

TRAIL NAME: GNARLY TRAIL (ABOUT 12 MILES ROUND TRIP)

Trail rating: 5 = step ups & downs, river crossing, steep hill siding, uneven surface, obstacles, rocky, steep switchbacks

Relevant USGS map: Mangus Springs, 1999

Directions:

Drive west on U.S. 180. When you see mile marker 100 (at Mangus Valley Road), keep on 180 for about 0.43 mi. to Saddle Rock Road and turn left.

Follow Saddle Rock Rd. about 1.4 mi. to the Gila National Forest line, marked by a cattle guard. Just over the cattle guard, turn left into the Saddle Rock parking area.



Trail information: The Gnarly Trail is a favorite for experienced endurance riders. It is not suitable for unsupervised beginners or the faint-of-heart. The unmarked trailhead is not easy to find. The trail itself is rocky and eroded at the beginning, and offers little cover from the elements. A couple of steep climbs and descents over gravel and slick rock, as well as a couple of gates and narrow tread on steep slopes make this a challenging ride. If your horse is not completely reliable on the trail, you might want to look for an easier way to spend the day.



From the parking lot, hike or ride south about 1.12 mi. to the Gnarly trailhead on the right. The trailhead is not marked, so you have to keep an eye out for it.

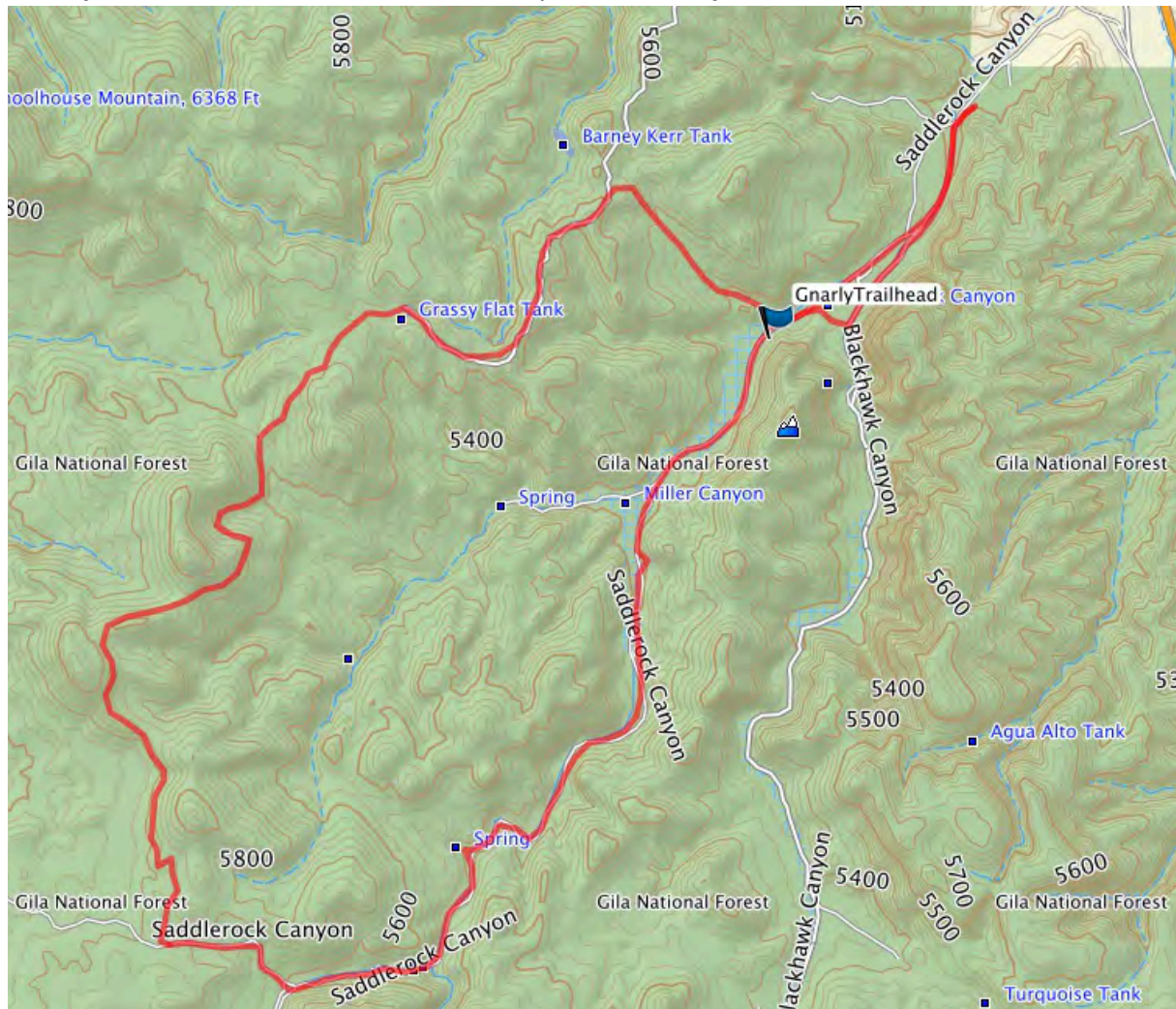
When this rock formation comes into view, you're getting close. You'll turn onto the trail before you pass the formation.



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From the road, the trail proceeds up a drainage and then into a narrow and rocky draw. You need to bear to the right through this narrow section—another draw (a false lead) enters from the left. Don't get sucked into it.

Beyond this narrow point, the terrain opens up, but the trail remains eroded and rocky for a while. Once you pass the Grassy Flats stock tank on the left, about two miles in, the terrain softens and climbs gently up to a section of the Continental Divide Trail (CDT), which you will follow south for about 3-1/3 mile until you reach the road back into Saddle



Rock Canyon. The CDT is marked up here only at critical points, so maintain a look out for the familiar blue and white triangles. If you have an opportunity to bear off to a road or trail on your right, please decline. Keep to the left and watch for a little cairn that takes you toward Saddlerock Canyon.

The junction from the CDT into Saddlerock Canyon is a wide, sometimes steep and eroded two-track. When you encounter it, turn left, then watch for a gate tucked back into the brush. Through the gate, go down the short, steep slope into the canyon. The footing is sandy for the rest of the ride and the trail is easy to follow. Watch out for quicksand,

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however, especially if you're there following a heavy rain, which usually floods the canyon, with impressive and dangerous results. If rain threatens, stay out of the canyon.



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