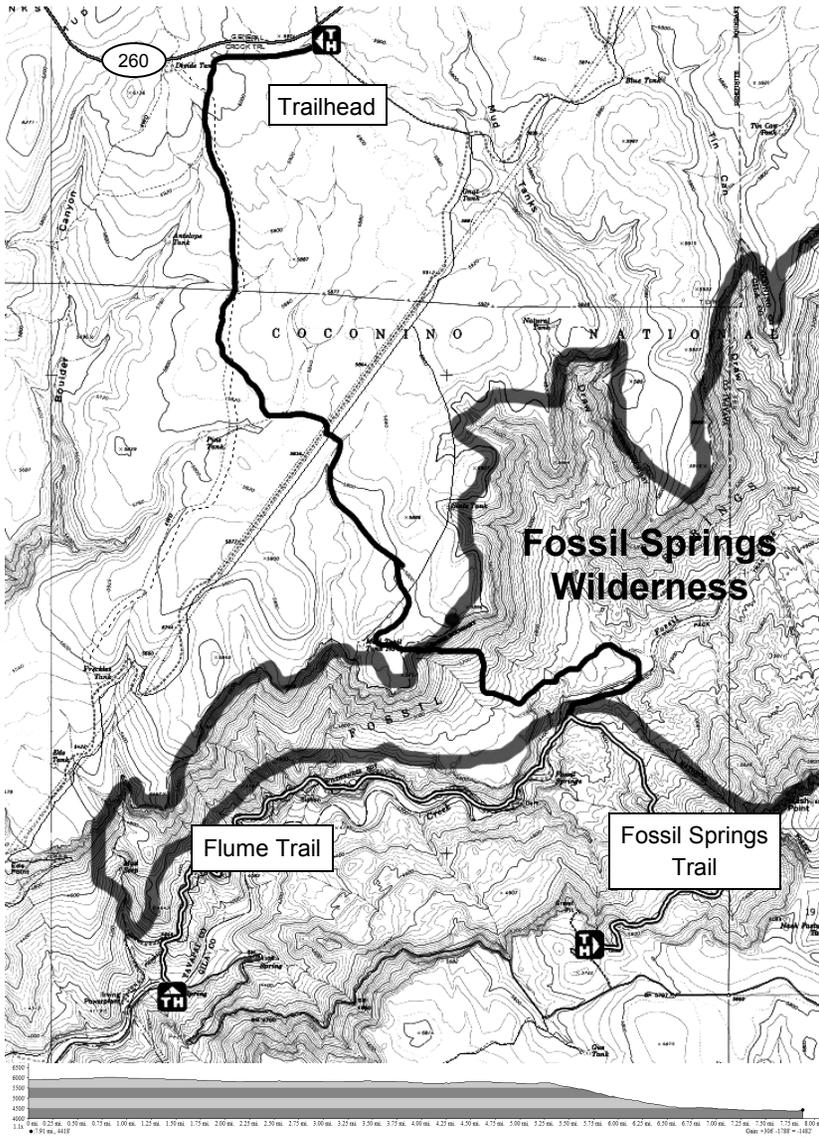


Coconino National Forest Trail Guides - Mail Trail #84



Length: 16miles (round trip)

Rating: Very Strenuous

Use: infrequent

Season: Year 'round, there may be snow in winter

Hiking time: 10 hours (round trip)

Cumulative Elevation: 1760ft.

USGS Maps: Fossil Creek.

Notes: No mechanized vehicles in Wilderness. Respect private property boundaries.

For more information contact: Red Rock Ranger District, P.O. Box 20429, Sedona AZ 86341, (928) 203-2900

History: From about 1884 to 1914, a horse and rider carried the mail from Camp Verde to Payson across what is now the rugged Fossil Springs Wilderness, a 50 mile trip that could take up to 18 hours to complete. This remote section of the route from General Crook Trail (now Highway 260) to Fossil Springs was painstakingly researched and reconstructed, with dedication ceremonies for the aptly-named Mail Trail #84 held in September 2006.

Hike: The trail begins across FR 9247B from the parking lot and here's where you begin cairn-spotting. There are 156 of these well-constructed, nicely-spaced cylindrical rock baskets that will guide your steps across the mesa and down into the canyon. For the first 0.75 miles or so you head west, paralleling the highway, before turning to the south somewhere around the tenth cairn. At times you will be on faint trails or old roads, at other times you're essentially cross country, cairn-to-cairn. As you approach the power lines, take a short jog east along a dirt road that joins the road directly under the power lines, where you go right and cross a cattle guard. Immediately take another dirt road to the left and follow it a short distance, watching for the cairns to branch off into the trees on the right. You eventually rejoin the road, which takes you the rest of the way down to Mail Trail Tank #2 at the edge of the rim, roughly four miles from the trailhead. Just before you reach Mail Trail Tank #2, be looking for a signpost on the left that is somewhat hidden by a tree. The sign indicates four miles to Fossil Springs. Follow the trail and cairns up a short ridge and then drop down to the Wilderness boundary marker, with big views into Fossil Creek canyon below. The trail down is fairly well defined and marked with cairns and signs as you descend to a plateau above the creek. At some point you will be directly north of Fossil

Spring, but there are cliff bands below you and the trail continues traversing well to the east. As you approach Mud Tanks Draw, the trail gets fainter and the brush and trees become thicker, so that the big rock basket cairns are no longer effective and they quit building them. However, there are occasional ribbons in the trees, blue-painted rocks on the ground, small ducks and enough scattered signposts to keep you more or less on track, and you're close enough now to Fossil Creek that you can't get completely lost. If you get tired of wandering through the scrub, one option would be to just drop into the open, boulder-filled creek bed of Mud Tanks Draw and rock-hop the rest of the way down to Fossil Creek. But if you manage to stay on the official trail, you will also come to Fossil Creek at an unmarked junction. It won't be visible, but directly across Fossil Creek from the junction is a Wilderness sign-in box and the well-established trail that will take you to the springs, located about one mile downstream, as well as the junction with the trail up to the well-used trailhead near Strawberry.