



Coordinates

Trailhead

N 43° 51.143'
W 114° 04.694'

End of Maintained Trail

N 43° 48.407'
W 114° 02.241'

Distance: 9.0 miles out-and-back

Total Elevation Gain: 1,550 feet

Difficulty: Strenuous

Elevation Range: 7,250 to 8,600 feet

Topographic Map: Standhope Peak

Time: 3.5 to 5.5 hours

Season: Late June through mid-October

Water Availability: Fall Creek, several unnamed creeks

Cautionary Advice: None

Additional Information: Salmon-Challis National Forest, Lost River Ranger District (208) 588-3400

Pit Latrine: Yes

UPPER FALL CREEK

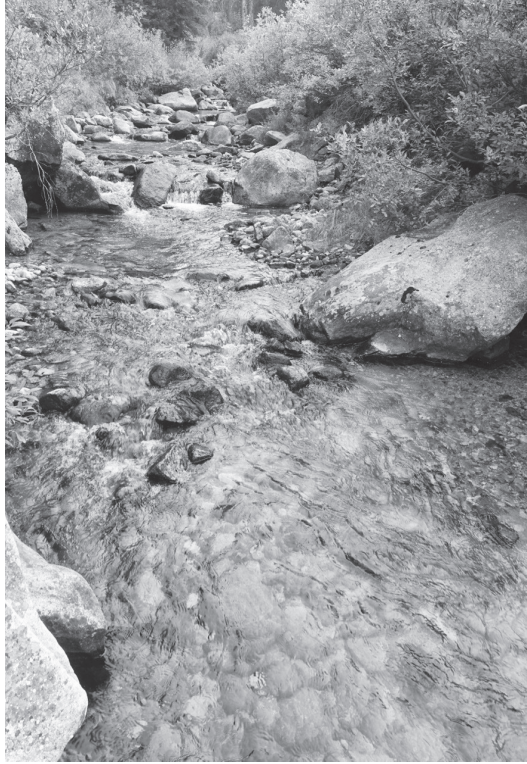
Few places in the Pioneer Mountains offer a better chance to chase the “in the middle of nowhere” feeling than upper Fall Creek. You won’t find it at the lofty Pioneer Cabin, along the flower-filled hillsides of Summit Creek, or at the glistening Kane Lake. This is unspoiled boondocks that is devoid of man.

The route to upper Fall Creek departs from the Fall Creek trailhead. Along the way, there are other destinations to seek including Moose Lake, Surprise Valley, and Left Fork of Fall Creek. These hikes are all worthwhile, but upper Fall Creek reigns for solitude seekers. Once you leave the junction for Surprise Valley, this route is a truly wondrous walk. You will hike through dense, fragrant forest, past oversized granite boulders, ford swift flowing creeks, and peer up to 10,000-foot rocky cliffs.

Although this is an official Forest Service trail, expect to encounter deadfall. It isn’t a problem though because most of the deadfall are slender lodgepole trees lying only a few feet above ground. There are several excellent places to camp overnight, and the crystal-clear Fall Creek is never too far from the trail. Beyond the end of the maintained trail at 4.5 miles, you can continue up the beautiful canyon on an ill-defined (often disappearing) footpath, which is a large part of the appeal.

TRAILHEAD DIRECTIONS

From Ketchum, drive east on Sun Valley Road, which transitions to Trail Creek Road (the road changes to a dirt-surface at 9.3 miles), for 22.2 miles. Turn right at a sign for Copper Basin-Wildhorse onto FR 135. Continue 2.0 miles to a Y-junction and veer right onto Wildhorse Road (FR 136). Follow FR 136 for 3.4 miles and turn left on FR 503. Continue on FR 503 for 0.4 mile and turn left into the large parking area. The trailhead is located near the bridge over Fall Creek.



Upper Fall Creek

THE HIKE

From the signed trailhead, cross the bridge over Fall Creek and pass through a gate at 0.1 mile. Continue across a sagebrush meadow for nearly a quarter-mile and then enter Douglas-fir forest. At 0.4 mile, begin a 300-foot ascent to where the trail nearly levels at 1.1 mile directly above Fall Creek. There are very good views looking up and down the Fall Creek watershed.

The trail continues east, undulating through forest and drops about 75 feet at 1.5 miles near the edge of lodgepole forest. Now cross a sagebrush meadow, and come to a ford of Left Fork of Fall Creek at 1.9 miles. Look to cross dead-fall during high water. This shaded setting in aspen, Douglas-fir, lodgepole pine, and willows is a good destination for a shorter hike.

After the ford, immediately reach a signed junction with the Highline Trail (hike 26). Continue straight (south) toward Surprise Valley. The trail enters an open area with sagebrush and then continues along the perimeter of lodgepole forest. You could establish a campsite here. Weave between willows and start ascending at 2.4 miles in Douglas-fir forest. Reach a signed junction for Moose Lake at 2.8 miles, then veer left toward Surprise Valley. There is a good camp-

site about 250 feet down the trail to Moose Lake.

The trail's grade intensifies and rises more than 200 feet to another signed junction at 3.2 miles. Veer right here. (The trail to the left leads to Surprise Valley, hike 27.) Although Fall Creek Trail is not signed at the junction, it is an official trail. Continue south into lodgepole forest, soon passing a massive granite boulder and decent camp opportunities within a few hundred feet. Deadfall from skinny lodgepole trees occasionally crosses the trail over the next half-mile but is easy to negotiate because most are only calf-high.

As you ascend, the forest becomes much denser and you get the distinct feeling a lot of critters live in this neighborhood. Pass a spring at 3.7 miles and then ford three small creeks in quick succession. At 4.2 miles, the forest thins and you will enter a small clearing. About 250 feet farther, impressive views unfold to the boulder-strewn, west-facing, canyon wall towering nearly 2,000 feet overhead.

At 4.4 miles, pass a fire ring and a good place to camp near Fall Creek. The trail reenters woods and reaches the end of the maintained trail at 4.5 miles, confirmed by a sign nailed to an Engelmann spruce tree. This is the end of the hike.

A user created foot trail continues south past the sign. The route proceeds along the edge of a boulder field and then abuts Fall Creek at 0.3 mile. From here, enter woods and then a clearing blanketed with willows, which is bisected by a small stream. Enter woods again, soon weaving around boulders and talus. At 0.7 mile, there is a good campsite. Beyond this point, the foot trail becomes braided in spots and is more difficult to follow. Even so, adventure seekers will be happy exploring the upper reaches of the impressive canyon.



A moose in the wide valley of Fall Creek