

SIGNAL PEAK TO SHEEP CORRAL CANYON (ABOUT 10 MILES ROUND TRIP)

Trail Rating: 4 = rocky areas, narrow spots, bridges, switchbacks, more elevation changes, physically challenging for horse

Relevant USGS map: Twin Sisters quad, 1999

Directions:

Drive north on NM Hwy 15 (Piños Altos Rd.) through Piños Altos. At the north end of Piños Altos, just beyond Cross Mtn. Road (on right), Hwy 15 intersects with Main St. (Y intersection on the left). Set your trip meter here.

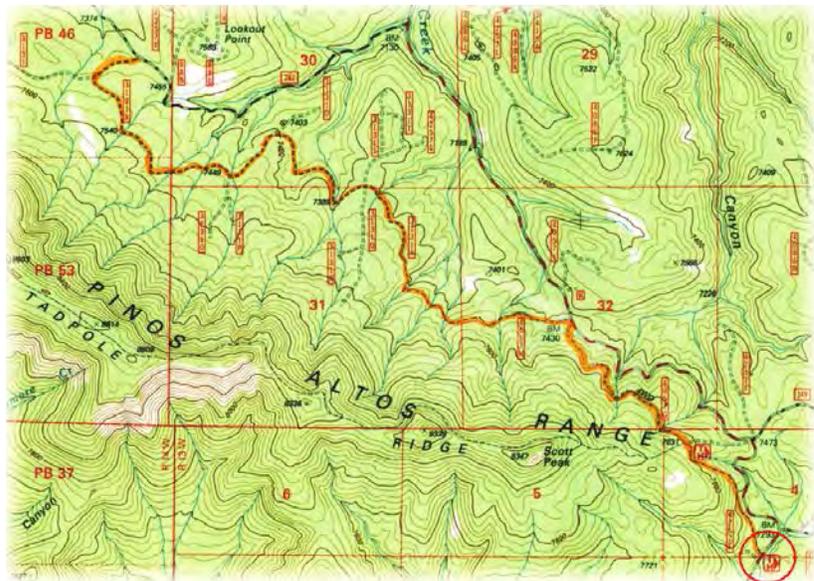


Continue on Hwy 15 for about seven miles (past Cherry Creek and McMillan campgrounds) to Forest Road 154 (a.k.a. Signal Peak Rd., a.k.a. Bear Canyon Rd). Turn right and continue short distance to parking entrance on left.

Parking area has lots of room for rigs, with plenty of space to turn around. Roads open to vehicles branch off the parking area. Try not to block them with your rig.

From the parking lot, hike or ride back to Hwy 15. Turn left at the highway and head down the shoulder toward the cattle guard. Trail begins on right just before the cattle guard. (Don't cross the cattle guard.)

From the trailhead, continue about 7/10 mile to a large cairn on the right. Here, the trail (a road, really) toward Sheep Corral Rd. diverges from the trail to Tadpole Ridge. Bear to the right and keep to the road.



The road is straightforward if you pay attention, but if you don't, you'll end up on a steep and rocky spur that goes to Hwy 15 and the Meadow Creek parking area, which isn't where you want to go. To avoid this foible, bear to the left as you travel past the cairn.

The road diminishes into a pretty and shady trail that skirts the mountainside. At about 0.94 miles from the trailhead, the trail wends back down to the highway, where it turns abruptly to the left (away from the highway) onto a two-track that (as of this writing) is signed "4057," or 4057K on the USGS Twin Sisters quad map (a portion of which appears above). The two-track is consistent and easy to follow until it morphs into the trail 3131A complex, from which trails 3131q, 3131s, 3131o, and 3131p branch off along the way. These spurs lead to campsites, where they end. Explore them if you want to, but be aware

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that they don't get you to Sheep Corral Road. In addition, the spurs are not always signed, so it's easy to wander off onto one of them without being aware of the transition.

The trail has a couple of steep descents and ascents across drainages, and some of these are rocky and slick, especially during and following wet weather. Novice riders should proceed with caution, as always. Ice and snow linger in some spots during colder months.

The trail goes along the north face of Tadpole Ridge, so it offers cool temperatures and plenty of cover for summer exploration. It travels through ponderosa and grassy terrain, some of which is spiked with luscious ferns and wildflowers.

This is not a particularly rocky trail, at least not by Gila standards. The climbs and descents tend to be short. It produces a most pleasant journey to Sheep Corral Rd., where you can turn left to continue deeper into the forest (and eventually the Gila wilderness) or turn around and head back to Signal Peak.

On the way back, watch the hillsides in the close distance for evidence of the Signal Fire, which erupted from somebody's careless campfire on a windy Mothers' Day in 2014 and caused damage from which the Continental Divide Trail through the area is still closed.

As you return, you can branch off to the left (about 4-1/4 miles from Sheep Corral Rd.) onto the spur we cautioned you to ignore on the way out. The spur goes down to the Meadow Creek parking area, from which you can follow Forest Road 149 (a.k.a. Sapillo Trail) about 0.73 mi. to trail #4257. Turn right onto 4257 and you'll end up at the Signal Peak parking area in about 1/2 mile.



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