

Sample hike from Trails of the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness, by Margaret Fuller

SLEEPING DEER AREA

36. SLEEPING DEER LOOKOUT

Round trip: 4 miles

Elevation gain: 760 feet; elevation loss (return climb): 120 feet

Highest point: 9,881 feet

Topographic map: Sleeping Deer

Time: 4 hours

Difficulty: easy but rocky

Access: In Challis, turn left (west) off Highway 93 onto Main Street. At .5 mile, turn right (north) off Main Street onto the paved Challis Creek Road. The pavement ends at 9.3 miles and the road intersects with one to Mosquito Flat Reservoir at 10.4 miles. Passenger cars and trailers are not recommended beyond this point. Four-wheel drive is a good idea. Keep straight ahead. Open and shut two ranch gates if they are closed. Continue on the primitive and rocky Sleeping Deer Road over Twin Peaks Saddle at 19 miles and on out to the end of the road at 42.9 miles.

The view from Sleeping Deer Lookout (9,881 feet) resembles a gigantic relief map stretching in every direction for over 50 miles. To the north, below 800-foot cliffs, Cache Creek Lakes decorate this map with blue-green ovals and triangles. Views to the south are of orange-pink sandy peaks near Crimson Lake, dark green canyons of Warm Spring and Loon Creeks and blue silhouettes of the White Clouds. Southeast stand the double points of Twin Peaks. To the east, a buffalo-shaped outcrop obscures the golden valley of Meyers Cove. To the northwest, the deep chasm of the Middle Fork divides the peach-colored needles of the Bighorn Crags from the wooded ridges of Chamberlain Basin. West of the lookout, the ground drops thousands of feet to the Middle Fork.

The Sleeping Deer Road is one of the most scenic and challenging in Idaho, hairpinning up and down along ridges above 2,000-foot deep canyons for more than 30 miles. It ends abruptly 400 feet above Rock Lakes, 2 miles from Sleeping Deer Lookout. At 18.6 miles the road passes a junction with the two-mile road up to the Twin Peaks Lookout, which sits on a triangular peak of chocolate-colored talus. From Challis, it is only 45 minutes (19 miles) to Twin Peaks Saddle (9,190 feet) at the Frank Church Wilderness boundary, but from there it is two more hours to the end of the road, which climbs 740 feet in the last 2.5 miles.

From the end of the road, the Sleeping Deer Lookout trail circles west around the south end of a sandy ridge, studded with whitebark pines, then turns north and west again. At 1 mile, the trail to the lookout splits off from the trail to Cache Creek Lakes. From this junction, the Cabin Creek Trail descends to the south 9 miles to the site of Falconberry Ranch on Loon Creek.

Take the lookout trail, which heads northwest along the side of Sleeping Deer Mountain, switchbacking up in scree. It passes a small shoulder of the peak at 1.3 miles, then after two more big switchbacks across talus reaches the 9,881-foot summit at 2 miles.