

Photo by: Jessica Morgan

# Hiking Guide

## INTRODUCTION

Saguaro (sah-WAH-row) National Park’s East District has a wonderful variety of over 128 miles of hiking trails for you to explore. This guide is intended to help you decide which of the trails will meet your needs, help you to have a safe visit, & inform you about park regulations.


## DECIDING WHICH TRAIL TO TAKE


### “I want to hike for 2 hours...4 hours...5 hours...”


The time it takes to complete a trail depends on how fast someone hikes, how many stops, the steepness of the trail, etc.. A very rough estimate of average hiking speed is 2 miles per hour; so dividing the trail distance by 2 will give you a rough estimate of your time.

### “I want an easy hike...strenuous hike...”

How easy or difficult a hike is depends on a hiker’s physical condition, experience, etc. & is very subjective. For this guide we have listed the trails as “Relatively Easy”, “Moderate”, or “More Challenging”

 = Relatively Easy - less than 300ft of elevation gain/loss & does not have steep inclines.

 = Moderate - gradual elevation gain/loss greater than 300ft, but less than 1,000ft.

 = More Challenging, steeper trail sections with elevation gain/loss of over 1,000ft.

### “I want a long...short...medium...hike”

Again, these terms are very subjective. For this guide, the trail suggestions have been broken down into three distinct categories:

1 - 2.5 mile hikes

2.5 - 5 mile hikes

5+ mile hikes

### Rough or Smooth?

All trails (except the accessible trails) are natural soil with some rough rock steps. Some steeper trails may have many steps. Many trails also have low lines of rock angled across the trail. These are called “water bars” & are periodically installed to slow & divert rain runoff to reduce the formation of gullies.

## HOW TO READ A TRAIL SIGN

Small (approx. 12”) black metal signs mark the intersections of the trails. The UPPERCASE name at the top of the sign should be the trail on which the sign is located. The name & distance to the next junction is usually shown below.

## GENERAL INFORMATION & PARK REGULATIONS

Hikers must remain on trails at all times. NO OFF-TRAIL USE IS PERMITTED in areas below 4,500ft elevation. Hiking groups are limited to 18 people. Larger groups must be divided & remain separated.

The Cactus Forest drive is open to vehicles from dawn to dusk. Hiking at night is allowed but vehicles may not be parked anywhere on interior roads, beyond the park gate at Old Spanish Trail. *Outlying trailheads are open 24 hours.*

Pets must be on a leash at all times. Pets are not allowed on trails, except for the paved Desert Ecology Trail. Pets may be walked along the roads & are allowed in the picnic grounds. The dirt Mica View road is a great place to walk your pet as they are less likely to get into cacti or encounter wildlife.

## HIKING SAFETY

### PLAN YOUR TRIP -

Always tell someone where you are going & when you will return. Stick with your itinerary, & let them know when you have safely returned.

### HIKE EARLY -

In summer, it can be very hot & dry. Plan to do your hiking in the early morning when it is cooler. During the hotter summer months, make sure to be back to the trailhead by 10am. As well, if the forecast estimates temperatures over 110 °F, abort your hiking plans for the day. Hiking when it is hot can be dangerous, even deadly!

### CARRY PLENTY OF WATER -

Water is available only at the visitor center. Open water sources in the park are very limited and not safe to drink. Treat all open water before drinking to avoid illness. One gallon of water per person, per day is the absolute minimum that should be carried. However, studies suggest that one should consume 1 liter of water PER HOUR PER PERSON while hiking in the heat. WHEN THE WATER IS HALF GONE, TURN AROUND. DO NOT RATION YOUR WATER...A smart tip is to drink some type of electrolyte beverage while hiking. Excess loss of electrolytes can lead to health risks such as heat exhaustion, hypotension, etc.

### DRESS PROPERLY -

Good closed-toed hiking shoes, loose fitting natural-fiber clothing, a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses, & sunscreen are a must for the desert climate. Desert temperatures can reach over 90 °F, & drop below 50 °F in one day. Summer temperatures can reach 125 °F in some locations.

### WATCH THE WEATHER -

Watch, or listen, frequently to weather reports on a radio or a cell phone app. Avoid deep canyons & dry river beds during stormy weather. If heavy rains occur, move to high ground immediately. Flash floods can be caused by heavy rain - it may not be raining where you are, but water can come down the canyon or river bed in a hurry! Also, do not hike on top of exposed peaks or ridges during a storm.

### DEFENSIVE PLANT LIFE -

Most plants are armed with spines or thorns. Stay on the trail, & watch where you are going. Cholla cacti are known for their spines that easily stick to any animal or person who brushes against them. The best tool for cholla removal is a regular pocket comb; which can be used to get between the cholla & you, & flick it away from the body.

### BE AWARE OF ANIMALS -

Be aware of rattlesnakes. NEVER PLACE YOUR HANDS OR FEET WHERE YOU CANNOT SEE THEM. If a rattlesnake is encountered, give it space & do not attempt to catch, move, or touch it at all. Be aware of bees going into and out of a cavity in a saguaro, tree, or other nook - honeybees in the Sonoran Desert are “Africanized” & will defend their hives aggressively. If a bee should begin “bumping” you, that is a sign you are too close to a hive. Be aware of any animal that is not behaving in a normal manner. No healthy animal will approach you. Do not interact with any animal that appears injured, sick, or otherwise “not normal.”











## GENERAL TRAIL INFORMATION

All listed distances and times reflect the total round-trip trail length.

Mileages between trail junctions are shown on this map.

Loop trails can of course be traveled in the opposite direction than described here.

Distance	and	Elevation change
1 - 2.5 miles		< 300ft = 
2.5 - 5 miles		300 - 1,000ft =  
5+ miles		> 1,000ft =   

## EASY NATURE TRAILS

### DESERT ECOLOGY TRAIL

0.25mi / 0.4km - Flat - 20 minutes

An easy stroll through the desert beside Javelina Wash. Signs along the way introduce you to the residents of the Sonoran Desert “neighborhood.” The trail is wheelchair accessible and open to leashed pets.

### FREEMAN HOMESTEAD TRAIL

0.9mi / 1.5km - 100ft / 30m - 1 hour

Wander down this path to the site of an old homestead, a grove of large Saguaros, and a cool desert wash. Signs along the way will take you deeper into the meaning of this “home in the desert.” The signs feature special exploration activities for youngsters.

## BIKING / HIKING TRAILS

### CACTUS FOREST (Inside Loop Drive)

5mi / 8km - 150ft / 46m - 2 1/2 hours

The portion of this trail within the loop drive passes the remains of two lime kilns used in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the site of an early ranger station. Mountain biking includes some sandy and single-track areas. Start at North or South Cactus Forest trailheads.

### HOPE CAMP TRAIL

6.6mi / 10.6km - 300ft / 92m - 2 1/2 to 3 hours

See the less-visited side of the park on this old ranch road. Two old cowboy camps are marked by windmill ruins. Mountain cyclists can continue south on the Arizona trail to Colossal Cave Mountain Park and beyond. Start at Loma Alta trailhead.

## ACCESSIBLE TRAILS

### DESERT ECOLOGY TRAIL

0.25mi / 0.4km - flat - 20 minutes

see “EASY NATURE TRAILS” above

### MICA VIEW TRAIL (NORTH)

1.5mi / 2.4km - flat - 1 hour

The section of trail from Mica View Picnic Area to the Broadway trailhead has been hard-surfaced with a mixture that is suitable for wheelchairs. Some users may need assistance getting to the trail surface from the gravel parking area if accessible spaces are in use.

## TRAILS FOR PETS

### DESERT ECOLOGY TRAIL

0.25mi / 0.4km - Flat - 20 minutes

see “EASY NATURE TRAILS” above

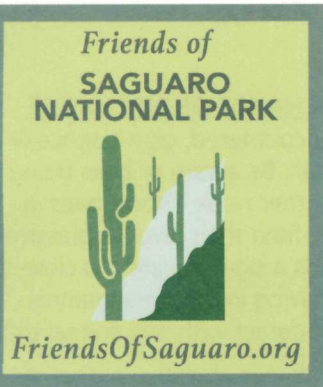
### THE ONLY TRAIL OPEN TO PETS

Another good pet walk:

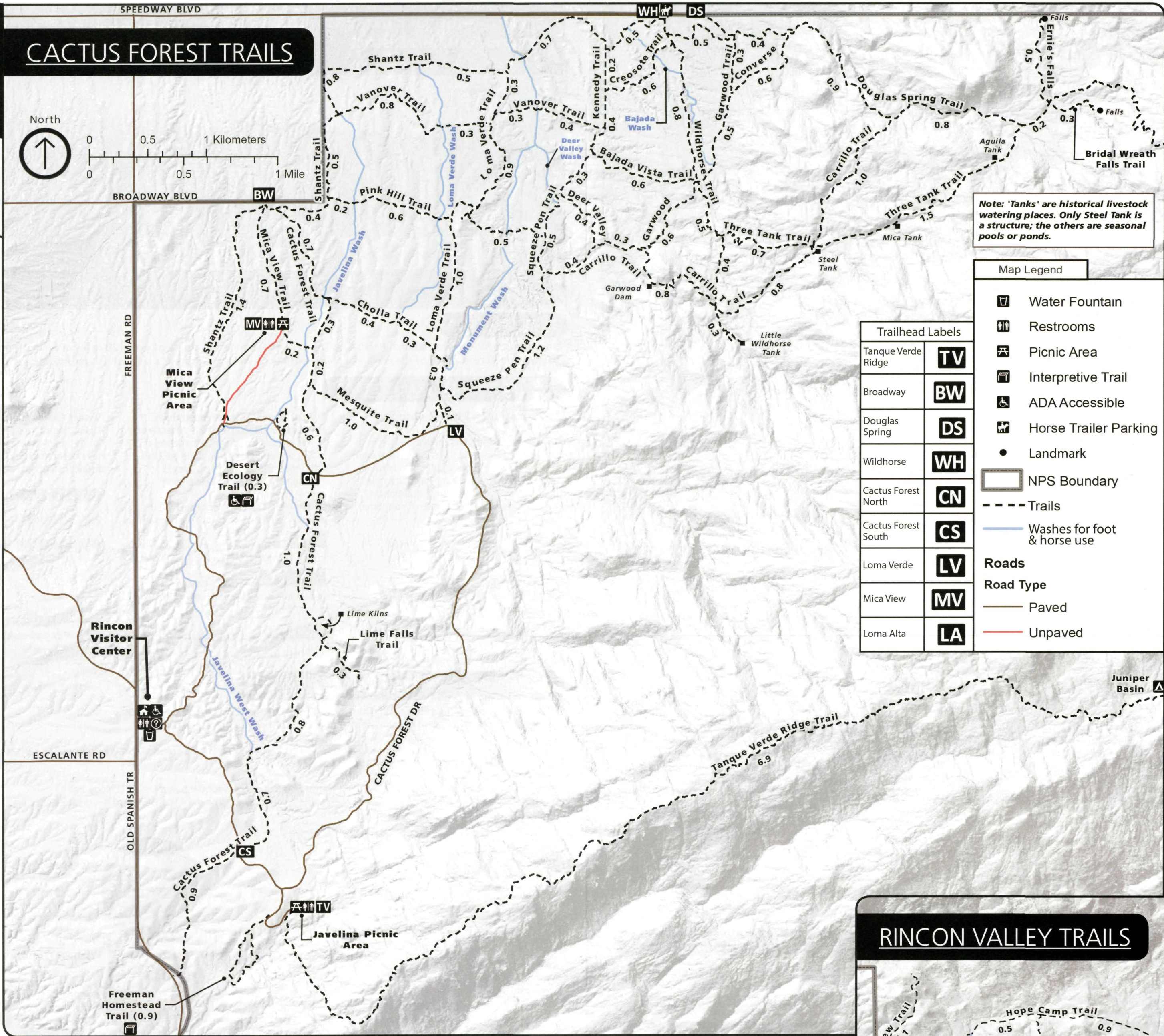
### MICA VIEW PICNIC AREA ROAD

1mi / 1.6km - flat - 1/2 hour

Unpaved and highly used, this is almost like a trail. One mile round trip, out and back. Pets welcome on Cactus Forest Loop Road and in picnic areas too. Always on a leash no more than 6 feet long. Dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities are allowed to go wherever their owner goes.



This Hiking Guide was generously provided by our official fundraising partner, Friends of Saguaro National Park



## SCENIC LOOP ROUTES IN THE CACTUS FOREST

**NOTE:** These routes are NOT marked as loops. You must follow signs and descriptions of the route as described here.

### MICA VIEW/CACTUS FOREST

2mi / 3.2km - Flat - Hour

Begin at the Mica View picnic area and head north on the graded Mica View trail. Look for young saguaros under nurse trees and Gila woodpeckers, cactus wrens, and curve-billed thrashers nesting. At the Broadway trailhead, turn right on Shantz trail, then a quick right on Cactus Forest trail heading south. Enjoy the views of Mica Mountain and Tanque Verde Peak. Turn right on Mica View trail to return to your starting point.

### LOMA VERDE/PINK HILL/SQUEEZE PEN

3.8mi / 6km - 70ft / 20m - 2 hours

Start at the Loma Verde trailhead. Take the Loma Verde trail north, past two wash crossings and the site of Loma Verde Mine. Pink Hill trail will join from the left. At the next junction, bear right to stay on Pink Hill trail. A short spur trail climbs the hill for a fine overlook of the Cactus Forest. Continue on Pink Hill trail to Squeeze Pen trail and turn right (the trail name is from cowboy days). After 1.4mi / 2.3km, rejoin Loma Verde trail and turn left back to your starting point.

### WILDHORSE/GARWOOD/CARRILLO/DEER VALLEY/SHANTZ

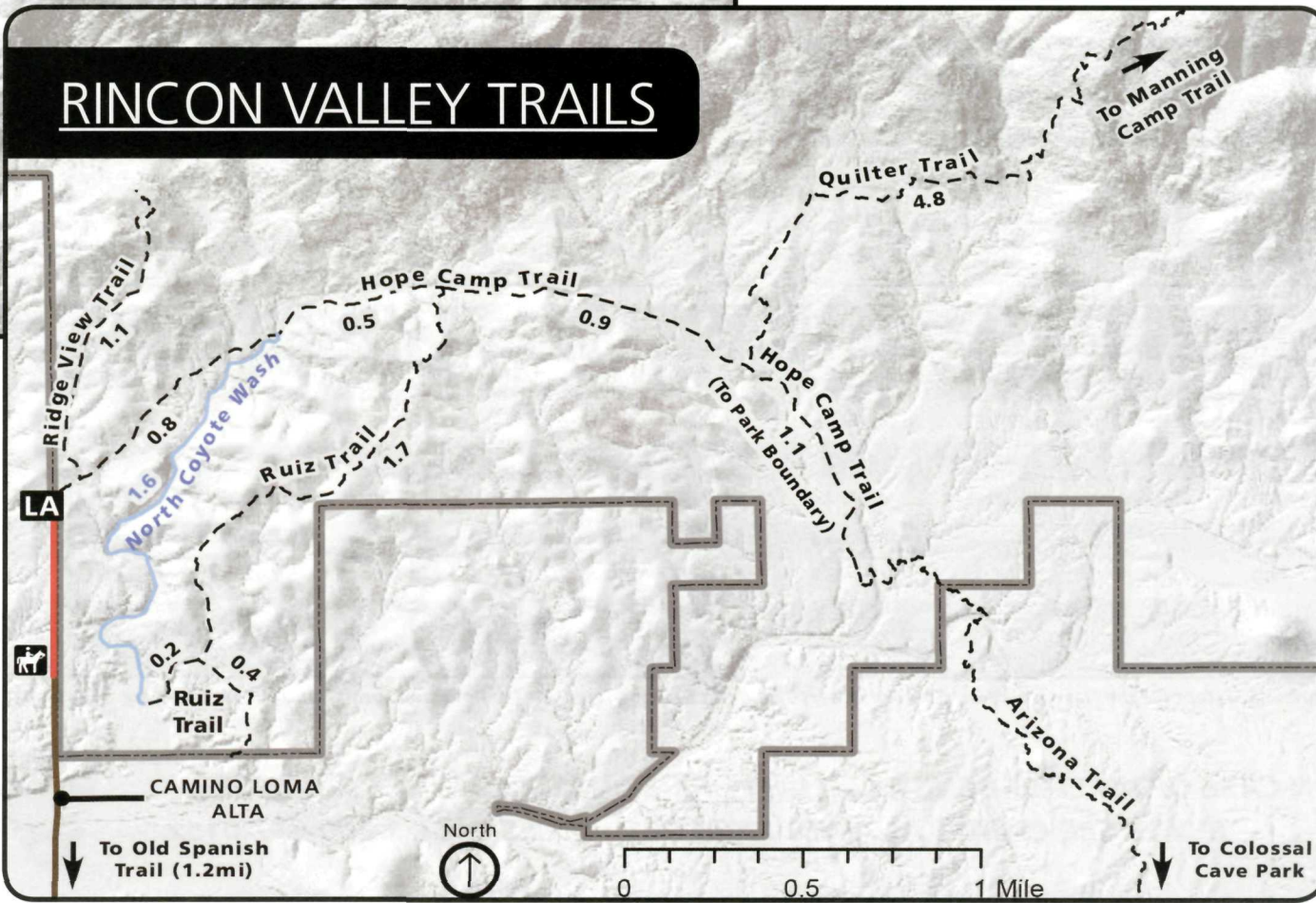
4mi / 6.4km - 200ft / 61m - 3 hours

From the Wildhorse trailhead, proceed south on Wildhorse trail. Riding has a long tradition in this area, even before the park was established. At 0.9mi / 1.4km, you'll reach a triple junction - bear right (south) on Garwood trail. Unusual saguaros abound in this area. At the Carrillo trail turn right - sometimes there'll be water running in the wash nearby! Walk downhill to Deer Valley trail, follow Deer Valley to Squeeze Pen trail bearing left. Take the next right down Deer Valley Wash. Notice the deep-rooted mesquite trees along the banks. Continue down the wash for 0.9mi / 1.4km, then turn right on the Shantz trail. Your starting point is 1 mile east on Shantz trail.

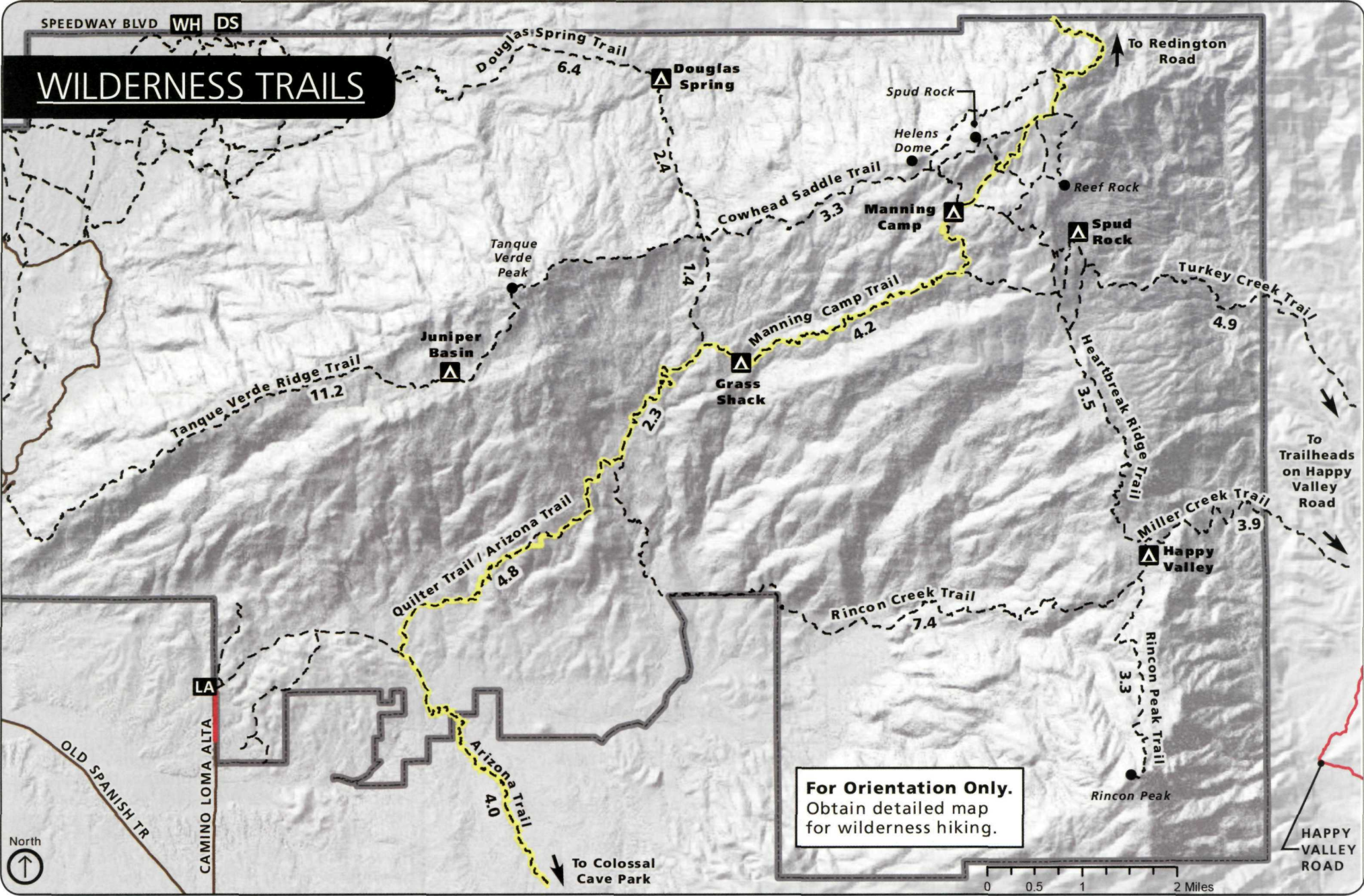
### DOUGLAS SPRING/GARWOOD/CARRILLO

5.8mi / 9.3km - 730ft / 225m - 4 hours

From the Douglas Spring trailhead, walk to the Garwood trail (first right). Follow this trail to its end at Carrillo trail. Bear left (uphill) on Carrillo trail and pass the site of Garwood's weekend ranch. The trail continues through lands once part of the Carrillo family cattle grazing leases, climbing to the Steel Tank and Rock Spring (both dry in 2018). Look carefully for the continuation of the Carrillo trail on the north side of the wash, opposite the tank. Continue on the Carrillo trail to Douglas Spring trail. Turn left (downhill) on a series of rock stairways and proceed 1.6mi/2.6km to your starting point.







BACKCOUNTRY DESTINATIONS

**TANQUE VERDE RIDGE & PEAK**  
18mi / 29km - 4000ft / 1220m  
- recommended two-day trip

Tanque Verde Ridge trail (trailhead at the Javelina Picnic Area) is the nearest backcountry trail to the park visitor center. A 1mi / 1.6km, 500ft / 150m (one way) climb takes you to the ridgeline. From there the trail climbs, exposed to the sun with hundred-mile views, 5.9mi/9.5km, 2400ft/732m to Juniper Basin campground, and continues 1.8mi/2.9km, 1050ft/320m up to Tanque Verde Peak. Many people hike up to the camp for a night, then summit and return the next day.

**DOUGLAS SPRING/COWHEAD SADDLE/MANNING CAMP TRAILS TO MICA MOUNTAIN**  
26mi / 42km - 6000ft / 1830m  
- recommended 2-3 day trip

Conveniently located at the east end of Speedway Blvd, this is a favorite for locals and visitors alike. Bridal Wreath Falls is a good destination in both the summer & winter rainy seasons. It is a 2.8mi / 4.5km (one way) hike that rises 1000ft / 305m. Backpackers continue 4mi / 6.4km (one way) to Douglas Spring campground. Or, Manning Cabin & the summit of Mica Mountain can be reached after a minimum 13mi / 21km (one way) trek from the trailhead parking area.

**MILLER CREEK/RINCON CREEK & PEAK TRAIL**  
15.5mi / 25km - 4250ft / 1295m  
- recommended two-day trip

One of the park's most rugged backcountry excursions is the 7.7mi / 12.5km (one way) climb to the wide-open summit of Rincon Peak. Camping is available 4mi / 6.4km along the route at Happy Valley Saddle campground. It is highly recommended that this trip be done in two days as the trailhead is nearly 50 miles from the visitor center, the last 16 of which are on a rugged dirt road. The climb is also daunting, with the final rock scramble requiring hand-over-hand maneuvering.

CAMPING AT ANY OF THE SIX SITES IN THE SAGUARO EAST WILDERNESS AREA REQUIRES ADVANCE PLANNING AND A PERMIT. (FEE.) PERMITS CAN BE OBTAINED UP TO TWO MONTHS IN ADVANCE, BY MAIL, FAX, OR IN PERSON AND MUST BE OBTAINED BY NOON OF THE DAY OF DEPARTURE. VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT NPS.GOV/SAGU FOR MORE INFO. **PERMITS ARE NOT REQUIRED FOR DAY HIKING**

THE ARIZONA NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

- 16.8mi / 27km (oneway, through the park)
- 5600ft / 1700m (one way)
- recommended overnight trip

This 800-mile / 1290 kilometer trail begins at the Mexican border and ends at the Utah state line. On the way it passes through National Forest lands, Wilderness areas, and two of Arizona's three National Parks. The Rincon Mountain passage enters Saguaro at a crossing of Rincon Creek and passes the Hope Camp historic site. Grass Shack campground is located 8.4mi / 13.5km up the trail; Manning Camp campground is 4.6mi / 7.4km beyond that. Both areas have a water source some of the year, with Manning (and nearby Devil's Bathtub) the most reliable backcountry water sources. Before leaving the park by way of Italian spring (seasonal), the trail reaches the wooded summit of Mica Mountain at 8666ft / 2641m - the highest point in Saguaro National Park.

*Note: You can bicycle TO the park on the AZ NST but NOT THROUGH the park, as bicycles are prohibited by Congress in legally designated Wilderness Areas.*

General Weather Information

Average Maximum and Minimum Monthly Temperature

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Max	64° F	68° F	72° F	81° F	89° F	99° F	98° F	97° F	94° F	84° F	73° F	65° F
Min	38° F	40° F	44° F	50° F	57° F	67° F	74° F	72° F	67° F	57° F	45° F	39° F

Sunrise and Sunset Times for Tucson, AZ (Mountain Standard Time, GMT-7)

	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
1st	7:25/5:30	7:17/5:57	6:51/6:21	6:12/6:43	5:38/7:04	5:18/7:25	5:21/7:34	5:39/7:21	5:59/6:49	6:18/6:10	6:41/5:35	7:07/5:19
5th	7:25/5:33	7:14/6:00	6:46/6:24	6:07/6:46	5:35/7:07	5:17/7:27	5:23/7:34	5:42/7:18	6:01/6:44	6:20/6:05	6:44/5:31	7:10/5:19
10th	7:25/5:37	7:10/6:05	6:40/6:28	6:02/6:48	5:30/7:10	5:17/7:29	5:25/7:33	5:45/7:13	6:05/6:37	6:24/5:58	6:48/5:28	7:14/5:19
15th	7:25/5:41	7:06/6:09	6:34/6:31	5:55/6:53	5:26/7:14	5:17/7:31	5:28/7:31	5:48/7:08	6:08/6:31	6:27/5:52	6:53/5:24	7:17/5:21
20th	7:23/5:46	7:01/6:13	6:27/6:35	5:49/6:56	5:23/7:17	5:18/7:33	5:31/7:29	5:51/7:03	6:11/6:24	6:31/5:47	6:57/5:22	7:20/5:23
25th	7:21/5:50	6:55/6:18	6:21/6:38	5:40/7:00	5:21/7:21	5:19/7:34	5:34/7:26	5:55/6:57	6:14/6:17	6:35/5:41	7:02/5:20	7:22/5:25
30th	7:10/5:55		6:14/6:42	5:39/7:03	5:19/7:24	5:21/7:34	5:38/7:23	5:58/6:51	6:17/6:11	6:39/5:36	7:06/5:19	7:24/5:28

Arizona, except for the Navajo Nation, does not observe Daylight Savings Time. Please note that sunrise and sunset times are approximate and will vary slightly from year to year.

IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY, CALL 911 FIRST; THEN CONTACT A RANGER.  
IF YOU SEE CRIMES AGAINST PARK RESOURCES CALL 1-800-637-9152.



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

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