



Have You Come in Search of a Lake?



As park rangers, we are often asked, “How do I get to the lake?” “Can I put in a boat, or swim or camp at the lake?” We do have a lake of sorts and offer a once a month guided walk with a ranger from November through April. Reservations are required and accepted one month in advance of the tour date. Special fees apply. See our website for more information.

There is no boating, swimming or camping at the lake because Lake Lucero is an ephemeral lake or a playa. It has the potential of filling only after several soaking rains usually during our monsoon season in the months of July and August. So why would you want to venture out on a three hour tour of a dry lake bed? Because Lake Lucero is unlike any other.

The only way to access Lake Lucero is through a restricted area of White Sands Missile Range. The tour starts 23 miles south of the monument at the Small Missile Range Gate. No photographs are allowed while traveling through the Missile Range. After driving 17.5 miles, we arrive at the trail head, the ranger gives a safety briefing and unlocks the gate.

It looks much different than the area by the visitor center. For starters, there is no sand in sight. The San Andres Mountains are much closer. They are not the distant mountains you see from Dunes Drive. You are surrounded by stocky honey mesquite trees, scrub brush, and grasses.

The trail down to the lake is $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile

long and over rough desert terrain and washes. You may be wondering, how this place could be the source of a sand dune? The answer is yet to come but that is alright because something else has caught your attention. You see a fence half standing with a tangled barb wire gate, a stone trough and windmill that long ago stop turning and is now lying still on the ground. The Lucero brothers, cattle ranchers, made a living off the land in the late 19th century. They were not the first people to live here but merely the last. There are still a few small forgotten reminders rusting away. The ranger continues making stops along the trail and explains the unique geology of the area and how the selenite crystals are formed.

Each person is free to explore and experience Lake Lucero in their own way. They are free to photograph the crystals and handle them but remember to leave the crystals at Lake Lucero. In the distance the small white mounds of sand are barely visible. There is a shimmering haze between us and those mounds of sand. Could it be water? When you look across the dry lake bed it shimmers and quite convincingly

looks like water rippling in the distance, but a mirage can easily trick someone who has never seen one.

At the end of the 30 minutes, the ranger blows the whistle and gathers everyone back-up. It's time to head back to the trail head and cars. As you walk back up you realize you are in a large, deep arroyo. As you look up at the mountain, you can imagine the water rushing down the slope to fill the lake. You almost didn't notice the gradual descent as you walked down to the lake bed but now you can clearly see how Lake Lucero is fed by mountain tributaries. You can't help but look back at the now dry lake bed and wonder what it would look like filled with water.



Lake Lucero Tour