

Baldy

Overview

This very difficult hike is a true Sun Valley classic with many locals making it an annual tradition. The first mile and a half is extremely busy as hikers swarm towards the platform that marks the turnaround point of the [Overlook hike](#). Other hikers split off the trail just after the 3-mile mark to [cut over to Roundhouse](#). Those who continue on to the summit find a little more solitude as they huff and puff their way over the College, Sunnyside Bowl and Upper River Run slopes. The trail concludes near the top of the Challenger ski lift. Views from the summit are outstanding.

Although the trail can be extended as an out-and-back route, it is most popular as a one-way trek with a descent on Christmas lift and then the gondola. Sun Valley operates its lifts throughout July and August typically from Wednesday to Sunday between 9 am and 4 pm. Riding down the lifts is free of charge. Dog cannot ride Christmas lift, but are welcome onboard the gondola. Visit sunvalley.com or call (208) 622-6236 to confirm when the lifts will be running.

The trail is closed during the ski season.

The Numbers

5-mile one way with chairlift and gondola ride down

3055 feet total elevation gain

Ascent Grade: 11.6% (Hard)

Water

There is very little water on this hike. You will pass over the Big Wood River as you cross from the parking lot to the trailhead and then again upon your return, giving dogs a chance to cool down and grab a drink. There is also a natural spring at about the 3.5-mile mark, but there are times its faucet is inoperable.

Bring plenty of water, as much of the climb is in the sun.

Drive

The trailhead is at the north end of the base of Sun Valley's River Run ski area. From downtown Ketchum, it is an easy 1-mile drive, all on paved roads. [Click here](#) for directions to the trailhead. There are about 50 spots available at the lower lot and ample parking in Sun Valley's upper ski lot.

To get to the trailhead after parking, pass over the bridge that spans the Big Wood River, pass between the two large lodge buildings, heading towards Lift #1 (River Run Express).

Turn right just after passing the lodge to your right. The trailhead is just beyond the Kinderspielplatz kiddie ski run.

When either of the two lodge buildings are open, there are bathrooms near the trailhead.



Trailhead

Season

July and August

Route

The first quarter mile of the hike rolls through the woods alongside and above the Big Wood River. At .25 miles, the climb begins in earnest and at about .85 miles you make a sharp left hand turn at a sign marking the Bald Mountain Trail.



Sign at .85 miles

Continue to follow the trail as it makes hairpin turns through the forest. At 1.3 miles you will leave the trees and enter onto an open hillside. At 1.35 miles you will see a trail shooting off to the left towards Sun Valley's Frenchman's ski lift. Stay right.

As you continue along the hillside, views of Ketchum will be straight ahead along with excellent over-the-shoulder views of the Big Wood River. At 1.6 miles you will come to a viewing platform erected by the Bureau of Land Management. This observation deck is usually occupied, but patience will allow you a chance to grab some spectacular photos of Ketchum and Sun Valley as well as peaks in the Boulder and Pioneer ranges.

As you approach the platform, you will see a trail to the left. Follow that trail and continue ascending along the open sagebrush-covered ridge.



Observation Tower (Turn Left)

As you continue along the ridge, the lower terminal of the Frenchman’s Lift will come into view. Shortly after the 2-mile mark, enter a short stretch of woods. As you leave the forest, look to the left to see the Janss’ Pass and Graduate ski runs, both lined with snow guns. At 2.45 miles, you will cross over the Janss’ Pass run and come to a sign marking the continuation of the trail to the summit. Continue straight.



Continue straight at the trail sign

The trail continues its rise and crosses over the Graduate ski run a couple tenths of a mile later. Look down the run for excellent views towards Ketchum.



Graduate ski run and views to Ketchum

At about 2.75 miles, cross over the famous College ski run and at 2.95 miles, pass a tree marked by a couple memorials honoring Dr. James Gibson and Dr. Teresa Skidmore Flippo Morton. Dr. Gibson was a Utah veterinarian who passed suddenly in Sun Valley in 1998. Dr. Flippo Morton was a leading cancer surgeon in North Carolina who loved Sun Valley. She was stricken by pancreatic cancer in 2015.

Right after the memorials, the trail hairpins right and just after the 3-mile mark, come to the signed junction of the Bald Mountain Summit trail and the Roundhouse Connector. Continue straight on the Bald Mountain Summit trail.



Junction after the 3-mile mark (Stay Straight)

After the junction, the trail continues along an open ridge and you soon pass under the Frenchman's lift line. At 3.3 miles, come to the Flying Squirrel ski run and make a quick hairpin turn back towards the lift line.

At about the 3.5-mile mark, come to another pair of memorials in a small, shaded grotto. First, there is a plaque honoring Louis Samuel Stur, one of Sun Valley's legendary mountaineers. Stur came to Sun Valley in 1951 where he first served as a ski instructor and eventually became the director of Sun Valley hotels. But his greatest gift to the region was the development of hiking routes throughout the Sawtooth Mountains. Stur died while hiking Mount Ebert in 1989.

The second memorial is a framed poem named "Broken Chain" which is dedicated to Kris Robert Hughes, who died at age 30 on September 11, 2001, while working in the World Trade Center. Hughes, a loyal Ohio State Buckeye, dreamed of retiring from his finance career at age 40 and moving to Sun Valley to open a fly-fishing shop. In 2011, the year he would have turned 40, his family held a month-long celebration of his life in Sun Valley and during the celebration, they placed the poem in the grotto.



Within the grotto is a faucet that, when operating, dispenses spring water. There is a small bowl beneath the faucet so dogs can sneak in a quick drink before taking on the rest of the climb.

At 3.6 miles, cross a road. During winter this is the Roundhouse Lane cat track. Across the road is a sign marking Bald Mountain trail. Continue straight past the sign.



Roundhouse Lane and signed intersection to trail (Stay Straight)

Cross over a signed intersection with a mountain bike trail just after the 3.7-mile mark and then cross the Upper River Run ski slope before passing under the Lookout Express chairlift at about 3.9 miles. Another hairpin turn sends you back to the northwest and again across Upper River Run.

At 4.15 miles, cross the College ski run once again and enter the shade of the woods. Hairpin turn again at the Warm Springs ski run and then cross College one more time at about 4.55 miles. There are amazing views down to Ketchum and Sun Valley at this point.

By now, you are in full sun and there is no shade for the remainder of the hike. Weave around the area where the College, Upper River Run and the Ridge ski runs all converge. As you head back to the northwest, the top of the Challenger lift comes into view. You will come within touching distance of one of Challenger's stanchions before coming to the last little push that takes you to the summit.

Take some time to catch your breath and enjoy the 360° views at the top of Baldy. As you walk with the trail to your back, Seattle Ridge emerges in the distance and beyond it, the City of Hailey.



View to the south from the top of Baldy

If Christmas lift and the gondola are running, there are a few options to get down. If you do not have a dog, hop on Christmas which drops you off at the top of the gondola which you can take to complete the ride down.

If you have a dog, you can backtrack to the top of the gondola and ride to the bottom. To do so, either follow the trail back down to the junction with Roundhouse Connector and take

that flat $\frac{3}{4}$ mile trail to the gondola. Alternatively, you can cut off a little mileage by turning right at the junction with Roundhouse Lane and following the wide road to the gondola.

Of course, it is always an option to hike the entire trail back down, but who doesn't love a downhill chair ride! Besides, you would miss these views:

