

Rocky Juniper Trail

The Rocky Juniper Trail, in the Hikers' Haven area, enters the mouth of a rocky canyon and climbs into a valley between scenic rocky cliffs with abundant Utah juniper. This is the northern limit of the range of Utah juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*). Most juniper in the rest of the Pryors (and Montana) is Rocky Mountain Juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*).

This is good habitat for a variety of birds ranging from prairie falcons to pinion jays. The route is within the Montana Audubon designated *Bear Canyon Important Bird Area*. (See link to more information at www.PryorMountains.org.) About a mile from the trailhead the hike crosses a saddle with a panoramic view of the slopes of Red Pryor and Big Pryor Mountains to the east and north. About a mile-and-a-half from the trailhead the hike reaches the Forest Service designated *Bear Canyon Recommended Wilderness* with views into Bear Canyon. From this point it is possible to choose two alternative return trails for loop hikes.

Rocky Juniper Trailhead: (5,250 ft elevation)

Look for driving directions to Horse Haven Rd and the Hikers' Haven area at PryorMountains.org. The Rocky Juniper Trail begins from Horse Haven Rd, 0.9 miles from Helt Rd. Take the left fork (north) at the 0.9 mile junction. Drive approximately 100 yards, then park. The primitive trail begins at a jackleg barrier in the mouth of the canyon. It is about 1.7 miles (one way) to where the Rocky Juniper Trail converges with the Big Sky Trail and the Bear Canyon Creek Trail. The trail climbs about 500 ft elevation in this 1.7 miles.

Road entering rocky canyon at 0.9 mile junction



Jackleg barrier at start of Rocky Juniper Trail



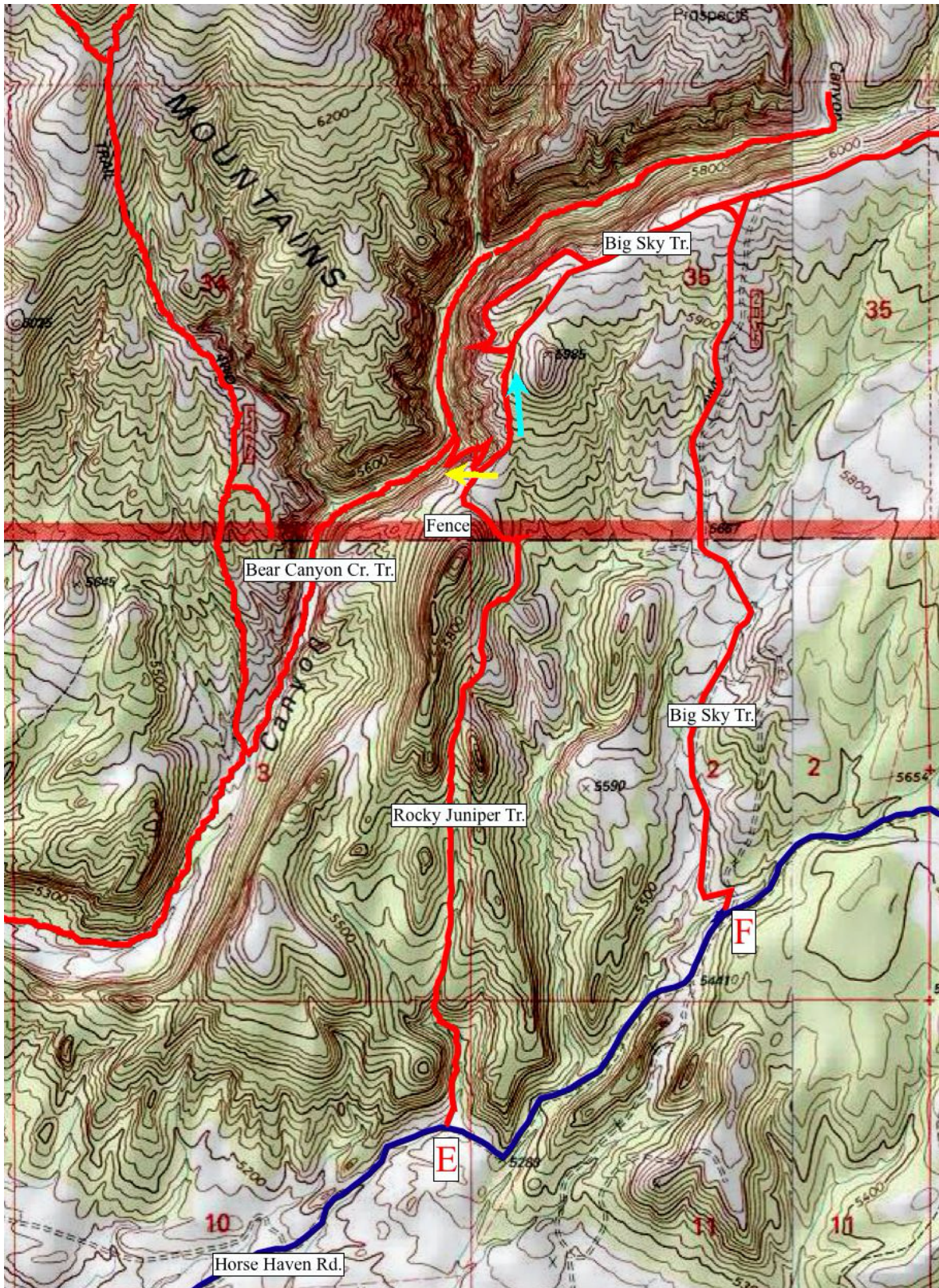
0.0 mile: Steep Rocky Beginning. A couple hundred yards beyond the barricade the track turns left (west) into a dry drainage. Then about a hundred yards farther the route turns right (north). At this point it doesn't look like either a road or a trail. With some imagination you can see that long ago some of this route was cut by a bulldozer. The first ¼ mile is steep uphill and very rocky.

BLM has designated the Rocky Juniper Trail as a "non-mechanized" route in the 2021 Pryors Travel Plan. That means no wheeled vehicles (with or without motors) are permitted. Currently there are no trail signs. We hope that sometime soon BLM will install some kind of trail markers.

Views of the hiking route climbing out of the canyon



*Map of Rocky Juniper and other nearby trails, and "The Junction."
The yellow arrow points down the switchbacks to the Bear Canyon Creek Trail.
Turquoise arrow points to the Big Sky Trail.*



0.3 mile: Gentler Trail. In another one or two hundred yards the route climbs out of the canyon onto flatter terrain. Most of the Rocky Juniper “trail” is really off-trail. Some parts have numerous intersecting paths where wildlife and/or previous hikers have gone. Follow paths nearly straight north along a shallow drainage. Don't worry about which is the "correct" path. Simply head north near the bottom of the drainage between parallel ridges of rocky hills on the left and right (east and west). Aim for the saddle marked with the black arrow in the photo below.

Typical trail after climbing out of canyon.



Head north to this saddle.



0.9 miles: Saddle. The trail comes to the saddle. The rocky ridge on the right (east) ends with a final rocky point. An expansive view of Big Pryor Mountain opens to the north and east. This would be a rewarding destination for a short hike – perhaps with a side trip up one of the rocky hills.

Continue northward from the saddle passing just east (right) of the final high rocky topped hill in the left photo below. *Be sure to look back at the saddle from the north so you know where to go on the return hike. (See photo.)*. The next section is the most “off-trail” part of the route.

View north from the saddle. Note trail.



The saddle looking back from the north. Note trail.

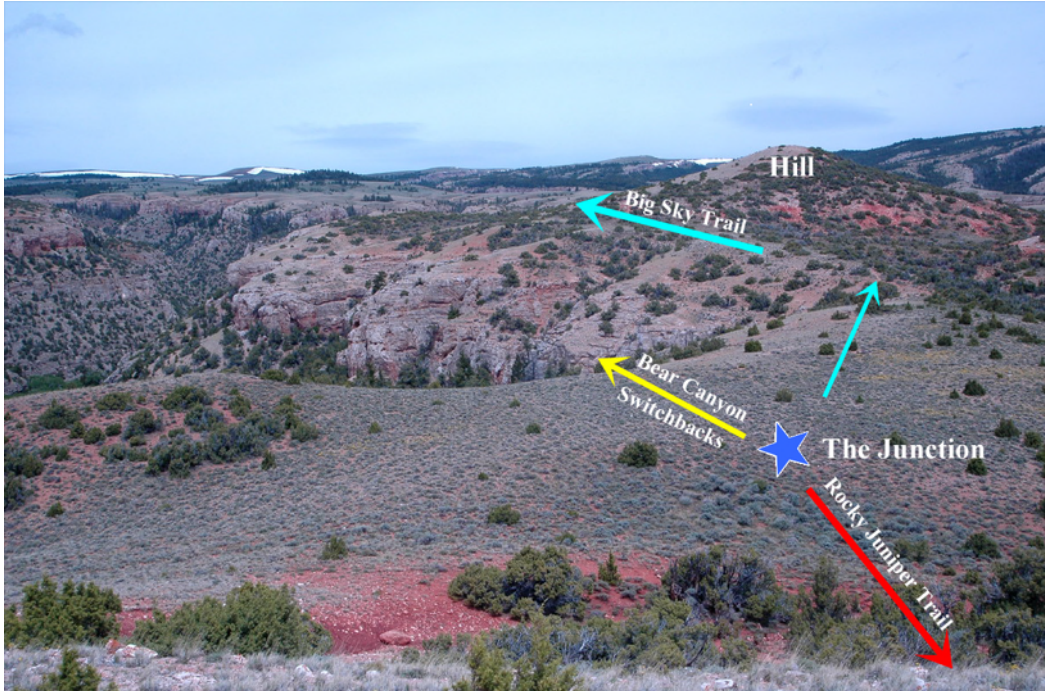


1.4 mile: Fence. About 1/2 mile north of the saddle is an east/west BLM/USFS boundary fence. (See map above.) As you go north curving left around the hill you will find this fence - perhaps in a dense juniper forest. (*Depending on where you encounter and cross the east-west fence, you may find another north-south fence joining it from the south in a "T".*) Follow the boundary fence west as it climbs the north end of the ridge into more open grassland. Cross to the north side of the fence wherever it is convenient. There is a great view of Bear Canyon. Turn north down the hill (and a little west) to the edge of Bear Canyon. This is "THE Junction." (See photo below.) GPS coordinates: about 45.09091°N, 108.51423°W.

Return Hike: Return the way you came, or consider two loop hike alternatives. **THE Junction** is where the Big Sky, Rocky juniper and Bear Canyon Creek Trails converge. You can return hike via either the Big Sky or Bear Canyon Trails. Either loop is about 6 miles total including walking back to your vehicle at the Rocky Juniper Trailhead. For more loop hike directions see Bear Canyon and Hikers Haven Area Loop Hikes at www.PryorMountains.org.

There are no trail signs, and no trails at **THE Junction**. Perhaps someday Custer Gallatin National Forest will fix that to better accommodate hikers in the Pryors.

Looking north to THE Junction from near the BLM / FS boundary fence on the hill.
The turquoise arrows indicate the Big Sky Trail north to the left of the hill. It then turns right (east) behind the hill along the rim of Bear Canyon rim.
The yellow arrow indicates switchback trail down to Bear Canyon Creek Trail.



Google Earth view of the Bear Canyon Switchbacks up from the Bear Canyon Creek Trail to The Junction with the Big Sky and Rocky Juniper Trails.

