

Ruud Mountain

Overview

Known for its brutal ascent of nearly 1000 feet over less than mile, Ruud Mountain is perhaps the most difficult trek among the popular routes near Ketchum and Sun Valley. Those who take it on are rewarded with fantastic 360° views of the Wood River Valley and peaceful wind-swept meadows, often awash in wildflowers in mid-summer. Ruud's distinctive ridge looms over many popular Sun Valley attractions, so perhaps the greatest prize for hikers who take it on is later looking up and relishing the fact that they conquered the climb.

A singular feature of the hike is the Ruud Mountain chairlift that lines portions of the intense climb. Built over the years 1937-1938, it is the third oldest chairlift in the world, \ surpassed only by two lifts built a year earlier, one on nearby Proctor Mountain and another on Dollar Mountain. Both of those lifts were torn down decades ago, making Ruud Mountain's lift the oldest still standing. The top terminal, with its newly reconstructed hut designed to match the original which deteriorated under the pressure of 80 winters, is an excellent place to rest and snap a few panoramic photos.

The Numbers

5.38-mile loop

1820 total elevation gain

Ascent Grade: 12.5% (Difficult)

Toughest Mile: 18.9%

Water

The only reliable source of water on the hike is Trail Creek, which you will pass on the way up at .18 miles and then again on the way back to the trailhead. Bring plenty of water, as the incredibly tough ascent is in full sun.

Drive

From downtown Ketchum, it is an easy 2.6-mile drive with all on paved roads. [Click here](#) for directions to the trailhead. There are about 30 parking spots on either side of the street, but spots can still get scarce by mid-morning during the summer.

There are no bathroom facilities at the trailhead.



Trailhead and Parking

Season

May through October

Route

Go straight and quickly come to the Hemingway Memorial.



Hemingway Memorial

Wind to your right and around the memorial. Go downhill and come to a T-junction with a wide path. Turn left.



First junction (Turn Left)

Trail Creek flows to your right as you continue along the wide path. Just before .2 miles, the path splits. Veer right and cross a bridge over the creek. This will be the last source of water until you return to this spot at the end of the hike.



Second junction (Veer Right)

Directly after the bridge, turn left and head up a very short, steep hill and turn left again at the top.



Third junction (Turn left and climb hill)



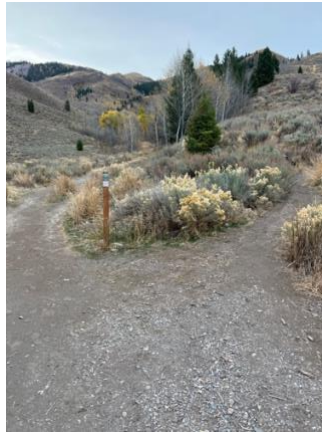
Top of hill (Turn Left)

As you wind around the hillside, you will see Trail Creek Cabin to your left. After a short descent, you will come to a four-way junction at .4 miles. The trail straight ahead takes you to [South Aspen](#) and the path to your left leads to [Corral Creek](#). Turn right and go up a small hill.



Four-Way junction (Turn Right)

At the top of the hill, you will come to a wide posted junction. Shooting to your left will be the beginning of the [Proctor Mountain hike](#). To the right looms the Ruud Mountain trail, aggressively climbing up a ridge.



Junction with Proctor Mountain (Stay Right)

Over the next .85 miles, you will climb nearly 1000 feet through a sage brush field, with only a few lone pines to protect you from the sun. There are no switchbacks, so the trail tests the achilles along with the lungs. Each step brings you closer to the Ruud Mountain lift that hangs to your right.



Initial climb

The trail finally flattens as you reach the top terminal of the lift at about the .9-mile mark. You will have climbed about 600 feet over the past half mile. Take a few moments to catch your breath and enjoy the view of Baldy and Dollar Mountains. It is also interesting to observe that the basic structure of fixed-grip chair lifts are not all that different today than they were back in the late 1930s. Ruud's top-drive/bottom-tension design is still in wide use today.



Baldy and Dollar Mountains



Ruud Mountain Lift

After resting, turn around to face your next challenge. The trail continues up a large knob with a rounded point. Mercifully, this part of the trail is a bit more snaky than the straight shot to the top terminal, but the pitch is still severe and shade is sparse. There is a spur off to the left at the mile mark, but continue straight up the hill.



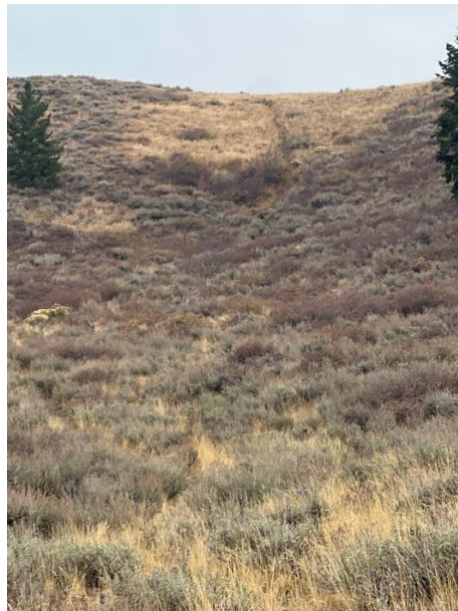
Second climb

The ascent finally relaxes just after the 1.25-mile mark as you reach a mountaintop meadow, though there are a few spikes of climb as you continue across the shoulder. Just before hitting 1.6 miles, the trail descends, but do not be fooled as at 1.8 miles the trail begins to rise again. Shortly after it ascends, come to a junction with a trail to your right that heads towards the Elkhorn section of Sun Valley. Stay left.



Junction to Elkhorn (Stay Left)

The climb intensifies once again after you pass the junction, eases again at the 2-mile mark and then quickly climbs again. As you continue up the hill, you will see the final push as the trail rise dramatically on the hill in front of you.



Final push

As you gain the final hill on Ruud, a trail will jut left to a small knob. It is worth the few extra steps for the view of the valley cut by Trail Creek. Just ahead are foothills framed by the rugged Boulder Mountains.



View of the Boulder Mountains

Head back to the main trail and turn left to begin the long descent. As you continue, notice a trail headed straight up a mountain. Thankfully, that is not part of the Ruud Mountain loop. As you curl to the left, walk along a ridge with straight-on views of the Boulder foothills and Sun Valley's gun club at their feet. Continuing on, you will see the Proctor Mountain trail below and to the left. You will connect with that trail to complete the loop.

For the remainder of the hike, ignore all the spurs shooting off from switchbacks. At 2.8 miles, enter the forest and re-emerge into the sun at 3 miles. There are good views of Sun Valley, including the White Clouds golf course.

At about 3.2 miles, come to the junction with the Proctor Mountain trail and continue straight.



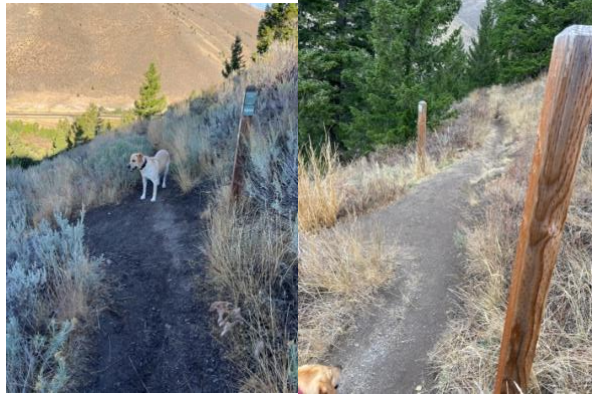
Junction with Proctor (Stay Straight)

From here, the trail slightly descends along an open mountain top covered in sage. Magnificent views of Bald Mountain and much of the valley open as you continue down the hill.



Views on the descent

At 4.2 miles, there is an offshoot to the right that leads to a bench memorializing Kim Germer-Prew, a Sun Valley local and hiking enthusiast who passed away in 2014 after battling cancer. Just before 4.3 miles, come to a junction with South Aspen. Stay straight rather than following the sign for Proctor Loop. Shortly afterwards, come to another posted junction with [South Aspen/Aspen Loop](#). Turn left and descend.



Two quick junctions (Stay straight then turn left)

The trail continues winding down the hill until it flattens at the valley bottom. Just before the 5-mile mark, take a quick left and then an immediate right to re-connect with the trail that leads back to the trailhead.