

El Diente Peak 14,159 feet, Class 3

sub-peak of Mount Wilson 14,246 feet

Mountaineers trip led by Norbert Ensslin.

Members: Ray & Joy Green, Michael Altherr, Evan Rose

We departed Los Alamos at approximately 8 AM on Friday, July 20, 2018. We five rode in Joy and Ray Green's vehicle, which was equipped with three rows of seats and a rooftop carrier. We drove to Aztec, NM, by way of NM 126 and US 550, then took NM 574, NM 170, CO 140 to Hesperus on US 160. We took US 160 to Dolores and CO 145 to Rico. About 7 miles north of Rico, we took a good dirt road (38) about five and a half miles to the trailhead.

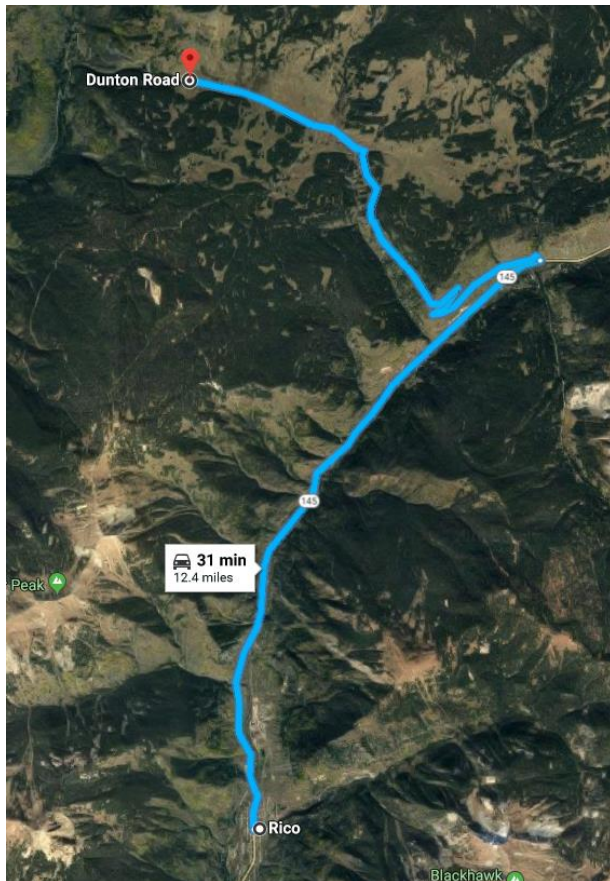


Figure 1: Driving route from Rico to the trailhead.

We started hiking to base camp at approximately 14:30 (see second map). The trail follows Kilpacker Creek for much of the route. Base camp for Norbert, Joy, and Ray was by the edge of a wooded area 4 miles from the trailhead at elevation 10,900 feet (overlapping green and red markers). Water was 5-10 minutes away. Base camp for Michael and Evan was at elevation 11,900 feet on a flat gravel bar adjacent to and above the stream (lone green marker). This camp was accessed by hiking several hundred yards off the main trail over scree. The camps were approximately one mile apart. Michael and Evan joined the others at the lower camp Saturday night after the climb.

Norbert woke at 4:30 AM on Saturday. He began hiking solo, followed by Joy and Ray. Michael and Evan awoke at 5:00 AM and began hiking, catching Norbert within the first hour. The trail is initially well-marked with cairns. The trail passes over talus and scree. Cairns are replaced at the upper altitudes with a set of social trails, and the climber is left to pick one or blaze a new one. Norbert, Michael, and Evan picked three different routes, with Michael arriving at the summit first at about 9:30. Nobody was particularly pleased with his choice of route. Michael encountered some class 4; Evan spent time choosing between alternatives (avoiding class 4); and Norbert initially chose a route that led away from the summit. The last hundred yards or so of the trail is well marked, however. The trail passes north of and below the ridge connecting El Diente and Wilson. The peak features a modest flat area and a rock to stand upon to be as high as one might be for the photo opportunity.

We three met Joy and Ray on our way down at a point near the end of the cairns and the start of the unmarked talus section. After some consideration of the time, people's energy level, and approaching clouds, we all decided to descend together. Michael and Evan broke camp and hiked to the lower camp

in a light rain. The light rain was repeated later in the afternoon. There was no heavy rain for this whole trip – just light afternoon showers on Friday and Saturday.

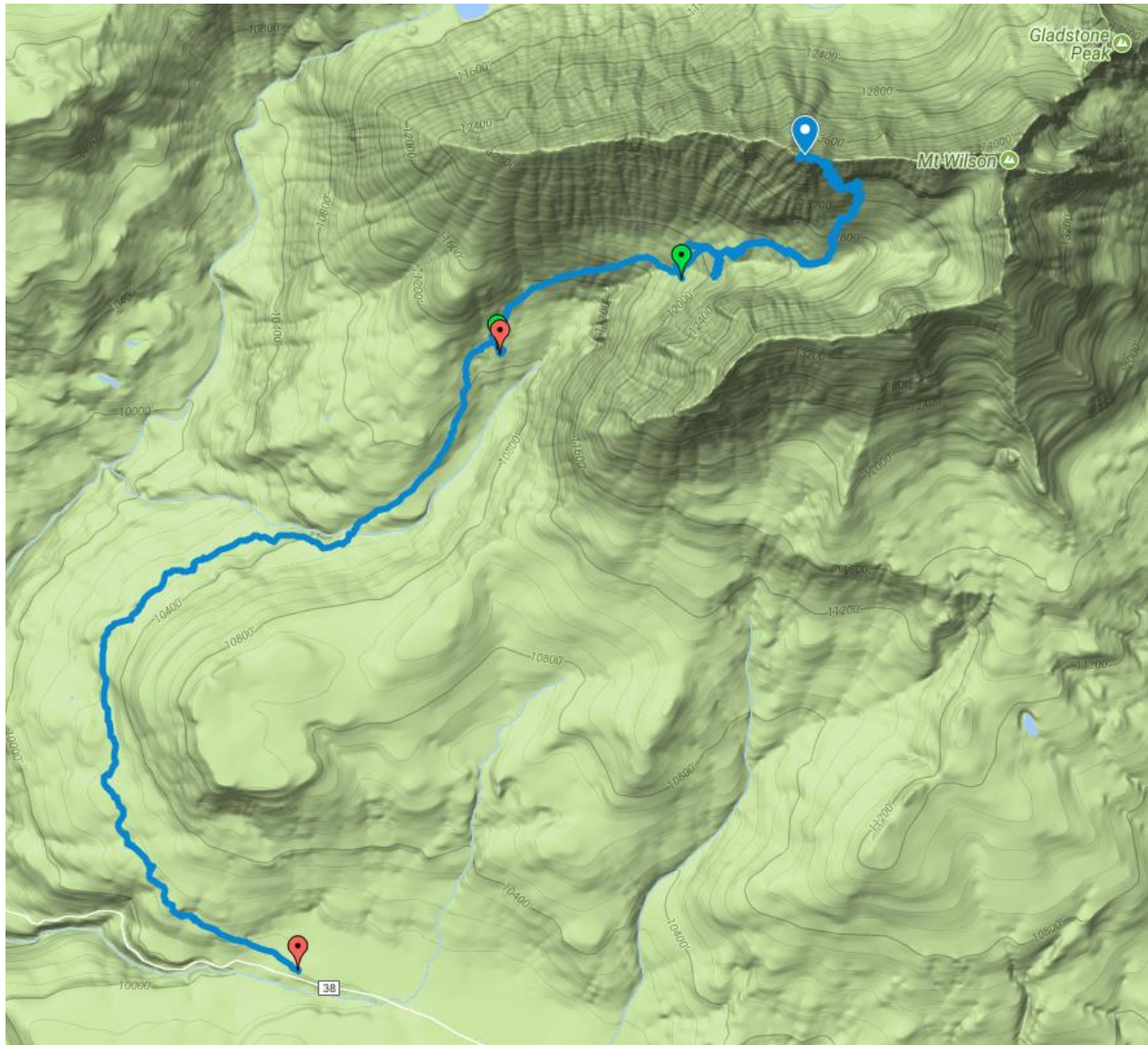


Figure 2: GPS track of the hike into base camps and the climb of El Diente. This is the South Slopes route, described by Gerry Roach in “Colorado Fourteeners.”

We met one other pair of male climbers ascending El Diente. They went on to climb the ridge to Mount Wilson. These men were camped in the same general area as Norbert’s camp, but closer to the river. We saw perhaps a dozen other people on Saturday afternoon, most coming from the direction of Mount Wilson. On Sunday we saw at least a dozen more people, predominantly day hikers. Some were hiking the loop to Navajo Lake.

On Sunday we hiked out, starting at about 9 AM. We arrived at Kennebec Café in Hesperus before noon and ate a delicious lunch - highly recommended. We returned to Los Alamos at 6:30 PM. On our way back to Los Alamos, we mostly retraced our route, except that we continued south on NM 170 to Farmington and then took NM 371 to 7010 to US 550, NM 126 and home. This route took us past the Valles Caldera, through the forest and ranches along a much-improved NM 126, and avoided Durango.

Assessment: El Diente is easily accessible with a six-hour drive from Los Alamos to the trailhead. There is a choice of campsites available a short hike from the trailhead. Campsites feature a choice of a wooded area that is close to the trail or a rocky area that is close to the stream and a waterfall, located a thousand feet higher. The second campsite offers a shorter climb on summit day. The scenery is very pleasant, featuring extensive talus slopes and waterfalls that are visible from either campsite. The climb does provide some challenges, with obligatory route-finding and dealing with loose rocks. The view from El Diente is spectacular in a 360-degree arc. This route can be combined with a traverse to Mount Wilson (class 4) or a second hike to Navajo Lake.

Photo Gallery



Michael Altherr hiking into camp with El Diente in the distance



The hike into camp with the waterfalls of Kilpacker Creek and El Diente



Looking back from the ascent route



Norbert ascending

Evan and Norbert at the summit



Looking south from the summit ridge



Wilson Peak and Navajo Basin to the north



View back toward camp from the south side of El Diente



Marmot

Grouse



Cliffs to the east of El Diente



Joy Green and Michael Altherr descending the talus



Michael Altherr on summit



View looking west across the talus slopes of El Diente



Ray and Joy Green



Columbines



Norbert Ensslin



Evan, Michael, Norbert and Ray with view toward Mt. Wilson