



Trail 16--Porter Fork

Duration: 1 hour to Mt. Olympus Wilderness Area; other times vary according to how far past the Mt. Olympus Wilderness Area you venture.

Distance: 1.4 miles to Mt. Olympus Wilderness Area

Difficulty: Easy to Mt. Olympus Wilderness Area; Moderate-Difficult as you ascend to Porter Fork Pass

Trailhead: Porter Fork Trailhead

Elevation: Porter Fork Trailhead 6000'; Beginning of Mt. Olympus Wilderness Area 6875'; Porter Fork Pass 9360'

Map: Mount Aire 7.5' quadrangle

GPS Coordinates: Porter Fork Pass--12 T 440,125.8 E/4500,969.9 N

Avalanche: Known avalanche paths; Site of the largest avalanche in Wasatch history, (1979).

Dogs: No dogs off leash on even-numbered calendar days per county ordinance. Dogs must be leashed in all parking lots, trail heads and developed sites.

Introduction: This jaunt up Porter Fork averages 826 feet of elevation gain per mile and intersects with a variety of trails coming from Big Cottonwood Canyon on the other side of the ridge. A trail you can make short or gruelingly long, it offers a pleasant foray past cabins and a bubbling stream, a further leg into Wilderness, and perhaps even a stiff jaunt to Porter Fork Pass which sits between Mill Creek and Big Cottonwood Canyon. Mountain veterans, when asked how far this trail goes, answer, "As far as you want." My specifics on this trail conclude at Mt. Olympus Wilderness Area.

Proceeding to the pass will give you a full day's workout and take you into more dangerous paths. Go only as far as time, desire and weather allow. Backcountry skiers and snowboarders use this trail as well so there is usually a defined route to follow. Avalanche danger is possible once you enter Mt. Olympus Wilderness Area. Be prepared.

Porter Fork's history of logging and milling continued through the 1800's. In the 1900's mining and prospecting took over. The first cabin built along the road up Porter Fork in 1907 served as a cooking and bunk house for miners working claims in the area. As the large mining operations in Mill Creek Canyon were abandoned, most of the miners left the canyon. Eventually, the log cabin they used in Porter Fork was converted to a summer home (1925). Vehicle access on the Porter Fork road is permitted only to Porter Fork residents, but the road is a public right of way for foot traffic.

Although Mill Creek Canyon as a whole did not reveal many significant mineral deposits, several promising claims were found in upper Porter Fork. By the 1920's, the mills were gone and most of the mining had stopped. At this time Porter Fork began to be used for recreation by the residents of Salt Lake Valley.

How to Get There: Drive up Mill Creek Canyon, for approximately 4.5 miles. A small sign on the south side of the road marks the beginning of Porter Fork. A decent-sized parking area sits at the Porter Fork trailhead. If additional parking is needed, Burch Hollow pull-out sits just up the road.

Trail Description: The Porter Fork trail starts at a clearly marked trailhead by crossing a bridge over the half frozen creek. The first 1.36 miles follows along the snow-packed summer cabin road and leads through approximately 45 summer cabins (though not all of them are visible). The opportunities to pass the creek single handedly wins the vote for the most beautiful part of this lower section of trail--the water bubbling through layers of snow and thin sheets of ice contrast the silence nicely. This section, following along the road, is easy to follow.

At 1.4 miles the groomed trail ends and you enter the Mt. Olympus Wilderness Area. The Porter Fork trail leaves the vehicle access road at this time. A sign marks the trail. Once the trail enters into the Mt. Olympus Wilderness Area, it turns to single track and you enter a forest wonderland with snow-covered evergreens hugging your route. Backcountry skiers follow this route as well. After entering the Mt. Olympus Wilderness Area you are in avalanche country. Be prepared and snowshoe here on safe days only. If you're breaking trail and are unfamiliar with the area, use a map and GPS coordinates as you find your way to the pass. If you're not the first on the trail there is usually a visible path to follow. The trail winds its way through the trees and up Porter Fork to Porter Fork Pass at the top.