

# T19 Southfork Trail

Smokey Bear Ranger District



## T19

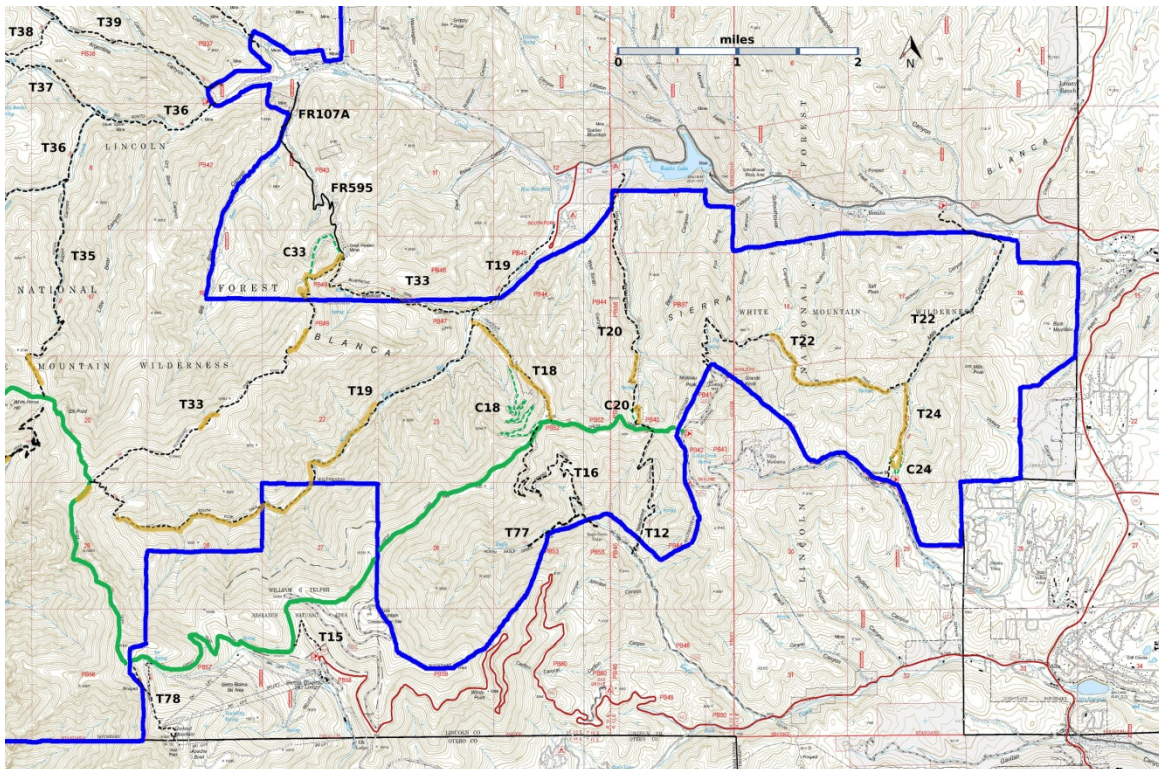
GPS Track (as .GPX)

Left click to open in your browser; then save from browser.

T19 is now open with warnings.

LENGTH	ELEVATION	DIFFICULTY	SCENERY
6.1 miles	7540 - 10460 ft 2920 ft difference	Difficult	4

Allowed Usage				



[Link to map color/symbol codes](#)

T12, T15, T16, T18, T19, T20, T22, T24, T33, T35, T36 (partial), T37 (partial), T38, T39 (partial), T77, and T78 are shown as black dashed lines on the map. The solid blue line is the border of the White Mountain Wilderness. The solid green line is T25 Crest Trail. Yellow over

a trail indicates that that portion of the trail is intermittent or hard to follow. The map image may be downloaded through the White Mountain Wilderness link below. The image can then be expanded and/or manipulated at high resolution.

**WARNING:** This trail was badly damaged by the Little Bear Fire and subsequent heavy rains. It was closed to the public by Forest Service order, but is now open, with warnings about erosion, fallen and about-to-fall trees, and other hazards.

**DESCRIPTION:** Before the 2012 Little Bear Fire, T19 Southfork Trail was a popular trail with a well-established tread. It was badly damaged in the Little Bear fire, and was closed by Forest Service order for three years. I began to hike – and rehab --T19 in Spring 2016, but it is still difficult to follow, particularly in the upper half. . It is strongly suggested that one download the GPS track from the website and use it as a guide.

In 2020 the trailhead was relocated to a point approximately 0.4 miles from the gate to Southfork campground. It is well marked and there is adequate parking. The initial part of T19 now follows the canyon bottom, past an area that is being reclaimed with native vegetation.

T19 crosses the south fork of the Rio Bonito thirteen times. At some crossings there are stepping stones. In the Spring, with runoff from melting snow and for a few days after a thunderstorm, the water may be more than a foot deep. Plan your hikes with this in mind.

From the lower trailhead, the first two miles are now fairly easy to follow, and two miles out and back will make for a lovely “picnic hike”, with views of the tumbling Southfork of the Rio Bonito. Along the way, one passes ruins of old dwellings and the sharp-eyed will see occasional wire bands of the old Bonito pipeline (Flat bands date from the mid 1920’s and wire coils date from a few years later.). Look for cairns to guide you into the White Mountain Wilderness, across a lovely meadow and into a forest glen, where a fire ring shows that others have camped there before.

The next two miles are tougher. There are more fallen trees, fewer cairns, and more need to look ahead for sawed trees that indicate that the trail once ran there.

The last two miles are tough. We hiked from the top by taking the Ski Apache gondola to the crest and hiking three miles along T78 and T25 to the junction of T25 and T19. There is very little tread in the grass of the upper meadow -- look down toward an old sign post, whose sign is long gone. Then follow along the left side of a ridge to a sharp right turn (cairn here). Once the tread peters out, look for the drainage where the creek starts. Stay on the north side of this drainage for the next 1.5 miles. The trail is obscure in this part – it took us three hours to hike the 1.5 miles. Make your way over/under/around fallen trees and keep your eyes open for sawed logs.

There is a reward. The fire did not reach all parts of the canyon, and there are some lovely glens. There are some drawbacks – in sunny parts sun flowers and thistles grow tall and make the trail hard to find, as well as stinging bare flesh. Expect to wash up thoroughly at the end – climbing over burned trees can put a lot of soot on you.

**John Stockert's Description (2002):** Heavily used T19 threads through some of the most beautiful canyon scenery found in the White Mountain Wilderness. The path follows South Fork Rio Bonito, the largest creek in the wilderness, for about four miles. Along its lower portion it passes through a large majestic meadow with scattered mixed conifers in an impressive box canyon. The path crosses the creek a dozen times with no bridges ... . Although gradients are mostly 10% or less along the first 3.6 miles, they become much steeper (up to 50%) with 30% to 40% being common along the last 2.4 miles of pathway. Highlights of the forested upper section are large trees with diameters ranging from three to seven feet, and some more than 100 feet high! Although canyon views are great, vistas become even better after mile 5.4 when the high mountain meadows are reached.

**ACCESS:** To reach the lower trailhead from Smokey Bear Ranger District Office in Ruidoso, drive NM48 north 8.3 miles to the junction of NM37. Turn left and follow the paved road 1.3 miles to FR107, Rio Bonito Road. Turn left (signed Bonito Lake) and follow the narrow pavement 4.8 miles (past Bonito Lake) to a main road junction at a sign indicating Southfork Campground. Turn left and drive 0.4 mile through Southfork Campground

**GPS Coordinates for Key Points**

NAD83	Lat/Lon hddd mm ss.s	UTM (13 S)
Junction of T19 and T25	N33 25 10.8 W105 49 24.8	423431 3698116
Lower Trailhead	N33 26 48.4 W105 45 18.2	429824 3701074

**Links to Other Resources**

- [White Mountain Wilderness Trails-p1 \(11 MB\)](#)
- [Burned Trails Map \(34 MB\)](#)
- [WMW Forest Service Resource](#)
- [Nogal Topo Map](#)
- [Southfork Rio Bonito Trailhead](#) [1996 Information]

Last Hiked: 10/12/2020

2/7/2021