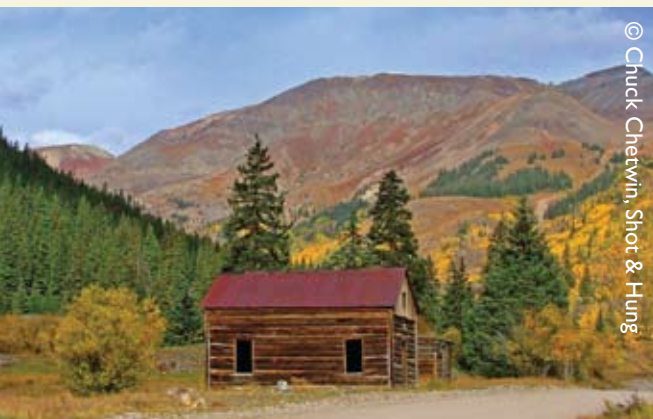
© Steve Robinson

Thompson Lake

FS Trail #236. Difficulty: Easy to moderate. To get there: Just north of Lake City, take a left turn onto Balsam Road. The trailhead is located just past the IOOF cemetery and it accesses both the Crystal Lake Trail and the Larson Lakes Trail. Park here if you have a two-wheel drive vehicle. Four-wheel drive vehicles can continue .8 miles to the National Forest boundary. Go right at the gate, following the Larson Lakes trail for about a mile, and take the left fork to Thompson Lake, which is a short distance away.

Waterdog Lake

Difficulty: Moderate to strenuous. Distance: 3.8 miles one way. To get there: From Highway 149, cross the bridge at the north end of Lake City. Turn left and continue one block. Turn left again to the water treatment plant. Park here and walk up the road for about ¼ mile until you see the trail sign, and take the trail to the right. Because this trail passes through private lands, please stay on the trail. This trail overlooks Lake City in several areas, and ends at Waterdog Lake, where you can fish, picnic, or camp.



© Chuck Chetwin, Shot & Hung

Ski Hill to Lake

Difficulty: Easy to moderate. Distance: approximately 1.2 miles one way. To get there: Take Highway 149 south for one mile to the Lake City Ski Hill parking lot. The trail head is to the south of the warming hut. The trail follows a gravel road for a while, then becomes a single footpath. Because this trail passes through private lands, please stay on the trail. The trail crests at a beautiful lookout, then descends gradually to intersect County Road 30.

Alpine Gulch

Difficulty: Moderate to strenuous. Distance: 6 miles one way, or connect with the Williams Creek trail for an overnight camping trip. To get there: Take County Road 20 (Engineer Pass road) for 2 miles; the trailhead and parking are on the left and marked with a sign. The first 2.5 miles of the trail goes through a lush, narrow canyon, with seven stream crossings. When you arrive at the eighth crossing, the trail forks. Take the left fork up the East Fork of Alpine Gulch. The trail continues for another 3.25 miles through meadows and aspen and spruce stands. The top of trail offers extensive views of the area and then connects with the Williams Creek trail.

Cataract Gulch

Difficulty: Moderate. Distance: 4.1 miles one way. To get there: Take Highway 149 south for 2.5 miles; turn right at County Road 30. Travel about 11 miles where the road forks; take the left turn toward Sherman. Travel 1.4 miles to the trailhead, which is on the left. This trail travels through forest and meadow to reach Cataract Lakes near the Continental Divide. There are several small waterfalls and some easy water crossings.



Along Nellie Creek



Wetterhorn Peak

The Fourteeners in Fall

Hiking to area Fourteeners in the fall is both possible and spectacular. Once above timberline, you'll find expansive views of the surrounding mountains and colorful forests. Be sure to check weather reports before heading out, make sure someone knows your itinerary, and be prepared for sudden shifts in the weather. Fall snowstorms are common and sudden - don't get caught where you can't get out.

Fourteeners Near Lake City

Uncompahgre Peak (14,309')
Wetterhorn Peak (14,017')
Handies Peak (14,048')
Sunshine Peak (14,001')
Redcloud Peak (14,034')
San Luis Peak (14,014')

Weather conditions will dictate which trails in the area are open during your visit. Check with the Lake City Visitor Center for current conditions at 1-800-569-1874.

Helpful Information

Welcome to Lake City, a historic mining town tucked into a valley in the San Juan Mountains of southwest Colorado. Our elevation is 8671 feet. We enjoy over 300 days of sunshine every year and a cool, dry climate.



Hikers in high country



When to View Foliage

The best time to view the leaves depends on weather conditions during the summer and fall. Typically, aspens in the surrounding mountains start to change at the end of August and continue through the end of September. Peak viewing usually occurs from the second through fourth weeks of September. Visit www.lakecity.com for current foliage conditions through the season.

Autumn Weather

Autumn daytime high temperatures are typically in the 50s or 60s. Lows in the fall are usually at or a few degrees below freezing depending on your location and elevation. For current road conditions, call the Colorado Department of Transportation hotline at 1-877-315-7623. Conditions can change quickly in the mountains, so be prepared for anything.

Altitude

Gains in altitude can affect anyone, especially when traveling above 7000 feet. Sometimes, the effects can make you sick. Symptoms can include: headaches, breathlessness, fatigue, nausea, inability to sleep, or swelling of the hands or feet. Check with your doctor if you have a heart or lung condition. If your symptoms worsen, consult a doctor immediately.

The Sun

It is essential to wear eye protection, a hat, and sunscreen when outdoors. The sun is many times more intense here than at sea level.

Recommended Map

We recommend that you purchase the Gunnison Basin Public Lands map that is produced by the USDA Forest Service. This map is available at the Visitor Center in Lake City, at area sporting goods stores, and at some online map retailers.

Licenses & Stamps

Fishing licenses are required if you are 16 years of age or older. A license or a wildlife stamp is required for entry into State Wildlife Areas, such as the Mason Family State Wildlife Area near Lake City. Licenses and stamps can be purchased in Lake City from local sporting goods stores. Visit the Colorado Division of Wildlife's website at www.wildlife.state.co.us for more information.



Lake City's historic Silver Street

Additional Information

Visitor Center
Silver Thread & Alpine Loop
Interpretive Center
800 N. Gunnison Avenue
Lake City, CO 81235
800-569-1874
970-944-2527
www.lakecity.com

Bureau of Land Management
(BLM)
Lake City Office
800 N. Gunnison Avenue
Lake City, CO 81235
970-944-2344
www.blm.gov/co/

Gunnison National Forest
(USDA Forest Service)
Lake City Office
800 N. Gunnison Avenue
Lake City, CO 81235
970-944-2500
www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/

Colorado Division of Wildlife
300 W. New York Avenue
Gunnison, CO 81230
970-641-7060



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COLORADO

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