



WIND RIVER HIGH ROUTE Wyoming ROCKY MOUNTAINS



ABOUT THE TRAIL

- **DISTANCE** 129 km (80 mi)
- **DURATION** 6 to 7 days
- **LEVEL** Challenging

The Wind River Range is one of America’s best-kept back-packing secrets. In contrast to nearby Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, both of which draw millions of visitors per year, the “Winds” have long flown under the radar of public attention. And therein lies part of their charm. Unlike the range’s famous neighbors to the northwest, the Winds do not require you to procure permits, reserve campsites, or book a hotel weeks in advance. All you need is a sense of adventure, a fair amount of backcountry experience, and a healthy set of lungs to deal with the lofty elevations.

Following the crest of the Continental Divide, the Wind River Range is approximately 160 km (100 mi) long and is located in the western part of Wyoming. The highest subrange of the Rocky Mountains outside of Colorado, the Winds boast countless granite peaks, more than 1,500 alpine lakes, and an impres-sive collection of 63 glaciers—the second-highest number of any range in the contiguous United States after Washington’s

Cascade mountains. If you’re a seasoned hiker searching for a challenging, off-the-beaten-track adventure in a jaw-droppingly beautiful location, look no further.

Among a multitude of trekking options in the Wind River Range, the Wind River High Route (WRHR), pioneered by Alan Dixon and Don Wilson, is one of the best. Stretching 129 km (80 mi) from Green River Lakes Trailhead in the north to Big Sandy Campground in the south (the direction that it’s typically walked), the rollercoaster route goes up and over nine passes between 3,505 m (11,500 ft) and 3,719 m (12,200 ft), with a total elevation gain of more than 6,096 m (20,000 ft). More than half of the WRHR consists of off-trail travel, and during its course, hikers will negotiate talus slopes, glacial ice, granite slabs, and lingering snowfields.

As with any long trek through the Wyoming wilderness, wild-life is a highlight. The Wind River Range is home to brown bears, moose, bighorn sheep, wolverines, marmots, and mountain lions. And if you arrive here in September, you will also witness the rutting (mating) season for elk. During this period, male elk (bulls) do their best to win over their female counterparts (cows) by any and all means necessary. Occasionally this can mean locking antlers with other bulls to establish dominance. But gen-erally, it involves showing off, most notably with a distinctive call referred to as bugling. Oscillating between a high-pitched cry,



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- ↖ An abundance of clear mountain streams means that great drinking water is rarely hard to find on the WRHR.
- ↑ Horse packing through the Winds.
- ← The snowmelt reveals a colorful blanket of wildflowers.