

Pike Creek Trail

DISTANCE: 4.7 miles

ELEVATION GAIN: 1200 feet

ROUTE TYPE: Out & Back

Plus Points

- Arguably the most scenic and dramatic day hike in Southeast Oregon
- Pike Creek is within the Steens Mountain Wilderness Area
- Multi-colored rock outcrops and spires beneath the 9,000'-high Steens escarpment
- A rich riparian corridor with a perennial stream, willows, alder and cottonwoods
- A newly-built trail in the rugged upper canyon has greatly improved hiking access
- No sign of cow activity in the canyon, beyond the trailhead parking area

Minus Points

- Since 2016, the Alvord Ranch charges \$5 a day for trailhead parking — details below
- Rattlesnakes are a possibility in the lower canyon, so caution is advised
- Solitude is not assured in lower canyon, as 25-30 groups per month visit in summer

Trail Notes

From the trailhead parking areas on the northeast side of Pike Creek, it's first necessary to bushwhack across the creek and find the old mining road running up the southern bank. The route then follows a single-track trail on this roadbed up into the canyon for about 1 mile, past a wilderness sign-in box in the first quarter mile. As you climb through this scenic slot canyon, high above the creek, there are long views back eastward to the Alvord Desert below. After one mile, the roadbed descends into cottonwood groves at along Pike Creek and one begins to see ruins of the old uranium mining prospect, along the trail and up the hillside to the south.

The route then crosses Pike Creek, across rocks that can be hazardous when runoff is high in early spring. The road then switchbacks up the north bank of the creek for another 0.3 miles, past more old mining ruins and under dramatic overhanging cliffs.

At the 1.3 mile point, on the high spot of the old road, a newly-built trail branches off up the canyon and hikers face a decision. To shorten the hike, follow the old road downhill a hundred yards to a shady lunch spot along Pike Creek. If you would like to explore the upper canyon, turn uphill onto the new trail. For the next mile, this trail traverses the north side of the Pike Creek canyon, through sagebrush scrub high above the stream. The views here are spectacular, south across the canyon to colorful rock ridges and spires, and west up the canyon to the headwall of the High Steens escarpment.

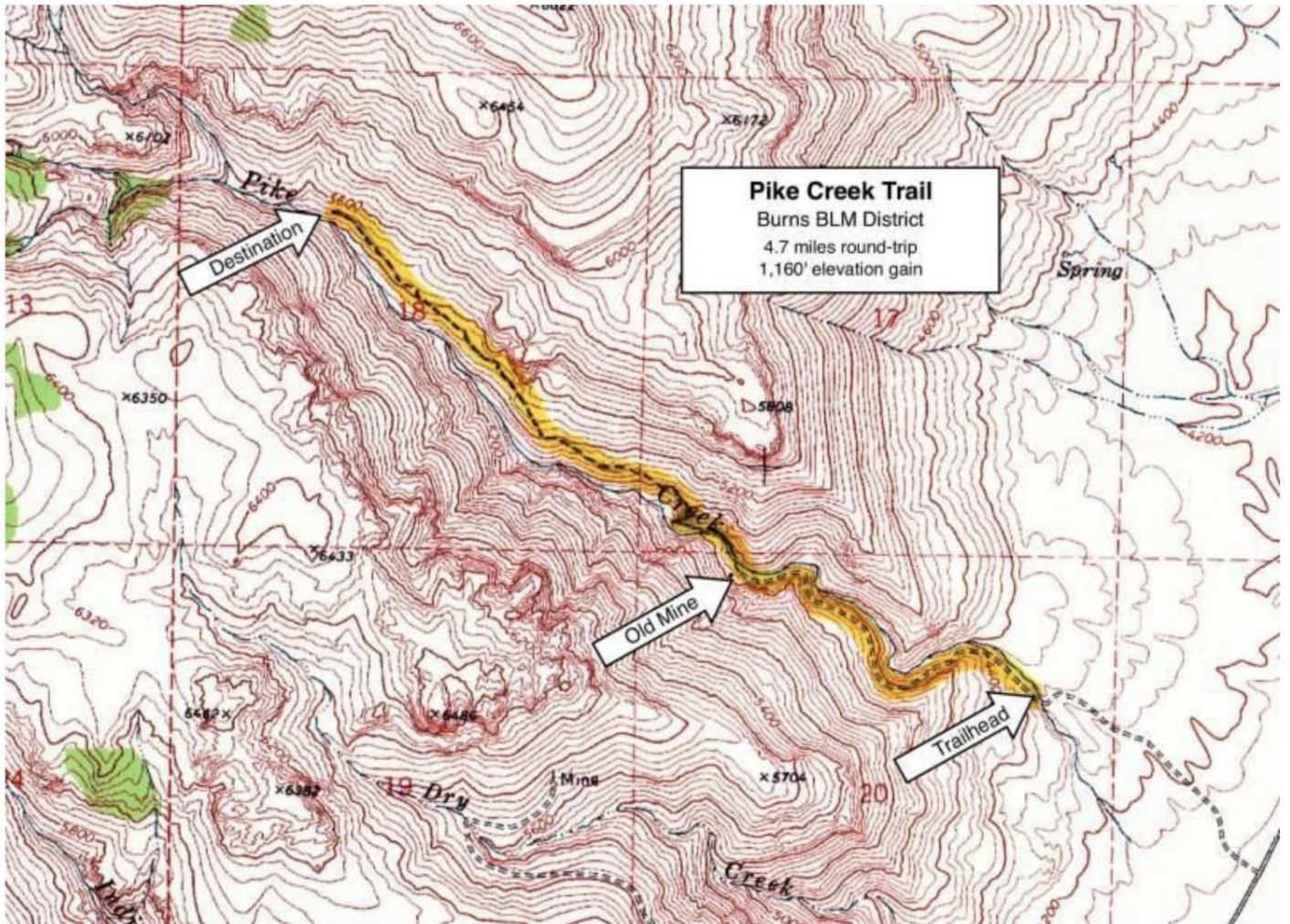
At the 2.3 mile point, the trail ends on a hillside bench about 100' above the creek. This is a scenic spot for a hike destination — but intrepid hikers can continue on cross-country for another 0.4 miles to Pike's Knob, a wide red tower in the middle of the canyon above a fork in the creek.

Road to Trailhead

On the East Steens Road, drive about 24.4 miles north from Fields Station, or about 15.3 miles south from the Mann Lake Campground. Look for a dirt road with a yellow cattle guard on the west side of the road, about 1.9 miles north of the Alvord Hot Springs and 3.6 miles south of the Alvord Ranch headquarters.

Turn west through the cattle guard and drive toward the cottonwood-lined stream in the distance. Low-clearance vehicles will want to find a pullout within the first few hundred yards, then walk the remaining 0.5 miles to the trailhead, as the road gets progressively worse the further one drives. High-clearance vehicles, with care, will be able to drive all the way to the north bank of Pike Creek.

UPDATE: In 2016, the Alvord Ranch began charging \$5 per day for parking and \$30 per night for camping at this trailhead. Before parking or camping here, one must first drive 2.0 miles south on the East Steens Road to the Alvord Hot Springs to purchase a parking and/or camping permit. Though discussions about free public access to this trailhead are ongoing between the BLM and the Alvord Ranch, the new fee and permit system is being strictly enforced at present.



Pike Creek Trail
Burns BLM District
4.7 miles round-trip
1,160' elevation gain