

Arizona hike: Aerie Trail, Sedona

Mare Czinar, Special for The Republic 11:07 a.m. MST April 8, 2015



(Photo: Mare Czinar/Special for the Republic)

Hiking blogger Mare Czinar likes nothing better than to hit the trail. You can find more of her news and recommendations at arizonahiking.blogspot.com.

For hikers stepping out on Sedona's rusty soil for the first time, best-bet trails include Boynton Canyon, Bear Mountain and Fay Canyon. Until recently, these crazy-popular routes were isolated from one other, but now the Aerie Trail tethers the trifecta of Upper Dry Creek-area trailheads to its own roomy parking area.

This new access point off Boynton Pass Road provides a respite from the boot-clad masses and access to dozens of trails. The 5.2-mile Aerie-Cockscomb loop takes off from this portal, swooping around Doe Mountain and the distinctive silhouette of the Cockscomb rock formation.

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As with any red-rock country hike, views along this gently undulating trail are picture-postcard quality. An optional slog up the connecting Doe Mountain spur path offers a panoramic spectacle of color-saturated mesas and buttes for those willing to tack another 1.2 miles to the trek.

From the Aerie trailhead, begin on Cockscomb Trail. Hike past the Rupp and Dawa junctions and turn left at the Aerie Trail sign at 3.3 miles. From here, hike 1.2 miles to the Doe Mountain junction. This 0.7-mile spur trail climbs 460 feet to the summit of a long mesa and is well worth a detour. Or, you can skip the climb and continue 0.7 mile back to the trailhead. All routes are signed.

Length: 5.2-mile loop (6.6 miles with Doe Mountain spur).

Rating: Moderate.

Elevation: 4,250-4,660 feet (5,120 feet with summit spur).

Getting there: From the State Route 179/89A traffic circle in Sedona, head 3.2 miles west on SR 89A to Dry Creek Road. Turn north and go 2.9 miles to Boynton Pass Road (Forest Road 152C). Turn west and go 1.5 miles to a T junction; veer left to stay on FR152C. Continue 1.4 miles to Aerie Road, turn south and go 0.4 mile to the turnoff for the trailhead on the right.

Details: 928-203-2900, www.fs.usda.gov/coconino.

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