

## 23

## ALPINE AND SAWTOOTH LAKES



## Coordinates

## Trailhead:

N 44° 11.920'  
W 115° 0.841'

## Sawtooth Lake:

N 44° 1.766'  
W 115° 03.777'

**Distance:** 7.8 miles out-and-back (Alpine Lake)  
9.6 miles out-and-back (Sawtooth Lake)

**Total Elevation Gain:** 1,300 feet (Alpine Lake)  
1,800 feet (Sawtooth Lake)

**Difficulty:** Moderate to Strenuous

**Elevation Range:** 6,700 to 8,450 feet  
(Sawtooth Lake)

**Topographic Map:** Stanley Lake

**Time:** 4 to 6 hours (Sawtooth Lake)

**Season:** Late June through mid October

**Water Availability:** Alpine and Sawtooth Lake, Iron Creek, tributary streams

**Cautionary Advice:** Campfires are prohibited at the lakes.

**Information:** Sawtooth National Recreation Area  
(208) 774-3000

**Restroom:** Yes

## ALPINE AND SAWTOOTH LAKES

Be forewarned: A visit to the Alpine and Sawtooth lakes may make you want to never return home. This trek breathes Sawtooth Mountains—soaring peaks, wildflower meadows, towering Douglas fir forest, crystal-clear creeks, and cobalt-blue lakes all cast within a world of granite. Although this hike is one of the more popular routes in the Sawtooth Wilderness, it would be a travesty to travel to Stanley and not see how amazingly beautiful a 10-mile walk can be.

There are three chapters to the hike. The first unfolds with a mellow 1-mile walk through woods to a beautiful meadow where Iron Creek meanders. In the second chapter, the hike is a bit more rigorous as you ascend to Alpine Lake through many switchbacks along granite hillsides. The gorgeous Alpine Lake sits in a glaciated bowl surrounded by forest and gray granite. In the final chapter, the dramatic climax includes a zigzag 500-foot ascent over talus and granite benches to the iconic Sawtooth Lake. The 173-acre glacial lake is bordered by the massive Alpine Peak and the triangular Mt. Regan, a granite-rimmed heaven that is easy to love.

Sawtooth Lake is not a secret, and the trail sees heavy foot traffic, especially on summer weekends. Both lakes offer campsites, although Sawtooth Lake is more limited as the lake is surrounded by steep, granite slopes, especially on its east and west side. Beyond Sawtooth Lake, several connecting trails offer extended hiking options with remarkable scenery. Families will find the scenic meadow near the wilderness boundary to be an excellent choice for a condensed 2-mile hike. It is often windy near Sawtooth Lake so make sure to bring a light jacket.

## TRAILHEAD DIRECTIONS

From the intersection of Hwy. 21 and Hwy. 75 in Stanley, drive west on Hwy. 21 for 2.6 miles and turn left on Iron Creek Road (FR 619). Follow the road 3.2 miles and turn right into the Iron Creek Trailhead. There is parking for more than 20 vehicles. The 10-site Iron Creek Campground is located just a short distance past the parking area. The campground sites are first come, first served and the setting is in mature forest. Hikers will also find a couple of dispersed sites near Iron Creek on FR 619.

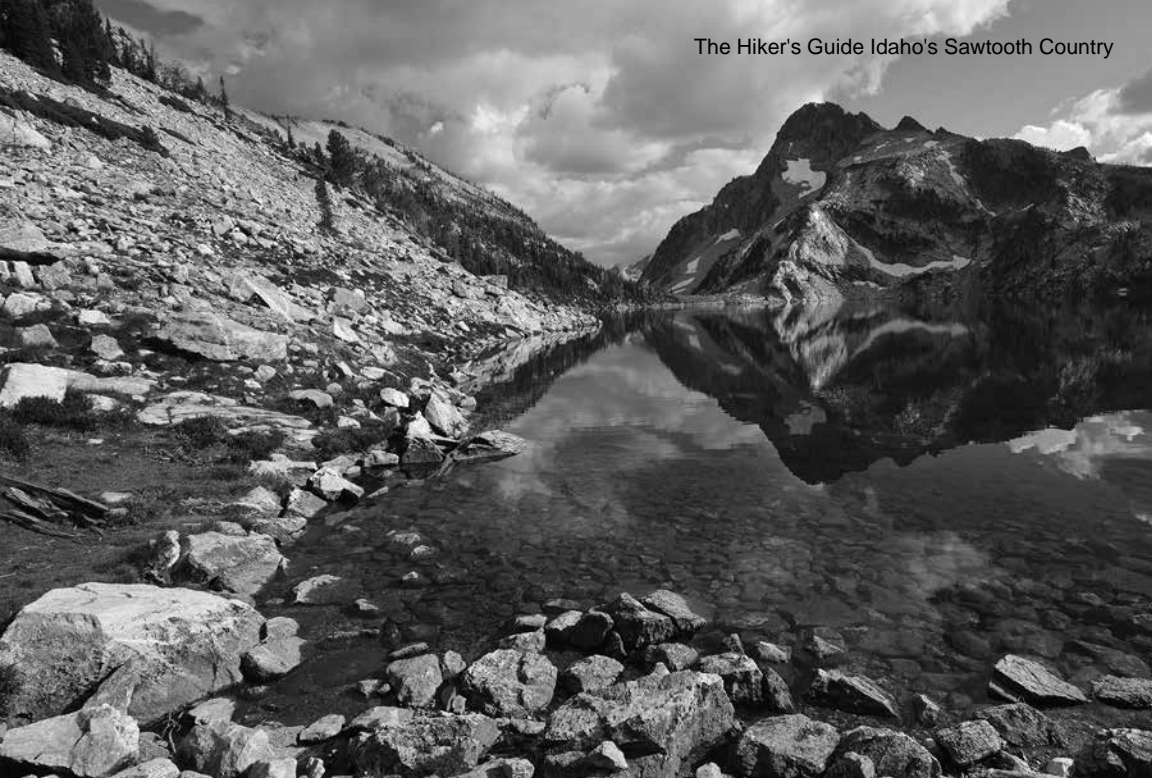
## THE HIKE

From the trailhead, hike west through dense lodgepole pine and subalpine fir forest. At .6 mile, the trail skirts the wide Iron Creek, passes an enormous granite boulder and ascends to the Sawtooth Wilderness boundary at 1.1 miles. Just beyond is the signed junction for the Alpine Way Trail. (A left turn, leads south to Goat Falls—see hike 25.) If you are looking for a short hike, the meadow beyond the junction is an excellent destination.

Turn right (west) at the junction and continue through forest to another signed junction at 1.7 miles. (If you continue straight, the Alpine Way Trail ascends 600 feet to a wooded divide and descends to Stanley Lake in 7.2 miles.) Turn left to Sawtooth Lake as the forest becomes more open and transitions to Douglas fir. After an ascent through four switchbacks, enter a small meadow and ford an unnamed creek at 3 miles.



Alpine Lake at sunset.



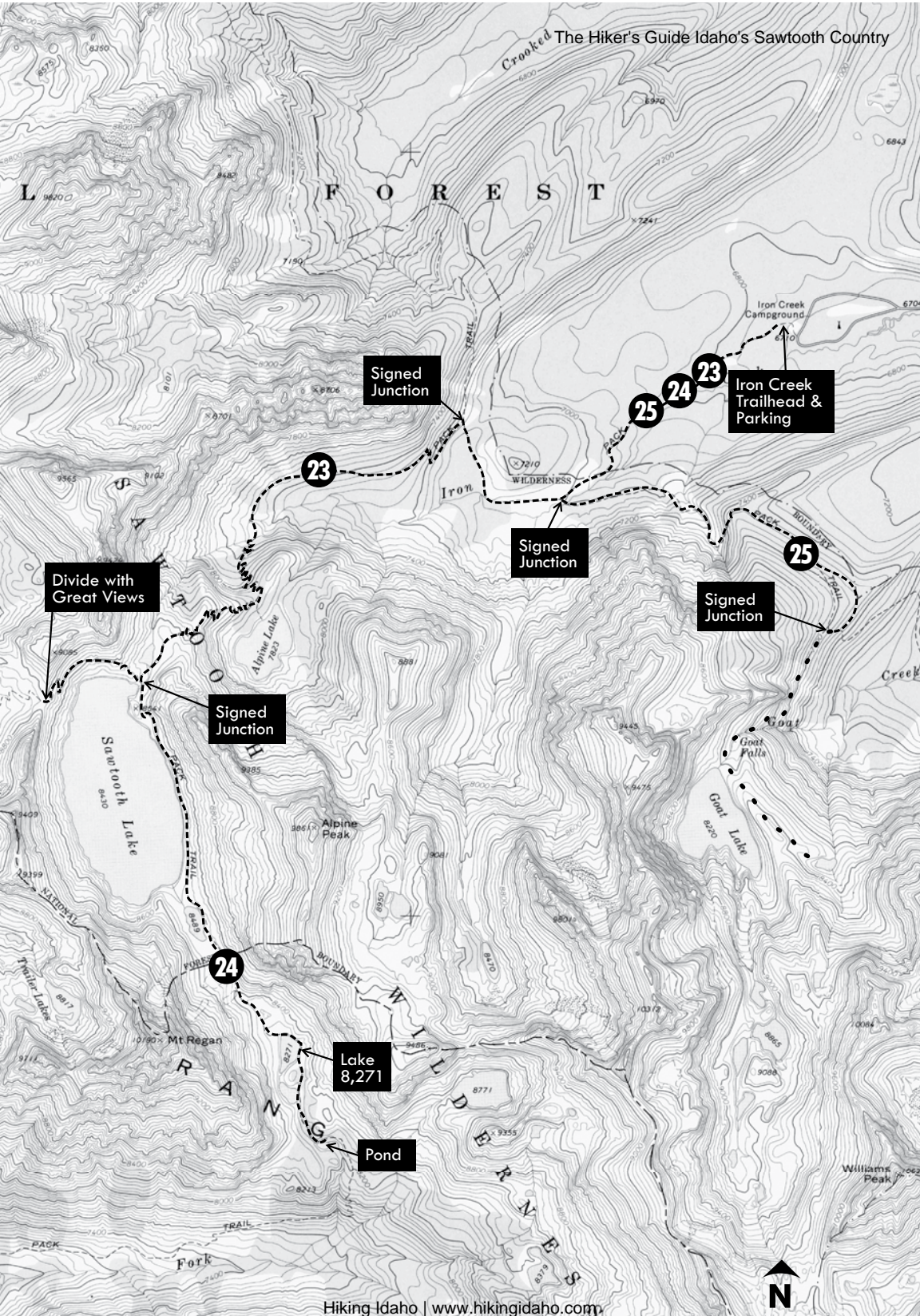
Sawtooth Lake and Mt. Regan.

Beyond the creek ford, the trail enters forest again and gains more than 400 feet as it switchbacks and weaves over granite benches. At 3.8 miles, come to the signed junction for Alpine Lake. If you are going to Sawtooth Lake, continue straight, otherwise, turn left and descend 100 feet in 150 yards to Alpine Lake.

Maybe one of the best 1-mile treks in the Sawtooth Mountains starts beyond the junction with Alpine Lake. At the junction, the trail continues to gain elevation through a series of zigzags dispensing sensational vistas down to Alpine Lake and northeast into the Stanley Basin. After more switchbacks and a gain of nearly 500 feet, the trail levels at 4.5 miles near a small pond. Continue over Sawtooth Lake's outlet creek to a signed junction near the lake's edge. There are several campsites between Sawtooth Lake and the pond. Campfires are prohibited at both Alpine and Sawtooth lakes.

To extend your hike, there are a couple of options. For an aerial view of Sawtooth Lake and the narrow canyon beyond Mt. Regan, turn right at the junction, and follow the trail as it ascends nearly 300 feet in .6 mile to a high divide separating Sawtooth Lake from the McGown Lakes basin. The views along the ascent are remarkable. A longer and equally scenic option is to explore the deep canyon south of Sawtooth Lake, nestled between Alpine Peak and Mt. Regan (see hike 24).





Hiking Idaho | [www.hikingidaho.com](http://www.hikingidaho.com)