

2/27/26-3/1/26

DESERT FIRE

SUPERSTITION WILDERNESS



Description

Wildfire is devastating and purifying, a release of years of accumulated sunlight back into charcoal and dirt. Forest fire has become a familiar presence across the west. So has a greater understanding of fire's role in the health of woodlands. Wildfire's increasing frequency in the Sonoran Desert is trickier, less clear cut. Invasive grasses and changing rain patterns are increasing fire frequency. But this desert is a relatively young biome, and it's not clear what this landscape will become.¹ This trip is an opportunity to walk within a desert in continual transformation, holding grief and curiosity open handedly, together.

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https://sabinonaturalists.org/wp-content/uploads/Wilder-et-al_2024_Fire-in-the-Sonoran-Desert.pdf

The hike moves through the area burned in the 2024 Siphon Fire to witness how growth is returning. The second half of the trip follows unburned drainages in verdant spring bloom. All the while, we circle the iconic Weaver's Needle formation, a prominent stone watchtower holding geological time in the center of an otherwise incomprehensibly rapid transition.

Together, we explore irreversible change and emergent realities. The acceleration of ecological transition means it might no longer be possible, or maybe even desirable, to return to a previous ideal landscape. As new fields of invasive grasses rush across slopes of land in brilliant greens, maybe there's a way to feel grief for the lost Palo Verde and Saguaro alongside curiosity in the nuances of the present. What is this place going to become?

Trip Details

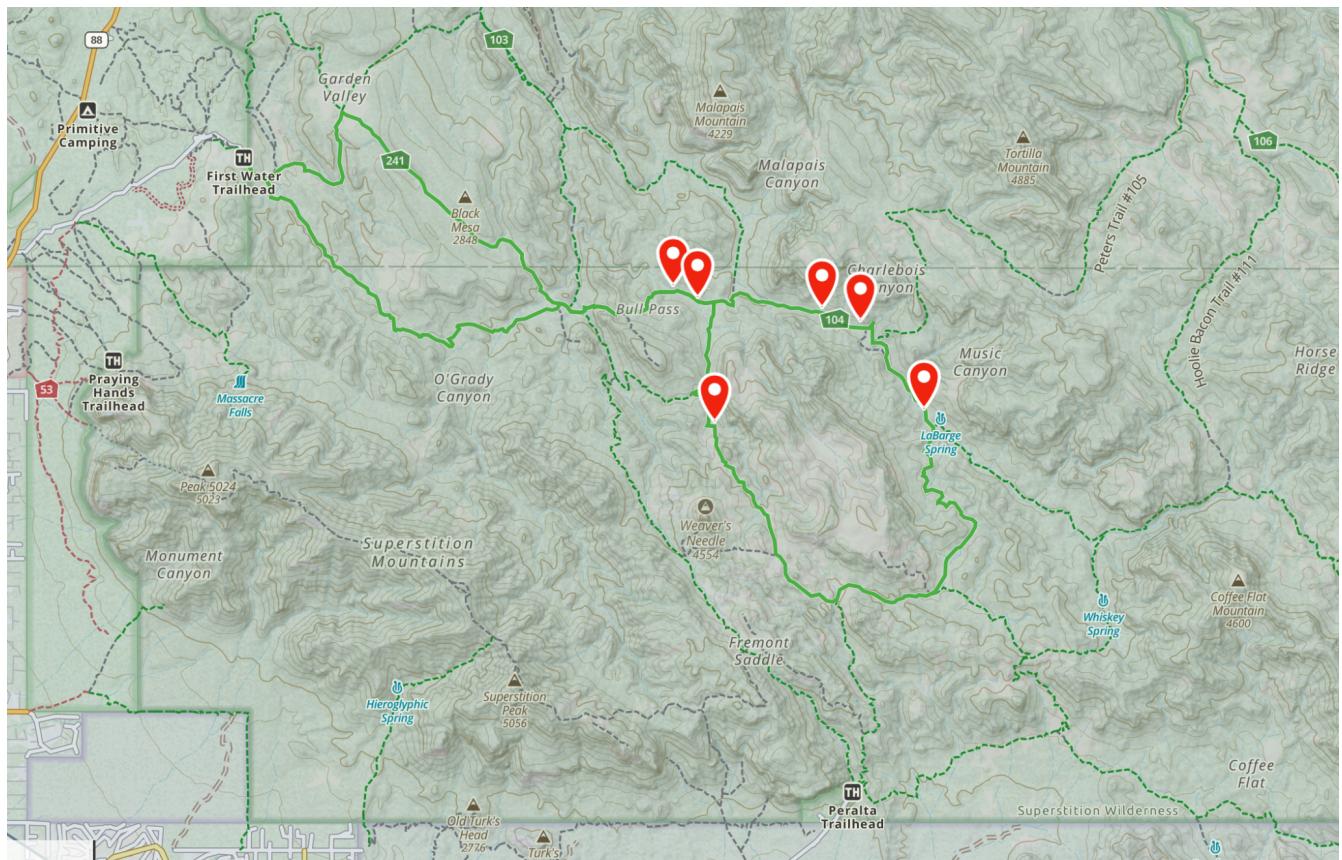
The Superstitions are a rugged and beloved wilderness area. We will hike in a rough figure eight, crossing and following along different drainages to see how the desert is changing relative to the season, elevation, and fire history. As planned, the trip is 23 miles across three days, but the itinerary is designed to be flexible depending on the changing availability of water.

Itinerary

Day	Description	Mileage
Day 1	Meet at First Water Trailhead, hike to first camp in Siphon burn scar	6 miles
Day 2	Hike along La Barge Creek to Charlebois spring, then loop around Bluff Spring Mountain back to camp	10 miles
Day 3	Hike back to First Water Trailhead this time along Black Mesa Trail	6.5 miles

Total Mileage: 23 Miles

[Map](#)



Elevation

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Ascent	4,481 ft
Descent	4,467 ft
Max Elevation	3,425 ft
Min Elevation	2,218 ft

DIFFICULTY: Moderate to difficult. The mileage and elevation isn't too terrible, but the terrain is rugged and rocky. Water can be tricky depending on how much rain happens in the next few weeks, so it is important to feel confident in your ability to carry around 3-4L at a time (6-8 lbs) and be able to commit to hiking up to 6-10 miles in a day to get to reliable sources.

Expected Conditions

- Weather - Days in the upper 70s and nights in the upper 40s. Some sections of trail could be hot and exposed. Sun protection (UV hats, clothing, sunscreen, etc) is advised.
- Trail - Uneven terrain for the most part. Pokey desert plants. Long pants and sleeves advised.
- Water - Charlebois and La Barge Spring are consistently reliable. As of late January, there were plenty of additional sources along La Barge Creek, Bull Pass Trail, and Bluff Spring Canyon. However, the itinerary is built to be flexible depending on what we find running as we go.
- Gear Considerations - You'll want:
 - Long pants and sleeves (lightweight)
 - Sturdy boots
 - Sun protection
 - Layers for chillier nights
 - Trekking poles
 - Water purification system
 - Containers for 3-4 L of water (bladders, smart water bottles, nalgene)

* Please let us know if you have any questions about gear, or would like a tip for obtaining or borrowing something!

Getting to the Trailhead

The last 2.5 miles of road from Highway 88 are dirt and a bit potholed. Most cars should make it, although high clearance would help. There is also parking near the highway, and we can shuttle folks the last bit if needed.

