

12

Igloo Mountain East End

Location: Mile 34, Igloo Campground

GPS: N63° 36.7' W149° 34.9'

Time on bus (one way): 1.5 hours

Hike Length: 3 miles (4.8 km)

Hiking Time: 4 hours

Elevation Gain: 1,700 ft.

Hiking Difficulty: Easy

Route Finding Difficulty: Moderate

Backcountry Permit Area: 29

USGS Map: Healy (C-6)



Photo 12B. Beginning of the forest path for Hike 12 to eastern summit of Igloo Mountain.

Highlights

Igloo Mountain is well known as a home for Dall sheep. Even though we did not see any sheep from the road, I was confident we would see some ewes and lambs during our hike. We found four ewes and their lambs sunning themselves in a sheltered, rocky area near the top, and another ewe was grazing in the meadow along our return route.

The fragrant meadow route to the summit ridge tested our motivation to reach the top by tempting us to stop to enjoy the flowers or perhaps a nap (*photo 12F*). Once on top, the views south and west of mountains, cliffs, alpine meadows, and geological striations offer some of the richest texture and lushest green I have seen in the park (*photo 12E*). Our sense of accomplishment was enhanced by finding and following the unmarked trail from the road through the boreal forest to reach the meadow that provided the route up Igloo.

My greatest highlights on this hike were hearing Travers (*age 14*) say, “I didn’t know anyone climbed mountains just for fun,” and then watching him figure out the route and beating us all to the top. Now, if I could only get him to carry some of my gear.

Route description

The bus driver will undoubtedly begin talking about Igloo and Cathedral mountains after you cross the Teklanika River Bridge. As you approach Igloo Mountain (*or even from the Teklanika rest stop*), look for the wide green strip leading up the northeast side of Igloo Mountain (*photo 12A*). This strip is the meadow that you will follow to the summit ridge. As you near the Igloo Ranger Station and just as the meadow is

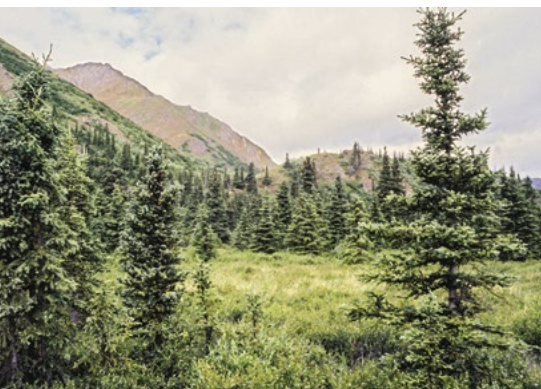
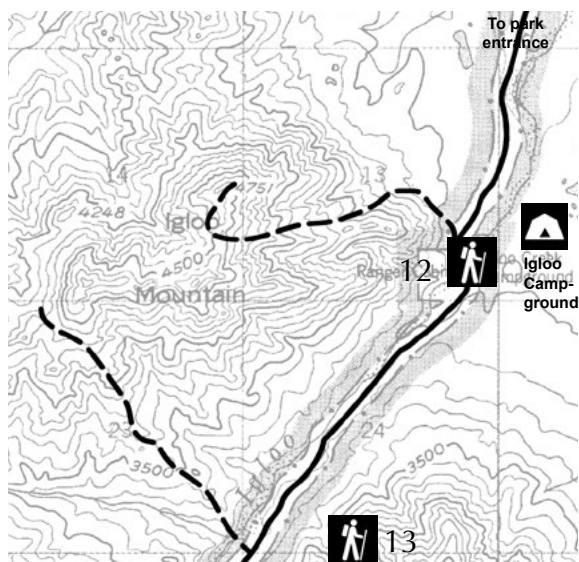


Photo 12C. The forested part of the Igloo Mountain summit route passes to the left of the small hill at right center.

going out of sight, look for the small hill (about 100 feet high) at the base of Igloo Mountain that is clearly visible above the trees. The trail to the meadow goes between this small hill and the base of Igloo Mountain. Use this hill as a landmark when you are on the unmarked trail to the meadow.

The route begins on an unmarked path near the Igloo Creek Campground. Get off the bus at Igloo Campground. Walk along the ranger cabin side of the road back toward the park entrance.



Look for a faint, unmarked path leaving the road through the vegetation (*photo 12B*). This path is located where the road begins to curve to the right. (The trailhead is about 30 paces from the 20 MPH speed limit sign.) Initially, the trail goes into the forest about 50 feet and then begins to head to your right (north) around the foot of Igloo Mountain and passes to the left of the small hill mentioned above (*photo 12C*). The path stays in the forest until it begins to gain elevation to cross the saddle between the small hill and the foot of Igloo Mountain. The path has some short wet spots and thick brush (*photo 12D*).

If you lose the path, alter your route toward Igloo Mountain instead of toward the road. When Igloo Mountain begins to rise out of the valley, contour around toward the meadow. Do not climb too high on Igloo until you can see the meadow that is your route to the top.

Follow the meadow toward the ridge at the head of the meadow. (I selected a route a little left of the meadow's center.) At the top of the meadow, climb onto the ridge at the head of the meadow and follow it to the summit of Igloo Mountain. You will see the final route to the summit ridge that is worn into bare soil and scree by people and sheep using this route. Once on top, it is an easy ridge walk to the eastern summit of Igloo Mountain, elevation 4,751'. (*photo 12E*).

Variations: I talked to rangers who had traversed the length of Igloo Mountain. However, only hikers with route finding skills and experience with steep scree slopes and rock scrambling should do this traverse. See the Hike 13 description for a route to the west end of Igloo.

Hikes 12 and 13
Contour interval 100 feet. Grid = 1 mile.



Photo 12E. Route to the summit ridge on Hike 12. Igloo Mountain's east summit is at the top right.

Cautions

Make a lot of noise and watch for bear and moose during the hike through the boreal forest and until you get into the meadow. The forest trail is narrow and bordered by shoulder-high bushes and grasses. If the bushes are wet, wear rain gear or expect to get completely wet. While this route provides easy access to Igloo with minor scree crossings at the top, most of the surrounding cliffs, rock outcrops and steep scree gullies look unstable. Do not risk a fall trying to get a better sheep picture.



Photo 12D. Hiking through brush during the first part of Hike 12.



Photo 12F. Napping on Igloo Mountain Hike 12

Geology of Igloo and Cathedral Mountains

Both Cathedral and Igloo mountains consist largely of basalt, an igneous rock formed when volcanoes spew out molten material known as magma. As the Kula tectonic plate was moving north about 60 million years ago, it was subducted, or forced underneath, the North American plate. As the Kula plate sank deep into the mantle of the earth, perhaps tens of miles, its leading edge melted. The molten magma seeped to the surface through the overriding North American plate and spread out over the landscape, creating a deposit known as the Teklanika Formation. The Kula plate was eventually subducted completely. The Pacific plate, following directly behind the Kula, first collided with the North American plate and then about 30 million years ago, for reasons unknown, began sliding westward along what is known as a strike-slip fault. As a result of these tectonic stresses, the Teklanika formation was broken up along fault lines into many segments which then tilted, one end of a block rising and the other falling, resulting in mountains like Cathedral and Igloo.

This effect can easily be seen directly across the valley of the Teklanika on Double Mountain, which resembles a somewhat battered layer cake tipped on its side. The top layer of the mountain is the dark brown rock of the Teklanika formation, while the bottom layer is the gray sandstones, shale and conglomerates of the Cantwell formation. Notice how both formations have been tipped to the south.

—Don Croner