

Day Hikes near the Gila Visitor Center

With over 400 miles of trails in the Gila Wilderness it is hard to know where to start. The following day hike descriptions offer an introduction to the area. Detailed maps are available for purchase at the Visitor Center and Forest Offices. Please pack out all trash. **SAFETY NOTE:** Before starting any hike, check current weather and river conditions. Many of these hikes require travel through narrow canyons or include river crossings that can be extremely dangerous at times of high water. Be prepared for changing conditions, and always take plenty of drinking water. For more information contact the Gila Visitor Center at 575-536-9461 or www.nps.gov/gicl

Hikes #1-3, and 5 begin at the TJ Corral Trailhead located 1 mile from the Visitor Center on the road to the Cliff Dwellings. Vault toilets are available at the trailhead. Day hike 4 starts at Woody's Corral, and Day Hike 6 begins just past the Visitor Center parking lot.

Day Hike #1: Little Bear Canyon/ Middle Fork Loop

Distance: 9 miles to river junction and back/ or 11 mile loop. **Elevation gain:** 630 feet.

This is an excellent hike to get a feel for both the open mesa tops and tight canyon bottoms in the Gila River Valley. At the first junction 0.25 miles from the TJ Corral trailhead turn right. At the second junction approximately 2.5 miles later continue straight ahead. The trail drops down into an increasingly narrow drainage (Little Bear Canyon). When the trail meets the Middle Fork trail, either return the same way back to the TJ Corral or turn right for 6 miles and dozens of river crossings to the Middle Fork Trailhead near the Visitor Center. Finish the loop with a 1 mile road hike back to the TJ Corral.

Day Hike #2: Stock Bypass Loop

Distance: 4 miles. **Elevation gain:** 210 feet.

While originally used to keep horses and other stock out of the National Monument and off the road, this leisurely trail also provides an opportunity for hikers to get off the canyon bottom. At the first junction 0.25 miles from the TJ Corral trailhead continue straight ahead. Cross the large dry wash (Adobe Canyon), turn left just inside the wooden wilderness boundary fence and follow the trail 2.8 miles to the next junction. Turn left onto the West Fork Trail and follow it for 0.5 miles and 2 river crossings to the Cliff Dwellings parking lot. Finish the loop with a 1 mile road hike back to the TJ Corral.

Day Hike #3: West Fork Loop

Distance: 12 miles. **Elevation gain:** 1,300 feet.

For hikers who want more challenge and variety, this hike allows access to the ridge-tops between the Middle and West Forks of the Gila River. At the first junction 0.25 miles from the TJ Corral trailhead turn right. At the second junction approximately 2 miles later turn left towards The Meadows. This 4 mile section of the trail has frequent scenic views. Turn left at the next junction for a steep, 3 mile decent into the West Fork. Turn left onto the West Fork trail and follow it for 2 miles and 2 river crossings to the Cliff Dwellings parking lot. Finish the loop with a 1 mile road hike back to the TJ Corral.

Day Hike #4: EE Canyon Loop

Distance: 8 miles. **Elevation gain:** 970 feet.

Begin at the Woody's Corral Trailhead located 1 mile from the Visitor Center on the road to the Cliff Dwellings. Water and vault toilets are available. Encounter rocky outcrops, panoramic views, and ponderosa pine forest on this trail. A moderate climb leads to the top of a ridge separating the West Fork

and Little Creek. At the first junction 3.3 miles from the Woody's Corral trailhead turn right and follow the trail on the ridge for another 0.8 mile. At the next junction turn right to descend through EE Canyon for 2 miles. Turn right onto the West Fork trail and follow it for 1 mile and 4 river crossings to the Cliff Dwellings parking lot. Finish the loop with a 1 mile road hike back to Woody's Corral. Or follow the trail along the West Fork with 3 additional river crossings.

Day Hike #5: Little Bear Canyon to Jordan Hot Springs

Distance: 7 miles one way from TJ Corral. **Elevation gain:** 630 feet

Temperature: Approximately 90 degrees Fahrenheit

Trail Description: From the TJ Corral, Trailhead is located 1 mile from the Visitor Center on the road to the Cliff Dwellings. At the first junction 0.25 miles from the TJ Corral trailhead turn right; follow the sign to the Middle Fork. At the second junction approximately 2 miles later continue straight ahead. The trail drops down into an increasingly narrow drainage (Little Bear Canyon). When the Little Bear Canyon trail meets the Middle Fork of the Gila River, follow the river upstream for 2.5 miles/15 crossings. The spring is on the right (northeast) side of the canyon away from the river, just beyond and above a marshy, grassy area with obvious seepage.

Day Hike #6: Middle Fork to Light Feather and Jordan Hot Springs

Light Feather (or Middle Fork) Hot Springs

Distance: 0.75 miles above Middle Fork Trailhead, one way.

Water Temperature: Approximately 140 degrees Fahrenheit

Trail Description: Turn right onto the road at the end of the visitor center parking lot, drive up a small hill, turn left, and park at the Middle Fork Trailhead. Light Feather Hot Springs is located upstream from the trail head by walking past the gate down a dirt road and follow the trail up the canyon for 0.5 miles with multiple river crossings. The hot springs are located near an unusual rock outcrop on the right. CAUTION: The water comes out of the ground at a temperature hot enough to burn your skin. Rerouting of the river water may need to take place before soaking in the springs is comfortable.

Jordan Hot Springs via Middle Fork Trail Head

Distance: 8.5 miles, one way.

Water Temperature: Approximately 90 degrees Fahrenheit

Trail Description: From the Middle Fork Trailhead (see description for Middle Fork/Light Feather Hot Springs) continue upstream for 6 miles, approximately 32 river crossings, to the junction with the Little Bear Canyon trail. From the junction, follow the river upstream for 2.5 miles/15 crossings. The spring is on the right (northeast) side of the canyon away from the river, just beyond and above a marshy, grassy area with obvious seepage.

Day Hike: Gila Cliff Dwelling National Monument.

Distance: 1 mile loop with an elevation rise of about 180 feet.

The Monument trail is only open during the seasonal open hours. Access is prohibited otherwise.

