

About the trail

The 900-mile Idaho Centennial Trail (ICT) weaves through the most scenic portions of Idaho's wild country, from high desert canyonlands in southern Idaho to wet mountain forests in North Idaho.

The ICT was designated as the official state trail during Idaho's Centennial year in 1990 by the Lasting Legacy Committee of the Idaho Centennial Commission. Since that time, only a few people have actually completed the Idaho Centennial Trail, revealing the challenge and time-commitment involved.



Jarbidge Canyon in southern Idaho
courtesy Roger Williams

Here on the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation web site, we provide information about the history of the trail's inspiration and designation, how to prepare for a trip on the ICT, what to expect on the trail, notes on resupply points, and what trail uses are allowed. The color maps on this web site are the best public domain big-picture maps available that show the complete ICT route. We recommend that trail users should compile their own set of USGS topographical maps, and carry a GPS on the trip.

"It's our hope that every Idaho resident will make it a lifetime project to at least visit a portion of the Idaho State Centennial Trail, if not travel the whole thing," said Steve Stuebner, author of *Discover Idaho's Centennial Trail* and many outdoor books. "The Idaho Centennial Trail provides a unique glimpse of the state's tremendous diversity and grandeur. It's well worth the journey."

Direction of travel: South to North makes sense

The Idaho Centennial Trail (ICT) follows existing trails and primitive backcountry roads throughout the state. Most people start at the southern trailhead near Murphy Hot Springs on the Idaho-Nevada border in early June, and travel north across the desert before it gets too hot. Then, they proceed toward the Sawtooth Mountains in mid-July, when most of the snow has melted from the high country. Then it's a race against time to reach the Idaho-British Columbia border by late September or early October.

Wilderness galore

For the fans of wilderness and remote country, the ICT runs almost continuously through the Sawtooth Wilderness, the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness and the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness for a distance of more 300 miles. The trail also courses along the famed Middle Fork of the Salmon River (if you like to fish, you've got to bring your fishing pole) and the Selway, both of which were among the

original eight National Wild and Scenic Rivers because of their purity, beauty and wild character (no dams from source to mouth).

North of the Selway-Bitterroot, the trail hop-scotches along the Idaho-Montana border on the backbone of the Bitterroot Mountains for more than 85 miles on high ridges. Dozens of high mountain lakes along this portion of the route will beckon the hard-core angler.

Alternative routes bypass wilderness

Three alternative ICT routes were created in areas where the main ICT runs through wilderness areas. These alternative routes pass through multiple-use managed forests, where a wider variety of trail uses are allowed, both motorized and non-motorized. For example, an alternative route bypasses the Sawtooth Wilderness on the east side of the mountains. Another alternative route runs to the west of the Frank Church and Selway-Bitterroot wilderness areas. And a third alternative route runs to the west of the Kelly Creek backcountry area and rejoins the ICT at Hoodoo Pass. All of the alternative routes rejoin the main trail as you travel north.

Elevation gain/loss

The trail features many climbs and descents – sometimes it can be nearly heartbreaking to see that how much elevation you'll have to lose to cross a river or canyon, and then climb once again to a high ridge. The Centennial Trail begins at 6,000 feet near Murphy Hot Springs, descends to 2,500 feet at the Snake River near Glens Ferry, and then yo-yos up and down through the mountains of Central Idaho between 3,000 and 9,000 feet. The trail's low point (1,900 feet above sea level) is along the Selway River near the Moose Creek Guard Station, and then it climbs again to high points between 5,000 and 6,000 feet in the Cabinet and Selkirk Mountains as the trail approaches the northern boundary.

Alpine lake along Stateline Trail area on Idaho/Montana border – courtesy Leo Hennessy



Three historic trails

The ICT crosses three historic trails along its route: the Oregon Trail near the Snake River, the Lewis and Clark Trail (on the north ridge above the Lochsa River), and the alternative route crosses the Nez Perce Trail. Those people who travel the entire length of the trail will cross through 11 national forests and about 100 miles of Bureau of Land Management land in the high desert.

All of the high points and statistics in the world can never cover the true challenge of traveling the full length of the ICT. It's a major challenge, to say the least, to camp out for more than 120 days, deal with a variety of biting bugs, snakes, blisters, extreme heat, rain and soggy clothes, and get up every day to make new progress on the trail. By the end, however, it's all worth it.

A Cooperative Effort

The Idaho State Centennial Trail is a cooperative effort. The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation provides overall trail coordination. The Bureau of Land Management manages the southern section of the trail. The U. S. Forest Service manages the middle and northern sections of the trail and private and other public land agencies allow trail users to cross their property for continuity.

Diverse Terrain

The trail passes through some of Idaho's most spectacular country. The route traverses a variety of terrain including sagebrush desert, flower-filled alpine meadows, dense cedar forests, six major river canyons, and passes by numerous crystal clear mountain lakes. Many unique geological formations, such as caves and hot springs, can also be seen from the trail. Along the way you will find Idaho as it was 100 years ago. Abandoned homesteads and cabins, old mines, logging camps and a restored, old time ranger station are many of the interesting sites along the route. The Centennial Trail primarily crosses public land, but there are small segments of private land along the way. Permission to cross or camp on private land must be obtained from the land owner.

Maps

[Click here to view an interactive topographical map of the trail.](#)

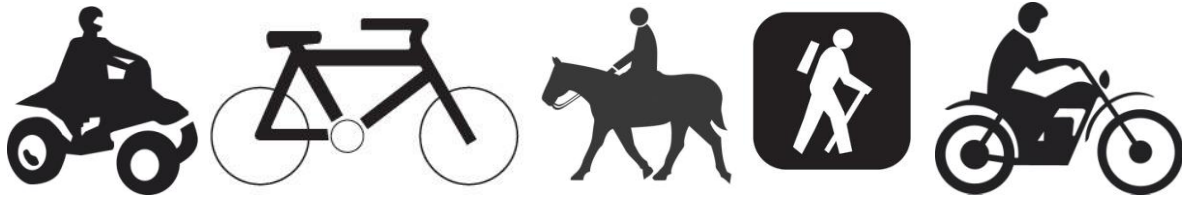
[Click here to view a trail overview map that includes contact information US Forest Service and BLM offices along the way.](#)

US Forest Service maps, BLM maps, and US Geological Survey (USGS) 1-24,000 scale topographic hard copy maps or topographic software such as National Geographic Topo are recommended for planning and on-trail use. USGS topographic hard copy maps are available at many outdoor equipment stores, and at the Branch of Distribution USGS, Box 25286 Federal Center, Denver, CO 80225. Forest Service and BLM maps can be purchased at any agency office.

Video

Check out a [short video segment](#) on the Centennial Trail, produced by Idaho Public Television.

Modes of travel



The alternative sections of the ICT provide opportunities for mountain biking and trail machines in the eastern side of the Sawtooths, and in the western alternative route around the wilderness areas. Check on the trail tread before you make a final choice. In some cases, you may travel on a 4WD road, two track primitive roads or single track. You may want to check with a local land management agency about what uses are allowed in the case of single track. Click [here](#) for information on how to contact the BLM or Forest Service.

Special Limitation:

*There is one, short section of the Centennial Trail in the Selkirk Mountain Range in the Idaho Panhandle that would not be passable for horses, pack goats or llamas because it is a large rock boulder field with no trail tread. The rest of the route should be passable to horseback riders, pack goats or llamas.

Re-supply points



By design, much of the Idaho Centennial Trail runs through the most remote and scenic countryside in Idaho, and thus, much of the trail is a long distance from any semblance of civilization.

Ideally, it's best to plan a through-trip on the ICT with help from family and friends who can meet you on the trail in pre-determined locations in remote areas and resupply you with mail, food, water and other essential supplies.

Along the ICT route, there are several towns or key road intersections that you will pass through, where you could receive supplies for the next part of the journey:

(Moving from the southern trailhead to the north)

- Murphy Hot Springs Road, 3 miles north of the Nevada border.
- Bruneau Canyon Overlook, about 15 miles south of Bruneau off of the Clover-Three Creek Road.
- Hammett, Idaho on I-84.
- U.S. Highway 20 near Cat Creek Summit, about 30 miles east of Mountain Home.
- Virginia Gulch/South Fork of the Boise River pack bridge near Baumgartner Hot Spring Campground on USFS Road #227.
- Grandjean Lodge, about 6 miles off of Highway 21 on USFS Road #524.

- Idaho Highway 21/USFS Elk Creek Road #614, a 4-mile highway walk to Stanley.
- Lola Creek Campground trailhead, about 20 miles northwest of Stanley just off of Idaho Highway 21.
- Middle Fork of the Salmon River float boat put-in on USFS Dagger Falls Road #558.
- Indian Creek backcountry USFS air strip on the Middle Fork of Salmon River in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, 25 miles downriver from Dagger Falls.
- End of the Stibnite-Thunder Mountain Mine USFS Road #375.
- Chamberlain Basin backcountry USFS air strip in the center of the Frank Church- River of No Return Wilderness.
- Main Salmon River crossing at Campbell's Ferry (could be a jet boat resupply here).
- Magruder Corridor USFS Road #468 near Burnt Knob.
- Running Creek USFS Road #357 at Warm Springs Bar.
- Moose Creek Ranger Station backcountry air strip in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness.
- Wilderness Gateway Campground on U.S. Highway 12.
- Old Kelly Creek Work Center on Moose Creek USFS Road #255.
- Hoodoo Pass on Long Creek USFS Road #250.
- Medicine Creek USFS Road #320 near Missoula Lake on the Idaho/Montana border.
- Gold Creek USFS Road #388 on the Idaho/Montana border.
- St Paul Pass on Cliff Creek USFS Road #560.
- Shoshone Park just off of I-90, about 3 miles east of Mullan.
- Cooper Pass on USFS Road #7623 on the Idaho/Montana border.
- Thompson Pass on USFS Highway 9 on the Idaho/Montana border.
- USFS Road #152 on the Idaho/Montana border.
- Porcupine Pass on USFS Road #151.
- Idaho Point, Idaho Point USFS Road #430.
- Clark Fork on Idaho Highway 200.
- U.S. Highway 95 at McArthur Lake State Wildlife Management Area.
- Priest Lake State Park, Indian Creek or Lionhead unit on the east shore of Priest Lake.
- North end of Bog Creek USFS Road #1013 near Upper Priest Falls.
- Centennial Trail East (Sawtooth Valley)
- Intersection Highway 75 and Chemeketan USFS Road #215 near Smiley Creek Lodge.
- Intersection Highway 75 and the Red Fish Lake USFS Road # 214, about 4 miles south of Stanley.
- Centennial Trail West (West of Frank Church and Selway/Bitterroot Wilderness)
- Landmark-Stanley USFS Road #579 near Pen Basin.
- Krassel Ranger Station, on USFS Road #674.
- Ponderosa Campground on USFS Lick Creek Road #412.
- Burgdorf Hot Springs on USFS Burgdorf Road #246.
- Wind River pack bridge that crosses the Main Salmon River on USFS Road #103.
- Elk City-Magruder Road, about 9 miles north of the Red River Ranger Station.
- Selway Falls on USFS Selway Road #223.
- Split Creek pack bridge that crosses the Lochsa River on Highway 12.

If needed, you could have supplies or mail sent to you via U.S. Mail in the following towns: Hammett, Stanley, Mullan and Clark Fork.

Trail conditions

Check on trail conditions before you go...

Please check with local land managers before you head out on The Idaho Centennial Trail. Click here to see a map with the telephone numbers and web sites for contacting local land managers throughout the trail's length.

Be aware that trail conditions may change or deteriorate because of cataclysmic environmental or climactic events, logging, mining, road-building, wildfires, avalanches, mudslides or other natural or unnatural events.

Trail conditions will vary according to how much use they receive and how often they are maintained. Some of the ICT route through federally designated wilderness areas follows pretty popular routes. These trails are typically maintained each year.

Other trails in unclassified primitive areas may not receive trail maintenance on an annual basis, if ever. But local recreation officers with the U.S. Forest Service should have a good idea about the trail conditions, regardless.

Wildfires and blow-down events in particular can make it difficult to stay with the ICT after hundreds of trees have dropped across the trail.



As a safeguard, we recommend that anyone who travels the ICT to carry detailed maps with them, along with a compass, and a GPS unit. Ideally, ICT users should pre-program travel routes or key landmark waypoints into their GPS so they can stay connected with the Centennial Trail during their trip.

To post or read information relative to the trail check out the new Idaho Centennial Trail blog at <http://idahocentennialtrail.blogspot.com>.

Trail signage

How is the Idaho Centennial Trail signed?

The Idaho Centennial Trail has been signed with the ICT logo (shown at left) from the Idaho-Nevada border to the southern boundary of the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, near Stanley.



Signs have been placed at all key intersections in both directions. Signs are either placed on free-standing posts or they are affixed to trees. The goal is to place ICT signs along the entire reach of the ICT, except in areas where the ICT passes through federally designated wilderness areas. In wilderness areas, ICT users will need to follow signs for the particular trails they are traveling on.

Even in areas that do not have ICT signs per se, the Forest Service often has trails signs posted for various trails that the ICT route follows.

Leo Hennessy, Non-Motorized Trails Coordinator for the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, has led many trail-signing volunteer projects over the years. He plans to work on signing the trail north of the Lochsa River and in the Idaho Panhandle in the near future.

If you are interested in participating in a trail-signing project, please contact Leo at Leo.Hennessy@idpr.idaho.gov or call him at 208-514-2419.

Water

Fill up on water when you can ...

The Idaho Centennial Trail follows many creeks and rivers in some areas, and travels along high dry ridges in others, so it will behoove ICT travelers to plan to carry plenty of water during the trip.

Water from springs, creeks or rivers should be treated to avoid getting the deadly giardia parasite and its resulting maladies. Use a water pump or other treatments to ensure that your water is safe to drink.

In the southern portion of the trail in the high desert, the trail follows a high plateau above the Jarbidge River. Because the canyon has sheer vertical walls, it is extremely difficult to get down into the river except when a side draw provides access. You will see a few side creeks on the map.

Another approach is to hide and cache water along the desert route (in advance) so you don't have to climb down into the Jarbidge River canyon. Stock users will need to cache more significantly more water than hikers to keep their animals watered.

North of the Snake River, as the route moves into the mountains and the national forests, pay attention to whether the trail travels along creeks or travels on high ridges. In general, the trail has good access to water from points north of U.S. 20 to the Sawtooths and throughout the Sawtooth Range.

The same is true in the southern portion of the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, south of the Salmon River. After you cross the Salmon, however, the trail does climb on high ridges in several areas leading up to Dry Saddle. In portions of the route in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, and along the Bitterroots on the Idaho-Montana border, the trail follows high ridges for grand views, but water will be scarce.

Farther into northern Idaho, water generally becomes more available north of Clark Fork. Watch the map as you are planning your adventure to be sure that you don't run short of water when you need it most.

Access issues

Access to the ICT is blocked near the Vienna Mine due to private lands. Until the trail is rerouted to alleviate the private landowners concerns the following bypass is required: When traveling south on Johnson Creek Trail #181 do not turn left on the Vienna Creek Trail #086 but continue down Johnson Creek and turn left on USFS road #079. Follow this road down the valley and take a left on Emma Creek Trail #063. Continue on the Emma Creek trail until you rejoin the ICT, Trail #224.

Fording Big Creek in the spring can be dangerous. Due to high water in the spring, many experienced hikers have been swept downstream while crossing Big Creek. Here is how to bypass the Big Creek ford: While heading north on Lookout Mountain Ridge trail #61 turn left on the Milk Creek Trail #055. At the bottom of the canyon turn right on the Monumental Creek Trail #005. Then cross the Big Creek pack bridge and turn right on Big Creek Trail #196 until you rejoin the ICT.

Trail junctions can be confusing in Chamberlain Basin. As you approach Chamberlain Basin, the topography is fairly flat with lots of tree cover and several trails converge in the basin area. This can cause confusion. The best solution is to pre-program waypoints into your GPS unit to ensure that you stay on the right trails.

You will approach the basin on Forest Trail 002. When you get to Stonebreaker Ranch, you will bear left on Forest Trail 001, Chamberlain Basin Trail. Follow Trail 001 from Chamberlain Basin downhill to the Campbell's Ferry Bridge on the Salmon River.

Route-finding can be difficult on the Stateline Trail on the Idaho-Montana border. This is particularly true between Hoodoo Pass and Mullan, and between Mullan and Clark Fork. The single-track trail becomes criss-crossed by roads as you travel north from Hoodoo Pass. A number of logging roads will create confusion on the state boundary as you travel north. The best thing we can recommend is to pre-program GPS waypoints into your GPS unit to stay with the route.

Access to the ICT (Trail #120) from Clark Fork may be blocked by private land. We recommend using a bypass route around this private land issue to avoid any difficulties. Drive up the Lightning Creek Road #419 to Porcupine Lake Road #642 and head for Porcupine Lake Campground. On Forest Road #419, you'll need to cross East Fork Creek in a 4WD vehicle. Continue another 2.5 miles to the Porcupine Lake Road #642 and turn left. Its six miles to Porcupine Lake. Pick up Trail #114 at the campground and climb three miles west to the ridge and a junction with Trail #120. Turn left on Trail #120 and head north. Now you're back on the ICT.

At the U.S. 95 junction with the ICT, head south to a bypass route to avoid private land issues adjacent to McArthur Wildlife Management Area. Go south on U.S. 95 for about 6.5 miles to Pack River Road (County Road 47 and Forest Road #231). At this corner you will find a nice convenience store and restaurant. Turn right on the Pack River Road and head north for 13 miles to Fault Lakes trailhead (Trail #59). Pick up the ICT here.

Between Fault Lakes and Hunt Lake, there is no trail. ICT users will need to bushwhack between the two lakes. From the smaller Fault Lake you can follow rock ramps up to the saddle overlooking Hunt Lake. From the saddle stay left travel down a steep talus slope to Hunt Lake. Traverse around the south and west side of Hunt Lake. The east side of Hunt Lake is thick brush. Pre-program GPS waypoints in this area to keep yourself on course. From the Hunt Lake outlet, the trail to the trailhead is almost continuous boulder hopping. The trail route is marked with orange spray paint dots on the boulders.

Idaho wilderness

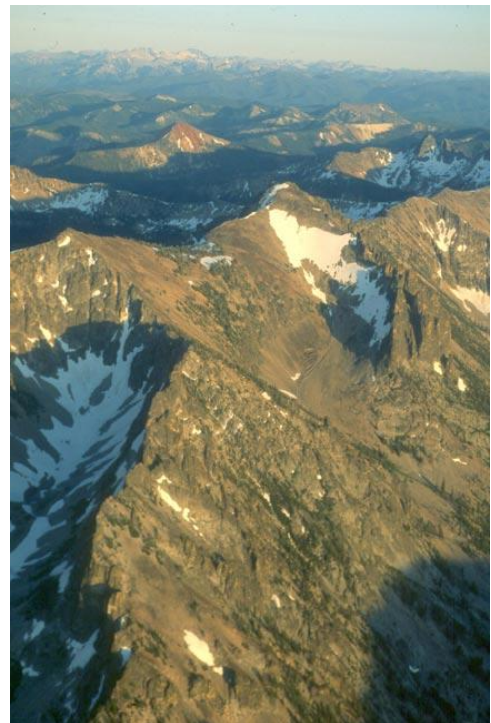
Idaho Wilderness along the ICT (Photos courtesy of wilderness.net)

The Idaho Centennial Trail winds through a portion of three federally designated wilderness areas, and skirts a fourth. That's because the trail advocates who created the ICT wanted it to pass through the most remote and beautiful parts of Idaho. All of these wilderness areas have national significance in terms of their beauty and outstanding natural values. Here are a few notes about each wilderness area, and what you can expect to find there.

The Sawtooth Wilderness:

In 1972, the 216,000-acre [Sawtooth Wilderness](#) was protected by Congress, with the late Sen. Frank Church-D-Idaho, and Democratic Gov. Cecil Andrus leading the charge.

The Sawtooth is the most heavily used wilderness area in Idaho, with more than 35,000 users per year. The ICT cuts through the central core of the Sawtooth range, providing awe-inspiring views of its many needle-like peaks. The pink



granite rock in the Sawtooths is a major draw for rock climbers. The wilderness is chock-full of emerald-colored high mountain lakes, alpine meadows and choice campsites.

The Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness:

Congress created the largest single wilderness in the lower 48 states when it set aside 2.3 million acres of Central Idaho as the [Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness](#) in 1980. Nowadays, many people refer to it as “The Frank.”

It was a hotly contested political fight to determine how much of the Central Idaho Primitive Area would be official wilderness. Once again, Sen. Church showed the political courage to lead the way to protect all of the 102-mile Middle Fork Salmon River corridor and 80 miles of the Main Salmon River corridor.

To stand on top of a peak in the heart of “The Frank” is a breathtaking experience, knowing that the seemingly endless sea of mountains unfolding before your eyes is wilderness as far as you can see in all directions. There are an estimated 850 high mountain lakes in “the Frank” as well as many tributaries of the Salmon River, the spectacular Big Horn Crags, the extensive meadow complex in Chamberlain Basin, and so much more.

The Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness:



The 1.28-million-acre [Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness](#) was considered to be so deserving of protection that it was among the first group of so-called “instant” wilderness areas set aside by Congress when the Wilderness Act passed in 1964. The late Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, was one of the chief architects of the Wilderness Act.

The Selway-Bitterroot features densely forested mountains, the Selway Crags, many mountain meadows, lots of high

mountain lakes, and the wild and scenic Selway River, a pristine gin-clear stream that’s chock full of rapids and cutthroat trout. It’s very likely that you’ll encounter elk or moose along the river corridor, particularly in the early morning or late evening.

The Gospel Hump Wilderness:

Portions of the ICT West route from the Wind River Pack Bridge on the Salmon River to Selway Falls wrap around the western and northern boundary of the 206,000-acre [Gospel Hump Wilderness](#) in the Nez Perce National Forest. The Gospel Hump was protected by Congress in 1978, with the late Sen.

Frank Church, D-Idaho, leading the way. The Gospel Hump features a number of high mountain lakes, deep and broad valleys and lush meadows.

Wildlife

Watch for Wildlife on the Idaho Centennial Trail

By Wayne Melquist, retired nongame wildlife coordinator

Idaho Department of Fish and Game (Photos courtesy of Idaho Department of Fish and Game)

From the cool forests of the Idaho Panhandle to the sagebrush plains of the Snake and Bruneau Rivers, Idaho's diverse landscape is home to an equally diverse group of wildlife. In their book, *Mammals of Idaho*, Earl Larrison and Donald Johnson wrote, ". . .the state of Idaho 'borrows' faunas and floras from neighboring physiographic provinces. A taste of the North country may be found in the caribou and bog lemming of the Northern Panhandle. The mountain goat and elk remind us that the Bitterroot and Salmon River Mountains are a part of the Northern Rockies. The Columbian ground squirrel relates the Palouse country to the Columbia River Plateau, while the strong influence of the Great Basin may be felt in the desert regions of Southern Idaho with such species as the antelope squirrel, kangaroo rats, and pocket mice."



For a variety of reasons, including questions on historical records for some species and the accidental visitations by many bird species to the state, the exact number of vertebrate species in Idaho will never be known. The best estimate of wildlife officials is that there are 589 species, including 83 fishes, 15 amphibians, 23 reptiles, 360 birds, and 108 mammals. Up to 10 percent of these species are introduced or non-native; the majority of which are fish.

Distributional information on Idaho's birds is best obtained from field guides, regional checklists, and the databases of the Conservation Data Center of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. These and other publications and leaflets about Idaho's wildlife have been produced and are available at area bookstores and from State and Federal agencies.

I won't devote time to the estimated 30 million species of invertebrates, including 290,000 of which are beetles! You can rest assured that you'll be accompanied by insects and other invertebrates during your entire trek!

Approximate number of vertebrate that occur in Idaho

	Fish	Amphibians	Reptiles	Birds	Mammals	Total
No. of species	83	15	23	360	108	589
No. of introduced species	41	1	0	12	6	60
No. of game species	38	1	0	48	24	111
No. of nongame species	45	14	23	309	77	468
No. of protected nongame species	4	3	0	309	11	327
No. of endemic species	6	0	0	0	1	7

People who journey along parts or all of the Idaho Centennial Trail are likely to encounter a wide variety of critters. The greatest variety of reptiles may be found in the deserts of southern Idaho, where the trail begins at the Nevada border. Many of the 23 species of reptiles may be encountered here, including (keep your eyes and ears open) the rattlesnake. Be especially alert for a host of other species in riparian areas – the strip of vegetation associated with streams. In the desert, a riparian area acts as an oasis for wildlife. Where there’s water and associated riparian vegetation, there is bound to be a variety of birds, mammals, reptiles, and an occasional amphibian. Look for owls, lazuli buntings, and yellow-breasted chats in the riparian areas; ravens, golden eagles, prairie falcons, jackrabbits, Townsends ground squirrels, and the ever-present magpie throughout the desert trek.



No matter what part of the ICT you’re on, you’re bound to be greeted by a squirrel, chipmunk, or some other rodent. Chipmunks and golden-mantled ground squirrels can often be found begging for handouts along the trail or in camp. The noisy red squirrel will surely escort you through pine and spruce-covered forests. While they occur throughout Idaho’s forests, don’t expect to see a northern flying squirrel, unless you’re nocturnal like them.

Leaving the desert and ascending into the diverse forests along the Centennial Trail will expose hikers to a big variety of common and not-so-common wildlife. Idaho’s forests, streams, meadows, and mountain tops will be a treat for all wildlife watchers. The drier ponderosa pine forests are home to the Harris’ woodpecker – the only woodpecker that forages for insects on the wing – pileated woodpecker, and

others of the wood-pecking variety. The more moist montane forests of higher elevations are home to the gray jay (often referred to as the “camp robber”). Sooner or later, you’re bound to be visited by these delightful birds, in camp, or along the trail, especially if you leave food out. Watch for the brilliant blue Steller’s jay as you travel the forests and the Clark’s nutcracker in coniferous forests near timberline.



Idaho’s forests are also home to a host of forest carnivores, most of which you’re unlikely to get a glimpse of. Marten, fisher, and wolverine, all members of the weasel family, inhabit the coniferous forests of central and northern Idaho. A glimpse of one of these creatures would surely be a rewarding experience. You may see spawning salmon or a family of otters as you travel along the larger rivers and tributaries. And don’t forget to keep your eyes open, and ears tuned, for the dipper or water ouzel – a bird that “walks under water” in search of aquatic insects, or the spectacular Harlequin duck. Both birds nest and raise their young along Idaho’s clear, pristine mountain streams.

Mountain meadows, lakes, and forest edges are good places to look for Idaho’s state bird--the mountain bluebird, or a moose. However, keep your distance, because a moose with a calf can be a very dangerous animal! And if you miss the opportunity to see one of Idaho’s wolves, listen for their lonely howl, which is much deeper and mournful than the “yapping” coyote. High-elevation forest edges are also good places to listen for the olive-sided flycatcher singing its “quick, three beers” song from high atop a large fir tree.

Talus hillsides and rocky areas are good places to spot mountain goats, pikas (rock rabbits) and the hoary marmot. Pikas build their nests and store hay in the boulder-strewn hillsides, where they are more often heard than seen.

Meadows, old burns, and huckleberry hillsides in the Selkirk Mountains of north Idaho are the domain of grizzly bears and a small herd of woodland caribou. Hughes Meadows has long been known for grizzlies in spring. In winter, when the grizzlies sleep, caribou can be found at the high ridges of the Selkirks, feeding on arboreal lichens 10-30 feet above the ground. The deep winter snows make this food source accessible to the caribou, commonly referred to as “bigfoot of the north” because of their large hooves which allow them to walk through deep snow.



If you have heard the call of the osprey, or seen its nest perched on top of snags and tall pine trees before you reach Priest Lake, you will surely see them here. Lakes Pend Oreille and Coeur d'Alene and their tributaries are home to a large population of osprey, or the "fish hawk."

I wish you a great journey on the Idaho Centennial Trail.

ICT pioneers

Roger Williams, Syd Tate call their 83-day trip a once-in-a-lifetime experience

By Steve Stuebner (photos courtesy of Roger Williams)

The first golden ray of sunlight bounced off shiny columns of basalt in Black Canyon, deep inside the Owyhee desert on the Idaho-Nevada border. Syd Tate rose with the sun, making coffee in his trail-worn charcoal-colored aluminum pot. Tate had a slight knot in his gut that morning, a natural extra dose of adrenaline in anticipation of the monumental journey ahead.

He looked at the soft-yellow light on the brown canyon wall. Somehow he knew that he and Roger Williams were going to make it. After five years of preparation, they finally were about to begin the first-known south-to-north trek through Idaho. By Williams' plan, they would hike 10 or more miles a day for three months to hike approximately 1,200 miles through one of the most rugged mountainous states in the nation.

Here at the Nevada-Idaho border, Williams, a retired research wildlife biologist for the Idaho Fish and Game Department, and Tate, retired owner of Tates Rents, an Idaho-home grown chain of rental-equipment stores, would begin the journey under blazing hot, clear days in the Owyhee Plateau, at an elevation of 6,100 feet. They would hike along the west side of the West Fork of the Bruneau River, a deep chasm with rare access. The canyon is rimmed by rhyolite and basalt lava rock, a magnificent display of spires, columns, vertical walls, and waterfalls. It's a gorgeous view, walking along the rim of the canyon, and it's quite easy to feel absolutely alone. In the uplands of the Owyhee Plateau, endless slopes of sagebrush and juniper roll on for infinity. No roads, powerlines or development. Just you, the canyon, and the sagebrush.

That's how Williams and Tate wanted it. Williams selected a route that traced through the wildest, most remote and least developed parts of Idaho. They could have started the hike in May, but they didn't want to run into snow in the Sawtooth Mountains, some 5,000 feet higher, to the north. Once they hit the Sawtooths, they would be hiking through the gnarly interior of Idaho – the Salmon River Mountains, the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, the craggy Idaho-Montana divide above the St. Joe River, and onward into the wettest region of Idaho, the white pine and cedar forests of the Panhandle.

Waiting for the snow to clear made sense. But by June 21, the days were sizzling hot. "We hiked in the mornings and evenings and shaded up in the middle of the day," Tate recalls, grinning at the challenge. This backpacking duo had a ton of experience. They possessed a strong can-do type of attitude. A little heat wasn't going to set them back.

“At no time did I entertain the thought that we’re not going to make it,” Tate says. “We were going to make it. It was a given.”

It seems appropriate that Williams, who was 59, and Tate, who was 52, were the first two human beings to pioneer a north-south crossing of Idaho in 1986. They started backpacking well before it was the vogue thing to do – in the late 1950s and early 1960s – and Williams knew the state’s backcountry better than almost anyone. He intentionally picked a route that avoided civilization to the maximum extent possible and coursed through the state’s many wilderness areas and scenic jewels.

Williams’ and Tate’s journey became the inspiration for creating the Idaho Centennial Trail during the state’s Centennial year in 1990. Although the trail they blazed did not follow the exact route of the ICT, much of the route they followed is similar to the final route picked by state and federal officials. Their experience is instructive for anyone who attempts the ICT in one year.

McGowan Peak

Williams says it took him five years to plan and chart the route. “The main thing was to avoid roads and developments, and given a choice, stay high.”



He also wanted to walk through the “best of Idaho” in places such as the Sawtooth Wilderness, the Bruneau Canyon, the Middle Fork of the Salmon, Chamberlain Basin, the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, and the Continental Divide along the Idaho-Montana border. Starting from the Nevada border, the backpacking duo would drop 3,000 feet in elevation to the Snake River, and then climb to the route’s high point of 9,700 feet above Redfish Lake in the Sawtooths.

Then, the route would take them on a roller-coaster ride through the mountain interior of Idaho for hundreds of miles. The lowest point of the route was 1,700 feet near the Kootenai River in the Idaho Panhandle.

Their ever-so generous wives would resupply them with food and clothing 12 times (about every two weeks). They completed the journey on Sept. 14 at the Canadian border. “We made it without serious mishap,” Williams says. “And we had one tremendous, once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

Tate enjoyed the mellow feeling he got on the summer-long trek, just taking it one step at a time, one day at a time. “You get into a mindset that doesn’t really compare with anything else,” he says. “If you’re out for a three-day trip, you get a mindset for a three-day trip. When you’re out for almost three months, you don’t really think about anything more than what you’ve got in front of you on that particular day.... Every day was different. We always looked forward to the next day and what it would bring.”

Williams' route-selection -- that is, often staying high on ridges for the best views -- often allowed them to look back and see where they'd been the day before, and to look ahead, to see the landscape ahead. "Some of the ridges were so high we could look back and see where we'd been even two days before," Tate says.

Sid Tate hikes through the Seven Lakes Basin



Both men used external frame packs for the journey. They started out with a cook stove, a water purifier and a small wood saw, but over time, they ditched all of that equipment to save on weight. They cooked all of their meals in trail-worn pots and pans on a stick fire. They each carried four quarts of water.

"The farther along we went, we realized that we could get by with less and less and less," Tate says. "The nice thing about backpacking is it's about the most simple way to enjoy life

as there is. The key is to keep it simple."

In the last third of the hike, they ran into rainy weather -- for five days in a row. Finding dry wood was a challenge, Tate recalls, but keeping their sleeping bags and clothes dry after that many consecutive days of rain was difficult. "It was tough," he recalls. Williams had arranged to stay in a Fish and Game hatchery building on the fifth night, near the town of Clark Fork. Both of them were greatly relieved to get out of the rain for a night and dry out their things. But Tate remembers that they looked so ragged that the hatchery manager's wife made them stay in an outbuilding, as if they were kooks.

"I think it's how we looked more than anything else," Tate says. "We were skin and bones. I had a beard sticking way out, and Roger was looking pretty scruffy, too. They were pretty wary of these odd-balls who showed up at their door."

Tate remembers the segment of the trail from the Lochsa to the Stateline trail as being among his most favorite moments, too. "Up on top of the border trail, I never felt further away from the rest of the world," he says. "We saw an Idaho-Montana marker, and I felt, boy, we are by ourselves up here. It's quite rocky and there's a lot of exposed granite. From the Montana side, the terrain fell away kind of gently, but on the Idaho side, there were sheer drops into a number of lakes basins. There was a new lakes basin around almost every bend."

At times, they had to drop from ridgetops and bushwack for water. Some nights they'd go dry and hope to run into water on the next day's hike. "There were times when we got thirsty at night," Tate says. "A gallon of water a day could get pretty thin."

One day they ran into dense fog in northern Idaho. It was the closest they ever came to getting lost. But along with the guidance of a compass, they followed an old wilderness phone line that kept them on track. "We were glad it was there," Tate says.

On Sept. 14, Williams and Tate hiked the last leg of the journey along Boundary Creek – aptly named, of course – and crossed into Canada in wet rainforest. They had done it. Their wives joined them for a champagne toast at the border, and they drove back to the Coeur d’Alene Resort to clean up and devour a tasty first-class meal at the luxury resort. “My wife met me with a razor,” Tate says, grinning.

At the trip’s conclusion, the two scruffy guys looked each other over and realized that their bodies had been transformed. Both of the athletic men had lost about 20 pounds. “Our legs looked like a weight lifters and the top half looked like a prisoner of war,” Williams said.

Near Kelly Creek in the Clearwater National Forest

After nearly 90 days in the Idaho backcountry, Williams and Tate had seen only a dozen people on the trail. They saw most people rafting down the Middle Fork. They enjoyed many views of wildlife, but not quite as many as they had hoped. They saw a few coyotes, elk, deer, antelope, bighorn sheep, black bear and “a good number of rattlesnakes.” They didn’t run into a mountain goat, and they never saw a grizzly.



“There’s an extreme amount of satisfaction that comes with a trip like that,” Tate adds. “I can’t think of anything better than spending an enjoyable summer hiking the Centennial Trail. Idaho is such a diverse state, and you never fully appreciate that until you’ve hiked the length of the state, from the desert, to the mountains, to the rivers, to the rainforest. It’s quite a place.”

Steve Stuebner is the author of Discover Idaho’s Centennial Trail. This article is excerpted in full from Chapter 3 in the guidebook.

Lasting legacy

The ICT was created by Lasting Legacy Panel

When Roger Williams and Syd Tate trekked the length of Idaho in the mid 1980s, they created the vision for a state trail, but it would take several years of hard work and committee meetings before the Idaho Centennial Trail was created in its current form.

Williams, a longtime member and past president of the Idaho Trails Council, a statewide trail advocacy group, pitched the notion of an official north-south trail through Idaho at the annual meeting of the Idaho Trails Council in the spring of 1987. He gave a slide show on his odyssey through Idaho’s incredibly rugged and diverse landscape, and sold the Trails Council on the idea. Although the notion of a statewide trail had been advanced casually before, no one had ever selected an actual route. The trails

selected by Williams and Tate in their 1986 trip became the starting point for discussion about an official route.

In 1989, Williams was named to sit on the Lasting Legacy Committee of the Idaho Centennial Commission, a committee that would select special historic projects as part of the Idaho Centennial celebration in 1990. Williams sold the Lasting Legacy Committee on the concept with his color slide show, and the Centennial Commission officially adopted the project as a way to showcase Idaho's outstanding beauty. The Idaho Parks & Recreation Board and department staff were very supportive of the project and helped move it along.

A Centennial Trail agency steering committee and citizens advisory committee were formed to select an official route. It was a difficult struggle to find a route agreeable to all trail user groups, environmental groups, eight different national forests and several BLM districts. A professional facilitator mediated the meetings. A trail-selection process called "Choosing by Advantage" was used to narrow down the route.

As things turned out, Williams' and Tate's route was retained in some instances and rejected in others. Alternative routes called Centennial East and Centennial West were created to provide bypass routes for trail uses banned in wilderness areas.

Finally, in 1990, after much debate and emotional anguish, a final route was adopted by the Idaho Parks & Recreation Board and all of the federal agencies. As things turned out, the painful debates paid off, the Centennial Trail takes visitors on a tour of Idaho's most spectacular landscapes.

Backcountry ethics

Practice common courtesy & minimum impact

Basic guidelines for all users:

- Stay on trails and don't cut switchbacks, take shortcuts or create new trails.
- Be considerate of other trail users.
- Wheeled vehicle users should avoid harsh maneuvers that damage trail tread.
- Avoid muddy trails. Save them for future trips when they are dry.
- Keep your party small, preferably less than five. Littering is unacceptable. Set an example and pick up after others.
- Never leave fishing gear or litter in or along waterways. It can kill wildlife. Do not leave fish remains in lakes or streams.
- Remove obstacles from trails when possible.
- Avoid deliberately disturbing wildlife, especially in winters and during calving and fawning. Observe from a distance.

- Ride or walk on the center of trail tread to protect uphill slope and outside berm.
- Place gates to be closed perpendicular to the fence line. Those to be left open should be parallel to the fence line.
- Do not disturb archaeological or historic sites, or natural features.

Send feedback/blog

Let us know about your trip on the ICT

Please make notes during your trip on the Idaho Centennial Trail if you run into any significant issues that trail managers should know about.

Knowing about things like trail access issues (running into a No Trespassing sign along the trail), and problem areas in terms of trail maintenance, blowdowns and wildfire damage are the kinds of things that would benefit other trail users. Post or read additional information relative to the trail by checking out the Idaho Centennial Trail blog at <http://idahocentennialtrail.blogspot.com>.

Please contact Leo Hennessy, Idaho Centennial Trail Coordinator for the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, if you run across any trail issues or other issues of note. You can reach Leo at lhness@idpr.idaho.gov or call 208-514-2419.

Thank you.

ICT guidebook

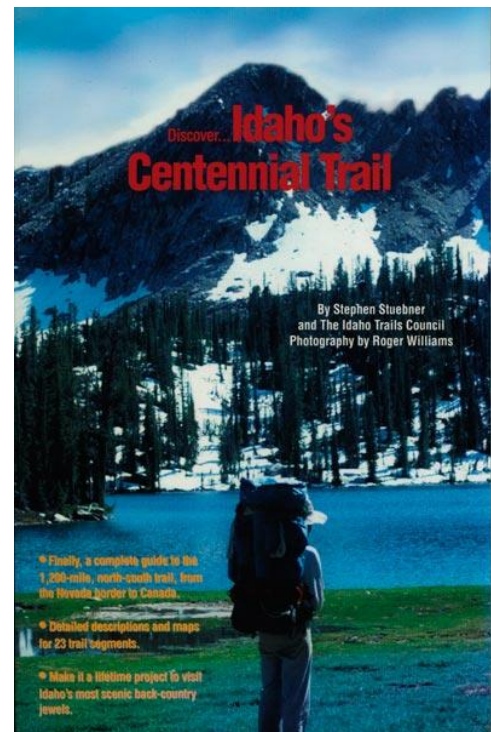
ICT guidebook provides detailed trail descriptions

In the late 1990s, Idaho author Steve Stuebner and the Idaho Trails Council teamed up to produce the first and only guidebook to the Idaho Centennial Trail. The 128-page book is titled Discover Idaho's Centennial Trail.

The book is available for sale on Steve Stuebner's web site, www.stevestuebner.com.

Be forewarned that the maps in the book are of poor quality, so we recommend downloading high-quality topographical maps from the Idaho Parks & Recreation web site, or create your own map collection from digital or paper sources.

Thank you.



For more information, contact the [Idaho Centennial Trail Coordinator, Leo Hennessy](#).