

Prospector Loop

Overview

Prospector Loop has its plusses and minuses, many contingent on the time of year and even the time of day. We tend to avoid this sun-bleached hike in the heat of a summer day, but rush to it on cool mornings in the spring or all day during the peak of autumn foliage.

The trail starts with a moderate climb before settling into a pleasant roll as it circumnavigates a small hill near the top of Elkhorn Road. Along the way there are excellent panoramas of Ketchum and Sun Valley, including uniquely framed vistas of both Sun Valley ski areas as well as views of all three of the resort's golf courses.

Those looking for an easily accessible short hike with great views of the valley will enjoy this hike, assuming they avoid the heat of the day.

The Numbers

3-mile loop

550 feet total elevation gain

Ascent Grade: 8.5% (Moderate)

Water

The only reliable water on this hike is not much more than a mud puddle that some dogs will find at about the 2.7-mile mark. Given that the hike is in full sun and includes a moderate climb at the start, it is advised to bring plenty of water, even on cooler days.

Drive

From downtown Ketchum, it is an easy 3.2-mile drive all on paved roads. [Click here](#) for directions. There is parking for only about 4-5 cars, so get your hike started early.

There are no bathrooms at the trailhead.



Parking and Trailhead

Season

May through October

Route

The first 500 feet of the trail is along a narrow asphalt driveway that leads to a short, squat water tank. The trail bends right as it turns to dirt. At .2 miles come to the junction that marks the start of the loop. Turn right.



Start of Prospecter Loop

The rocky trail is moderately steep as it winds up and around the open hillside, but the views of Dollar Mountain framed by its big sister, Bald Mountain make up for the effort. Even so, there are better views of both the Sun Valley Company's ski mountains later in the hike.

At .45 miles, stay right at the junction. The trail flattens a bit but continues rising to a saddle marked by an old fence line at .9 miles. The trail shoots off to the left and right and there is a small sign pointing towards the “SV Loop.” Stay straight and begin to descend into the valley.



Saddle junctions and sign at .9 miles (Follow the arrow and descend)

As you descend through the open, quiet valley, views to the northwest open to the foothills of the Boulder Mountain range and below them, a few fairways of the Sun Valley Company’s Trail Creek golf course. Above it to the left is the gorgeous White Clouds course. Up and to the right there is an abandoned ski lift which parallels the beginning of the [Ruud Mountain](#) hike, an extremely challenging trek, but one worth taking on for those seeking even better views than those on offer at Prospector.

Just after the 1.5-mile mark as you wind to the left, Bald Mountain once again becomes the dominating fixture on the near horizon, with Dollar Mountain sitting just to its left.



Bald Mountain and Dollar Mountain

At about the 2-mile mark, you get a glimpse at Sun Valley Company's third golf course, Elkhorn, which sits to the left and below Dollar Mountain. At 2.3 miles, you will come alongside another old fence line before coming to the final junction at 2.7 miles. Though you will feel like bending right, stay left.



Final junction (Stay left)

Within a tenth of a mile, you will come to the end of the loop marked by the "Prospector Loop" sign. Turn right and back down to the parking lot.