



Hike on the Blue Mountains Trail: Wallowa Forks Loop - Multi-Day Backpack

Departing from **Wallowa Lake Trailhead**, near **Joseph and Enterprise, Oregon**, this loop connects with West and East Forks of the Wallowa River via two high-mountain passes. Camp alongside glacier-fed streams and alpine lakes in the Eagle Cap Wilderness, Oregon's largest designated Wilderness Area.



THE STATS:

Recreation type: Multi-day backpack

Route type: Loop

Mileage: 23.4 miles

Duration: 2-3 days

Elevation gain (gross): 4,896 feet

Active time hiking (estimated): 12 hours round trip

Time of year: August and September

Physical difficulty: Difficult

Logistical difficulty: Easy access

Permits required: Free, self-issued Wilderness permit at the trailhead. Group size limited to 12 people. All other wilderness restrictions apply.

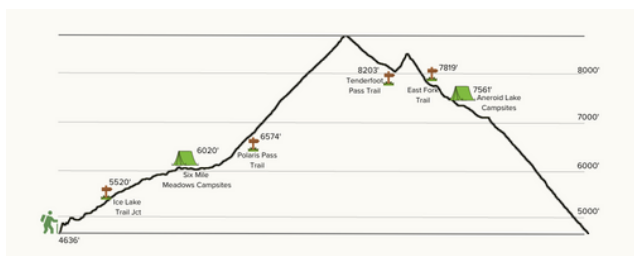
TRIP DESCRIPTION:

The East and West Fork Wallowa trails are the two of the most popular trails for visitors to the Eagle Cap Wilderness, offering fantastic views of craggy mountains, streams, and Wallowa Lake from well-maintained paths departing from Wallowa Lake Trailhead, near Joseph and Enterprise. These trails can be connected into a loop via the spectacular and rugged Tenderfoot and Polaris Passes. This a convenient choice for capable hikers looking to spend a couple nights in the Eagle Cap Wilderness.

Totaling just under 24 miles, hikers can choose to begin on either the East or West Fork trails. Both directions are a good choice for a three-day itinerary, which splits the mileage somewhat evenly. Primitive camping with water can be found at Six Mile Meadow and Aneroid Lake.

Be sure to account for the elevation, exposure, and variable trail conditions on the west side of Polaris Pass, usually on day two. This trail section is one of the steepest in the wilderness, and the pass itself holds potentially treacherous snow into the summer. If you are trying to fit the trip into two days, we recommend first ascending the East Fork toward Aneroid Lake. This choice has you descend the 2600 feet of Polaris Pass rather than climbing on the much longer second day.

There are terrific options to extend your trip by exploring the unique geology and plant communities around Dollar Lake, the Bonnie Lakes Basin, or the headwaters of the North Fork Imnaha River from the Aneroid Lake area.



Hike on the Blue Mountains Trail: West Fork Wallowa



TRIP DESCRIPTION, CONT:

Access the Wallowa Lake Trailhead (the Blue Mountains Trail's northern terminus) at the south end of Wallowa Lake. Parking can be congested in the summer season, so pile into one vehicle or grab a shuttle from town. Free, self-issued wilderness permits are available at the large trailhead kiosk.

The Eagle Cap Wilderness is Oregon's largest designated wilderness area. Its 355,533 acres were protected by the U.S Congress in 1964. It has become increasingly popular as more Oregon residents and visitors from outside of the state travel to experience the Wallowas. With increased visitation, the area is experiencing the impacts of overuse, especially in the Wallowa Lakes Basin. Therefore, it is imperative to follow Leave No Track principles, and you can join us in reporting recreation impacts using the Recreation Impacts Monitoring System (RIMS) app (contact us for details and to sign up or download the app and get started).

BEFORE AND AFTER IN JOSEPH AND ENTERPRISE:

On the northern end of Wallowa Lake, 6 miles from the Wallowa Lake Trailhead, Joseph, Oregon is a small but vibrant community with a lot to offer visitors and residents alike. As the northern terminus for the Blue Mountains Trail, it is a full-service town with a small grocery, laundromat, restaurants, and lodging. It is compact and all hiker services are easily walkable. It also has a vibrant arts community.

While in Joseph, you can get outdoor gear and equipment at Quickhatch Provisions or The Sports Corral. Local attractions include the Old Chief Joseph Gravesite and the adjacent Iwetemlaykin State Heritage Site at the north end of Wallowa Lake, the Josephy Center for Arts and Culture with its rotating exhibits that provide unique and in-depth perspectives of Wallowa County, the Wallowology Natural History Discovery Center that offers an exploration of the natural history of the region, and you can take a self-guided tour of Joseph's artistic endeavors along the Joseph Oregon Bronze Art Watch.

The still small but larger community of Enterprise is another 6 miles northwest of Joseph along Highway 82. Here you'll find more places to eat, sleep and get the gear and goods you need to make the most of your time in the mountains. Sugar Time Bakery has some of the best sweet and savory snacks and sandwiches in the area, and you can join the crowds for a great pint of beer with a bison burger and other good fare at Terminal Gravity Brew Pub. There are many places to stay for all budgets, along with camping a short distance from town.

For a full list of amenities, including grocery stores, where to do your laundry, post offices, public transit options, and more places to eat and stay, check out the Blue Mountains Trail Town Guides for Joseph and Enterprise online at hellscanyon.org/blue-mountains-trail-towns.

TRIP PLANNING INFORMATION AND LINKS:

Trailhead access point: Wallowa Lake Trailhead

USFS webpage: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/wallowa-whitman/recarea/?recid=51603> -
Google Maps: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/2YuUB6Fm3wx3ZFH16>

Nearby town guides for Joseph and Enterprise:

<https://www.hellscanyon.org/blue-mountains-trail-towns/joseph>
<https://www.hellscanyon.org/blue-mountains-trail-towns/enterprise>

Take a shuttle from town to the trailhead:

<https://ccno.org/publictransit/summer-shuttle-schedule/>

Local US Forest Service Office:

Wallowa Whitman National Forest Wallowa Mountains Office, 541-426-5546

Trail conditions: West Fork 1820, East Fork 1804, and Polaris 1831

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/wallowa-whitman/alerts-notice/?cid=stelprdb5317834>

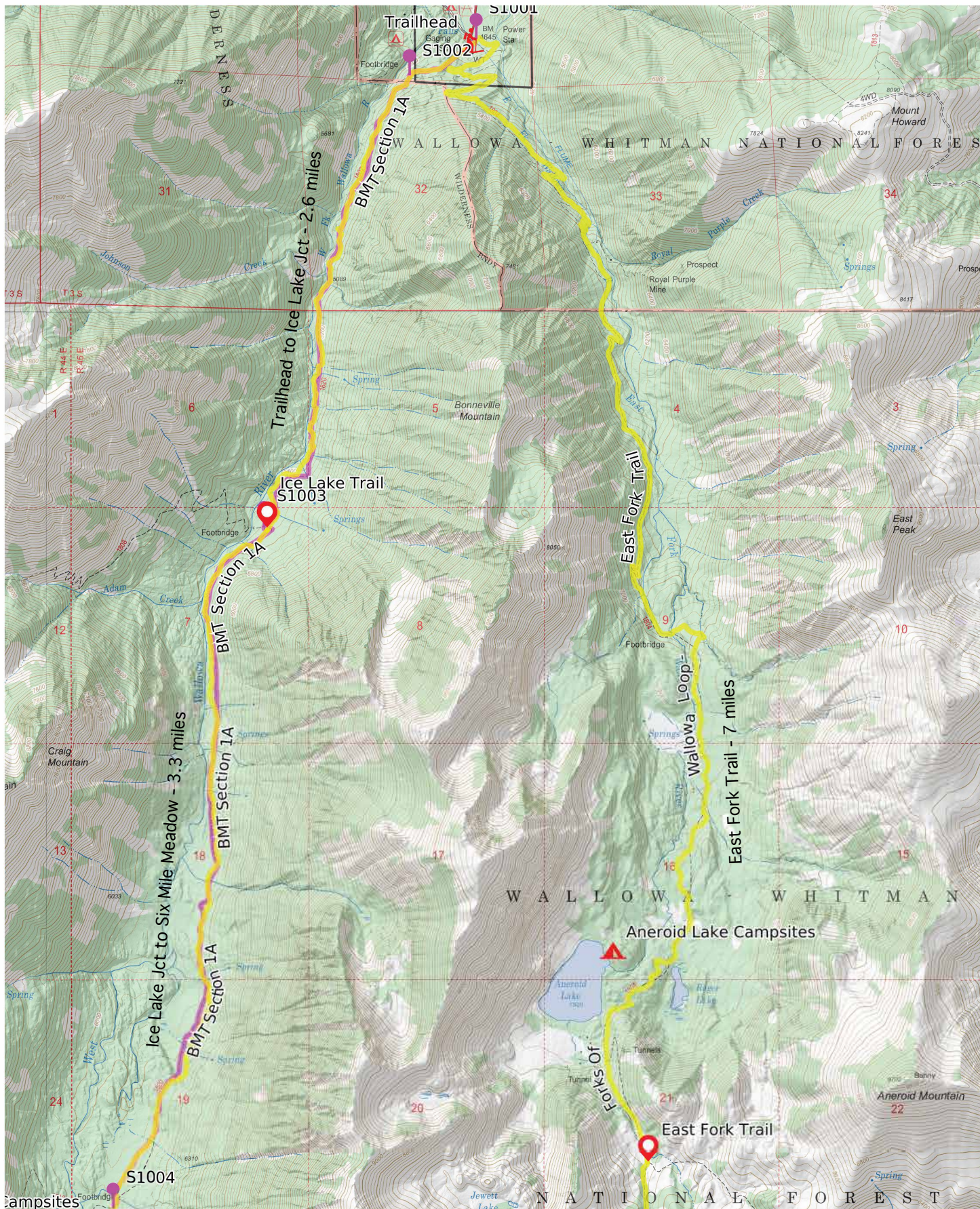
Weather forecast at trailhead via the National Weather Service:

<https://forecast.weather.gov/MapClick.php?lat=45.280&lon=-117.204>

Credit for photos as follows: Front page: Tenderfoot Pass by Jamie Dawson.

More information about and resources for the Blue Mountains Trail are available online at hellscanyon.org/blue-mountains-trail

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BMT Trip - Wallowa Forks Loop 1/2 1 2 3 4km

WGS84

UTM Zone 11T



0.5 1.0 1.5 2.0mi
Scale 1:35000 1 inch = 2917 feet

