STERLING MINE DITCH TRAIL



BLM Medford District

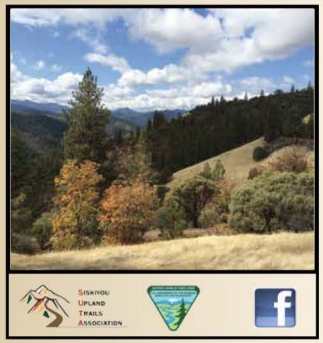
Sterling Mine Ditch Trail - A Vital Partnership

A partnership between the Medford District Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Siskiyou Upland Trails Association (SUTA), and the neighboring community drove the re-opening of the historic Sterling Mine Ditch Trail (SMDT). This partnership is vital to keeping the trail open for the community. The BLM provides resource planning and management of the SMDT and helps with large-scale maintenance needs.

SUTA is a non-profit community trails association that is developing a trail system connecting existing trails in Jacksonville to those of Ashland, Oregon, along the scenic ridgeline. This will become the Jack-Ash trail. The historic SMDT is a key part of this community trail system and will create a 25-mile loop in the center of the Jack-Ash Trail. SUTA has taken the lead in procuring grant funds and organizing volunteers to assist with rehabilitation and maintenance of the SMDT. SUTA volunteers provide most of the needed maintenance of the SMDT through scheduled work parties. You may assist BLM and SUTA in helping keep this historic trail open for public use by participating in a work party. Visit www.SUTAoregon.org to schedule work parties, activities, and other events.

Medford District BLM
541-618-2200
www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford

Siskiyou Upland Trails Association
P.O. Box 901
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A History of Riches

Long before the appearance of European settlers, Sterling Creek and the Little Applegate River area were traditional homelands of the Dakubetede people. This group was also known as the Applegate Creek Indians and was part of the Rogue River Indians, a name applied to the people of the Upper Rogue River and its tributaries. The Dakubetedes utilized an abundance of berries, seeds, roots, fish, and game throughout the year to maintain a diverse diet. The Dakubetedes spoke a dialect of the Athabascan language group, unusual for the tribes in interior southwest Oregon. The Dakubetedes took part in the Rogue River Indian Treaties of 1853 and 1854 that resulted in their removal from their homelands to the Grand Ronde and Siletz Indian Reservations in northwest Oregon.

When gold was discovered in 1854 on Sterling Creek, prospectors poured into the area. At first, they panned for gold along the creek, but this proved to be inefficient in extracting the gold that was buried under layers of rock and soil. Hydraulic mining, using a powerful jet of water, promised better returns for large scale mining; they just needed more water.

In 1877 miners built the Sterling Mine Ditch to redirect water from the upper reaches of the Little Applegate River to the Sterling Creek Mine. The ditch followed the contours of the rugged slopes of Anderson Butte and lost only 200 feet in elevation over its 26.5 mile length. Using hand tools, up to 400 workers, most of them probably Chinese, completed the ditch in just 6 months, at a cost of $70,000. The ditch carried water to the mine, and the trail alongside it provided access for ditch maintenance. During peak operation, hydraulic mining on Sterling Creek blasted away up to 800 cubic yards of soil and rock each day. Impacts to fisheries and water quality were immense, and generations would pass before the hydrologic balance and fish habitat in Sterling Creek would recover.

The mine discontinued operations in the 1930s, and the ditch and trail became overgrown with brush and trees. The Sterling Mine Ditch Trail (SMDT) is a marvel of late nineteenth century engineering. Be sure to see the tunnel, dug as a shortcut through the ridge at the top of the Tunnel Ridge access trail! You can also see old flume remnants while hiking along sections of the trail. As you drive along Sterling Creek Road, you can see piles of stones and boulders along the creek that were left by hydraulic mining as soil was washed away in the search for gold. In addition to gold, the layers of soil and rock also yielded bones and tusks of elephants and other ancient inhabitants of the area.



Hydraulic (Placer) mining at Sterling Creek Mine, 1905. Photo: Southern Oregon Historical Society.



The tunnel through the ridge still exists at the top of the Tunnel Ridge access trail.



Woodland section between Tunnel Ridge and Little Applegate.

The Natural Environment

The SMDT passes through a diversity of landscapes and ecosystems as it winds its way around the ridges and ravines of Anderson Butte. This diversity contributes to an ever-changing array of wildflowers, trees, birds, wildlife, and environments. Trail users enjoy panoramic views of surrounding landscapes--the Siskiyou Crest, Wagner Butte, Little Applegate Valley, Greyback Mountain, and the Red Buttes Wilderness, as well as deep woods and lovely meadows. Groves of mature ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, big leaf maple, white and black oak, cedar, hazel, fern and other woodland plants flourish on shady north-facing slopes and in draws near Deming Gulch, Armstrong Gulch, and along the Little Applegate and Tunnel Ridge access trails.

Drier southern exposures support madrone, manzanita, oaks, buckbrush, mountain mahagony, silk tassel, Klamath plum, and even a few junipers. Several champion trees are found along the ditch, including a massive madrone 18 feet in circumference, growing between Bear Gulch and Tunnel Ridge.

Spring brings an abundance of wildflowers and birds that last well into summer. Summer can be very warm along south-facing exposures, but north-facing slopes and draws provide a refreshingly cool respite from the heat. Autumn's changing colors splash the deep green forest canopy with yellow, orange, and red accents.

Although you may not see them often, many species of wildlife call the area home. Be aware, as you travel along this ditch, you share the trail with other local species such as poison oak, ticks, and an array of wildlife including bears, cougars, bob cats, coyotes and deer.



A giant madrone graces the SMDT and dwarfs a hiker.



The level grade of the SMDT makes for pleasant hiking.



A seasonal waterfall on the Bear Gulch trail

History



Ride the trail for a look into the past.

Ditch construction workers were the very first trail users. "Ditch riders" were also among the original trail users. These were men who rode horseback along the trail on the berm of the ditch to make sure the water continued to flow.

Please be courteous of others while riding the trail. Follow right-of-way signs.

Recreation



Annual "Run-the-Ditch" 5-mile run.



Impressive stonework is found in retaining walls which still support the trail in many places along the ditch.



People of all ages enjoy the SMDT. Photo: L.Smith.

Botanicals



Arrowleaf balsamroot and paintbrush decorate a meadow along the trail.





Fritillary and Douglas iris are local spring beauties



Calypso orchids abound in early spring on shaded slopes.

Wildflowers are among the prime attractions of the ditch between February and August. Varieties in bloom change with the seasons and habitat. They include three species of fritillary: calypso, rattlesnake, and bog orchids; trillium; bleeding hearts; Oregon sunshine; and at least forty other species (see the wildflower list on www.SUTAOregon.org).

Volunteer



Volunteers install new trail signs.

Keeping this beautiful trail open for all to enjoy depends upon help from volunteers like you! Trail work parties provide opportunities to gain skills in trail design and maintenance, enjoy the constantly changing natural environment of the trail, get some great exercise, and meet new friends.

Check www.sutaoregon.org for work day details.

EXPLORING THE STERLING MINE DITCH TRAIL

This historic trail is located south of Jacksonville, Oregon. The trail is maintained for non-motorized recreation by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management Medford District (BLM) and the Siskiyou Upland Trails Association (SUTA). The Sterling Mine Ditch Trail (SMDT) provides recreational opportunities for visitors of all ages: short, level strolls for small children; long-distance hikes; runs; horseback trails; & mountain bike rides. The trail is open for use by hikers and runners year-round, thanks to its 2,000-2,400 foot elevation.

Currently, three trailheads are located along Little Applegate Road: Bear Gulch, Tunnel Ridge, and Little Applegate. There are four trailheads off Sterling Creek Road on unpaved BLM roads: Deming, Armstrong Gulch, Wolf Gap and Grub Gulch trailheads. With a little planning and two cars for a shuttle, you can create a wide variety of routes. Horse trailer parking is provided at a landing east of the Deming trailhead, and at Armstrong Gulch trailhead, Tunnel Ridge, and at Little Applegate trailheads.

Please help preserve and protect your trail! In the interests of maintaining the trail in top condition for all users, equestrians and bicyclists must avoid using the trail after significant rains.

The SMDT provides recreation opportunities year-round. Winter is popular with hikers and runners because snow does not usually accumulate at the trail's low elevation.

Trail Etiquette & Safety

Equestrians, hikers, runners, and bicycle riders can enjoy and share the trail safely by following some simple rules of trail etiquette:

PROTECT THE TRAIL

- Please respect private property and stay on the trail.
- Protect natural and cultural resources.
- Respect "No Trespassing" signs.
- Pack it in; pack it out.
- Leave no trace.
- Be courteous of others on the trail.

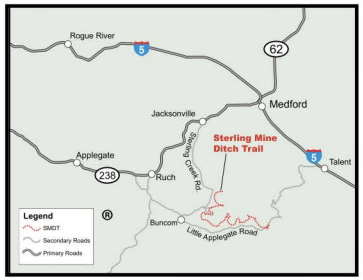
PLAN FOR THE TRAIL

- Always carry water and a snack when using the trail. A few seasonal streams cross the SMDT but are not reliable water sources, especially in late summer.
- Dress for the conditions.
- Review maps and trail guides prior to making a trip.
- Be alert for ticks, poison oak, and rattlesnakes.

SHARE THE TRAIL

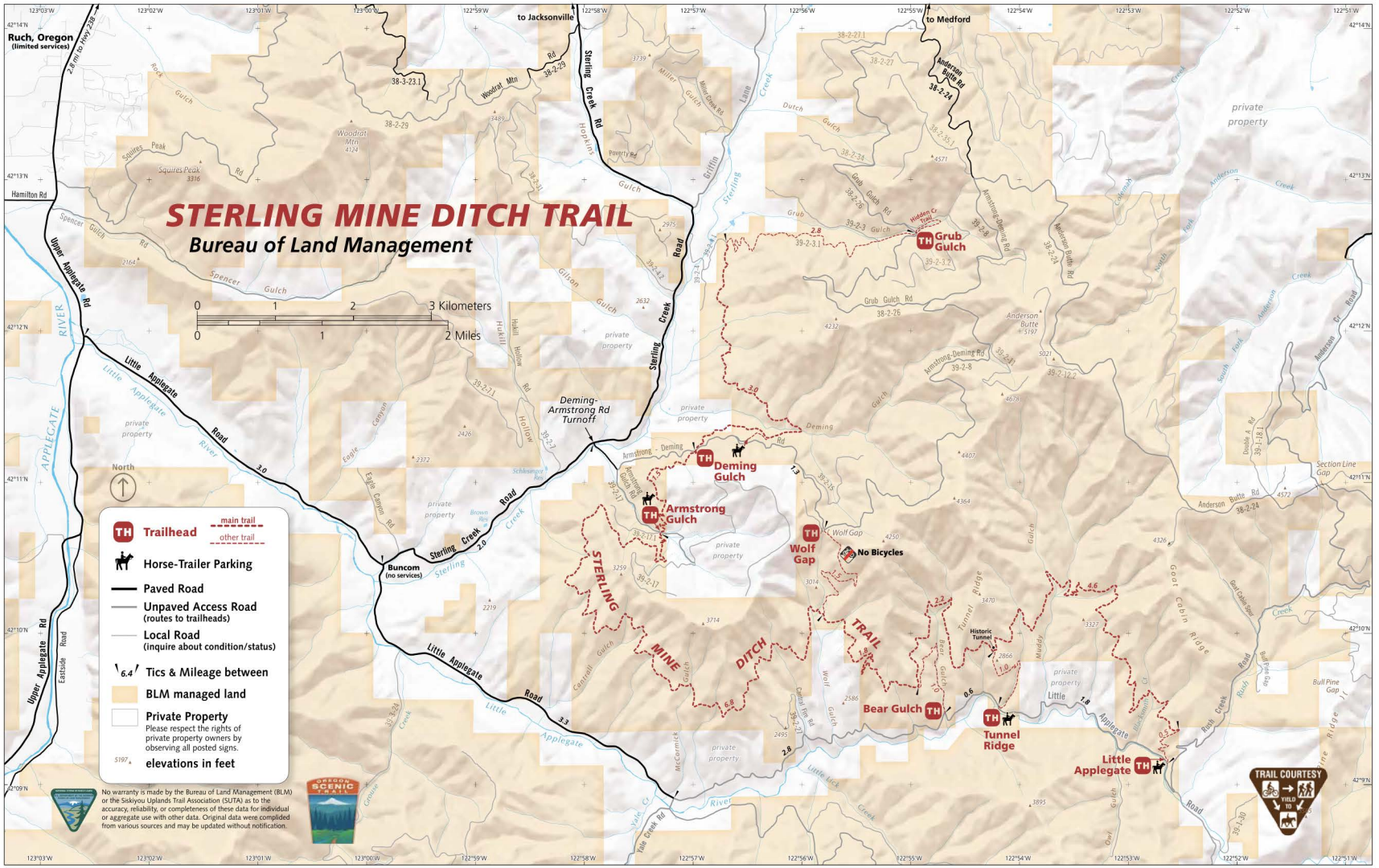
- Ask horse riders which side of the trail they prefer.
- Speak calmly and avoid sudden movements when you are around horses.
- Horses and mountain bikes can damage the trail when soils are wet. In winter and spring, please wait for drier conditions to help us protect the trail.

For detailed directions to the trailheads and suggested hikes, see SUTA's website: www.sutaoregon.org



The Sterling Mine Ditch Trail is maintained jointly by the Medford BLM, the Siskiyou Upland Trails Association (SUTA), and community volunteers. To learn how you can participate in work parties, visit SUTA's website www.sutaoregon.org.





All photos in this brochure courtesy of SUTA unless otherwise indicated.