

Long Gulch to Pioneer Cabin

Overview

Among the four hikes leading to Pioneer Cabin, this is perhaps the most challenging. However, those who undertake it are rewarded with solitude and remarkable beauty. The nearly 3000-foot climb, bathed in sunlight, is divided into two segments, with the latter being a strenuous ascent that concludes in a serene mountain meadow approximately one mile from the cabin. The descent follows the well-traveled Pioneer Cabin trail.

Pioneer Cabin is a must-see for any serious hiker. Nestled on an open slope with fantastic views of the rugged Pioneer Mountains, it was built in 1937 by the Union Pacific Railroad to serve as a hut for backcountry skiers. Today it primarily serves as a lunch spot for hikers, though some adventurers still use it for overnight accommodations.

The Numbers

8.9-mile loop

2930 total elevation gain

Ascent Grade: 11.1% (Difficult)

Hardest Mile: 14.7%

Water

Carry ample water for this hike, as the climb is through sun-exposed fields and rocky hills. At 3.25 miles, you'll cross Corral Creek, which can be challenging during high water. The only other water source is near the hike's end.

The Drive

From downtown Ketchum, it is an 8.8-mile drive with the last 3.8 miles on a well-maintained dirt road with turnouts. [Click here](#) for directions. There is parking for about 15 cars, though the lot will fill up on summer weekends.

There are bathrooms at the trailhead.



Parking and Trailhead

Season

Late June through September

Route

The trailhead is to the left of the Pioneer Cabin trail. If you cross the creek, you've gone the wrong way. Long Gulch trail begins by passing through a grassy field and enters a small aspen grove within a quarter mile. The climb steepens as you continue along a finger ridge and stunning views to the tree-covered Pioneer Mountains open before you. The rocky path passes through sagebrush fields, with wildflowers blooming in late June and early July.

At nearly 1.5-miles, the climb intensifies and the views become even more spectacular as a taller, rugged, often snow-capped section of Pioneers rise above. The climb finally relents for a bit at about 2 miles as it traces along a hillside.

At 2.5 miles the trail begins a looping descent towards Corral Creek, which flows far below. The descent steepens at the 3-mile mark and shortly afterwards you get a welcome respite from the sun as you enter a pine forest that lines the creek.

You reach the creek at 3.25 miles. During low water periods, you can skip across rocks in the creek, but during high water flows, the only way across is deadfall that sits about four feet above the roaring creek. Exercise extreme caution.



Corral Creek crossing

After the creek, the hike becomes even more difficult as the climb intensifies once again. The path leaves the cover of trees for a stretch and passes through a tallus field. The lungs burn as you look upward seeking some shade and relief from the ascent. Just after 3.5 miles, trees mercifully provide some shade, but the climb continues for another .7 miles until you reach a serene mountain meadow. The next .8 miles is a pleasant rolling walk towards Pioneer Cabin. As you approach the cabin, views to Bald Mountain open straight ahead while a wild, picturesque valley lays below to your left.

At 5 miles you get your first glimpse of Pioneer Cabin, not too far ahead of you. When you get to it, feel free to enter the cabin and take a look around. Past the cabin and to its left as you approach is a small rock amphitheater that provides spectacular views of the Pioneers and the valleys below.

The descent follows the extremely popular Pioneer Cabin trail, so say goodbye to the solitude of Long Gulch. But the trail is popular for a reason, as it provides expansive views south and east towards Sun Valley. Begin the descent by turning right from where you entered the Pioneer Cabin clearing. Crest a small hill and begin descending the rocky path that twists along an open hillside. The easy-to-follow trail comes to a junction with the fantastic [Johnstone Creek trail](#) at 6.25 miles. Turn right at the junction.



Junction with Johnstone Creek (Turn right)

At 6.6 miles, there is an offshoot straight ahead, but turn left.



Offshoot at 6.6 miles (Turn left)

The trail enters the woods at 6.75 miles and winds down the mountain for much of the remainder of the hike. Ignore any offshoots at the numerous switchbacks. With a little less than a mile remaining the trail straightens out and Corral Creek occasionally nestles close by to the left. Continue on to the trailhead, marking the completion of the hike by crossing a bridge over the creek.