

Waterloo River Bridge to Mill Canyon to Rock Creek Trail (19 km dirt road then double then single track trail)

A beautiful point-to-point dirt road then trail where you start off on the flats and then gradually increase the climb and the difficulty thereafter. Arrange return transportation from Mill Canyon TH. Normally passable from May 1st through November 1st, but snow and ice can linger on the high trail in areas with northern exposure.

Directions:

Turn east off Hwy 55 at Waterloo exit (~24 km south of Whitehall) and proceed less than a km to the bridge that crosses the Jefferson River.

Begin run from the bridge, going south and staying on improved gravel road. Take the first left turn to the east on Loomont Ln. Cross the RR tracks and then take the first right at the house with the old rock silo. Run south to the end of the road then turn left past the old Waterloo School (now a private residence) before crossing a small bridge over an irrigation canal at the 5 km point of your run where the noticeable climbing begins. The road splits immediately after the canal. Take the right fork and proceed SW toward Whiterock Ranch for ~2.5 km until you turn left on Mill Canyon Road which has no confusing forking. You will pass 10 km at the small Mill Canyon Pond at the mouth of the canyon. The next 4 km of less-improved road take you up to the Mill Canyon TH (no facilities) where Coalpits Trail (north) and Rock Creek Trail (SE) continue. Rock Creek Trail is rugged and steep for 5 km to the ridge where you may turn right at the junction of Curley Creek Trail to find Rock Creek Lake (which is now only a small pond). This is the 19 km point, but you must also walk or run back to the Mill Canyon TH if you arranged a car pick up there.

Alternative finish: Rock Creek itself spills eastward from the pond with Rock Creek Trail continuing adjacent for another 6 km down to its eastern TH in South Boulder Canyon, which makes the route 25 km. Driving a pick-up car from Waterloo to South Boulder requires looping around the south end of the Tobacco Root Mountains at Cardwell, which takes about an hour.

Description:

The 19 km route has a full 1000 meter altitude gain (ouch), most of which is experienced in the run's latter half. The footing is normally good through 14 km until the Mill Canyon TH, but sections of the Rock Creek Trail are ... rocky. The climbing is steepest on first third of the Rock Creek Trail.

Negatives:

The first 10 km on open land can develop strong southern headwinds.

Return to automobile shuttle point required (higher clearance vehicle recommended).

Rock Creek Trail sometimes used by motor sports enthusiasts.

Mountain lion habitat in the canyon – running companion recommended.

The Whiterock Ranch uses Mill Canyon for summer grazing so avoiding cow pies is a must.