

Dry Cottonwood Loop (19 K)

A good winter route to run in Deer Lodge due to light traffic, and the road passable for most of the year. The upper switch-back portion of the loop does get drifted in from December through March.

Directions:

Exit I-90 at Galen (#197) or Racetrack (#195) exit and go east on the dirt road to the base of the foothills and then follow East Side Rd to Dry Cottonwood Canyon (2 K NE from Galen Exit or 4 K SE from Racetrack Exit).

Description:

19K loop all on graded dirt. Add to the distance by running the access road from I-90. You will be in the open on the upper northern half but in the canyon bottom on the south side. Let the daily wind direction guide your choice about which direction to circle the loop. On a cold day, take the tailwind on the high northern half. There are a few steep pitches but most of the climb is moderate.

Negatives:

Can be muddy with rain or snowmelt.

Possible drifting snow on steep climb at halfway point.

Other Notes:

The Continental Divide Trail crosses the Dry Cottonwood Road at the pass, and that trail is another nice run in either direction, as is the road which branches there to the east (down into the adjacent valley) or south (along the Divide).