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Trailing the Sheep in Ketchum, Idaho



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Travel

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Sheep in Ketchum, Idaho before they are led in the Trailing of the Sheep parade CAROL WALLER

Imagine shepherds on horseback leading 1,500 sheep down a mountain pass onto the main street of Ketchum, Idaho, on their way to winter grazing grounds. This is not a movie -- it's a twice-yearly event which has been turned into a 5-day [Trailing of the Sheep Festival](#), considered one of the Top Ten Fall Festivals in the World. This year, it will be held from October 10th through October 14.th



Oinkari Basque Hoop Dance at the Festival CAROL WALLER

Visitors can watch Basque immigrants celebrate their shepherding heritage with dancing and musical performances, food (all-things-lamb including lamb lasagna, lamb tacos, and lamb meatballs), wool shearing and spinning demonstrations, wooly crafts for sale, and the National Sheepdog Trials.



National Sheep Dog Trials CAROL WALLER

The festival culminates in the Trailing of the Sheep Parade, in which over 1,000 sheep are led down Ketchum's Main Street.



Trailing of the Sheep parade in Ketchum, Idaho CAROL WALLER

Sheep have always provided man with food and fiber for clothing, and the purpose of this festival is to preserve the history and culture of shepherding in Idaho and the West. In the mid 1800s, the Basque people (originally from Spain and France) came to America to service the camps during the Gold Rush, but found they could make a better living herding sheep for ranchers. Some took sheep as wages and built their own sheep empires. By 1918, the sheep population had reached 2.65 million, which translated as six sheep to one person.



Sheep herder leading sheep towards Main Street, Ketchum for The Trailing of the Sheep Parade CAROL WALLER

The Trailing of the Sheep Festival, which has been taking place for 22 years, started as a dispute between the Ketchum shepherders and cyclists. The cyclists complained because sheep droppings were getting into their chains and gears on a new 12-mile bike path (built in 1991). Unknown to the cyclists, the new path included an easement for the shepherds because it was the sheep migration route. The cyclists were furious. John Peavey, a third-generation shepherd and his wife Diane, received nasty phone calls from the cyclists who told them, 'Get your sheep off our bike path.'



Sheep Tailing with herder prior to the Trailing of the Sheep Parade CAROL WALLER

Even when the Peaveys explained that the sheep were using the route long before the bike path, they got nowhere with the cyclists. So the couple figured out a way to make lemonade out of lemons: they asked the cyclists and locals to help herd the woolies as they came towards Ketchum. The cyclists and other locals loved their new assignment, and soon, the trailing of the sheep turned into The Trailing of the Sheep Festival, now a five-day event.

The Festival is ideal for both families and couples. The Wood River Valley region in south-central Idaho is a land of hills dotted with sagebrush and split rail fences –the real American West. In October, the aspens are quaking, the foliage turns brilliant colors, and the temperature is sunny and warm. Besides all the sheep festivities, there guided hikes to *arboglyphs*, pictures drawn on aspen trees by the early Basque shepherders who lived in the forest while tending the sheep.



Priest blesses the sheep on Main Street, Ketchum CAROL WALLER

The most exciting event is the sheep parade, led by authentic sheep wagons, followed by dancing groups of all ethnicities, then Scottish highlanders blowing bagpipes (the prelude to the sheep arrival), and finally, hundreds of sheep trotting down Main Street. A priest from Ketchum blesses the sheep as they pass by.

For those headed to The Trailing of the Sheep Festival, lodging options include downtown Ketchum's [Limelight hotel](#) the boutique-y [Knob Hill Inn](#) on Ketchum's north end and the 213-room posh [Sun Valley Lodge](#).



Sheep at their new resting place CAROL WALLER