

HIKING IN THE TORTOLITAS

An Informal Guide

Compliments of



Dove Mountain Hikers

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Trail data courtesy of Gary Borax (and his GPS)

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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 in 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. 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, about five years ago work was begun to construct about 25 miles of new trails. In addition, volunteers primarily from the Heritage 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 (HHHC) 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 numbers of saguaros as the Tortolita Mountains.

Finally, few hiking areas can boast to offering the opportunity to relax with a gelato, 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. This document will include both numbers if known, but ratings will be based on the cumulative gain.

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.

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. Turn left and 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.

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.

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: *5.6 miles RT*

Elevation: *715' from low point to high, with a 760' cumulative gain*

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, 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.

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 with a large saguaro 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 ... 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" that you observed from the line shack below. A nice short side trip to your right down the wash takes you to an 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. 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 (both 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, a sign suggests going out further on the dramatic rock formations 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. Much 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. The 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.

Wild Burro Trail (Alamo Spring to 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>5.2 miles RT (or 4.3 miles if you return via the wash)</i>
Elevation: <i>tbd' from low point to high, with a tbd' cumulative gain</i>

During the spring of 2010 the Wild Burro trail was extended to the “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 the spring. Look for it to turn to the right and following 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 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.

After over two miles since leaving the Wild Mustang Trail, 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.

To return to Alamo Spring, either follow the same trail back, or hike down the wash. It is an easy trek 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 up to ten miles or more, which changes the hike to “difficult”, and possibly “very difficult” for some.

Lower Javelina Trail

General Description: <i>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: LIGHT BLUE LINE</i>
Difficulty: <i>Easy to moderate</i>
Length: <i>3.1 miles loop</i>
Elevation: <i>290' from low point to high, with a 490' cumulative gain</i>

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 ... there is a west portion and an east portion, and hikers cross the wash, and therefore 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 description will take the trail in a clockwise direction, but following the directions “backwards” would get you 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 trail which has 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 out 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>4.7 miles loop</i>
Elevation: <i>425' from low point to high, with a 650' cumulative gain</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 on the path toward the west and 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 a couple miles 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 no more 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 shorter hike.

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 a little further down the trail if you are returning to the trailhead parking area.

Wild Mustang Trail

General Description: *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*

Difficulty: *Difficult/very difficult*

Length: *4+ miles one-way, but requires additional 1.4 miles to access the trailhead, plus return distances. Minimal RT distance of 8.6 miles*

Elevation: *1250' from low point to high, with a 1310' cumulative gain*

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 actually 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.

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 and start gently uphill further and over a couple easy saddles 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.

An interesting side bushwhack at this location leads up to the peak to your west, known locally as Feldsien Peak. A caution, however. It is not recommended that you bushwhack off-trail unless you are experienced both in hiking and in the area. Besides other dangers, the peak area itself has some sheer drop offs, mostly on the back, or Cochie Canyon side.

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. Several of these were also killed, apparently due to the February freeze.

After heading northwest along the trail, which generally rolls up and down with a few fairly easy climbs, 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).

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.

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: *Difficult*

Length: *3.8 miles one-way, but requires additional miles to access the trailhead, plus return distances. Minimal RT distance of 7.1 miles*

Elevation: *1065' from low point to high, with a 1445' cumulative gain*

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.

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: *3.2 miles one-way, but requires additional 1.8 miles to access the trailhead, plus return distances. Minimal RT distance of 10.4 miles (although hikers can shorten this by not going to the end of the trail*

Elevation: *565' from low point to high, with a 1705' cumulative gain*

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 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 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.

Ridgeline Trail

(UNDER CONSTRUCTION ... SCHEDULED TO BE COMPLETED EARLY 2012)

Cougar Canyon Trail

General Description: *The Cougar Canyon Trail is currently not an official trail. There are plans for trail development in the future, including trailhead facilities. In the meantime, there is a route which is fairly easy to follow. Includes some rock climbs, a beautiful crested saguaro, and petroglyphs. MAP NOTE: NOT SHOWN*

Difficulty: *Moderate (but with rock climbs in the wash)*

Length: *Estimated about 6-7 miles RT*

Elevation: *Estimated 700' from low point to high with about the same cumulative gain*

The Cougar Canyon Trail is a fun hike, and not too difficult. To reach the "trailhead" take Como north from Moore Road (it is one block west of La Cholla). When you reach Cougar Canyon Trail (gravel road) follow it for several miles. It will go west and then turn north and wind around some hills. Be careful not to turn in a driveway by mistake ... most are marked private property. Note the power lines. When you reach a point where you feel the road is deteriorating, yet the power poles are just to your right, park there. There is room for several cars near an old driveway, which appears to be unused.

From there you will hike up the road to the west, go past an old gate, and into Saguaro Ranch property, and continue curving up to your right on the road until you drop into a wash. Here, turn right into the wash, which you will follow for over a mile and quickly back out of Saguaro Ranch property. Watch for barbed wire in a few places. You will "enjoy" several rock climbs. However, most of the wash is fairly level and sandy.

After hiking about a mile, look for a cairn at a point where the wash turns abruptly left. From here climb up from the wash and continue in a northerly direction ... there is a VERY faint trail. Your mid-hike goal is a beautiful crested saguaro which you should see a couple hundred yards from the wash. Enjoy a break at this point; it is a great photo location.

The trail, or route then goes east. There should be a fairly visible path, but be aware that cattle still graze in the area, and make their own routes. Concentrate on heading east keeping the hillside and ridge line to your left. There are two very interesting crested saguaros along the way. One should be just a little left of the trail while the other is a little further, on the right side and somewhat up a small hill.

After you have hiked about a mile from the first crested saguaro you should be able to see the route drop down into a wide rocky wash. Find the easiest way to hike down to it, then turn right and go about a hundred yards, carefully cross a barbed wire fence into a broad deep cut in the rock. At the far end, it will turn abruptly left and then drop off. Be cautious. Hikers can also climb up the right side of this wash and have great views of Oro Valley and Rancho Vistoso. On the left walls of this area, just after you pass the barbed wire, there are a considerable number of petroglyphs.

Most hikers use this as their lunch and turnaround point, then retrace their way back past the crested saguaros, down into the wash, and return to their cars.

As noted in the “General Description” their are currently plans being made to build a trailhead facility close to your parking location. The route of the future trail is yet to be finalized.

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 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.

Using your imagination and studying the trail map might suggest some other loops. And if you are truly adventurous, and comfortable exploring the connector route from the Wild Mustang Trail to the Cochie Spring Trail, some longer and more strenuous loops are possible. 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 about 1320’ feet of elevation from the low point to the high, the hiker will actually climb about 2675’ 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 Cougar Canyon Trail. But the impressive example below the Alamo Spring Trail can also be seen from the Lower Javelina Trail below. 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 a crested barrel cactus as they hike down within sight of the road into Cochie Canyon. It, like the crested saguaros, provides interest, but with no good explanation of its cause. 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.