

KRAIG ADAMS

Sawtooth Wilderness Loop Hiking Guide

3 days alone on a 70-mile loop from Grandjean, Idaho

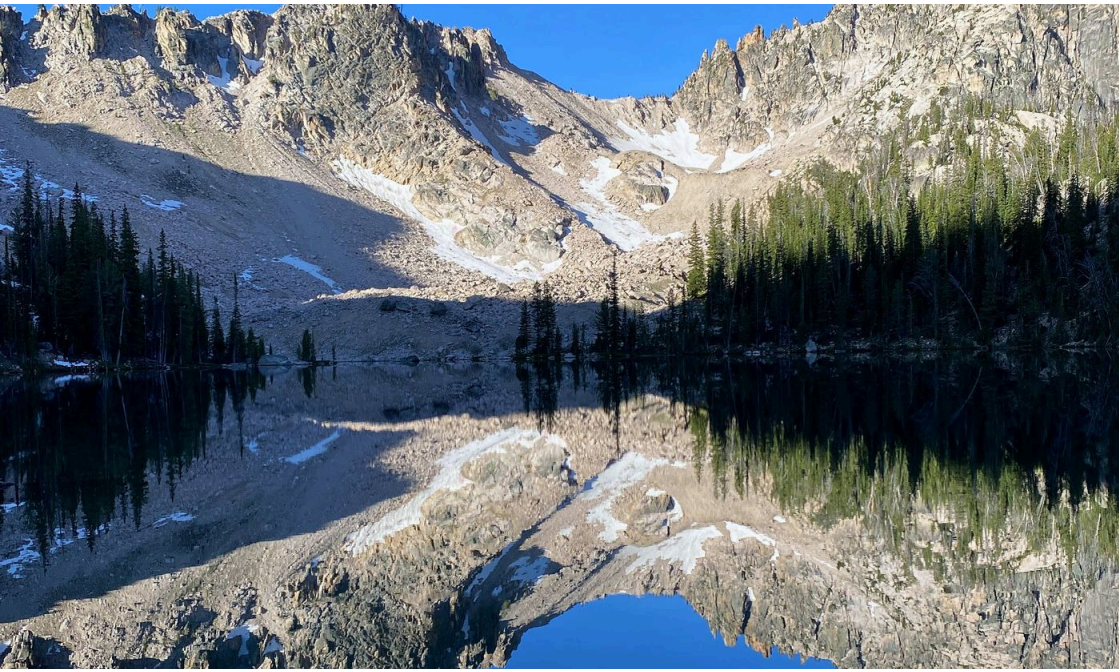
2027 season edition · updated September 2026

Contents

	Welcome
	At a glance
	Straight answers
	The Grandjean closure
	When to go
	Permits and rules
	Getting there
Day 1	**Grandjean to Baron Lake**
Day 2	**Baron Lake to the Ten Lake Basin**
Day 3	**Ten Lake Basin to Grandjean**
	Other ways to do it
	Food and water
	Camping
	What I paid
	Gear for this route
	How I filmed it
	Weather and safety
	Using the GPX files
	Before you go, check these
	One-page trip sheet
	About this guide

Welcome

In July 2020 I hiked a 70-mile loop through the Sawtooth Wilderness in Idaho, alone, in three days. I started and finished at the Grandjean Trailhead on the west side of the range, went up Trail Creek to Sawtooth Lake, over to the Baron Lakes, the Cramer Lakes and the Ten Lake Basin, and walked back down the South Fork of the Payette River. I'd never been to Idaho before. I found the loop on AllTrails, and I liked that it was a loop, so I could park my car and come back to it.



Upper Baron Lake on the morning of Day 2.

The wildflowers were amazing, and calling this area Sawtooth makes so much sense: the tall peaks have such jagged tops. And man, I've never seen more lakes in my life. Little lakes, big lakes, all blue and turquoise, lake after lake after lake.

Read this first: Grandjean is closed in 2026

In July 2026 debris flows destroyed the Grandjean Campground and Trailhead, and the Forest Service closed the Grandjean area, the end of its road past Sawtooth Lodge and the first miles of the trails through December 31, 2026. The Trail Creek Trail, my Day 1 climb, was "wiped out." Nobody knows yet when the loop can be walked from Grandjean again. The Grandjean closure has the details and the ways into the same mountains from the Stanley side.

What's inside

- Straight answers to the questions people ask about this loop
- The 2026 closure, when to go, and the wilderness permit and rules
- Getting there, and all three days: my notes, the trail, where to get off, a map with an elevation profile, and links to that day in my film
- A slower four to six day version, a first overnight at Sawtooth Lake, and a route that skips Grandjean
- Food and water, camping, what I paid, the gear for this route (what I carried and filmed with) and how I filmed it
- Weather and safety, one page of things to check, and a printable trip sheet

How to use it offline

Save this PDF to your phone's Files or Books app before you leave home. Load the GPX files and download offline maps while you still have Wi-Fi. Each day starts on a new page. The film links need a connection; everything else works in airplane mode.

When I say "I," it's my own trip in 2020. Rules, roads and closures below were checked in September 2026 and are dated, and the checks are collected on one page: Before you go, check these.

At a glance

QUICK FACTS

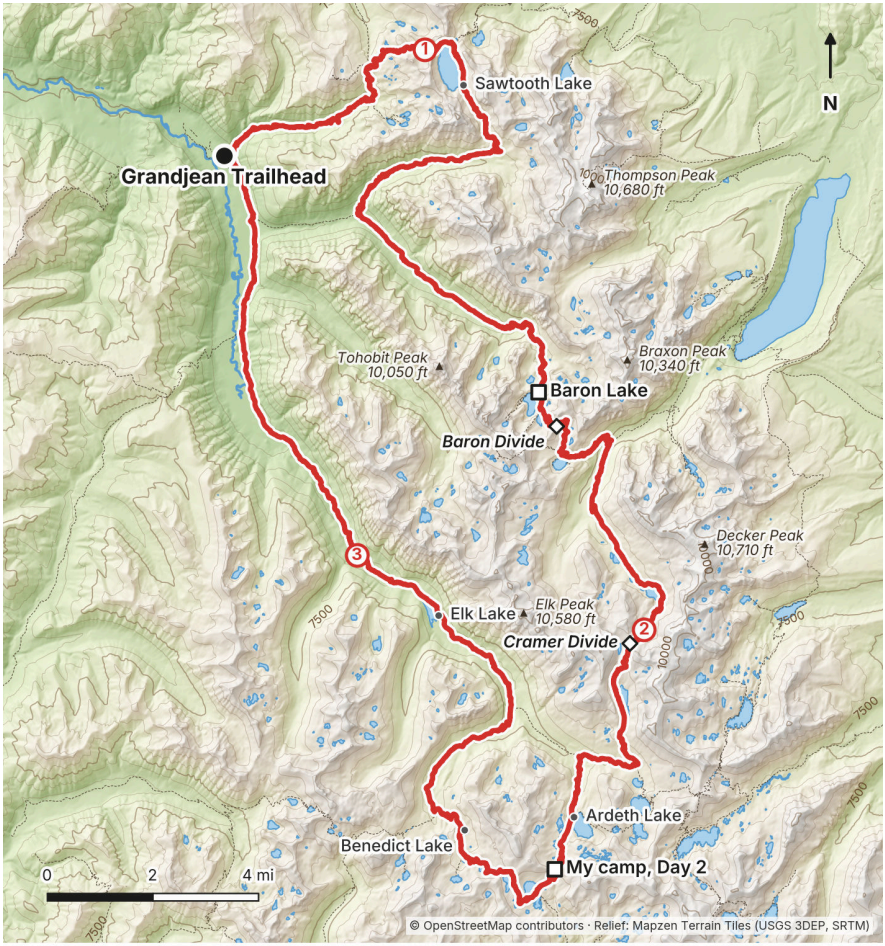
Distance	71.3 miles (114.7 km) by my GPS, a loop
Climbing	about 11,350 ft (3,460 m) up and the same down
Days	3 for me. I recommend 4 or 5
Start and finish	Grandjean Trailhead, 5,190 ft (1,580 m)
2026 closure	Grandjean is closed through Dec 31, 2026 (Forest Service order 0414-04-165). Start from the Stanley side instead: Iron Creek Trailhead or Redfish Lake. See The Grandjean closure
Highest point	Cramer Divide, 9,490 ft (2,894 m) by my GPS, Day 2
Passes	Four, none technical
Permit	Free, self-issued at the trailhead
Nearest airport	Boise (BOI)
Nearest towns	Lowman on the west side, Stanley on the east
Trip date	July 17 to 19, 2020, solo

DAY	ROUTE	MILES (KM)	UP / DOWN (FT)	SLEEP
1	Grandjean to Baron Lake	25.7 (41.4)	6,480 / 3,340	My tent at Baron Lake
2	Baron Lake to the Ten Lake Basin	20.8 (33.5)	4,310 / 3,670	My tent above Ardeth Lake
3	Ten Lake Basin to Grandjean	24.8 (39.9)	560 / 4,320	Back at my car

The numbers come from my own GPS recordings, smoothed the same way as in all my guides. The AllTrails map I found said 62 miles, but I tracked way more than that, because the map didn't show all the switchbacks. There are so many switchbacks on this trail. My recording app's own totals came to 73.7 miles and about 12,100 ft of climbing, before I cut out a few minutes at the trailhead and the drive at the end (see Using the GPX files).



Middle Cramer Lake and its waterfall on Day 2.





My loop from Grandjean, with the numbers of the three days. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Straight answers

Can I hike this loop now? Not from Grandjean while it's closed. Forest Service order 0414-04-165 closes the Grandjean area, its trailheads and the first miles of the trails through December 31, 2026, "unless rescinded," and the Trail Creek Trail was washed out in July 2026. Until it reopens, the high part of the loop, Sawtooth Lake, the Baron Lakes and the Cramer Lakes, can be reached from the Stanley side: the Iron Creek Trailhead or Redfish Lake. Check the Sawtooth National Forest alerts before you plan anything. See The Grandjean closure.

How many days do I need? I did the whole 70 miles in three days, so that's over 20 miles a day, and I pushed through way faster than I probably should have. I recommend doing it in four or five days, just to take your time and not go at an insane speed. There's a plan in Other ways to do it.

Is it hard? It wasn't bad at all. It's a long loop, so you have to be a bit more experienced, but the elevation gains are not that extreme. There's no technical climbing or scrambling at any point. You go over three or four passes (four, by my GPS), and none of it is technical. You don't summit any peaks, though you can if you want.

I'm new to this. Is there something shorter? If you're starting out and you're unsure about that length of time and carrying that much food, I'd recommend just doing an overnight at Sawtooth Lake. Hike up, find a camp spot, spend some time there, and hike out the same way or a different way. There are multiple ways up to that lake. See Other ways to do it.

Do I need a permit or a reservation? You didn't really need reservations or permits beyond a self-permit, which is part of why I thought it was an easy one to do. At the trailhead you write your information, rip off the page, put it in the box, and carry your paper permit with you the whole time. In 2026 that free permit is still required for every visitor, day or overnight, and there's no quota. See Permits and rules.

Where do I camp? Almost every single lake had one or a couple of campsites, so it was really easy to find a spot to set up a tent. There are no huts or campgrounds inside the wilderness. See Camping.

Will it be crowded? It was a pretty isolated trail, except for the Sawtooth Lake area, where I saw at least a dozen, a dozen and a half people. Almost everyone out there had a fishing pole.

What about bears? I read that there are bears in the area. You aren't required to have a bear can, but it's recommended that you hang your food or hide it. I brought bear spray, didn't have to use it, and didn't see a single bear. There wasn't much wildlife at all, just the occasional woodchuck or squirrel.

What's the worst part? The mosquitoes, for me, in mid July. As soon as you stop and you're by water they swarm you. See Weather and safety.

Are there river crossings? Only a couple of water crossings. It was so hot that they were refreshing. I walked right through in my trail runners, and in that heat they dried in about 20 minutes.

Is there phone signal? My record doesn't say. Plan as if there's none, and carry a satellite messenger if you can.

What did it cost? Technically this hike didn't cost me anything other than the food I bought before I drove into the mountains. The permit is free and so was the backpacker parking. See What I paid.

The Grandjean closure

Checked September 29, 2026, on the Sawtooth National Forest's alerts and conditions pages.

What happened. The 2024 Wapiti Fire burned the country around Grandjean. On July 17, 2026 flash floods damaged the trails, and on July 23 debris flows destroyed the Grandjean Campground and Trailhead. The Forest Service's conditions page (updated August 25, 2026) says the Trail Creek Trail "was also wiped out" and asks hikers to go into the Sawtooth Wilderness from another trailhead.

The closure order. Order 0414-04-165, "Grandjean Area, Road, and Trail Closure," is in effect from July 28, 2026 through December 31, 2026, "unless rescinded." It closes all the national forest land, roads and trails inside its boundary: the campground, the hiker and horse trailheads, the campground road, the end of the Grandjean Road, the Trail Creek Trail and the first part of the South Fork Payette River Trail. Sawtooth Lodge and Sacajawea Hot Springs are left out of it. In September 2026 the Forest Service said the campground would stay closed for the rest of the season. There's no word yet on 2027.

Other damage. The July 22, 2026 trail report says the July 17 flooding damaged sections of the Baron Creek Trail (my Day 1 afternoon), which was still "passable" between the Baron Divide and the North Fork. The Grandjean Road was being rebuilt from August to late November 2026, with delays of up to four hours Monday to Thursday.

What it means for you.

- Check the alerts page, fs.usda.gov/r04/sawtooth/alerts, and the conditions page before you book anything. When Grandjean reopens, this guide works as it is.
- Expect the lower miles of Trail Creek and the South Fork Payette to look different from my photos and film, and possibly to be rerouted.
- Until then, the high part of this loop can be reached from the Stanley side: from the **Iron Creek Trailhead** to Sawtooth Lake (about 5 miles one

way), and from **Redfish Lake**, with the boat across the lake, to the Baron Lakes and the Cramer Lakes. I haven't hiked from either. Other ways to do it has a two to three day through-hike from Iron Creek to Redfish Lake that follows my line in the middle.



Early light on the Trail Creek Trail, Day 1, in 2020. The trail was washed out in July 2026.

When to go

What I got. I hiked July 17 to 19, 2020: three days of clear skies, bright sun and no chance of rain. The wildflowers were amazing. Every morning the petals would open up, and you'd see entire meadows or hillsides with five different colors. There were still a few snow patches near the Cramer Divide.

Heat. This was probably one of my hottest hikes ever. From noon to 5 p.m. I think it was in the high 80s. I walked from shade to shade, took way more water breaks, washed my face in the water whenever I could, and took a couple of naps around 3 p.m. to cool down. A siesta. The last day, low down in the valley, was hot and dry.

Mosquitoes. They were the worst part of the hike in July. Expect them wherever there's water and no wind.

Clear skies. One downside of clear skies is that you don't have any clouds to light up in the evening or morning, so I kind of missed out on sunset and sunrise colors.

The season. Before the 2026 closure the Grandjean Campground was open into September (its Forest Service page gives a September 21 closing). Idaho Highway 21 to Grandjean closes in places in winter for avalanche danger. Snow lingers on the high passes into early summer: the Forest Service's June 21, 2026 trail report noted snow making the trail near Sawtooth Lake confusing. Stage 1 fire restrictions were in force across the forest in August 2026, and wildfire smoke is possible in late summer.

Forecast. The National Weather Service point forecast for the Baron Lakes area: forecast.weather.gov (44.08, -115.03).

Permits and rules

From the Sawtooth National Forest, checked September 29, 2026. The main rules come from the Sawtooth Wilderness occupancy and use order (0414-04-161, in effect March 1, 2025 to March 1, 2030).

- **Wilderness permit:** free and required for everyone, day hikers and backpackers. Fill it out yourself at the trailhead or the wilderness boundary and carry your copy. No quota and no reservation in 2026.
- **Groups:** 12 people at most from May 1 to November 30. Groups of 8 or more, or anyone with stock overnight, must contact a Forest Service office first.
- **Campfires:** banned within a quarter mile of any trail, and within 200 yards of Sawtooth Lake and the Alpine Lake below the Baron Divide (and a few other lakes and drainages not on this loop). Any fire you do make has to be in a fire pan, fire blanket, stove or brazier. Fire restrictions are added in dry summers.
- **Camp** at least 100 feet from trails, lakes and streams, on ground that's already bare.
- **Human waste:** bury it in a hole 6 to 8 inches deep, at least 100 feet from water and campsites, and carry out your toilet paper.
- **Dogs:** on a leash no longer than 15 feet on trails from July 1 through Labor Day.
- **No drones,** bikes or other motorized or mechanized equipment in the wilderness.
- **Food:** no bear canister is required inside the wilderness. At trailheads and campgrounds in the Sawtooth National Recreation Area outside the wilderness (Iron Creek, Redfish), a food storage order applies from the Saturday before Memorial Day through Labor Day: keep food in a hard-sided vehicle, a bear-resistant container, or hung at least 10 feet up and 4 feet out.

Getting there

What I did. I flew into Boise, rented a car at the airport, and drove about two and a half hours into the mountains to the Grandjean Campground. There are a lot of places to get into the Sawtooth Wilderness, but I recommended Grandjean: it's a great little campground, and there's a backpackers' parking lot where you don't have to pay anything to park. I bought my food at Walmart before I drove into the mountains. After the hike I camped for free on public land close to Grandjean.

The drive (when it's open). From Boise, Idaho Highway 21 runs north and east through Idaho City and Lowman. The Forest Service gives the way from the other side: from Stanley, 35 miles on Highway 21, then 7 miles east on the Grandjean Road (Forest Road 524) to Sawtooth Lodge, and left to the campground and trailhead. Check road conditions at 511.idaho.gov: Highway 21 closes in winter between Idaho City and Lowman and east of Grandjean for avalanche danger, and a mudslide closed it for four days in July 2026.

Grandjean (normal times). The campground has 31 first-come sites (10 for horse campers), vault toilets and drinking water; $22 a night on the Forest Service's 2025 fee list (I remembered $16 in 2020). The trailhead page lists no drinking water. All of it is closed through 2026.

Near the trailhead. Sawtooth Lodge, near the end of the Grandjean Road, is outside the closure: cabins, a restaurant with craft beer and a pool fed by hot water (sawtoothlodge.com, 208-259-3331). In 2020 it was kind of closed because of COVID, but I could still get a beer there. Along the South Fork there are hot springs: rocks in the river where hot water sits. Sacajawea Hot Springs is outside the closure too.

From the Stanley side. Iron Creek Trailhead: from Stanley, 2.5 miles northwest on Highway 21, then 4 miles on Forest Road 619. No drinking water. Redfish Lake: the lodge's boat crosses the lake to the inlet trailhead (2026: $20 one way, $28 round trip; no reservations; inlet pickups 9 a.m., noon, 3, 5 and 7 p.m. in summer, only 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. for sure after Labor Day; last day October 11), and the backpacker parking lot is free.



Sawtooth Lake and Mount Regan on Day 1.

DAY 1

Contents

Grandjean to Baron Lake

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME I TOOK
25.7 mi (41.4 km)	**6,480 ft** (1,975 m)	**3,340 ft** (1,018 m)	**14.5 hours** 6:27 a.m. to 9 p.m. with long breaks

HIGH POINT

8,770 ft (2,675 m), the divide above Sawtooth Lake, at 9.5 miles

TRAILS

Trail Creek (453), Iron Creek-Stanley Lake (640), North Fork Baron Creek (478), Baron Creek (101)

SLEEP

My tent at Baron Lake

WATER

Trail Creek, Sawtooth Lake, the North Fork and Baron Creek, then Baron Lake

My day

I started at the Grandjean Trailhead at 6:27 in the morning and climbed Trail Creek in the shade. By 10:46 I was on the divide above Sawtooth Lake, and I spent the next hour and a half around the lake. This was the busy part of the loop: I saw at least a dozen, a dozen and a half people there, and almost all of them were fishing.



Wildflowers above Sawtooth Lake, Day 1.

The wildflowers here were amazing. Then I went down the North Fork of Baron Creek, a long way down into the heat of the afternoon, walking from shade to shade. The bottom of the day is the junction with Baron Creek at 5,680 ft, reached a little before 5 p.m. From there it's a long climb back up Baron Creek to Baron Lake. I got there at 9 p.m.

The trail

My times and heights are from my GPS.

Grandjean Trailhead to the Trail Creek junction: 6.5 miles, 6:27 to 9:19. The Trail Creek Trail climbs steadily out of the South Fork Payette valley through forest and then open slopes, from 5,190 ft to 8,040 ft. At the top it meets the Observation Peak Trail and the Iron Creek-Stanley Lake Trail. Keep going toward Sawtooth Lake. (Closed in 2026: order 0414-04-165 closes the Grandjean Trailhead and the Trail Creek Trail through December 31, 2026, and the trail was washed out in July 2026. Until Grandjean reopens, start from the Iron Creek Trailhead near Stanley, about 5 miles to Sawtooth Lake, or from Redfish Lake: see The Grandjean closure.)

To the divide and Sawtooth Lake: about 4.5 miles (3 to the divide), 9:19 to about 12:10. On the Iron Creek-Stanley Lake Trail past the basin of the McGown Lakes to the divide at 8,770 ft (9.5 miles), then down to Sawtooth Lake, about 8,430 ft. The trail follows the lake shore with Mount Regan at the far end. No campfires within 200 yards of the lake.

Sawtooth Lake to the Baron Creek junction: about 7 miles, 12:10 to 4:57. The North Fork Baron Creek Trail drops about 2,800 ft down the North Fork to where it meets Baron Creek (18.2 miles, 5,680 ft). The Forest Service lists it as 5 miles; my GPS measured more.

Up Baron Creek to Baron Lake: 7.5 miles, 4:57 to 9:01. The Baron Creek Trail climbs 2,650 ft up the valley to Baron Lake at 8,330 ft. The July 2026 floods damaged sections of this trail; the Forest Service called it passable.



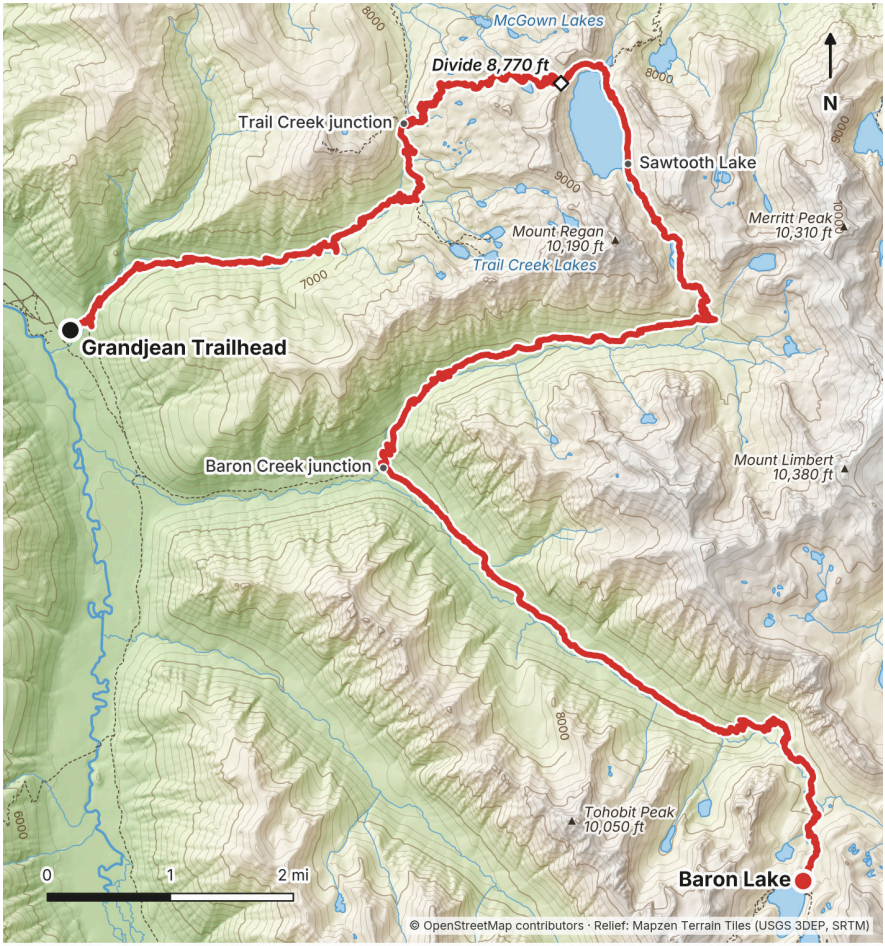
A creek below Sawtooth Lake on the way down the North Fork of Baron Creek, Day 1.

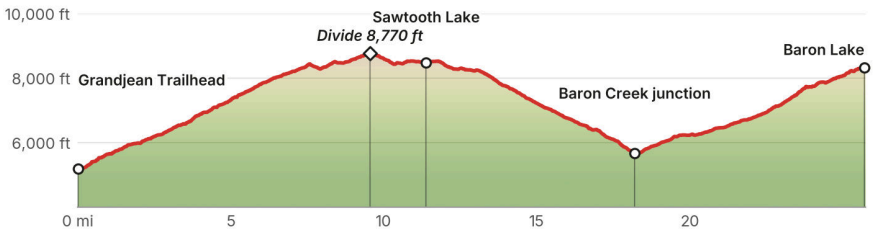
If you need to get off

Back the way you came, or from Sawtooth Lake north on the Iron Creek-Stanley Lake Trail, about 5 miles to the Iron Creek Trailhead near Stanley (on the other side of the range from a car at Grandjean). From the Baron Creek junction, Baron Creek runs down to Grandjean in about 10 miles (the Forest Service figure; it's inside the 2026 closure).

Watch this day

Film, Day 1 · The route, in the guide part of my film





Day 1 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



The Cramer Lakes on Day 2.

DAY 2

Baron Lake to the Ten Lake Basin

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME I TOOK
20.8 mi (33.5 km)	**4,310 ft** (1,313 m)	**3,670 ft** (1,120 m)	**12 hours** 7:45 a.m. to 7:40 p.m.

HIGH POINT

9,490 ft (2,894 m), the Cramer Divide, at 12.6 miles

TRAILS

Baron Creek (101), Mount Cramer (154), South Fork Payette River (452), Ten Lake Basin (482 and 463)

SLEEP

My tent high on the Ten Lake Basin Trail, above Ardeth Lake

WATER

Lakes all day: Upper Baron, Alpine, Cramer, Hidden, Ardeth

My day

The first two days were up higher, with lakes and peaks and passes, and this one had two passes and the most lakes. In the morning Upper Baron Lake was completely still, with the peaks reflected in it. Then over the Baron Divide at 9 a.m. and down past Alpine Lake into the Redfish Lake Creek valley.



Coming down from Alpine Lake toward Redfish Lake Creek, Day 2.

Then I climbed to the Cramer Lakes, where I took a break by the water, and over the Cramer Divide, the highest point of the loop, in the heat of the afternoon. There was still some snow up there. I came down past Hidden Lake to the South Fork Payette, climbed past Ardeth Lake into the Ten Lake Basin, and set up my tent high on the trail at 7:40 in the evening. On this trip I camped in my Nemo tent without the rain fly for the first time, so I could watch the colors of the sky and see the light in the morning to know when to wake up.

The trail

Baron Lake over the Baron Divide to Alpine Lake: 3.8 miles, 7:45 to 9:47. Past Upper Baron Lake (1.1 miles), then up to the Baron Divide at about 9,150 ft by my GPS (2.2 miles), and down to Alpine Lake, 8,340 ft. No campfires within 200 yards of Alpine Lake.

Alpine Lake to the Redfish Lake Creek junction: 2.2 miles, 9:47 to 10:41. Switchbacks down to 7,390 ft, where the Baron Creek Trail meets the Mount Cramer Trail by Redfish Lake Creek (6.0 miles). The Forest Service calls it Flatrock Junction. The Forest Service warns that the creek crossing here "is usually very high in spring and early summer." The trail to the Redfish Lake inlet and the boat goes down the valley from here.

Up to the Cramer Lakes: 4.4 miles, 10:41 to about 1:20. The Mount Cramer Trail climbs to Lower Cramer Lake (9.6 miles) and on past Middle and Upper Cramer Lake, about 8,300 to 8,400 ft.



The Cramer Lakes from above, Day 2.

Over the Cramer Divide to the South Fork Payette: 5.6 miles, about 1:20 to 4:49. A steady climb over rock and scree to the Cramer Divide, 9,490 ft by my GPS (the Forest Service says 9,500), at 12.6 miles. Then down past Hidden Lake (14.3 miles) to the South Fork Payette River Trail (16.0 miles).



Rock and snow just below the Cramer Divide, Day 2.

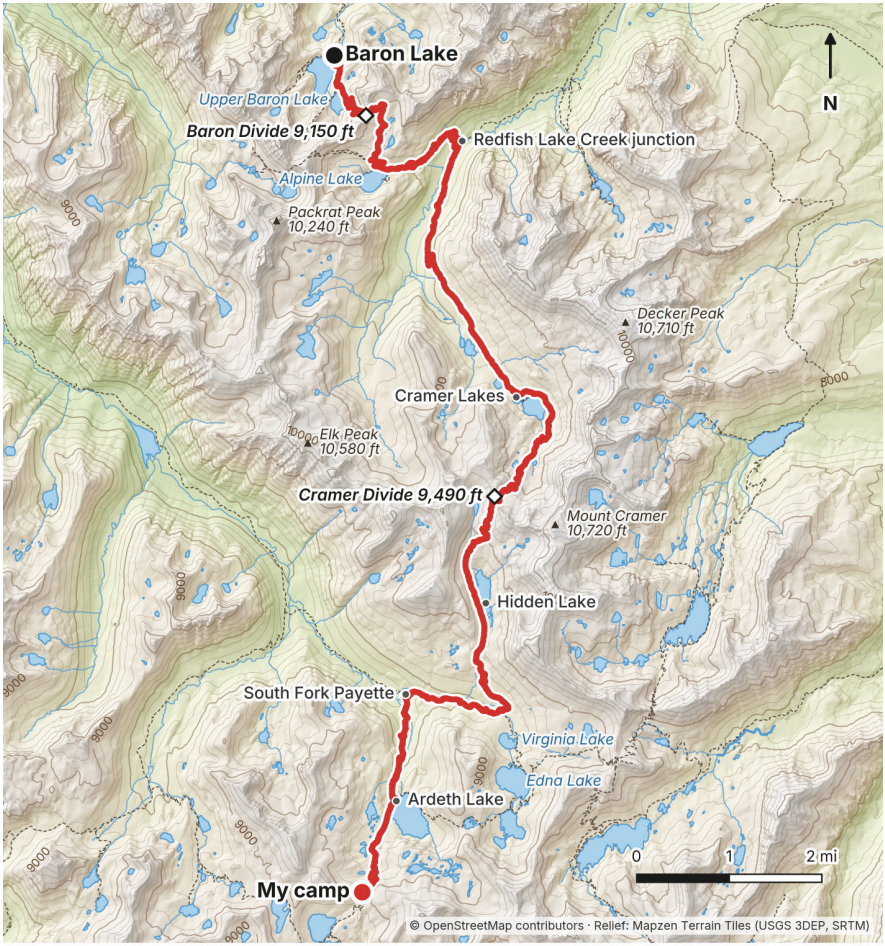
Down the South Fork and up into the Ten Lake Basin: 4.8 miles, 4:49 to 7:40. Down the South Fork Payette River Trail to the Ten Lake Basin Trail (17.4 miles, the low point of the afternoon at about 7,650 ft), then up past Ardeth Lake (19.0 miles, 8,250 ft) to my camp at about 8,950 ft (20.8 miles). My camp was near the top of the pass between Ardeth Lake and Spangle Lake, which some maps call Glens Pass; it's not an official name.

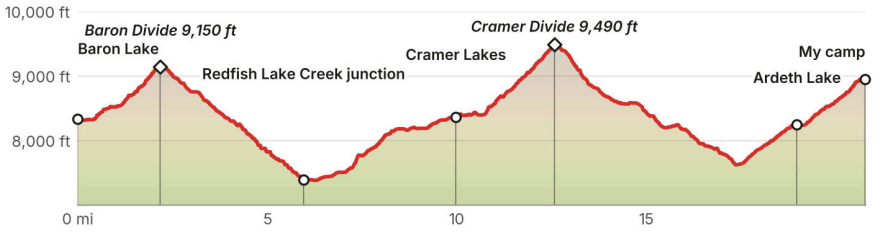
If you need to get off

From the Redfish Lake Creek junction (mile 6.0), the Baron Creek Trail goes down the valley 3.75 miles to the Redfish Lake inlet, where the lodge's boat crosses the lake to Redfish Lake Lodge (in season, at set times). That's the best way out on this day. Once you're over the Cramer Divide, going on is the way out: the South Fork Payette runs all the way down to Grandjean.

Watch this day

Film, Day 2 · Water crossings, in the guide part





Day 2 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



Lake Ingeborg early on Day 3.

DAY 3

Contents

Ten Lake Basin to Grandjean

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME I TOOK
24.8 mi (39.9 km)	**560 ft** (170 m)	**4,320 ft** (1,317 m)	**11.3 hours** 6:26 a.m. to 5:44 p.m.

HIGH POINT

8,950 ft (2,729 m), my camp, and a short rise past Spangle Lake

TRAILS

Ten Lake Basin (463), Benedict Creek (462), South Fork Payette River (452)

SLEEP

My car at Grandjean

WATER

Lakes in the morning, then the river and its side streams

My day

The last day was just a huff to get out. It's almost all downhill, and after the lakes in the morning it was almost entirely a tree tunnel, low down and hot. It wasn't that fun to shoot, so I didn't capture many clips. On camera that day I said, "It is hot, dry, I'm tired." I reached the Grandjean Trailhead at 5:44 p.m. After the hike I camped for free on public land near Grandjean and went to the hot springs by the river.



The South Fork Payette River near the end of Day 3.

The trail

The Ten Lake Basin to Benedict Lake: 4.8 miles, 6:26 to 8:50. Down to Spangle Lake (1.0 mile, 8,590 ft), where the Ten Lake Basin, Benedict Creek and Middle Fork Boise River trails meet. Keep right on the Benedict Creek Trail, over a short rise at 8,950 ft (2.2 miles) to Lake Ingeborg, then past Rock Slide Lake (3.2 miles) to Benedict Lake (4.8 miles, 8,270 ft).

Down Benedict Creek to the South Fork Payette: 4.8 miles, 8:50 to 10:49. The Benedict Creek Trail drops through forest and past granite slabs to the South Fork Payette River Trail at 7,110 ft (9.6 miles).



My camera on its tripod on the South Fork Payette River Trail, Day 3.

Down the South Fork Payette to Grandjean: 15.1 miles, 10:49 to 5:44. A long, gentle descent down the valley, past Elk Lake (12.5 miles, 6,680 ft), mostly in forest, to the Grandjean Trailhead at 5,190 ft. The river and its side streams are the water. The Forest Service lists the South Fork Payette River Trail as 13.8 miles from Grandjean to Smith Falls. The first miles above Grandjean and the trailhead are inside the 2026 closure (order 0414-04-165, through December 31, 2026); while it's in force, leave the high country toward Stanley instead, by Redfish Lake or Iron Creek.



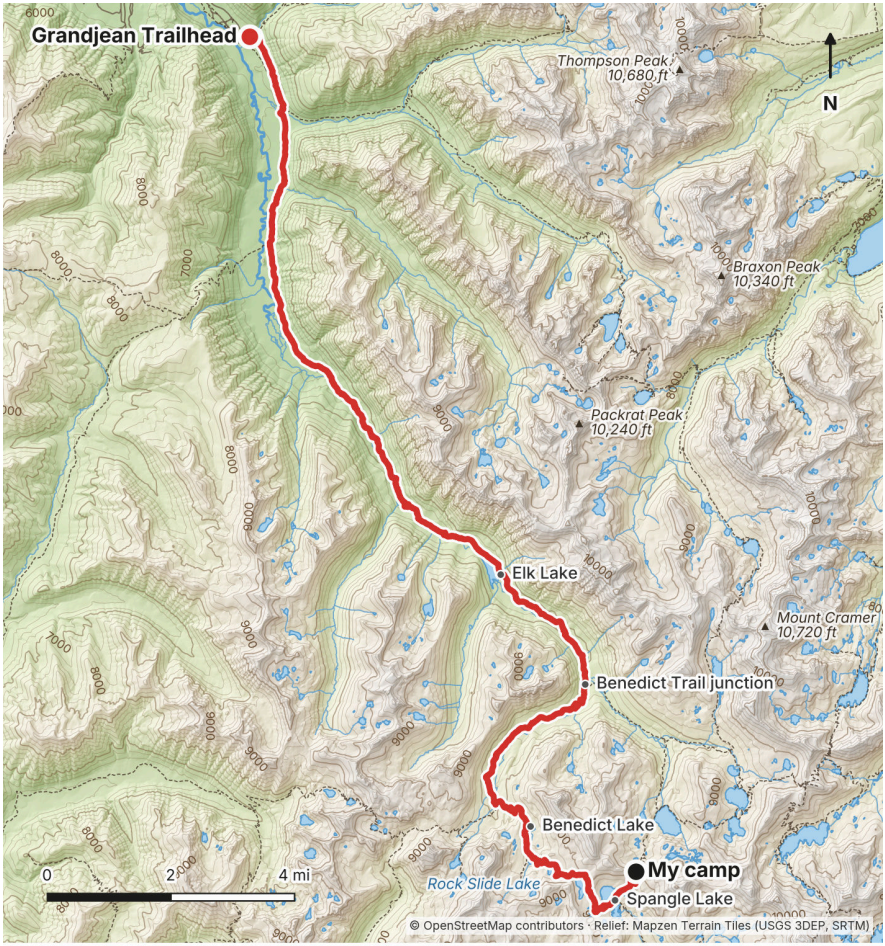
The South Fork Payette valley on the way back to Grandjean, Day 3.

If you need to get off

This whole day is the way out. At Spangle Lake the Middle Fork Boise River Trail heads south, away from any car at Grandjean; don't take it by mistake.

Watch this day

Film, Day 3 · Heat and midday hiking, in the guide part





Day 3 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Other ways to do it

I walked the three days in this guide. These are other ways to use it, and I didn't do them. The distances come from my GPS unless they're marked as the Forest Service's.

The loop in five or six days

I recommend four or five days. My line, split at lakes, for when Grandjean reopens:

1. Grandjean to Sawtooth Lake (about 11 mi). No campfires within 200 yards of the lake, and it's the busiest spot
2. Sawtooth Lake to Baron Lake (about 14.8 mi)
3. Baron Lake to the Cramer Lakes (about 10.4 mi)
4. The Cramer Lakes to Benedict Lake (about 15.2 mi), over the Cramer Divide and through the Ten Lake Basin
5. Benedict Lake to Grandjean (about 19.9 mi), downhill all the way

For six days, stop at Elk Lake on the way down: Benedict Lake to Elk Lake is about 7.7 miles, and Elk Lake to Grandjean about 12.2.

A first overnight: Sawtooth Lake

What I'd recommend to someone starting out. From the Iron Creek Trailhead near Stanley, the Iron Creek-Stanley Lake Trail goes past the other Alpine Lake to Sawtooth Lake: about 5 miles one way (Forest Service trail report). Camp at a lake, spend some time there, and hike out the same way. No campfires within 200 yards of Sawtooth Lake or that Alpine Lake.

While Grandjean is closed: Iron Creek to Redfish Lake (2 to 3 days)

The middle of my loop, from the Stanley side, as a one-way hike:

1. Iron Creek Trailhead to Sawtooth Lake, about 5 miles (Forest Service figure)

2. Sawtooth Lake down the North Fork of Baron Creek and up Baron Creek to Baron Lake, about 14.8 miles (my Day 1)
3. Baron Lake over the Baron Divide to the Redfish Lake Creek junction, about 6.0 miles (my Day 2)
4. Down to the Redfish Lake inlet, 3.75 miles (Forest Service figure), and the boat across the lake

That's about 29.5 miles. You need a way between the two trailheads, and the boat only runs in season (to October 11 in 2026). If you miss the boat, the trail goes on around the lake from the inlet to the Redfish trailhead, about 5 miles. Check that the Baron Creek Trail is open and passable after the 2026 floods.

Food and water

Food. I got about five days' worth of food at Walmart before I drove into the mountains, because I didn't know how long I'd be out there. I knew it would be three or four days, so five was good, and if I wanted to camp out in my car afterward I wouldn't have to go back to a grocery store. There's nothing to buy on the loop.

Hot or cold. I brought my Jetboil, and I do enjoy a hot meal at least once a day: a backpacker meal, a rice side, or Idaho potatoes (I had to do something Idaho related). But I don't want to take out the stove every time I eat, especially at breakfast, when I just want to pack up and go. So almost every morning on this trip I had nut butter and some granola. I might be getting away from coffee and tea too, because you have to boil water for them. I'd rather keep walking and drink water, and if I need the extra caffeine, a squirt of MiO.

Water. Lakes and streams all the way round, and it's never far to the next one. Treat or filter it. In the heat I drank a lot more than usual.

Food storage. No bear canister is required in the wilderness, but hang your food or hide it at night.

Camping

Where I slept

NIGHT	WHERE	HEIGHT
July 17	Baron Lake	8,330 ft (2,540 m)
July 18	High on the Ten Lake Basin Trail, above Ardeth Lake	8,950 ft (2,730 m)
July 19	Free camping on public land near Grandjean	

Wild camping. There are no huts or designated campgrounds inside the Sawtooth Wilderness: you camp where you want within the rules. Almost every lake had one or a couple of campsites. Use a site that's already bare, at least 100 feet from the trail and the water, and no campfires within a quarter mile of a trail.

Free camping outside. I love camping for free on public land; I feel like I'm getting away with something. After the hike I found a good spot near Grandjean, cooked some hot dogs, and slept in my tent in the good weather. The Forest Service doesn't list dispersed campsites near Grandjean, and in 2026 the whole area is closed.

What I paid

My records for this trip are thin: no booking emails or receipts survive from July 2020.

ITEM	WHAT I PAID
Wilderness permit	Free
Backpacker parking at Grandjean	Free
Food, about five days' worth, from Walmart	Not in my records
Flight to Boise and the rental car	Not in my records
Grandjean Campground	I didn't stay; I remembered about $16 a night in 2020 ($22 on the Forest Service's 2025 list)

For your budget (2026 prices). The loop itself costs nothing. From the Stanley side, the Redfish Lake boat is $20 one way or $28 round trip, and Redfish day use was $12 on the Forest Service's 2025 list.

Gear for this route

What this trip needs

- A head net and clothes that cover you up: bug spray doesn't do that much against these mosquitoes
- Sun protection and a way to carry plenty of water for hot afternoons
- A tent that keeps bugs out, and a warm layer for nights above 8,000 ft
- A filter, a stove if you want hot food, all your food plus a spare day
- Offline maps with the GPX files, and a satellite messenger or beacon

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I did this loop in three hot July days with mosquitoes at every lake. Here's what I carried in 2020, what I'd take now, and what I filmed with.

What I carried in 2020

- **Pack:** Hyperlite backpack. Similar: Hyperlite Mountain Gear Southwest 2400 (Hyperlite).
- **Tent:** Nemo tent. I left the rain fly off with those clear skies. Similar: NEMO Hornet Elite OSMO 1P (Amazon).
- **Sleep:** a sleeping bag and pad. With no chance of rain I could have cowboy camped, just a sleeping bag on a tarp or a pad, but the mosquitoes would have attacked my face. With a mosquito head net I probably could have.
- **Shoes:** Brooks Cascadia 13 (Amazon), now the Cascadia 20. I walked straight through the water crossings, and they dried in about 20 minutes in that heat.
- **Sun hoodie:** a sun hoodie. Against the mosquitoes you just have to cover up; bug spray doesn't do that much.
- **Stove:** Jetboil stove. For a hot meal once a day. Similar: Jetboil MicroMo (Amazon).

- **Food:** backpacker meals, rice sides, Idaho potatoes, nut butter and granola, MiO
- **Safety:** bear spray. Never used.

What I'd take now

- **Sun hoodie:** PATH Projects Pyrenees T19 Hoodie (PATH Projects). Cover up against mosquitoes and sun.
- **Cap:** PATH Projects Muir Cap 2.0 (PATH Projects)
- **Sunglasses:** Goodr OG Sunglasses (Amazon)
- **Tent:** NEMO Hornet Elite OSMO 1P (Amazon). A tent that keeps bugs out.
- **Quilt:** Hyperlite Mountain Gear 20° Quilt (Hyperlite)
- **Sleeping pad:** Therm-a-Rest NeoAir XLite NXT (Amazon)
- **Warm layer:** Arc'teryx Cerium Hoody (Arc'teryx). Nights above 8,000 ft.
- **Water filter:** Katadyn BeFree AC · 1L (Amazon). Treat or filter the lakes and streams.
- **Stove:** Jetboil Stash (Amazon). If you want hot food.
- **Navigation:** AllTrails+ (AllTrails, 30% off). Import my GPX files and download them offline. Offline maps need the paid plan.

Filming kit

More in How I filmed it. No drones in the wilderness: see Permits and rules.

- **Camera:** Sony a6600
- **Lens:** Sony E 10-18mm f/4 OSS. About 16-30 mm on full frame.
- **Tripod:** a tripod. All of my shots are locked down on it.

What I film with now

Since September 2026 I film with a smaller setup: the Pocket 4 and the Mic 3 on the trail, and the Mini 5 Pro in the air where drones are allowed.

- **Camera:** DJI Osmo Pocket 4 (Amazon)
- **Mic:** DJI Mic 3 · 1 TX + 1 RX (Amazon). It pairs with the Pocket 4.
- **Drone:** DJI Mini 5 Pro (Amazon)

How I filmed it

I love making silent films, because I can just focus on showing and not telling. The second half of the film is more of a guide, where I explain the experience, but I want the hiking part to be silent, relaxing and immersive.



My camera on its tripod above Sawtooth Lake and Mount Regan, Day 1.

All of my shots are locked down on the tripod. I set it up, walk past, come back, grab the tripod and carry on. A lot of people say that's extra miles, but it's not too bad: I was out there for three days and showed only about 15 minutes of footage, a tiny sliver of the hiking, so I'm not walking past the camera that much.

The camera was a Sony a6600 with a 10-18 mm lens (about 16-30 mm on full frame). I locked the white balance at a daylight Kelvin setting for the whole trip, so you can tell when it's morning, midday or getting dark, and I shot everything with Sony's standard picture profile, no color grading, in 4K. This was also the first hike I shot at 30 frames per second.

Say hi. It was really fun to run into a couple of subscribers on the trail. One man told me his whole story: he was on day eight of his own hike, 67 miles in, and aiming for 100. If you see me on the trail, say hi, especially when I'm hiking alone.

Weather and safety

Emergency: 911. By the USGS place records, most of this loop is in Boise County, whose Sheriff's office handles search and rescue there (208-392-4411); Sawtooth Lake and the Stanley-side ways in from Iron Creek and Redfish Lake are in Custer County (Custer County Sheriff, 208-879-2232). Don't count on phone signal: carry a satellite messenger or personal locator beacon.

Heat. From noon to 5 p.m. it was in the high 80s for me. Start early, drink more than you think, rest in the shade in the middle of the day, and cool off in the lakes and streams.

Mosquitoes. Cover up: long sleeves, long pants, a head net. Camp away from the water and with a breeze if you can.

Water crossings. Only a couple, and easy for me in July. The Forest Service warns that the crossing at the Redfish Lake Creek (Flatrock) junction is usually very high in spring and early summer.

Passes. Four, none technical: the divide above Sawtooth Lake, the Baron Divide, the Cramer Divide and the pass above Ardeth Lake. Expect snow on them early in the season, and don't be on a pass in a thunderstorm.

After the Wapiti Fire. The burn around Grandjean brings flash floods and debris flows in heavy rain, which is what closed it in 2026, and burned forest drops trees for years. The Forest Service also warns that many wilderness loops may still have downed trees.

Bears. There are bears in the area. Hang or hide your food, and carry bear spray if it makes you feel better. I didn't see any.

Fire. Check the current fire restrictions before you go (idl.idaho.gov fire restrictions finder) and the wilderness campfire rules in Permits and rules.

Going solo. I hiked alone and saw few people except around Sawtooth Lake. Leave your route and your return time with someone at home.

Using the GPX files

My own GPS recordings from July 17 to 19, 2020, with all timestamps removed.

FILE	WHAT IT IS
sawtooth-loop-day-1.gpx	Day 1: Grandjean to Baron Lake
sawtooth-loop-day-2.gpx	Day 2: Baron Lake to the Ten Lake Basin
sawtooth-loop-day-3.gpx	Day 3: Ten Lake Basin to Grandjean
sawtooth-loop-full-route.gpx	All three days, with waypoints for the trailhead, the junctions, the passes, the lakes and my two camps

Two small trims: Day 1 starts at the trailhead (my recording began with a short walk around it), and Day 3 ends at the trailhead (my recording kept running while I drove up the road).

AllTrails. On a computer, sign in at alltrails.com, create a new map and use Import. It then shows up in the app on your phone. Offline maps need a paid plan.

Gaia GPS. Open the file from Files, email or AirDrop and choose Gaia GPS, or use Import on gaiagps.com. Download the map area offline.

Garmin. In Garmin Connect on the web, go to Training, Courses, Import. Save it as a course and send it to your watch.

Organic Maps (free). Download the offline map for Idaho, then open the GPX file and choose Organic Maps. It works fully offline.

Before you leave, download offline maps for the whole range, turn on airplane mode, and check that each day and your location show up.

Before you go, check these

These change every year. Everything else in this guide stays the same.

Closures and roads

- Whether the Grandjean closure (order 0414-04-165) has been lifted, and the state of the Trail Creek, Baron Creek and South Fork Payette trails: the Sawtooth National Forest alerts and current conditions pages, and the latest trail report
- The Grandjean Road and Idaho Highway 21 on 511.idaho.gov
- Fire closures and fire restrictions for the summer

Permits and rules

- The free wilderness permit at the trailhead (no quota in 2026), and the group rules if you're 8 or more
- The Sawtooth Wilderness order's campfire, dog and camping rules

Trail and weather

- Snow on the passes early in the season, and high water at the Redfish Lake Creek crossing
- The forecast, especially heat and thunderstorms, and wildfire smoke
- The Redfish Lake boat's season, times and prices, if you use the Stanley side
- Offline maps and the GPX files on your phone, a head net, and food for a spare day

One-page trip sheet

DAY	MI (KM)	FROM, TO	SLEEP	NOTES
0		Boise, drive to Grandjean (about 2.5 hours for me)	Near Grandjean	Food before you leave town; permit at the trailhead
1	25.7 (41.4)	Grandjean to Baron Lake	Baron Lake	Trail Creek, the divide 8,770 ft, Sawtooth Lake, North Fork Baron
2	20.8 (33.5)	Baron Lake to the Ten Lake Basin	Above Ardeth Lake	Baron Divide 9,150 ft, Cramer Lakes, Cramer Divide 9,490 ft
3	24.8 (39.9)	Ten Lake Basin to Grandjean	Near Grandjean	Spangle Lake, Benedict Creek, the South Fork Payette
Total	**71.3 (114.7)**			**About 11,350 ft up and down**

Closure: Grandjean area closed through Dec 31, 2026 (order 0414-04-165). Until it reopens, start from Iron Creek or Redfish Lake near Stanley. Check fs.usda.gov/r04/sawtooth/alerts.

Trails: Trail Creek 453 · Iron Creek-Stanley Lake 640 · North Fork Baron Creek 478 · Baron Creek 101 · Mount Cramer 154 · South Fork Payette River 452 · Ten Lake Basin 482/463 · Benedict Creek 462

Rules: free self-issued permit · 12 people at most · no campfires within 1/4 mile of a trail or 200 yards of Sawtooth and Alpine lakes · camp 100 ft from water and trails · dogs leashed July 1 to Labor Day · no drones

Stanley side: Iron Creek Trailhead (Sawtooth Lake about 5 mi) · Redfish Lake boat ($20 one way in 2026, to noon Oct 11; after Labor Day only 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. inlet pickups are sure; or walk about 5 mi around the lake)

Emergency: 911 · Boise County Sheriff 208-392-4411 · Custer County Sheriff 208-879-2232

About this guide

Sawtooth Wilderness Loop Hiking Guide: 3 days alone on a 70-mile loop from Grandjean, Idaho, by Kraig Adams. 2027 season edition, updated September 2026.

I hiked this loop alone from July 17 to 19, 2020, and made a film about it: Hiking 70 miles Alone in Idaho. Everything in first person comes from that trip: the film and its guide section, my GPS recordings and my photos. Rules, roads, closures and prices were checked in September 2026, and anything that changes yearly is dated.

Updates and contact. If something has changed, or you spot a mistake, email me at kraig@kraigadams.com.

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Safety. Hiking in the Sawtooth Wilderness has real risks: long distances far from roads, heat, storms, snow on the passes, river crossings, wildfire and burned areas that flood and slide. This guide describes my trip in 2020, not current conditions, and in 2026 part of this loop is closed. Trails, rules and roads change. Check the Forest Service alerts, follow the wilderness rules, and turn back when conditions aren't right. You're responsible for your own safety.

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Credits. Photos are mine, from my trip, and the cover is my film's thumbnail. GPX files are my own recordings. Maps © OpenStreetMap contributors, openstreetmap.org/copyright (ODbL). Relief: Mapzen Terrain Tiles, from USGS 3DEP and SRTM. Trail numbers and official mileages from the Sawtooth National Forest's trail report.