

Lolo National Forest Trails

Plains/Thompson Falls Ranger District

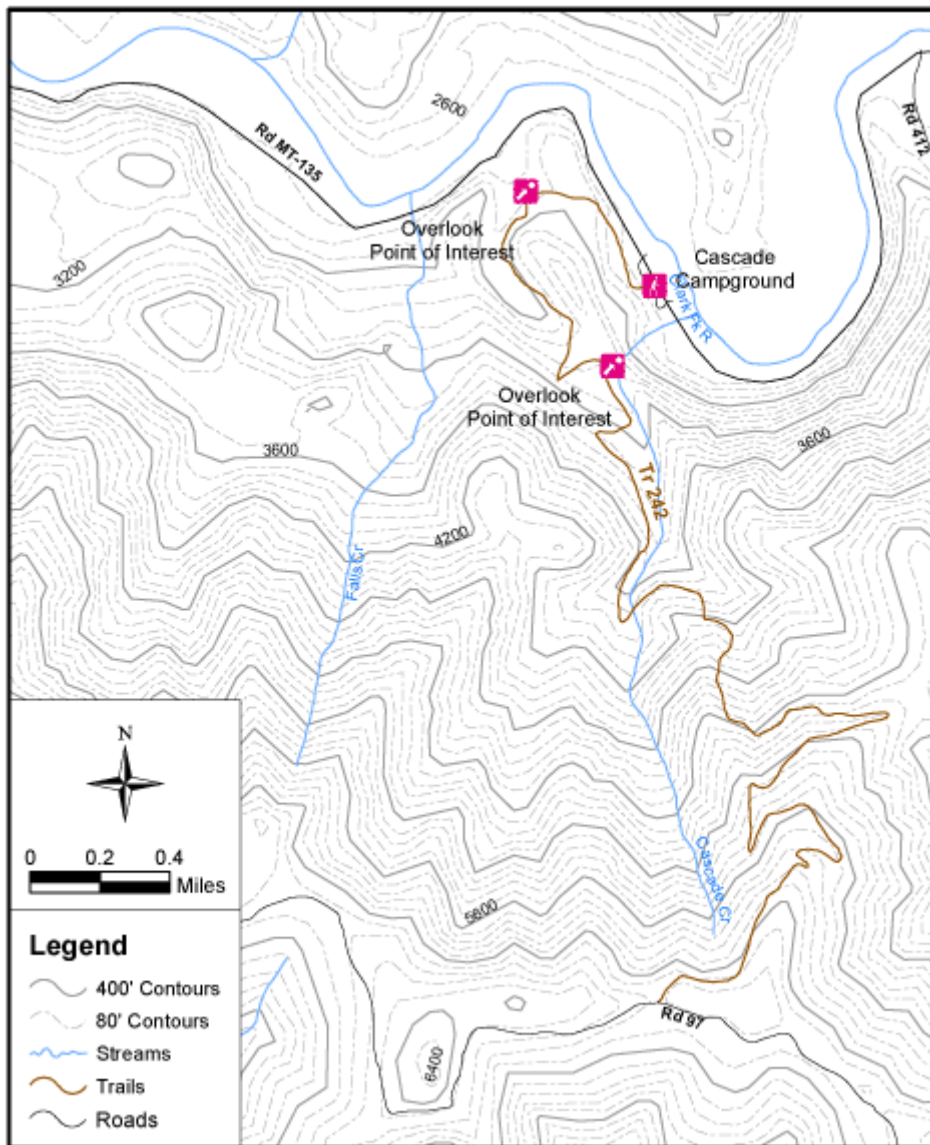
Iron Mountain #242/Clark Fork Valley Overlook #242-A

Extended Information

Trail Attributes Table

Item	Remarks
Managed Use(s):	Hiker
Difficulty:	Moderate, due to total length and grade.
Trail Length:	1.4 miles (one-way) to the scenic overlook at the top of Cascade Creek falls; 7 miles (one-way) to the ridge top.
Trail Termini:	Beginning – Cascade Campground along the Clark Fork River Ending – Forest Road 97 on ridge top
Trail Elevation:	At beginning/lowest – 2560 ft. At end/highest – 6160 ft.
Managed Use Seasons:	Spring/summer/fall
Maintenance Frequency:	Yearly log-out
Trip Type/Duration:	Short day hike to the scenic overlook and back to Cascade Campground; full day to ridge top and back. Options for one-way hike with car shuttle to or from either end.
Trail Usage:	Moderate to scenic overlooks when campground is open, otherwise Low.
Trailhead Facilities:	Parking for 2 to 3 cars at the campground; outhouse available when campground is open. When the campground is open, drinking water is usually available at the hand pump near the trailhead.
Trail Use Restrictions:	Closed to all motorized vehicles and stock yearlong.
Reference Maps:	Lolo NF Visitor Map, West Half USGS Topographic Quadrangle - Quinns Hot Springs
Map Location:	Section 19, T18N, R25W
Associated Trails:	None

Trail Map



Attractions and Considerations

The Iron Mountain Trail #242 follows a wagon road built in 1887 as a route to haul silver ore from the Iron Mountain mine in the Flat Creek drainage to the Clark Fork River near Cascade Campground. At the river, ore was loaded on flat boats and floated to the railroad at Paradise, Montana, from where it was shipped by rail to various smelters for further refining. The old wagon road, which is now a trail, was used for ore hauling until 1891 when the construction of the railroad through Superior, Montana, made it shorter and more practical to haul ore down Flat Creek to the railroad at Superior. An interpretive sign near the campground discusses the historical significance of this trail route. Two overlook areas along the lower trail offer spectacular views of the Clark Fork River valley.

Trail Description

The trail begins in Cascade Campground located adjacent to Montana Highway 135 (the "Cutoff" Highway) near the Clark Fork River. The trailhead is in the canyon bottom and the trail climbs steadily on a north facing slope to end at Forest Road 97 on a major ridge above the campground. Except for a short segment, the trail is mostly in the timber. For the most part, the trail profile is wider than average and the trail grade generally ranges from 6 to 12 percent with occasional short steep pitches of 16 to 20 percent. There are several short sections of rocky trail tread in the first mile. When the campground is open, drinking water is usually available at the hand pump near the trailhead.

There are 3 shaded rest benches and two overlook sites within the first 1.4 miles of trail between the campground and the scenic overlook at the top of Cascade Creek Falls. At mile 1.3, take a short spur trail 500 feet to the northeast to the overlook at the top of the falls. The trails to the scenic overlook are National Recreation Trails.

For the most part, Cascade Falls is not visible. Please be extremely careful at the falls and stay on the trail and back behind the fences at the overlooks. Watch small children!

Except for two overlook sites along the trail, views of the canyon and surrounding mountains are limited by vegetation and topography. The trail has one shallow stream crossing of Cascade Creek about 1/3 of the way from the trailhead to the ridge top.

The 4200-foot elevation marker along the trail is the maximum elevation of the prehistoric Glacial Lake Missoula which filled and drained numerous times 12,000 to 15,000 years ago. The lake formed as a result of glacial ice dams 115 miles down river, near present day Sandpoint, Idaho. When the lake was full, the trailhead and campground were under up to 1,600 feet of water. Evidence of Glacial Lake Missoula-sculpted features can be seen along the Clark Fork River canyon along the highway and from the overlook sites along the trail. These include gulch fills and canyon walls scoured to bare rock by water action as the lake repeatedly drained and filled. Learn more about Glacial Lake Missoula on the Internet at:

<http://www.iceagefloodsinstitute.org>

Trail Access

The trailhead is located in Cascade Campground on Montana Highway 135 between St. Regis, Montana, and the junction of Highway 135 and Highway 200. (The campground is approximately 7.5 miles south of Paradise, Montana, and 5 miles south of the junctions of Highways 135 and 200.)

The trail begins at the campground bulletin board near a small parking area. When the campground is closed (usually October through mid-May) trail visitors may park at the campground gate and walk approximately 100 yards to the trailhead. The trail ends on Forest Road 97 on the divide south of the campground. The trail can also be accessed by Forest Road 97 out of Superior, Montana, or the Ninemile Valley. With a car shuttle, a one-way trip is possible.

Access Map



Reminders

Visitors are reminded to practice Leave No Trace techniques. For details on this and other trail etiquette topics, visit our main trails page at:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/lolo/recreation-trails>

More Information

For current trail conditions and other trail information, contact the Plains/Thompson Falls Ranger District at (406) 826-3821, PO Box 429, Plains, MT 59859.

To visit the ranger station, drive west on Highway 200 to the town of Plains, then take Clayton Street east to the station.