

La Plata Mountains Mountain Bike Trail System

Trail Name	Miles	Kilometers	Trail Difficulty	Rating	MTB Project Ranking		
					System	Colorado	National
San Juan National Forest							
Bear Creek to Sharkstooth Pass Trail	18.2	29.3	◆ Difficult	2.5	2	348	3,153
Sharkstooth Pass Trail	7.4	12	◆◆ Extreme Difficulty	3	13	1,350	12,871

Trail Difficulty, Rating, and Ranking based on the MTB Project (www.mtbproject.com)

Trail Difficulty Key

- Easy 5% grade; 2 inch obstacles
- Intermediate 10% grade; 8 inch obstacles
- ◆ Difficult 15% grade; 15 inch obstacles, occasional harder sections
- ◆◆ Extreme Difficulty 20% grade, 15+ inch obstacles, many harder sections

Land Manager

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MTB Project Trail Comments

Bear Creek to Sharkstooth Pass Trail

This trail gives excellent views of the La Plata mountains, as it goes over Sharkstooth Pass, before then dropping down Bear Creek before returning back to the road via the Gold Run trail. This trail has several hike-a-bike sections, multiple stream crossings, and, if ridden earlier in the summer, multiple snow field crossings.

From Mancos, turn right and drive up county road 42 until you reach Windy Gap. Most cars will be able to make it to Windy Gap, and 4WD vehicles can turn right on the road to Twin Lakes to drive directly to the trailhead. If you park at Windy Gap, there is an ATV trail that can be ridden down to the trailhead.

Once at the trailhead, begin climbing up Sharkstooth pass, with many excellent views of Hesperus Mountain along the way. Once above treeline, the trail gets much rockier and more difficult to ride. We ended up hiking quite a bit of it. Eventually you reach Sharkstooth pass. The pass gives the opportunity for an optional climb of Centennial peak, if you have the time. Sharkstooth pass is the point of no return, and going any further pretty much commits you to the entire ride.

Begin descending down the other side of Sharkstooth Pass. This is probably the steepest section of the trail, and crosses a couple talus fields. This section of trail can contain a lot of snow as well earlier in the season.

Once below tree line, you'll come across a trail junction, choose to go left on the Bear Creek trail. From here you have about six and a half miles of downhill riding, with the trail becoming mellower and easier as you descend the valley.

After riding down Bear Creek, there will be a bridge on the left that starts ascending up the Gold Run trail. This trail is quite steep, and we ended up hiking most of it, around two miles or so. This was probably the most tiring section of the ride for me.

Eventually, you climb up out of the valley and are back on a dirt road. Turn left on the road and follow it back to Windy Gap. Once at Windy Gap, turn left and find the ATV trail to go back down to the trailhead.

Sharkstooth Pass Trail

From Mancos, head North on county road 42, which becomes forest road 561. Follow the signs to Transfer Camp Ground and from there to Sharkstooth trailhead. Most cars will be able to make it to Windy Gap, and 4WD vehicles can turn right on the road to Twin Lakes to drive directly to the trailhead.

The trail starts on a steep 1.6 mi ascent to Sharkstooth Pass, with many excellent views of Hesperus Mountain along the way. Sharkstooth begins with a mixture of scree and smooth singletrack, then passes through

multiple switchbacks before reaching treeline. Once above treeline, the trail gets much rockier and more difficult. Most will find themselves hiking quite a bit of the higher sections of the climb to Sharkstooth pass.

The view from Sharkstooth pass is spectacular. From here you can see many of the highest peaks of the La Platas, the Sharkstooth, out West towards Cortez and even North toward Telluride. From here you'll descend the other side of the pass into the Bear Creek drainage. This descent will see you lose essentially all the altitude that you gained on the first climb and consists of steep, technical downhill sections and some short punchy climbs.

The first section of this descent is probably the steepest section of the trail. You'll descend a series of switchbacks before crossing a large talus fields (this section of trail may contain a lot of snow earlier in the season). Following the scree field, you'll descend another steep section that takes you below treeline. From here the trail mellows out at the 2.5 mile mark. At 3.3 miles you'll pass the junction with Bear Creek Trail. At mile 3.6 you'll reach the end of the descent from the pass.

After a short stretch of moderate climbing, the steep climbing begins once again. Trail finding in this section may be difficult, look for cairns and marked trees. After a bit of gentle grade you'll reach another scree field at the 5 mi mark that climbs steeply to Indian Trail Ridge. From here, you'll enjoy a fun descent with fantastic views of La Plata Canyon and the Columbus Basin.