

Pioneer Loop National Recreation Trail #750

Length: 35 miles

Use: Receives little use on the northern and central sections.

Difficulty: More difficult

Recommended Season: May to November

USGS Maps: Stine Mountain, Foolhen Mountain, Shaw Mountain, Proposal Rock, Stewart Mountain, and O'Dell Lake

Trail Beginning: Stine Creek along the Pioneer Mountain Scenic Byway #73, 5 miles south of Wise River.

Trail Ending: Ends at Lacy Creek Trailhead

Access: Via Stine Creek at the north or Lacy Creek at the south end of trail. Other access trails are Foolhen Ridge #86, Steel Creek #380, and Pettengill Creek Trail #245.

Attractions and Considerations

There are stock ramps at Stine Creek and Lacy Creek trailheads and at several trails that give access to the Pioneer Loop National Recreation Trail, including Steel Creek Trail #380, Pettengill Trail #245, and Foolhen Ridge Trail #86. All roads are passable in 2-wheel drive vehicles; however, the last three miles of Bryant Creek Road #1213 is not recommended for use by vehicles towing trailers. The Pioneer Loop Trail is in good condition and is regularly maintained; however, it does become somewhat vague in meadow areas. Portions of the trail are used by motorcyclists. The section of the trail between Baldy and Sand Lakes is closed to motorized use by wheeled vehicles at all times. Stock camps exist at Alder Pass, the head of Stone Creek, Sand Lake, at the head of Pettengill, and in Lacy Creek. Grass for stock can be limited early in the season.

Narrative

The Pioneer Loop National Recreation Trail is a ridgetop trail that extends along the length of the backbone of the W. Pioneer Mountains and one can see many spectacular views looking either direction from the ridge. In Stine Creek, the trail starts at an elevation of 6,080 ft. and climbs in the next three miles to over 9,100 feet. This is one of the more difficult sections of the trail. It is rocky and can be hard to follow near Stine Mountain. There is little water along this section of trail. At the head of the Meadow Creek drainage, the trail tops out on one of the main ridges along the crest of the West Pioneers, and then begins to level out. The forest land is dry on the ridge, being made up of whitebark pine, lodgepole pine, and subalpine fir. Along this section of trail Stine Mountain to Foolhen, there are numerous vista points overlooking the valleys and mountain ranges surrounding the area.

The trail follows a path west of Alder Peak, then turns south, just to the east of Foolhen Mountain. The walk is generally level but it dips down somewhat steeply after it passes by the mountaintop. The trail then climbs slightly and drops again as it leads down into the next saddle and valley. The somewhat dry, but still dense forest, is consistent all along these 15 miles of the trail. In early summer, it is possible to see many elk and some deer grazing in the meadows along the trail and in the side drainages. Further on, the area becomes more lush as the trail dips down toward Effie Creek, but dries up again as

it climbs the saddle just southeast of Shaw Mountain. From Shaw Mountain the trail drops quickly into a wet meadow area one mile later.

Here it is possible to see elk, moose and deer. The trail follows the north side of Upper Stone Creek above wet lush meadowlands and forest. Then the trail climbs again, as it heads for the drier ridgetop once more. Far reaching panoramas are visible from this part of the trail west toward Wisdom and the plains below. The trail continues on this ridgeline for about 2-1/2 miles, and then drops once again to cross a wet saddle and small creek, before climbing slowly to Sand Lake, a flat, meadow area with a large, high mountain lake on the south side of it.

The trail then climbs a short 1/2-mile out of the lake basin and parallels the ridgeline to reach Baldy Lake, 1-1/2 miles later, which sits at the base of a steep granite talus slope. Mountain goats can often be seen on the steep ridge above Baldy Lake. The trail levels out as it passes through some meadowland and whitebark pine forest, to reach Schweinegar Lake.

Just east of Schweinegar Lake, the trail heads down Lacy Creek. It passes a few wet meadows, and switchbacks down the side of the drainage for the first mile, then starts to level out. From where the trail starts to level out to the Lacy Creek Road and Trailhead, the trail tread is rocky.

For more information, contact the Wise River Ranger District.