

West Fork of Norton Creek to Prairie Lakes View

Overview

Before we hit this trail, we fully expected it to land on our list of [Hikes We Did So You Don't Have To](#). Instead, it surprised us. This hike has a lot to offer: beautiful solitude, spectacular rock formations, and some tough — but manageable — climbs.

The payoff is a rocky knob perched about 600 feet above the Prairie Lakes, with sweeping views over the entire cluster of alpine lakes and ponds below. It's a spectacular spot to settle in for a picnic, catch your breath, and take in a perspective on the Prairie Lakes that you simply don't get from the shoreline.

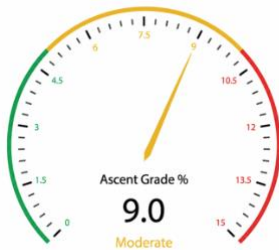
The Numbers

8.48-mile out-and-back

2291 elevation gain

Ascent Grade: 9% (Moderate)

Hardest Mile 12.4% (Difficult)



Season

Mid-June through early October

Water

The last reliable water source on the ascent is at 1.7 miles. There is not much shade on the hike, so carry plenty of water for you and your dogs.

The Drive

From downtown Ketchum, it is a 22-mile drive with the last 7 miles on dirt roads. The first 6 of those miles are along the well-maintained Baker Road, but the last mile into the trailhead is a just a bit rougher. Still, any car with healthy tires will be able to make it to the trailhead.

[Click here](#) for directions to the trailhead. There is parking for about 20 vehicles, but the lot fills quickly on weekend mornings.

There are bathroom facilities at the trailhead.



Parking and trailhead

The Route

After crossing the bridge over Norton Creek, continue straight at the junction with Norton Lakes Trail.



Continue Straight to Follow Trail 134

The trail begins climbing gently under an open sky, with a hillside rising to your right and Norton Creek babbling to your left.

At .75 miles, come to a simple creek crossing. On the other side, the views open dramatically to a picturesque 9,900-foot, talus-covered peak rising above a small meadow that bursts with wildflowers in mid-summer.



Crossing at .75 miles and views

There is another easy creek crossing at 1 mile before the trail enters the woods and begins to steepen. Cross the creek again at 1.65 miles, after which the stream continues alongside the trail for a short distance.

At 1.7 miles, you'll reach the last reliable water source. With a difficult, sun-exposed climb ahead, this is a good place to top off your water bottles.



Crossings at 1 mile and 1.65 miles

This marks the beginning of the hike's main climb. The trail continues through an open meadow, rising steadily toward the slope ahead. At about 2.4 miles, the trail finally levels out and enters the forest. At 2.5 miles, reach a junction and turn right.



Junction at 2.5 miles. (Turn right)

The trail enters a hillside meadow at about 2.6 miles. At 2.7 miles, look uphill to spot a cave tucked into the hillside. Reach the high point of the climb at 2.9 miles and take some time to enjoy the sweeping views into the valleys on either side.

From here, the trail rolls along the right side of the ridge before dropping steeply toward the valley floor. Footing can be tricky in places, and hiking poles will come in handy. As you descend into the valley, keep an eye out for the unusual rock formations rising on either side.

Cross the valley and, at 3.75 miles, begin climbing toward the saddle overlooking Prairie Lakes. At 4 miles, make one final push to reach a saddle-top junction at 4.15 miles. You can continue straight and descend to Prairie Lakes, but we suggest turning right toward the rocky knob overlooking the lakes and surrounding valley.

This is the final payoff. Climb the knob and find a comfortable spot to sit and enjoy a picnic while taking in the scenery. At least four of the Prairie Lakes and ponds can be seen dotted across the valley below. Of course, the farther you climb, the more expansive the views become—and the more lakes you'll be able to spot.



Views at the destination