

Order of the Arrow
Camping Guide
Part 3

Gila National
Forest
Camps and
Recreation
Areas

Introduction

The Gila National Forest is located in southwestern New Mexico. The Gila and Aldo Leopold wilderness area are contained within the forest as well as numerous other recreation areas. The elevation ranges from 4500 to nearly 11,000 feet and includes desert to the alpine life zones.

Additional can be obtained at:

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| Forest Supervisor Gila National Forest 2610 North Silver Street Silver City, NM 88061 505-388-8201 | Wilderness Ranger District Gila Visitor Center Route 11, Box 100 Silver City, NM 88061 505-536-9461 | Black Range Ranger District P.O. Box 431 2601 S. Broadway Truth or Consequences, NM 87901 505-894-6677 |
| Mimbres Ranger District Box 79 Mimbres, NM 88049 505-536-2250 | Reserve Ranger District Box 117 Reserve, NM 87830 505-533-6231 or 6232 | Glenwood Ranger District Box 8 Glenwood, NM 88039 505-539-2481 or 2824 |
| Luna Ranger District Box 158 Quemado, NM 87829 505-773-4678 | Silver City Ranger District 2915 Highway 180 East Silver City, NM 88061 505-538-2771 or 5735 | |

It can not be recommended too strongly, that one should contact the Forest Service when planning any trip to the Gila to obtain the information about forest closures, fire restrictions, forest fires, water availability, flash floods and other dangers.

Lake Roberts

Lake Roberts is located in the Gila National Forest about seventy miles north of Deming, around two and one half hours drive from Las Cruces. At the lake are two campgrounds (Lake Roberts and Upper End) available for small groups. Both are fee areas, and both have drinking water available and restores. In addition to fishing in Lake Roberts (be sure Scouts and leaders have necessary permits) there are excellent opportunities for nature study in the marshy area adjacent to Upper End Campground. Across the highway from Lake Roberts picnic area is a nature trail (Trail 779), with markers, which winds through Purgatory Chasm and is strongly recommended for a very short hike. USGS map: Copperas Peak

Rocky Canyon Trail / Brannon Park

This trip provides good hiking without too much climbing in the east half of the Gila Wilderness Area. Take US 180 north from Deming to NM 61, then NM 61 to San Lorenzo. At San Lorenzo, take NM 35 towards Lake Roberts. The trailhead (#640) is located on the north side of the road directly across from the turn-off to Sapillo Group Campground, 2.5 miles east of Upper End Campground at Lake Roberts. Rocky Canyon trail (#700) leads 8.5 miles from Sapillo Creek up Rocky Canyon to Brannon Park, a very large open meadow surrounded by tall ponderosa pines. This was the site of a frontier homestead, and long sections of the old split rail fencing can easily be found around the perimeter of the park. There are at least two intermittent springs in the park and availability of water is uncertain during dry seasons. With its flat grassy acres, Brannon Park has countless "perfect" campsites. Trail #700 disappears several times crossing the park and there are unmarked intersections, with trails leading into canyons to the north, so map and compass work are vital for continuing in the proper direction. Leaving Brannon Park, Trail #700 travels north along the mesa. The trail turns east while dropping back into Rocky Canyon and ends at Rocky Canyon Forest Camp three miles beyond Brannon Park. This small campground on NM 61 consists of a few concrete tables and a pit latrine along a small creek. The end of Trail #700 is here at Trailhead #637. About 1/4 mile west of the campground, Trail #700 is joined by Trail #803 at a large signboard. Trail #803, the Caves Trail, leads 3/4 miles down Rocky Canyon to an area of small caves, steep cliffs, and interesting rock outcroppings. This trail is poorly marked, but as it just leads down the canyon, the general direction is easy to follow. There are a couple of good campsites along Trail #803 if you want to stay in the Wilderness area and out of the campground. Except in the driest times, water is available from the creek. Be sure to purify all water from creeks or springs. There is no "loop" available, so it is necessary to back track along Trail #700 to the starting point or arrange for pick up at the Rocky Canyon forest Camp.

This trail is on USGS map, North Star Mesa and on USFS visitors travel guide and map, Gila Wilderness.

Sapillo Group Campground

Sapillo Group Campground is located in the Gila National Forest about seventy miles north of Deming. It is for larger groups and is a fee campground. However, most rangers in the past have said that Scout groups can camp there without fees. Water or tables are not available, there are toilets, open pit fireplaces, bring your own wood, but if fire danger is high, plan on using propane or charcoal for cooking. The campground is nestled in among huge pine trees, so there is lots of shade. Wildlife is in abundance, across the highway and up to your right a short distance is a large meadow/field area where you can see elk. There are also deer and wild turkeys in the area.

Fishing is available at nearby Lake Roberts as are hiking trails to explore. USGS Map: North Star Mesa

Sapillo Creek and the Gila River

Traveling north out of Silver City on Highway No. 15, one will pass through Pinos Altos and continuing approximately ten more miles, turn left on Forest Service Road #282 to the Sheep Corral Canyon, some five to six miles into the forest. Park in the vicinity of an old cabin and prepare for your hike. The elevation is approximately 7410 feet. Following Forest Service Trail #231, the five-mile trail drops 2000 feet to the convergence of the Sapillo and the Gila River. Campsites are plentiful as are the small mouth bass, trout and catfish. One, two or three nights of camping and fishing is a very realistic venture. Remember, the hike out won't be easy, as the climb out is five miles with a 2000-foot rise. However, the challenge of another way out could result in crossing the Sapillo and following the Gila River north along Forest Trail #724. The trail follows the river up stream and north through deep canyons eleven to twelve miles, exiting the river at a campground one mile south of the Gila Hot Springs at the Grape Vine Campground. The elevation here is approximately 5400 feet. Either way the trail is taken, you witness terrain typical of the Gila Wilderness: steep canyons and twisting river bottoms. USGS map: Granny Mountain.

Turkey Creek

Turkey Creek is a scenic area in the Gila National Forest. The area is located at the fork of the Turkey Creek and the Gila River. Take US Highway 180 west from Silver City to the junction of NM 211. From there go through the town of Gila, NM. Continue on Turkey Creek Road (forest route 155) for several miles until you reach the Gila River. Cross the river in only a high clearance vehicle and continue to the trailhead corral and park. A short distance from the trailhead the Gila River Trail (724) trail joins Turkey Creek trail. A one hours hike up the Turkey Creek (Trail 155) will take you past a quiet and secluded canyon (Skeleton Canyon) that is loaded with crimson Big Tooth Maples during the second week of October through the fourth week of October. Geologic formations of rock shelves, small pools, worn rocky shoots and small falls make the canyon quaint and memorable. The hike from the trail head to Skeleton Canyon is relatively flat, but the one and one-half mile hike to the Turkey Creek Hot Springs will require a small amount of climbing. There are several places along both Turkey Creek and the Gila River that are good for camping. This is an especially good hike for beginners and new scouts. USGS map: Canteen Canyon, Diablo Range, Canyon and Little Turkey Park.

Middle Fork of the Gila River

Begin by taking Highway 15 from Silver City to the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, Gila Visitor Center (a 1-1/2 hours drive by car). Continue west on 15 to the Scorpion Corral. Parking is available at the corral. Take trail 729 that rises gently for one and a half miles and then drops gently down through Little Bear Creek. Ponderosa pine forest provides shade. Some light climbing is needed, but the majority of this hike is a good one for the new scouts as a shakedown hike. The hike is approximately 3 to 4 miles and will take one to two hours depending upon one's condition. The hike might take the inexperienced hiker two hours. Deciduous riverbed flora line the Middle Fork of the Gila. Large sand plains are present on the south side of the river. Smaller grassy shelves there, three to six feet above the river, provide more secluded and private campsites. The south side of the river provides shade under large spreading cottonwood trees. The north side of the river provides red sandstone palisade spires. River bottom trails go northwest along the river. Many deep rocky canyons dumping into the river basin provide opportunities for exploration. One can return on trail 729 or return on the middle fork trail 157. The latter requires many (15-18) river crossings ending a hike of six to seven miles on the picturesque Middle Fork at the Gila Visitor Center. Hot springs are located approximately one mile north of the Visitor Center on the east edge of the river. Fresh spring water is located on the hike into the Middle Fork, approximately one-half to one-third from trail's juncture with the Middle Fork. Filtration or treatment is advised, but the water is wet and cool. USGS Maps: Burnt Corral Canyon, Woodland Park, Little Turkey Park and Gila Hot Springs.

The Deloche Canyon Trail

From Silver City take Hwy 180 sixty miles northwest to Glenwood. Approximately three miles north of Glenwood, take No. 78 (Bursum Road, this is noted as 28 on the USFS maps but is 78 on the USGS maps) to Mogollon. Between two and three miles east of Mogollon, find Forest Trail #179. This will be a wide spot in the road. Parking is available along the road. The hike is one and one-half miles to the ridge, where a fantastic view south allows one to view the Whitewater watershed of deep canyons and ridge tops. Turning east, the trail follows below worn volcanic cliffs and ridges to Whitewater Creek. The drop down to Whitewater Creek (about three miles) is easy but remember the hike coming back out is a killer. Numerous campsites await the hiker, as does a steadily rising or falling Whitewater Creek that has numerous holes and trout awaiting the would be fisherman. Bigtooth maples, firs, box elders and heavy foliage make the Deloche destination a cool one in hot summer months. The plush vegetation, cool stream and deep canyon provides a wonderful get-away. One may return by the same route or travel downstream through the Catwalk (six miles west) to the Whitewater Picnic Ground. USGS map: Holt Mountain.

The Hummingbird Saddle Hike

From Mogollon, take No. 78 (Bursum Road, this is noted as 28 on the USFS maps but is 78 on the USGS maps) seven to eight miles east to the Sandy Point trailhead and parking lot. Directly across the road to the south is the crest trail (forest trail #182). One and one-half miles from the trailhead is Bead Spring, the headwater of Willow Creek. An excellent campsite is located at the spring. Three miles beyond is a beautiful campsite with a window through the forest overlooking Hummingbird Saddle and an absolutely beautiful panoramic view of aspen from late September to mid October. Hummingbird Spring is located right on the trail under a canopy of yellow blaze aspen. Another spring is located approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ miles to the west on Whitewater trail (#207). Until now the hike has followed the ridge of Willow Mountain and one could camp overnight and return to the car if it was left at Sandy Point. One could use this as a starting point for a major backpacking trek south or east or drop down into Redstone Park and out Whitewater Creek, meeting a pick up ride at the Catwalk. USGS Map: Grouse Mountain.