

Left Fork of Fall Creek

Overview

We are not going to lie to you – we did this hike by mistake. Made a wrong turn early on and just kept on going. When we finally realized we were off our chosen path, we thought about adding this hike to our [“List of Hikes We Did So You Don’t Have to”](#) but there are at least three reasons you may want to take on this route:

1. You’re a completist – You listen to every podcast on your feed, watch every episode of every show you ever start (even the ones you don’t really like), and you want to do every hike on our site;
2. You love cows – You hear a snap of a branch behind you. You spin as you reach for your bear spray, expecting to see a moose charging at you. Instead, it’s a big black cow and its calf chasing tail to get away from you. Listen, we can almost guarantee you will see some free-range cattle on this hike, but even if you do not, you will definitely see plenty of cow patties!
3. You dig jump scares – The Dusky Grouse really mess with you on this hike. They hold hard until the split second before you or your dog is about to step on them. Then they burst into flight violently, scaring the bejesus out of you. I swear we heard them laughing at us as they flew away.
4. You want solitude – Being half-serious here, after it splits from the popular trails that lead to Surprise Valley and Moose Lake, this is a VERY lightly used trail. Now, there is usually a reason a trail is lightly used. In this case, it is because Surprise Valley and Moose Lake are far superior hikes. Still, there is something to be said for having the Pioneer Mountains to yourself.

So, yeah, maybe this is not the most special hike you will ever do and, sure, the destination is just okay, but it takes you to the heart of Idaho’s untouched wilderness. Besides, the Pioneers never disappoint – if you doubt us, just scroll through the photo gallery.

The Numbers

8.8 miles out and back

1910 feet total elevation gain

Ascent Grade: 7.7% (Moderate)

Hardest Mile: 10.4%

Water

The trail parallels the Left Fork of Fall Creek, but the water is often too far away to reach. There are a few crossings where you can refill a water bottle. When you come to those crossings, a filter will come in handy as much of the hike is in full sun and there are sections of hard climb.

The Drive

From downtown Ketchum, it is a 27-mile drive to the trailhead with 17.7 of those miles being on well-maintained dirt roads.

[Click here for directions to the trailhead](#). There is parking for about 15-20 vehicles. Other hiking options from the trailhead are the more frequently used [Surprise Valley](#), [Moose Lake](#) and [Waterfall Trail](#). [Upper Fall Creek](#) is another option for those seeking solitude.

There are bathroom facilities at the trailhead.



Parking and Trailhead

Season

Late June through early October

Route

The trail immediately crosses a wooden bridge spanning Fall Creek. At .1 miles, come to a gate on your right and squeeze through the fence. Begin walking through a sagebrush field and enter a pine forest after the half mile mark. The woods get thicker and the climb intensifies at about .8 miles. The ascent moderates at the mile mark and nice views open to Fall Creek flowing far below you.

The trail descends briefly at 1.4 miles and you enter a large sagebrush field at 1.6 miles. Come to a creek crossing at 1.8 miles and look for deadfall to ease the ford.



Creek crossing at 1.8 miles

Right after the ford, come to a signed junction with Surprise Valley and Moose Lake. Turn left onto the narrow trail, following the sign to Highline Trail.



Signed junction at 1.8 miles (Turn Left)

The trail intensifies through sagebrush and switches back several times as it traverses an open ridge. There are excellent views of the Pioneers at this point. A little after the 2.5-mile mark, come to an easy stream crossing and then immediately to a tougher one. Look for deadfall to your right to make the crossing.



Crossing at 2.6 miles

The trail rises from the stream and a right turn leads to a boggy aspen grove. At 2.75 miles leave the aspens behind and enter another open sagebrush meadow. Come to another aspen grove at 3.3 miles and pass up and over a small knob. As you crest the hill, a series of beaver ponds lined by healthy willows come into view on the right. Watch your footing on the side-slope loose dirt.

As you continue from the side slope, the trail starts to become less defined. Take your time and resist the urge to move uphill since the trail continues to parallel the creek until it finally swerves left at 3.7 miles and begins to climb through a section of forest. At 3.9

miles, come to an obscure junction and turn left. The trail continues through another open field.



Junction at 3.9 miles (Veer Left)

Continue climbing and at 4.05 miles, come to another junction. While a swath of green to the left draws your attention, the trail continues to the right.



Junction at 4.05 miles (Veer Right)

Follow the loosely defined path until it connects with another trail at about 4.4 miles. This is the destination. Find a rock to sit and enjoy the wide valley below.



View from the destination