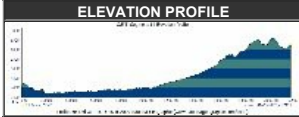


G.E.T. Guidebook

Segment 14: Eagle Creek - Painted Bluffs 23.9 miles

Segment Length	Segment Status	Season
23.9 mi.	finalized & accessible	fall & spring
Resources		
		Additional maps: Clifton 1:100K Topographic (BLM) Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (USFS) Land management agency: BLM Safford Field Office Apache NF Clifton Ranger District
G.E.T. Topo Maps 40-44 Town Guide: Morenci/Clifton Water Chart Image Gallery: Album 4		

Beginning access point

Old Safford-Morenci Trail east trailhead. From Clifton take US 191 (Coronado Blvd) north to the town of Morenci. Continue another ~5 miles and turn left onto signed, graded dirt Lower Eagle Creek Rd a short ways before ridge-top overlooks of the mine. The road descends to the flood plain of Eagle Creek in another 5.5 miles, where it turns left past a pumping facility, then right to cross the creek. A high-clearance 4WD vehicle is often advisable here and beyond. Now on unsigned Black River Rd (the same road changes names), continue ~1.6 miles, along the way ignoring a side road at right, to the signed Old Safford-Morenci Trail east trailhead. Parking for several vehicles is available along the roadside opposite and just beyond the trailhead sign.

SEGMENT OVERVIEW

The past and present merge with a certain canniness in this segment. Initially the G.E.T. follows a continuation of the historic trade route which ran from Safford to Morenci (beyond the current BLM-designated Old Safford-Morenci recreation trail). We then join the canyon of perennial Eagle Creek en route to the Apache National Forest. At length we climb away on the rugged Painted Bluff Trail, where ancient Anasazi pictographs adorn secluded mountain cliffs. Finally our tour tops out above the modern-day mining colossus of Morenci, affording competing perspectives of southeastern Arizona's so-called Copper Belt, one toward its natural and prehistoric wonders, the other its present-day material resources.

In the late 1800's, when the Old Safford-Morenci Trail (Segment 13) was an active trade route, it reached the boomtowns of Morenci and Clifton via Eagle Creek and Gold Gulch, following a route which modern roads have since rendered obsolete. Nor has this portion of the old route been reclaimed as a recreation trail; it is NOT part of the reconstructed Safford-Morenci Trail, but its history is still very much alive and on display. A burro trail, pick-axed from the sheer walls of Gold Gulch, still grants passage around an impressive slot canyon here, and old metal pitons that once served those ambitious trailbuilders yet remain in place. Gold Gulch is accessible as part of an alternate route that offers foot access to the Coronado Trail (US 191) outside Morenci, from which hikers can attempt a hitch into town in order to resupply (or else continue on to the end of Segment 14 where the main route crosses US 191 and hitchhike from there). This alternate route option can also be used to bypass most of the 50+ creek fords of Eagle Creek along the main route, but with the disadvantage of either an extended paved roadwalk directly past the Morenci Mine, or a hitchhike and missed miles, in order to rejoin the main route at segment's end. As such, we normally advise against using the alternate for avoidance's sake except whenever Eagle Creek is in flood.

In the old days, the vast mineral deposits of Morenci spelled paydirt. And for those who make a living from this remote and rugged country today, the dirt still pays - big time. Purchased by the Phelps-Dodge Corporation in 1881 (more recently by Freeport McMoRan) and first developed as an underground copper mine, the lands around Morenci have continued to yield ore ever since. At a depth of nearly 1000 feet and breadth of several miles, the Morenci mine is now one of the largest open-pit mines in the world and is North America's largest producer of copper cathode, the stuff that keeps us "wired" in our modern, high-tech world. A side trip to Morenci village winds past the mine, within plain sight of its towering equipment and massive haul trucks, all the while telling the story of a land whose many and varied chapters are little-read by the outside world.

Morenci village and its sister town of Clifton are potential resupply points for thru travelers. Clifton is a virtual living history museum to the old mining days before Morenci stole the reigns. In fact, the celebrated Apache Geronimo was also born nearby, and Chase Creek Street in town still looks much the same as in the days when saloons and brothels lined its now-quiet flanks.

Hikers following the main route in this segment generally enjoy a leisurely pace along Eagle Creek, sloshing back and forth across the drainage as dictated by the terrain, and pausing among leafy shade trees to admire the surrounding cliffs. The upper reaches of the canyon can be a little more challenging, with a somewhat deeper channel and the occasional beaver dam-flooded area. The Painted Bluff Trail is likewise rather primitive in character, is quite remote in its lower reaches, and ultimately provides a scenic and rewarding trip out to US 191 at segment's end.

ROUTE DETAILS

From the Old Safford-Morenci Trail east trailhead (waypoint 13250, el. 4100'), turn right onto Black River Road. The rough, graded dirt road ascends among mesquite and juniper to pass an old corral. At 0.6 of a mile, ignore a well-worn 2-track road on the left (the 2-track leads to a flat, relatively camp-friendly spot by a usually dry stock pond within 500 feet). Continue to a junction at 1.0, where the main GET route turns sharp left onto a road flanked by a pair of tan metal posts. (Or continue straight at the junction on Black River Rd to follow the **Lower Eagle Creek Road Spur**, a roadwalk route which leads 6 miles - first down to a single ford of Eagle Creek, then uphill all the way - to US 191, where one can attempt to hitchhike into Morenci or Clifton to resupply. See the description of this alternate route at the end of this chapter.)

The main GET route soon reaches a Y-intersection, taking the left fork. In 0.1 ignore a road on the right that heads out to a point above an old reservoir in the canyon of Eagle Creek. In another 0.1, turn left (west) at a t-junction, and follow the road somewhat uphill, then down to reach a first crossing of **Eagle Creek** in its scenic cliff-bound canyon at

2.0 (waypoint 14130, elev. 3690'). Typically ankle-to-shin deep here in its lower reaches, and 10-15 yards wide, perennial Eagle Creek is forded about 50 times in the 9 or so miles the GET follows it. The channel gradually narrows up-canyon, and in a few spots may be thigh-deep during average flow periods, especially in the final two miles. The current is typically reduced at the deeper crossings. Be sure to treat the creek water before drinking, particularly due to likely cattle activity upstream.

Ford the creek, passing beneath an old tram car line that must have served the former reservoir downstream. (*Westbounders, ford the creek beneath the tram and join the road that heads right from the opposite bank, soon leaving the drainage.*) A cobbly 2-track parallels the creek upstream, which we follow, here passing the remains of a gaging station.

The willow-lined creek soon turns north, the track fording it at frequent intervals. At **2.5** a spur track on the west bank accesses a potential camping spot among shady sycamores and mesquite trees. (The site is likely popular with fishermen as well; all of Eagle Creek in this area is owned by the Phelps-Dodge Corporation [now Freeport McMoRan, Inc], which thankfully allows public use of the resource.)

The tan and buff conglomerate cliffs on the east wall of the canyon are impressive near the confluence with Horseshoe Canyon, where the creek bends west. Probably the most spectacular part of Eagle Creek Canyon occurs near **4.4**, where another, unnamed drainage cuts deeply down to the main canyon. A scenic camp could be made at **5.2** (waypoint 14150), a smooth, grassy spot with campfire ring on the east side of the creek, a short ways after the track fords to this side.

The red, iron-rich volcanic exposures of Coronado Ridge soon come into view off to the north, while our canyon now widens a bit, offering the option to follow the 2-track road or impromptu horse/cow paths that leave and rejoin the 2-track at intervals. The meandering paths are often easier on the feet than the rocky, creekside track. At **7.1** another potential camp appears, above the cobbles on the north bank, among some shady walnut trees.

With perhaps 38 of 50 fords now behind you, the 2-track comes to a gate in a fenceline at **8.3**. Pass through the gate, which is unlocked and unposted, and turn right, circumventing an old ranch house, the bulk of which is posted private property. Primary vehicle access to the lonely dwelling must be via the adjacent San Carlos Reservation, rather than up the creek.

The obvious way north up the canyon keeps to the west bank initially, passing a tree with a rope-swing. (*Westbounders - heading south - should be on the west bank approaching the homestead, as a fenceline spans the drainage ahead.*) Soon pick up a de-facto pack trail, which, like the 2-track, follows along the banks and occasionally fords. (OHV's occasionally widen the first part of the trail between flooding episodes.) Seemingly well-trod by horses, the pack trail attempts to stay back from the creek corridor as much as possible, thereby avoiding the densest riparian vegetation. The trail occasionally branches and can take some finding again after it fords, though pruned tree limbs here and there offer reassurance. Wildlife is abundant in this more pristine portion of the canyon; watch especially for raccoons and coati mundi along the cottonwood and sycamore-lined creek.

The final mile along the creek is somewhat rough and slow-going, with deeper fords and occasional deadfall tangles at creekside due to flash flooding. Beyond the side drainage of Pistol Creek (shown on the map), the pack trail generally sticks to the east bank of Eagle Creek. Keep to this side of the creek as the canyon bends southeast. Here the trail emerges from the trees onto the open flood plain, follows its southern edge, then skirts back into the bordering woods on your right for a short ways, before ending for good at a cairn. Note the prominent red cliff straight ahead, an obvious landmark, on the south side of the creek where it bends north upstream. Continue in the open portion of the flood plain a little farther, then bushwhack to the creek, fording it just before this bend. The canyon now resumes a northward tack. Soon ford again to the east bank at the confluence with Knight Canyon, at **10.8** (waypoint 14180, elev. 4015'). The confluence is somewhat inconspicuous, as Knight Canyon is willow-lined and often sediment-laden here, although flagging tape and/or a cairn sometimes mark the turn-off. (*Westbounders, emerging from Knight Canyon, ford [Eagle Creek](#) here, then walk down the opposite bank and ford back across just beyond the bend, where the creek turns northwest. Find a way through the riparian growth, then back in the open turn northwest. Look for a cairn on your left indicating where pack trail heads into some woods at the base of the cliff there.*)

Now in the Apache National Forest, proceed cross-country up the rocky drainage of Knight Canyon, passing through a gate at **11.2**. As the canyon turns north, look carefully for a pack trail on the left (west) bank, which immediately climbs away (waypoint 14192). This, in essence, is the westernmost end of the Painted Bluff Trail #13, which you'll follow east all the way to the Coronado Trail (US 191) near segment's end. (If you reach an area in the drainage with huge, obstructing boulders, then you missed the trail turnoff.) Primitive and brushy, Trail 13 contours above the drainage, surveying some intriguing eroded cliffs, and soon reaches the hardscrabble remains of Lower Cottonwood Corral (waypoint 14194), which it passes directly through. The trail then returns to the canyon floor at an area of possible [spring pools](#) in the bedrock, at **11.7** (waypoint 14200), often a fine source (scout down-canyon a short ways if the first area of pools is dry). Immediately the trail climbs away again, via the same side of the canyon.

The trail now develops a habit of crossing the main drainage back and forth, though the crossing points are often vague and the trail hard to pick up again on the opposite side. Look for possible flagging, and note that the trail rarely follows the rocky drainage itself for very long, but prefers to cross it directly, then parallel it farther up in the flood plain where the going is less rough. The trail crosses to the left (west) bank at 33 08.956 109 28.806, where it remains until reaching Cottonwood Corral at **12.5** (waypoint 14210). Now defunct, the old corral would make for a flat and smooth campsite, with spotty live oak shade and some intriguing rock formations adorning nearby ridges. [Spring pools](#) are occasionally found in a sculpted bedrock portion of the adjacent drainage less than 100 yards southwest of the corral, though this source is often dry.

Beyond the corral the trail continues to another crossing of the drainage, marked by cairns. Most of the crossings beyond are also now marked by cairns, some more obviously than others. Approaching **12.9** the trail returns to the drainage and remains in it as our route turns north, (waypoint 14220) trading Knight Canyon for an unnamed canyon that nevertheless is the more prominent of the two. Look for the resumption of trail tread in a short ways. (*Westbounders, upon joining Knight Canyon, watch for the trail leaving the rocky drainage course on the left, where it remains until crossing back to the other side soon before reaching Cottonwood Corral.*)

A trail sign heralds your arrival at Cottonwood Spring environs. Nailed to a sycamore, the sign seems out-of-place in this secluded area, with "Hwy 666" (now US 191) shown as 9 miles away (likely closer to 8) and Eagle Creek 4 miles back (more like 3 and change). [Cottonwood Spring](#) (**14.1**, waypoint 14230) typically flows in the drainage for a couple hundred yards, occasional cattails and watercress assuring that it is a reliable source. Be sure to fill your bottles here, as the next fairly dependable water is nearly 12 uphill miles away at Frye Spring (or seasonally at Granville Campground). (*Side note: just west of the aforementioned trail sign, what appears to be an unmarked trail climbs away on the north side of the drainage. In fact, this is nothing but a well-worn stock path, not the Painted Bluff Trail which instead remains in the drainage. Westbounders, be careful not to go this way by accident when leaving Cottonwood Spring, as the errant path goes nowhere after the initial steep climb.*)

Now better defined by cairns, the Painted Bluff Trail continues to shortcut the drainage's meandering course, crossing it at frequent intervals, while rolling hillsides of scattered mesquite cast a decidedly arid air. At times the trail climbs a fair height above the drainage in order to shortcut bends in the channel. Finally the trail crosses to the north bank one last time, turns right alongside it, and climbs a short ways to reach a corral at **15.9** (waypoint 14240), leaving the drainage for good. Pass through the corral and turn right beyond it. (*Westbounders continue through the corral and turn right, soon descending to cross the drainage at a cairn.*)

Old cattle paths may briefly confuse the way ahead, where our trail soon angles somewhat northeast, then climbs east to a level height-of-land. From here to Wood Canyon the trail contours along south-facing slopes, with occasional short climbs and descents. A cement trough on the left (at waypoint 14245) is fed by [Pinto Spring](#) about 300 feet up the slope above, but the pipe is disabled and the trough dry. Following the pipe will lead to the spring, which collects in another cement trough at the base of a cliff.

Also above the cement trough at trailside, an Anasazi rock art site is located among the colorful cliff exposures of the Painted Bluffs. Situated at the base of the main cliff band, perhaps 300 vertical feet above the trail, just to the left of the steep little canyon that divides the cliffs (Pinto Spring is to the right, lower), the site contains some of the best preserved pictographs (cliff paintings) in the Southwest, due in no small part to its rugged isolation. Other surprises also await discovery here; by all means, plan to allot some extra time to explore the area, but consider leaving your GPS unit off here, and allow the next explorer to enjoy the same rewards in finding the site as you experienced.

The trail commences a final descent into Wood Canyon, crossing the rocky, usually dry drainage at **17.6**. Just before the crossing, a rough little side trail on the right (heading south) leads less than 0.1 mi. to a primitive campsite in a secluded setting among Arizona cypress. Just by the camp is [Curve Spring](#), an unreliable pool (or series of pools) in a bedrock portion of the wash (waypoint 14250). At last check, though, the side trail was so overgrown as to be more or less impassable. The best way to the spring may be to just head down the drainage itself.

The trail turns left up the east bank of the drainage, then heads right to climb away on more prominent tread. (*Westbounders, the trail turns left as it approaches the drainage, heading south along the bank for a ways, then crosses the wash.*) Back in more open terrain, pass a cleared area on the right in 0.1, which could fit a tent or tarp. The trail corridor remains in generally passable condition, with occasional large cairns offering reassurance. Dip awkwardly into a minor drainage, then climb away toward the east, reaching a gate at **18.7** (waypoint 14260). Commanding views open back down the broad expanse of Wood Canyon toward distant peaks beyond Eagle Creek.

The trail now slabs across the rocky slope as it ascends southeast, traversing among pinyon pines and Arizona cypress trees, the latter of which appear to be faring rather poorly in this area, perhaps due to climate change and/or the proximity to the Morenci mine. (Elsewhere in the region they appear to be thriving, as obviously they once did here, given the density of the stands.) Arrive at a prominent saddle at **18.6** (waypoint 14270, elev. 6480'). A small, somewhat sloped campsite with fire ring is here, nestled among the conifers. Here the Morenci mine comes into view off to the east, presenting a sudden, striking contrast to the landscape behind you. The open-pit copper mine's orange tailings walls are enormous, a fact which only hints at the colossal scale of the ongoing excavation. Massive haul trucks plumb the depths day and night, yet from this vantage appear as mere toys.

From the saddle the trail heads northeast in the company of scrub oak and our now-familiar Arizona cypress. Occasional blowdowns in this stretch will continue to be the norm as long as the standing dead timber remains. As of 2013 a route had been hacked by ax through the worst tangle, resulting in a somewhat awkward but at least passable detour. Beyond here the trail reaches a level, airy perch at **19.9**, where an old wooden plank supported by rocks serves as a bench, inviting pause. The area has been laboriously cleared of debris and would make for a viewful, if dry, camp.

The overgrown limbs of scrub oak and mountain mahogany once made for a scratchy walk, but the trail now remains good en route to a drainage crossing at **20.3** (waypoint 14290). After ascending a small rise by a dry stock impoundment, singletrack trail ends and Painted Bluff Trail 13 continues to the trailhead as an old 2-track road. The 2-track climbs north, then trends east in open, grassy terrain. Continue straight at **20.7**, where an eroded track climbs away at left. The mine is once again in view, though soon enough will become a distant memory (except, that is, for those planning to resupply in Morenci, whose highway detour visits the open pit at close range).

Descending a small red-clay knoll, the old 4WD turns left, soon contouring east, then turning north again to descend toward a crossing of the canyon's main drainage. Here our road bends southeast, passing some shady live oaks at left - a nice lunch spot. Ignore a side road that joins from the north and continue climbing southeast on the main 4WD. (*Westbounders stay left, descending.*) Painted Bluff Trail 13 ends in less than half a mile at **22.2** (waypoint 14320, elev. 6250') by a large dirt parking area off of US 191. (*Westbounders, look for a cairned metal sign at the northwest end of the lot. Just beyond it, a wooden signpost for the Painted Bluff Trail indicates which 2-track road to take here.*)

From the trailhead, the GET follows the dirt access road north to a junction with US Highway 191 by a hairpin turn at **22.3**. This curving mountain biway is known as the Coronado Trail, as it roughly follows the historic route of Francisco Vazquez de Coronado's expedition in search of the fabled Cities of Gold. (Those intending to hitch into Morenci or Clifton to resupply should plan to be patient waiting for a ride, especially weekdays and mornings. One way to improve the odds is by first following the low-speed, 2-lane road south a bit under 2 miles to a scenic roadside overlook for vehicles, which sees some turnaround traffic coming up from Morenci, in addition to tourists heading south toward town. All southbound traffic heads at least as far as Morenci. Along the way to the overlook, you'll pass signed Chase Creek Scenic Vista at 0.6 - a worthwhile stop. An interpretive sign points out several area peaks, as well as a small natural arch below, alongside the serpentine highway. Portions of the Morenci mine are also visible. In any case, it seems few vehicles stop here, preferring the more obvious turnout located about a mile farther down the highway, the recommended hitchhiking spot. Note that locals actually seem to refer to this lower turnout as the Chase Creek Scenic Vista, rather than the upper one, a worthwhile consideration if calling for a ride.)

From **22.3** the GET follows the highway north, immediately entering the Apache National Forest. After a few curves the road straightens out above the drainage of Chase Creek, trading southerly views for a secluded forested setting. Pass a highway sign for southbound vehicles listing "Morenci 16 miles," and offering another potential hitchhiking spot (maybe try pointing at the sign with a trekking pole whenever a vehicle happens past, in order to indicate your destination to unfamiliar tourists). At **23.7**, turn right onto Granville Circle at the signed entrance to Granville Campground. The dirt road crosses a cattle guard, passing through a pleasant forest of gamble oak, maple, and occasional ponderosa pine - excellent habitat for stellar and scrub jays, as well as the distinctive acorn woodpecker - before entering the campground proper. Vault toilet facilities (with trash cans), as well as combination picnic / camping sites are here (free, first-come first-served, generally a quiet place), in addition to several **water spigots** which are turned on usually from April to October. (The rest of the year you might find water at the north end of the campground, by a private cabin. See the beginning of chapter 15 as well as the water chart for details.) Segment 14 ends at **23.9** (waypoint 15010) by a parking area just north of the restrooms, enclosed by a low stone wall, in essence the trailhead for the Granville and Pinal trails accessed in Segment 15.

ALTERNATE ROUTE: LOWER EAGLE CREEK ROAD SPUR

This alternate route is intended as a way to reach US Hwy 191 in order to hitchhike into Morenci and Clifton to resupply, rather than by hitchhiking from the end of the segment. Although it's a 6 mile hike out to the highway via this alternate (as opposed to less or no off-route hiking from segment's end) the hitchhiking prospects are arguably better via the alternate due to the proximity to the Morenci mine and related traffic. The Lower Eagle Creek Road Spur can also be used to bypass Eagle Creek during times of high water. One ford of the creek is still required, but would only very rarely prove unmanageable on foot. In general, this alternate route is not intended to serve as a way to walk either all the way into Morenci or around the main route in Segment 14 altogether, since either would involve a protracted roadwalk on US 191, which features a narrow shoulder, hairpin turns, and for the most part an industrial air as it tours past (in essence, *directly through*) the Morenci mine.



Current streamflow data for Eagle Creek is available from the USGS [here](#). The data is recorded not far above the alternate route's single ford. Suffice it to say, readings in the near-normal to somewhat-elevated range for any given date should allow for safe crossing.

From the road junction at 1.0 of the main route, (**0.0** of the alternate) keep right (east) on Black River Rd. Soon descend rather steeply into the scenic gorge of Eagle Creek, passing a ranch on the right just before the dirt road fords the creek, at **0.6** (waypoint 14020, elev. 3600').

Eagle Creek is typically 10 yards wide and ankle-to-calf-deep here. Despite the pumping plant just upstream, and almost certain cattle activity, the perennial water seems to be as suitable for drinking (with treatment) as other creeks its size along the route. Just beyond the creek, the primary alternate route turns left along the road (now called Lower Eagle Creek Rd), while the **Gold Gulch alternate** heads right, an interesting detour that meets up with the Lower Eagle Creek Road Spur again in a few miles. (Refer to the GET topo map set, and see below.) Use the Lower Eagle Creek Road Spur in order to avoid further fords of Eagle Creek, or in times of high runoff or imminent flash flooding, when the otherwise intriguing slot in Gold Gulch would be dangerous to enter. The Lower Eagle Creek Road Spur follows Lower Eagle Creek Rd past the pump house, then turns right and switchbacks uphill, soon passing the curious ruins of a Spanish missionary-style church. The road finally tops out on a scenic ridge above the gorge, and continues east to cross the shallow drainage of upper Gold Gulch, where the Gold Gulch alternate rejoins (waypoint 14070). Distances are similar along either route.

Gold Gulch alternate

From milepoint **0.6** of the Lower Eagle Creek Road Spur, on the east bank of Eagle Creek, the **Gold Gulch alternate** heads right (south). Follow the rough jeep track, which soon dabbles with the creek again. The canyon, with its richly hued, eroded cliffs and pinnacles rising 1000 feet above the tall creekside greenery, is truly a feast for the senses. Eagle Creek here is privately owned by the Phelps Dodge Corporation (now Freeport McMoRan, Inc), which nonetheless allows recreational use of the canyon, including camping. The jeep track fords the creek here and there; some of the fords may be deeper (but with gentler current) than others. Pass some potential campsites on the right (west) bank, not long before the side canyon of Gold Gulch enters on the left, at **1.5** (waypoint 14040).

The entrance to Gold Gulch is fairly obvious - the first prominent side canyon, with a deep floor and small grove of cottonwoods near its mouth. Turn left onto a cobbly side track to ford Eagle Creek again, then enter the narrow gulch. (Or, to visit the hot spring shown on USGS maps, it appears that one would continue another half mile down Eagle Creek.) The dry creek bed of Gold Gulch soon narrows to a beautifully sculpted slot canyon, which is navigable for about 200 feet, where an impassable pour-off may nonetheless delight with a thin [rivulet of fine-tasting water](#).

Curiosity quenched, backtrack out of the slot, and look carefully for an old trail that leaves the wash on its south bank. The trail heads up-canyon, paralleling the drainage while ascending slightly along the base of a cliff, past a grove of mesquite, and soon reaching a switchback. At the switchback it should be possible to clamber up the low-angle cliff to a rejoining of the trail above - an option if the trail's modest exposure seems problematic. Otherwise, follow the trail - a narrow side-cut notch in the cliff face - as it climbs through another switchback. This trail was apparently built in the early days of the Safford-to-Morenci trade route; the occasional pitons below the trail aren't of any use now. Beyond the bare rock, the trail contours along a brushy bench, remaining close by the south wall of the canyon. Follow the bench to its intersection with the main wash of Gold Gulch, just above another impassable pour-off. *(Westbounders, upon reaching this pour-off, veer left around it onto the bench, keep the cliff wall close on your left and continue until it seems you cannot proceed further. Here look for the notched trail in a low-angle cliff, with conspicuous bolts.)*

Eastbound, Gold Gulch continues as a non-technical slot, although you may need to remove your pack in a couple of spots in order to hoist yourself unencumbered over small pour-offs. It's hard to imagine how pack animals would have ever negotiated these narrow, serpentine canyon walls. In dry weather only, secluded camping may be possible where the canyon widens into a box, especially inviting when the slot below happens to contain [pools of water](#). Proceed widely around a final pour-off by following the brushy slope on its left side. The slot/box portion of the drainage ends here, at **2.0** (waypoint 14050)

Walk up the wide wash of Gold Gulch, negotiating a couple of fencelines, to reach a 4WD crossing at **2.9** (waypoint 14060). A corral and unreliable stock pond are on the left. Continue cross-country up the wash, at **3.6** passing beneath a trestle-supported water pipeline serving the Morenci mine. Bighorn sheep are often seen grazing near this pipeline, especially where it first climbs from Eagle Creek farther to the west. The wash reaches graded, 2WD Lower Eagle Creek Rd. Turn right on the road, here rejoining the primary alternate route eastbound (waypoint 14070).

Continue east on Lower Eagle Creek Rd. The vivid orange tailings of the Morenci open pit loom dead ahead. *(Westbounders, turn left off the road to follow the **Gold Gulch** alternate down the wash of Gold Gulch, or remain on the road to keep to the **Lower Eagle Creek Road Spur**.)*

Lower Eagle Creek Rd curves and climbs, passing a ranch on the right, then ends at an intersection with paved, 2-lane US 191 at **6.1** (waypoint 14080, elev. 5200'). This curving mountain highway is known as the Coronado Trail, as it roughly follows the historic route of Francisco Vasquez de Coronado's expedition in search of the fabled Cities of Gold. Traffic is generally light, and the highway is low-speed, but the road is narrow and with only a minimal shoulder in places. Hitchhike into Morenci from here, or around the road bend just to the south (or call a town business such as the motel to see if anyone might offer a ride). *Walk the final 5 miles into town only as a last resort.*

Side Route to Morenci & Clifton

US 191 heads south, then curves east by a storage yard, where you may witness some of the goliath mining equipment up close. An historic Catholic cemetery - of all things - is nearby on the left, now all that remains of the town of Old Morenci, long since consumed by the ever-expanding mine (and reincarnated as the present-day village of Morenci, ahead). The highway loses elevation through a series of dramatic hairpin turns, affording revealing views north into one of the mine's main ore pits. The road enters a 60 yard-long tunnel, which grants semi-safe passage via a pedestrian walkway. Beyond, a huge conveyor overhead delivers quarried material to a sorting facility. Use caution when entering the short underpass ahead - eastbounders must walk along the left shoulder to avoid a blind curve on the right. *(Westbounders, approach the underpass by walking behind a guardrail on the left side of the road, then cross the road to enter the underpass on the right side.)*

Reach a traffic light by the main entrance to Freeport-McMoRan Inc., where the mine's low-grade ores are processed into pure copper cathode (via a supposedly enviro-friendly leaching process), then shipped by train to smelting facilities outside the area. Continue south on US 191 about 1.4 miles to [Morenci village](#). The village plaza, with post office, bank, restaurants, supermarket, and nearby Morenci Motel, is on the right. (To visit [Clifton](#) and historic Chase Creek Street, you can remain on now-busy US 191 for 3 more miles, or follow an old railroad grade - quiet but longer - as shown on the map set.)
