

New Mexico / bei Taos

La Junta Trail

DISTANCE: 2-3 miles

ELEVATION GAIN: 1000 feet

ROUTE TYPE: Out & Back

The La Junta Trail is a dramatic and challenging hike down to confluence of the Río Grande and the Red River. With its vertigo-inducing views and steep descent into the gorge, it is the most difficult of the hikes at Wild Rivers that lead from the rim down to the Rio Grande. The trail ends at the point where the two rivers come together creating a beautiful and turbulent mix of waters.

According to Wild Rivers manager Joseph Leon, La Junta is a popular hike during the late fall and winter because it faces south and the snow melts quickly from the trail.

The hike begins at 7,500 feet with a series of steep switchbacks, lined with rock walls. There are views of the Río Grande and the Red River in the gorge below. This section includes a ladder and three flights of metal stairs. During the times I have done the hike, all the dogs on the trail refused to use the stairs. The smaller dogs were carried down. My dog weighs almost 100 pounds, so I returned a different day to try the trail without the dog.

After the initial section, the steepness moderates and the trail continues to follow more moderate switchbacks through a field of black lava rocks. Here there are large rock formations near the trail and the sound of the rivers grows louder.

At just under a mile, the trail reaches the conjunction with Little Arsenic and Big Arsenic trails. Continue on to the left (south) for about a quarter of a mile along a flat plateau. The Río Grande and the Red River come together at a sharp point. At the confluence, there are smooth black boulders that provide a place to stop and rest and listen to the rivers as they join together and continue their journey south. The total round trip is just over two miles and the elevation change is about 1,000 feet.

Across the way is the Cebolla Mesa trail, which is part of the Carson National Forest. There used to be a log bridge that crossed the Red River, connecting La Junta and Cebolla Mesa trails. Several years ago, the bridge broke in half. A new bridge has been purchased to replace the old one, but it would have to be placed by helicopter, which is cost-prohibitive. Both the BLM and the Carson National Forest staffs would like to see the bridge replaced and are considering alternative strategies.

For the return trip, you can retrace your steps on La Junta trail. Another choice is to return to the conjunction with the other trails and continue an additional .9 miles along the flat plateau near the Rio Grande and head up the Little Arsenic trail, a scenic, but more moderate climb up to the rim of the gorge. You can follow the Rio Bravos Nature Trail from the Little Arsenic trailhead back to the La Junta trailhead, for a total loop of about four miles.