

## Mill Creek Wilderness Trail

Mill Creek Wilderness is a small wilderness area in central Oregon that embraces a small “U” shaped portion of the Ochoco mountain range that is the watershed of the East Fork of Mill Creek. It has a handful of entrances, but the most popular one, and also the easiest to access, is the Wildcat Campground on the creek. It is only about an hour drive from Bend, Oregon. From nearby Prineville you proceed on Highway 26 to Mill Creek Road and drive up about 10 miles up to the campground.

There are a few backpack camping sites there, but because of its moderate size, it is also a great day-hike spot. And because of its moderate stature it might be free of snow earlier than the Cascades or other high-elevation mountains, and therefore appropriate for spring or late fall hikes, it is an ideal place to exercise your legs as a warm-up to summer backpack trips. I would avoid mid-day summer hikes here as it can get pretty warm.

The ponderosa pine and western juniper that frequent the territory before the campground, are largely replaced by grand fir and Douglas-fir as you start your hike from Wildcat campground. At higher elevations, there are a scattering of lodgepole pines. I have heard that there is western larch sprinkled around, but I didn't see any.

The Twin Pillars Trail leaves from Wildcat Campground follows the East Fork of Mill Creek for nearly three miles before it splits into two trails. The north trail goes toward the Twin Pillars which is a volcanic plug that is sometimes ascended by climbers. The south trail climbs to Wildcat Mountain. That first stretch along the creek must be crossed several times without the benefit of a bridge. Unless it is late summer, where you might be able to cross dry-footed, I would recommend old tennis shoes to walk through the shallow creek as I did in mid-summer.



*One of the many stream crossings*

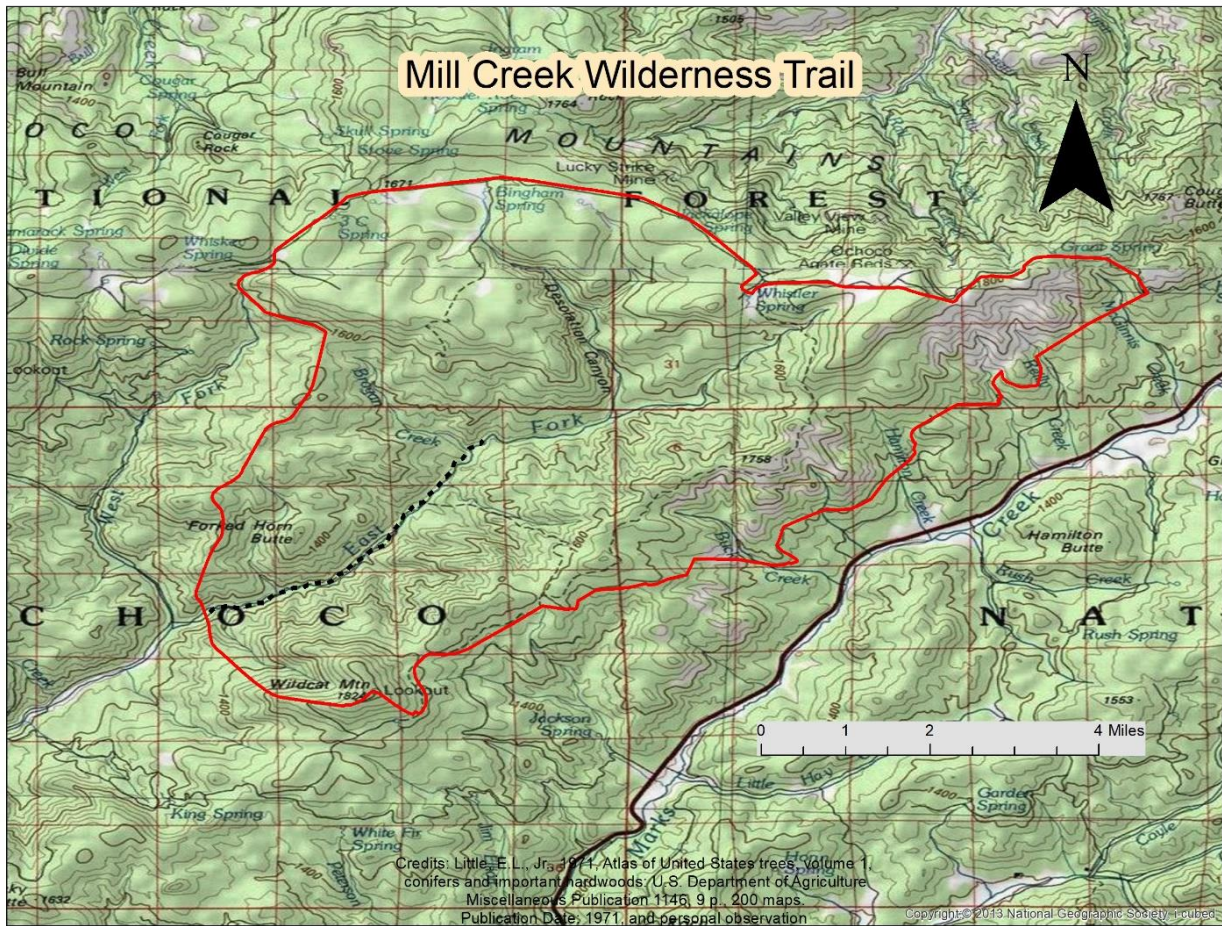


*A representative bottom-of-the-canyon picture*





A typical up-slope view with Douglas-fir, grand fir and a few ponderosa pine



The dashed line showed the hike I took from Wildcat Campground