
An Alpinist Guide to Pocatello

Snow Climbs and Scrambles



Scot Kelchner

1st edition © 2017

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Introduction

Being an alpinist in Pocatello is the complete opposite of ‘misery’. What draws so many of us to this lovely spot on Earth is the public lands that neighbor our city, lands chock full of opportunities for wandering and adventure. Springtime here is as satisfying and invigorating as anywhere one can live in the Rockies.

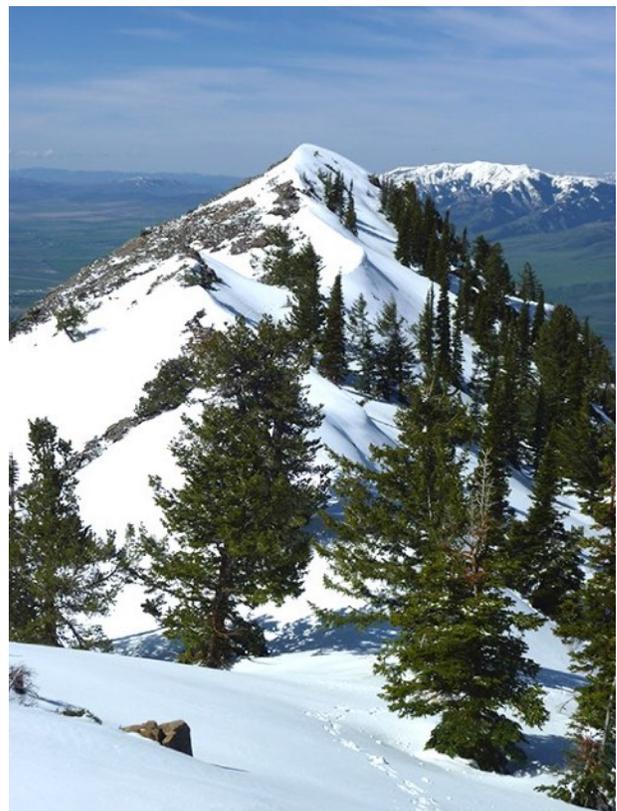
This is a guide to some of the local spots I particularly enjoyed in my 13 years of scrambling up peaks in the Pocatello area. It is by no means comprehensive: it’s just a short description of routes you might like to check out for yourself if winter is ending and you are getting itchy for the high mountains further afield, or if you want to test how much your lungs and muscles atrophied during the winter. Several summer scrambles are included.

By and large, I find that introductions in guide books tell me nothing I need to know. There is nothing you need to know in this introduction, either. *Q.E.D.*

All the good stuff in a guidebook tends to start in Chapter 1. Or maybe Chapter 2, if Chapter 1 is entitled *A Pioneer’s History of the Insipid Rock Formation*.

Guide books ought to just point out the stuff you might want to take a look at. More noble might be to have some grand purpose for this guide, such as increasing tourism and making the local businessmen excited. Or to enrich my pockets with the royalties from the six copies I might be able to sell for 99 cents each on Amazon.com. Nah! No way.

Frankly, it’s just a fun way for me to give a little something back to the community I have enjoyed being a part of. As you’ll see, it took me only a few days to write, and clearly I am not the kind of hack who tremors at ending any sentence with a preposition (see the preceding sentence). You might even catch me danglin’ my modifiers. Who cares? Climbing mountains is about freedom, about finding your own way, about slipping the surly bonds of human thought and conventions. About fun!



Perfect conditions on Mountaineer's Ridge

Given the title of this guide, I feel obliged to mention that any of our local ecologists (and we have a *lot* of them roaming the city) will tell you that true alpine zones in the region are scarce. Tree line can be up to a thousand feet higher at this latitude in the Rockies.

Our peaks are bare because they are lousy places to make a living if you are a tree (same with alpine zones). A couple of the toughest Idahoans I ever met are Limber Pines that eke it out in the scree and wind on the saddle between Bonneville and Snow. That takes serious grit.

You can find sparse assemblages of alpine flora in the area, particularly around the summits of Haystack and Old Tom. This, together with the bareness of the rocky ridges and cliffs, the vertical relief, and the steepness of our slopes, gives our mountains the subtle ability to persuade a busy clamberer that he/she is “up there” in the mighty Winds, the renowned Tetons, or the ignored Lemhis. Particularly if he/she has never visited those sites.

I use the term *alpinist* in the title simply because one can find many routes below tree line in the area that give honest-to-goodness alpine experiences. This is particularly true in late spring when the bowls and gullies are full of hardened snow. In many places around here, one would not be mistook for a poser in a gear catalog when donning crampons or wielding an ice axe — these tools are actually useful and even necessary on some of our slopes. Go give your mountain toys a workout and prep your body and mind for climbing those big peaks of your dreams. You won't be disappointed by what Pocatello has to offer.

Finally, let me note that even though I put together these routes from my own explorations (I'm strictly a solo adventurer) and have tried each one multiple times, it's certain that I'm not the first who has ever climbed them. Local nutters for decades have been out in these hills digging up adventure for themselves. I'm giving you a new set of reference names for undoubtedly old routes that you can score, abhor, or ignore. I recommend the later.



Information

Safety

If you want to be safe, don't try any of the routes in this guide. You simply can't be absolutely safe when in the mountains — at some point, something unexpected will happen to you.

Know your stuff before you try some of the more challenging experiences listed here. Avalanches and rockfall are frequent on these routes. The best climbing is when the snow gets hard or icy in the spring, at which time you must be steady in your self-arrest technique so that you don't put any of the many sharp ends of your ice axe into your lungs, throat, or kidneys (you can survive the thigh, if you miss the artery). Know reflexively how to stop yourself immediately — there are rocks and trees at the bottom of all the steeper slopes listed and these are stronger than bones: don't go crunchity-crunch against them at high velocity. Wear a brain bucket and keep alert for falling rock or warming snow conditions above you in a bowl or chute. Don't get too high up on a rock face without knowing how to get back down.

Wait, what am I saying? You know what to do, right? If you don't, stay off these rock and snow routes until you've got the skills down pat. No one is encouraging you to climb anything in this guide, and no one wants to take responsibility for your own decisions. If you go out to play, leave the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and me off of your list of Who To Blame if you screw up. It's just you making your own decisions, so be responsible.

Ratings of routes

This guide uses only one rating: Class 3. Whether it is snow or rock, Class 3. That is because every route I recommend for your consideration has a Class 3 way through it. Sure, you can pick a harder way up the west face of Scout Mountain: there are Class 4 and 5 options galore on that pile of rock. But there is also Class 3.

I wrote this guide to be about snow climbs and scrambles that can be done alone by a skilled mountain enthusiast. That means Class 3. Some are probably more dangerous (like *Sidewinder*, the avalanche-prone couloir up the northwest face of Haystack), but it never feels harder than class 3 on a rock face, just scarier.

As for wanting to know what Class 3 is, the modern internet is a wonder. Look it up.

Ethics

I have often felt that the pompous ethics section of so many guide books could be quietly torn out of the store copies without anyone noticing. Why those ethics paragraphs don't suddenly combust like the swastika on the Ark of the Covenant's crate in the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is beyond my understanding.

Having said that, don't *ever* let me find you doing one of the following:

Littering. Honestly, that wrapper and plastic water bottle ain't heavy at all, dude. What are you, a wuss? Carry it out.

Flicking a cigarette butt into dry grass and brush. Everything is flammable here when it's not covered in snow.

Making a hiker leap off the trail because of your mountain bike or motorbike. That just sucks — you *know* the trails are shared. Wake up.

Not being able to stop your dog with a vocal command when it's off the leash. In all of my years here, I've only met two dogs who stopped at their owners' calls. Many more have damaged me, even with friendship.

Not burying your poop, leaving toilet paper out on top of your immaculate pile, or leaving it all next to a stream. Even the Romans knew that water and poop make sewage. And for everyone's sake, don't leave it on the summit of a mountain.

I have a mind like a steel trap. If I see you doing *any* of these nasty things, I won't forget you.

What does “off trail” mean?

I'm going to hazard a guess that it means, “Off...the...trail.” I mention this because many of the approaches to the routes in this guide wander quite a ways from any established path (or as we call them locally, “motorbike ruts”).

That means you will be forcing your way uphill through dense thickets of *Ceanothus* (tobacco bush), *Purshia* (bitter brush), *Artemisia* (sagebrush), *Rosa* (wild rose), *Salix* (willow), and that curious but nefarious runt of a tree, *Cercocarpus* (mountain mahogany). Prepare to be scratched. A lot.

In the summer months, the aim is to walk the motorbike-ravaged half pipes we call trails to a point I reference in this guide. Then you will strike out on even worse terrain to get to the base of the climb. You will learn not to mind the bloody scratches: the payoff is worth it.

Footing is usually tricky, especially when the balsamroot and lupines have grown tall enough to hide the ground's surface. Many of the slopes are uneven and covered in small rocks and boulders. Be prepared to stub your toes and regularly drop six inches without warning as you stumble your way up and down each hillside.

This is open country, which means you can usually see everything you need in order to get to the base of a route. If you *want* GPS coordinates, I'm expecting you know how to use Google Earth online. If you *need* GPS coordinates to climb, you probably shouldn't be out there.

How this guide book differs from good ones

First, it's *FREE*. Don't buy it from anyone. If someone printed it for you, thank them and pay only for the paper and ink. (We're talking pennies here.)

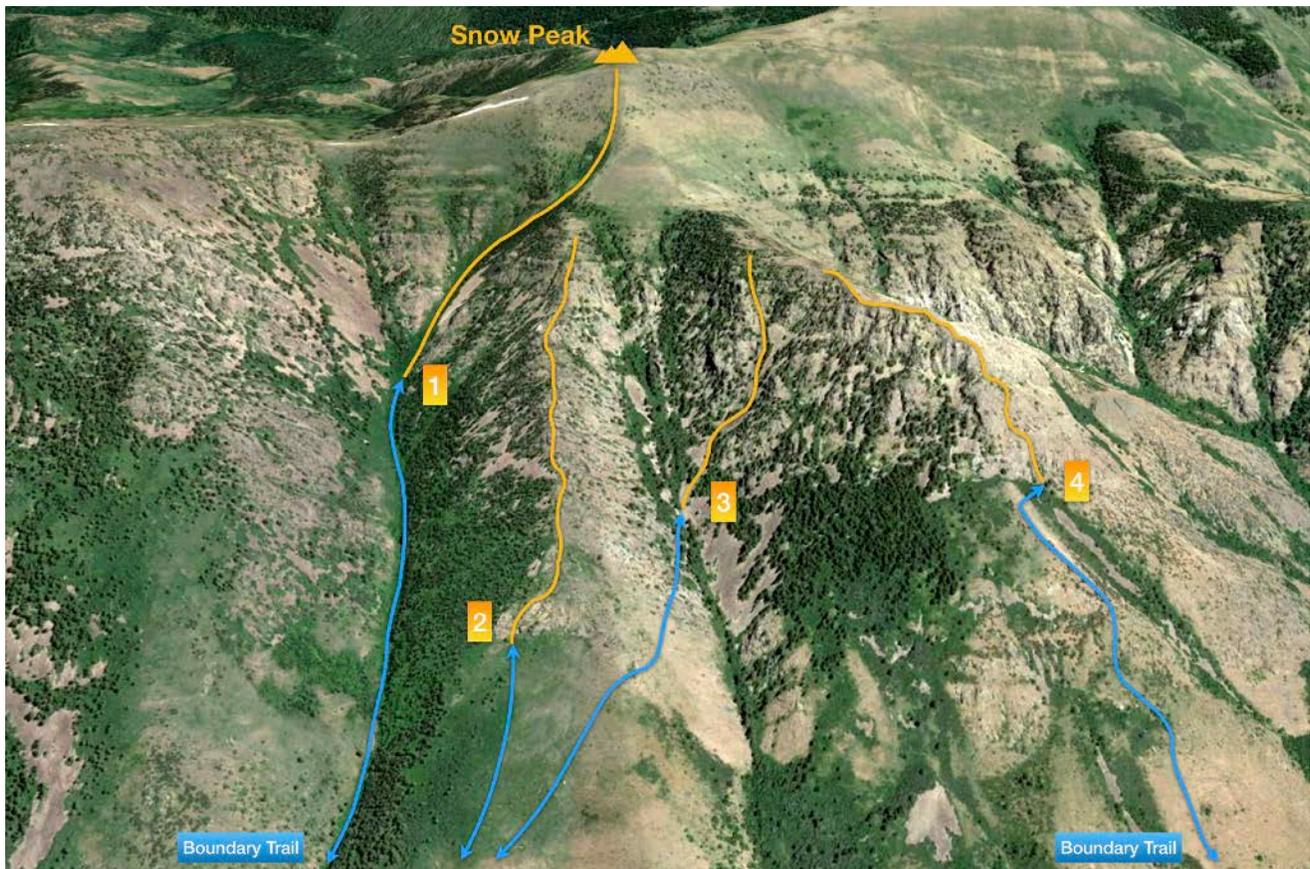
Second, I don't care *how* you do a climb. No one cares how *I* did a climb (at least, they *shouldn't* care) so why should I care how *you* do it? Just have fun. Or, barring that, have an adventure.

Third, in most cases I only try to suggest where you *might* want to start, approximate an elevation, and give a few sentences about the route. No other information is required for those who regularly wander in the mountains. Haystack's routes are the exception: the starts can be tricky to find because of the surrounding trees. But you can't go wrong on Haystack's West Face, so whatever gully you end up in, just go up! They're all about the same.

Fourth, my sweeping aerial images, provided with little pain and no helicopter rentals (thanks Google Earth) show lines I've added to mark routes: approaches are in blue, the route is in orange, and a continuation is in green. These can at best give you a basic idea of where I like to go. Make your own route, by all means. No one's watching.

I recommend this guide be used mainly as an ideas book. Strike out on your own and find 20 more climbs. Someone, for example, ought to write about where to go if you want to actually bring a rope and a friend along.

Snow Peak



Snow Peak Routes: (1) Snow Basin. (2) The Stairway. (3) The Gullies. (4) Mountaineer's Ridge.

Snow Peak offers an impressive variety of experiences despite it being lodged between the rather stodgy features of Bonneville Peak and Robber's Roost. This is the peak I visit most in the region. The summit is rather dull looking, but the flanks offer great fun for the alpinist from early spring through to November.

The peak is easily identifiable from I-15 in the spring and early summer by the crescent of snow near its otherwise bare summit. This marks the upper border of *Snow Basin*, and it tends to form an impressive cornice from April to mid June.

People have certainly visited these routes, even if I never met them there. For example, my name for the top ledge of *The Stairway* is "Dumper's Roost": a large pile of uncovered human waste was deposited there once by a possibly distressed traveller. It took several years to wear itself away; see the "Ethics" section for an opinion of such matters.

Snow Basin

This bowl is an excellent opportunity to experience proper snow climbing as if you were in a remote mountain cirque. The considerable concern for a nasty fall is also an attraction.

The approach is gnarly. About the easiest way in is to stay higher up along the north wall of Rock Creek's ravine, below the summit of Bonneville. Dogwoods, willows, and other shrubs grow dense along the water way and are ridiculous to bash through. Best to just avoid them.

Quite a ways in, you will reach a spot where the snow is thick, the trees are juveniles (avalanche regrowth), and a pathway reveals itself into the bowl. Hug to the right side and you'll get some very enjoyable snow trekking in April-May.

Once in the basin, many routes are available. I like to continue along the right side for a ways, then follow the sweep upward to a steep pinch-point between the short trees on the left and the Crescent's cornice on the right rim. Traversing this spot is highly enjoyable, especially when followed by a direct climb up the vertical face of the cornice (if the cornice is stable). What makes the action so studly on hard snow is the fall you might take: many hundreds of slick feet downward into a line of trees. Crunch!



The Crescent: a large semi-circular snow heap visible on Snow Peak until mid summer.

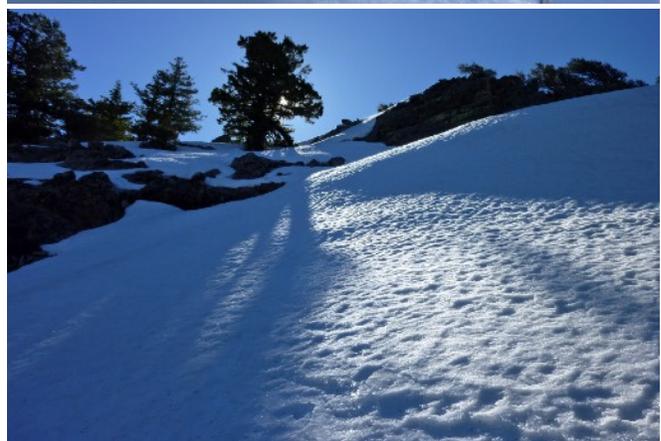
The Stairway

A local I met once called this ridge “The Bowling Alley”. That, of course, makes no sense: the term “bowling alley” is used by climbers to describe a steep couloir plagued with frequent rockfall, whereas this is a ridge line full of chunky cliff bands — all of the rocks fall off to the sides. So I’m just going to call it *The Stairway*. Once you’ve been on it, you’ll see why.

This is a beauty of a route when the snow is hard. When so, begin the climb from the Douglas Fir forest along Rock Creek’s track. Climb the steep slope through the trees, enter a glade of aspens, and follow it up to the base of the first cliff band. On the left side of the band, follow what looks to be a steep slope through the cliff; in summer, it’s a ledge. From here, stick to the left (north) side of the ridge to find snowy passages over, through, or around the cliffs.

The ridge is excellent fun in the summer, too. Using the start described in the Approaches section, you’ll find an astonishing number of short cliffs (15-50 feet high) on your way up the ridge. The rock is fractured horizontally and vertically, giving you many ledges to hang off. Be alert for loose blocks; they’re everywhere.

The final ledge is only a few feet high; this is Dumper’s Roost. From here, you can wander up to Snow Peak’s summit, head out to Mountaineer’s Ridge, or turn and descend.



North West Gullies

The Gullies are a complex set of ravines, cliffs, and fins adorning the northwest slope of Mountaineer's Ridge. Depending on your skill level, you can have fun with some very technical stuff here, far beyond Class 3. Rockfall hazard is high everywhere on the slope, attested to by the hundreds of vertical feet of talus and boulders one crosses on the approach. Avalanche danger is also high: the cornices in the picture on page 4 are directly above one of the western routes. Make sure the snow conditions are safe before you climb.

All of the slope is in the shade until very late in the morning, which means you don't have to get up before dawn to enjoy this area. The multitude of ways that one can weave upward to the ridge line gives you the opportunity to make each climb a new adventure.

Exiting the route drawn in this guide requires finding a way through the last cliff band, which is most easily done on the right side of the final small bowl (i.e., to the right of the orange line's top, as drawn on the overview map for Snow Peak).

The summit is Mountaineer's Ridge. Descent is most safely done by traversing north (left) to Dumper's Roost and *The Stairway*, then coming down that ridge or foot-skiing its more gentle slopes to the broad ravine at the base of *The Gullies*. Making a descent too early in the traverse can get you into trouble with cliff bands and chutes hidden below you in the forest.



Mountaineer's Ridge

The premier scramble in the area runs up the rocky southwest ridge of Snow Peak. It's a long, pleasant, airy trip in an alpine-like environment that is very, very engaging.

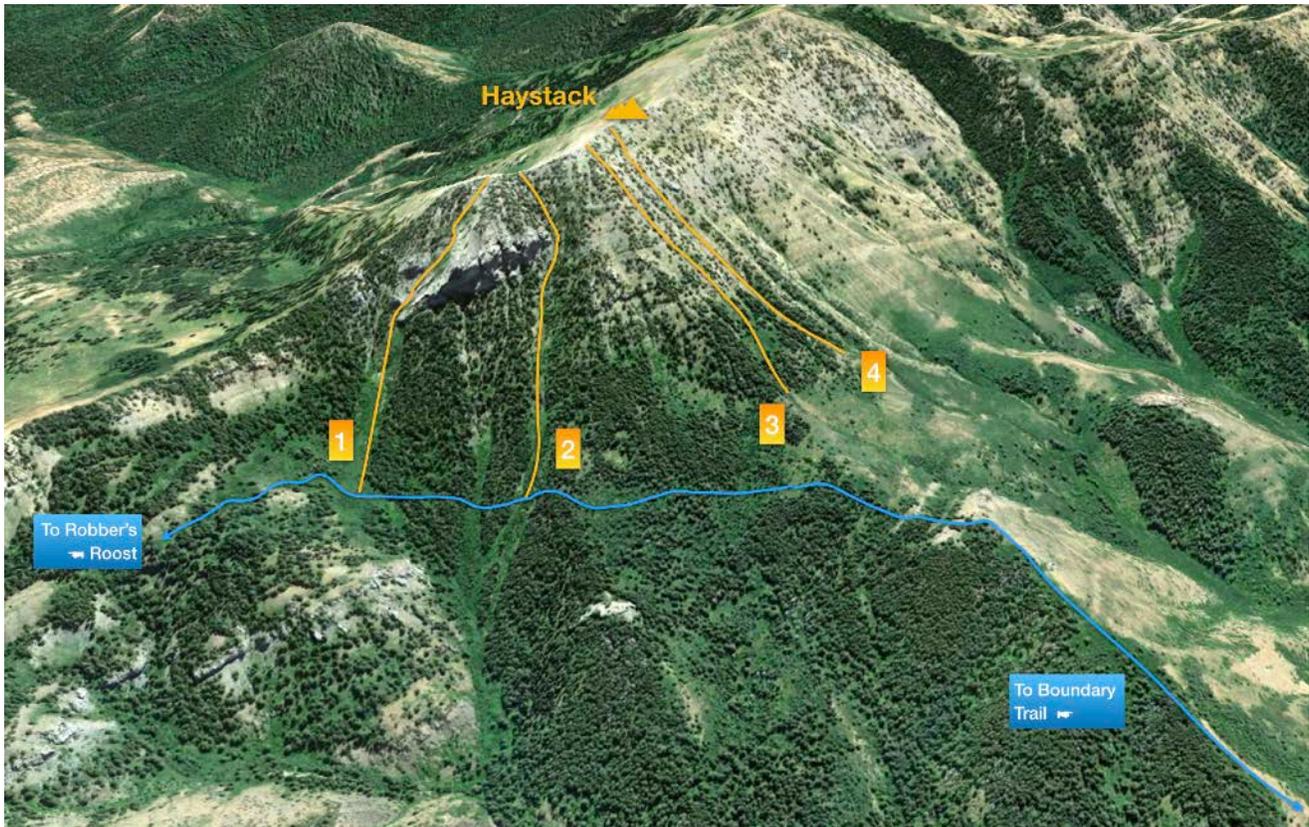
The approach requires a hike in along the Boundary Trail, followed by a meander upward through high-quality meadows and across the talus gully to the start of the climb.

At the base of the cliffs, swap your footwear for approach shoes with sticky rubber and then freely weave your way upward through short ledges, cliffs, and boulder problems until the rock becomes steeper and more clean. The next couple of hundred vertical feet is prime stuff — good rock with an airy view. Take as steep a route as you like: there are many options.

Reaching the top of the first knoll, enjoy the view and exposure, and then head along the ridge line through three small towers (20-40 ft. high) that give nice Class 4 opportunities. After a final stretch of sloping quartzite ledges to the south, you'll reach the trees. From here, a little more up gives access to an overland northward traverse through brush to Dumper's Roost. This offers a descent by *The Stairway* that winds downward through several cliff bands to the uneven slope below. Return along the Boundary Trail.



Haystack Mountain



Haystack Routes: (1) Sidewinder. (2) The Sluice. (3) West Face North. (4) West Face South.

Haystack has the most dramatic features in the Portneuf Range: a vertical cliff of several hundred feet in height, and several avalanche-prone chutes that form narrow steep gaps through the forested slopes. The climbs listed here are each at least 1,000 feet of elevation gain, which is a lot of steep uninterrupted snow climbing given the constraints of our area.

Any day on Haystack is a tiring one. In early spring, the walk in and out can be as long as 14 miles with a 4,000+ elevation gain, almost half of it on snow. Throw in the flooded stream crossings and you've got yourself a proper May adventure.



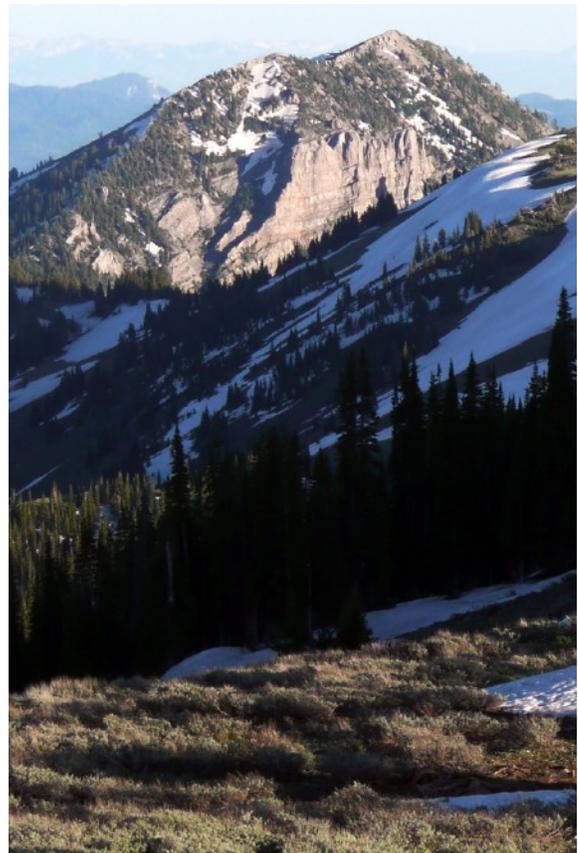
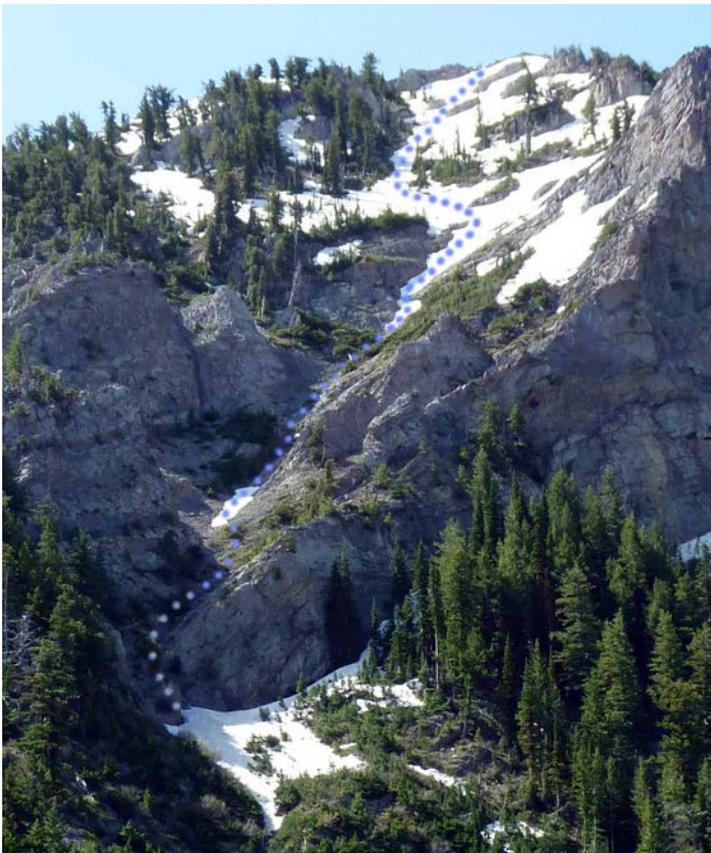
Sidewinder

The most challenging route in this guide (at least, mentally so) is *Sidewinder*. It directly tackles the best alpine feature in the Portneuf Range: the bowl and couloir that cuts through the vertical northwest face of Haystack Mountain.

Avalanche debris at the start of the climb each spring should wake you up and question your plan. Be sure the snow conditions are satisfactory for your attempt before you head upward. Rockfall is common. And if you're soloing it, expect a very bad fall if you slip.

Working your way into the couloir is the most enjoyable bit. It's more unnerving than difficult, but when the snow is firm it is quite doable. Zigzagging up through this tight spot in the main line for rock and snow fall is only the work of a few minutes. The bowl above is a straight-forward steepish climb to the summit; stay left and hug the trees for easy passage.

Descent is along the thin limestone ridge to the left (north). This drops steeply down to the north shoulder of the mountain which leads to Robber's Roost. From there, you can take the Robber's Roost trail (probably under snow) back to the start of the climb. Alternatively, you could try a controlled descent or down-climb of the West Face of Haystack.



The Sluice

The longest, steepest snow route of those listed here is *The Sluice*. Like *Sidewinder*, you will need to keep alert for snow and rockfall from hidden regions above.

The climb's best features are its vertical relief (1,400 ft.), the steepness of its upper half, and the exposed alpine-like sensation you get as you pass the giant cliff of Haystack.

The route begins from the first avalanche path that crosses the Robber's Roost trail, a few minutes before you reach the open meadows at the start of *Sidewinder*.

Depending on the snow level, there can be up to three exposed ledges to work your way through. In early spring this usually does not pose a problem. The route tops out in about the same place as *Sidewinder*.



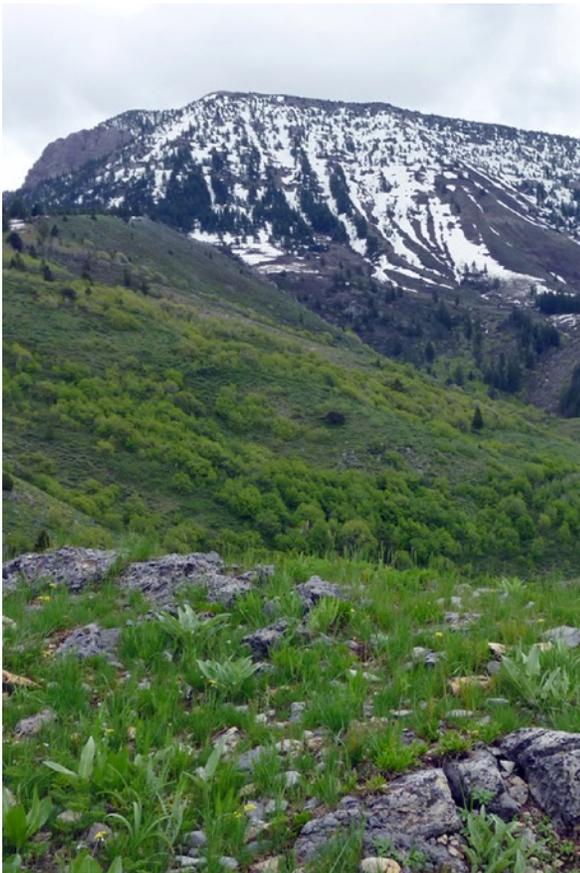
West Face Routes

Pick any clearing along the base of the West Face of Haystack and you will get roughly the same experience: 1,000+ vertical feet of steep, proper snow climbing with a fantastic view.

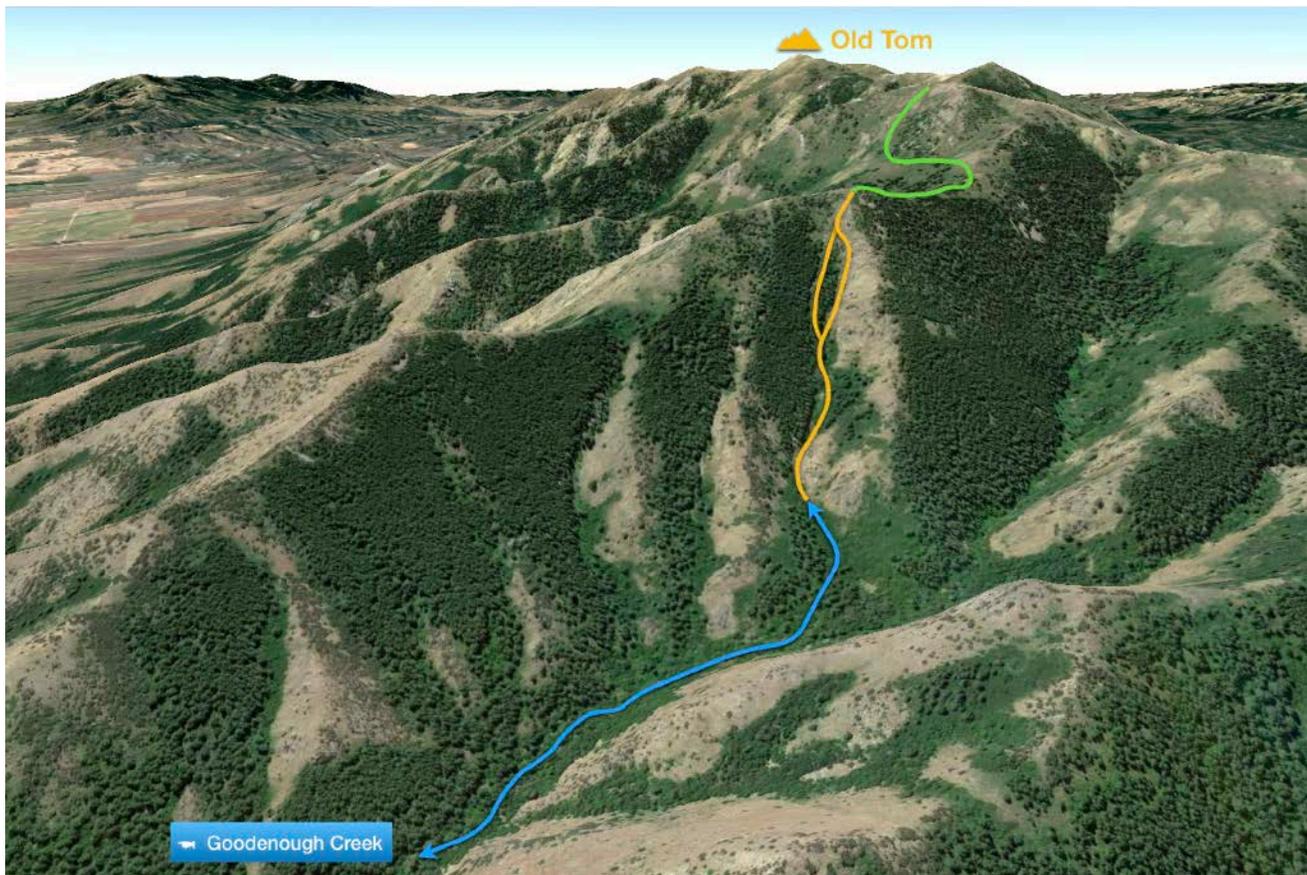
Routes on the West Face are a little easier to get to than those on the northwest when the snow is deep (i.e., if Robber's Roost Trail is indistinguishable in the snowy forest). When you first break out of a patch of forest along the trail and see the beginning of the steep slope to Haystack's summit, there will be a meadowy low hump to your right. Wander off the trail here and walk over the hump: the open view ahead will give you an idea of where to go.

One enjoyable aspect of this slope is how the plants around you change as you near the summit. You can usually tell you are approaching the top by watching the firs get shorter and shorter, their topographies becoming more sprawling and low.

The summit is sharp limestone, so don't rip your pants when you sit to rest. Descent can be either by the way you came up, or by traversing the ridge to the north and descending to Robber's Roost (see *Sidewinder*).



Old Tom North



Old Tom Routes (North): Grouse Gully. The climb is in orange; a continuation is in green.

For obvious reasons, Old Tom has been a favorite quiet escape of mine. Easy to drive to, rarely visited, high and exposed, regular yet unique. Most of the mountain cannot be quickly accessed by trail, which means that a lot of it just sits quietly in its splendor. What a Champ!

At the north end of this lengthy mountain is a classy snow climb accessible by trail. The north-facing *Grouse Gully* happens to be the first long snow climb I put together after arriving in Pocatello more than a decade ago. The route suggested itself from I-15 on one of my first drives to McCammon – not a bad find.

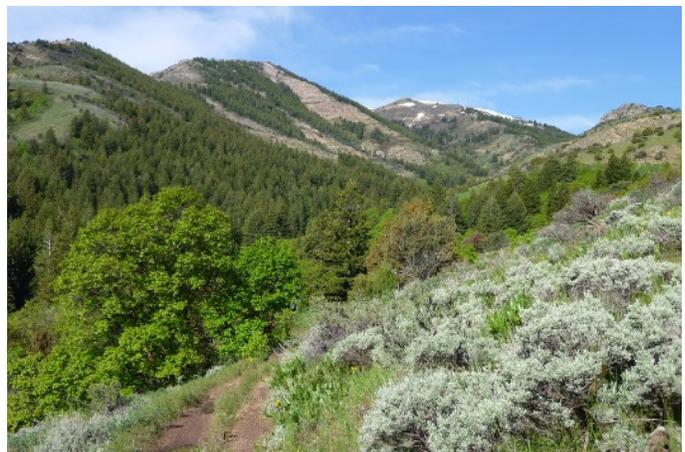
Every time I visit this route, two things are apparent: avalanche debris (new each year), and a stropy Dusky Grouse at the gully's mouth (perhaps a sequential member of a local lineage of annoying birds). Thanks to many run-ins, I began calling the route *Grouse Gully*.

Grouse Gully

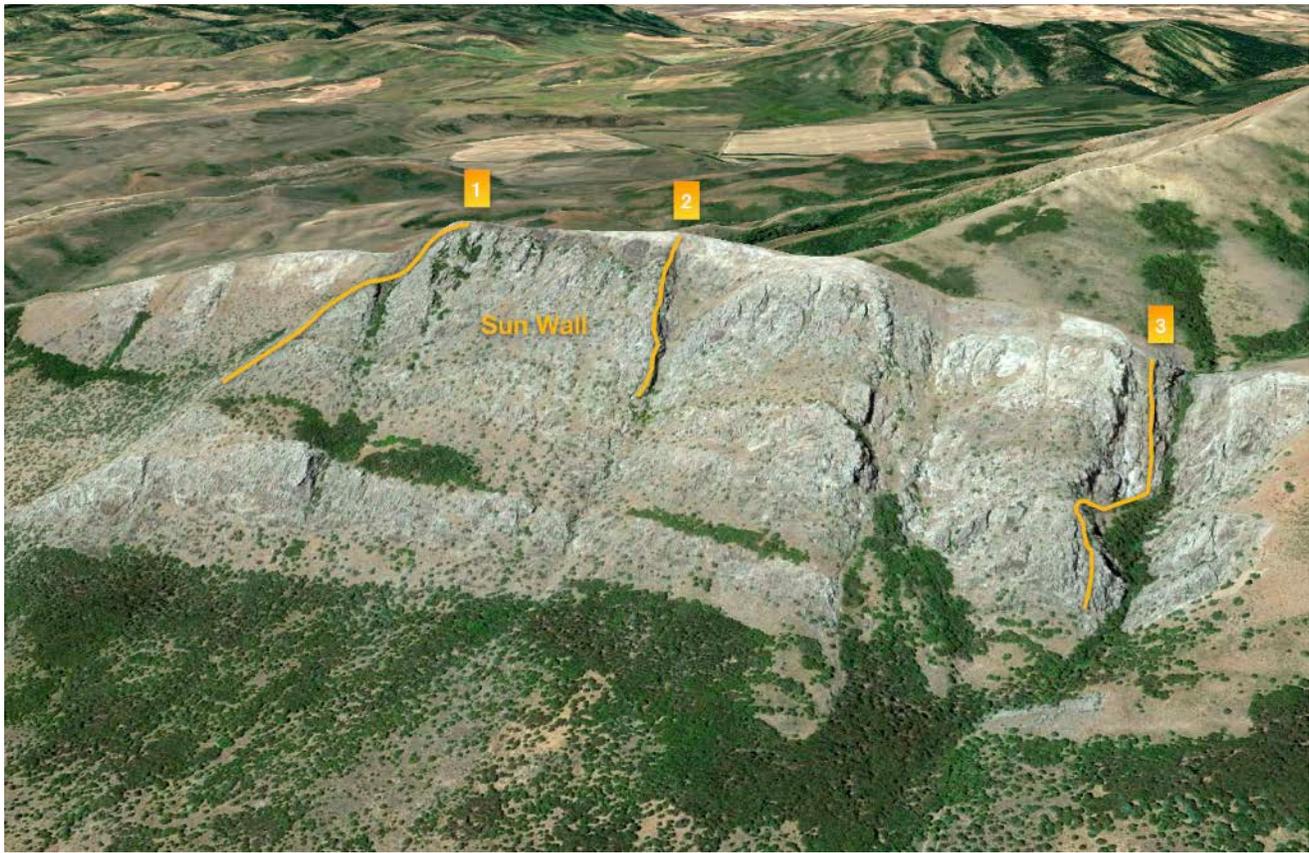
Because of the surrounding forest, chirping birds, and gentle breezes, *Grouse Gully* hardly qualifies as an alpine climb. But it has three things working strongly in its favor: a short approach (about 1 hour), an avalanche-prone steep and narrow slope with neighboring ledges, and the opportunity to follow its summit ridge to further snow bowls and a trek to the peak of Old Tom.

Finding the beginning of the gully is tricky: shrubs choke the exit for several hundred feet uphill of the trail. To find the start of this route, keep track of its large ledges visible from the trail in certain spots, as well as the elevation and number of stream crossings (see Beta).

The top of the main snow climb is a rocky ridge that leads west to a large snow bowl. If you traverse south from here, a fine snow climb up a broad basin awaits you. The summit proper is a ways further along, but the trip is highly enjoyable: a narrow ridge with cornices above wide basins of snow leads to a nondescript summit. When bare in the spring, it's covered in a dense gathering of ladybug beetles. These aren't your garden buddies — they pinch, hard.



Old Tom South (Sun Wall)



Old Tom Routes (Sun Wall): (1) SE Ridge. (2) The Fin. (3) The Grotto.

At the south end of Old Tom Mountain is an anomalous feature I call Sun Wall. It is the loneliest place of those included in the guide. One end of Sun Wall's ridge forms the north cliff of Garden Creek Gap, itself an anomalous feature, but one with a road through it.

Access to Sun Wall is from Garden Creek Gap, on its uphill side. There is BLM and Forest Service land here, but there is also a lot of disconnected private land. I'm not at all sure where one juts into another. The whole jumble is a confusing mess of land ownership, so be thoughtful if you visit Sun Wall and try your best not to trespass.

Sun Wall is *hot* in the summer, but pleasant on autumn mornings and evenings. Coyotes prowl the region, as do grouse and deer. The formation has a significant slope, so you might feel like these routes are harder than Class 3; maybe they are in spots. But I've managed them with a bit of chutzpah and some sticky approach shoes, so maybe you will, too.

South East Ridge

South East Ridge is an excellent opportunity to feel like you're in the mountains when you really are on a relatively low-elevation, barren spur of an unvisited peak. (Perfect!)

The ridge itself is composed of the typical blocky, bouldery stuff you find all through this guide, but what makes the route a knock-out is its upper third: a relatively smooth quartzite ledge with plenty of holds and a long drop below.

Like everything in this guide, there is a Class 3 way to get around the smooth dark face. But when your feet are sticky, the rock is dry, and your huevos are boiled, that face is irresistible.

The Fin

The Fin is not a particularly good route. Its approach is not much fun, and the climb is too much like the other climbs on this wall. But maybe you'll feel differently, so I'll include it.

What makes it kind of satisfying is that it follows an obvious natural feature in Sun Wall: a 'crease' in the wall next to one of the four obvious gullies. It gives you a chance to play on something like an arête.

The Grotto

This climb has the longest approach, but it's a fun scamper. One feels 'locked away' from the world in this broad, steep-sided gully with trees and bushes.

The route is contrived, to be sure. But it is a lot of fun, too. Take the broad gully to the south as an approach, and head down the slope as far as you can until you run out of good rock to play upon. Start here.

The Grotto is in two parts. The first part is not particularly stellar, but you're here to play, so play anyways. About half way up, you will release your grip from the stone and stroll down and to the right, shortly getting to the bottom of the second part of the climb.

From here, crank right on up, any way you like (although there is an obvious natural line). This is a fine scramble, particularly at dawn. Not that I expect any of you will try it at dawn. Just saying: it's great the sun first hits it.

Scout Mountain



Scout Mountain: West Face.

The most prominent peak seen from Pocatello — and the busiest in terms of hikers, ATVs, and campers — is Scout Mountain. Nonetheless, it's a fun place to play on crumbling stone.

The extensive West Face provides many opportunities for alpine-style workouts, but it suffers from two problems. First, much of the rock is rather unstable and covered in slippery lichen. Second, the face itself isn't all that high. Considering the work it takes to get up there in the first place, these two snags might turn many potential scramblers away.

Winter makes the approach more challenging, but it's still great fun. The access road is closed in the winter far down the valley, but one can ski into the campground then bivvy, wander, and even climb to the summit on a crisp clear day.

In summer, there are enough people around that someone might thoughtfully call in a helicopter to rescue you if they see you scrambling up the cliff face. Be warned.

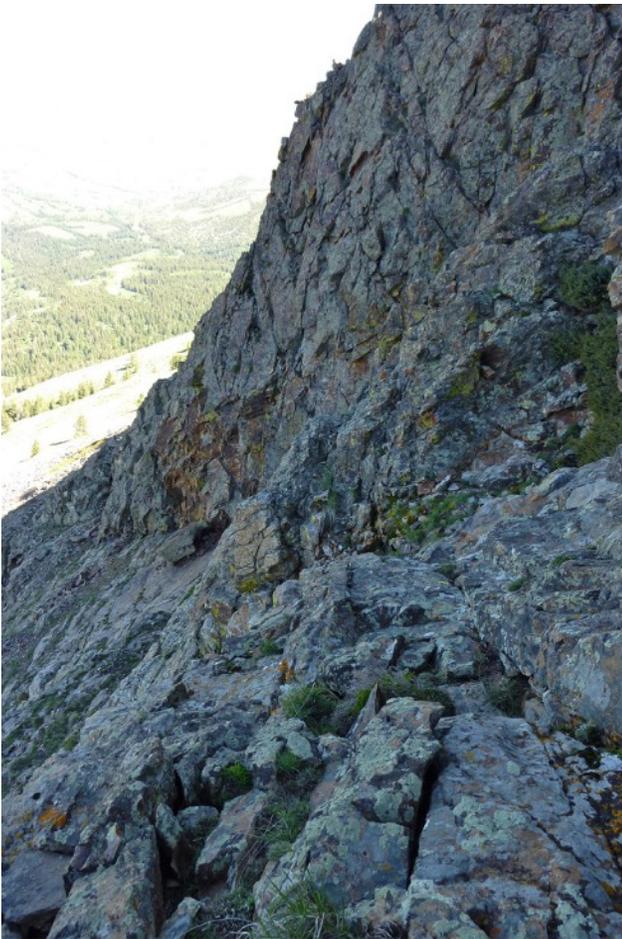
West Face

The West Face of Scout Mountain might be the first place you'll think to climb when getting into town. The peak can be seen from many places in Pocatello and the surrounding hills, although it never particularly impresses anyone with its overall form or height.

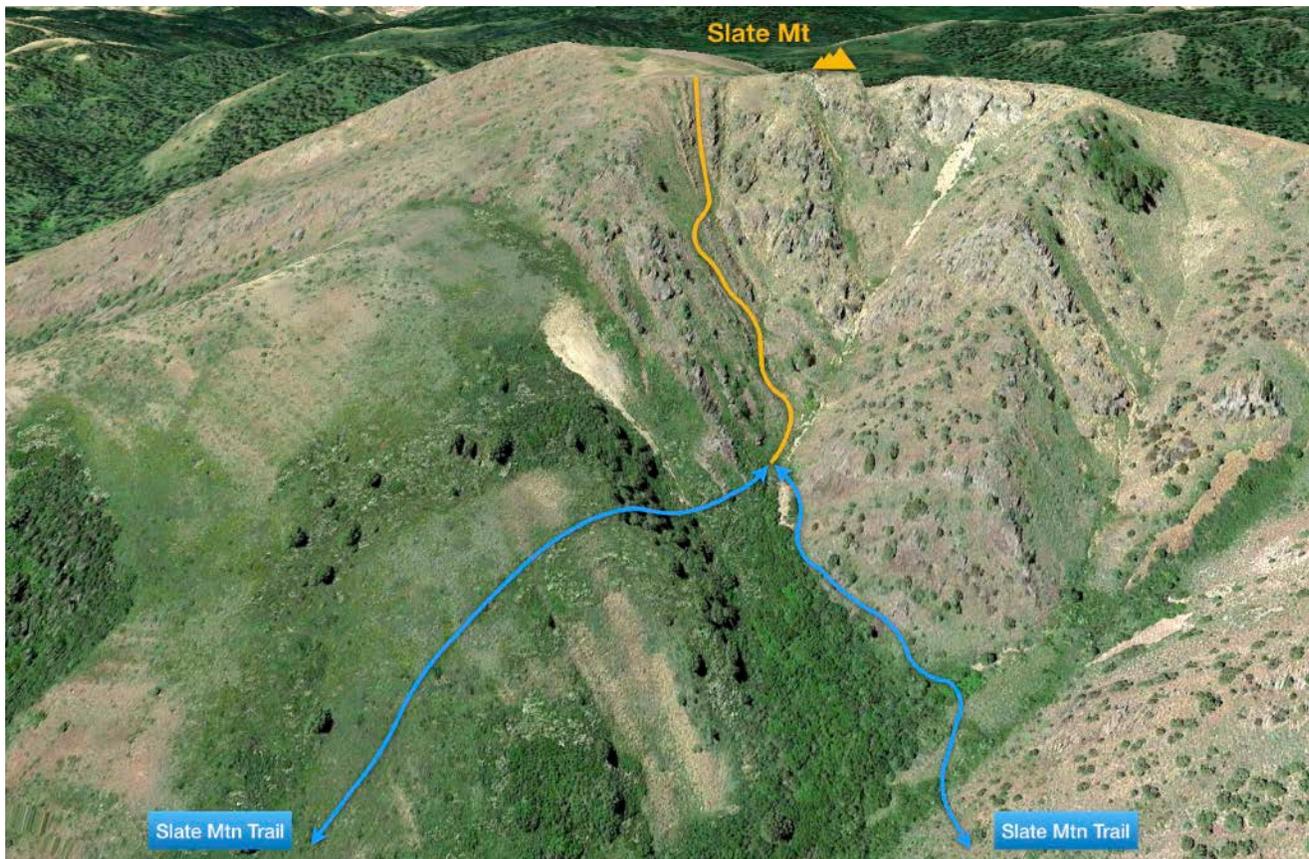
Still, being close to the very popular Scout Mountain Campground and trailhead, why not pop up there for a day and see what it's like for yourself?

The approach isn't so bad for our area. A stiff walk up a typical meadowy slope brings you to a lengthy talus field, then to the cliffs proper. There are innumerable ways to reach the summit, so wander around a bit before deciding your route up. I've suggested a region of cliff that is about Class 3, despite its height and exposure.

Lichen is thick and extensive on this face. It's best to try it on a dry day in a pair of approach shoes with sticky soles. Loose rocks are everywhere.



Slate Mountain



Slate Mountain: The Ribs

Easily spotted from I-15 on the way out of town before one gets to Portneuf Gap, the vertical striped face of Slate Mountain is a readily accessed snow climb early in the season.

You'll want to start on this one in March-May because it will melt away long before your options on Snow and Haystack are gone. Its low elevation is the culprit.

The climb itself is not long, but it gives one a taste of proper mountain snow work. The slope is steep, the small rock ribs are elegant and scenic, and the peak doesn't require seven pancake dinners to reach the top.

Slate Mountain Trail gets a lot of use in the summer, but it is not so heavily used in the early spring when snow still covers the north-facing slopes and corners of the trail. Most people approach Slate Mountain from the Gibson Jack Trailhead, but the climb described here is best accessed from South Mink Creek Road.

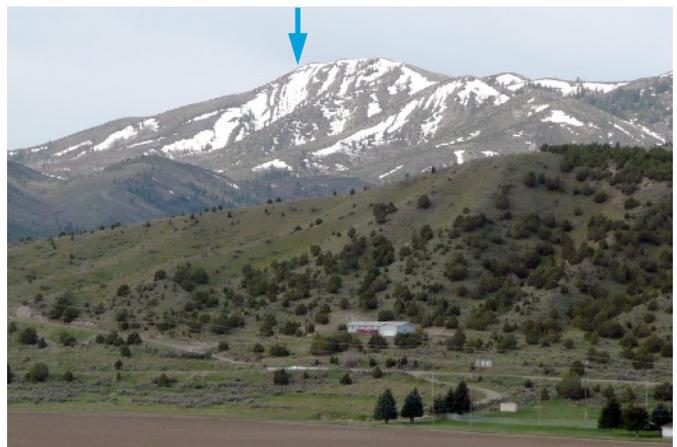
The Ribs

The perfect start to a spring mountaineering season is to kick your way up *The Ribs*.

This route is ready to go long before the lengthier, higher routes on Snow Peak, Old Tom, or Haystack are available. In fact, the requisite snow field for *The Ribs* won't last in a hard, crampon-friendly condition much longer than two or three weeks. Don't miss it!

I've always wanted to ski these chutes in winter. I have no doubt that many people have done so. This is the only route in my guide on which I found a fellow human being. He was a cool guy, and I hope he doesn't mind that I've included a nondescript photo of him on the climb.

By the way, this is probably the safest route in the guide for a true glissade descent. Steer yourself clear of the rock fins and you'll get a good runout at the bottom.



Portneuf Traverse



Portneuf Traverse: Inman Pass to Harkness Canyon

Here's a fine way to spend a long day in the mountains: take the 13.5 mile ramble off-trail along the entire main Portneuf Range, from Inman Pass to Harkness Canyon. You're likely to be utterly alone up there, except for the birds and the breeze.

The entire walk is a prolonged day of stunning views; there's no place to get away from them. The only trees you'll walk through will be on the shoulder south of Inkom Pass, the approach to Bonneville Peak, and the steep slope up to Haystack Mountain from Robber's Roost. Otherwise, the remaining 13 miles will be wonderfully open ridge line.

Bring all the water you'll require as there are no natural sources along the way. You'll find a smattering of foot paths here and there, particularly from Inkom Pass to Bonneville Peak, and from Snow Peak to Robber's Roost. The rest of the hike is up to you; just stick to the ridge top, hopping among ledges, boulders, and bushes when you're not just cruising along grassy slopes with sagebrush. End at the Boundary Trail above Harkness Trailhead.

Seven Summits



Seven Summits: the ultimate hike in Pocatello.

Here's my 40 mile route for walking the entire northern Bannock Range in just one or two days. There are ways to trim off a few miles and get it down to 33 or so, if you go overland.

I have to admit that given the elevation change and lack of water, I've never wanted to do this in one day myself, though I have no doubt there are ultra-fit mutant Pocatelloans who would find this a typical day's workout. Knock yourselves out, guys.

Two days for this route has been my preference. One can either spend the night at the Scout Mountain Campground and then plow through to Wild Mountain the following day, or get picked up at West Fork Trailhead on the South Mink Creek Road, snag a shower and a meal, and begin again the next morning. There's hardly any good water available along this walk.

About 10 miles of this route is off trail; that can be increased if you save a few miles by dropping straight down the slope from Scout Mountain's summit (avoiding the campground).

Seven Summits: Beta

Parts of this long walk involve Class 2 and 3 scrambling, so attempt the route only if you are comfortable with steep slopes and exposure to heights.

Part 1: Garden Creek Gap to Scout Mountain Campground

Begin at Garden Creek Gap and scamper up the edge of the north cliff until you gain a sage and juniper-covered ridge. Follow this up through a ledge section at the south end of Sun Wall, then ramble along the lengthy, open ridge line to the summit of Old Tom.

From here, continue along the narrow rocky ridge to a conical summit at the north end of Old Tom proper. Descend the sage-covered slope to an obvious track and follow this north to the saddle between Old Tom and Scout Mountain. Various tracks will meet up; take a right and follow the main trail to the summit of Scout, which zigzags eastward to gain a ridge then westward to follow the main ridge to the summit.

Leaving Scout's summit gives you many options: (1) retrace your steps back to the saddle and follow the trail downhill to its junction with Valve House (shortest route by trail if you want to continue on to West Fork Trailhead); (2) continue along the track north over the shoulder of Scout and down to the Crestline Trail, which you can follow to a trail junction that leads to the roadway about a mile below Scout Mountain Campground (best route if you want to camp); (3) try your luck with a direct descent westward through the main cliff band (there are at least two gullies that make this easier), follow the slope downhill toward the scuzzy pond at its base, then join the Valve House trail westward (best route for those who prefer overland fun).

Part 2: Scout Mountain Campground to Wild Mountain

If you camp at Scout Mountain Campground, you will want to start the next day heading south through the campground to the trailhead and follow the main trail uphill for a ways until you reach Valve House Trail.

Take this long, ATV-choked track gently overland then downhill to its meeting with South Mink Creek Road. From here, it is slightly uphill and across the street to gain the West Fork Trailhead. Begin up West Fork until you reach the somewhat subtle connector that leads northwards uphill to the Slate Mountain Trail. When you reach the open saddle, turn left and climb the sagebrush-covered slope to the summit of Slate Mountain.

Head north along the ridge line, occasionally finding a footpath. When you reach a small ridge that leads down to Slate Mountain Trail on the right, take a left instead and head overland down to a grassy knob along a broad ridge that connects you to Gibson Mountain. Cross over the knob and climb up the steep slope to reach the main trail to the peak.

Follow this to the summit of Gibson, then backtrack a little and take the westward trail down into Elk Meadows.

When you reach the meadows, turn right at the junction and continue along the main road past the turnoff to Gibson Jack Trailhead and on to a track that leads up the barren slope of Rock Knoll. Summit, then continue north along the open grassy slope, following it out around the broad drainage to the east. You'll meet a track that will take you on to Horse Lake. From there, turn right (east) and head along the open ridge to Kinport Peak.

Leave Kinport Peak on the east side and follow the track along to Wild Mountain, the last of the Seven Summits. There are at least two ways to exit the summit: (1) backtrack to the trail that runs northeast below the summit of Kinport (watch for mountain bikes) and take this down to the City Creek Trailhead; or, (2) head south into the basin, going either overland or by path to Gibson Jack Trailhead.



Seven Summits tour: Old Tom summit, looking north toward Scout Mountain.

Seven Summits Landmarks	Trail?	Estimated Mileage
Garden Creek Gap to Old Tom summit	No	4.0
Old Tom summit to Scout Mountain summit	No/Yes	5.5
Scout Mountain summit to Scout Mountain Campground	Yes	4.1
Scout Mountain Campground to West Fork Trailhead	Yes	6.7
West Fork Trailhead to Slate Mountain summit	Yes/No	3.2
Slate Mountain summit to Gibson summit	No	2.6
Gibson summit to Rock Knoll summit	Yes	2.6
Rock Knoll summit to Horse Lake	No/Yes	2.3
Horse Lake to Kinport Peak	Yes	1.7
Kinport Peak to Wild Mountain	Yes	1.4
Total		34.1
Exit 1: City Creek	Yes	4.8 (38.9 mi)
Exit 2: Gibson Jack Trailhead	No/Yes	2.6 (36.7 mi)



Five Summits: the northern five of the seven summits.

Approaches

Slate Mountain

The quickest approach is from Slate Mountain Trailhead, found just before one reaches the Bannock Ranger Station along South Mink Creek Rd. Alternatively, one could approach from West Fork trail, find the connector that takes you north to Slate Mountain Trail, where you will turn left and head for the climb.

Approach 1: from south side of ridge, leave trail at 6045 elev. and follow the broad open ridge up through scattered Douglas firs, eventually traversing into the bowl. Begin climb at the bottom of the main chute (about 6430 elev.).

Approach 2: from north side of ridge, leave trail when it traverses base of main gully (about 5980 elev.) and stay along the right slope above brush until the main chute is reached.

Scout Mountain

Follow the road up East Fork Mink Creek to the Scout Mountain Campground. Park and walk south to the trailhead. Follow trail south and uphill a short ways to about 6830 elev., then leave the trail and head uphill through the bushes to the left. The bushes fade to meadows; follow these up to a talus field and clamber through it until you reach about 7980 elev. where the cliff band begins. From here, it's up to you: pick a spot and start climbing.

Old Tom North (Grouse Gully)

Start in the large parking area at the back end of Goodenough Creek Campground. Cross the footbridge and follow the trail up to about 6550 elev. From here, bash uphill to the left into the bush until you find a shallow gully with shrubs that leads up to an open place where the main climb begins (about 6800 elev.)

Old Tom South (Sun Wall)

Park on uphill side of Garden Creek Gap. Try to respect private property which is scattered about but hard to recognize. Walk down the road to the Gap, then scamper up along the edge of the north cliff face to reach the ridge line trending north to Old Tom. Follow this until a scrambly bit of cliff appears (the knob at the south end of Sun Wall). Work your way down the steep broad gully to the right (east) until you reach the base of the bouldery wall on your left (about 6440 elev.). This is the beginning of *SE Ridge*.

To reach *The Fin*, one can make an unpleasant traverse north from the start of *SE Ridge*, keeping the same elevation along the slope. One can also wander down from the ridge line just past (north) of the top of the scramble, but this is not fun either.

To reach *The Grotto*, don't descend from Sun Wall's ridge line but instead continue along its top, heading north, then descend a big gully near its northern end. Follow this gully down to the base of the Grotto climb, which begins at about elevation 6075.

Haystack

Approach can be long if you walk all the way in from the start of Robber's Roost Canyon Road (which I often do). Follow the trail toward Robber's Roost up past the knolls along Haystack's west ridge until you reach the base of the main west face (about 7700 elev.). West Face routes 1 (North) and 2 (South) require turning right from the trail and finding meadows to the west and south where the routes begin. To reach *Sidewinder*, continue to the left and follow the trail northward: *Sidewinder* begins in the obvious avalanche field at 7680 elev. *The Sluice* begins at 7610 elev. (GPS 42-43-14 N, 112-07-14.2 W). *West Face North* begins at 7870 elev. (GPS 42-43-02.8 N, 112-07-17.6 W). *West Face South* begins at 7770 elev. (GPS 42-42-49.4 N, 112-07-19 W).

Snow Peak

All routes are accessed from where the Boundary Trail meets the road to Pebble Creek Ski Area (6450 elev.). Follow the trail as it traverses the range heading south. After about 35-40 minutes, cross Rock Creek, follow the trail up a steep bank, then break out into a meadow with a track crossing the trail. For *Snow Bowl*, follow this track left (east) up Rock Creek until the track ends, then bash through brush until the base of the bowl is reached (staying high on the north slope is recommended). For *The Stairway*, continue on from the track crossing a little farther then turn left and head through brush up the broad pyramidal slope until you reach the first rock band where the climbing begins. For *The Gullies*, continue along the trail downhill to the creek, then forge your way up slope on the north side of the gully to avoid most of the bush, or instead traverse across the pyramidal slope from the beginning of the approach to *The Stairway* (easier); continue up the ravine until you reach the base of *The Gullies*. For *Mountaineer's Ridge*, the easiest approach is to continue along the Boundary Trail and descend a downhill stretch of several hundred feet, after which you will reach a clear meadow on the left that allows for a straight climb uphill to the talus-filled gully at the base of the cliffs (a long walk); traversing from earlier along the trail usually leads to dense brush that is almost impenetrable.

Beta for climbs and scrambles

Peak	Route	Elevation (Start)	Vertical Climb	Best Season
Snow Pk	Snow Basin	7800	1,330	Snow (April-May)
	Stairway	7400	1,200	Snow (April-May); Summer (Jun-Nov)
	NW Gullies	7500	1,050	Snow (April-May)
	Mountaineer's Ridge	7730	820	Summer (Jun-Nov)
Haystack	Sidewinder	7680	1250	Snow (April-Jun); Summer (Jul-Nov)
	Sluice	7610	1400	Snow (April-Jun)
	West Face 1	7870	1160	Snow (April-Jun)
	West Face 2	7770	1260	Snow (April-Jun)
Old Tom	Grouse Gully	6800	1140	Snow (Mar-May)
	Sun Wall: SE Ridge	6440	480	Summer (May-Nov)
	Sun Wall: The Fin	6440	490	Summer (May-Nov)
	Sun Wall: The Grotto	6075	630	Summer (May-Nov)
Scout Mt	West Face	8260	270	Summer (Jun-Oct)
Slate Mt	Ribs	6430	570	Snow (Mar-May)

Information (estimates) about potential starting points, length of climb, and seasons.