

Pioneer Cabin

Overview

Pioneer Cabin is one of the most popular treks among locals, with many hikers making it an annual tradition. They are drawn to its challenge, beauty, and expansive views. But what makes this hike stand out is its destination. Pioneer Cabin. 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 ski hut for backcountry skiers. Today it primarily serves as a lunch spot for hikers, though some adventurers still use it for overnight accommodations. Nothing quite equals the thrill of cresting the final rise of the Pioneer Cabin Trail and catching your first glimpse of the cabin.

The hike is a steady and sometimes difficult climb. Thankfully, the toughest part of the climb occurs under the cover of forest during the first three miles. The last portion of the ascent is not quite as arduous, but there is no protection from the sun which presents its own challenge. Hiking poles are helpful for the descent.

There are three other hikes that will get you to Pioneer Cabin – [Long Gulch, Johnstone Creek, and North Fork of Hyndman Creek](#). Each is worth exploring.

The Numbers

7.55 mile out and back

2560 feet total elevation gain

Ascent Grade: 13% (Difficult)

Hardest Mile: 15.1%

Water

Excepting extremely wet periods, you leave any trace of water behind just 3/4 of a mile into the hike. Given the relentless ascent, bring plenty of water.

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

Key Season

Late June through September

Route

The trail starts with a bridge crossing over Corral Creek. The path begins climbing as the creek runs to your right. The forest thickens at about .4 miles and shortly afterwards you come to an easy stream crossing. The stream runs away from you but re-emerges at .75 miles as a small watering hole. Except in wet periods, this is the last available source of water on the ascent.

The first of many switchbacks is at .85 miles as the trail continues its steady rise. Ignore all the spurs that run off the sharp turns. South-facing switchbacks offer spectacular views of the Pioneer Mountains.



Southerly views to the Pioneer Mountains

Just after the 2.1-mile mark, the trail leaves the trees for a mountain meadow and at 2.25 miles come to the first of two quick unsigned junctions. Stay right at each of them. The climb finally eases a bit as you continue through the meadow.



Two unsigned intersections starting at 2.25 miles (Stay Right at each)

At 2.6 miles, come to a signed intersection with the Johnstone Creek Trail. Turn left.



Intersection with Johnstone Creek (Turn Left)

The climb intensifies once again after you pass the intersection. As you approach the 3-mile mark, a large rocky knob rises before you. You are nearing the final push, as Pioneer Cabin lies behind the peak of that knob.



Nearing the final push

At about 3.15 miles, begin climbing a rocky slope. As the trail steepens along a talus covered hillside, it begins to switchback once again. Finally, the trail straightens and widens as you near the peak of the hill. As you come over that peak at about 3.65 miles, Pioneer Cabin comes into view in front and to your left



Pioneer Cabin

Take some time to explore the area. Feel free to enter the cabin and take a look around. Past the cabin and to its right is a small rock amphitheater that provides spectacular views of the Pioneers and the valleys below. Finally, look for the signs marking the [Long Gulch](#) and the [North Fork of Hyndman Creek Trails](#) because it is never too early to start planning your next trip to Pioneer Cabin.