

Rio Laja Trail- Section 9: *White Pillar Trail*

Description:

This section of the trail is accessible during most of the year. Like Section 8, sand and gravel extraction, such as deep under-cuts in the land, have caused large sections of fields to drop away. Highway 51 is visible or audible for much of the hike. This section is 3.25 miles/ 5.2 km long, ending at San Ignacio.

Access to trailhead parking:

Beginning at the intersection at Ventanas golf course, travel north on highway 51 for approximately 12.5 miles/ 20 km. Turn off of highway at Capilla de San Judas Tudeo where there is an old, cinderblock bus stop on highway. Pass on dirt road through small pueblito. Before reaching river, turn left to park in an area large enough for four or five vehicles, much of it beneath a giant spreading shade tree.



Waypoint 1: Trailhead parking, Mile 0.0/km 0.0. GPS coordinates: 21.079, -100.821. From the parking area the trail passes to the right of a white graffiti-covered abutment under a long suspension bridge. The river is to the left of the trail. Across the river, observe a brown Capilla. A large pepper tree on the right bank of river marks the beginning of the path that ascends a steep slope on a well-worn trail to the flats above. The path follows the curve of the river then runs alongside agricultural fields parallel to the river.

Trailhead parking by Bridge



At .23 miles/ .37 km, the path crosses into an agricultural field at this point where the footpath was lost to erosion. The trail continues on a path on the right side of a row of large trees. Beside the last giant tree in the row, make a 90° left turn toward the river, then take the higher foot path/road exiting the riverbed.

Distinct trail to row of large trees

Waypoint 2: White concrete post at mile .6/ .96 km. At the white concrete post, take a 90° left turn back toward the river, then a right turn onto a road. Ahead is a tree-lined arroyo cutting across the field. During the dry season, it is possible to cross the arroyo on a path just beyond a white concrete post on the left alongside the arroyo. During the wet season, walk toward Hwy 51 and cross over the arroyo on the highway itself. After crossing the arroyo, follow the path that descends to a lower trail. The lower trail passes to the left of a row of trees parallel to a cornfield, then the road swings back up to the upper field. Pass the stone ruin of a bridge abutment at 1.38 miles/ 2.21 km. Bordering this property, turn right toward highway 51.

During the dry season, the trail runs alongside a culvert next to the highway. During the wet season, it might be necessary to go up onto the highway to pass over the culvert when it is running with water. Follow the road toward the river, then exit road onto a defined footpath. Observe a cluster of newish brick buildings with red tile roofs on right, and on left, four cement posts (one fallen down) that appear to be part of an old bridge. Pass a brown marker on the riverside you will see on your right a plantation of trees that resemble Joshua trees.



Waypoint 3: Six white concrete pillars, at 1.98 miles/ 3.2 km. Continue on trail toward an unfinished brick structure with a brick barbecue at the rear. The trail descends to front of building, toward river. Duck under a string of barbed wire where trail will descend, then ascend the bank to a fence line. The trail passes a rodeo ring. Where the fence ends, cross a road to border a white post fence on right. Pass a large hacienda and agricultural fields.

Six white pillars

Waypoint 4: Dirt soccer field, at 2.42 miles/ 3.9 km. The trail passes a stand of carrizo, and an open patch of land

with handmade soccer goals. Dense bushes on either side of the path open up to another field, in an area where the river widens.

Waypoint 5: End Section 9, start Section 10 at mile 3.25/ 5.2 km. GPS coordinate: 21.109, -100.834. Section 9 ends at San Ignacio, near a hay field with road access and an open area for parking. Tall pepper trees offer welcome shade, while across the river a white chapel with red trim provides a distinctive landmark. This section is 24.22 miles/ 38.76 km from the start of Section one on the Rio Laja trail network.

