

Rocky Juniper Trail

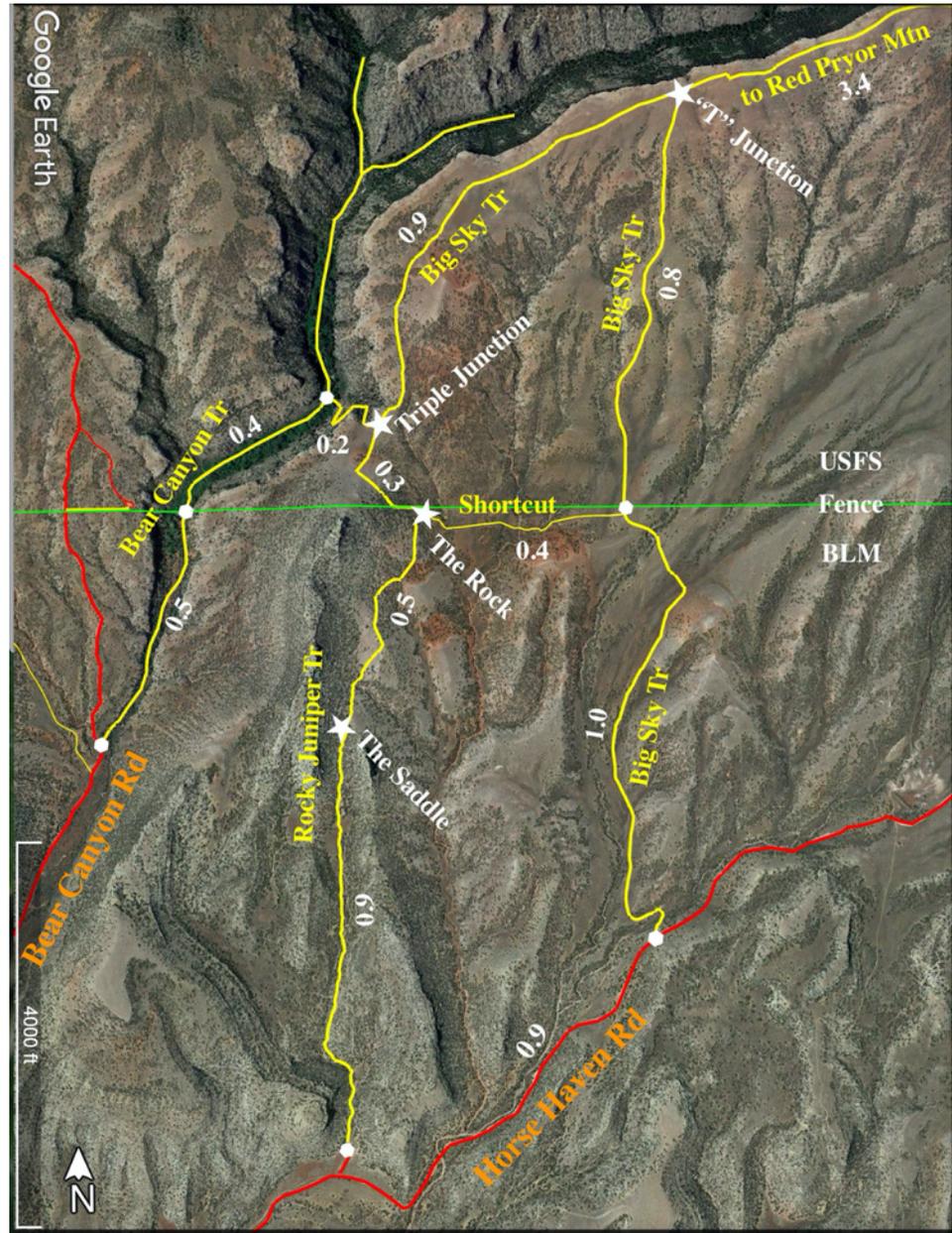
Revised 11/2022

The 2021 BLM Travel Plan for the Pryors officially designated the Rocky Juniper Trail. It is designated for foot travel only (human and horse). Mountain bikes and motorized vehicles are not permitted.

In 2022 BLM placed "Trail" signs at the trailhead and key points along the route, and made a much-easier-to-follow trailbed. They included an 0.4 mile shortcut between the Rocky Juniper and Big Sky Trails just south of the BLM/USFS boundary fence. This makes a 3.7 mile loop hike (including 0.9 miles of Horse Haven Road between the Rocky Juniper and Big Sky trailheads. Bear Canyon cannot be seen from this loop.

The longer 5.4 mile loop hike with Big Sky Trail extends farther north into the USFS managed Bear Canyon Wilderness Area with spectacular views of Bear Canyon. A loop hike with the Bear Canyon Trail is also an option.

The USFS trails are not officially designated or signed by Custer Gallatin National Forest. We hope they will be someday soon.



Rocky Juniper Trail Area Map. (Mileages in white.)

The Rocky Juniper Trail 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 route, within the Montana Audubon designated Bear Canyon Important Bird Area (IBA), is good habitat for a variety of birds ranging from prairie falcons to piñon jays. (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 Area (RWA).

Getting there:

Detailed maps and driving directions to Pryor Mountain hiking trailheads are available at PryorMountains.org.

The Rocky Juniper Trailhead is on a short spur road north from Horse Haven Road 0.9 miles from Helt Road. Both the spur and the trailhead have “Rocky Juniper Trailhead” signs.

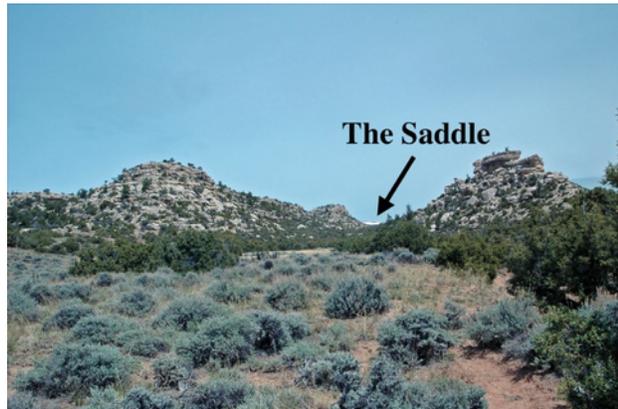
0.0 mile: Trailhead (5,250 ft.). A couple hundred yards beyond the barricade the track turns left (west) into a dry drainage. Then about a hundred yards farther the route turns right (north) again. The first ¼ mile is steep uphill and very rocky.



Rocky Juniper Trailhead

0.3 mile: Gentler Trail. In another one or two hundred yards the route climbs out of the canyon onto flatter terrain and continues north between parallel ridges of rocky hills to the east and west. The trail and signs lead to the saddle marked with the black arrow in the photo below.

0.9 miles: “The Saddle” (5,660 ft.). The rocky ridge on the right (east) ends with a final rocky point. The rocky ridge on the left (west) continues another half-mile north. An expansive view of Big Pryor Mountain opens to the north and east. The well signed and cleared trail (in 2022) continues northward from the saddle. Look back at the saddle from the north so you know where to go on the return hike. *(See photo.)*



Looking north to the Saddle.



Looking back south to the Saddle

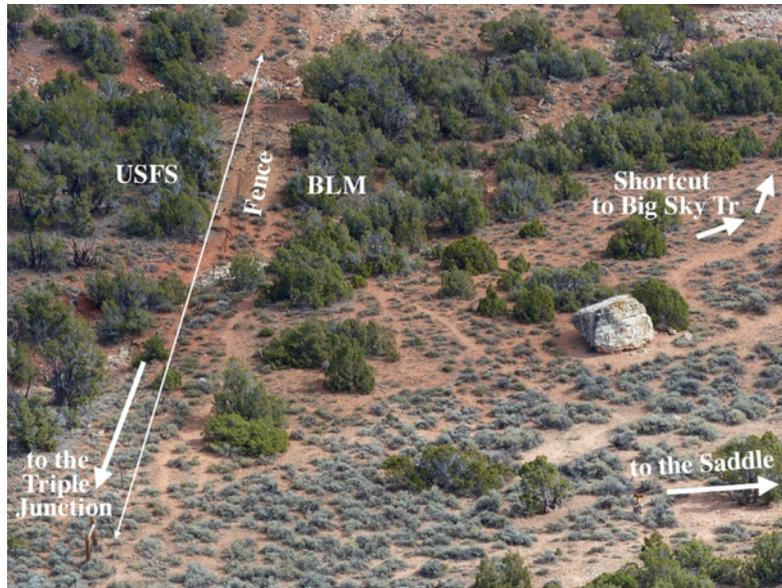
1.4 mile: “The Rock” and BLM / USFS Boundary Fence (5,630 ft.). About 1/2 mile north of the saddle the trail leads to a large, isolated limestone boulder (about 8 feet “diameter”). See photo. This boulder is a useful landmark.

There are **two alternatives** for continuing beyond the Rock:

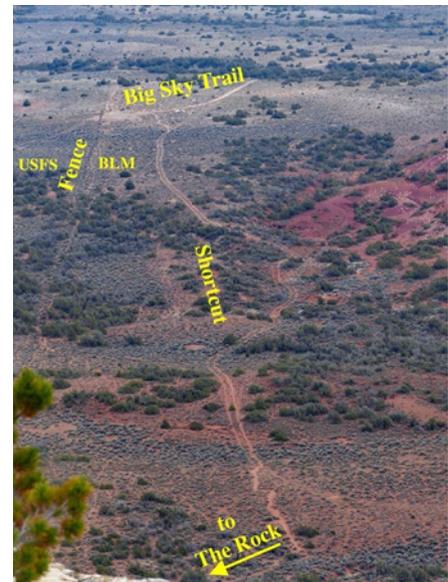
The Short Option: The signed BLM shortcut trail goes east about 0.4 miles past the Rock to the Big Sky Trail. Part of this trail is single-track. Part is an old unused two-track. Turn right (south) on the Big Sky Trail 1.0 mile to the Big Sky Trailhead on Horse Haven Road. It is another 0.9 miles on Horse Haven Rd back to the Rocky Juniper Trailhead – 3.7 miles total for the loop.



The Rock



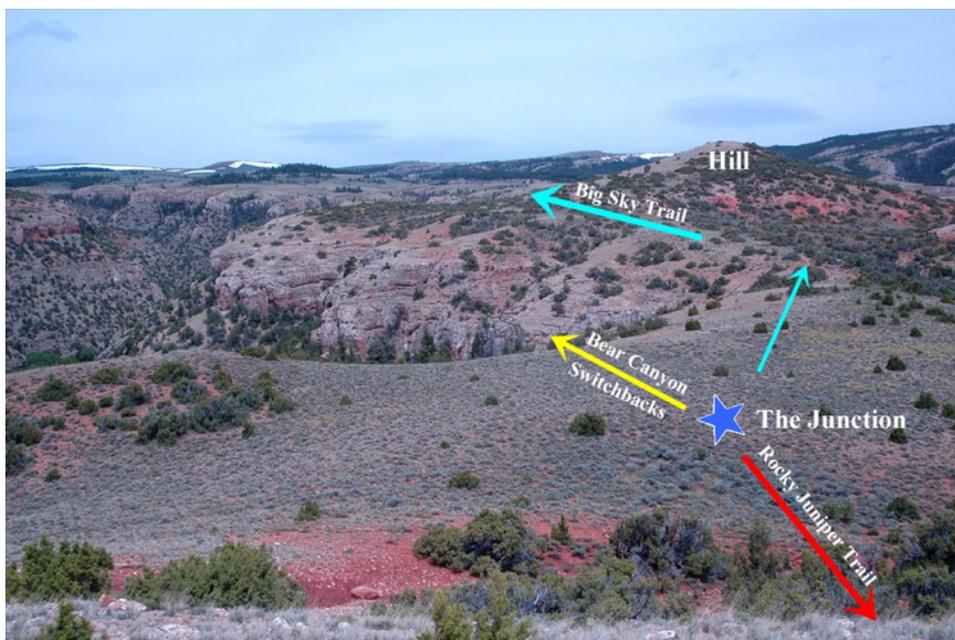
The Rock and trails to the Triple Junction, the Saddle, and the Shortcut.



The Shortcut

The Long Option: This route continues north into the Bear Canyon Recommended Wilderness Area. There are no trail signs on these not-yet-designated USFS routes. The east-west BLM / USFS boundary fence is a few feet north of The Rock. Follow the fence west for about 0.1 mile until it breaks out of the trees. Then turn north, downhill about 0.15 mile to the unmarked Triple Junction near the edge of Bear Canyon.

1.6 miles: Triple Junction or “The Junction.” (GPS coordinates: about 45.0909°N, 108.5142°W.) The Rocky Juniper, Big Sky, and Bear Canyon Trails converge at this junction. 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.



The Triple Junction

Looking north to the Triple Junction from near the BLM / FS boundary fence on the rocky topped hill to the south.

The turquoise arrows indicate the Big Sky Trail north to the left of the north hill. It then turns right (east) behind the hill along the rim of Bear Canyon.

The yellow arrow indicates switchback trail down to Bear Canyon Creek Trail.

How to find the three trails from the Triple Junction:

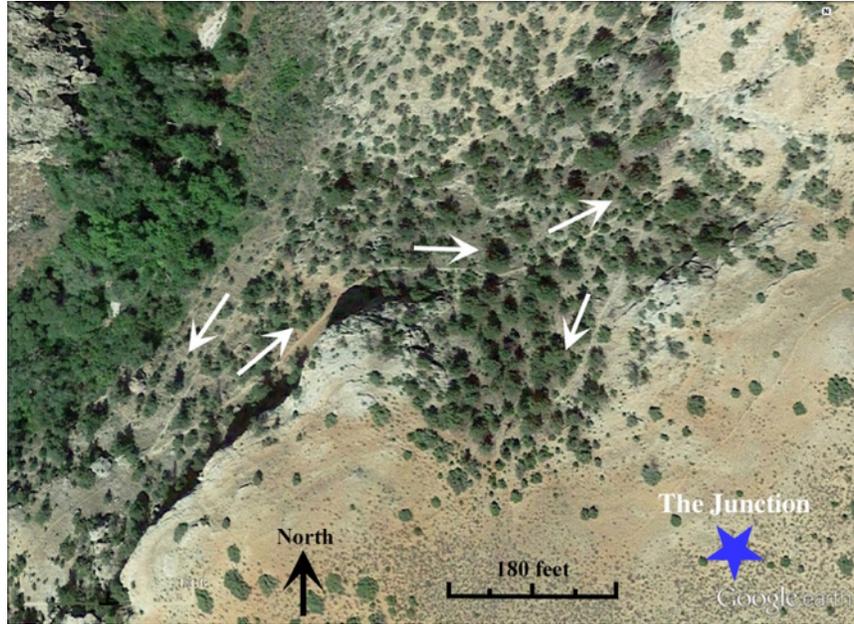
For more loop hike directions see *Bear Canyon and Hikers Haven Area Loop Hikes* at www.PryorMountains.org.

Rocky Juniper Trail: From the triple junction walk south uphill to the fence and follow it east to The Rock.

Bear Canyon Trail: From the junction walk northwestish and down into the canyon to intersect the trail. See Google Earth view of the Bear Canyon Trail switchbacks.

Big Sky Trail: From the junction walk northish between the canyon (on the west) and the north hill (on the east). See photo. The route goes around north of the hill and then east along the rim of the main (east) fork of Bear Canyon. (See the *Big Sky Trail Guide and maps*.)

Either the Big Sky or Bear Canyon Trails make an approximately 6 mile loop hike with the Rocky Juniper Trail including walking back to your vehicle at the Rocky Juniper Trailhead.



The switchback trail climbing out of Bear Canyon is visible beside white arrows.