

Mogollon Rim Trail 2021

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Dead Horse

MRT 2021 Day 1, April 5, Monday

- Start Cottonwood Connector mile 0 at historic jail, S1A 0
- End S1A 8.5
- Miles walked: 8.5

Cairn and I had an appointment in Tuscon this morning to help Dottor, and then we drove up to Cottonwood AZ and she dropped me off in the Old Town area at 2PM.



So why am I here? Long story long, last year on the Arizona Trail, just past Pine, I was hiking for several miles along the base of the Mogollon Rim, and really enjoyed it. The Mogollon Rim is an escarpment (meaning long cliff) that marks the edge of the Colorado Plateau in Northern Arizona, and runs for a couple of hundred miles or so.

When I learned that Blisterfree, the creator of the Grand Enchantment Trail and Northern New Mexico Loop, was working on a Mogollon Rim Trail, stitching together existing trails and roads into a 500 mile route, and that it would be released to the hiking public soon, I asked for an early preview, and so here I am.



The Jail Trail starts from the historic jail in Old Town and winds through Fremont cottonwoods in the Verde River riparian area. Across a highway bridge is Dead Horse Ranch State Park, and a network of trails.



A detour to Tuzigoot National Monument to visit pueblo ruin from the 1300s is well worth a detour.



After a couple of miles the route enters national forest and gradually climbs a series of mountain bike trails and dirt roads to some heights overlooking Cottonwood, where I make my first camp.

Sedonaland

MRT 2021 Day 3, April 7, Wednesday

- Start S1 mile 17
- End S1 mile 48.1
- Miles walked: 31.1

Winter Cabin Trail, brushy in places, takes me up out of Sycamore Canyon, and a few forest roads lead to Secret Mountain and Loy Canyon Trail, which descends steeply at first, and then provides an easier downhill grade that seems to go on for ages.

We are in the land of red sandstone.



At section mile 29.9 Red Rock camping restrictions are in effect, and the next place to camp is at mile 48.1, and I enter the restricted zone at 1PM. It is certainly too early to stop for the day, so the plan is to hike on for a thirty miler day with a night hike the last few miles.

Many grand rock formations are on proud display, which seems to inspire tourists to rent noisy ATVs.



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The MRT goes down a wash to avoid the motorists, but there is no escaping the din of helicopter tours. The wash was hard to walk in because of overhanging cats-claw, but meandering parallel game trails were easier to follow. The route makes several cross-country segments to avoid dusty dirt roads, and later followed some mountain bike trails.

One dirt tank I hoped to get water from was dried up, and a residential area that might have had a duck pond was posted “No Trespassing”, so I did not risk it. Later, after dark as I continued hiking in cooler temperatures, I did find a rock pool of water in a dry creek bed, as documented as likely in my hiking guide, so all is right with the world. I reach Brins Mesa at 9PM, and cowboy camp, not bothering to put up a tent.

At midnight, and later at dawn, nearby coyotes call out, and echoes from sandstone cliffs make an eerie sustained reverb.

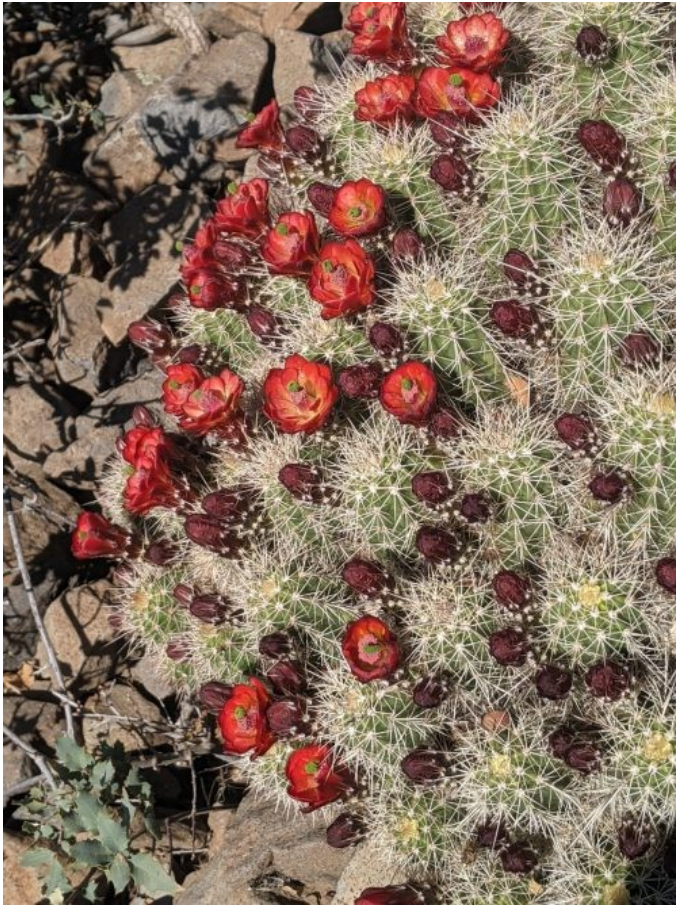
Long Way Around

MRT 2021 Day 5, April 9, Friday

- Start S2 mile 7.9
- End S2 25
- Miles walked: 17.1

After a short walk on top, the route plunges down, just before we get to Woods Canyon, which makes a deep cut into the Rim. We are going to bypass the canyon by going all the way down to “ground level”, then going back up on the other side, instead of walking around the canyon cut. The trail guide suggests this choice will be made clear soon, but the wisdom is not yet apparent while I am struggling on the trail.





So down Hot Loop Trail, and along Horse Mesa, and down Woods Canyon Trail, and at the bottom I stop at the USFS Visitors Center, now closed to visitors for Covid, on the highway south of Sedona, and stock up on water, because the next section can be dry.



The route back up is along a faint old ranchers trail, and I lose it part way up. Back on the Rim, the route joins Chavez Trail, remains of wagon tracks, a trade route during pioneer days.

Wet Beaver

MRT 2021 Day 6, April 10, Saturday

- Start S2 mile 25
- End S2 mile 49.1
- Miles walked: 24.1

A final view of Woods Canyon just bypassed shows how far it has cut into the Rim, and how far to hike around the cut.



After finishing the old wagon road and passing I17, the morning stays on forest roads on grassy land with scattered lava rock and widely spaced junipers. The trail crosses Yarick Canyon, shallow and not a difficult traverse. Out of several stock tanks along the route during the day, Mullican Place Tank stands out, more of a nature area than a tank, with shade trees, ducks, frogs, and shaped more like a natural lake. This is what all tanks should aspire to when they grow up.



In the afternoon the trail provides a special treat. Descending down well-constructed Bell Trail down a deep canyon, we cross always-flowing Wet Beaver Creek at a popular swimming hole, and plenty of people are out to enjoy the water.



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After several days on the trail, my clothes are a bit fragrant, so I stop for a soak.



Out of the canyon, the trail resumes on the Rim among grass, juniper, and tanks, and a dozen elk are grazing on grass on the edge of the last tank near sunset.



Finished audiobook [The Adventures of Sally](#), by P.G. Wodehouse.

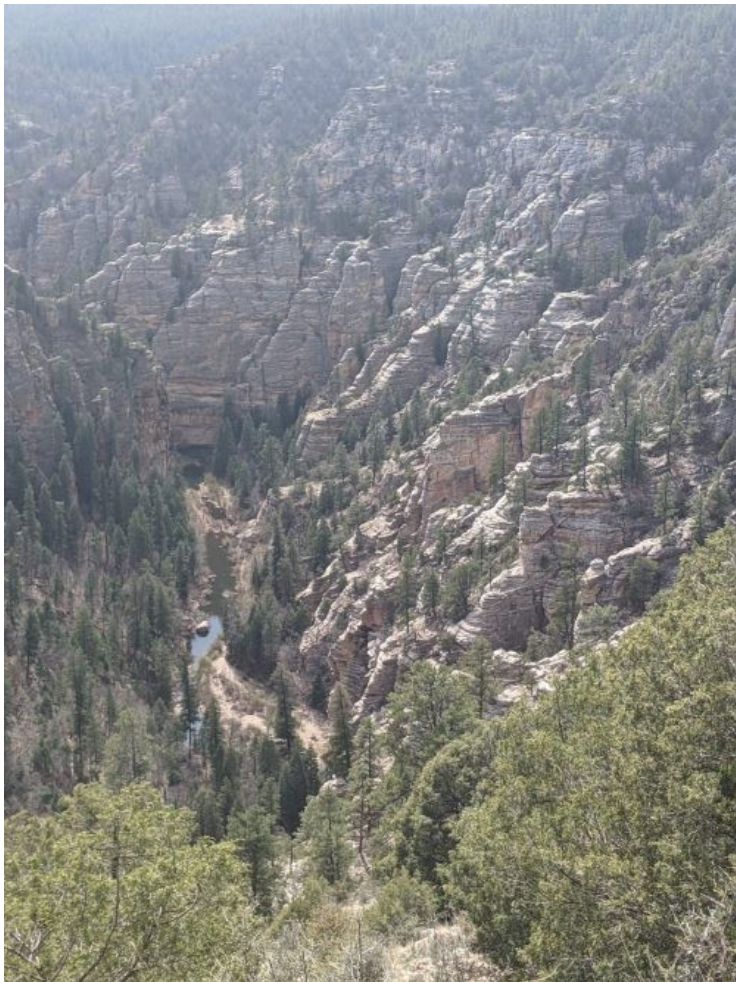
West Clear Creek Canyon

MRT 2021 Day 7, April 11, Sunday

- Start S2 mile 49.1
- End S2 mile 73.1
- Miles walked: 24

The morning resumes on rocky Forest Service roads through grass and thin juniper forest. From the map, we are a few miles north of the Mogollon Rim, running in a jagged east-west direction. That suggests we are about to descend into another deep canyon, and are going far enough towards the start of the canyon to make that practical.

The descent down Tramway Trail into West Clear Creek Canyon is quite steep and includes a lot of high steps on sandstone boulders. I suspect the trail would be a challenge for the general public, but the canyon is known as a popular swimming spot in summer months.



At the bottom is a creek that connects large pools that sometimes extends to both sandstone canyon walls. Dozens of wet-foot crossings are a series of puzzles to be solved: do I find a route through a pool that is not too deep, or scramble on top of boulders, or push through reeds and brambles on the other side and cross at the creek?







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The climb out of the canyon is a vertical scramble on boulders, not so carefully constructed as the way down. After walking along a ridge and going down a hillside burn area, camp is in a little narrow canyon.

Town tomorrow.

Finished audiobook [The Prince and Betty](#), by P.G. Wodehouse.

Passed Pine

MRT 2021 Day 8, April 12, Monday

- Start S2 mile 73.1 of 89.0
- End S3 mile 2.5
- Miles walked: S2 15.9 + town 3.0 + S3 2.5 = 21.4

From last night's camp is now all ponderosa forest, tall and shady. More dirt roads finally lead to Pine Canyon Trail, which descends the Rim on well-constructed trail down Pine Canyon, where today's destination town of Pine is located.



The mind boggles at the number of person-hours required to build such a length of trail of this quality all the way to the outskirts of town. Going down in pine forest is eerily quiet, only interrupted with an occasional woodpecker tap-tap.

I meet an MRT hiker, John W, who was taking a break with cell signal.



He was surprised to see another person hiking the MRT this year. I had been seeing his name of trail sign-in logs, so knew he was a half-day ahead for days. And I had been seeing his footprints with distinctive horizontal heel ridges (New Balance) for many miles. He did not intend to stay a night in town, just get a supply box and perhaps a meal.

I passed on. My hope was to get a cabin for a night and take a break. My memories of the town from an AZT hike were good ones. So I zoom down the trail, hoping to arrive in early afternoon, and periodically stop to text or call for a cabin reservation.

It was not to be. Calls went to voicemail, texts went unanswered. Going into town, I stopped at a brewery that used to rent a cabin to hikers, and learned it is now used by employees. No motels are close by, and I will not settle for a tent site. So after getting food supplies at the grocery and stopping outside the closed library for wifi and to recharge, I get back on trail late in the day.

The MRT joins the AZT out of Pine to follow the Highline Trail for several miles. We are hiking along the base of the Rim.



I stop early at a tent site with a good view.

Highline Detour

MRT 2021 Day 10, April 14, Wednesday

- Start S3 mile 27.6
- End S3 mile 53.1
- Miles walked: 25.5

Our route stays on the Highline Trail all day. Still located in the old burn area, the pathway has not been redone to make it friendly to mountain bikers and to prevent erosion problems.

At mid-morning the route goes over slickrock, horizontal gently rounded sandstone rock formations.



By mid-day we are past the burn area and back in ponderosa and mixed conifer forest, welcome for shade. Promontory Butte sticks out from the Rim, and the route needs to make a 10 mile detour to the south and back to get around it, which is how I spent the rest of my day.



The trail has been reconstructed in this section, now that we are past the burn, and I meet several mountain bikers and day hikers today.

Forest Lakes

MRT 2021 Day 11, April 15, Thursday

- Start S3 mile 53.1
- End S3 mile 68.6
- Miles walked: 15.5

After quickly leaving the Highline Trail, the Military Sinkhole Trail (why is it named that?) leads up to the Mogollon Rim. Up on top is cold and windy in early morning. The Lakes Vista Trail follows along the edge, giving vistas of rolling hills of ponderosa pine forest.



The route eventually leaves the edge and goes along Willow Springs Lake.



Hiking to the spillway of the reservoir and crossing over, the trail leaves the lake and passes a series of small ponds, and heads eastward through manually thinned ponderosa forest. A herd of wild horses watch me go past.



Arriving at the small resort town of Forest Lakes, I make my way to the general store, which also houses the post office, and pick up my supply box. I had walked rapidly all morning to get here before the 1PM post office closing time. Many businesses in this town reopen in mid-April, as most of the vacation homes in the community are unoccupied for winter. The general store was reopening today, under excited new owners. The post office just relocated today in the general store, from its winter quarters in another building. Across the street, I inquire at the RV park if they have a cabin for rent. They were also preparing to reopen, and were not planning to have the cabin ready for a couple of days, but they took pity on this poor hiker and did a quick clean of the rooms so I could stay the night.



After a soaking bath and using their coin-op laundry machines, I feel renewed.

General Crook

MRT 2021 Day 13, April 17, Saturday

- Start S4 mile 24.1
- End S4 mile 51.2
- Miles walked: 27.1

The route here is on the General Cook Trail (General George Crook National Recreation Trail), though it is on dirt road for a good portion of its length. (Remind me to look up who General Crook is.) It goes towards Show Low, and was probably designed with water sources in mind, it is a reasonably choice for the MRT. The trail here is marked with metal chevrons nailed to trees.



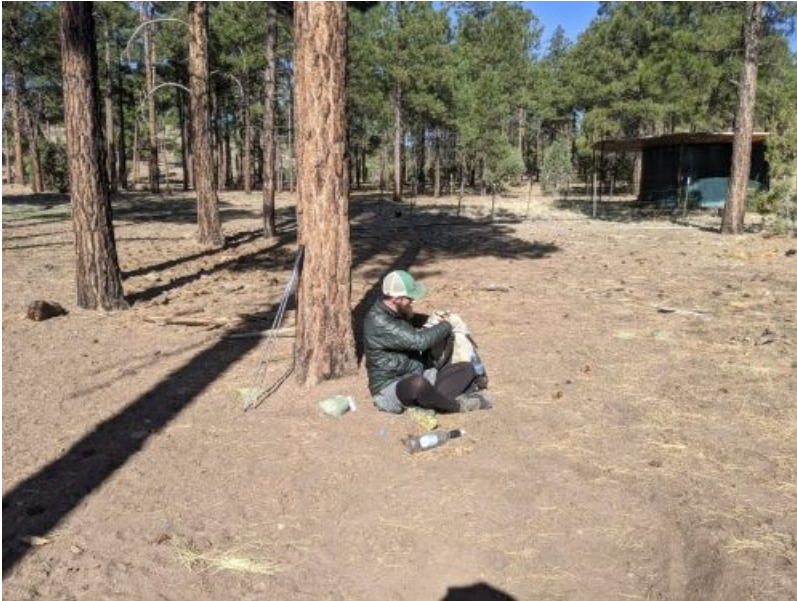
Water sources are getting less reliable, and further apart, in this section. One interesting wildlife waterer used a concrete rain catch basin to guide water to a lower storage tank, with steps for wildlife.



Wild horses still can be found grazing along the route, at least for the first half of the day.



I see John W again! He stopped a few hours to hang around with a large group of AZT hikers in Pine, so I had been ahead of him a little.



We pass each other several times today.

The General Crook could improve trail marking at times, especially in old burns and at road intersections. The route does go south through Cottonwood Wash, a pleasant flat shallow canyon with grass and scattered trees.



Toward the end of the day the route, now on trail, becomes less flat, and passes up and down several ridges. The route here, the General Cook Connector, has been aggressively signed by a local trail group out of Show Low.

Lookout Show Low

MRT 2021 Day 14, April 18, Sunday

- Start S4 mile 51.2 of 77.7
- End S5 mile 1.5, just past gate on fed land
- Miles walked: 28

The town of Show Low is close, and I need to get some more food to get to the next town. Can I get to town soon enough to do quick shopping, find wifi, and then get out again onto Forest Service land where I am allowed to camp? It will be close. Walking fast today...

Quickly finishing General Crook Trail, the route goes along Juniper Ridge Trail, marked the same way on bits of old road and one-track, often no visible tread.



Gaining the ridge, a locked fire lookout tower is a good start to the day.





Clouds have been threatening, but clear at the tower, but gather again. One brief shower requires the rain jacket to be deployed.

From Lookout Connector Trail, the route goes to Los Caballos Trail, then to Chihuahua Pine Connector Trail, to Buena Vista Loop Trail. A new section of Buena is built in swirly mountain bike trail style, and as a treat, goes to the Mogollon Rim, with ponderosa below.



We only get a brief visit to the Rim, as the rest is on tribal land in this area, the Fort Apache Reservation.

Finally reaching pavement, an ice storm lasts for several minutes. Arriving at the big-box section of Show Low, I avoid a giant supermarket and opt for a Walgreens, since I only need a few items to last to the next town. A Lowes home store donates wifi, with my thanks. No time to stop for town food, nor am I craving any, since the last town was recent. On to Show Low Lake.



Getting one foot onto federal land, I make camp at dusk.

Los Burros

MRT 2021 Day 15, April 19, Monday

- Start S5 mile 1.5, just past gate
- End S5 mile 26 + 0.4 to campground
- Miles walked: 24.5

The MRT stays on the extensive White Mountain Trailsystem today, mostly on built single-track paths, Expect a series of trail names, that you do not need to pay much attention to, but help me remember what I hiked.

After a brief cross-country zig-zag, the route goes on Timber Mesa Trail on a ridge to the east of Show Low, with some views.



A large marsh area is to the east of town, unusual for AZ. On this trail I meet a member of TRACKS, the organization who builds and maintains the White Mountain Trailsystem.

Osprey Connector crosses the first real creek in a while. Then on to Ice Cave Trail, leading to a lava tube, a cave formation that traps cold air.



A timber harvesting operation is nearby.



Country Club Trail is unusually wide built trail, going through ponderosa forest on flat terrain, leading to Chipmunk Connector, and more signs of recent harvesting.



Then a surprise late in the day.



Knowing the Forest Service, if access were prohibited, they would tell you with bold signs, so I proceed. A few miles of the area had burned pine needles to reduce fire load, but even small trees were not scorched by the level of fire. Similar to burning weeds at home.



I end the day at Los Burros Campground, near a piped spring and picnic tables. No one else is here.



Finished audiobook [The Lion's Skin](#), by Rafael Sabatini.

So High

MRT 2021 Day 16, April 20, Tuesday

- Start S5 mile 26 + 0.4 to campground
- End mile 54.0 along Railroad Grade Trail
- Miles walked: 28

Smoke from the recent controlled burn mixes with the morning sunlight.



Hiking along Los Burros Connector to an intersection, look what is waiting for me.



See, this sign is different from the last one. They may be doing a controlled burn right now. But luckily for me, the MRT chooses to take one of its many zig-zags here, and my route is along pleasant dirt road with no prohibitions.

Aspens start appearing among mixed conifer. They have not leafed out yet.



Very gradually over the morning the route climbs along dirt road. Eventually we get to an immense meadow, CC Flat, and hike along a good part of its perimeter. Seasonal ponds in the meadow provide frog croaks and duck calls.



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Turning up a jeep road into forest, the way goes along a boundary fence with native lands.



Checking the gps, I am at 9.5k feet. How did we get so high? Leaving the forest, downhill into another huge meadow area, the next adventure is an old railroad converted to trail, the Old Apache Railroad Grade Trail. The path is on railroad berm through more meadow/plain/grasslands.





A herd of elk, a hundred strong, see me walking the trail from a half-mile away, and one of them gets nervous, and they all jump a fence and hide in the treeline.

I make good time on this very straight and level rails-to-trail, with a fierce tailwind. Finally the route passes near a cluster of trees, and I make camp in a depression, the better to hide from wind. Current elevation is only 9.1k feet, and yes, the night will be a cold one.

Greer

MRT 2021 Day 17, April 21, Wednesday

- Start S5 54.0 of 58.6 along Railroad Grade Trail
- End S6 mile 14.0 along W fork Black River
- Miles walked: $4.6 + 2.2 \text{ Greer access} + 2.2 + 14.0 = 23.0$

My goal today is to resupply in Greer quickly, so I can hike out and get past the next high elevation adventure and down lower, for a warmer night.

Greer seems to be a cute little community of vacation homes and rental cabins. I get into town before the PO opens, so I go next door to the library and use wifi. My box at the PO is my last on the MRT. I am skipping the traditional resupply village of Blue, taking the Blue bypass option, but I need to carry more food.

I treat myself to a big breakfast.



The cute cafe has porch seating. The day is cold and windy, but outside dining spares other customers the hiker smell. Later I hike to the convenience store for snacks and to charge electronics, and am hiking out by 11AM, pretty swift for a town stop.

The trail out of town goes through a burn area with several downed trees, but not too bad to climb over.



Mount Baldy Wilderness is a small wilderness area. The summit of Baldy Peak, 11.4k, is on tribal lands. We are taking a trail without panoramic views, but we do get to enjoy thick mixed conifer forest mixed with frequent mountain meadows.



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Patches of snow are frequent, and the trail climbs up to 9.5k foot elevation. Water sources are abundant due to the snow melt.

Out of the wilderness, the route goes on some cross country adventures, and down some roads, to Thompson Trailhead. Going a short distance down along a river, I set up camp late. Tonight's elevation is 8.7k.

Black River

MRT 2021 Day 18, April 22, Thursday

- Start S6 mile 14.0 W Fork Black River
- End S6 mile 37.3, 4th ford of Black River
- Miles walked: 23

Continuing along the West Fork of the Black River in early morning, I see a side pool has iced over.



A fish barrier, a dam with overflow, was constructed here to protect the Apache Trout, a native species. Other trout that might hybridize with or prey on the this fish cannot jump the barrier.



Continuing down the little canyon, a burn area has affected the trees in the heights, but near the river was spared.



After fording the river once, I climb out of the canyon and get on Indian Spring Trail, a loop trail that swings north and provides the MRT with a couple of more town resupply options, then swings around to head towards the next adventure. The trail is in a burn area, and several blowdowns block trail, but many have already been cleared. Shipman Spring has unique troughs fashioned out of hollow logs.



The route heads south on road for several miles, starting at over 9k elevation in mixed conifer with aspen, down to 7.8k, back in ponderosa. After some cross country waypoints and a bit more road, the main event of the day is starting on the Black River, with dark volcanic rock on the canyon walls.



Fording the river is tricky because the rocks are so slippery. Wedging my feet between the boulders seems to work. After one of several fords of the day, the route goes way high up the canyon wall on barely visible primitive trail, with several blowdowns, and I lost the way several times, and gps does not help much on steep slopes. After the fourth ford, that is enough for today.

River to Wallow

MRT 2021 Day 19, April 23, Friday

- Start S6 mile 37.3, 4th ford of Black River
- End S6 mile 58.8, on Bear Wallow Trail
- Miles walked: 21.5

Continuing along Black River, the trail became much easier to follow, and places to ford were easy to see. Later, I pass a group of 5 campers, and they say the trail becomes fainter and harder to follow up ahead, which I find to be true, but still not too bad.







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After **28 more fords (!!)** I finally reach the bridge signaling the end of this 12 mile river passage in late morning.

After a roadwalk and cross-country exercise, the route enters the Bear Wallow Wilderness, and descends down Gobbler Point Trail several miles to Bear Wallow Creek, and Bear Wallow Trail follows the creek up for the rest of the day through wild rugged mixed conifer forest that largely escaped the Wallow Fire. I camp within earshot of the gentle murmuring of a mountain creek.



What is a wallow, anyway?

“bear wallow : a declivity or sink in the ground made or capable of having been made by bears“

Finished audiobook [Moments with Mark Twain](#), by Mark Twain.

Down Rim

MRT 2021 Day 20, April 24, Saturday

- Start S6 mile 58.8, on Bear Wallow Trail
- End S6 mile 76.8
- Miles walked: 18.0

The day starts with a brutal cross-country climb, dodging blow-downs and cat's-claw.

The trail guide says we are now on the Rim, but it feels different. The rock crown at the top is missing, and the top is not so flat to the north, more like a ridge.



I come across 5 men sitting with their backs against trees, all in camo gear, some with faces hidden by masks, all facing different directions, with guns on the ground in easy reach, completely motionless, not turning their heads to watch me. These are turkey hunters. I apologized for making noise, asked to take a photo for my journal, but they politely decline.





• The route goes down off the Rim along a narrow trail from 8.5k to 6.7k elevation, and I am finally warm again after days of cold temps.

The route now goes along the Highline Trail, different from the Highline of several days past. This is a primitive trail, not often maintained, frequently faint, often steep climbs and descents, just arrrrghhhh.

From the Highline we get views of the Rim above that does not exactly look like my Rim that I am used to.



Views to south definitely look like south of the Rim, descending into hot and arid lands.



The route crosses a road at a super nice trailhead and approach trail to Raspberry Creek, supposed to be tough going ahead. I cowboy camp after a long day.

Raspberry Creek, Blue River

MRT 2021 Day 21, April 25, Sunday

- Start S6 mile 76.8 Raspberry Primitive Area, 84.2 until alternate
- End S7 35 after resuming S7 30.5 after 8 mile alternate
- Miles walked: 19.9

Starting into Raspberry Creek is a narrow riparian zone in a narrow canyon.



Climbing up Raspberry Canyon, impressive views reward the ascent.



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Following Raspberry to where it joins with the Blue River, the main MRT route goes north, but I take the Blue River Alternate, that goes south along the river for about 8 miles. I ford the river dozens of times, but it is narrower than the Black River, without slippery rocks.



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An intact beaver dam shows chomp marks on some of the logs used to build the structure.



After joining back up with the MRT, and a cross-country exercise to remind me what trail I am on, the route goes through Little Blue Creek, a remarkable slot canyon, or “box”, splashing through ankle-deep water with high vertical sandstone walls.



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The minnows at my feet are busy playing minnow games. After a full mile of this slot canyon, the day is late and now the walls are tallest, so I need the night-time mode on my camera.



Finding a sandy bank near the creek, I cowboy camp, listening to water and frogs.

MRT Complete

MRT 2021 Day 22, April 26, Monday

- Start S7 mile 35.0, Little Blue Creek
- End S7 mile 48.9 MRT end, then 10 miles to just outside Alma
- Miles walked: 23.9

I camped at the joining of Hannah Springs Creek and Little Blue Creek, and could feel the warmer water in Hannah. I had planned to hike 0.4 miles to Hannah Hot Springs this morning for a soak, but the very first pool was way too deep for me. Oh well.



Continuing down, Little Blue joins the Blue River, which I had just been on yesterday. Going a ways south, our route diverts to the Baseline Trail, with a climb of 1.5k feet, ouch. Here is a parting view of the Blue from part way up.



After climbing, the trail goes along a contour of a ridge headed east, with views below.



Finally the route gets to the Arizona-New Mexico border at a simple unsigned gate next to a very welcome water source, Charlie Moore Spring and troughs. This is the official end of the Mogollon Rim Trail!



I continue along Sunflower Mesa as I had done on my [Grand Enchantment Trail thru-hike](#), but know I cannot get to Alma or Glenwood before dark. I camp on Forest Service land just outside Alma, hoping for a day off the trail in a very nice stone cabin in Glenwood tomorrow.

My crazy plan is to walk home, since the Grand Enchantment Trail goes past Alma, and also goes very near my home. If you only are interested in reading about the MRT, then stop here. Otherwise, let us continue up the trail together...

Mineral Creek

MRT/GET 2021 Day 23, April 27, Tuesday

- Start Alma 18090
- End Bursum Road 20055
- Miles walked: 13.5

I had planned to take a room and rest, but Cairn pointed out a mistake in my planning spreadsheet, so I actually have less days to complete my trip by a mid-May deadline to help Dottor with something. The store in Alma has enough for resupply, so I decide to spend a few hours here and continue on by noon.

The cafe and general store in Alma is popular this morning. USFS staff, hotshot crews, ranchers with trailers full of cattle and saddle horses, tourists, local retirees, and more stop by for breakfast, and lunch looks to be completely full as I depart.

Mineral Creek Road has an RV Park with a cool collection of ancient small tractors.



Mineral Creek Trail has enchanting rock formations at every turn.





A successful gold and silver mine was along here in 1880, and artifacts remain to puzzle over.





The upper portion of Mineral Creek Trail becomes vague, with flood debris and vegetation obscuring the way. Then a steep climb out of the canyon on Log Canyon Trail eventually leads to Bursum Road, a major graded forest road in the Gila.

Bursum and Bypass

MRT/GET 2021 Day 24, April 28, Wednesday

- Start Bursum Road 20055
- End 20320 on High Country Bypass, about to rejoin with main route
- Miles walked: 18.9 bypass + 6.2 = 25.1

My tent was sagging strangely in the middle of the night. Surely iI did not pitch the tent so poorly? Then I understood.



Walking further on Bursum Road, now at 9k elevation, it started to snow pellets and the clouds spread wide and low, as snow crunched beneath my shoes.



I was soon supposed to start climbing Mogollon Crest Trail, and go even higher. There will be no good views on the crest with these clouds, and the snow will be worse, and I heard a rumor of lots of blowdowns to scramble over in the cold and snow. But the map offered another opportunity, a High Country Bypass, about the same length, that would stay on Bursum longer and then join with West Fork Trail much earlier. That sounds better for today's conditions. And I get to explore someplace new in the Gila.

Bursum.Road offers views to the north, with many burn areas.



Snow stops, then starts again, repeating during the day. In late afternoon the snow is joined with rain. Light rain showers continue at night. The temperature stays low, even at lower altitudes, so walk fast to stay warm.

At Willow Creek Campground, just off Bursum Road, is a trailhead for West Fork, which starts off as good trail. Then in a burn area that worsened flooding, the trail is washed out for a good distance. Too late, I see a sign.



The trail gets good again, only to get washed out in a narrow canyon, slow going as you climb over blowdowns and boulders.



Finally the trail meets the West Fork of the Gila River, only to climb out of the river canyon, where the route is just about to rejoin with the main GET route.

Finished audiobook [The Snare](#), by Rafael Sabatini.

Diamond Creek

MRT/GET 2021 Day 26, April 30, Friday

- Start Upper Scorpion Campground, 21130
- End
- Miles walked: 13.8 + 3 resupply = 16.8

On the road walk down to Doc Campbell's for resupply, I met several CDT hikers. This is a little odd, since they are likely to hit the border with Colorado before June, a bad idea, meaning overwhelming snow suddenly at Cumbres Pass.

Doc's was not scheduled to open before noon, but they have a hiker area around the side with a picnic table and chairs, and a charging strip for our electronics. I met several hikers, but someone said there were 30 hikers at one time the day before!



One young woman, Lightwalker, was hiking with her three dogs, with the youngest resting on the top of her pack while she hiked. She started in January. She is resting here several days with her foot in a cast/brace, using crutches, to recover from a stress fracture of a metatarsal. Other hikers I met included Aden, Bison, Delta, PDF. One group of 3 was doing a podcast during the trip.

The staff at Doc's kindly got people their resupply boxes early before the store opened, and even let me inside briefly to get a few snacks before hitting the trail again, 10:30, pretty good for a "town" day.

On the roadwalk back I spot 5 javelinas climbing out of an arroyo.



At the Visitor's Center for the Gila Cliff Dwellings, I take the Middle Fork Trail, which is used by the CDT, and cross the river a few times. I know some people doing a trail project on the Middle Fork right now, but I do not have time to hike over and say "hi". After a short distance along Middle Fork, I divert over to White Rock, and then Adobo Springs. (I know these trail names do not mean anything to the reader, but I need to write them down to remember them, or at least to search for them later, since my friends that work on trails in the Gila name-drop a blizzard of trail names, and I want to know which ones they mention that I have hiked on.)



The land suddenly changes from riparian to arid when starting White Rock.



After one crossing of the East Fork of the Gila, the route joins Diamond Creek, a very twisty narrow deep creek cutting through grass meadow, with plenty of fish, sometimes lined with willow, that has carved a twisty narrow canyon over geologic time. At first one can hop over the creek, but it broadens a bit to require wet-foot fords about 80 times. I meet some fishermen camped nearby.





I hear a sort of quack and a splash, and see a beaver dam. The beaver must have seen me and dived into the water to shelter in its underwater lodge.



After several miles of Diamond, the route follows up a dry creek-bed of gravel, then climbs a ridge, a good place to camp.

Diamond Peak

MRT/GET 2021 Day 27, May 1, Saturday

- Start 22170 on ridge
- End 24060 north of Diamond Peak
- Miles walked: 24.2

Off the ridge, the route descends into Tom Moore Canyon, rather flat, averaging 400 feet across, walled in by low rolling hills on both sides, dry and with no visible drainage along most of its six mile length, grass and ponderosa.



Afterwards the route exits the Gila Wilderness and passes a landing strip and work center in the small gap between the Gila Wilderness and Aldo Leopold Wilderness.

The work center catches rainwater and saves into a cistern, and a faucet in the animal pens gives clear water.



It looks like they added a vault toilet, unlocked, fairly recently next to Me Own work center.

On Me Own Trail, the route stays flat among juniper and pine for a few miles.



A deep descent to Lower Diamond Creek shows a winding mountain creek, very different than the meadow creek yesterday. Today's creek runs to a trickle with scattered pools in a rugged untamed thick forest with many blowdowns.



Our trail climbs from the creek past jagged ridge crests.



Joining the CDT, which we will share for a day or two, a steep ascent to Diamond Peak gives some views.





Running out of sunlight, I get down as far in elevation as possible and shelter from the wind in the trees to camp.

CDT Alone

MRT/GET 2021 Day 28, May 2, Sunday

- Start 24060 north of Diamond Peak
- End 26050 on ridge
- Miles walked: 25.3

On the CDT in New Mexico, there are two alternate paths, that split off just after Silver City. The “official” trail, which we are on now, goes along the Black Range, and is higher altitude, has fewer water sources, and goes further eastward before heading west to join up with the alternate. The Gila River alternate goes through the Middle Fork of the Gila River, has an extra resupply point at Doc Campbell’s, and is vastly more popular among hikers, but is not the official route, because of the rare but non-zero chance of flooding. So when the GET briefly joined the CDT on the Middle Fork a few days ago we were on the alternate, but today we are on the official route. A few days ago we met several hikers at Doc’s, with tales of 30 coming through in one day. Today I see no one, and rarely even see footprints.

Down from Diamond Peak, the route stays along a ridge, gradually descending, with views.





Finally down, as the route approaches near Lookout Mountain, I am delighted to see a new section of trail that I actually worked on last fall with the CDT Coalition.



The trail gets on a low rounded ridge and stays on it for most of the day, pretty unusual that a ridge can be continuous that long. There are views in the distance of cinder cones and mountain ranges, too distant for this camera to capture.



I end the day still on the ridge, at 7.5k elevation, much better and warmer than the 9.5k of the previous night.

Finished audiobook [The Man With Two Left Feet](#), a short story collection by P.G. Wodehouse.

XC Day to Shipman

MRT/GET 2021 Day 30, May 4, Tuesday

- Start “seg27 detour water’, new bypass for Monticello Box
- End 28050 on Shipman Trail
- Miles walked: 23.8

What happens when you want to travel east, but all the ridges, canyons, and roads are oriented north-south? When you on the GET, you do a lot of cross-country (XC) navigating, going straight up one ridge and down into the drainage, several times in one day.

Starting out, my route does some road walk and then XC to rejoin the main GET route.



The rest of the morning is a series of XC along drainages and up and down ridges, separated by road sections. The route visits a few tanks, all dry, so there are no water sources until late in the day.

The biggest and most impressive XC was across Kelly Canyon. The route goes cross-country along an open ridge 2.5 miles just to find the one spot to cross with no cliffs on either side.



In the background of this photo is the San Mateo Mountains, where we are headed.

After plunging straight down the deep canyon and back up, heartbreak when we still have go XC past a few more ridges to get to Burma Road, and this road is known for its own canyon crossings.

Getting to Shipman Trail, entering the Apache Kid Wilderness in the Cibola National Forest, is of special interest to me. I plan to lead a backpacking trail project for NMVFO in the fall of this year on Shipman, and this GET section hike is partly to do recon on the trail.





Just a short distance on Shipman, I see some sawing and lopping opportunities, and some false trails to close, and some tread to clear. Tomorrow I will have a better idea.

Finished audiobook [Attack Surface](#), by Cory Doctorow.

Apache Kid

MRT/GET 2021 Day 31, May 5, Wednesday

- Start 28050 on Shipman Trail
- End 28280 Red Canyon, beyond Apache Kid Wilderness
- Miles walked: 18.3

Shipman Trail continues to climb, past Myers Spring, crossing talus, past the ridge and the Myers cabin ruin as the trail enters a mild burn area, and down to Nave Spring. All the time I am taking notes for a future trail project, noting a possible group campsite, counting blowdowns (80), and so forth.



Shipman Trail connects to Apache Kid Trail, the main and longest route in the Wilderness, extending even to the next Wilderness to the north, the Withington. Apache starts off in really good condition for a little over a mile, then runs into many blowdowns and trail erosion problems because of a burn, possibly multiple burns. I counted 360 blowdown in two miles, before finally giving up counting.

In addition to a project on Shipman, my trail group is planning another project on Apache Kid in the fall, a car camping trip. We will have plenty to do...





Blowdowns persist until mid-afternoon, when the trail goes beyond the burn.



Finally the trail exits the wilderness and goes into a peaceful small grassy canyon to end the day.

Finished audiobook short story [Force Multiplier](#), by Cory Doctorow:

Withington and Potato

MRT/GET 2021 Day 32, May 6, Thursday

- Start 28280 Red Canyon, beyond Apache Kid Wilderness
- End 30070 about to start Milligan Hills XC
- Miles walked: 25.0

Starting up Red Canyon, still on the Apache Kid Trail, the route uses switchbacks to gain 2k elevation up to Grassy Lookout with its fine 360 degree views, where the Apache Kid terminates.



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Following along Forest Road 138 going north and level for a few miles is no ordinary roadwalk. The road is at 9.5k elevation, often stays at the top of a ridge for fine views, and is just outside the Withington Wilderness to the east. No roads are allowed in a wilderness, but the Withington has this road just outside its boundary for most of its length.



Starting the Potato Canyon Trail, the upper switchbacks have been hit by erosion from a burn, and accumulating blowdowns.



Going as far along trail as possible, I drop down into drainage heavily affected by flooding from the burn. Eventually the drainage settles down to flat and gravel, with one big detour needed to avoid a steep pour-off.



I was doubtful that Potato Creek would be running and clean after the effects from flooding, but was pleasantly surprised.



After a few last miles walking in drainage on gravel, I spot the distinctive cliff formation that always signals to me that Potato Canyon is about to end.



After first dinner, I do a night-hike on road for five miles, just to get further into the next section.

Finished audiobook [A Man of Means](#), by P.G. Wodehouse and C.H. Bovill.

Finished audio short story [The Sign of the Broken Sword](#), by G.K. Chesterton.

Magdalena

MRT/GET 2021 Day 33, May 7, Friday

- Start 30070 about to start Milligan Hills XC
- End Magdalena, NM
- Miles walked: 28.2

The day begins in the Milligan Hills on the approach to the Magdalena Mountain Range, playing a curious cross-country game of a sequence of directions, half a mile east along a fence line, then go up an arroyo until finding old two-tracks, and so on, all with an implied aim of navigating around blocks of private land, state land, and BLM.



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Finally at mid-day comes the start of the Magdalena ascent, going along dirt roads and one long cross-country ascent to Mills Cabin, and the first water found since Potato Canyon yesterday. Then a final climb on Mills Canyon Trail to the ridge that links North Baldy and South Baldy.



I get to the ridge fairly late in the day, around 5PM, so finishing the ridge before dark looks improbable. Fortunately another option exists, an alternate route down using Hop Canyon Trail, five miles of easy downhill to Hop Canyon Road, and another few miles roadwalk to Kelly Road and Magdalena. The views are not as good, but good enough.



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• Also, I had inside information. The NMVFO [worked on Hop Canyon Trail](#) last year, and cleared it of all downed trees. So after Apache Kid and many of the of New Mexico trails on the GET, it was delicious to descend on 5 miles of good trail with only five new blowdowns that could not be pulled off the trail by one tired hiker.

On the roadwalk into town, no one wanted to offer me a ride, so I arrive in Madgalena after dark, around 9PM. Although the first hotel's office was closed, the next was open with good room rates. And Family Dollar was open to 10PM, unusual for a small town, so I was able to get resupply and dinner. After rinsing out trail clothes in the sink, I am now ready for the next adventure.

Polvadera and Home Again

MRT/GET 2021 Day 34, May 8, Saturday

- Start Magdalena, NM
- End Lemitar, NM and home
- Miles walked: 30.5

Starting early north from Magdalena is a bit of Cibola National Forest with hills, grass, and juniper.



Afterwards, the route will spend most of the day crossing a huge grassland plain to a small mountain range near the village of Polvadera along the Rio Grande.



The grassland is actually a complex mixture of grasses, bare dirt, wildflowers, small shrubs, and my namesake, sagebrush, not often found this far south.

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The route involves some roads, cross country, and arroyos to negotiate a checkerboard of private, state, and BLM sections. Approaching to the mountain ridge, I follow San Lorenzo Arroyo to the north side of the ridge to San Lorenzo Canyon, a slot canyon with fine rock formations.







Through the canyon, I follow the drainage down past I-25 to Polvadera, and then walk south to the next village, Lemitar, and am finally home!



Finished audiobook [Kidnapped](#), by Robert Louis Stevenson.