



Mt. Elwell Trail and Loop

Plumas National Forest
Beckwourth Ranger District



Trail Description

Plan to explore panoramic viewpoints, forest, craggy outcrops, wildflowers and fall colors along the way. Mt. Elwell Trail is a 12 mile out and back hike to the Pacific Crest Trail. The Mt Elwell Loop is an 8 mile alternate route that returns via the Long Lake Trail.

Start from the Smith Lake Trailhead at the north end of the parking area. In 1 mile, go left at the intersection with Smith Creek Trail. A short distance later bear left onto Mt. Elwell Trail. The trail ascends into a fir and Sugar Pine forest. About halfway into the three mile ascent is Maiden Lake. From here, the climb steadily gets more difficult. Several craggy outcrops mark the crest of Mt. Elwell. Steep drop-offs and high winds combine to make scrambling on these rocks dangerous.

Prominent viewpoints include Mt. Shasta, Mt. Lassen and the Feather River Valley to the north; Sierra Buttes, Bear Lakes, Silver Lake and Round Lake to the south; Smith Peak Lookout, Gold Lake, Beckwourth Peak and Sierra Valley to the east; and Table Mountain and Mt. Fillmore to the west. Look for the remnants of an old fire lookout. These are artifacts and should not be disturbed.

From the peak, the trail descends less than one mile to intersect with Long Lake Trail. Early in the descent, watch to the northwest for a view of Jamison Lake, turquoise colored Rock Lake and barely visible Wades Lake. Long Lake Trail is the return option for those hiking Mt. Elwell Loop. Mt. Elwell Trail continues to the Pacific Crest Trail 1.1 mile away.

Long Lake Trail skirts the north side of Long Lake to the dam. Many opt to cool off in the lake. Below the dam, expect to see wet areas that abound in wildflowers from spring to fall. From the dam the trail ends back at the parking area two miles away.

Driving Directions

From Graeagle go south about 1.5 miles on Highway 89. Turn right onto Gold Lake Highway. Drive 4 miles and turn right at Gray Eagle Lodge/Smith Lake Trail. Before reaching the lodge turn right to the parking area and trailheads.



Photo by Jim Bradeen

Notes

- Open to foot, bike and equestrian traffic
- A restroom is available at the parking area
- Do not drink from naturally occurring water sources without proper water treatment
- Dogs must be under control at all times
- Take along a map
- Expect changeable weather, dress in layers
- Avoid the area during lightning events
- Stay hydrated, bring plenty of water
- Keep energy levels up with extra food
- All human waste must be 100 feet from any trail, road, campsite or water source. Solid human waste must in addition be buried 8 to 12 inches and pack out all tissue.
- Pack out all trash

Related Activities

- Many intersecting trails await exploration
- Swimming (cold water)
- Fishing
- Observing wildlife
- Flowers and fall color
- Photography
- Picnic

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For more information;

Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region — <https://fsweb.r5.fs.fed.us/>
Plumas National Forest — www.fs.fed.us/r5/plumas — (530) 283-2050
Beckwourth Ranger District, PO Box 7, Blairsden, Ca. 96103 — (530) 836-2575

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Elevation—6080' to 7818'

Usage—Low

Trail Conditions;

- Maintained Trail with some switchbacks
- Mostly easy to moderate grade
- Some strenuous sections with loose rocks
 - ◆ 1 mile steep grade near Mt. Elwell summit
 - ◆ $\frac{3}{4}$ mile steep grade near PCT
- Trail bed made up of loose rock and dirt fill

