

Prof. Dean Wheeler's 15 favorite hikes near Provo, Utah

Even though Utah is a desert, its beautiful mountains collect snow and water and are cooler (in temperature, and in other ways) than the valleys. Provo and nearby areas have some amazing hikes, especially next to streams or to waterfalls and lakes. I've been enjoying Utah's mountains almost my entire life. If you live in or travel to the area, I hope you get to enjoy them too.

Safety:

- The hikes in this list are in order of difficulty and steepness. I am not a rock climber or technical hiker and have taken my young children on all these trails. Nevertheless, only you can judge which ones you can safely do. Don't worry if you must go slow or turn around early, because you will still have a great experience.
- Always bring a hiking buddy and tell someone else your plans before you go.
- It's generally best to start summer hikes before 8 am to beat the heat and crowded parking lots, though most of these are also great for evening/sunset hikes.
- You can hike year-round. In winter stick to well-traveled low-elevation hikes (i.e. the trails that start in the valley) and you will rarely need special equipment except shoes with good traction.
- No matter the time of year, don't forget to bring water!

And now the list of my 15 favorite hikes near Provo, in order of difficulty.

1. **Bridal Veil Falls.** 15-minute drive up beautiful Provo Canyon and 20-minute leisurely walk from parking lot to falls. If you want a longer walk, just keep going. This trail is a short segment of the Provo River Parkway, a 15-mile paved walking and biking path that follows the Provo River. Map to trailhead: <https://goo.gl/maps/t8VtZsNftu>.

Another option is to rent bikes or e-bikes at the bottom of the canyon (<https://outdoors.byu.edu>, <https://www.voltagerentals.com>, <https://garysbikesutah.com/rentals>) and ride them up the Provo River Parkway past Bridal Veil Falls and back.

2. **Big Springs.** 25-minute drive up Provo Canyon. A gentle family-friendly walk that you can take as far as you like, though it does get steeper after 1.5 miles. The trail starts at a large parking lot, immediately crosses a small creek and then follows the creek through multiple meadows. Is accessible year-round (great for snow sledding in the winter). Map to trailhead: <https://goo.gl/maps/BrYwCcTvzCT2>

3. **Rock Canyon.** 5-minute drive. It's a half-mile walk to get into the canyon, where you will see gorgeous rock formations and follow alongside a creek with multiple bridge crossings. Is always a great hike—be sure to experience the canyon in all 4 seasons. After 3 miles the trail gets to a campground also accessible by car, but hikers rarely go that far. Map to trailhead: <https://goo.gl/maps/6zshkTujFUu>. Note: the trailhead parking lot is under construction Feb-Nov 2024, but trail into the canyon can be accessed from nearby neighborhoods by means of Bonneville Shoreline Trail.
4. **Battle Creek Falls.** 25-minute drive. This hike gives you a quick payoff. Has a gentle slope most of the way but gets a bit steep right as you get to the falls. Is accessible year-round. Hike is 1.6 miles (2 hours) roundtrip and 700 feet elevation gain to falls. If you continue up the trail beyond the falls, there's more to see including smaller falls. Map to trailhead: <https://goo.gl/maps/8W3NwnHgkqp>
5. **Dry Canyon.** 20-minute drive. This hike alternates steep and flat parts, but nothing on the main trail is technical. It starts in a narrow canyon that despite its name does have a small creek. You'll eventually get views of the Orem Temple framed by the canyon. Hike is 1.3 miles (1.5 hours) roundtrip and 600 feet elevation gain to get to the intersection with Curley Springs Trail, with lots of options to extend your hike if wanted. The trailhead is a nice parking lot, except in winter you must park next to a gate and walk up the short access road: <https://goo.gl/maps/3NYCTY6MEd52>
6. **Bridesmaid Falls.** 15-minute drive up Provo Canyon to same parking lot as Bridal Veil Falls. This little-known hike is 2.5 miles (2 hours) roundtrip and 700 feet elevation gain. Starting at the stop sign next to the parking lot, go 200 yards up the bike path (toward Bridal Veil Falls) and turn right at Bonneville Shoreline Trail (there is a small sign). Follow this dirt trail for 0.8 mi (25 min). Turn left (uphill) at the gravel road that goes both uphill and downhill from the trail. Keep going up until you get to the falls—it can be quite steep for the last 100 yards if you really want to get wet in the falls. Another option when you are 100 yards from the falls is to go west along a level side trail to a valley overlook. Map to trailhead: <https://goo.gl/maps/t8VttZsNftu>
7. **Timpanogos 1st and 2nd Falls.** 30-minute drive up Provo Canyon past Sundance Resort to The Forest Service's Aspen Grove parking lot (\$6 fee). The road continues past this point as the scenic Alpine Loop. This hike is the same trail as Mt. Timpanogos summit (hike #15). Starting at the parking lot bathroom, go to the right/west when the trail splits. Also make sure to turn left/west at the sign at the T after 10 minutes of hiking (going the other direction is also a good hike but won't have waterfalls). You can take the trail as far as you want, but 2.8 miles (2 hours) roundtrip, 700 feet

elevation gain will get you to 2 different gorgeous waterfalls, the second one being even better than the first. The parking lot tends to fill up by 8 am in July and August. Map to trailhead: <https://goo.gl/maps/sZ3KzXqSaVE2>

8. **Stewart Falls.** 30-minute drive up Provo Canyon to same parking lot as Timpanogos hikes #7 and #15 (\$6 parking). This is an extremely popular family-friendly hike with a big payoff at the end. 4 miles (3 hours) roundtrip, 500 feet elevation gain to the falls. Same trailhead as Timpanogos summit but go left / south when the trail splits just above the parking lot bathroom. Map to trailhead: <https://goo.gl/maps/sZ3KzXqSaVE2>. Note: there is an alternate way to hike to the falls from Sundance Resort.

9. **Bloods Lake.** A beautiful 60-minute drive up Provo Canyon to Midway and then Pine Canyon. The parking lot is very close to Park City and often fills up by 9 am. Despite the name this is a delightful high-mountain lake with wildflowers and a well-maintained trail. The lake is quite warm by August and great for swimming too. Bring bug repellent in the summer to ward off occasional mosquitoes. Hike is 3.2 miles (2 hours) roundtrip, 700 feet elevation gain to the lake. If wanted you can continue past Bloods Lake to Lackawaxon Lake and/or Clayton Peak, which can double the hiking time and add up to 1000 feet more elevation. However, you will be rewarded with spectacular vistas and some granite boulder fields that are great fun to scramble across (not kidding). Map to trailhead: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/g4QPvsymRj8KNMBJA>

You could combine this hike with a drive to Park City by way of Empire Pass/ Deer Valley Resort. Or you could drive by way of Guardsman Pass to connect to Big Cottonwood Canyon and Salt Lake Valley.

10. **Y Trail.** This trail right above BYU campus is convenient and has great vistas. I avoid hiking it in the heat of summer because there is no shade, but it is a great choice during the other 3 seasons. The hike is 2.2 miles (2 hours) roundtrip and 1100 feet elevation gain to get to the top of the Y. It's steep but the trail is well-maintained and there will be many other hikers to encourage you. If you need an extra challenge, you can continue further up and summit Y Mountain for a total 7 miles round trip and 3200 feet elevation gain. BYU maintains a nice trailhead parking lot with flush toilets.

11. **Lost Creek Spring Falls.** 15-minute drive. A great waterfall adventure hike that is not well known. The trail is on the north side of Provo Canyon, directly across from Bridal Veil Falls. The hike is 2.3 miles (2 hours) roundtrip and 1000 feet elevation gain to the falls. The trailhead is a small gravel parking area across the highway from the Bridal Veil Falls overlook (can use overlook parking lot as a car turnaround point). Start walking along the dirt road that heads west from the parking area. After 200 yards turn right (north) at another road that heads steeply up the mountain. The

road will eventually meet up with a stream. The trail generally follows both sides of the stream (take your pick). Requires some climbing across rocks once you get to the stream but still accessible to any skill level. You will soon get to a waterfall, which is a good turnaround point. However, if you are a highly experienced hiker there is a way to continue to 3 additional waterfalls by following the stream further up. Map to trailhead:

<https://goo.gl/maps/d1XiCtH2anv>

12. **Timpanogos Cave National Monument.** You need to do this epic hike and cave tour at least once in your life. 35-minute drive by way of American Fork or 60-minute drive by way of Provo Canyon and scenic Alpine Loop. Hike is 3 miles roundtrip and 1100 feet elevation gain, taking 1.5 hour to hike up, 1 hour for the cave tour, and 1 hour to hike down. It's free to hike the paved trail, but you need advanced reservations and payment (online) to tour the cave. Map to trailhead and visitors center:

<https://goo.gl/maps/puTD3NLLfey>

13. **Grove Creek Canyon.** 25-minute drive. Accessible year round. No part of the trail is steep or technical but in the second half of the hike there are steep drop-offs that might scare some people. The trail eventually gets to a waterfall and a wooden bridge among large pine trees. Hike is 4 miles (3 hours) roundtrip and 1500 feet elevation gain to the bridge. Shorter hikes are also nice, with scenic views of Utah Valley and Utah Lake (and the location of buried \$25,000 in the [2024 Utah Treasure Hunt](#)). Map to trailhead: <https://goo.gl/maps/hD64e4KNDpu>

14. **Kyhv (formerly Squaw) Peak.** 5-minute drive. Good training and test for longer summit hikes—if you can do this then you can also do Mt Timp or Lone Peak or Y Mountain summits. Great panoramic views and wildflowers in summer. Hike is 7.3 miles (5 hours) roundtrip and 2800 feet elevation gain. Start on Rock Canyon Trail (hike #3) and follow sign to split left after 1.5 mi (after bridge 5).

15. **Mt. Timpanogos Summit.** 30-minute drive up Provo Canyon. A challenging and life-changing hike with spectacular waterfalls, vistas, wildflowers, an icy cold lake, and mountain goats. 14 miles (10-12 hours depending on fitness level) roundtrip and 4900 feet elevation gain. Same trail as hike #7 and parking lot as hike #8 (\$6 fee to Forest Service). To avoid the summer heat, I strongly recommend commencing the hike at 3 am and using a headlamp for the first 3 hours. Best wildflowers mid-July to early Aug (depending on snow melt off). Bring plenty of water, a bit of food, some sunscreen, and a jacket (weather at the peak is highly variable). Even if you run out of energy and must turn around early, there are amazing payoffs all along this hike. Map to trailhead:

<https://goo.gl/maps/sZ3KzXqSaVE2>

Scenic Drives:

- Don't miss driving the highway up Provo Canyon (US 189) all the way to Midway and back, which is one of the world's most scenic drives and should be experienced in all 4 seasons.
- Diverting from US 189 to Sundance Resort and the Forest Service "Alpine Loop" (State Route 92) is a great drive. It's especially good when the colors turn in the fall, but avoid weekends as the roadway can get crowded.
- Continuing from Midway on to Park City is another fun driving option.
- The Mount Nebo Loop in S. Utah County starting at Payson and ending at Nephi is another great drive in the summer and fall.

Other nearby day hikes:

Some of these are quite easy and some are challenging. They didn't make the Top 15 list mostly because they involve a longer drive, or in a couple cases were similar to ones already on the list, but they are all great hikes.

- Slate Canyon (Provo)
- Left Fork Days Canyon Trail (Springville)
- Grotto Falls + Maple Lake (Nebo Loop)
- Fifth Water Hot Springs (Diamond Fork Canyon)
- Bunnell's Fork (Provo Canyon South Fork)
- Shingle Mill Trail (Provo Canyon South Fork)
- Horse Flat Trail / Primrose Overlook (Alpine Loop)
- Timpooneke Trail / Scout Falls (Alpine Loop, requires reservation)
- Silver Lake (trailhead at Silver Lake Flats, Am. Fork Canyon)
- Horsetail Falls (Alpine)
- Rocky Mouth Falls (Sandy)
- Donut Falls (Big Cottonwood Canyon)
- Lone Peak (Draper/Alpine)
- Pfeifferhorn Peak / Red Pine Lake (Little Cottonwood Canyon)
- Little Sahara Sand Dunes
- Maple Canyon loop + Box Canyon (Sanpete County)
- Tabernacle Hill Lava Tubes + Meadow Hot Springs (Fillmore)

And if you are willing to drive 3+ hours and stay overnight then there is **Southern Utah, with its national and state parks...**