

*Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area
Field Trip Guide - Swan Falls Road*

Mileage
Location
Comments

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Kuna Visitor Center

The Visitor Center is located at the intersection of Kuna Road and Swan Falls Road and is designed to provide the visitor with information about the NCA as it pertains to specific sites and recreational opportunities. The center is staffed by volunteers on spring weekends.

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03.0

Barker Road

Northern boundary of the NCA

Northern harriers frequent this area

Red-tailed and Swainson's hawks sometimes perch on the telephone and power poles

Townsend's ground squirrels and black-tailed jackrabbits take cover in the sagebrush

Kuna Butte is on the west side of the road and burned in 1996. The furrows you see are from rangeland drill seedings of bunch grasses. This butte and the surrounding area was covered with sagebrush and bunch grasses similar to that on the east side of the road.

Mileage
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04.5

Kuna Cave Road

The area all around has burned several times in recent years.

Prairie falcons and Northern harriers frequent this area

Mileage
Location
Comments

06.0

Nicholson Road

More of the sagebrush community has burned in recent years, 1995 and 1996.

Mileage
Location
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08.0

Turnoff to **Initial Point**

Initial Point is one mile east of Swan Falls Road. Initial Point was the starting point for the official land survey of Idaho in 1863.

If you plan to stop here, please refer to the additional information found at the end of this guide.

The many volcanic rock outcroppings you see to the south are popular spots for raptors to perch and hunt.

The view to the southwest is of the **Owyhee Mountains**.

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10.2

PP&L 500kV Powerline

This powerline is supported by large steel towers which are used for roosting and nesting by some birds of prey. Special nesting platforms were placed on some of the towers to get raptors to nest below the electrical lines. Large powerlines, like this one, do not usually electrocute birds. The greatest number of electrocutions occur on much smaller powerlines where the wires are closer together. Finally, you are moving out of the recent burned areas.

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11.2

Top of the hill above the large farm

There are many badgers in this area which reflects the number of Townsend ground squirrels living among winterfat shrubs.

The NCA contains one of the densest populations of badgers in the world.

Coyote Butte is directly east of the road.

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11.5

Double-pole powerline

Birds of prey often use the cross-arms on this powerline as hunting perches.

Trio Butte is to the southeast.

Look east for a good example of a well-defined boundary between good shrub habitat and an area that burned a few years ago.

West of Swan Falls Road is a good stand of winterfat with lots of badger holes.

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12.0

Intersection with Victory Lane

To the south and west is the **Initial Butte Farm**. Irrigated agricultural land stays green much longer into the summer than the surrounding desert grasses. These lands can be important to raptors hunting for small rodents later in the summer and in times of drought.

Mileage
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13.0

Adjacent to Initial Butte Farm

As you make the turn along Swan Falls Road, look for "extra insulators" on the cross beams of the powerlines, and extra tall fence posts. Prairie falcons and red-tailed hawks perch and hunt in the adjacent agricultural field.

Mileage
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14.0

Heading south on Swan Falls Road

As you make the turn south, **Sinker Butte** is directly in front of you.

Mileage
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15.5
Dedication Point Interpretive Site and Overlook

This site provides a good opportunity to see raptors. A quarter-mile interpretive trail leads to an overlook into the **Snake River canyon** and a view of the 500 foot cliffs which are the nesting areas of the prairie falcon, red-tailed hawk, and golden eagle.

Mileage
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16.5
Adjacent to a stand of winterfat

This stand of winterfat mixed with patches of sagebrush provides important habitat for the Townsend ground squirrel. A food supply this close to the canyon rim makes for a quick turn around for a prairie falcon feeding many hungry nestlings.

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17.7
Three-Pole pullout

This pullout overlooks **Swan Falls Dam**
This site is a good location to look for prairie falcons, red-tailed hawks, and turkey vultures.
Sinker Butte is to the southwest. This feature is an extinct volcano. Travellers on the South Alternate of the Oregon Trail passed around the south side of this butte.

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18.5
Top of **Swan Falls grade**

A steep grade into the canyon begins
The pullout on the corner is another good spot for spotting turkey vultures, red-tailed hawks, and prairie falcons.
This vantage point provides great views both upstream and downstream into the canyon.

Mileage
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18.8
Adjacent to **cliff**

Notice the layer of **sedimentary rock** that becomes visible between two layers of **volcanic basalt rocks**. This sedimentary layer is visible up and down the canyon for many miles.
Three pullouts are located along the road as you descend into the canyon. The pullouts provide scenic views of canyon cliff nesting habitat and prey habitat.

Mileage
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19.5
Talus slope

The basalt cliff walls consist of many cracks and crevasses. When water gets into these, the natural process of freezing and thawing slowly forces the rocks apart and causes them to fall to the base of the cliffs. Notice the sharp, angular edges of these boulders. Similar boulders found along the **Snake River** are talus slope boulders but they have smooth, rounded edges. This difference was caused by the effects of a massive flood which occurred in the canyon about 15,000 years ago.

Mileage	20.0
Location	Swan Falls Dam and Visitor Center
Comments	The facilities have public restrooms, drinking water, and a picnic area. The Visitor Center opened in the spring of 1997 to the public and provides interpretation about the history of the dam and hydroelectricity, and the resources of the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA).

Additional Information

Greenstrips

Greenstripping is a treatment to aid in minimizing the spread of wildfires. The basic concept behind greenstrips is the replacement of fire-vulnerable vegetation with "greenstrips" of fire resistant vegetation along major roads and other locations to retard fire spread and enhance fire suppression efforts. The greenstrip locations are planned to divide large acres of annual and shrub-dominated vegetation into smaller units. In this way, the size and frequency of wildfire may be reduced, which will reduce the rate of loss of important shrub communities.

To date, the greenstrips along Swan Falls Road have been unsuccessful due to severe drought conditions. This is evident by the large burned area on both sides of the road.

Initial Point

Initial Point butte is one mile east of Swan Falls Road. *All parking should occur at the base of the butte.*

Initial Point was the starting point for the official land survey of Idaho in 1863. All property in the state is described in relation to the survey marker cemented into the platform atop the stairs. The city of Meridian is due north of this point, hence the name.

Please make every effort to keep your group together. As you move up the hill, please stay on the road to avoid disturbing nesting ravens. If the birds are disturbed, they may abandon their nest resulting in the death of young birds. It is also a good idea to have an adult leading and trailing the group. On warm, spring days, snakes may be sunning themselves on the road.

PLEASE BE VERY CAREFUL, WATCH YOUR STEP.

While in this area, you may hear what sounds like distant thunder. This is actually tank and artillery fire from the military training area used by the Idaho Army National Guard to the southeast.