

Hiking in the Indian Divide Railbed Area

(between Capitan and Carrizozo)

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Access:

West of the Indian Divide Trestle (T3), there is a road pullout on the south side of US380, 0.6 mile west of Indian Divide, the crest of US380. There is a gate – latched but not locked – that allows easy passage through the barbed wire fence. Hike toward the windmill. The old railbed can be found just south of the windmill.

East of the Indian Divide Trestle (T3), turn off US380 at Ranchman's Camp Road and drive west along Ranchman's Camp Road 0.3 miles to the point where it turns left. Park near this turn, and hike southwest with the barbed wire fence in sight. Sometimes there are animal trails to follow. When you reach a flat area – the old spur – hike along it to the cairn. Follow an animal trail down toward the barbed wire fence. When you reach a second flat area, you are on the old mainline railbed. Hike southwest towards the northeast abutment of the Indian Divide Trestle.

Description:

This remnant of the Carrizozo-Capitan railroad lies entirely on USDA Forest Service land, and even though the routes described are not official Forest Service trails, they are open to hikers. Exercise caution as you step over rocks and around trees. Please remember that all artifacts are protected by law as part of our common heritage. Do not remove any rail spikes, metal, wood, coal, etc.

West of T1: The sides of the gully at T1 are very steep. Plan on accessing this segment of railbed by hiking along the south side of US 380. The railbed is overgrown but generally easy to follow. Eventually it disappears under US380.

Between T1 and T2: The railbed is in excellent condition. Access this segment by hiking west from the windmill and crossing a shallow drainage. Note the old firebrick on the T2 abutment – erosion control.

Between T2 and T3 (Indian Divide Trestle) : This is the interesting railbed segment. There is a switchback and access to the southwest abutment of the Indian Divide Trestle, which was 200' long, 85' high, with five tiers. A roundtrip hike from the pullout to the abutment and back is about 2.5 miles with an elevation gain from the windmill to the abutment of about 130'. The distance given is for a hike in which one hikes to the end of the two stems before reversing direction. There are cairns at the two switch points for the switchback. The upper stem railbed is more difficult to follow, but it contains lots of coal, fire brick, and the site of a trestle.

Between Ranchman's Camp Road and T3: The segment of Ranchman's Camp Road that runs parallel to US380 is actually old railbed, graded and surfaced as a county road. Try to follow the old railbed as an extension of Ranchman's Camp road. It is difficult because of the many juniper trees, but one can find bits of coal. The old railbed crossed into the US380 right-of-way about 50' to the west of the gate. The construction of modern US380, with its massive road cut at Indian Divide, removed part of the old railbed -- both mainline and spur. As one hikes southwest from this gate, keeping the barbed wire fence in sight, one first comes to the remnant of the old spur, and after a bit more animal trail, to the remnant of the old mainline railbed. Hike southwest through a deep, rock-strewn railbed cut to the northeast abutment of the Indian Divide Trestle.

There is no trail leading from one abutment of the Indian Divide Trestle to the other, but if you are the sort of hiker that knows how to get down and up steep slopes (85%) safely, go for it!

One can also follow old railbed southeast from the dumpsters on Ranchman's Camp Road. Take the left fork (which becomes a private road) about 50 yards and look to the southeast. At first the old railbed looks like just another two-track ranch road, but a closer look reveals the berm of the railbed. It is really gentle hiking for about 0.3 miles. The windmill is on private property, so turn back at that point.

Indian Divide Railbed

- Mainline
- Spur
- Trestle
- Access route

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