

# The Big Sky and Big Sky Ridge Trails

## The two trails diverges at the “T” 1.8 miles from the trailhead.

The **Big Sky Trail** in the **Hikers' Haven Area** has wide open views of the Montana and Wyoming big sky, the SW slope of Big Pryor Mountain, the Beartooth Mountains, and much of Wyoming. A 4-mile round trip (630 ft. elevation gain) to the rim of Bear Canyon and back provides great views of several forks of Bear Canyon. There are alternatives for extending the hike a little, or a lot farther, for more views. It is a 10 mile round trip (3,000 ft elevation gain) to the top of Red Pryor Mountain. Hike as far up as you want, then sit and enjoy the Pryors' wilderness solitude and expansive views.

[Download Printable Big Sky Trail Guide](#) at PryorMountains.org.

The trail begins from Horse Haven Road, 1.8 miles from Helt Road. (See Hikers' Haven [Driving Directions](#) at PryorMountains.org.) There is room to park in the flat area on the left just before the jackleg fence barrier. Behind the barrier a two-track trail winds down into and crosses a draw. This is the beginning of the trail. No motor vehicles or mountain bikes are allowed past the barrier.

*Left: Jackleg barrier at the Big Sky Trailhead.*

*(Motor vehicle and mountain bikes are not permitted.)*

*Right: Horse Haven Road continues northeast.*

**0.0 miles: Start hike.** (Starting elevation: 5,500 ft.) The track winds in a large “S” crossing the draw and around a low hill, then heads mostly north through a wide flat valley of juniper, sage and grasses. For the first mile it climbs very gently.

### **1.0 miles: Fence at BLM/USFS boundary.**

(Elevation: 5,700 ft., gain: 200 ft.). South of fence is BLM managed land. North is Custer Gallatin NF Recommended Wilderness. (Please report any signs of wheeled access.) Scramble through or over the fence. The trail continues mostly north climbing out of the valley, not quite as gently as before. As you climb turn around to see growing views of the Wyoming prairie, and the Bighorn, Wind River and Beartooth Mountains.



**1.8 miles: The rim of Bear Canyon and a “T” junction.** (Elevation: 6,130 ft., total gain: 630 ft.) The “cross” on the “T” is along the rim of the main fork of Bear Canyon. (A few hundred feet before this “T” a track branches to the left. It just cuts across one corner of the “T”.)

Dramatic Bear Canyon, which has been hidden until you arrive at the “T”, is now practically under your feet. A little to your right (east) the main fork of intermittent Bear Creek flows south through the deep canyon, makes a sharp right turn to the west, and passes in front of, and below you. To your left (about half a mile west) the west fork drains south through another deep canyon and joins the main fork. The main fork turns sharply left and flows south.

**Left (west) Branch of “T”:** This branch of the track follows the canyon rim west a little more than half a mile to views overlooking the junction of the main and west forks. This makes leisurely and enjoyable day hike. Allow time to relax and enjoy the quiet and scenery.

**2.2 miles (0.4 mile west of “T”):** The track turns a little south and gets farther from the canyon rim. An option is to leave the track at this point to follow the canyon rim for about 0.2 miles farther west to a viewpoint at the canyon junction. A small drainage to your left (south) gradually deepens between this rim route and the track you left. At the west end of this trackless ridge it is easy to cross the drainage back to the track and another viewpoint described below (2.4 miles).

**2.4 miles (0.6 miles west of “T”):** A “Y” in the two-track. Both branches disappear in a hundred feet or so. Continuing a short distance to the right (west) you will find another viewpoint overlooking the junction of the canyons. The left branch soon turns into a single track game trail heading south.

**Return** the way you came or consider two loop hike alternatives: About 300 yards south on the single track is “*THE Junction*” where the Big Sky, Rocky juniper, and Bear Canyon Creek Trails converge. You can return to your vehicle via either Rocky Juniper trail or the Bear Canyon Creek trail. See [detailed guide](#) for these loop options at PryorMountains.org.

**Right (east) Branch of “T”, the Ridge Trail:** This branch of the track follows the canyon rim east past the bend and then follows a narrow ridge northeast between unnamed canyons, climbing steeply (about 1,000 ft/mile) toward the top of Red Pryor Mountain. Depending on your energy level, many viewpoints along this ridge would make good places to stop, and enjoy the Pryors’ scenery and solitude before retracing your route down the mountain.

**If you continue to the top of Red Pryor Mtn:** (Elevation: 8,400 ft., total gain: 2,900 ft.)

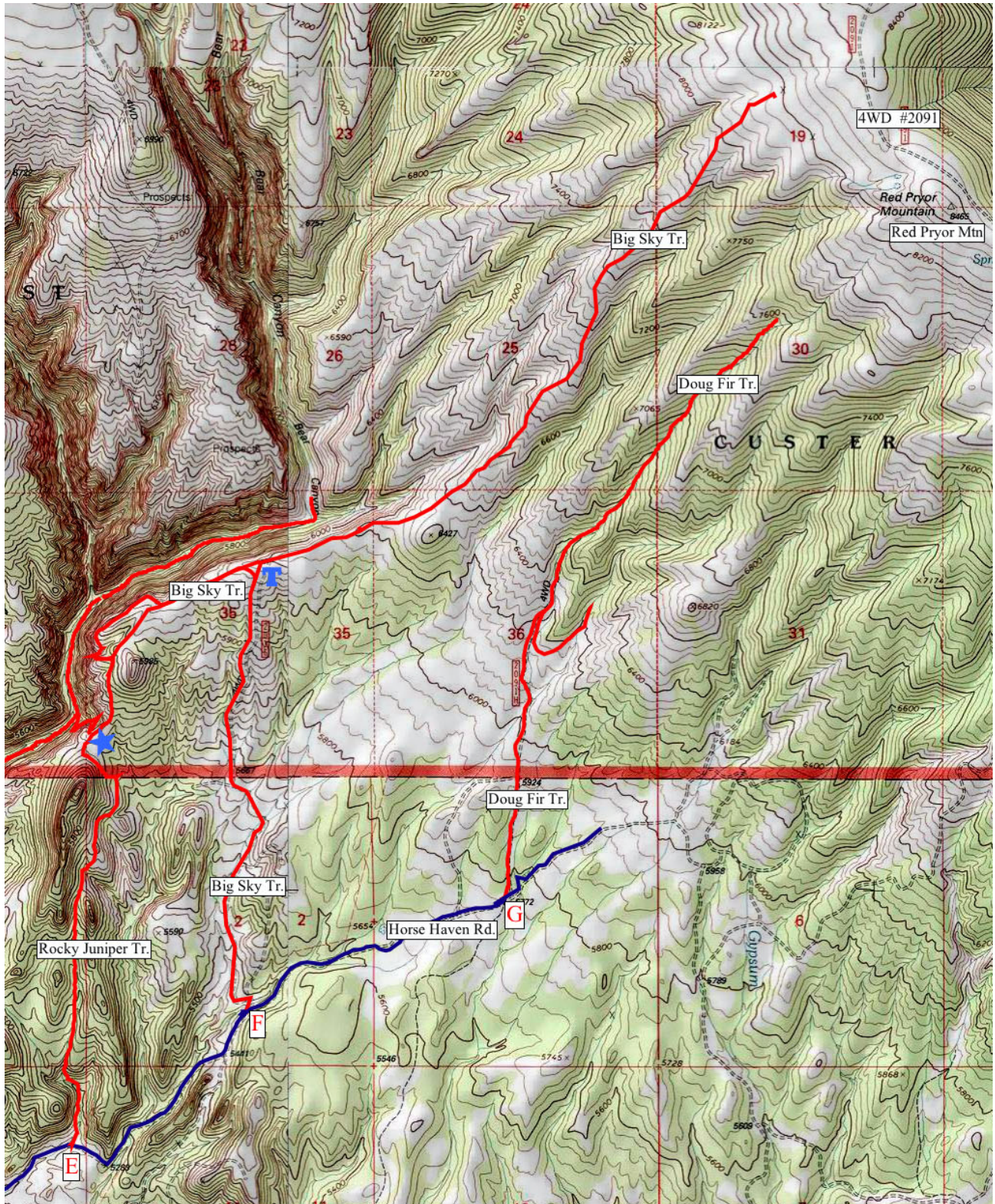
**14.8 miles (3.0 miles from “T”):** The Ridge Trail leads toward 4WD route #2091. But shortly before getting there, the ridge track fades as you ascend through open grassland. When the track disappears you can either continue eastward, for maybe 1/4 mile, to the 4WD route and turn south to Red Pryor Mtn., ... or head off-trail SE toward Red Pryor Mtn, the highest point in that direction. It is about 3/4 mile and about 300 feet more elevation gain. It is only a “bump” a hundred feet above the nearby ridge line.

Despite the 4WD route, the climb to the high point is rewarding. Big new views open of the Crooked Creek Valley and East Pryor Mountain, and of the Big Pryor Plateau to the north. No motor vehicles may be there when you are. The 4WD route is normally not opened to motor vehicles until May 22.

**Warning:** If you go to the top of Red Pryor Mtn carefully note where you left the Big Sky Ridge Trail so you can find it for the return hike down the mountain. There are no signs. Off-trail routes could be much more challenging. The key is to get started down the correct ridge.



*Bear Canyon*



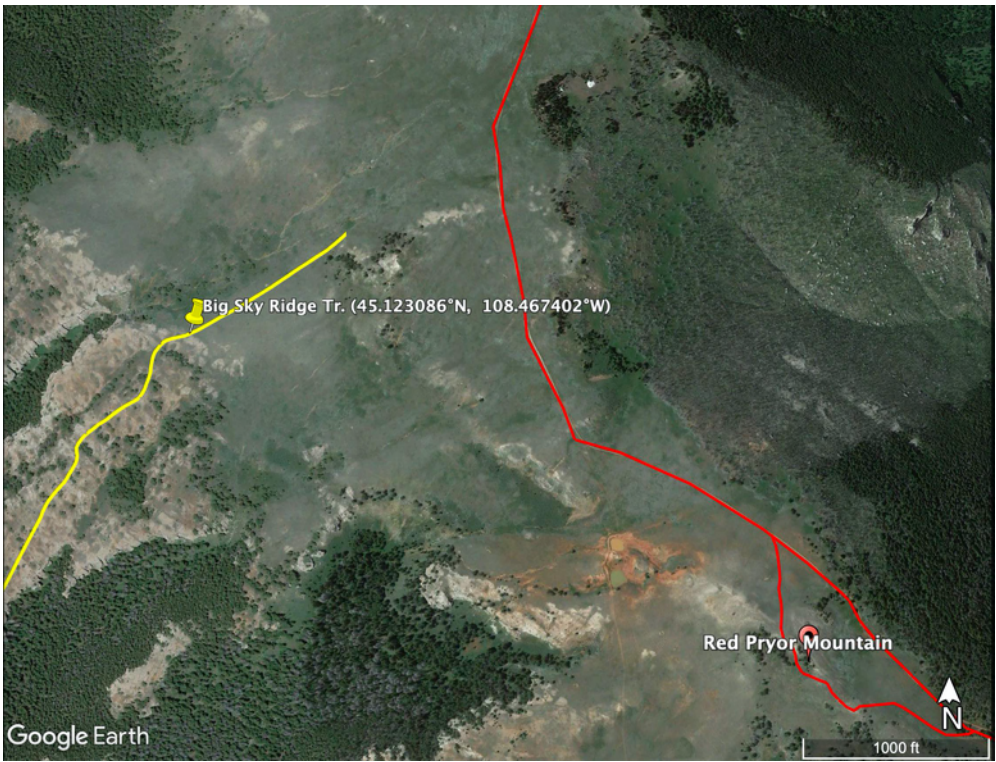
 **THE** Junction

## The Big Sky Trail and nearby trails

 T Junction

These Google Earth (GE) images (dated 6/25/2017) may help find the Big Sky Ridge Trail - especially for hikers who came up via the Doug Fir Trail and are looking for the Big Sky Trail for the return loop.

The first GE view shows the top end of the Big Sky Ridge Trail (yellow), and 4WD route #2091 (red). It is about 3/4 mile and 300 feet elevation off-trail between the yellow pin and Red Pryor Mountain.



The second GE view zooms in to show (without yellow trail) to show the two-track as of 2017. It was fairly clear for about 1/4 mile NE from the yellow "pin" (with GPS coordinates).

