

Castle Rock (627ML)

(Moderate)

DIRECTIONS TO TRAILHEAD: From Triple Creek Ranch Driveway, turn right onto the West Fork Road. Proceed on the paved road about 5 ½ miles. Turn right onto the Nez Perce Road just past the US Forest Service Ranger Station. Signs will say Nez Perce Road – Elk City, Idaho. Drive 16 miles to the top of the Nez Perce Pass. There is generous parking area at the pass. The trail starts on the back of the parking lot. The restrooms and horse ramps are on the south side of the road.

MILEAGE: 2.7 miles – Castle Rock – 7,722 feet

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: This is strictly a ridgeline trail. This route follows a segment of the old southern Nez Perce Trail. The trail starts south just beyond the horse-loading ramp. After starting from the parking area there is a split in the trail about 0.5 miles in. Take a left at the split. A weathered sign inscribed “Castle Rock” will be posted on the tree here. Follow this trail all the way to the summit.

After the split, you will soon enter a subalpine pocket meadow. A sharp northeast bend forces the ridgeline route downhill, where you reenter lodgepole and fir forests as the trail makes its way deeper into Montana. Reaching a wooded saddle 1 mile short of Castle Rock, the trail begins its ascent again and follows toward the looming landmark. The well-defined route traverses areas that are mostly forested.

Some 2.5 miles after leaving Nez Perce Pass you arrive at the foot of Castle Rock. True to its name, the peak is fairly well fortified; the most viable routes to the summit originate on its southern slopes. A large cairn (rock stacks) and multiple bronze benchmarks guard the highest point. Note also the final 0.2 mile is cross-country and may entail some scrambling on all fours.

SPECIAL NOTES: This peak stands on the threshold of two vast wildernesses – the Frank Church- River of No Return and the Selway-Bitterroot – but its currently part of neither. The summit views look over 4 million acres (which is large enough to encompass the state of Delaware three times over). Castle Rock owes its topographic prominence to the durable porphyritic andesite exposed throughout – actually the eroded core of a long inactive volcano. Literally dozens of high Bitterroot peaks crowd the horizon as you stand atop the windswept heights of Castle Rock. But the peaks to the north seem more spectacular than the rest.

Have Fun & ENJOY!