

8-Mile Hike to Placer Peak - J.D. Doak, Hike Leader

Please read this hike description before signing up for the hike.

Hike Summary

8-miles out and back
2,500 ft. elevation gain
Technical
6 to 7 hours

Fitness

One must be in good to excellent fitness to participate on this hike. Please keep this in mind when deciding whether or not to go on this hike.

Background

Placer Peak is the tallest peak in the Ortiz Range at almost 9,000 feet. The Ortiz Mountains Educational Preserve (OMEP) is owned by Santa Fe County and managed by the Santa Fe Botanical Garden (SFBG). A right-of-way agreement with Lac Minerals allows SFBG to cross their property to access the Preserve. OMEP is only open for activities led by SFBG-trained docents. Reservations are required.

Logistics

Because of heat and the possibility of afternoon thunderstorms, we start this hike early in the morning. Please arrive at the parking area at the top of Goldmine Road at 7:30 am for an 8:00 am start time. The travel time from Santa Fe to the gate is nearly an hour. If you are late, the group will leave without you.

Before the hike begins, everyone is required to sign a liability waiver and we suggest a donation of \$5 to SFBG. Waivers are mandatory. If you do not sign the waiver, you may not go on the hike.

The gate to the Preserve is always locked after a hiking group enters. The group must stay together hiking in and hiking out. The first two miles of this hike are on a steep and narrow access road that crosses land owned by Lac Minerals. The last two miles climb a narrow, single-track trail to the peak that is very steep and technical. The elevation at the gate is 6,500 ft. and the peak is nearly 9,000 ft. for a 2,500 ft. elevation gain.

Whether you're hiking for the first time or you are an experienced pro, you will still need to double-check your gear before heading out. Please bring clothing suitable for a variety of weather conditions (including rain) and wear sturdy, comfortable hiking boots. Bring a hat with a brim to keep the light out of your eyes and the sun off of your face and neck. If you are hiking early in the spring or late in the fall, be prepared for cold weather by bringing a fleece top or jacket, gloves, and a warm hat. (You lose most of your body heat from your head.) Wear plenty of sunscreen and bring more to reapply, even if it's cloudy. You also need to pack water and snacks, and bring a lunch for the peak. For this hike, we insist that everyone bring at least 3 liters of water. The bigger you are, the more water you need, and you'll also need more water if it is a hot day. Hiking poles will help you immensely on the hike down.

The Hike

Before the hike begins, we do a head count. Each hiker, including docents, counts out loud one at a time until everyone has spoken. We will do this count at every rendezvous point to ensure that all hikers are accounted for.

The hike leader always hikes at the front of the group. The hike leader will also assign a “sweep”. The sweep is someone willing to hike at the rear of the group and will never leave anyone behind. All hikers must hike between the hike leader and the sweep.

The first part of the hike climbs up the 2-mile access road on the right-of-way through Lac Minerals’ property. It starts off flat, but then becomes steep, rocky, and loose. Near the end of the road, we enter the Preserve. Shortly thereafter, a parking area opens to the left with a portable restroom at the back. We continue straight on the road, step over the chain, and then walk another 20 or 30 yards to arrive at the educational kiosk on your right. The kiosk is a rendezvous point where the group stops together to rest, get some water, and enjoy a snack.

From the kiosk, we continue on an old mining road for approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile until we see a post marking the Placer Peak Trail on the right. This is another rendezvous point.

The route now follows a steep, technical, single-track trail. The trail consists of loose rock and dirt making it challenging to negotiate, particularly on the return trip. After hiking approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile on the trail, we arrive at the Bear House, the next rendezvous point. The Bear House is a lean-to hut with a first aid kit. The views are magnificent. We rest here for another water and snack break.

Next, we begin climbing a ridge and, for the first time on the hike, we get a glimpse of Placer Peak on the left. Once we have climbed the ridge, we head left onto fairly open terrain where cairns mark our trail.

The last push to the peak involves a tough scramble up a rocky, brush-filled slope. It is about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the Bear House to the peak. We will gather on the peak for an hour or so to eat lunch, in awe of the magnificent 360° views

We hike down the exact same way we hiked up, taking half as long to hike down as it did to hike up. Count on approximately 4 hours going up, and about 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours going down.

Hike Rules

- No dogs or other pets are permitted on any hikes in the Preserve.
- Before the hike begins, everyone is required to sign a liability waiver and we suggest a donation of \$5 to SFBG. Waivers are mandatory.
- No smoking.
- All hikers must hike between the hike leader and the sweep.
- Do not leave the group or attempt to enter or exit the Preserve (including bypassing the gate) on your own.
- Bring at least 3 liters of water. Heavier hikers and hot days call for more water.
- Wear appropriate footwear - hiking boots are best. No flip-flops.
- Be prompt – arrive at 7:30am for an 8am start.
- One must be in good to excellent fitness condition to participate in this hike.