

ELECTRIFYING: THE AUTHOR'S ROUTE CLIMBS STATIC PEAK, SEEN HERE FROM TIMBERLINE LAKE. FOR BETA ON THIS THREE-DAY ALPINE TREK, SEE PAGE 80.

# A PERFECT WEEK IN THE TETONS

You won't waste a minute with our only-the-highlights hiking and climbing guide to the West's archetypal range. From the loftiest summits to the loneliest cross-country routes, this seven-day sampler visits every type of Tetons treasure—and then some.

PHOTO BY JEFF DIENER

The cliff wasn't supposed to be here. Back home in Boise, this spot—an obscure, 10,500-foot saddle north of Indian Lake—had appeared steep on both sides, but it sure hadn't looked vertical. At least not on the topo map.

Now, tearing my eyes from the sharp peaks and bottomless canyons that stretch for miles all around, I lean forward and peer over the lip of a 25-foot drop. The unexpected obstacle makes me wonder how many times enthusiasm and deceptive 100-foot contour lines have gotten me into trouble on off-trail adventures. Whatever the total, it looks like I'll be adding one more. At the "pass" I'd envisioned us strolling over in the southern hinterlands of Grand Teton National Park, we've hit a dead end. And we're only hours into our 31.5-mile, two-day hike.

"Looks like it gets interesting now," I joke to my friend Molly Loomis, who's taken a rare break from her summer job with Exum Climbing Guides to join me on a trek exploring a corner of her "office" that she's never seen.

A quick scan of our surroundings reveals limited choices. To either side of this saddle, the cliffs only rise higher, arcing like a great wall for more than a mile in either direction. Below and behind us, tucked into this stone fortress like an infant in the crook of an adult's arm, Indian Lake sparkles in the September sunshine. From where we stand, it looks like we might be able to skirt the cliffs by hiking up a steep shoulder above the lake's far shore. But that's a definite maybe, and it lies in the wrong direction. Before resigning ourselves to a big detour with an unknown outcome, we drop our packs and poke around for a safe route through, examining scary-steep ball-bearing gullies, chockstone-choked chimneys, and billy goat ledges to nowhere.

Molly and I are attempting a cross-country traverse I've schemed for years. From Death Canyon trailhead this morning, we hiked seven uphill miles of trail rarely trod by hikers (we saw no one) to 9,710-foot Mt. Hunt Divide. Then we headed off-trail over terrain so primeval it wouldn't surprise me to stumble over a mastodon bone. Our plan: bust a hiking route west over Mt. Hunt to Fox Creek Pass, where we'll pick up the Teton Crest Trail.

As we panted up Mt. Hunt, Molly pointed out rocks riddled with fossilized mollusks from a prehistoric sea, magnifying

the lost-world character of our surroundings. A steep thousand feet later, Hunt's summit of shattered stone plates tinkled like broken glass under our boots, and we fell quiet before a 360-degree view that perhaps a handful of people enjoy each year. Dark cliffs and huge amphitheaters of rubble rimmed lakes rarely visited. Summits pushing 11,000 feet, mostly unnamed, extended long arms to one another, earthen bridges for us to follow. To the north, the severely vertical giants of this range, including the Grand Teton itself, jugged skyward like gothic cathedrals. Here in the southern Tetons, the mountains spread out more horizontally, resembling rambling castles more than churches.

Our overnight hike is merely the appetizer in a weeklong smorgasbord of Teton adventures I've lined up with different friends. After numerous long backpacking trips here, I'm taking a cue from local hikers, climbers, and backcountry skiers, who prefer fast-and-light

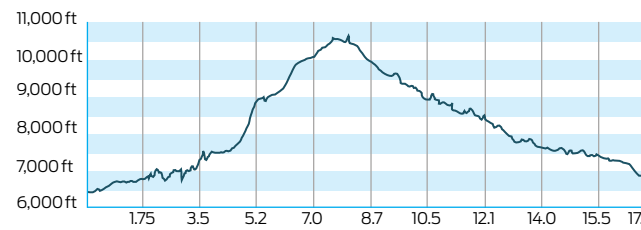
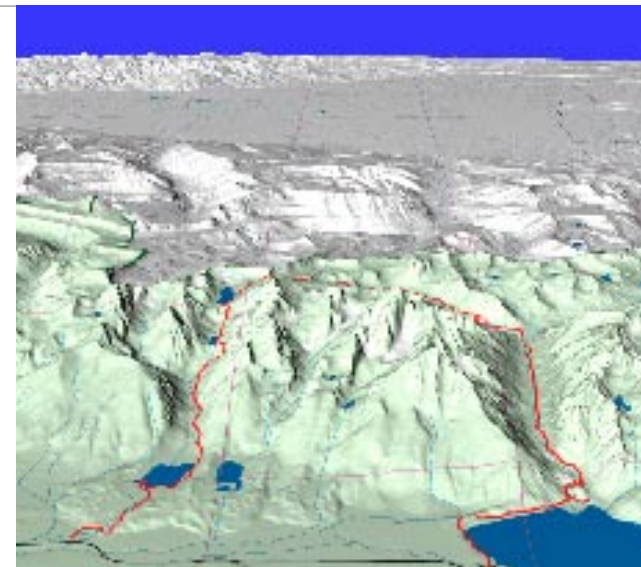
forays over slogging for days with a heavy pack. A sampler of one- and two-day outings is possible because the Tetons, though reaching nearly 14,000 feet, are a relatively small and accessible range: They extend fewer than 40 miles north-south, with just seven crow miles separating the western (road's end in Teton Canyon) and eastern boundaries (Jenny Lake). By biting off big mouthfuls of this wilderness in a series of quick meals, I'll taste it all—and finally get to spots I haven't seen despite many visits.

The recon trip for this week of multisport adventure had taken place five months earlier, when two friends and I skied for three days from WY 22 near Teton Pass to the Granite Canyon trailhead. For experienced backcountry skiers with avalanche-safety training and solid navigation skills, it's a tour of unparalleled scenery, mostly above treeline with sweeping views of high, snowy peaks—all day long and even in camp—and ample solitude.

Afterward, at the trailhead, two women strolled up, both thirtyish and fairly fit by Jackson standards—which means they could probably run a sub-3:30 marathon in the morning and ski double black diamonds blindfolded in the afternoon. They asked where we'd been. I described our route, noting how long we'd been out. Frowning, one remarked, "It took you three days to do that?!"

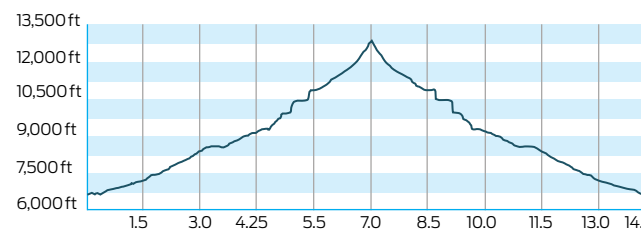
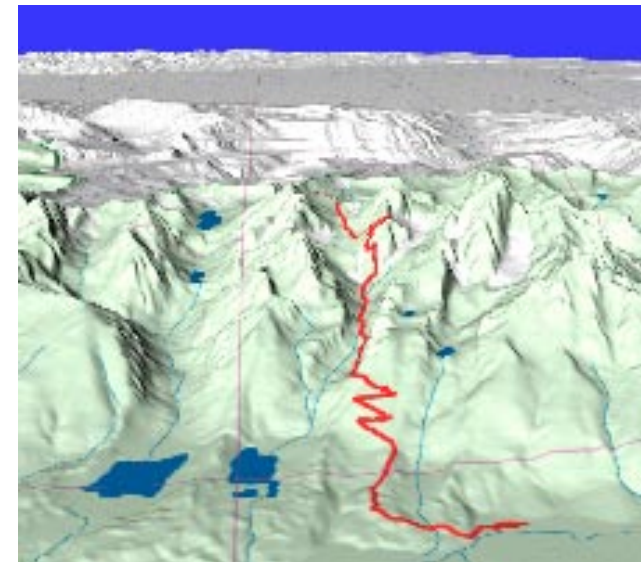
Feeling both amused and inspired by their bad-itude, I'd returned home and ramped up the ambition of my weeklong

>> AVALANCHE CANYON TO CASCADE CANYON



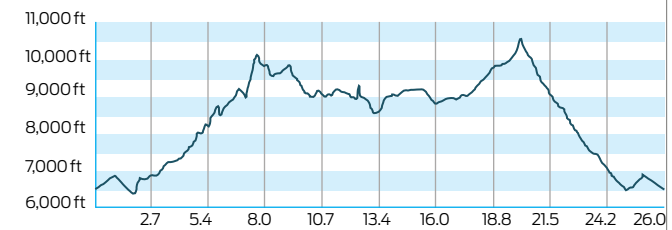
- 1. 12T 0519907E 4839451N Turn on unmarked trail leading to Avalanche Canyon
- 2. 12T 0515827E 4839544N Campsite near soaking pool in Lake Taminah outlet creek
- 3. 12T 0514096E 4844684N Site on promontory with killer view of Cascade Canyon

>> GARNET CANYON TO CASCADE CANYON



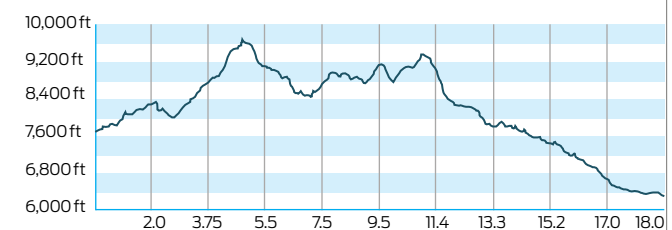
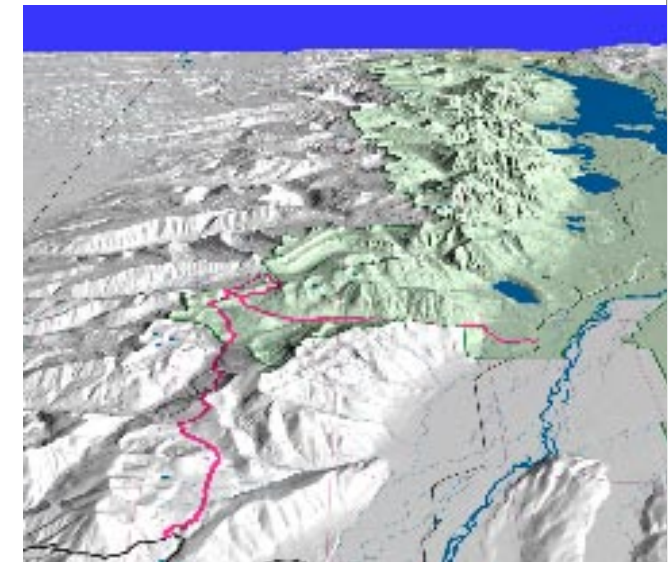
- 1. 12T 510022E 4831347N Alpine meadow campsite; no water available here
- 2. 12T 509411E 4831611N Route's crux—downclimb a 25-foot cliff at this waypoint
- 3. 12T 508188E 4833688N Scenic campsite near reliable water

>> MT. HUNT-STATIC PEAK LOOP



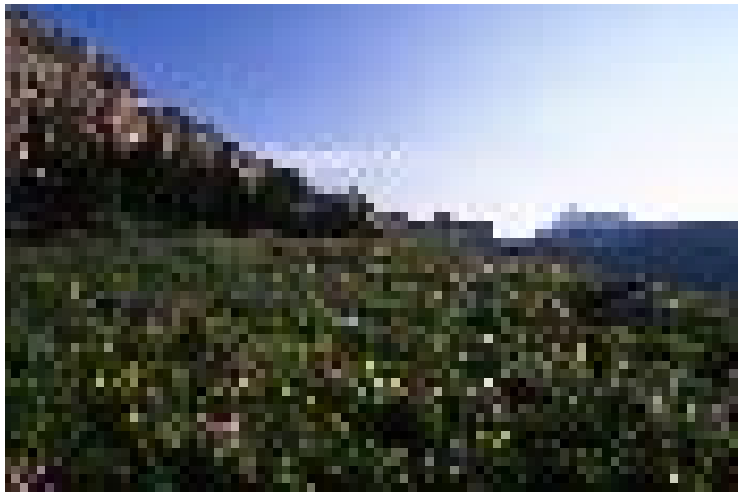
- 1. 12T 0510022E 4831347N Alpine meadow campsite; no water available here
- 2. 12T 0509411E 4831611N Route's crux—downclimb a 25-foot cliff at this waypoint
- 3. 12T 0508188E 4833688N Scenic campsite near reliable water

>> GARNET CANYON/SOUTHERN TETONS



- 1. 12T 0516877E 4841444N The Meadows camping zone
- 2. 12T 0515534E 4841281N Campsites in lower South Fork Garnet Canyon
- 3. 12T 0514585E 4841264N Secluded tent sites in Middle-South Teton saddle

EXHILARATING: CLIMBING GUIDE MOLLY LOOMIS LEADS THE WAY TO MT. HUNT DIVIDE. BELOW: WILDFLOWERS BRIGHTEN DEATH CANYON SHELF ALONG THE TETON CREST TRAIL.



plan. Only now, I'm peering over a cliff, contemplating how big bites—if consumed too hastily—can lead to choking.

MOLLY AND I STARE DOWN a shadowed chimney that pinches to several feet of crack-climbing before it reaches the cliff bottom. "I think that might work," she says. I'm leery, but she carefully downclimbs and announces, "That's not too bad." I follow, discovering she's right: It's easier than it looked. Molly climbs back up to lower our packs down—bless her over-trained heart—and we're suddenly energized at having found a way through.

We cross steep scree and rolling grassy meadows, looking out over the nearer castles and the more distant cathedrals bathed in slanting sunbeams as if this were the day of their creation—and we have it all to ourselves. In cool evening shade, glad to have our boots and packs off, we pitch our tent in the park's most gorgeous backcountry camping zone: on Death Canyon Shelf, a 9,500-foot bench sandwiched between a three-mile-long, 500-foot-tall cliff and the deep trench of Death Canyon. Boulders as big as small houses lie strewn about this alpine tableland, their sides and edges so neatly squared off they look quarried. Out the tent door is a postcard view of the Grand Teton.

Tomorrow, we'll complete this rugged loop, traversing the Sierra-like granite parkland of Alaska Basin and climbing over Static Peak Divide on one of the loneliest and most scenic stretches of high trail in the park. We'll hike the short climbers' trail up 11,303-foot Static Peak, among the park's highest walk-up summits, taking in its view of Buck Mountain, the southern Tetons, and Jackson Hole.

But for now, I sit on a rock to soak in the warm bath of déjà vu. After more than a dozen trips in these mountains over 15 years, I frequently walk in my own footprints. I first heard the comical whistle of marmots in the Tetons. I've shivered and laughed under snowmelt waterfalls and

shared unforgettable summits and campsites with friends old and new. I've held my breath while my ice axe hummed in a thunderstorm, been the first person to come upon the remains of a climber who'd just fallen 500 feet, and found another who'd tumbled 200 feet down a snow couloir, where he might have frozen to death overnight had my hiking party not happened upon him.

Many spots here feel like pages in a personal scrapbook, but few trigger memories as powerful as the Shelf does. On one of my first Western-mountain adventures, three buddies and I awoke during a night here to the clomping of a huge bull elk just outside our tents. Early the next morning, we sat peering through binoculars, counting a dozen moose in Death Canyon below. One of those friends returned with me the following summer to attempt the Grand; just two years later, I labored in vain to resuscitate him following a climbing accident. Every time I cross the Shelf, I think of Rick.

If a place can be a repository of memories both cherished and haunting, spanning an emotional gamut so complete it seems like a short but self-contained lifetime, the Tetons are that place for me.

ABOUT 36 HOURS LATER, I pause at the trailhead in Lupine Meadows as the nasal bugling of a bull elk pierces the morning calm. Dave Simpson and I grin: It's an auspicious start to the second leg of my week, which will take me and Simpson, a PR rep for Gregory, Scarpa, and others, up a peak that graces more photo albums than possibly any other in America. Teewinot's 5,600-foot east face screams skyward directly above Teton Park Road and Jenny Lake, culminating in a sinister-looking, multihorned summit.

In air cool enough to raise goosebumps on our bare arms, we follow a steep climbers' trail that switchbacks up Teewinot Mountain. Halfway to the top, the forest ends and the trail grows rougher, crossing scree and sloping, pebbly ledges. Several hundred feet below the top, it peters out. We reach what seems like a dead end at a nearly vertical, 20-foot granite slab. Dave, who's been up here before, eyeballs it closely and identifies it as the crux of this serious scrambling route. Very patiently and deliberately, I follow him up, clinging to holds I wish were just a little bigger, trying not to think about the 5,000 feet of air under our butts.

A short while later, my jaw unhinges as we take turns crawling up onto Teewinot's 12,325-foot summit, which literally comes to a pointy arrowhead not suitable for lengthy sitting. The earth falls away thousands of feet all around us. Mt. Owen and the Grand Teton—looming another 600 and 1,400 feet, respectively, above us—look close enough to leap onto. In four hours, we've climbed more than a vertical mile, walking just less than two, and I feel positively euphoric. I'm amazed that such a magical wilderness aerie lies so close to civilization—and that someone who's fit and knows the route could run up here and be down for lunch.

That thought leads to a plan that needs no debate. We begin trotting as soon as we clear the scramble—and just

three hours after tagging Teewinot, we're sipping cold beer in warm sunshine on the deck at Dornan's, reliving a fine day beneath the most photogenic skyline in the Lower 48.

TENTING AMID THE INDUSTRIAL THRUM of RVs at Gros Ventre Campground is tolerable enough, especially when I spot moose and bison in the nearby sagebrush flats. But the morning after Teewinot, my psyche is already craving another backcountry night. And I do have a schedule to keep. So I collect my buddy David Ports, just in from Missoula, and head for Garnet Canyon and another classic overnight.

Nexus of climber ambitions in the Tetons, Garnet is a tight horseshoe of cliffs and flying buttresses soaring 1,500 feet straight up. After a nearly five-mile, two-hour hike with light packs, we set up home in the lee of an elephant-size glacial erratic. Clouds scurry above the sharp ridges, almost keeping time with a meltwater creek humming down the valley beside us. We kick back for a utilitarian meal of freeze-dried noodles and kick ourselves—with loads so light, we could've stashed a few beers from the cooler we left behind.

In the morning, we start hiking while it's still cold and dim. The sparse human traffic this late in the season mostly turns off toward the Lower Saddle and the Grand Teton; we choose Garnet's less-traveled south fork. Initially steep, the angle relaxes as we ascend steadily through a treeless landscape of granite tilting skyward. Less than two hours from our camp, David and I scramble up a refrigerated gully where fist-size rocks frequently roll out under our boots and bounce downward, gaining velocity and making longer ricochets before finally exploding far below. Escaping the gully, we walk a few minutes up a ridge of crazily stacked talus until we can't go any higher. At 12,514 feet, the South Teton's blocky crown overlooks almost the entire Teton Range, with the Grand and Middle Tetons in-your-face close.

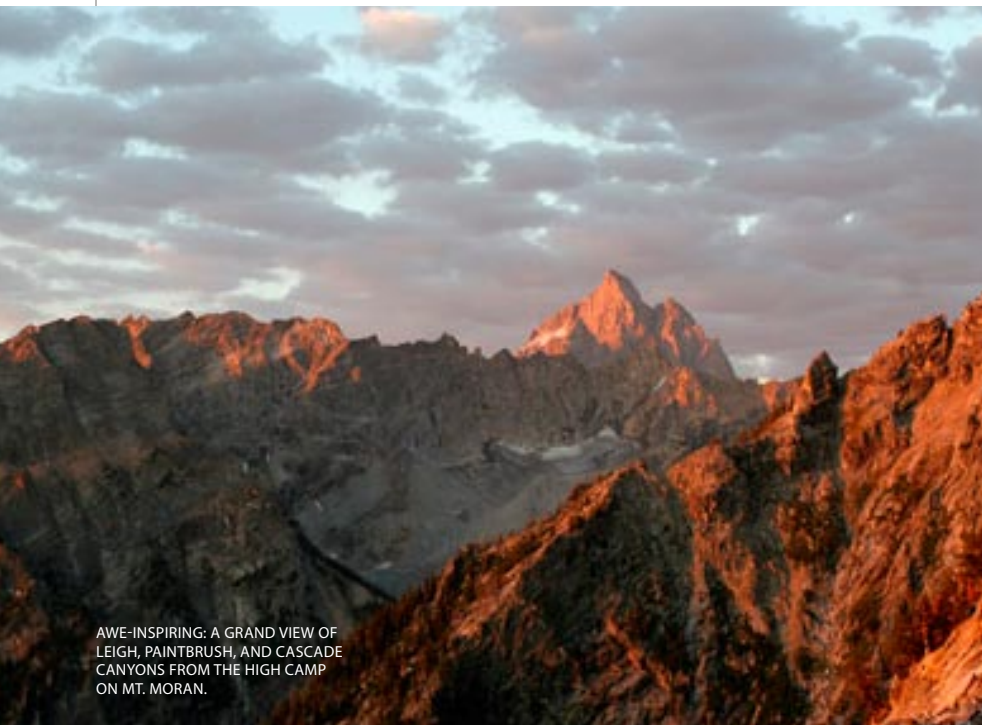
As we descend, I gaze almost straight down more than 2,000 feet to Snowdrift Lake, a vivid turquoise gemstone shimmering in the sunlight, and think: tomorrow.

THE TRAIL UP AVALANCHE CANYON doesn't appear on any map. Informed locals know it as a strenuous, sometimes-



DEATH-DEFYING: THE AUTHOR CLINGS TO 12,325-FOOT TEWINOT. THE GRAND TETON AND MT. OWEN AWAIT.

PHOTOS BY GREG VON DOERSTEN (LEFT BOTTOM); MICHAEL LANZA (2)



AWE-INSPIRING: A GRAND VIEW OF LEIGH, PAINTBRUSH, AND CASCADE CANYONS FROM THE HIGH CAMP ON MT. MORAN.

of Cascade Canyon, an otherworldly terrain of yet more towering granite walls, domes scarred by ancient glaciers, enormous erratics, and vast slopes of rubble that reveal, in spots, the underlying glacial ice. The Schoolroom Glacier drips into a little green tarn. Tiny alpine plants show off their multicolored autumn hues.

As we cruise downhill, with the deck at Dornan's and a few cold ones beckoning, I recall many of the times I've labored under a heavy pack in these mountains. Those trips were unforgettable—but this week has been equally so, with more ground covered, and no lack of wilderness campsites. I know that more long, big-pack trips lie in my future. But for ranges like the Tetons, I like this new approach. As Jenny Lake comes into view, I'm already plotting my next perfect week.

obscured use path leading a hard-earned three miles—and 2,000 feet—up to Lake Taminah. Few venture beyond the lake, as evidenced by the path's abrupt disappearance there. Fewer still hump all the way to 10,680-foot Avalanche Divide, pick up the unmarked spur trail coming up and out of the South Fork of Cascade Canyon, then descend Cascade to its outlet at Jenny Lake.

It's a ridiculously gorgeous 17.5-mile outing, perfect for a weekend—but we're going to do it in a day. Only the lunatic few abuse their quads in this fashion—I imagine the uber-ski-chicks running it—and almost always in the longer days of July or August. But David and I have agreed to end my Teton sampler with one of those all-day efforts you remember long after the aches and blisters disappear.

On the way in, we thank park management for not building a trail up Avalanche Canyon, because it has the vertical majesty of Garnet—along with two of the park's biggest and most spectacular high-elevation lakes—yet attracts hardly any human traffic. We hike beneath soaring spires, crossing talus where the occasional loose rock growls underfoot. From a distance, cliff bands appear to bar the way to both Lake Taminah and higher, bigger Snowdrift Lake—more dead ends—but once there we find the easy way through breaks in the cliffs.

Snowdrift's electric blue-green waters remind me of Moraine Lake in Canada's Banff National Park, minus the lodge and overflow parking. But an icy, buffeting wind raises whitecaps beneath a headwall cliff nearly a mile long and a few hundred feet tall, so we don't linger. By 1 p.m., we've crested Avalanche Divide and started down the South Fork

## Tetons Trip Planner

**Season** July through late September. Violent afternoon thunderstorms are common in July and August. An ice axe is often needed for high passes and steep off-trail hiking until mid-July.

**Getting There** Most trailheads are within 20 minutes of the Jackson airport. For shuttles, try Teton Taxi, (307) 733-1506, tetontaxi.com.

**Bears** Grand Teton National Park requires visitors to use bearproof food canisters when camping below 10,000 feet in the backcountry. Free loaner canisters are available at the Jenny Lake Ranger Station and the Craig Thomas and Colter Bay Visitor Centers.

**Map** Trails Illustrated *Grand Teton National Park #202* (\$10, natgeo-maps.com/trailsillustrated.htm)

**Guidebooks** *Hiking Grand Teton National Park*, by Bill Schneider (\$15); *A Climber's Guide to the Teton Range*, by Leigh Ortenburger and Reynold Jackson (\$35)

**Permits** Free and required within the park; backcountry camping is unregulated outside the boundaries (including Alaska Basin and the national forest lands south and west of Granite Canyon). The park issues one-third of permits in advance (apply between January 1 and May 15; there's a \$25 fee for making the reservation) and two-thirds first-come at the Jenny Lake Ranger Station and the Craig Thomas and Colter Bay Visitor Centers. Reservations are recommended for popular zones in midsummer. Camping in some off-trail areas outside designated backcountry camping zones is permitted, including at Indian, Taminah, and Snowdrift Lakes; inquire at the backcountry desk. Get climbing permits at the Jenny Lake Ranger Station.

**Post-hike eats** The quintessential Tetons wind-down is found on Dornan's outside deck in Moose. (307) 733-2415; dornans.com

**Contact** (307) 739-3300, nps.gov/grte. Permits: (307) 739-3309. Climbing rangers: (307) 739-3343. More climbing info: tetonclimbing.blogspot.com. Forecasts: mountainweather.com/jackson.htm

Turn the page for  
hiking route details



PHOTO BY CATHERINE COE

## 5 Hikes, 7 Days (or so)

How to retrace each segment of the author's perfect week

### >> MT. HUNT-STATIC PEAK LOOP

*Ramble an unknown portion of Teton backcountry on a partly off-trail tour.*

This 26.8-mile loop, mostly above treeline with glorious Teton vistas, features lonely trails, a cross-country traverse amid secluded alpine-lake basins and meadows, high summits, and big canyons. It's also the most difficult route described here, with miles of steep, off-trail hiking, tricky route-finding, and a technical descent of a 25-foot cliff. A strong party can do it as a two-day trip, but taking three to four days allows a moderate pace and lets you enjoy some of the park's best backcountry campsites (the plums are Indian Lake, Death Canyon Shelf, and Alaska Basin).

Hike the trail up Open Canyon to just west of Mt. Hunt Divide; then head off-trail up Hunt's east ridge to its summit. Continue west (look for goat trails) to a 10,500-foot saddle north of Indian Lake, where you'll hit the cliff; experienced climbers might downclimb it unroped, but a 70-foot static line and harnesses are recommended for a rappel. (The rock is poor; be careful setting up an anchor.) Continue west to Fox Creek Pass, then follow the Teton Crest Trail north across the shelf to Alaska Basin. Loop back via Static Peak Divide—drop your pack for the quarter-mile, 500-foot hike up Static Peak—and lower Death Canyon Trail.

**The Way** From the Moose Visitor Center, follow Moose-Wilson Road south about three miles. Turn right at a sign for Death Canyon trailhead and continue one mile to the end of that road, which is usually passable for cars.

### >> TEEWINOT MOUNTAIN

*This serious scramble ends on a pinpoint summit overlooking the Grand Teton.*

Few peaks are as thrilling as Teewinot, which culminates in a summit the shape and size of an upturned bicycle seat. But don't attempt it unless you're comfortable with exposed, can't-fall scrambling, or plan to follow an experienced climber on a rope through several technical 20-foot sections of nearly vertical rock.

At Lupine Meadows trailhead, find the unmarked climbers' path heading for Teewinot's 5,600-foot east face. It switchbacks steeply to The Apex through a triangle of forest where black bear sightings are common. Leaving the trees, follow the rough path; when it peters out, good routefinding skills are needed to find the easiest way through the steep rock. Stay right of the central gully, which leads straight up to the summit notch; instead, zigzag to the north end of the summit ridge. There, a few third-class moves put you on top, at 12,325 feet.

**The Way** To reach the trailhead, drive eight miles north from Moose Visitor Center and turn left at the sign for the gravel road leading to Lupine Meadows.

### >> GARNET CANYON/SOUTH TETON

*Explore a majestic climbers' haven in the heart of the Tetons.*

This 14.2-mile out-and-back probes the central Tetons, visiting the basecamp area for climbers attempting the Grand and other peaks. Your goal: Garnet Canyon, whose cliffs, winding glacial stream, and huge erratics are quintessential park features. Your other goal: South Teton's 12,514-foot summit—fifth-highest in the range—which offers one of the park's best views attainable without a rope. This outing can be done in a big day—you'll ascend 5,800 feet—but spending a night in Garnet Canyon is worth the effort of hauling camping gear.

From Lupine Meadows trailhead, follow the Garnet Canyon Trail to the Meadows camping area. Hike through the campsites on a faint path, then climb toward the Middle Teton's prominent black dike; at the cliffs, traverse left. Follow climber trails up Garnet Canyon's south fork. Continue to the saddle between the Middle and South Tetons. There, turn south for South Teton's Northwest Couloir, ascending it to the summit ridge. Snow can linger in the couloir into August, requiring an ice axe, but the route is generally dry by late summer. Camp either in the Meadows or Garnet's south fork zone. There's also a pair of high, secluded tent sites in the talus just before the Middle-South Teton saddle.

**The Way** Begin at the Lupine Meadows trailhead (see Teewinot description).

### >> AVALANCHE CANYON TO CASCADE CANYON

*Link two of the park's deepest and most spectacular valleys via a high pass.*

Joining obscure, trailless Avalanche Canyon and popular Cascade Canyon gives as complete a Teton experience as anything described here. You'll enjoy five-star scenery, a pass well above 10,000 feet, and adventurous but straightforward cross-country hiking. This 17.4-mile, point-to-point trek can be done in a long, arduous day, but take two or three to enjoy great campsites at Lake Taminah, Snowdrift Lake, and the South Fork of Cascade Canyon.

From the Valley Trail north of Taggart Lake, turn west onto the unmarked use trail to Avalanche Canyon (it's often blocked by sticks) just before the Valley Trail begins climbing the low ridge separating Taggart and Bradley Lakes. Obscured in spots and challenging to track across talus slopes (look for cairns), the use trail is otherwise obvious much of the way to Lake Taminah. From there, you'll navigate cross-country, but it's an uncomplicated hike up the canyon. Find the breaks in the cliff bands below Taminah and Snowdrift Lakes to avoid any scrambling. (Hiking up Avalanche and down Cascade makes this routefinding much easier.) At 10,680-foot Avalanche Divide, pick up the good spur trail into the South Fork of Cascade Canyon, then follow maintained trail all the way to Jenny Lake.

**The Way** Start at the Taggart Lake trailhead, three miles north of Moose Visitor Center

on Teton Park Road. Leave a second vehicle at Jenny Lake Visitor Center, just minutes farther up the road, or hitch a ride back to Taggart post-hike. Catch a shuttle boat across Jenny Lake from the Cascade Canyon boat launch to avoid hiking an extra 2.3 miles around the lake. See [jennylakeboating.com](http://jennylakeboating.com) for prices and schedules.

### >> SOUTHERN TETONS

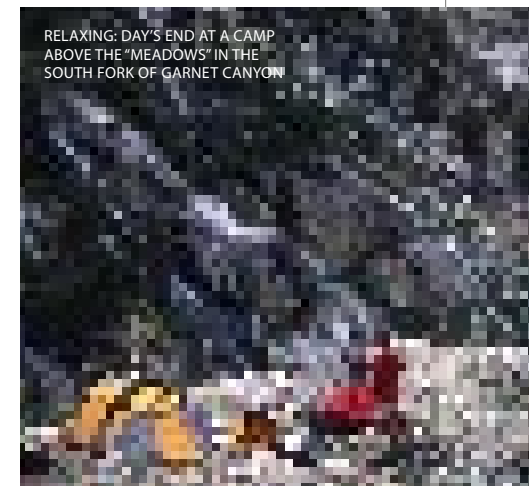
*The range's best-kept secret harbors big, open mountain terrain.*

First-timers in the Tetons naturally gravitate to the tall peaks around the Grand. But veterans return time and again to the sprawling high country between Fox Creek Pass and WY 22. The scenery comes straight out of an old Western: big, forested canyons flanked by cliffs stretching for miles; wildflower-filled meadows; peaks hardly touched by boots; and less severe terrain than the picture-book Tetons—which means off-trail opportunities abound. The mountain views are almost constant, moose are abundant, and there's hardly anyone out there. The author's roughly 24-mile route (including side trips) was done in spring on skis and is partly off-trail, but you could parallel it almost entirely on trails.

From WY 22, follow the Phillips Pass/Teton Crest Trail for 3.9 miles to Phillips Pass. Climb east off-trail to the open crest of the ridge running southwest from Rendezvous Peak, which has an amazing 360-degree view. Continue north over Point 9815 and follow the Teton Crest Trail to Marion Lake. From there, spend a day exploring the high plateau around the striking pinnacle of Spearhead Peak and Fox Creek Pass before descending the cliff-walled defile of Granite Canyon on its namesake trail.

**The Way** You'll need to drive two vehicles or hire a shuttle (see page 78 for shuttle service info). The Phillips Pass/Teton Crest trailhead is less than a half-mile up Phillips Ridge Road, which is off WY 22 about two miles east of Teton Pass. Granite Canyon trailhead is on Moose-Wilson Road, about 6.5 miles south of the Moose Visitor Center and 9.5 miles north of WY 22.

PHOTO BY GREG VON DOERFSTEN



RELAXING: DAY'S END AT A CAMP ABOVE THE "MEADOWS" IN THE SOUTH FORK OF GARNET CANYON