



# Hike on the Blue Mountains Trail:

## North Fork John Day Trail - 2 Day Backpack

Departing from the **Crane Creek Trailhead**, near **Sumpter, Oregon**, the North Fork John Day Trail follows its namesake river through the heart of the North Fork John Day Wilderness. This surprisingly rugged trail descends through old growth forests, steep canyons, and has two river crossings through cold knee to waist-high water. You will be rewarded for taking it slowly and enjoying the solitude, scenery, and wildlife along this section of the Blue Mountains Trail.



### THE STATS:

- Recreation type:** 2 day backpack
- Route type:** One way with shuttle, or out-and-back
- Mileage:** 25.6 miles one way
- Duration:** 2+ days
- Elevation gain (gross):** 4,258 feet
- Active time hiking (estimated):** 11 hours round trip
- Time of year:** June to late October
- Physical difficulty:** Difficult
- Logistical difficulty:** Challenging, 4WD vehicle recommended to Oriental Creek CG, and 2 vehicles needed for a shuttle
- Permits required:** Free, self-issued Wilderness permit at the trailhead. Group size limited to 12 people. All other wilderness restrictions apply.

### TRIP DESCRIPTION:

The North Fork John Day Trail follows its namesake river for over 25 miles through one of Eastern Oregon's most remarkable wilderness areas. Even if you choose to hike downstream, the trail is still surprisingly rugged and offers plenty of challenges for experienced hikers. But if you love hiking through old forests and experiencing the solitude of the Blue Mountains, this trail will not disappoint. You will also see artifacts of the region's gold mining history, with old placer mine tailings along portions of the river, and an old miner's cabin that is still intact.

If hiking in the downstream direction, there are two potential trailheads, one at Crane Creek following the route of the Blue Mountains Trail, and the other at the North Fork John Day Campground. If you plan to camp at the trailhead before your hike or wish to avoid the need to cross waist-deep water at Crane Creek, starting at the North Fork John Day Campground is a great option. Another knee-to-waist-deep crossing is required at an old miners cabin between Crane Creek and Granite Creek. There are only a few good established backcountry campsites along the full route, but small footprint sites can be found throughout the trail with a little exploration. In many sections of the trail, the tread climbs 200+ feet above the river, sometimes with steep drops along the narrow path, or with overgrown ceanothus that you will need to push through. Sure feet and confidence with exposure go a long way on this route. In the early season, be prepared for ticks as well, especially through the more overgrown sections of the trail.

If you plan to do this as a one-way hike, you will need to have two vehicles to set up the shuttle. The driving time between trailheads takes about 2 hours. If you have one vehicle, you can hike it as a 4 day out-and-back or simply shorten your trip.



**More information about and resources for the Blue Mountains Trail are available online at [hells canyon.org/blue-mountains-trail](https://hells canyon.org/blue-mountains-trail)**

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The Blue Mountains Trail was developed and is operated by Greater Hells Canyon Council. This trip report was published in 2024.

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## TRIP DESCRIPTION, CONT:

The North Fork John Day Wilderness was designated and protected in by the U.S Congress in 1984, and it encompasses over 120,000 acres. The North Fork John Day River is the coldest of the tributaries to the mainstem John Day, draining snowmelt from the Elkhorn and Greenhorn mountains ranges. At its higher reaches, the river offers spawning for steelhead, chinook salmon and native redband trout. The trail is overgrown in sections, and you can join us in reporting recreation impacts or areas that need additional maintenance using the Recreation Impacts Monitoring System (RIMS) app (contact us for details and to sign up or download the app and get started). This area is still recovering from past mining impacts, and it supports abundant wildlife; when hiking here, please follow Leave No Trace principles.

## BEFORE AND AFTER IN SUMPTER:

Sumpter became a mining boomtown in the late 1890s. Its population peaked at over 2,000 in the early 1900s. Today, Sumpter's population is under 200 and the economy relies heavily on tourism. The town and the broader region's mining history is still evident. You can visit the historic Sumpter Dredge; there is a mining museum, and there are piles of gravel along the nearby creeks, remnants of the previous dredging activities.

Sumpter has restaurants, lodging, and two small markets, but is a limited-service town. The markets have limited supplies, so plan when packing food and supplies for your trip through the North Fork John Day Wilderness. The shortest route for setting up a shuttle between trailheads does not go through Sumpter.

While in Sumpter, the Elkhorn Saloon and Carole's Mad Dog Restaurant offer delicious food options, including burgers, pizza, and a full menu of pub-style fare. Coffee, breakfast, and lunch are available at the Sumpter Nugget. There are plenty of nice, simple accommodation options, including the Depot Inn, the Sumpter Stockade Motel, and the Sumpter Bed & Breakfast. We highly recommend visiting the Sumpter Dredge operated as an Oregon State Park, or taking a ride on the Sumpter Valley Railroad.

For a full list of amenities, including markets, accommodations, post offices, public transit options, and more places to eat and stay, check out the Blue Mountains Trail Town Guides for Sumpter.

## TRIP PLANNING INFORMATION AND LINKS:

### Trailhead access points: Crane Creek Trailhead

USFS webpage: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/umatilla/recarea/?recid=56509>

Google Maps: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/yNZodLd4oDU7Rs8Y9>

### Oriental Creek Campground

USFS webpage: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/umatilla/recarea/?recid=56609>

Google Maps: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/KdBLsp39KjSrA7636>

### Nearby town guides for Sumpter:

<https://www.hellscanyon.org/blue-mountains-trail/towns/sumpter>

### Local US Forest Service Office:

Umatilla National Forest North Fork John Day Ranger District, Ukiah, 541-427-3231

### Trail conditions: North Fork John Day River Trail #3022

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/umatilla/recreation/recarea/?recid=56599&actid=51>

### Weather forecast at Crane Creek Trailhead via the National Weather Service:

<https://forecast.weather.gov/MapClick.php?lon=-118.405&lat=44.883>

Credit for photos as follows: Front page: Jared Kennedy



North Fork John Day Trail on t 1/3 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 km

WGS84

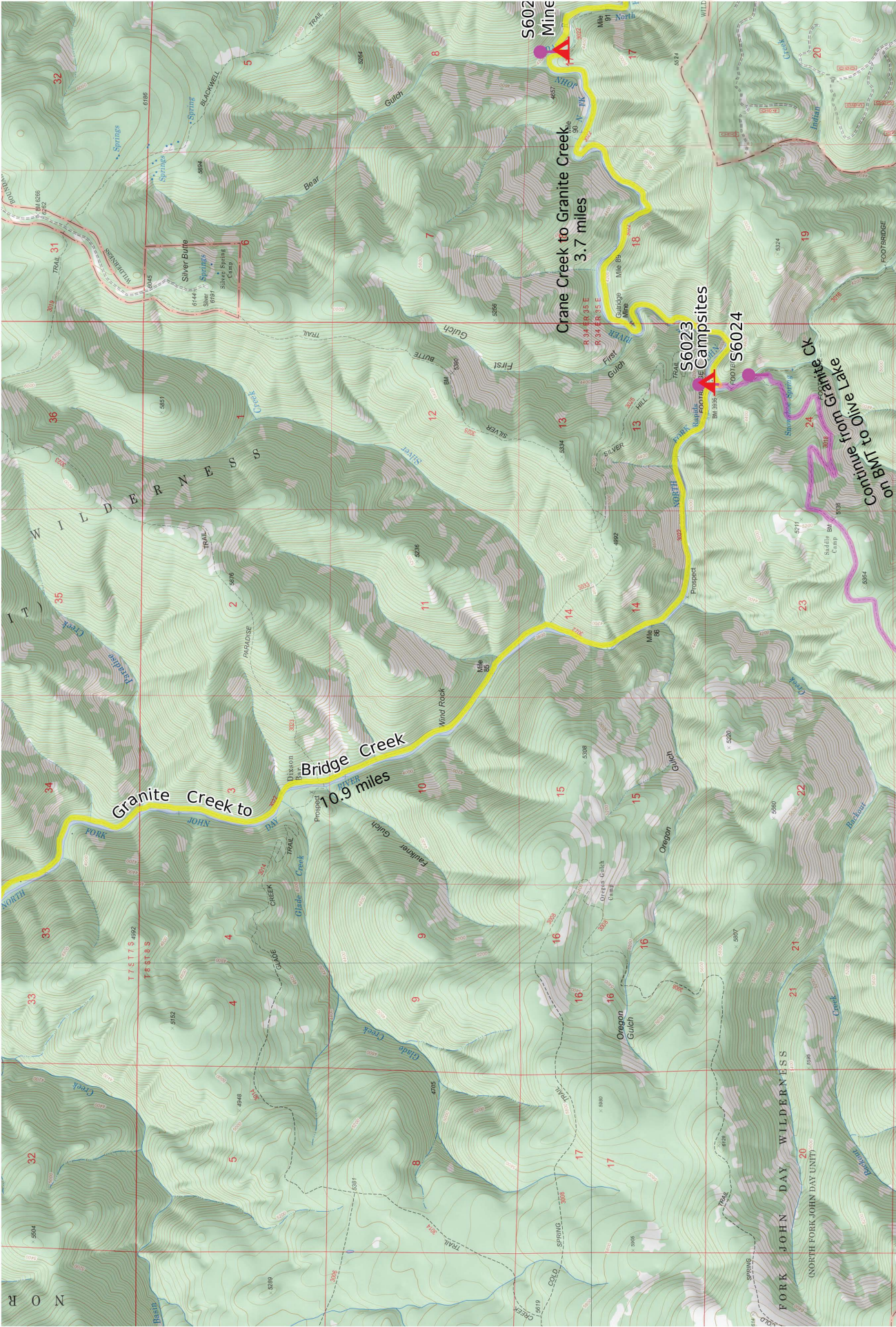
UTM Zone 11T

Scale 1:45000 1 inch = 3750 feet

1 2 3 4mi

MN 13.8°





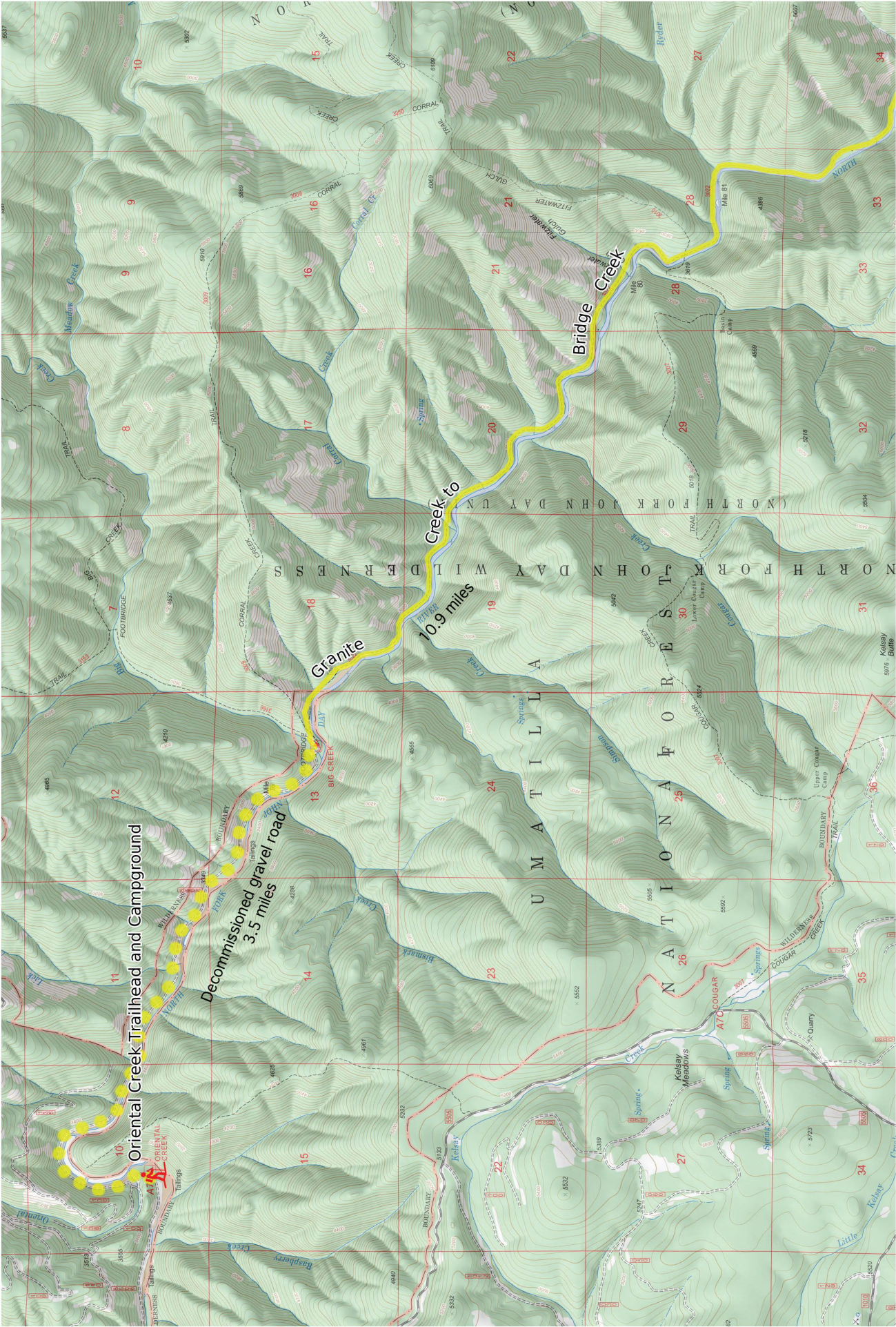
North Fork John Day Trail on t 2/3  
 WGS84  
 UTM Zone 11T

Scale 1:45000 1 inch = 3750 feet

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 km  
 0 1 2 3 4 mi

▲ MN 13.8°

**CALTOPO**



North Fork John Day Trail on t 3/3  
 WGS84  
 UTM Zone 11T

