

Steens Mountain Trail Descriptions

Page Springs Trails

Blitzen River Trail: This 4 mile trail follows the Donner und Blitzen Wild and Scenic River upstream to its confluence with Fish Creek. The trail begins at the south end of Page Springs Campground. The trail gets regular use, so tread conditions are usually good. There are some small channel crossings with stepping-stones. There is a short trail re-route about 1/2 mile in. Stay left to go up and over the bluff. Alternatively, you may continue on the original trail, being careful to avoid eroded trail sections along the river. There can be excellent trout fishing in the Donner und Blitzen (catch and release please). Many birds and wildlife inhabit the canyon so be on the lookout. Watch for the western rattlesnake, especially in rocky areas, as they are typically active spring through fall. If an overnight backpacking trip is in your plans, there are many established campsites within the canyon.

Length: 8 miles (round-trip)

Trail Rating: Easy, elevation gain varies by route

Best Time to Hike: Year-round, except when snow-packed

Wilderness Nature Trail: This easy 1 mile loop trail begins at the south end of Page Springs campground and ends near campsite #25. The begins separately from the Blitzen River trail, look for the wood trail sign. There is a pedestrian gate near the beginning of the trail at the wilderness boundary, please close it behind you. The trail continues along a seasonal stream eventually climbing through rim rock. Views of the Donner und Blitzen Wild and Scenic River, the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, the Steens Mountain high country, and the town of Frenchglen await you as you reach a high plateau at the halfway point of your hike. The trail continues along the rim edge and down ending near campsite 25. Keep an eye out for the western rattlesnake as they are active spring through fall. Please stay on the trail. Social trails are resource damage and obscure the designated route.

Length: 1 mile loop

Trail Rating: Easy with an elevation gain of 200’

Best Time to Hike: Year-round, except when snow-packed

The Gorges Trails

Steens Summit Trail: This short, 1/2 mile hike allows easy access to the summit of the 8th highest mountain in Oregon at 9733’. Parking is available at the end of the Wildhorse Lake Overlook Road. Head past the gate and follow the closed road up to a stunning, 360° view of Steens Mountain and the surrounding countryside. If you are lucky enough to be up there on a clear day, you can spy 3 other states and Mount Shasta almost 200 miles away. But don’t let the short distance of the hike fool you; air is a little thin at this altitude. Be prepared for wind and quickly changing weather conditions.

Length: 1 mile (round-trip)

Trail Rating: Easy with an elevation gain of 200’

Best Time to Hike: July – October

Wildhorse Lake Trail: This challenging hike is not for the faint of heart. Trailhead parking is at the end of the Wildhorse Lake Overlook Road. The trail follows a road grade before splitting to the left, switch-backing its way down to the lake edge. The trail is steep, and tread can be unstable, so use extreme caution. For overnigheters, camping is limited to two, established sites at the lake. Fishing is allowed and can be great. Make sure you have a camp stove as fires are not allowed within the Wildhorse Lake basin. Please be a responsible hiker and avoid cutting switchbacks or hiking the trail when snow drifts persist.

Length: 1 1/4 miles to the lake

Trail Rating: Very Difficult with an elevation loss/gain of 1200’

Best Time to Hike: July - October

Mud/Ankle Creek Trail: If open country and solitude is what you desire, this is the hike for you. To access this trail, which is actually an old two-track road, turn to the east on Newton Cabin Road (directly across from the Riddle Ranch Road). Follow this road 1 mile to the parking area (4-wheel drive recommended). After disembarking your vehicle, head east where you will soon encounter trailhead information and a gate. Beyond the gate, the trail begins. You will encounter 3 stream crossings along the route which will be difficult, if not impassable in spring and early summer. Use caution! Many old spur roads branch off from the main route allowing exploration of the Ankle Creek Basin, the upper Donner und Blitzen Wild and Scenic River, and the rim of Wildhorse Canyon for the really adventurous. Aspen, juniper, and an abundance of wildlife and are around every corner on this hike. The trail is not maintained and can be brushy. This is a popular area for equestrian use, please share the trail.

Length: 7 miles to the Ankle Creek crossing

Trail Rating: Moderate, elevation gain varies depending on route

Best Time to Hike: May – October

Big Indian Gorge Trail: This gorgeous hike begins at the back of South Steens Campground. The hike is 8 miles long to the headwall of the gorge and passes through numerous meadows, cottonwood, and aspen groves. Along the way you will make 3 stream crossings between miles 2 and 3 which can be difficult or impassable at times in the spring and early summer. Use caution! The trail is regularly used and should be easy to follow. Along your journey, you will be amazed at the size of this classic U-shaped, glacially carved gorge, the wildflowers in spring and summer, and the waterfalls tumbling out of the headwall. Many existing campsites are available in the canyon, including “Cottonwood Camp,” an aptly named stock camp around the 6 1/2-mile mark. This is a popular area for equestrian use, please share the trail. Indian Creek is closed to fishing.

Length: 16 miles (round-trip)

Trail Rating: Moderate with an elevation gain of 1200’

Best Time to Hike: June – October

Big Indian Headwall: This trail begins at a small pull-out on the Steens Mountain loop road and follows a drainage down the headwall of Big Indian Gorge to where it connects to the Big Indian trail. There are no switchbacks, and the headwall route is not maintained.

Length: 1 1/2 miles

Trail Rating: Difficult with an elevation loss/gain of 2,200’

Best Time to Hike: June – October

Little Blitzen Gorge Trail: This trail begins at the trailhead parking area along Steens Mountain Loop Road near South Steens Campground. The trail drops through sage for 1 1/4 miles before reaching the Blitzen River. The river crossing can be deep and swift, especially during spring and early summer. Exercise caution! The trail continues into a spectacular, glacially carved, U-shaped gorge passing through meadows, cottonwood, and aspen groves. The trail is 9 miles long to headwall. Look for summer wildflower filled meadows, fall aspen colors and numerous waterfalls. Many existing campsites are available in the canyon, including “Four-Mile Camp,” an aptly named stock camp around the 4.5-mile mark. The Little Blitzen Gorge Trail intersects the Nye Trail around the 5-mile mark and the Wet Blanket Trail around 7 1/2-mile mark. These trails can be combined with Cold Springs Road and the Steens Mountain Road for a lollipop loop hike. This is a popular area for equestrian use, please share the trail.

Length: 18 miles (round-trip)

Trail Rating: Moderate with an elevation gain of 1200’

Best Time to Hike: June – October