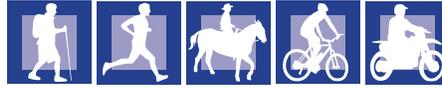


# Lava Mountain Trail



**Distance:** 13.4 miles (including the side trip to North Star Lake)

**Elevation Range:** 5900'-8330'

**Trail Type:** singletrack

**Difficulty:** moderate

**Season:** late June-October

**Driving Distance:** to lower TH: 47.5 miles (31 miles dirt);

to upper TH: 64.5 miles (48 miles dirt);

alternate drive to upper TH: 91.5 miles (25.5 miles dirt);

TH to TH distance: 29 miles (all dirt)

**Driving Time:** lower TH: 1:30; upper TH: 2:00;

alternate drive to upper TH: 2:00

**USGS Maps:** Trinity Mountain, Prairie

## Pros

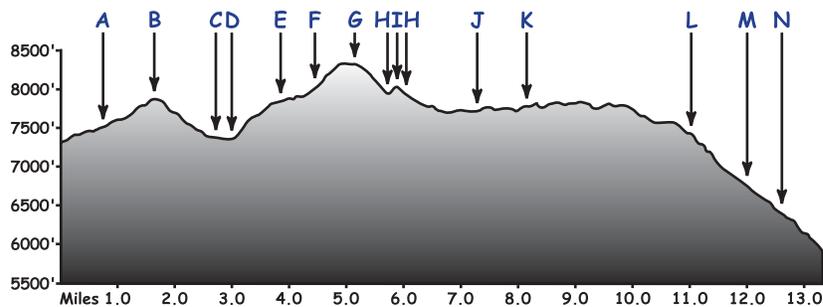
This trail receives relatively light use, especially the lower half. A quiet backcountry experience is likely to be enjoyed. Scenic highlights include: colorful meadows, mountain lakes, and wide-open ridgetop vistas. Those not interested in traveling the entire length of the trail can opt for a pleasant out-and-back day hike to the lakes. All three lakes are stocked with rainbow trout about once every three years.

## Cons

Traveling the entire length of the trail requires two vehicles to shuttle between the upper and lower trailheads. Those with dogs will need to carry extra water, as there is none to be found along the lower half of the trail. Also, the lower half was heavily impacted by the Foothills Fire of 1992. As a result, this section is very exposed to the hot summer sun.

## Getting There

**To the lower trailhead:** From Broadway Ave and I-84, travel east for 9 miles on I-84 to the Blacks Creek Exit (#64). After exiting, turn left on Blacks Creek Road and follow it 7 miles to a junction with Slater Flat Road (15.5 miles). Turn left to continue on Blacks Creek Road (FSR



## Lava Mountain Trail

189), which will turn to dirt one mile later. From the junction, travel 26 miles to Long Gulch Road (FSR 113) (41.5 miles). Turn left on Long Gulch Road and follow it 4 miles to a right turn onto FS Road 222 (45.5 miles). Follow the somewhat rough FSR 222 (high-clearance recommended) for one mile to a fork. Follow the right fork (FSR 222b) one mile to the signed trailhead at 47.5 miles. Parking is very limited.

**To the upper TH:** Follow the lower trailhead directions to the junction of Blacks Creek Road (FSR 189) and Long Gulch Road (FSR 113) at 41.5 miles. Turn right on Long Gulch Road and follow it into the town of Prairie. From Prairie, continue forward on Meadow Creek Road (FSR 128). Just past town, the road curves right (south) at a junction with Burnt Creek Road (45.5 miles), then curves back left (east) at a junction with Ireland Road (47 miles). Continue east for another 9 miles on Meadow Creek Road to a left turn onto Trinity Ridge Road (FSR 129) (56 miles). Proceed 8.5 miles on Trinity Ridge Road to a left turn onto an unsigned primitive road (64.5 miles). Follow this road a very short distance to its end at the signed trailhead.

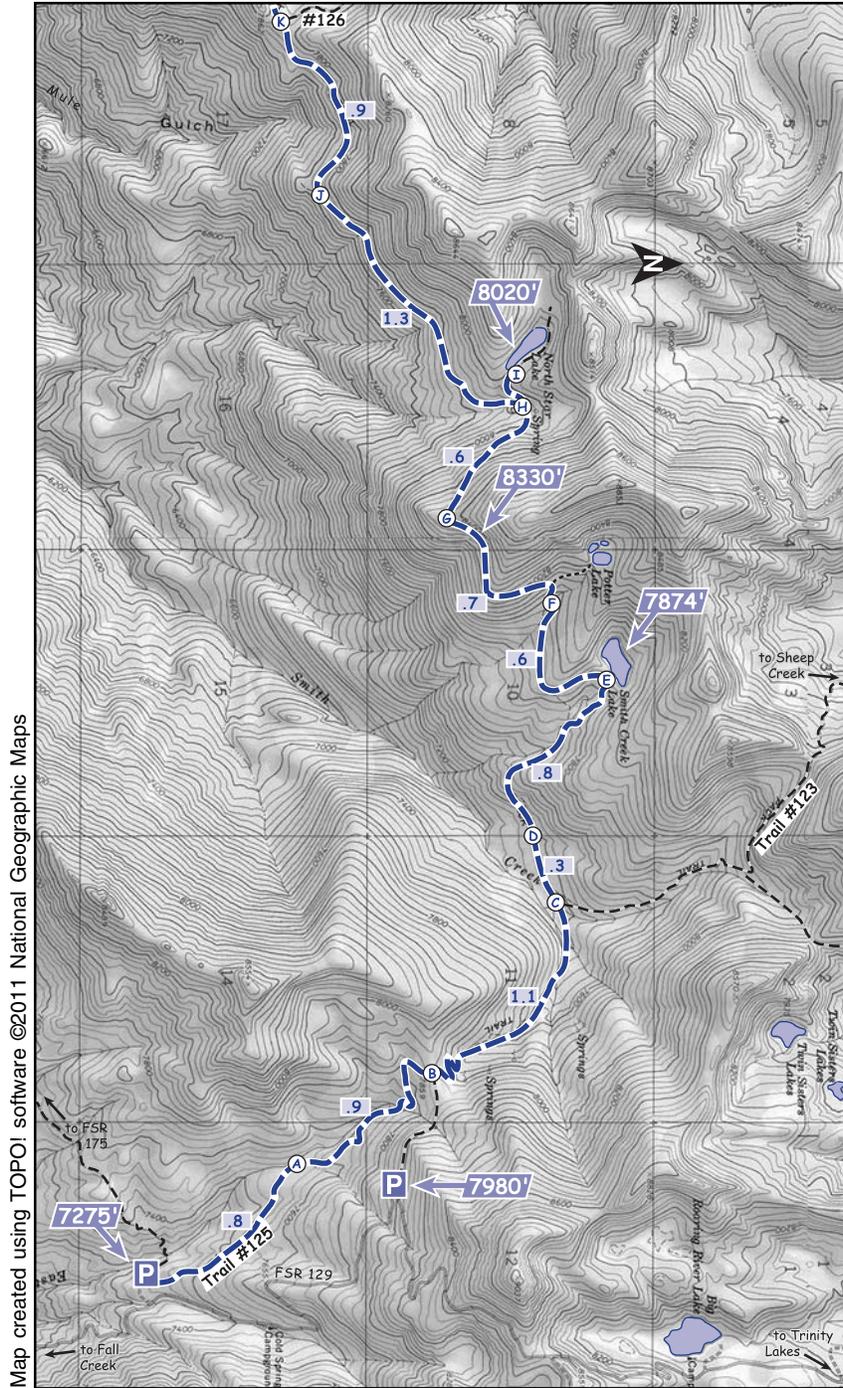
Another trailhead is located 1.5 miles further up the increasingly rough and rocky Trinity Ridge Road. It is simply a small unmarked pull-out, located at the end of a switchback. This alternate starting point offers a shortcut to the Lava Mountain Trail, shortening its distance by 1.2 miles (it is also the starting point for the Twin Sisters Lakes hike).

**Alternate drive to the upper TH:** Those who would like to avoid driving 48 miles of dirt road can take a different route with less dirt, but more mileage. From Broadway Ave and I-84, travel east on I-84 for 41 miles to the Fairfield Exit (#95) at Mountain Home. From the exit, go left (north) on Hwy 20, traveling 21.5 miles to a left turn onto Anderson Dam Road (FSR 134) (62.5 miles). Proceed 5 miles on Anderson Dam Road to the dam (the road turns to dirt surface after 3.5 miles). Cross the dam, then go right on the South Fork Road (FSR 113) (67.5 miles). Proceed alongside the reservoir for 9 miles to a junction with Fall Cr Road (FSR 123), at Fall Creek Lodge (76.5 miles). Proceed on Fall Cr Road for 4.5 miles to a junction with Lester Cr Road and Meadow Cr Road (FSR 128) (81 miles). Go left (forward) on Meadow Creek Road and follow it 2 miles to a right turn onto Trinity Ridge Road (FSR 129). Proceed 8.5 miles on Trinity Ridge Road to a left turn onto an unsigned primitive road (91.5 miles). Follow this road a very short distance to its end, at the signed trailhead.

### The Trail

The trail starts off traveling up the East Fork of Fall Creek through a pleasant patchwork of dense forest and colorful meadows. At 0.8 mile the trail crosses a boardwalk over a creekside marsh (**A**). A short distance later, it crosses a tiny side creek. At 1.7 miles a junction is reached atop a broad saddle (**B**) (the trail to the right is an alternate shortcut start that is only 0.5 mile long).

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Map created using TOPO! software ©2011 National Geographic Maps

## Lava Mountain Trail



Dave Nevins takes in the scenery at Smith Creek Lake.

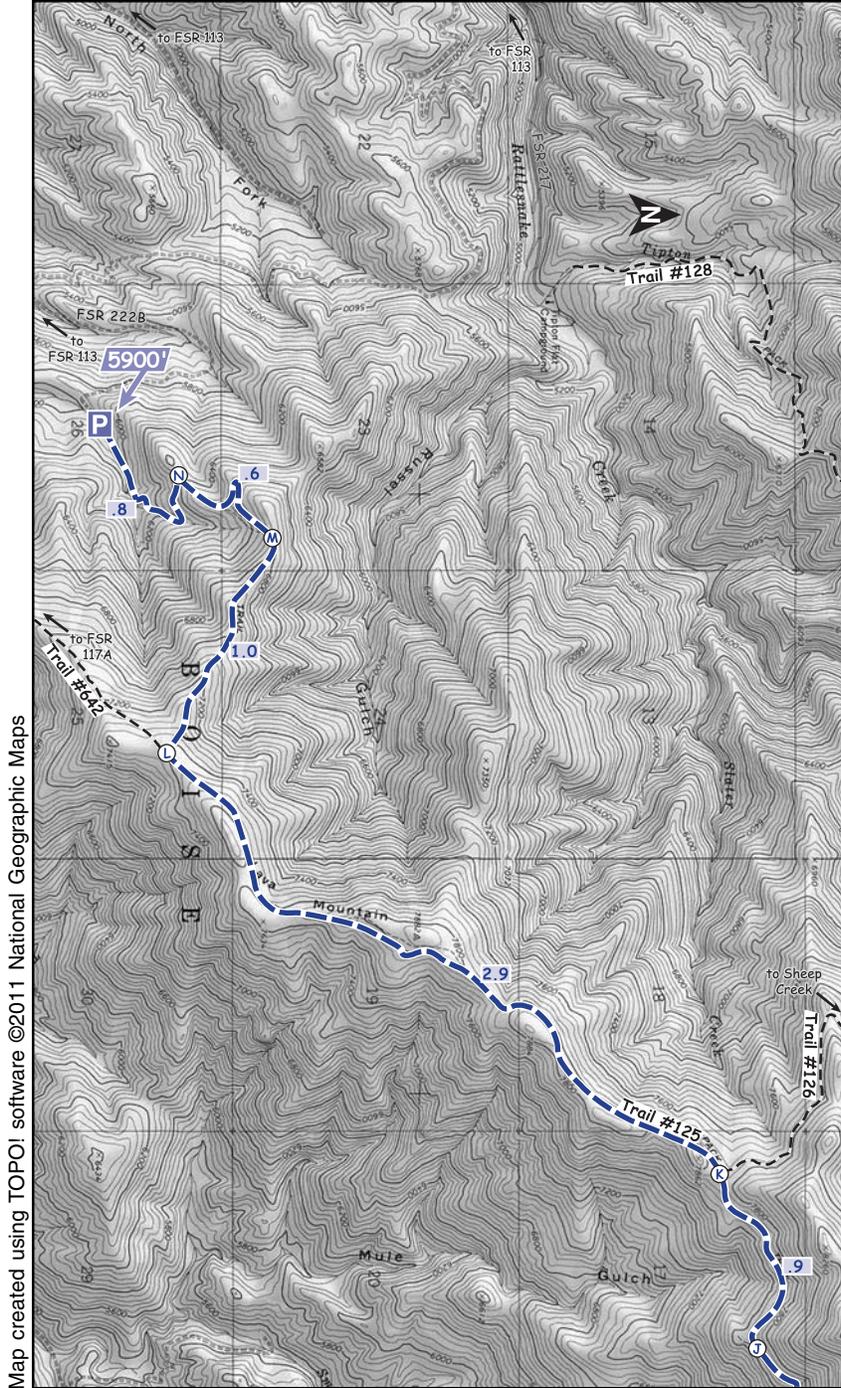
From the saddle, the trail makes a steep descent into the Smith Creek drainage. It meanders through dense forest, crossing a half dozen tiny spring-fed creeks along the way. At 2.7 miles the descent levels out at a crossing of willow-lined Smith Creek, which is much larger than the previous creeks. This crossing is followed immediately by an easily missed junction with the very faint FS Trail #123, which splits off to the right **(C)** (Trail #123 is described in the Twin Sisters Lakes section).

Beyond the junction, the trail crosses a broad grassy flat, then starts a steady climb to Smith Creek Lake. The ascent begins abruptly, at 3.0 miles, with a steep and rocky grade **(D)**. Soon, the trail moderates and meets a branch of Smith Creek **(E)**. It then follows the creek up to Smith Creek Lake at 3.9 miles. This lake, being the most accessible of the three lakes, receives the most use.

Beyond Smith Creek Lake, the trail contours upward and presents great views of the Smith Creek drainage and Trinity Mountain. At 4.5 miles it reaches the trickle of a creek that flows from Potter Lake **(F)**. A side trip to Potter Lake can be made starting from a switchback that is located 0.1 mile further up the trail. It is a relatively easy 0.2 mile cross-country hike up to the tiny shallow lake.

Beyond Potter Lake Creek, the trail climbs steeply to the course highpoint at 5.0 miles. It then makes a gradual contouring descent to an open ridgetop at 5.2 miles **(G)**. Here, North Star Lake is visible ahead, perched in a small basin. Next, the trail makes a contouring descent toward North Star Lake. At 5.8 miles a small creek is reached. This is followed immediately by an unmarked trail junction **(H)**. Go right to make

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## Lava Mountain Trail

a short side trip to North Star Lake at 5.9 miles **(I)**. This scenic little lake apparently has a muddy bottom and is not good for fishing. Of the hundreds of mountain lakes in the region, North Star is the closest to Boise.

Beyond the North Star Lake turnoff **(H)**, the Lava Mountain Trail contours downward along an open mountainside, high above the Smith Creek drainage. Expansive views abound of the surrounding mountains and Smith Prairie below. At 7.4 miles a faint unsigned trail splits off from the main trail and drops away to the left **(J)**. At 8.2 miles, after some modest ups and downs, the trail crests the main ridgeline. Here, there is a junction with the Bear Gulch Trail (#126) **(K)**.

From the junction, the trail continues forward, following the ups and downs of the rollercoaster ridgetop through a setting of open mountainsides and patches of burned forest. At 9.8 miles it passes just under the summit of Lava Mountain, which is hardly distinguishable from other ridgetop highpoints along the trail's course. Beyond the summit, a steady descent leads to a trail fork at 11.1 miles **(L)**. Continue on the right fork, which immediately drops away from the main ridge to join a splinter ridge (the left fork continues down the main ridge to FSR 117A).

The remainder of the trail makes an aggressive descent into the Lava Creek drainage. At 12.1 miles a saddle is reached in fire-devastated forest **(M)**. Here, the trail cuts left and drops away from the ridgetop for awhile. At 12.7 miles, following another brief stretch of ridgetop travel, a second saddle is reached **(N)**. From here, the trail passes a prominent granite outcrop and meets up with Lava Creek, which it then follows to the lower trailhead at 13.4 miles.



North Star Lake