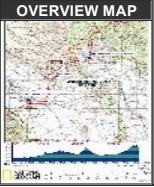



## G.E.T. Guidebook

### Segment 12: Gila Valley North 21.9 miles

Segment Length	Segment Status	Season
21.9 mi.	finalized and accessible	fall, winter, spring
Resources		
		<b>Additional maps:</b> Safford 1:100K Topographic (BLM) <b>Land management agency:</b> BLM Safford Field Office
<a href="#">G.E.T. Topo Maps 35-37</a> <a href="#">Town Guide: Safford</a> <a href="#">Water Chart</a> <a href="#">Image Gallery: Album 4</a>		

#### Beginning access point

**US 70 at 8th St & Hollywood Rd.** The GET crosses US 70 here, a half mile east of downtown Safford. Free, long-term parking may be available in town; inquire at the Chamber of Commerce office on US 70 between 8th Ave and 14th Ave (with a large parking lot nearby), or at the USFS/BLM office on 14th Ave at 8th St.

**Alternative access: Sanchez Rd at Gila bridge.** Section hikers with vehicle support can bypass the first 5 miles of this segment, which follow pavement and dirt agricultural roads out of town. From beginning access point above, follow US 70 east 4.3 mi. to Solomon, turn left (north) on Sanchez Rd, and continue 0.8 mi. to the bridge over the Gila. A dirt turnout is on the left just beyond the overpass.

#### SEGMENT OVERVIEW

The Grand Enchantment Trail rejoins cotton-spangled farmland once more as it departs Safford environs, then ascends gradually out of the Gila Valley and into the Gila Mountains on our tour of this segment. The Gila Mountains of Arizona are of course not to be confused with the Gila National Forest in New Mexico, farther ahead on our route. This comparatively low-elevation mountain range is fault-block in origin, a colorful, rock-studded upheaval that delineates the broad Gila Valley for many miles on its north.

The geology changes markedly as we enter this high-desert range. Gone from the surface environment are the sturdy granites, gneisses, and schists that form the heart and character of the Pinalenos, Santa Teresas, and other sky island ranges, replaced instead by the cobbly sedimentary and volcanic rock of the Gila Conglomerate. As is common throughout southeastern Arizona, the mineral copper is abundant in this area, a fact that has not gone unnoticed by mining interests over the years. In 2005, the Phelps-Dodge Corporation (now Freeport-McMoRan) secured plans to develop a pair of open pit mines in the Gila Mountains west of our route and only a few miles north of Safford, a boon to the rural economy here, if in some ways a transformation of the town's very soul. And so our route looks on from afar, offering vantages from this range of the distant past, the heady present, and an uncertain future.

In essence, this segment is a lead-in to the historic Old Safford-Morenci Trail which we explore in Segment 13. Along with Segment 14, these three segments - collectively the G.E.T.'s "mining miles" - make for a good 3-5 day section hike physically linking the Safford area with Morenci and the historic mining town of Clifton. Segment 12 here offers the fewest water sources of the three. Be sure to carry an adequate supply out of Safford, and consider detouring to the community of Solomon - 5 miles into the segment and about a half mile off-route - as all of the potential sources in this segment are either rancher-dependent or otherwise unreliable. (The Gila River may be fine for "camp water," but would not be suitable for drinking due to agricultural use of the valley.) Overall, the hiking route in this segment, a mish-mash of developed roads, jeep tracks, and drainages, is quiet and sufficiently remote-feeling, and becomes ever more so as you make tracks into the desert hills beyond town.

#### ROUTE DETAILS

From the 4-way junction of US 70 with 8th St on the west and Hollywood Rd on the east, (waypoint 11130, elev. 2920') head east on Hollywood Rd. The minor paved road passes through the little unassuming enclave called Hollywood, part residential, part agricultural.

At **0.9** of a mile (waypoint 12000), the arrow-straight road finally bends toward the south, becoming Montierth Lane. Leave the road at the bend and continue due east across the northern edge of a cotton field, keeping an embankment on your left. The way is unimproved initially, but a dirt farm road comes in at the next field plot and you can continue east on this. (The farm roads in this area - little-used except by cotton farmers themselves - are generally considered public rights-of-way, while just to the north lies the Gila River's extensive, sporadically wooded floodplain which is public domain as well, where you could make a pleasant camp. The floodplain tends to be very sandy, so is not as conducive for travel.)

Remain at the very northern edge of cultivated land as the perimeter road trends east and southeast, crossing a couple of minor irrigation channels, which can be a little tricky to dry-foot hop when flowing. At **2.0** (waypoint 12001), the road comes to a t-junction, with a row of shade trees at right extending south. Turn right here (south), tracing the eastern edge of the field. In a short ways you can then pick up an easterly road once again (waypoint 12002). Remain nearly due east on this road, ignoring occasional side roads at left and right, and continue to its end at a t-junction (**3.1**, waypoint 12004). Here turn right (south) to **3.5** (waypoint 12006), then left (east) on a short bridge over the San Simon River, little more than an irrigation channel here. (*Westbounders, be sure to cross the bridge, THEN turn right (north) onto the road just beyond.*) Remain on this road as it continues east across more cotton fields, a veritable sea of white in the early autumn prior to harvesting. Pass a few utility-type structures at roadside, then reach paved Sanchez Road at **4.5** (waypoint 12008). (*Westbounders, leave Sanchez Rd and turn right onto the first groomed dirt road beyond the Gila River, left side of an irrigation channel. A road sign warning of "ice on bridge" is located just north of the turnout.*)

As a detour, you could follow Sanchez Rd south for 0.5 mi. to reach the small community of **Solomon**, which has a convenience store for water, as well as a post office and

restaurant. (See [Town Guide](#)) Otherwise, turn left (north) on Sanchez Rd. Traffic is generally light, while more bordering cotton fields lend a bucolic air. At **4.8**, the road spans the Gila River in its wide flood plain (el. 2950'), with river access available via either the north or south end of the bridge. Continue north to the paved road junction at **5.5** and take the left fork onto Airport Road.

Leave Airport Rd at **5.7** (waypoint 12030), and join the wide, braided drainage of Tidwell Wash heading north. (A 2-track just east of the wash ends within 0.1 mi. in the wash) Generally follow the easternmost branch of the wash for easiest travel in this cross-country stretch. At **7.4** (waypoint 12040) a 4WD road crosses. Leave Tidwell Wash here by turning right (east) on the 4WD, and continue to **8.4**, where a power transmission line and its service road cross.

At the powerline, turn north onto the dirt 2-track service road. Pass around the east side of a power substation at **9.4**, ignoring roads that head west, and continue north with the trans. line. A **solar-powered well** just east of the substation may offer a trough and sometimes feeds water to a stock pond visible to the west via PVC tubing, from which you may be able to collect good water. The pond itself seems to receive little stock use and its north side might make for an ok camp hidden in the brush. Farther ahead on the powerline road, pass a side track on the left that goes to another earthen stock tank of unknown reliability. At **10.2**, (waypoint 12060) ignore an intersecting 4WD road at a 4-way junction, then at **10.5** (waypoint 12070) reach another 4-way with a lesser road and turn left (west) onto it, leaving the powerline service road. Cross the wide, sandy course of Tidwell Wash, which away from the road crossing may offer good, secluded cowboy camping prospects. The 4WD road ends at a t-intersection with Solomon Pass Rd, at **10.9** (waypoint 12075). Turn right (northeast) onto graded dirt Solomon Pass Rd. Vehicle traffic is generally light. (*Westbounders note that the 4WD turnoff, at 10.9, is the first such option on your left after the corral at 12.3.*)

A windmill and corral appear at left, at the road bend near **12.3**. The corral may contain several **troughs** with water now fed by solar power. Cross a cattle guard here. Just beyond, a lesser road heads right. Don't take it, but instead continue a short distance on Solomon Pass Rd to the next junction, at **12.4** (waypoint 12080), where a 2-track road heads off at the 2 o'clock position (northeast). Take this 2-track, which parallels Solomon Pass Rd on the opposite side of the drainage below the pass. The rocky swath is essentially unused by vehicles, and is safer than the main road to Solomon Pass, where the two roads again meet. (*Westbounders turn left just beyond the pass onto the 2-track.*) Far-ranging views from Solomon Pass (**13.4**, el. 4540') include the Gila Valley, Pinalafios, and Santa Teresas toward the south and west, while in the opposite direction lies broad Turtle Mountain beyond Bonita Creek, both destinations northward along our route.

Proceed north once more on Solomon Pass Rd, descending among diminutive high-desert ground cover to a pair of corrals near **14.1**. The second corral, on the left (west) side of road, has **one or two troughs with float-valves** that sometimes hold water, and have had a good track record in recent years. (The stock pond of **Rattlesnake Tank** itself was not visited.) Soon a 4WD track forks left (waypoint 12110), but continue on graded Solomon Pass Rd to **14.8** (waypoint 12120). Now take the left fork onto (likely signed) Salt Trap Road. Pass sometimes-wet **Don Tank**, downhill to the east, often with cows, and continue north to **16.1** (waypoint 12130), where the obvious, gravelly wash of Bear Spring Canyon crosses. (Here the **Spring Canyon Alternate** route follows Salt Trap Rd another half mile, then turns left onto a 4WD road to reach the Safford-Morenci west trailhead in 3.5 more miles. A **solar-powered well with trough** is a possible water source at MP 2.0 of the alternate. This is the vehicle route to the trailhead, shorter but less interesting, and potentially offering less solitude, than the main GET route.)

The main route turns left (west) to follow the rocky, braided wash of Bear Spring Canyon (not *Spring Canyon*, mentioned above). Negotiate a wire fence across the wash near **17.4**. Ahead, the drainage forks. Our route follows the left fork, remaining in Bear Spring Canyon, while the right fork leads to **Boo Tank**. (This is an earthen stock pond located in the drainage as mapped, and often has some silty water, and - less often - good pools just below it in the rocky wash. Camping is possible nearby, or alongside Bear Spring Canyon.)

Along the GET, reach a road junction in the drainage at **17.8** (waypoint 12140). Turn left (south) onto the dirt track, then right (west) at the t-junction almost immediately beyond. (*Westbounders (heading east here!), be sure to turn left at the t-junction and head back into the wash, rather than keeping straight on the road, which would lead you astray toward Burro Saddle, shown on the map.*)

For the next mile and a half or so the somewhat graded (4WD-ish) dirt road generally follows in or near the hackberry and juniper-lined wash of Bear Spring Canyon, and passes occasional mining exploration sites. At length, leave the road (waypoint 12145) where it climbs decisively out of the drainage on its left side, and continue in the wash itself with occasional sections of bordering trail. The canyon gains an air of seclusion here, yet remains open with good views, especially toward Weber Peak on the southwest. At **19.4** (waypoint 12150) pass an old gate in the wash, a cable draped between a pair of metal posts. In a few tenths of a mile, join the 4WD track that definitively leaves the drainage at left. The track soon contours through a shallow side canyon. Avoid several side roads at left (which climb away). Rejoin the main drainage of Bear Spring Canyon near an earthen impoundment.

Keep straight where another 4WD road joins from the left (waypoint 12160) (*westbounders take the left fork, staying in the drainage*). Momentarily reach the head of the canyon at an ocotillo-blessed pass (**20.7**, waypoint 12170, el. 5100'), with commanding views of the rugged Gila Mountains all around. An abandoned homestead is visible in the canyon to the north. Our rocky 4WD track now turns west to another outlook, back toward the sweeping expanse of the Gila Valley and, closer, the San Juan and Dos Pobres open pit copper mines now in development. Follow the road northeast, downhill. Bear right at a fork, then soon right again (**21.5**, waypoint 12180) (*westbounders take the left fork and stay left*).

Our road crosses the wash containing unreliable **Bear Spring**. Turn left down the wash a short ways to look for pools in the bedrock channel. If unsuccessful, turn left again in less than 0.1 mile and walk up a short, narrow side drainage which occasionally has pools of water near its cliffy head.

The 4WD road reaches the Old Safford-Morenci Trail west trailhead, with signboard and trail register, on the left at **21.9** (waypoint 12200, el. 4700').