



West Mountain Trail #131

Length: 16.1 miles (26 km)

Use: Light

Difficulty

Motorcycle: Most Difficult

Horseback: Most Difficult

Hiking: More Difficult

USGS Maps: Tripod Peak, Sagehen Reservoir, Smith's Ferry

Recreation sites nearby: Wilson Corrals Trail, Tripod Lookout, Tripod Peak Trail, Joe's Creek Trail, Renwyck Trail, Antelope Trail, Gabe's Peak Trail, Willow Lake Trail, Campbell Creek Trail, Poison Creek Trail

Attractions and Considerations

The West Mountain Trail begins in a valley, crosses several creeks, and passes through meadows and forests as it gradually ascends West Mountain Ridge. Once on the ridge, the trail passes Snowbank Mountain, Jacob's Ladder, Hangman's Tree and Tripod Lookout, providing panoramic views of Round Valley, Long Valley, Smith's Ferry and Cascade. The trail is rich in Idaho history. Wilson Meadows is named for Allen Wilson, a pioneer who grazed sheep there in the early 1900's. The origin of the name Jacob's Ladder isn't known, but it does resemble a ladder or steps cut from rock. There are conflicting but fascinating legends about Hangman's Tree. One says that a buckaroo of the early 1900's created a fictional "tall tale" by throwing a hangman's rope over a tree limb. Another early settler says the rope was there in 1915, but it was used to hang horse thieves who happen to be caught near a stout tree limb.

From the trailhead on National Forest Road 625G (NF-625G) to Tripod Lookout, the trail is open only to non-motorized use except for snowmobiles, which are permitted December 1 to May 15. South of the lookout to the trailhead on NF-644 is open yearlong to all motorized vehicles. The section of trail between Wilson Meadows and Tripod Lookout will be difficult to find because cow paths bisect the main trail. Cattle graze the trail south of Wilson Meadows in the summer and fall.

The trail, bordered by huckleberry bushes, climbs gradually as it enters a forest of lodgepole pines and Douglas-fir. The trail soon crosses Poison Creek and passes through several bogs. Within 2 ½ miles, the trail crosses Squaw Creek for the first time, then climbs steeply through a meadow. As it reaches a tributary of Squaw Creek, it changes direction abruptly from southeast to east. Recreationists should watch for a large arrow cut in a tree on the west side of the trail.

The trail is bordered by rock cairns and passes through a meadow, ascends a small hill, and passes the signed intersection of the Wilson Corrals Trail. The trail soon reaches the northern end of Wilson Meadows, which is marshy in early spring. To avoid wet feet, hikers should skirt its west edge.

At the southern edge of Wilson Meadows, the West Mountain Trail is intersected by two other trails. An unsigned short trail near a stockman's cabin leads to the Snowbank Mountain road (NF-446). In the same area, the unsigned and unblazed Gabe's Peak Trail intersects the West Mountain Trail from the west. The trail gradually gains elevation as it travels south toward Jacob's Ladder. Within a mile and southeast of Jacob's Ladder, the trail passes Hangman's Tree, which is signed in a prominent saddle north of Tripod Lookout. Within a half mile, the trail passes the signed Renwyck trailhead and shortly intersects a short, steep trail to Tripod Lookout.

As it gradually descends, the trail splits with the West Mountain trail forking east and the unsigned Joe's Creek Trail forking south. An unblazed section of the trail overlaps an unsigned, well-traveled road for a quarter mile, enters the forest again, and within a mile intersects an old, narrow roadbed. The trail continues southwest and the old roadbed forks east. About a mile from NF-644, the trail parallels a narrow stream, then ascends steeply to a registration box and trailhead sign where West Mountain Trail ends.

Trail Beginning

Elevation: 5440 ft (1658 m)

The unsigned and unblazed trail begins at the intersection of NF-625 and NF-625G.

Trail Ending

Elevation: 6160 ft (1878 m)

The trail ends at a trailhead sign on an unsigned road.

Access 1:

Start at Smith's Ferry on State Highway 55, go west on NF-644 for 2 1/2 miles to the intersections of NF-626. Go northwest on NF-626 about 20 miles to Sagehen Reservoir where the gravel road changes to pavement. Continue on the paved road for about a mile paralleling the east, then the north side of the reservoir to the intersection of NF-609. Go north on NF-609 about 2 miles to the intersection with NF-653. Go north on NF-653 about 12 miles to the intersection of NF-625. Go west on NF-625 about 8 miles to the signed intersection of NF-625G on the north side of the road 1/8 mile west of where NF-625 crosses Squaw Creek. Squaw Creek is identified with a sign. While paralleling Squaw Creek, the unblazed trail overlaps NF-625G through a logged forest. Parking is available for 8 to 10 vehicles at the trailhead.

Access 2:

Starting at Smith's Ferry on State Highway 55, go west on NF-644 for 2 1/2 miles to the intersection of NF-626. Go northwest on NF-626 about 5 miles to a trail sign on the north side of NF-626. Go northwest at the trail directional sign about 500 feet to a trailhead sign and registration box on the north side of an unsigned road. Parking is available for 8-10 vehicles at the trailhead.

