

Arizona / Organ Pipe Cactus NM

Mount Ajo

DISTANCE: 9 miles

ELEVATION GAIN: 2500 feet

ROUTE TYPE: Out & Back

A nice hike to the highest point in Organ Pipe National Monument. The hike involves a steep climb with an elevation gain of 2440 feet. The route is described as a semi-loop, heading up the Bull Pasture Trail and using the Estes Canyon Trail on the return.

From Gila Bend, drive south on Highway 85 to Ajo, then take Highway 86 east to the small town of Why. The Monument is 22 miles south of Why on Highway 85. After picking up a permit (\$8 per car, good for 7 days), head east on Ajo Mountain Drive (well graded dirt) for 10+ miles to the Estes Canyon/Bull Pasture Trailhead.
Passenger Car

From the parking area follow the trail a short distance to where it splits. The Estes Canyon Trail heads left and the Bull Pasture trail goes right. Stay right on the Bull Pasture Trail as it climbs at a moderately steep grade through the foothills of Mount Ajo through some nice desert scenery for one mile to a junction where the Estes Canyon Trail joins in again. Continue straight at this junction and climb another 0.5 miles to top out at a saddle and sign for Bull Pasture.

The trail officially ends here, however, an easy to follow use trail continues the rest of the way to the summit. Continue onwards as the path heads through the grass in a southeasterly direction then bends left to begin climbing again along the left side of a prominent ridge. The path then bends right and begins climbing very steeply up a rocky gully, passing several natural arches along the way (watch your footing on the way down in this section, the gravel is loose).

The trail eventually tops out just below the ridgeline of the mountain and bends north, following the ridgeline up at a more moderate grade and bypassing two minor peaks to the east before finally reaching the summit. The peak features an ammo can with register, several solar powered weather stations and outstanding 360 degree views of Mexico to the South, the Tohono O'odham rez to the east and the rest of Organ Pipe Cactus NM.

Supposedly it's possible to see all the way to the Gulf of California on a clear day. When ready, return the way you came, or complete the semi-loop by turning right when you reach the junction with the Estes Canyon Trail. This path descends steeply into Estes Canyon, then winds it's way through the desert roughly following the dry wash to eventually reach the trailhead 1.7 miles later.

Mount Ajo Summit - Todd's Desert Hiking Guide

