

# 3 EMIGRANT LAKE

**Length:** 9 miles round-trip

**Hiking time:** 5 hours or overnight

**High point:** 8,600 feet

**Total elevation gain:** 950 feet

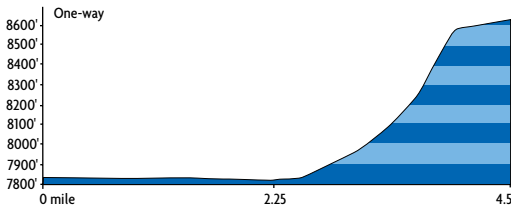
**Difficulty:** easy

**Season:** mid-July through late October

**Water:** available from Caples Lake and Emigrant Lake (purify first)

**Maps:** USGS 7.5' Caples Lake, USFS Mokelumne Wilderness

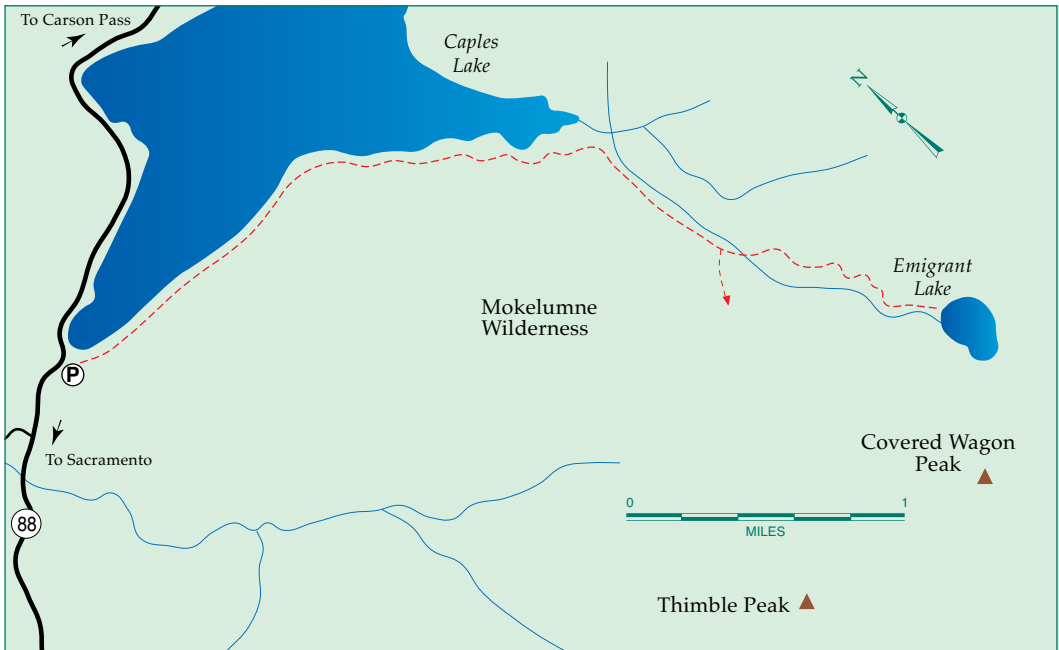
**Information:** Amador Ranger District, Eldorado National Forest



This trail offers an easy day hike or overnight trip that's suitable for all. You'll travel through small, flower-filled meadows and a mixed pine/fir forest to deep Emigrant Lake, where mountain peaks

tower high above. Day hikers do not need permits. Overnight hikers need to contact the Amador Ranger Station for more information on obtaining a permit (209-295-4251; [www.fs.fed.us/r5/eldorado](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/eldorado); during the summer season you can also call the Carson Pass Information Station, 209-258-8606.) No fires are allowed, so bring your backpacking stove. Groups are limited to a maximum size of twelve for day hikes and eight for overnight trips.

The trailhead parking area, signed for Caples Lake, is on the south side of Highway 88 by the



Caples Lake Dam, which is 4.9 miles west of Carson Pass (parking fee).

The signed trail begins near the bathrooms and, after passing a few quaking aspen, contours just above the shore of Caples Lake through a mixed forest of red fir and lodgepole pine. Caples Lake, quite popular for fishing, also offers cool refreshment on hot days.

Open views of Round Top's summit (Hike 2: Winnemucca Lake and Round Top) appear 1 mile from the trailhead. You'll also see the vast expanse of the high ridge north of Highway 88. At 1.2 miles note the sign for Emigrant Road; however, most traces of this historic trail have disappeared.

Continue straight and pass through a small grove of quaking aspen. The trail crosses four seasonal creeks over the next 1.2 miles, each bordered by lush greenery. The path then angles south along Emigrant Creek and away from Caples Lake.

The way now climbs gently through small meadow patches and past granite boulders and outcrops. Mountain hemlocks join the forest as you walk near the willow-lined creek bank and go left at a trail fork at 3.4 miles.

A rock hop across Emigrant Lake's outlet stream awaits at 4 miles, after which you'll have occasional eastward views through the trees of The Sisters' rocky spires as the climb continues. At 4.3 miles the trail levels and parallels a small meadow near the stream, which is bordered by an abundance of red mountain heather.

Finally, 4.5 miles from the trailhead, you reach the deep, granite-ringed waters of glacier-formed Emigrant Lake. A steep, talus-clad cliff rises from the lake's south shore, and to the southwest lies the broad ridge of 9,565-foot Covered Wagon Peak. Farther west towers 9,805-foot Thimble Peak, a volcanic vent that covered much of this area with lava, volcanic ash, and mudflows 4 million to 20 million years ago.

Emigrant Lake offers several good swimming sites in late summer. Those who stay overnight can find campsites, but they must be at least 300 feet from the lake.

Let your eyes wander from lake to cliff to peak to sky.

### Caples Lake

