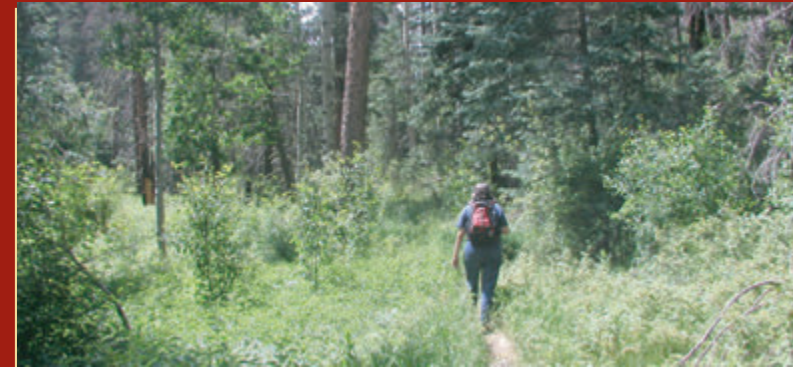


LOS ALAMOS COUNTY TRAIL NETWORK GUIDE



# WEST JEMEZ TRAILHEADS



Cañon de Valle Trail

Three trailheads along West Jemez Road (State Road 501) provide access to the canyons and mesas east of the crest of the Sierra de los Valles. The canyons are deep and sometimes shady as all were partially burned in the Cerro Grande and Las Conchas fires. Running water is found in stretches of all three, and in summer they support dozens of species of wildflowers. Although trail access is on Department of Energy land, these trails are all on the Santa Fe National Forest.

**Finding the Trailhead:** From the intersection of Trinity and Diamond drives at the Los Alamos Medical Center, head south on Diamond toward the medical center. At a traffic signal at the far end of the medical center, turn right onto West Road. This road winds into Los Alamos Canyon, passes the ice rink, swings through a horseshoe turn, then heads uphill. In a mile, pass the road to the Pajarito Mountain Ski Area on the right, and at the t-intersection with West Jemez Road, turn right. From this point it is 0.6 mile to Pajarito Canyon, 1.6 miles to Cañon de Valle, and 2.4 miles to Water Canyon.



### USING LOS ALAMOS COUNTY OPEN SPACE

The Los Alamos County Trail Network is open to non-motorized use only.

**Resource Protection:** All cultural resources such as Ancestral Pueblo room blocks, pot sherds, petroglyphs, and historical artifacts are protected by Federal and State law. Let all cultural resources lie undisturbed.

**Share the Trail:** These are multi-use trails for pedestrians, equestrians, and bicyclists. Bicyclists should yield to all other users.

**Dogs in Los Alamos County Open Space:** All dogs must be on a leash when within 100 yards of a trailhead. Dogs must be under voice and sight control at all times.

**Safety:** When exploring trails, always carry water, sunscreen, a hat, extra clothing, a flashlight, and a navigational aid.



The foothills, canyons, and mesas in and around Los Alamos are linked by a 58-mile network of trails. Hikers, runners, horseback riders, mountain bikers, and other trail users delight in the variety of trails from which to choose. The trails offer a quick escape from the hectic pace in the town; a route by which to commute to work; an easy stroll or a physical challenge; and a chance to observe wildlife or to soak in impressive views. The County Trail Network links with over 100 miles of trails on the surrounding Santa Fe National Forest and the adjacent Valles Caldera National Preserve.



For more information on Los Alamos County Open Space and Trails, visit [www.losalamosnm.us/parks](http://www.losalamosnm.us/parks)

For additional maps and forest information, contact the Española Ranger District, Santa Fe National Forest at 505 753-7331 or [www.fs.usda.gov/santafe](http://www.fs.usda.gov/santafe)

Download maps and trail descriptions to your mobile device at [www.everytrail.com](http://www.everytrail.com)



## WATER CANYON TRAIL



**Length:** 1.5 miles to meadow; 5 mile loop  
**Elevation Gain:** 400 feet for loop  
**Fitness Level:** easy to moderate  
**Features:** attractive canyon, water  
**Trail surface:** packed dirt  
**Mountain Bike Skill Level:** intermediate

Water Canyon drains the east flank of Cerro Grande and has seen more than its share of post-fire flood events over the past two decades. The trail has been rebuilt twice since 2000. The trip to Sawmill Meadow makes a delightful short trip suitable for all ages; the full loop is a great half-day hike and short bike trip. Along the trail you will find shady forests, burned woods, boulder pile-ups from floods, and there is always water in the middle section of the canyon. The constant flow is a result of a mid-1940s water development that supplied Los Alamos National Laboratory. A small dam and other water works can be found in the north tributary drainage just above Sawmill Meadow.

Park on the wide shoulder of State Road 501 about halfway between the low point on the highway at Water Canyon and the intersection with State Road 4. From the parking area, head north, back toward Water Canyon for a few yards and find a double-track angling off to the left (before reaching the large water detention structure). The track leads to a crossing of the main channel, and the trail heads left on the north bank of the channel. In a minute, the Perimeter Trail comes in from the right. The trail now winds through the forest, gradually climbing gently along the slopes of the canyon. In 0.4 mile, cross the channel to the south side as the trail weaves through a debris flow of rocks and logs. The trail crosses the channel again, skirts along the edge of a deep erosion gully, and then crosses the outflow from the north tributary and reaches Sawmill Meadow. An informal trail leads right to the water works.

From the meadow, the trail continues up the canyon, occasionally clinging to the slope high above the floor of the canyon (bikes and hikers with children use caution). The trail ends at Forest Road 181. Turn right and follow the road as it winds 2.5 miles to the Perimeter Trail near Highway 501. Turn right onto the Perimeter Trail, parallel the highway, and in one mile meet the Water Canyon Trail near the trailhead.



## PAJARITO CANYON/ NAIL TRAIL LOOP



**Length:** 4.2 miles roundtrip  
**Elevation Gain:** 800 feet  
**Fitness Level:** moderate  
**Features:** attractive canyon, water  
**Trail surface:** packed dirt  
**Mountain Bike Skill Level:** intermediate

This loop combines narrow singletrack with old roads to create a trip that offers an attractive route through a canyon with running water. Some of the climb up the Nail Trail is steep, but this is a moderate trip suitable for foot travel and, aside from the challenging first half mile, for mountain bikes.

A rough track leads to trailhead parking, and trail users with low-slung cars can park along the wide shoulder at the trailhead. Find the sign post on the west side of the parking area and follow the arrow pointing to the climbing area (head north). Pass the return leg of the loop near the canyon bottom, cross the channel, and begin a steep and rocky climb up the north canyon wall. Swing west through a broad turn on a steep and narrow ridge, and then continue up a rock staircase that is particularly challenging on a bike. After the rocky stretch, the trail swings north again and ascends at a reasonable grade through ponderosa pines. Two climbing turns lead to a wide road segment that is badly eroded by post-fire runoff. At 1.4 miles from the start, an old road heads straight, but the Nail Trail bears left. After 0.1 mile on this road, rock cairns point right onto a long singletrack section. The trail crosses through a drainage and soon enters the Cerro Grande burn scar, offering great views of Pajarito Canyon to the left. The trail makes several short climbs and descents before dropping steeply into Pajarito Canyon.

Swing left just before reaching the water. The trail parallels the stream, mostly on a shelf high above the channel. Over the next two miles, the trail loses 800 feet in elevation as it winds through the forest. After the second stream crossing, climb steeply at the narrows where the climbing area is located. A steep drop leads to another crossing. Turn left on the south bank and follow the trail as it heads back to the trailhead.



## CAÑON DE VALLE TRAIL



**Length:** 6.5 miles out and back  
**Elevation Gain:** 1,200 feet  
**Fitness Level:** difficult  
**Features:** attractive canyon, water  
**Trail surface:** packed dirt  
**Mountain Bike Skill Level:** intermediate

Cañon de Valle is a long, attractive canyon with tall conifers, abundant wildflowers, and running water. The trail up the canyon follows a route that has been used for 150 years, but post-fire floods have force sections of the trail to be rerouted out of the flood zone. The long trail gains more than 1,000 feet as it climbs to the boundary fence of the Valles Caldera National Preserve. The fence is the turnaround point for this trip as access to the Preserve is not permitted from this point.

There is parking off of State Road 501 a few yards up a rutted double track. Follow that track to a huge iron gate, and pass around the right side of the gate on a rough and rocky track that soon crosses the stream channel. In a few yards, take a hard right to get on a rocky road heading up the canyon. After a few minutes, again cross the channel as the trail narrows to a single track. About a half mile from the start, two channel crossings lead to the intersection with the Perimeter Trail to the left. Continue up the canyon, passing a rough road (the continuation of the Perimeter Trail) to the right. Now the trail hangs on the north bank, for a quarter mile before two more channel crossings. About 1.5 miles from the start, the trail climbs on two switchbacks to traverse the slope high above the channel. The trail gradually drops to the channel and makes two more crossings. From this point the canyon is nearly untouched by fire and flood. The route ascends along the old road through tall conifers and much of the channel here has running water all year. About 3 miles from the trailhead, fire-burned forest is found on the slope to the right while the trail remains in the trees. A fence, usually marked with boundary signs, identifies the Valles Caldera National Preserve. Turn around here and return to the trailhead by the same route.

