

Gray Butte Trails

The Gray Butte trail system travels through a good example of the Oregon high desert juniper and sagebrush landscape. It is part of the Crooked River National Grassland, that is managed by the National Forest Service. The easiest access is probably coming from Highway 97 near Terrebonne, along Smith Rock Road, then Lone Pine Road. Skull Hollow Campground is right off the Lone Pine Road entrance if you want a base camp for your adventures.

Three of the trails are popular amongst horse riders as their trailhead names suggest: Scales Corral, Cyrus Horse Camp, and Trail Crossing Corrals. The Cyrus Horse Corral Trailhead that I visited was set in a flat, appealing open area, that had built-in horse pens, as well as a restroom and picnic tables. The Gray Butte trailhead, that I set out from, looked like your typical foot-traffic starting point. It was located more in the middle of the trail system, and could be reached by both the north and south dirt roads, although I would recommend the southern access from SE Lone Pine Road – the northern route was bumpier and had sagebrush trying to deface the sides of my car.

The area is bedecked by a pair of volcanic buttes: Gray Butte and Pine Ridge. They stand guard over flatter territory that is festooned with the typical high desert juniper/sagebrush landscape. Although, as the name suggests, ponderosa pines are lightly sprinkled around the top of Pine Ridge, as well as Gray Butte. The pines are not documented in any of the material I have read about the area. Their distribution, although limited, apparently takes advantage of the slightly higher elevation, and north slopes. These two buttes can be reached by older (steep) jeep trails, but aren't directly accessed by official trails.

A downside to the trails and roads of the area, is the myriad conglomeration of both – they often crisscross each other, and make finding your destination challenging. But you might find this to be an upside by using Gray Butte as a guiding landmark, where you can wander through accommodating sagebrush, without necessarily following official trails.

If you want to try a long hike, and use a car shuttle, you can start at one of the four trailheads, and head southwest to Smith Rock State Park on a 7½ mile well marked trail.



Gray Butte Trailhead



Gray Butte from near Trailhead – this also shows the very common western juniper in the foreground



The well-graded trail near the beginning of Gray Butte trailhead - it gets steeper later on



One of the few ponderosa pines on the Butte

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