Historic Blue Forest Trail

3 miles (4.8 km) round trip
Elevation Change: 200 ft (61 m)

GPS coordinates:
Starting point: N 34°56’34.9” W 109°46’39.8”

The Blue Forest Trail was constructed between 1934 and 1937 by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which connected the lower and upper Blue Mesa roads. In 1955 the trail and the lower road were closed and replaced by the Blue Mesa Loop Trail. In 2013 the Blue Forest Trail was re-established for adventurous hikers. The trail connects the main park road at the Tepees area to the paved Blue Mesa Loop Trail. It is accessed from the Blue Mesa Loop Road.

The Blue Forest Trail winds through colorful blue and white badland hills. It offers a new view at every turn, and both the foreground and background hold your interest at every step. It gives the hiker a bit of history, a lot of scenery, an intimate look at petrified wood being exposed by erosion, and with the help provided here, a short geology lesson. Through the combination of these elements, the Blue Forest Trail exemplifies the essence of Petrified Forest National Park.

STAMP

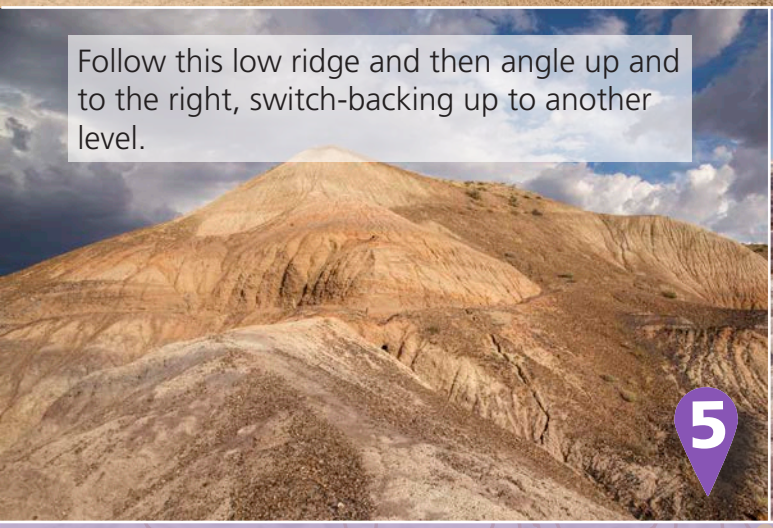
Blue Mesa Loop Road
Blue Mesa Loop Trail
Main Park Road
The Tepees Pullout, east-side
(Starting Point)
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
North
KEY
Suggested route
Maintained trail
Pullout
0
0.125
0.25
0.5
0.75
1
Miles
Kilometers

Park at the roadside pullout at the Tepees area, near mile marker 14, on the northbound (east) side of the road. From this spot the 1937 gravel road is still apparent, but no longer open to vehicles. This is the unmarked trailhead for the modern Blue Forest trail. The first half-mile (0.8 km) follows this old road grade and is relatively flat. Please be cautious on the walking surface, which consists of slippery gravel.

The trail starts with a moderate incline to get to the first little hill. Look for these switchbacks and the wooden post from the end of the original 1937 road as landmarks.

Once you get on top of the first hill, start looking for the remnant gravel used by the CCC for trail tread. It's not always on the trail, as it has washed downslope in some places, but it shows you where to go. Think "follow the yellow brick road" but in this case it's "follow the gravelly trail…"

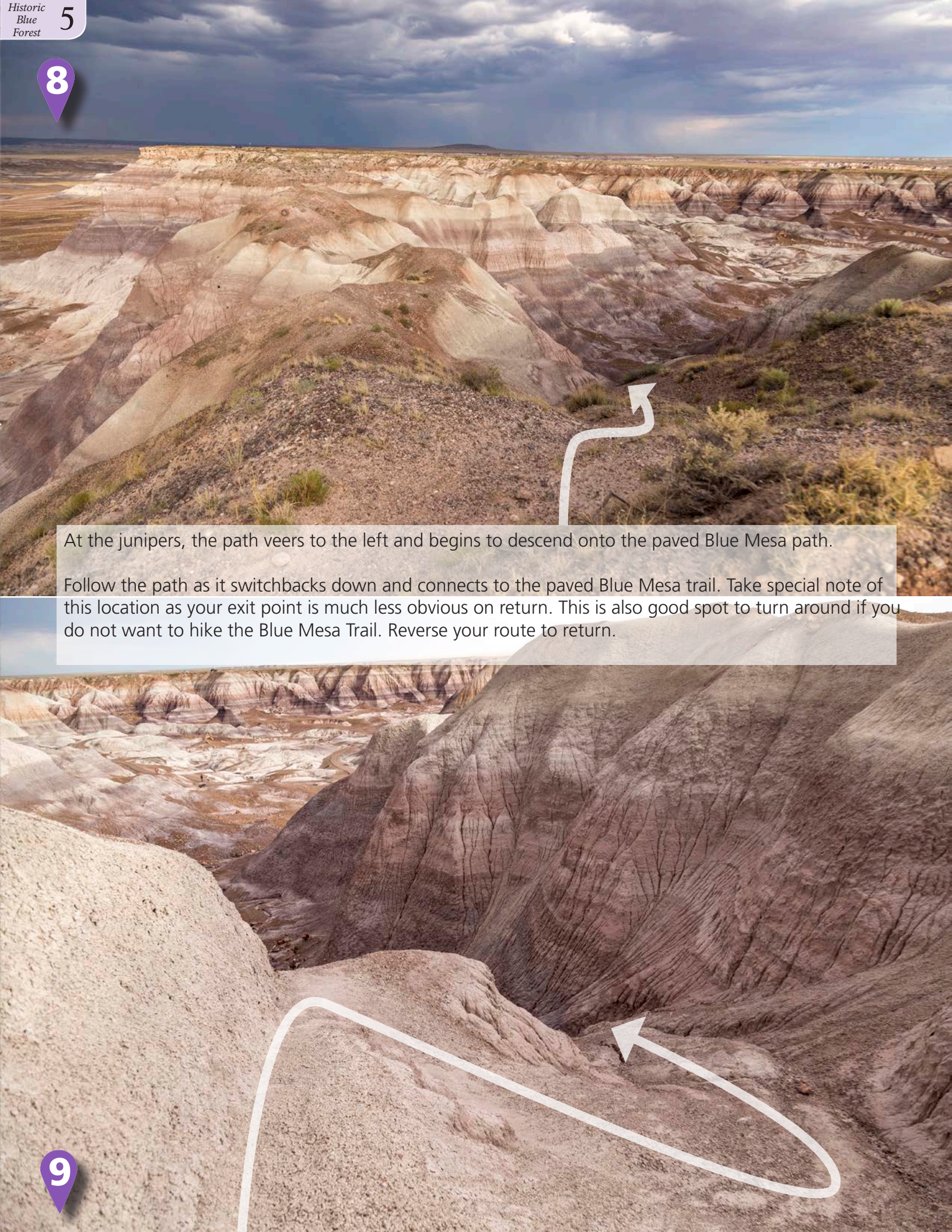
When you get to the hoodoo formations, keep them on your right and continue along this small ridge. You will still be able to see the remnants of brown gravel along the path.



Follow this low ridge and then angle up and to the right, switch-backing up to another level.

Continue on the clear path to the top.

You will be headed towards three small junipers. From here, past the Junipers, you can see the Blue Mesa overlook parking lot.



At the junipers, the path veers to the left and begins to descend onto the paved Blue Mesa path.

Follow the path as it switchbacks down and connects to the paved Blue Mesa trail. Take special note of this location as your exit point is much less obvious on return. This is also good spot to turn around if you do not want to hike the Blue Mesa Trail. Reverse your route to return.

Things to Know About Off the Beaten Path Hikes

Hiking off-trail offers the opportunity to enjoy this landscape beyond the experience of the average visitor. These "Off the Beaten Path" hikes are suggested routes; not paved or maintained trails—although you may notice social paths or old road beds. All of the hikes require route-finding skills. Bring a compass and/or GPS tracking device.

Please consider the following and plan accordingly:

You are responsible for your own safety.

Some areas have little to no cell phone coverage.

Understand that you are heading into a wild natural region.

Know your personal limits, and of those in your party.

Wear appropriate shoes and sun protection. Bring food and *plenty of water (1 gal./person/day)*.

Follow all park rules and regulations.

Do not create rock cairns or trail markers.

The backcountry of Petrified Forest National Park offers:

- A semi-arid landscape with elevations over 5,500 ft (1,700 m) with no water or shade.
- No marked trails—route-finding skills are necessary.
- Uneven surfaces that may become impassable when wet.
- Steep hills, narrow canyons, and crumbly surfaces.
- Temperatures that fluctuate widely (>100˚F/38˚C in summer and <32˚F/0˚C in winter).
- Solitude and beauty.

Unless you have an overnight Wilderness Area Permit, you are required to be out of the park by closing hours. Backcountry camping must be one mile away from any established trail or road. Camping in vehicles in parking areas is not permitted. Ask park staff for more details on backcountry camping.

Using This Guide

This book is a collaboration of staff and volunteers who have wandered these areas to find important landmarks and beautiful vistas. The maps provide the route to destinations. The photos are references to help you find your way. Remember to keep an eye on the weather, find a landmark near where you parked to stay orientated, and be sure to drink plenty of water!

Onyx Bridge

4 miles (6.4 km) round trip

Elevation Change: 300 ft (91 m)

GPS coordinates
Trailhead:
Onyx Bridge: 35°6'31.0"N 109°47'32.1"W

GPS coordinates are set in:
Degrees° Minutes' Seconds"
Be sure to set your GPS in the appropriate format to prevent confusion. There may be a margin of error up to 30 meters for the listed coordinates.

Use the cancellation stamps found at the Painted Desert Visitor Center, or Rainbow Forest Museum to date your adventures!

The Leave No Trace Principles

The Leave No Trace Principles are the bedrock of the Leave No Trace program. They provide guidance to enjoy our natural world in a sustainable way that avoids human-created impacts. These principles have been adapted to they can be applied in your backyard or your backcountry.

Leave No Trace™
Center for Outdoor Ethics | LNT.org

The following are a selection from the Leave No Trace Seven Principles. © 1999 by the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics: www.LNT.org.

Plan Ahead and Prepare

- Know the regulations and special concerns for the area you'll visit.
- Prepare for extreme weather, hazards, and emergencies.
- Schedule your trip to avoid times of high use.
- Visit in small groups when possible. Consider splitting larger groups into smaller groups.
- Repackage food to minimize waste.
- Use a map and compass to eliminate the use of marking paint, rock cairns or flagging.

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

- Durable surfaces include established trails and campsites, rock, gravel, dry grasses or snow.
- Protect riparian areas by camping at least 200 feet from lakes and streams.
- Good campsites are found, not made. Altering a site is not necessary.

In popular areas:

- Concentrate use on existing trails and campsites.
- Walk single file in the middle of the trail, even when wet or muddy.
- Keep campsites small. Focus activity in areas where vegetation is absent.
- In pristine areas:
- Disperse use to prevent the creation of campsites and trails.
- Avoid places where impacts are just beginning.

Dispose of Waste Properly

- Pack it in, pack it out. Inspect your campsite and rest areas for trash or spilled foods. Pack out all trash, leftover food and litter.
- Deposit solid human waste in catholes dug 6 to 8 inches deep, at least 200 feet from water, camp and trails. Cover and disguise the cathole when finished.
- Pack out toilet paper and hygiene products.

Leave What You Find

- Preserve the past: examine, but do not touch cultural or historic structures and artifacts.
- Leave rocks, plants and other natural objects as you find them.
- Avoid introducing or transporting non-native species.
- Do not build structures, furniture, or dig trenches.

Respect Wildlife

- Observe wildlife from a distance. Do not follow or approach them.
- Never feed animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers.
- Protect wildlife and your food by storing rations and trash securely.
- Control pets at all times, or leave them at home.
- Avoid wildlife during sensitive times: mating, nesting, raising young, or winter.

Be Considerate of Other Visitors

- Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.
- Be courteous. Yield to other users on the trail.
- Step to the downhill side of the trail when encountering pack stock.
- Take breaks and camp away from trails and other visitors.
- Let nature's sounds prevail. Avoid loud voices and noises.

Look what I found!

One of the marvelous things about exploring the Wilderness Areas is finding all the unique artifacts.

We cannot stress enough how important it is to leave any fossils, archeology artifacts (i.e. pottery sherds and arrowheads), rocks, plants, or animals exactly where you found them. Much like a forensic scientist at a crime scene, when artifacts are removed or displaced, a wealth of information is lost about that item. Please join the millions of hikers before you and do not pick up anything you find out on these hikes. Take a picture of the artifact, and one of the surrounding area, and show these to a ranger so we can send a scientist to recover it. Be careful not to post where you found these items online, because those locations may encourage looters.

Petroglyphs are easily damaged by even the softest touch. The oil on your hands will deteriorate the rock art. These ancient symbols cannot be recovered once lost.

Help us protect these awesome resources for future explorers such as yourself!

Petrified Forest National Park
1 Park Rd, Box 2217
Petrified Forest, AZ 86028
www.nps.gov/pefo

These **free** apps will assist you while you venture through Petrified Forest National Park.

Chimani

Chimani provides apps for specific National Parks, including Petrified Forest! Features include:

- *GPS-enabled maps*
- *Expert-written details on more than 120 points of interest*
- *Collect points and earn badges for visiting parks and other points of interest*
- *And much, much more!*

*Be sure to download the features inside the app before heading in the park.

iNaturalist

iNaturalist offers a chance to become a citizen scientist! Take photos of flora and fauna with your device and upload. Find out what that critter or flower is with in-depth descriptions. Most importantly, these records give biologists a way to track and monitor life in these ecosystems with your help. Join the iNaturalist commuity today!

Both apps available on:

Download on the App Store

Available on Google Play

Sometimes going off the beaten path makes all the difference

FIND YOUR PARK

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