

HIKING THE TORTOLITA MOUNTAINS



Dove Mountain Hikers

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Preface & Introduction

When we moved to the Tucson area in the winter of 2004-2005, we were quickly turned into hikers through the efforts of the then, brand new Dove Mountain Hiking Club (now Dove Mountain Hikers). And as we did more and more hikes, I soon purchased such tomes of hiking information as Betty Leavengood's *Tucson Hiking Guide*. This plus a few other books like it, and several web sites on hiking provided maps, directions and descriptions of many local hikes. The Tucson area was, and is, rich in hiking trails.

But one local mountain range was NOT included. The Tortolitas. There are basically five mountain ranges encircling greater Tucson. The Catalinas to the north, Rincons to the east, Santa Ritas to the south, Tucson mountains to the west, and the Tortolitas - the smallest of these ranges - to the northwest. And a short travel further away from Tucson brings even more ranges. But in the lists of hiking trails, there was no mention of the Tortolitas. They are the immediate "back door" of Dove Mountain. For all practical purposes, no real trails existed in the Tortolitas. Some "routes" yes, and long-time residents would regularly follow these known routes into the mountains. With the establishment of Canyon Pass, the developers built a trail to the top of the high mountain just west of Canyon Pass. But that trailhead lies within their gated community, and the trail was restricted to the use of residents, their guests, and with permission, some local hiking clubs.

So, no established trails that could be "advertised" to the local hiking public. But ... that "oversight" was soon to change.

Thanks to a bond election several years ago, funds were established for the development of more recreation areas in Pima County, and the Town of Marana was one of the entities which secured some of those funds with the intent, among other uses, to build trails in the Tortolitas. Mostly under the guidance and direction of Tom Ellis, Director of Parks and Recreation for Marana, more than five years ago work was begun to construct over 32 miles of new trails. In addition, volunteers primarily from the Highlands Hiking Club and the Dove Mountain Hikers helped in the development of these trails. These two clubs continue as caretakers of the Wild Mustang Trail (HHC) and the Alamo Spring Trail (DMH).

Given the multitude of trails and hiking areas in the greater Tucson area, is there strong reason to want to include the Tortolitas in hiking offerings? The greatest reason must always be that hikers love to explore new surroundings. Many have hiked the older, better known trail areas. But the Tortolita trails are new. And they offer great hikes which can meet varying needs and abilities, from only a couple miles in length to loops of ten miles length and more. Hundreds of species of plants bring a lush colorful glow to the area in the spring, while native birds and animals are often spotted by the observant hiker. Petroglyphs and mortar holes tell us that others hiked ... no, lived here hundreds of years before our visit. And few if any areas of the Sonoran Desert offer the number of saguaros as the Tortolita Mountains.

Finally, few hiking areas can boast to offering the opportunity to relax with a coffee, a glass of wine, a lunch ... or nothing in your hand ... but enjoying the view from the patio of the Ritz-Carlton Dove Mountain. And if it is approaching sunset, listen and watch for the Native American flutist as he serenades you from some boulders just above the pool area. He welcomes the end of the day and the approaching sunset with his music.

Be Aware

Sun, water, critters, weather, equipment, your capabilities!

If you take each of the above into consideration, you should be able to hike in comfort. First **“Sun”**. The Tortolitas are a welcome hiking location in the fall, winter and spring. Only the truly experienced hiker should consider hiking here in the summer. Many do, and it can be enjoyable. But when the temperature during the day is expected to reach or exceed 100 as is normal in our summers, the sun can become a major enemy. There is very little shade and no water on these trails. Take caution.

“Water”. No hiker should start out on any hike without adequate water to last more than the hike would suggest. You never know what you might encounter, and need more. In the cooler months, you can likely get by with less. The warmer it is, or the further/higher you intend to go, the more water you should carry. If you have to ask “how much”, I would question whether you should be out on the trails.

“Critters”. In my 5 years of hiking these trails, I have only seen three rattlers. One was coiled next to the trail about ten feet ahead and made plenty of noise to stop me in my tracks until he cleared away. A second was leisurely crossing the lower Wild Burro Trail in the wash area, had recently filled it’s stomach with lunch, and seemed to care less that I was walking around him (or her) taking pictures. The third was actually off-trail on a bushwhack hike further up in the mountains. It was a small one, and still had half a mouse in its mouth being ingested ... not going to do any harm at that point in time.

But they are around. The warmer the weather, the more alert one should be. Beyond snakes, I have seen coyotes, javelina, road runners, hawks, turkey vultures, and a few other critters ... but rarely will these attack, or even approach you. For the record, though, in the winter of 2009-2010, a rabid javelina attacked a walker in Dove Mountain, and there have been reports of cougars in the Tortolitas. So be aware.

“Weather”. While the sun and the heat are the most common “weather” concerns, there is also the chance of rain and flash flood. Many of the trails in the Tortolitas are accessed via the Wild Burro wash. If there is threat of heavy rainfall, the hiker should remain VERY aware of possible heavy water runoff. Wild Burro wash drains a large area, so a lot of downfall becomes concentrated in the wash. The further up the wash you are, the narrower it is, therefore possibly increasing the depth and speed of flow. In the lower reaches of the wash, it is very wide, and only the heaviest of rainfall would create a dangerous situation. While some snowfall has been noted in the Tortolitas, their relatively lower heights compared to some of the neighboring ranges greatly limits the likelihood of any significant snow depths.

“Equipment”. Wear comfortable hiking shoes/boots, preferably with two pair of socks. Consider layering your clothes depending on the temperatures as well as sun exposure. A hat with a full brim will help shield your head and neck from sunburn. Use of hiking poles varies by each hiker’s comfort. Many use two, some just one, and some none. I recommend at least trying them ... some hiking equipment stores will let you “borrow” a pair. Consider carrying a first aide kit (unless a hike leader in your group carries one). And a must is to bring adequate water, either in canteens, water bottles or hydration backpacks.

“Your Capabilities”. Most hike descriptions include trail ratings, whether they be “A - D”, “1 - 5” or “easy - moderate - difficult”. But learn your abilities, and only try to exceed them if you think you have trained enough to move up to another level. To try to do more than you should is not only risky and dangerous for your safety, but can be a nuisance and hindrance to the hike leader and hiking group. If you are hiking alone, I would suggest it is stupid to try to exceed your own capabilities.

Trail Ratings

For this inventory of hikes, a simple use of “easy - moderate - difficult - extremely difficult” will be used. A general rule of thumb will be:

“Easy”	Three miles or less with no more than 500’ elevation
“Moderate”	Up to five miles with up to 1000’ elevation
“Difficult”	Over five but less than ten miles and up to 2000’ elevation
“Very Difficult”	Ten miles or more and greater than 2000’ elevation

Note that in the Tortolitas, as well as trails most anywhere, there are two numbers to consider when evaluating *elevation*. One is the distance from the low point to the highest point. The other is the cumulative gain, which includes adding together all the uphill, which on a rolling trail can be significant. The Alamo Spring Trail is a good example. It has only about 1000’ of elevation from low point to the high point, but hikers will climb nearly 1500’ covering the route.

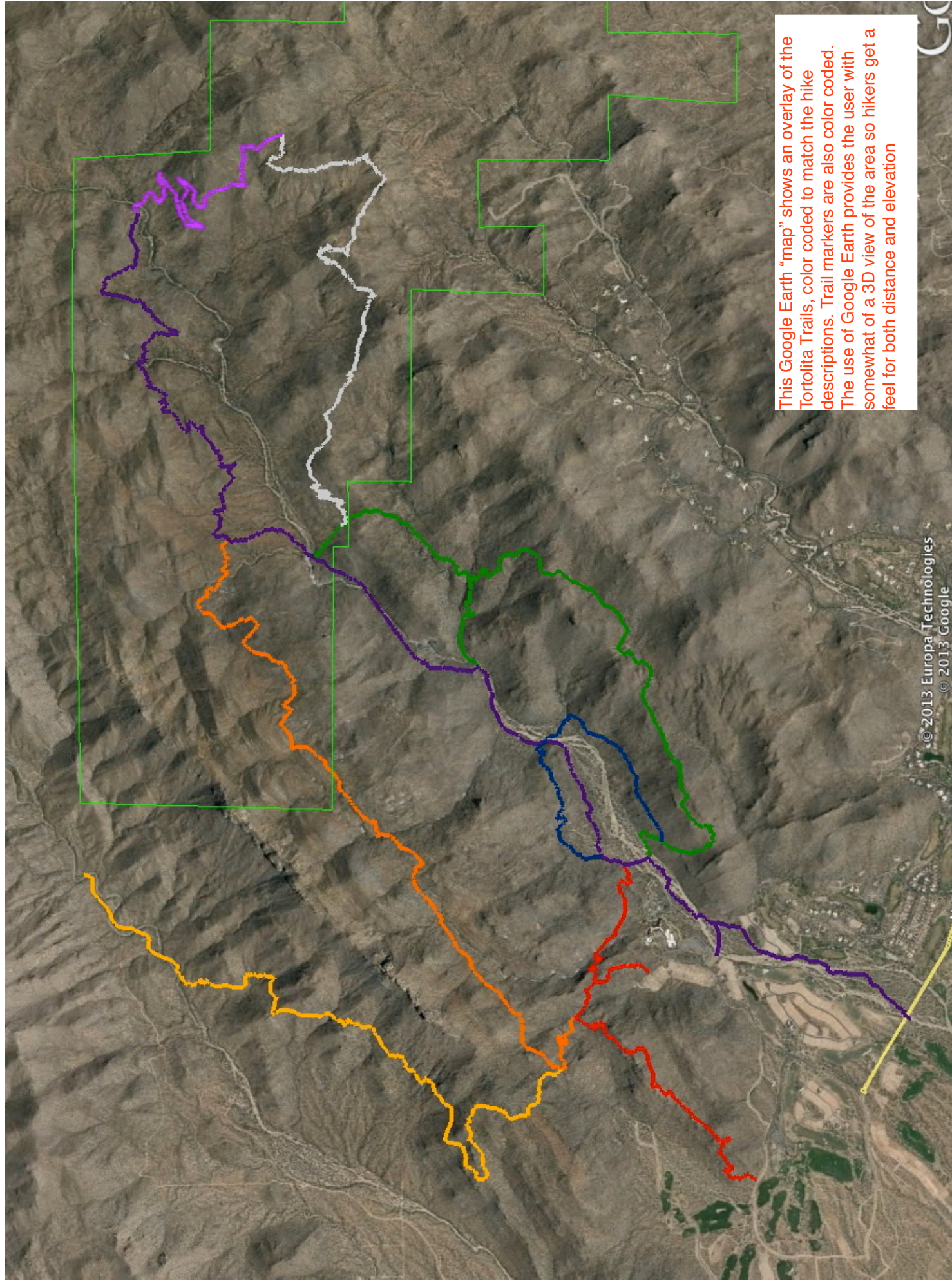
The Tortolita Trails

The trailhead for most of the Tortolita trails is at the “Wild Burro Trailhead” at the south end of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel parking lot. To reach this from Tangerine Road, drive north on Dove Mountain Boulevard up the hill several miles past most of the residential areas and the Gallery Golf Club, make a right turn at the turnaround (you will see a large sign welcoming you to the Ritz-Carlton). At the gatehouse, simply tell the gatekeeper you are going to hike the trails. Continue on up the road less than a mile and you will see the trailhead parking area on your right. **The trailhead elevation is 2810’.** Individual trail descriptions which follow give their highest elevation. Hikers should determine how much elevation gain their hike will offer, realizing that ups and downs will increase the actual gain.

In addition to the parking lot, which has room for many cars plus horse trailers (yes, some of the trails are approved for equestrian use as well as mountain bikers), a picnic ramada, restrooms and a source of water. You are welcome to use the maps included in this guide, or visit the Town of Marana website (marana.com), click on maps and scroll down to the Tortolita Trails map. Another trail map can be downloaded from the “dovemountaincivicgroup.org” website ... click on “hiking”.

From the trailhead parking area, look for directional signs near the edge of the wash. There is a trail down into the wash which leads to the Wild Burro Trail. You will find it behind the picnic ramada and between the large artistic “cairns”. Follow it up the wash about 1/2 mile and you will come to the state land fence-line. Here several of the trails in this canyon branch off. Trail signs are being updated and most now carry color-coded arrows ... the colors match those used in the following map.

Note that the Ritz-Carlton has developed a separate route from just east of their building (look for their orange grove) which leads to the Wild Burro Trail. Hotel guests, or anyone else is welcome to take this alternative route into the wash and the many trails. If you are planning on a stop at the hotel before or after your hike, consider this alternative. If hiking to/from the hotel you will shorten your distances by a few tenths of a mile.



This Google Earth "map" shows an overlay of the Tortolita Trails, color coded to match the hike descriptions. Trail markers are also color coded. The use of Google Earth provides the user with somewhat of a 3D view of the area so hikers get a feel for both distance and elevation

Wild Burro Trail (Trailhead to Alamo Spring)

General Description: *This hike offers a nice introduction to the Tortolitas since it is not that difficult, yet exposes the hiker to some of the upper reaches of the area (Tortolita Mountain Park extends from the area of Alamo Spring to the north), plus the trailheads for several of the other hikes in the Tortolitas. MAP NOTE: PURPLE LINE*

Difficulty: *Moderate to difficult*

Length: *2.4 miles (one-way)*

Highest Elevation: *3560'*

The Wild Burro Trail offers a moderate hike basically following the wash from the trailhead to Alamo Spring. After dropping down into the wash from the trailhead, cross the wash via the marked route, then turn left and go about 1/2 mile to the state land boundary. There you will see signs indicating various trails that can be taken. While one could simply follow the wash on up the canyon, the actual trail goes left along the fence-line, then curves to the right at the point where the Upper Javelina Trail breaks off to the left. Look for directional signs with purple arrows.

Follow this trail through the generally flat area just west of the actual wash. Be careful to not take the left branch after a few hundred feet which is the Lower Javelina Trail. Note that further ahead you can see some petroglyphs on one of the rock formations that will be just left of the trail several hundred yards further. A large saguaro stands just in front of them. Additional petroglyphs are on the back side of this rock formation.

After less than a mile of hiking you will re-emerge into the wash which you will follow about 1/2 mile to the old line shack. As you get closer to the line shack you will note that the canyon is getting narrower, and just ahead will end with some large boulders and a hill.

Be alert for trail signs on your left. There will be steps up the small hill to the line shack ... which is a nice little rest stop and photo location. Then the trail starts climbing just west from the line shack. About halfway from the line shack to Alamo Spring, you will reach the level wash area above the "falls" overlook that you observed from the line shack below. A nice short side trip to your right down the wash takes you to the overlook. There are a few petroglyphs on the left side of this rocky area. Use caution as you approach the overlook, as there is a sheer drop off.



Resume your hike up the wash until it starts to narrow again. Look on the right side for a trail marker which will guide you to the trail climbing over the ridge ahead of you. Once at the top, it is a short drop into the Alamo Spring area. Note that this is a common turnaround location for the Wild Burro Trail, but hikers can venture further. Near Alamo Spring there is a commemorative bench place in memory of a hiker who loved the Tortolitas. Feel free to stop and rest before either returning the way you came, or venturing further up the trail. [Less than a mile up the Wild Burro Trail, you will have a choice of taking it further to

the Goat Corral, or taking the Wild Mustang Trail which will loop further to the west, before following a route along the west side high above Wild Burro canyon. Another option would be to take the Alamo Spring Trail back along the east side of Wild Burro canyon (these hikes are described later.)]

While at Alamo Spring, take a short hike just to the west to the location of another old line shack (there is a directional sign). In addition, another sign suggests going out further on the dramatic rock formations in front of the bench for views as well as offering a nice location for snacks or lunch.

You might have noticed as you topped the ridge to reach Alamo Spring, the area above the spring is much like a vast bowl several miles across. Most of this area is part of Tortolita Mountain Park.

Also be aware that the original trailhead for the Wild Burro Trail was at the temporary trailhead parking on Dove Mountain Blvd. From the new trailhead a trail still continues southwest toward that point and joins the walking paths which follow Dove Mountain Blvd. It is possible to follow these paths/trails from the intersection of Tangerine and Dove Mountain Blvd. up to and beyond Alamo Springs. It is one mile from the old temporary trailhead to the current trailhead parking area by the Ritz-Carlton. The length and elevation of this segment are not noted in this guide.

Wild Burro Trail (Alamo Spring to Water Tank and Goat Corral)

General Description: <i>This hike goes from Alamo Spring northeast to the area of the old goat corral. A wonderful chance to experience more of Tortolita Mountain Park - the vast basin above Alamo Spring. MAP NOTE: PURPLE LINE</i>
Difficulty: <i>Moderate to difficult</i>
Length: <i>2.4 miles (one-way)</i>
Highest Elevation: <i>3920'</i>

During the spring of 2010 the Wild Burro trail was extended to the water tank and “goat corral” about two miles northeast of Alamo Spring in Tortolita Mountain Park “as the crow flies”. This route starts along the Wild Mustang about a half mile above Alamo Spring. Look for it to turn to the right and follow a “zig zag” path into the heart of Tortolita Mountain Park. Hikers may wonder why the trail goes to some of the places it does, but along the way you are exposed to things like crested saguaros, rock formations, exceptional views, or other attractions. It is a route that “goes out of the way” to lead one past these special locations. There once were at least three crested saguaros along this trail, some quite unique in their appearance. Two close to the trail, and a third is a little above the trail on a hill. This one is a double crested saguaro (the top crested and an upper arm also crested). Following the freeze of February 2011, several of these have died.

Over a mile into this trail, you will notice a vast rock area to your left a little up a wash you are crossing. It is worth a short side trip to visit this area. After any rains a small stream of water may be running across or next to it. This can be an enjoyable stop for lunch if you reach here when hungry.

View from near the junction of the Wild Mustang Trail and the Cochie Spring Trail.



After over two miles since leaving the Wild Mustang Trail junction, you will reach an old windmill, now with solar power, providing water for any cattle still grazing in the area. This is adjacent to Wild Burro wash. Just past the windmill there is an old rock corral about 100 yards east from the windmill, across the wash. Look carefully for the trail as it shifts from the west side of the wash to the east side. Whether the corral “housed” goats or other animals is at best, a guess, but it is a sign of earlier times when the area was used much more actively for grazing. (Note that

there are plans to build a trail from the area of the goat corral to the east connecting with the Ridgeline Trail. This trail is under construction and could be done before the summer of 2014. This combination would create another loop hike in the Tortolitas, albeit a loop from Alamo Spring.)

To return to Alamo Spring, either follow the same trail back, or hike down the wash. It is an easy trek in the wash if you don’t mind walking in the softer sand, and it offers some different scenery including a couple vast rock “spillways” that are fairly gentle slopes of slab rock, and might serve as nice lunch or snack stops. But step carefully if the rocks are wet as they can be slippery. The wash route will save you about half a mile.

Remember that if you extend your hike from the trailhead all the way to the goat corral and back, you will be covering over ten miles, which changes the hike to “difficult”, and possibly “very difficult” for some.

Lower Javelina Trail

General Description: *The Lower Javelina Trail may be the easiest in the Tortolitas. It is not long, and not a lot of elevation gain. Yet it offers some beautiful scenery in the area all within a mile of the back of the hotel. MAP NOTE: BLUE LINE*

Difficulty: *Easy to moderate*

Length: *1.7 miles, several miles longer due to need to hike to the trailhead and return. Also depends on whether both sides or only one are hiked.*

Highest Elevation: *3090’*

If anyone asks you to take them on an easy hike in the Tortolitas, yet one that offers them a chance to view some of the beautiful scenery of the area, consider the Lower Javelina Trail. Not only is it quite easy in its full length, hikers have the option at the half-way point of not doing the other side, but returning via the Wild Burro Trail, therefore making the hike a little shorter and avoiding more climbing. This trail is actually a loop along the lower sides of the ridges of Wild Burro wash (see map) ... there is a west portion and an east portion, with hikers crossing the wash, and therefore crossing the Wild Burro Trail as they go from side to side.

To access this trail, follow the signs at the trailhead into the wash and turn left, or up canyon on the Wild Burro Trail. After going less than half a mile, you will reach the state land fence-line, where the signs will direct you either left or right, depending on which way you want to travel the route. Also, if you look up canyon from this spot, you will generally see where the trail will come down and cross the wash ... about 3/4 mile up canyon where it is narrower.

This hike description will take the trail in a clockwise direction, but following the directions “backwards” would get one on a counter-clockwise route.

At the fence-line, turn left following the signs, which also note the Wild Burro and Upper Javelina are along this route for about .3 mile (you will pass the Upper Javelina trail leaving to the left at about the same location as the trail you are on does a modest right turn.

Soon you will come to another marked juncture where the Wild Burro Trail turns right, while the Lower Javelina Trail goes left (although basically straight) and slowly starts to climb up the west side of the canyon. You will only climb about 1/4th of the way up, and if you look ahead, you will see a ridge coming down to the wash. Your trail will take you just over the top of that. Along the way there are some beautiful rock formations and views, although that can be said for most of the trails in the Tortolitas ... in fact in Arizona. There is a crested saguaro about 50 yards to the left of the trail as it goes uphill.

When the trail drops down into the wash again, watch closely for the cairns and rock edging guiding you across to where the east portion goes up. The alert hiker may see a crested saguaro partway up the east side of Wild Burro canyon. There is a short climb back up to the level the trail follows on the east side, which is probably a little higher and longer than the west side. Again you will have some nice views including looking toward the Ritz-Carlton Hotel.

After a mile of hiking you will meet the Alamo Spring Trail coming down from the saddle above. Turn right on that and you will shortly reach the fence line again. From there you will turn left and follow the Wild Burro Trail back to the trailhead.

Upper Javelina Trail

General Description: <i>A moderate trail offering great views of the Ritz-Carlton hotel, the golf course, Dove Mountain plus Marana and the Avra Valley. MAP NOTE: RED LINE</i>
Difficulty: <i>Moderate</i>
Length: <i>2.8 miles, but nearly 4 miles if done as a loop using the roadside walkways</i>
Highest Elevation: <i>3290'</i>

This is both a nice loop hike from either the hotel or the golf clubhouse, and it is a dandy hike for those not wanting a longer trek into the mountains. Like the other loop hikes, this can be done in either direction. These directions are from the Ritz-Carlton Hotel or the adjacent Wild Burro Trailhead clockwise. Just do everything “backwards” if you prefer.

From the hotel take the crushed granite pathway which follows Secret Springs Drive back to the southwest, or toward the Ritz-Carlton gatehouse. If you start from the trailhead parking area, cross Secret Springs Drive and you will locate the walkway. Continue about half a mile to Boulder Bridge Pass. Turn right here and hike toward the west and past the golf clubhouse. Several hundred yards after passing the golf clubhouse, you will see a fence with a gate just to your right.

Go through the gate, turn right and follow the trail along the fence, up a few switchbacks and after climbing you will come to several wonderful overlooks of the golf course. The trail will slowly climb up to the ridge and generally follow it for about a mile or little more until you reach the junction of the Wild Mustang Trail. Here, The Upper Javelina Trail turns directly right, crosses the saddle just in front of you, and then drops down toward Wild Burro canyon. After less than a 1/4 mile you will see a trail branching off to the right. This alternate route will bring you down almost to the front door of the hotel and can be taken if you prefer a hike about one mile shorter.

Meanwhile the main trail goes to the left and soon switchbacks down toward the canyon and the backside of the hotel property with great overlooks of the patio and pool areas of the Ritz-Carlton. You will emerge on the Wild Burro Trail where you will take a right turn and hike down several hundred yards to the wash and the state fence-line. Here the Wild Burro Trail will make a right turn down the wash. Within less than half a mile, look either for the turnoff to the hotel marked by cairns on the trail, or go further down the trail if you are returning to the trailhead parking area.

Wild Mustang Trail

General Description: <i>This trail offers both a fairly strenuous hike plus many very picturesque views as it winds back in Wild Burro canyon just below the west ridge. Note that using this trail requires also taking other trails to access its trailhead and to return. It can be part of several difficult to very difficult hikes, when combined with other trails to form a loop. MAP NOTE: ORANGE LINE</i>
Difficulty: <i>Difficult/very difficult</i>
Length: <i>3.8 miles one-way, but requires additional 1+ miles to access the trailhead, plus return distances. Minimal RT distance of 8+ miles</i>
Highest Elevation: <i>4070'</i>

The Wild Mustang Trail is considered by many the most beautiful of the Tortolita trails. Perhaps because it covers over 4 miles as it winds back toward Alamo Springs, which includes crossing several saddles, each opening to a new view, including some looking to the east where Mt. Lemmon and the Catalinas can be seen. Eventually you will view the picturesque open area above Alamo Springs, Tortolita Mountain Park ... it is a spectacular trail.

This trail starts at the junction of the location where the Upper Javelina Trail crosses a saddle and makes a sharp left or right turn depending on your direction. To reach the start of the Wild Mustang Trail, from the trailhead parking lot, cross Secret Springs Drive (the road into the hotel) and turn right on the path. A little before you reach the front entrance area of the hotel, a marked path will turn off to the left. Follow it a couple hundred yards as it wraps around the base of the hillside, then turns abruptly to the right and up the hill. This is commonly called the hotel spur and is shown on the map in red.

About a quarter mile up the hill, and after several wonderful overlooks down to the hotel, you will reach a trail junction. If you went straight you would be on the Upper Javelina Trail heading back down toward the backside of the hotel. Instead, turn left at this point and go less than another quarter mile up over the saddle where you will come to the junction of the Upper Javelina Trail, which continues on the the left down toward the golf clubhouse, and the start of the Wild Mustang Trail which heads off to your right.

From here you will travel nearly 4 1/2 miles back into the Tortolitas, well up on the side of the canyon wall providing great views, yet well below the several rocky peaks along the ridge line to your left. Note that after about .4 mile there will be the junction to the Cochie Spring Trail which continues straight to the west at the location sometimes known as "Joel's Picnic Rock". You make a sharp right turn here, following the signage, and start gently uphill. Just over the first ridge and about 200 yards on this section of trail there is a crested saguaro just off to the east or left of the trail. Further you will come to a beautiful overlook area. There is a trail marker here. It is broad and level, so a nice spot to rest for a snack.

While hiking the Wild Mustang Trail, be especially alert for crested saguaros, as there are at least six within easy sighting of this route. A couple are near enough to the trail for good photography, while others can be spotted in the distance. However, several of these were also killed, apparently due to the February freeze several winters ago.

After heading northwest along the trail, which generally rolls up and down with a few fairly easy climbs, you will eventually cross a saddle where you will have views of the vast basin above Alamo Spring. The trail will start dropping down and eventually turn to the right and into the more open and flat area and finally loop around to your destination - Alamo Spring. Note that this upper part of the trail and the spring are in Tortolita Mountain Park. Technically, at the point where the Wild Burro Trail breaks off toward the northeast and the Goat Corral is the end of the Wild Mustang Trail. From here down to the spring is actually the Wild Burro Trail (confused? - look at the map). NOTE: if continuing on the Wild Burro Trail toward Alamo Spring, make sure you head to the right ... that is the direction back toward the trailhead and the hotel.

The spring is actually an old well and just below that there are signs of an old dam. Many years of rain have filled the area in with silt, but the giant cottonwood is symbol of the fact that this historically was a wetter location. While at Alamo Spring, a short side trip will take you to the location of another smaller line shack, and an easy rock scramble out to the marked "overlook" offers both views and a wonderful lunch spot.

The most direct route back to the trailhead parking area is the Wild Burro Trail. Be sure to visit the old line shack at the point where the trail drops down into the lower Wild Burrow wash (the trail goes right next to it), noting both the old round concrete water tank, and the much larger "swimming pool" about 100 feet southeast of the line shack ... more signs that this area once had much more water. From Alamo Spring one also has the option of taking the Alamo Spring Trail back to the main trailhead, making a longer hike and a large loop of the trails. For this loop one would hike the red, orange, purple, green and purple again sections of trails. Good reason to have a map and watch the trail signs with the color coded arrows

Alamo Spring Trail

General Description: *Following much of the east ridge over Wild Burro canyon, this trail offers a variety of great views, including the Solana community, Gallery Golf Club north course, and at the upper end, Alamo Spring. Shorter than the Wild Mustang Trail routes, but more elevation. MAP NOTE: GREEN LINE*

Difficulty: *Moderate to Difficult*

Length: *4.1 miles one-way, but requires additional miles to access the trailhead, plus return distances. Minimal RT distance of 8+ miles*

Highest Elevation: 3870'

The Alamo Spring Trail enjoys many beautiful views as it stretches along the east ridge line of Wild Burro canyon back toward Alamo Spring. To access this trail, from the trailhead parking area, follow the signs down into the wash to the Wild Burro Trail, which you will follow northeast about half a mile to the state land fence line. At this point look for the trail signs which guides you to the left or right (you go right) where you will climb to the saddle above. This will include a few switchbacks. You will also pass the junction of the Lower Javelina Trail about 1/3 of the way up to the saddle ... remember to stay to the right; don't turn left onto that trail.

At the saddle enjoy views back down to areas of Dove Mountain and the Gallery Golf Club. Resuming your hike you will follow the trail as it goes up to the left toward the ridge, which it will follow for several miles. After about a mile on this trail, you will drop down through a lower area where you can look down into Wild Burro canyon and see parts of the Lower Javelina Trail on the far canyon wall. If you look down along the east canyon wall, you may also see another crested saguaro below you, several hundred yards off the trail.

For the next mile or so you will traverse several moderate ups and downs, cross a few flat rock areas where you will need to watch carefully for the trail, and pass a beautiful "landscaped" rock wall on your left. From here you will soon hike over a saddle, then start down toward the location of the spur trail. Be alert for a trail marker at this point, because it appears the Alamo Spring Trail continues down the hillside toward the west. That is actually the spur trail leading down to the area near the line shack and the Wild Burro Trail.

Hikers going to Alamo Springs should turn right at that trail marker, then drop down and cross a wash and in about a mile, cross another easy saddle and drop down to Alamo Spring with views of Tortolita Mountain Park to the north. This is a beautiful lunch location. From here you have the option of returning on the Alamo Spring Trail, take the Wild Burro Trail back to the trailhead (the shortest way back), or continue on the Wild Mustang Trail for a longer trek.



View from the Dan Hill memorial bench located by Alamo Spring.

Note that just a few hundred yards prior to reaching Alamo Spring, there is a clearly marked junction with the Ridgeline Trail. That trail extends further away from the trailhead several miles (check the map) and if taken, would add many miles to one's hike.

Cochie Spring Trail

General Description: *The Cochie Spring Trail offers a look into a different canyon than Wild Burro. Hikers don't reach the trailhead until they are halfway to Cochie canyon. While the info implies that it has a lot of elevation, much of it is spread over some distance, so there are only a few steep climbs. This is an out and back hike. MAP NOTE: YELLOW LINE*

Difficulty: *Difficult/very difficult*

Length: *3.6 miles one-way, but requires an additional nearly 2 miles to access the trailhead, plus return distances. Minimal RT distance of 10+ miles (although hikers can shorten this by not going to the end of the trail*

Highest Elevation: 3420'

Hikers wanting to do the Cochie Spring Trail need to be aware that they must hike several miles just to reach the trailhead, then hike the trail - which is an out-and-back route of over six miles RT, and then hike the several miles from the trailhead back to the parking area. But it is a great hike for those wanting the distance, wanting to see what is "over in the next canyon", and enjoy having their climbing spread over several miles rather than with steepness and switchbacks.

The most direct route to the trailhead is to take the alternate Upper Javelina Trail (hotel spur) by crossing Secret Springs Drive from the parking area, turn right and then watch closely for a marked path on your left. This will be just a little way before reaching the spa and the front door area of the hotel. Take this path a couple hundred yards along the base of the hill and watch for the trail to then start up. You will climb several hundred feet of elevation, and soon reach a saddle where the main Upper Javelina junction is marked. Take a left turn (right would take you back down behind the hotel) and climb a fraction of a mile further to the junction of the Wild Mustang Trail, which you will take to the right. In about .4 mile you will see a sign for the Cochie Canyon Trail. The Wild Mustang Trail heads to your right, but you stay straight.

You will travel generally west on "level" ground for about a mile. In the distance you can see Picacho Peak. In fact there is quite a panorama from this area including the Santa Ritas, the Tucson mountains, Kitt Peak and Baboquivari, the Watermans and Ragged Top. When the trail starts to make a curve down to your left, you might walk just a little way off trail to your right. There you can look down into Cochie canyon as well as back to the north. In the far distance where the road travels up the hill, you will see part of the old Carpenter ranch.

Back on the trail you will hike down and around the ridge you recently reached, finally turning back to the northeast and below the overlook you just passed. From here the trail will stretch for several miles along the canyon side, crossing the ridge ahead of you, which is above an old ranch next to the wash. When you

cross that ridge you will soon drop down to the wash area where the trail officially ends near an old windmill, a small dam and an old corral. Hikers could continue on the roadway considerably further into the canyon, but this description presumes they would return from here via the same route just used.

Note that there is an unmarked two mile “route” that one could take from this “end of the trail” location up and over the ridge that appears high above to the east. This route would provide, for the accomplished hiker, a way to make a loop hike, going out on the Cochie Spring Trail and returning on the Wild Mustang Trail, or one of the others in Wild Burro Canyon. It is recommended that hikers NOT familiar with the route should NOT attempt it. In many places the route is faint and this far from the trailhead is not a place to get disoriented and lost.

Ridgeline Trail

General Description: *The Ridgeline Trail has been completed. It climbs up to the ridges separating upper Wild Burro Canyon from Ruellas Canyon to the east with some sections offering views to both sides. MAP NOTE: THE RIDGELINE TRAIL IS SHOWN IN WHITE.*

Difficulty: *Moderate*

Length: *3,2 miles, but requires using several miles of other trails to access. Whether hiked as an out and back, or looping using the Wild Burro Loop Trail and the Wild Burro Trail, over ten miles will be covered.*

Highest Elevation: *4230'*

The Ridgeline trailhead is a fraction of a mile east from Alamo Spring off the Alamo Spring Trail. The junction is clearly marked. The route climbs up and turns mostly to the east to the ridge which separates Wild Burro and Ruellas canyons. Instead of following the original route plan to head further to the east and tie in to the area of Cougar Canyon, the Ridgeline Trail has been tied to the Wild Burro Loop Trail at a point at the saddle above Ruellas Canyon. From there the “loop” trail to the point where it reaches the location of a route down to the goat corral and therefore linking with the upper Wild Burro Trail.

A somewhat unique characteristic of this trail is a result of its name ... Ridgeline Trail ... as that positions it where it will offer some of the more spectacular views of any of the trails. By being positioned up high, at or near the ridges, and often looking down into canyons on both sides, hikers are offered opportunities for viewing or photography of an exceptional nature. And while this trail has been designed to be easier on the hiker, biker or equestrian using it ... it also comes with a bench to sit and rest. In addition to a bench on the Ridgeline Trail, one has been placed on the Alamo Spring Trail as well as at the overlook location on the Wild Mustang Trail. The bench located near Alamo Spring, which was placed there in memory of hiker, Dan Hill, offers both a place to sit and relax as well as one of the most beautiful views from the trails out toward Marana.

The Ridgeline Trail, like some of the others, has been constructed to be much more biker and equestrian friendly. It is mostly much smoother with fewer rocky steps. It tends to follow contours rather than climb dramatically. Its slope is such to help drain the water during Tucson's rainy seasons.



View of upper Wild Burro Canyon from the end of the Ridgeline Trail.

This route will make a loop hike from Alamo Spring along the Ridgeline Trail and the Wild Burro Loop Trail are all completed (about summer 2014) and the Wild Burro Trail. Readers should understand that this trek, when measured from the Wild Burro Trailhead, will be a very long one, and with considerable elevation gain ... surely a "very difficult" hike.

The original plan for this trail had it continuing several miles to the east and back to the southeast into the area more above Saguaro Ranch. Given the issues of establishing access to what someday perhaps be a trailhead at the end, this segment has been put on hold. For further information, contact the Town of Marana.

For those who have heard of the wild or feral mustangs which roam in the Tortolitas, most of the sightings have been from locations on or to the east of the current Ridgeline Trail. In addition several crested saguaros have been noted in the area, with a few very close to the trail itself.

Wild Burro Loop Trail

General Description: *The Wild Burro Loop Trail currently is under construction. See details below. MAP NOTE: THE WILD BURRO LOOP TRAIL IS SHOWN IN LIGHT PURPLE.*

Difficulty: *Moderate, or easy depending on hiker direction.*

Length: *1.7 miles, but requires using several miles of other trails to access. This trail can be used either to extend hiking the Ridgeline area to a point overlooking the goat corral and then returning or continuing down and looping back toward the hotel and trailhead parking via the Wild Burro or other trails. This loop will definitely extend well over ten miles.*

Highest Elevation: 4230'

The Ridgeline Trail originally was planned to extend further east and then southeast. For various reasons, the trail now ends at a spot high above upper Ruellas canyon (see white line on map). The trail at this point now heads back to the northwest and has been named the Wild Burro Loop Trail since its purpose, besides

to add some marvelous views into upper Wild Burro canyon, is to form a loop back to the Wild Burro Trail where it ends at the water tank and the "goat corral".

After less than a mile of following the contour, the trail drops down in a series of gentle switchbacks to the water tank and the upper end of the Wild Burro Trail. On the map that follows, viewed from the perspective of looking back down Wild Burro canyon, one can see the obvious loop formed. From Alamo Spring one could hike the short segment of green, then the white Ridgeline Trail, follow the light purple down to the water tank, then the dark purple of the upper Wild Burro Trail back to Alamo Spring.

Remember that to do this loop from the trailhead parking area, the distance is well over 13 miles, and the total elevation gain, given the ups and downs, would far exceed 2000'. While the segments of this loop may not be "difficult", the full loop certainly must be considered that if not "very difficult".

Note to bikers: not only is this loop a great mountain bike ride, by using parts of the Wild Mustang Trail and the Upper Javelina back to the area of the Golf Club of Dove Mountain, a much longer ride can be accomplished.



Tortolita trails as viewed from north end of Wild Burro canyon. Hikers and bikers can view various options of loop hikes. Alamo Spring is located where the green line meets the dark purple in mid picture.

Canyon View Trail

General Description: *The Canyon View Trail is a private trail of the Canyon Pass Homeowners Association. Use is limited to those who are with a resident, or groups who have received permission to use the trail. For those who are invited to use this trail, it offers marvelous views of Canyon Pass, and much of Dove Mountain. MAP NOTE: NOT SHOWN*

Difficulty: *Moderate*

Length: *3 mile loop*

Elevation: *900' from low point to high, with the same cumulative gain*

The Canyon View Trail is quite short, has a fairly steep climb, yet offers a fun loop hike with wonderful views of the Canyon Pass community, much of Dove Mountain, plus into Wild Burro canyon from the trail summit. Several of the Tortolita trails described in this book can be seen from this vantage point.

Remember that this is a private trail and access is via the guarded gate into Canyon Pass. You must either be with a resident, or have received prior permission to use the trail from the homeowners association. The trail is accessed from North Crimson Bluff Drive. Directions to that point can be gotten from the gatekeeper.

From the steep road (park carefully and use your brake) hike up the hill, through the gate just a fraction of a mile. The trail is marked and climbs past a crested saguaro up to the left with a few switchbacks to a saddle which offers a brief rest location and views (it is a fairly steep trail in many places as it climbs nearly 1000' in about a mile.) From this point you will continue on around the hillside in a clockwise direction and eventually climb up to what appears to be the peak. But when you continue hiking, you will then see that the real peak, ... your destination still lies ahead.

It is actually not too much further, and when you do reach the summit, which you access from the west side, you will be greeted with the great views mentioned earlier. Most hikers stop here and have either lunch, or a snack. When ready to head back down, the trail will head to the north, then wind down a long ridge and eventually drop onto an old "Jeep" road which you will follow back down toward your car. Parts of this has some difficult footing so take care.

"Uncharted" Routes

There are several "uncharted" routes that some hikers have taken that are worth noting. But a word of caution. If you do not have familiarity with the area, maps and/or GPS guidance, it would be unwise to explore these routes, especially alone. This would be especially true in the hotter months, as there is NO good source of water in the Tortolitas, shade is at a great premium ... getting lost "back there" would not be fun.

Before writing further, let me note that there are many short routes leading off the main trails which often go to a nice overlook or to a lunch spot. These are close to the trails, and don't lead the hiker far from "familiar territory". Feel more free to explore them.

Suggested Loop Hikes

The design of many of the trails in the Tortolitas suggests combining them into loop hikes, going out from the trailhead on one trail and returning on another. Remember that the Lower Javelina Trail and the Upper Javelina Trail already are designed as loops. There are three other loop hikes using the existing trails.

First ... and longest ... is the **"Loop Around the Rims"** hike using primarily the Alamo Spring Trail out and the Wild Mustang/Upper Javelina Trails back. Or the other direction if you prefer. This hike is just over ten miles in length from the trailhead and back, with 1250' of elevation and 1975' of cumulative elevation gain. Must be considered a very difficult hike, yet offers a combination of many wonderful views in the Tortolitas.

Second is on the **East Rim** and would be to go out on the Alamo Spring Trail and return on the Wild Burro Trail. Measures just over seven miles in length, 1065' of elevation and 1445' feet of cumulative elevation gain. A moderate hike, and also one that can be hiked in either direction - counter clockwise or clockwise.

Third is on the **West Rim**, going out on the Upper Javelina/Wild Mustang Trails and returning on the Alamo Spring Trail. Also a moderate hike with 8 1/2 miles distance, 1250' elevation and 1310' of cumulative elevation gain.

And the newest loop is the one formed by the **Ridgeline Trail, Wild Burro Loop Trail and the upper Wild Burro Trail** ... with Alamo Spring as the starting point. This trail added to the "Loop Around the Rims" above makes for about the longest loop trek possible in the Tortolitas

Using your imagination and studying the trail map might suggest some other loops. Just remember that the shortest of these is over 8 1/2 miles in length and the longest is nearly 12 miles. More importantly, while they each have well over 1000' feet of elevation from the low point to the high, the hiker could actually climb about two or three times that of cumulative elevation.

Geocaching

Since the trails have been developed in the Tortolitas, many geocaches have been placed there. What is geocaching you might ask? According to GEOCACHING.COM *"Geocaching is a high-tech treasure hunting game played throughout the world by adventure seekers equipped with GPS devices. The basic idea is to locate hidden containers, called geocaches, outdoors and then share your experiences online. Geocaching is enjoyed by people from all age groups, with a strong sense of community and support for the environment."*

Hikers interested in this activity might simply seek as many of the geocaches in the Tortolitas as they can, or organize competitions between groups. This could bring a different excitement to the hike, and help encourage hikers to explore additional trails in order to discover more of the geocaches.

Crested Saguaros

In the descriptions of several of the Tortolita hikes, there are several mentions of crested saguaros. This writer has not found a definitive explanation for why these occur. Some say it is from freezing - but don't they all freeze? Others say perhaps a virus. And some suggest that lightning strikes have "stunted" the affected cactus.



Whatever the cause, there are certainly a significant number of crested saguaros near the Tortolita trails to catch the eye and the interest of hikers. This is probably most obvious on the Wild Mustang Trail, the "Goat Corral" Trail, and the Ridgeline Trail. But the impressive example, seen here, below the Alamo Spring Trail can also be seen from the Lower Javelina Trail. And there is the crested saguaro early along the Canyon View Trail in the Canyon Pass community.

For anyone exploring the route from the Wild Mustang Trail over to the Cochie Spring Trail, they will pass right next to where a crested barrel cactus once stood as they hike down within sight of the road into Cochie Canyon. It has since died. It, like the crested saguaros, provided interest, but with no good explanation of its cause. More exist along the Tortolita Trails. Just view, take pictures if you wish, and enjoy.

Sadly, many of these crested saguaros plus other cactus died following the freeze of February 2011.