
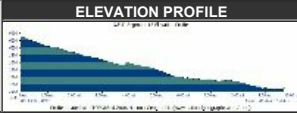


## G.E.T. Guidebook

### Segment 18: Sunflower Mesa 9.7 miles

Segment Length	Segment Status	Season
9.7 mi.	finalized & accessible	all year
<b>Resources</b>		
		<b>Additional maps:</b> Gila National Forest (USFS) <b>Land management agency:</b> Gila NF Glenwood Ranger District
<a href="#">G.E.T. Topo Maps 48-50</a> <a href="#">Town Guide: Glenwood / Alma</a> <a href="#">Water Chart</a> <a href="#">Image Gallery: Album 5</a>		

#### Beginning access point

**FR 712 at Trail 307 Trailhead.** 4.5 miles north of Glenwood NM, just south of where the highway crosses Mineral Creek in Alma, (at signed Mile 46) turn west off US 180 onto a graded dirt road. The road crosses the San Francisco River - often shallow or dry here, otherwise requiring a high-clearance vehicle. (An alternate bridged crossing via County Route 004 is accessed 1.2 mi. S on US 180 from mile marker 46. See the GET mapset for an overview.) Keep left at the first junction beyond the ford, then right at the next junction, here joining County Route 004. In 2.4 mi. from US 180, keep straight at a t-junction with a road at left. In about 6 mi. from US 180, past a power transmission line, turn right (onto FR 712, which may require 4WD when wet). A sign here says "Sunflower Mesa." Continue 3.8 mi. to the AZ/NM boundary at a fenceline. Primitive parking is available on either side of the fence near the signed trailhead for Charlie Moore Trail #307. **Please note:** These driving directions follow the route of the GET for its entirety in this segment.

#### SEGMENT OVERVIEW

Along with Segment 19, this short segment offers a convenient link between the backcountry of Arizona's Blue Range and the Gila Wilderness in New Mexico. US 180 serves as a natural dividing line between these segments, and at 4900 feet is also the lowest point along the eastbound GET until the Rio Grande valley some 250 miles away. (Long-distance hikers heading westbound will commonly encounter lower elevations in Arizona.) The 2-lane highway offers access to the village of [Alma](#), directly along our route, and also somewhat larger [Glenwood](#) a few miles to the south.

Sunflower Mesa is one of several broad volcanic plateaus that slope eastward from the Arizona border toward the valley of the San Francisco River near Alma. The landscape is quintessential New Mexico: wide open, with far-flung mountain vistas, and an austerity that invites contemplation. The GET in this segment follows graded Forest Service roads, offering easy walking and straightforward navigation. Besides the occasional rancher or hunter driving by, you're likely to have these roads to yourself. Although Sunflower Mesa would be considered prime range land, in fact it is not grazed by livestock as often as elsewhere. Water is quite scarce, confined to a few scattered earthen stock ponds, all of them unreliable. Plan to fill your bottles at the end of the segment, in Alma or perhaps from the river. The single crossing of the San Francisco along FR 106 presents no challenges most of the time, and in many years the river here runs dry by late spring.

#### ROUTE DETAILS

Forest Route 712 terminates at the trailhead for Charlie Moore Trail 307. Pass through the gate in the north-south fence (waypoint 17180, elev. 6300'), leaving Arizona and the Apache National Forest to enter New Mexico and the Gila National Forest. (Note that New Mexico observes Daylight Savings Time, while Arizona does not. Eastbound, set your watch one hour ahead during DST.) Follow the road that heads southeast, away from the fence. In about 0.1 of a mile (waypoint 18010) another road joins from the right and heads back to the border at a metal tank (likely dry). Stay on FR 712, which now turns northeast. First though, pause for a photo at the "border monument" here at the junction. The mileage listed on the sign seems to be a bit off the mark.

The surrounding terrain becomes ever less rocky as you proceed along Sunflower Mesa. Remarkably, the state line is almost precisely the end of the GET's cobbly, volcanic terrain, the standard fare underfoot since Safford environs. Pass a couple of tanks / troughs within the first mile; the one at around 0.4 - a **500 gallon tank** - was noted in 2013 to have a faucet that dispensed spring-fed water into the trough, but has been dry of late. Cross a cattle guard along the road at 0.9, then at around 1.4 a thirsty hiker could leave the road on a cross-country bearing for **Pit Tank** (waypoint 18025), located 0.3 of a mile due north near the head of a side drainage of Beaver Canyon. (This earthen tank was observed on satellite imagery to be wet and of apparently decent size and quality in May of 2014 (drought conditions), while other tanks along the mesa were dry or of poor quality at that time.) The junipers continue to decrease in size and number with the elevation, until only grama and other short grasses remain. Fall hikers may also confront a phalanx of the mesa's namesake sunflowers nodding at roadside (the surrounding terrain is sometimes densely carpeted with smaller yellow flowers at this time of year - not sunflowers - and can be a sight to behold).

As of 2015 a small, **float-valve-controlled trough** was located at roadside around 3.0, full upon first observation. Here again, don't count on these ephemeral rancher improvements, which have a poor record of reliability in this area. Sunflower Mesa Road comes to a prominent t-intersection with FR 105 at 3.8. Turn left (north) at the unsigned junction. FR 105 bends clockwise as it climbs a low hill and passes beneath a pair of tall power transmission lines. The prominent lone peak off to the northwest is Whiterocks Mountain. To the east you may note snow in springtime atop the Mogollon Mountains, here in plain view across the San Francisco River valley. A full moon rising over those mountains from this vantage is an experience the author won't soon forget.

Follow graded FR 105 gradually off the mesa, noting the return of junipers, as the increased slope angle must favor them as it does other drought-tolerant vegetation. At 5.7

(waypoint 18050) turn left (east) by the entrance to a private ranch. Cross the dry, but cottonwood-nourishing wash of Vigil Canyon at **6.6**. Just beyond, a convenient, if decidedly front-country, camp could be made near the lone live oak at left (this is Gila National Forest land, after all). The wash may sometimes flow where the canyon narrows to the east. Note on the map where the road comes close to the sycamore-lined drainage again, where you can clamber down the bouldery embankment in search of **small pools** among the rocky-strewn drainage bottom. (More secluded camping is possible in the drainage here.) Keep straight at **7.3**, now on FR 106 (C004), which also heads right (south, as C003 / Smoothing Iron Rd). (Note that the roads in this area are referenced by county route number - on signs and some maps - and also by forest route number.)

Ignore a lesser road that forks right at **7.9** and continue on graded 2WD FR 106 to a prominent fork at **9.0** (waypoint 18080). **The GET heads left here onto signed C017**, but hikers planning to walk into Glenwood for resupply can instead continue straight (southwest) on C004 to US 180, thereby cutting off about a mile of the highway walk. A bridged crossing of the San Francisco River along this detour also facilitates safe passage during high water, whereas the main GET route confronts the river directly (see next). (One can access the river from the northwest corner of the bridge, to collect water when it's flowing, etc.)

The main route descends to a junction with FR 104 (C008, waypoint 18090). Turn right and continue a short ways to cross the drainage of the **San Francisco River** along the roadway. In the wet spring of 2005, the ford was 25 feet wide and shin deep, while in the fall of that same year the river was entirely dry here. Following the 2012 Whitewater-Baldy Fire in the Mogollon Mountains and subsequent 2013 catastrophic flooding, the river filled with a large volume of sediment and may in fact be dry at the surface here now more often than not. Continue east among pastureland, crossing a cattle guard just before reaching US 180, at **9.6**. Turn left (north) and walk the paved, 2-lane highway's shoulder on a bridge over **Mineral Creek**. The segment ends a short ways beyond, at a junction with Mineral Creek Rd on the right (**9.7**, waypoint 18110, elev. 4900'). The Alma Grill is nearby, as well as the adjacent Alma Trading Company, which has **bottled water** for sale and also an **outside spigot**. To visit either, head 100 yards north along Highway 180.