

Spotted Dog Wilderness Area (16 km or any distance you like)

Spotted Dog wilderness area is gigantic by runners' standards. It is a good place for an ultra marathoner to go out and get lost for some really long runs through the rolling hills. It has three entrances. One from Elliston, which has a long and winding road into the center of the Spotted Dog. One from Avon, and one from Freeze Out Lane north of Deer Lodge. The Freeze Out Lane entrance is open yearly from 1 May until snow season. and it restricts motorized traffic into the central portions of the wilderness. The many roads into, and through, that area are primitive.

Directions:

To find the Freeze Out Lane entrance into Spotted Dog, exit I-90 at Beck Hill Rd (Exit #179) and then take the frontage road on the west side of I-90 south toward Deer Lodge. Take the first I-90 underpass and proceed to the "T" in the road. Turn right on Freeze Out Lane and then immediately turn left to the gated entrance of Spotted Dog.

Description:

The Spotted Dog entrance road from Freeze Out Lane offers two good access points into the backcountry, but you won't find any road signs out there. The northernmost road fork climbs steeply on switchbacks to an outpost on barren Rocky Ridge which is also the site of several relay towers.

The more aesthetically pleasing passage into the Spotted Dog backcountry from Freeze Out Lane is to park somewhere along the steep road that climbs the southern rim of the O'Neill Creek Drainage and then (just before you cross underneath the huge overhead electrical transmission lines) veer left off the main "road" onto a secondary "road" that closely skirts the creek. From there no motorized vehicles are allowed. The road climbs slowly and eventually branches, offering a couple good options for exploring.



The O'Neill Creek Drainage

The map provided shows a 16 km double-track loop that is sometimes more like a cow path than a road. There are areas of shade in the first half of the run and the second half of the loop is high and exposed with an excellent view of the Deer Lodge Valley as you loop back. There is a confusing fence crossing by the old cattlegaurd, right at the halfway point where the loop turns back into the woods. Take the supplied topo map with you. It is easy to get lost out there, but remember your reference point is to follow the sight of the biggest transmission line back to your starting point.

Negatives:

Can be muddy with rain or snowmelt.

Headwinds on return route common esp. in the afternoon.