

afoot&afield

Inland Empire

A comprehensive hiking guide

David & Jennifer Money Harris



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BERKELEY, CA

To Abraham and Samuel

Afoot & Afield Inland Empire: A Comprehensive Hiking Guide

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Big Bear Lake; Desert Divide (Trip 10.7)

Frontispiece: Galena Peak above Mill Creek (Trip 5.3)

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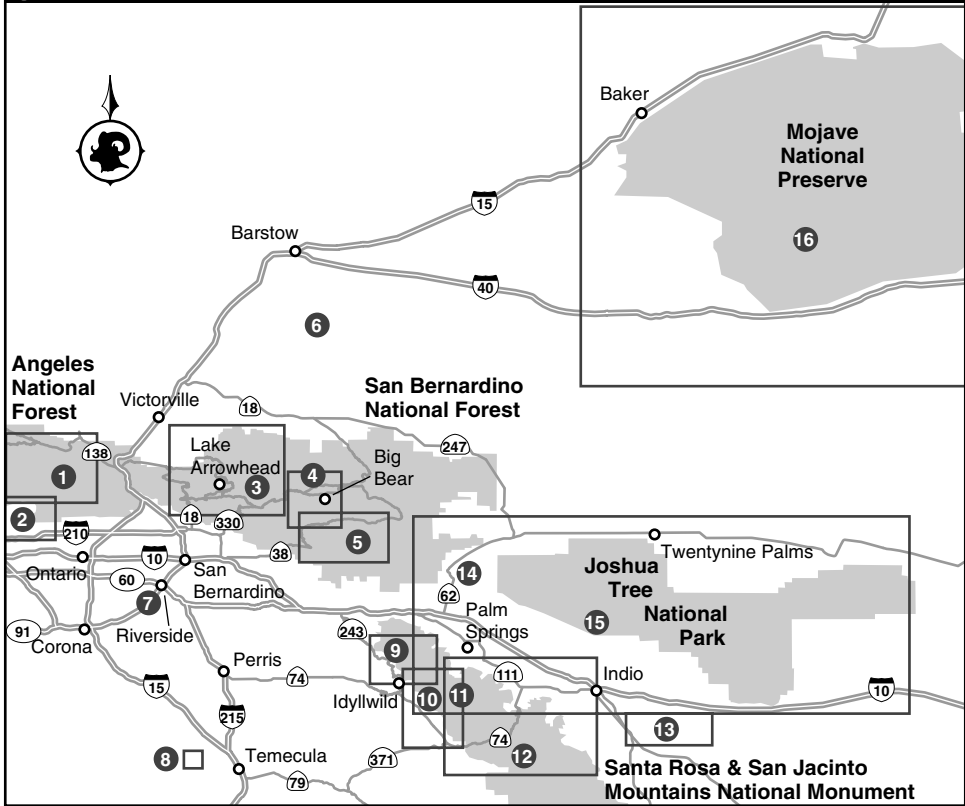
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The remaining errors are our own.

Wild lands are a precious resource. Each of the trips in this book owes its existence to the vision and effort of many people, from grass-roots volunteers to conservation organizations to civil servants to far-sighted political leaders, who have protected the land and constructed and maintained the trails that we now enjoy.

The Inland Empire



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Introducing the Inland Empire

The origin of the term *Inland Empire* is shrouded in the mists of history, but one theory says it was coined by real estate developers to lure buyers to this purported paradise. The boundaries of the Inland Empire are even murkier. One definition, adopted in this guide, is that the Inland Empire spans Riverside and San Bernardino counties and eastern Los Angeles County including Claremont, San Dimas, Pomona, and La Verne. Though these borders are inexact, few would dispute that the Inland Empire is a hiker's paradise.

The Inland Empire is home to California's best and most diverse hiking south of the Sierra Nevada. It includes Southern California's three tallest mountains, Mojave National Preserve, the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, and the world-famous Joshua Tree National Park. There are hundreds of lesser known, but tremendously enjoyable, hikes to be found just about anywhere you live or visit in this area. It is remarkable that these hikes, many of them in the peaceful tranquility of the mountains or desert, are located in the fastest-growing region of California, within a short drive of more than 15 million residents.

Prior to the arrival of European invaders, the Inland Empire was lightly populated by Native Americans who were keenly adept at living in the unforgiving deserts and mountains. The Spanish arrived in the late 16th Century, established a few missions and ranches, and named the major geographical features, but considered the region poorly suited for colonization. A hardy band of Mormon settlers were the first white Americans to arrive in numbers, coming by wagon over Cajon Pass in 1851. They established an outpost near present day San Bernardino, but soon returned to

Salt Lake City. The development of railroads and irrigation drastically changed the Southern Californian landscape. The citrus industry took root in the 1870s, and soon industrious farmers (one of the author's great-grandparents included) flocked to the area to seek their fortune growing oranges and shipping them back to the East Coast.

California joined the United States in 1850 in the wake of the Gold Rush, and the government moved promptly to survey the new state. In November of 1852, Colonel Henry Washington and a team of surveyors made the arduous ascent of San Bernardino Peak, where they established the initial point from which all of Southern California was measured. Curious hikers can take in the expansive views where his survey monument still stands on the shoulder of the peak. Baseline Avenue loosely follows his survey line from Highland to San Dimas.

Colonel Washington's Monument on
San Bernardino Peak





Mt. Baldy Area

Mt. Baldy, also known as Mt. San Antonio, is one of the four towering saints standing watch over the Inland Empire. At 10,064 feet, it stands well above any other summit in the San Gabriel Mountains, and is taller than the Zugspitze, Germany's highest peak. The bare, snow-capped top is readily recognizable from great distances in Southern California and constantly reassures tens of millions of suburban residents that wilderness is within sight. In 1923, Charles Francis Saunders wrote of Baldy in *Southern Sierras of California*, "If you have anything of the Californian in you, you mark it for the objective of an outing sometime." The summit has been a Southern California hiker's favorite for more than eight decades now.

Numerous lower peaks surrounding Mt. Baldy also offer superb hiking opportunities. The 44,000-acre Sheep Mountain Wilderness to the west is the largest roadless area in the San Gabriel Mountains. The 12,000-acre Cucamonga Wilderness to the southeast protects many of the best hiking opportunities in Southern California. Between the two wilderness areas is the quiet mountain resort of Mt. Baldy Village and a small ski area that offers excellent runs immediately after good winter storms.

Sheep Mountain Wilderness is named for the desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*) that once roamed these mountains in large herds. Their numbers plummeted from about 750 in 1982 to about 90 in 1995, most likely because of predation by mountain lions, but they have slowly recovered and number almost 300 due to conserva-

tion efforts. Sightings are not uncommon near the Mt. Baldy Bowl and in the more remote parts of the wilderness.

A wilderness permit is required to enter Cucamonga Wilderness, and can be obtained, at no charge, in person or by mail from the Mt. Baldy Visitor Center or Cajon Ranger Station. Most hikers enter this area via the Icehouse Canyon Trail. Campfires are not allowed at any backcountry campsites; bring a camp stove. A fire permit is required for the use of a stove. Dogs are permitted on a leash no longer than 6 feet. Leave vicious or noisy dogs at home.

A wilderness permit is required for entry into Sheep Mountain Wilderness from the East Fork Trailhead only. The only trip this affects is Iron Mtn. A permit can be obtained, at no charge, in person or by mail from the San Gabriel River Ranger District office (see Appendix B); mailed requests must arrive at least two weeks in advance.

Nelson Bighorn Sheep



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Mount Baldy Area

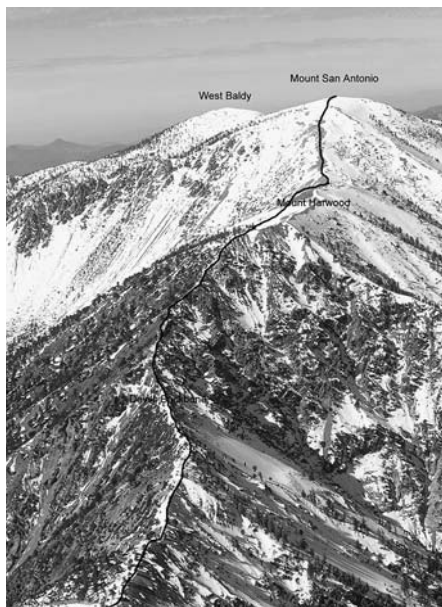


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Directions to Mt. Baldy Village

Many trips in this chapter start from Mt. Baldy Rd. near the village of Mt. Baldy. The road can be reached from either the 210 or 10 freeways by taking the Mountain Ave. exit in Upland and driving north. The top of Mountain Ave. turns right, then back left (west), passes San Antonio Dam, then leads north to the Lower San Antonio Fire Station, across San Antonio Creek and back south and west to a T-junction with Mt. Baldy Rd. Turn right and drive 5 miles up to Mt. Baldy Village. The Mt. Baldy Visitor Center is on the left (west) side of the road just past Mt. Baldy Lodge.

Alternatively, if you are coming from west of Claremont, exit the 210 Freeway at Baseline. Go west 0.1 mile, then turn north on Padua. At the top of Padua, turn right on Mt. Baldy Rd. and follow it 7.5 miles up to Mt. Baldy Village.



Devil's Backbone on Mt. Baldy in winter

trip 1.1 Mt. Baldy Loop

Distance	12 miles (loop)
Hiking Time	6 hours
Elevation Gain	3900'
Difficulty	Strenuous
Trail Use	Dogs
Best Times	June–October
Agency	Angeles National Forest (Mt. Baldy Visitor Center)
Recommended Map	Tom Harrison <i>Angeles High Country</i> or <i>Mount San Antonio 7.5'</i> (trail not entirely shown)



DIRECTIONS (See directions to Mt. Baldy Village above) From the ranger station in Mt. Baldy Village, continue up the Mt. Baldy Rd. for 4.2 miles to Manker Flats. Park on the side or middle of the divided road near San Antonio Falls Rd.

Mt. Baldy is one of the most popular hikes in Southern California. Its summit is high and offers breathtaking views, yet the route is straightforward for a hiker of average ability. There are many routes on the mountain, but this one is especially enjoyable because it makes a loop up past the Baldy Bowl and down along the stunning Devil's Backbone to the ski area at the

Baldy Notch. From here, one can follow a dirt service road back to Manker Flats.

Alternatively, it is possible to do the loop in reverse and ride the chair lift up, saving 1300 feet and 3.5 miles of climbing. The lift begins 0.4 mile above Manker Flats at the top of Mt. Baldy Rd. At the time of this writing, the chair lift is open on weekends and holidays 8 A.M.–5 P.M., and costs \$15 round-trip or \$10 one-way. Call Mt. Baldy

Ski Area at (909) 981-3344 for more information.

From Manker Flats, walk west through a gate and up a service road. In 0.5 mile, the road makes a hairpin turn, and you have an excellent view of San Antonio Falls (see Trip 1.2). In another 0.3 mile, look for a trail switchbacking up the slope to the left. It is easy to miss; if you get to a point directly overlooking Manker Flats, you have gone too far.

This unmarked path is known as the Baldy Bowl Trail or Ski Hut Trail. Follow the trail 2 miles through an open forest of Jeffrey and lodgepole pines up to a Sierra Club ski hut, built by volunteers in 1937, located off the right side of the trail. This marks the halfway point in distance and elevation gain. Just beyond, cross the head of San Antonio Creek beneath the scree-filled Baldy Bowl. This area is a backcountry skier's paradise in the winter and early spring. On a rare quiet day, it is also a good place to look for bighorn sheep.

Author hiking on the Devil's Backbone

The trail continues around the southwest edge of Baldy Bowl, crossing a field of talus and switchbacking up to the ridge. Shady spots along this part of the trail remain icy long after most of the mountain has melted out. Expert mountaineers have had serious and fatal slips on this seemingly innocuous stretch of trail. The trail then follows the ridge north, climbing above treeline, and reaching the summit 2 miles beyond the ski hut.

After taking in the magnificent scenery, descend east along the Devil's Backbone Trail. This 3-mile trail passes along the south side of Mt. Harwood, and then follows a knife-edge ridge down to the ski area at Baldy Notch. Again, be especially careful because a slip down one of the steep chutes may be your last.

From the lodge at Baldy Notch, follow the service road descending to the southwest. In 3 miles, reach the original junction with the Baldy Bowl Trail, and in 1 more mile arrive back at Manker Flats.



Mecca Hills Wilderness

Fifteen miles southeast of Indio near the north shore of the Salton Sea, the dusty town of Mecca sits amid lush fields of carrots, peppers, and artichokes; thick groves of oranges, pecans, and date palms; and row upon row of rich grape vines. The earliest people to inhabit Mecca were the Cahuilla Indians. Because they lived so far inland, these Desert Cahuilla had little contact with the colonizing Spanish who established missions in San Gabriel and San Diego.

Although the Desert Cahuilla had dug an extensive network of wells to support agriculture in the Coachella Valley, it wasn't

until the late 19th Century that Anglo-Americans considered developing the area for agriculture. In Mecca Hills' arid climate, it was the presence of water that led to the development of a railroad stop named Walters along the Yuma-Los Angeles rail line. Mecca's founder—R. Holtby Meyers—at the urging of his wife, changed the town's name from Walters to Mecca because the desert climate and burgeoning date palm industry so closely resembled the famed holy city. Developers capitalized upon this image and used the exotic images of Arabian oases to draw people to Mecca. It

Hikers in Ladder Canyon

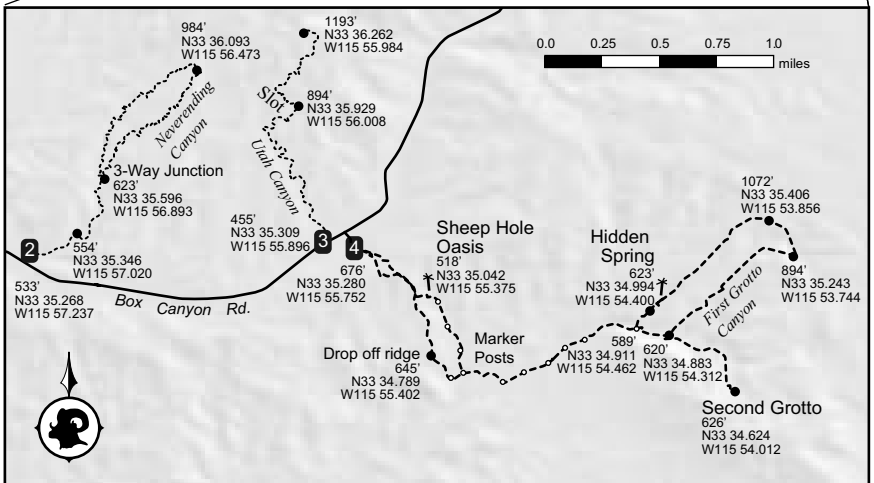
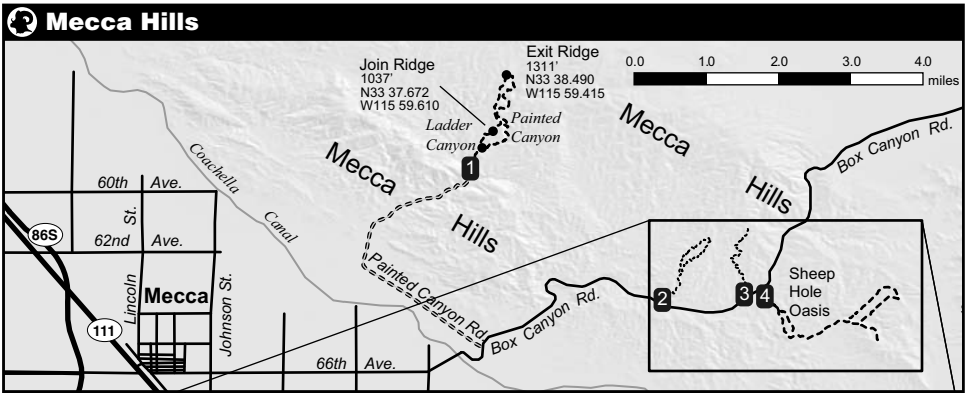


clearly worked; the area began to attract numerous family farmers. The completion of the Coachella Branch of the All-American Canal in 1948 transformed small family farms into sprawling commercial fields.

Agriculture is not only the lure in Mecca; the town lies beside a section of the San Andreas Fault zone that draws both professional and amateur seismologists. The seismic activity of the fault has thrust up a range of hills cut by a labyrinth of winding, narrow canyons, sandy washes, and caves, known locally as grottos. The violent upheavals that create the beautifully colored canyons of Mecca Hills Wilderness are the result of friction between the North American and Pacific plates along a spur of the San Andreas Fault. Much of

the rock, which has been upturned and exposed by centuries of earthquakes, is over 600 million years old. These rocks provide geologists and seismologists with valuable clues about the effects of temblors on the earth's crust. Because of its unique geological formations, the United States Congress designated the Mecca Hills as a federally protected wilderness area in 1994.

Mecca Hills Wilderness area is replete with flora and fauna that have adapted to the hostile desert environment. Yellow-bloomed palo verde trees densely populate the deep washes in the area. The Mecca aster, a violet-tinted flower resembling a daisy, grows only in this area and in Baja Mexico. Majestic ocotillos stand sentry on the tops of mesas and on the gentler slopes.



Their braches typically burst forth in a flurry of vermilion blooms in late spring, adding yet another layer of rich color to the painted canyons in the area. The rare spotted bat, famous for having the largest ears of any North American bat, lives in Mecca Hills Wilderness. Desert tortoises and prairie falcons also call the area home. Bighorn sheep cross into Mecca Hills from the Oracopia Mountains looking for reliable sources of water at Sheep Hole Oasis and Hidden Spring Canyon.

There are only a handful of established trails in Mecca Hills. This chapter describes the two most popular, Ladder Canyon and the Grottos, along with two cross-country routes exploring other spectacular canyons. However, inquisitive canyoneers will enjoy exploring the maze-like washes snaking through the colorful hills. Philip Ferranti's book, *140 Great Hikes in and near Palm Springs*, is a handy reference for more canyon adventures in Mecca Hills.

The 1994 California Desert Protection Act designated much of the Mecca Hills as Wilderness. No wilderness permit is required, but bicycles and motorized equipment are not allowed. Camping is allowed, with a maximum 14-day stay.

The pleasures of hiking in Mecca Hills include beautiful views of the Salton Sea. The Salton Sea lies in a basin more than 200 feet below sea level that was once connected to the Gulf of California until accumulated

silt from the Colorado River cut the basin off and allowed the water to evaporate. The basin has refilled with water on many occasions. In 700 AD, the Colorado River turned north and formed Lake Cahuilla, which lasted a thousand years, until the Colorado River changed direction once again, leaving the lake to evaporate over time. Subsequent outpourings of the river have occasionally created small salt lakes. In 1901, the California Development Company built a system of irrigation canals to divert the Colorado River to farm the Imperial Valley. A flood breached the canals, sending the river pouring into the basin for a year and a half. By the time the canals were repaired, the present Salton Sea had formed. It now covers 376 square miles and is the largest lake in California. The water evaporates rapidly but is replenished by agricultural runoff. This causes the salinity to steadily increase, imperiling the fish that live in the lake and the migrating birds that depend on the fish. On the other hand, if the lake were to completely dry up, it would leave a basin full of carcinogenic dust that would be whipped about the Coachella Valley by the strong desert winds. The Salton Sea clearly presents substantial environmental and economic challenges, but it is also a source of fascination and wonder. Consider detouring to visit it if you have extra time on a Mecca Hills trip.

trip 13.1 Ladder and Big Painted Canyons

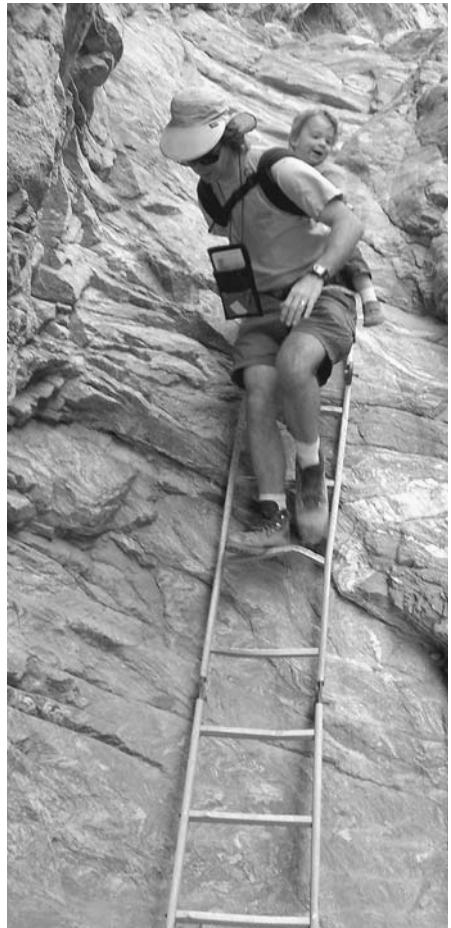
Distance	5 miles (loop)
Hiking Time	3 hours
Elevation Gain	750'
Difficulty	Moderate
Trail Use	Good for children
Best Times	October–April
Agency	BLM (Palm Springs Field Office)
Recommended Map	<i>Mortimar, Cottonwood Basin 7.5'</i>



DIRECTIONS From Interstate 10 in Indio, exit south on 86S and drive 10 miles to 62nd Ave. near the town of Mecca. Drive east 2 miles to its end at Johnson St., then turn right, proceed another 2 miles, then turn left on 66th Ave. The road changes name to Box Canyon Rd. and passes a signed turnoff for Painted Canyon Rd. Turn left on Painted Canyon Rd. A sign indicates 4WD vehicles only, but unless there have been heavy rains, the road is usually easily passable by low-clearance cars. Proceed 4.7 miles to the parking area in Painted Canyon.

Ladder Canyon and Big Painted Canyon are highlights of the Mecca Hills. The path snakes through a steep-walled canyon, up several ladders, and through a narrow slot canyon. The ladders are usually maintained by volunteers, but assess the conditions for yourself before trusting your footing. Once you leave Ladder Canyon, you will hike along the ridge, and find yourself surrounded by great views of Mecca Hills and the Salton Sea. After the ridge you will descend into the aptly named Big Painted Canyon for your hike back.

From the parking area, begin hiking northeast up the wide canyon behind the BLM sign. Look for healthy palo verde trees, smoke trees, and cat's claw acacia growing in the bottom of the wash. In 0.5 mile you will come to a trail marker on the right side of the canyon that points left toward the yawning boulder-strewn mouth of Ladder Canyon. Scramble into the side canyon and climb the ladders, then continue through the long narrow slot. After the canyon begins to open, stay right at a fork, 0.9 mile from the start. In less than 0.1 mile, look for the first easy way to walk up the right slope of the canyon. Follow a use trail up the wall of the canyon; you will need to negotiate a short but steep dirt wall part way before reaching the ridge crest, 1 mile from the start.

Descending Ladder Canyon *photo by Cidney Scanlon*

288 Afoot & Afield Inland Empire

Turn left at the top of the ridge and hike north. Enjoy the views into the canyons on both sides, but don't get too close to the edge because the sandy slopes drop off abruptly over tall cliffs. Soon you will be able to see radio towers in the distance, follow the ridge toward these towers. In 1.1 miles, reach a saddle at the north end of the trail. To the left, you can see a dry waterfall near the head of Little Painted Canyon. The

main trail turns right and drops into Big Painted Canyon.

Big Painted Canyon is a geologist's delight. Head down the canyon, staying right (downhill) at a junction. In 1.5 miles, climb down another pair of ladders where the canyon narrows and drops. Reach the trail junction 0.5 mile farther where you originally entered Ladder Canyon.

trip 13.2 Never Ending Canyon

Distance	3.5 miles (loop)
Hiking Time	2 hours
Elevation Gain	500'
Difficulty	Easy
Trail Use	Dogs
Best Times	October–April
Agency	BLM (Palm Springs Field Office)
Recommended Map	<i>Mortimar 7.5'</i>



DIRECTIONS From Interstate 10 in Indio, exit south on 86S and drive 10 miles to 62nd Ave. near the town of Mecca. Drive east 2 miles to its end at Johnson St., then turn right, proceed another 2 miles, then turn left on 66th Ave. The road changes name to Box Canyon Rd. and passes a signed turnoff for Painted Canyon Rd. Reset your odometer here. Drive on Box Canyon for 3.4 miles past the Painted Canyon sign, and pull off onto a dirt road on the left. The beginning of the trail is marked by a line of large rocks blocking the dirt road.

Never Ending Canyon is a gorgeous hike between the colorful walls of the Mecca Hills. The hike leads you through two separate canyons, the second of which rejoins the first, leading you back to your car. You are rewarded by a breath-taking view when you reach the crest at the head of the canyons. Most of the hike follows trailless washes so cross-country navigation skills are necessary. Do not attempt this hike when rain threatens because the slot canyons are at risk of flash floods.

From your car, dirt roads lead east and north. Walk east down the larger road, passing the line of boulders. Follow the wash as it bends to the left near a damaged signpost, and enter the first canyon. Stay in the main wash when you encounter small side canyons. The trail will soon fork

into two distinct trails on either side of a large formation near a rusty old icebox; continue into the left canyon. Follow this canyon and admire its unique sand and mud walls imprinted with fascinating water patterns. Soon you will see an old rusted car wreck. Avoid the smaller trail on the left, staying in the main canyon, and soon come to a three-way junction. Do not take the first smaller canyon on the far right. Instead continue your path in the middle canyon, winding around the right side of a prominent round-topped formation with interesting strata. (You will return via the far left canyon.)

Stay in the larger canyon, avoiding smaller trails that branch off. Soon the canyon will narrow. Some fallen rocks and landslides may block your meandering path, but they

trip 15.27 Spectre Point

Distance	14 miles (semi-loop)
Hiking Time	9–12 hours
Elevation Gain	3200'–4000' (depending on the number of peaks)
Difficulty	Strenuous
Best Times	October–April
Agency	Joshua Tree National Park
Required Map	Trails Illustrated <i>Joshua Tree</i> or <i>Cadiz Valley SW 7.5'</i>



DIRECTIONS From Highway 62 about 40 miles east of Twentynine Palms, park at a turnout on the south side of the road 0.8 mile east of mile marker 72.

While driving on lonely desert highways, mountain climbers sometimes pass imposing jagged desert peaks and wonder what they would be like to climb. The Coxcomb Mountains, located in the remote northeast corner of Joshua Tree National Park, are emblematic of these kinds of mysterious summits. The crest of the Coxcombs is a triple-peaked massif. The highest peak is called Spectre Point. The northern peak is called Aqua (or Tensor), and has a USGS benchmark. And the most difficult summit to climb is called Dyadic. These challenging cross-country climbs belong on the must-do list of any serious desert mountaineer. The northern Coxcomb Mountains are in a day-use area; no camping is allowed.

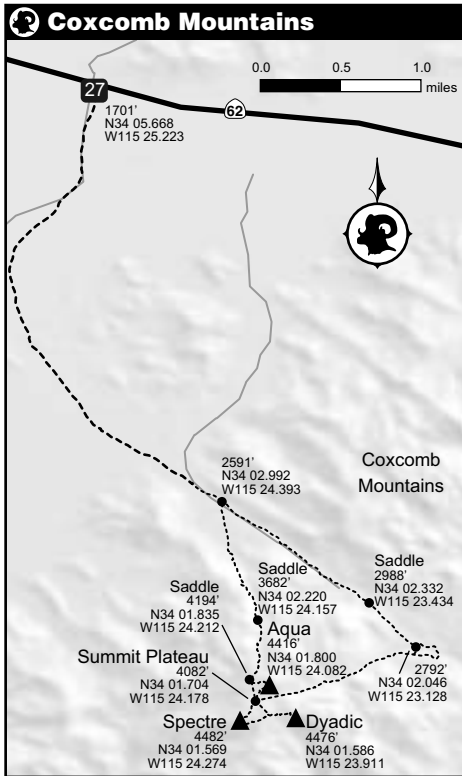
This hike can be done as a semi-loop. It begins with a long but easy walk across the desert along an old road to the base of

the northern Coxcombs Mountains. Then the route makes a beeline up a steep and boulder-filled series of canyons to the summit plateau. Spectre and Aqua are both rated class two, Dyadic involves fourth-class climbing on crumbling weathered granite, so a 100-foot rope and some slings are recommended if you choose to climb that summit. Bag as many of the peaks as you desire, then explore an alternate descent that is longer but arguably easier before returning via the old road.

From the parking area, a sandy jeep road (now closed to vehicles) leads south through the creosote-studded desert. After passing some rock mounds, it veers left (southeast) toward the distinctive low saddle between the high parts of the dramatic Coxcomb Mountains. In 3.6 miles, the jeep road drops into the broad wash leading

The Coxcomb Mountains





toward the saddle. Continue up for 0.2 mile. Look for a prominent gully to the south leading to a broad gap immediately left of the highest rocks. Leave the main wash and head south up an easy side wash to the base of the gully, which is rocky but easier than

it looks. Climb to the top, and then follow a wash that continues up the valley beyond. At the top of the valley, it is easiest to stay left as you climb to another saddle. You have now traveled 1.0 difficult mile since leaving the main wash.

Descend into the canyon beyond and turn right. Hike up the canyon, staying left at several forks, to a point just below the pinyon-clad Aqua Peak; continue up the canyon to a saddle on the right (west) side of Aqua 0.6 mile from the last saddle. There are great views from here into the Pinto Basin.

South of this saddle, and slightly obscured from view, is the summit plateau. If you plan to climb Aqua Peak, turn left (east) and follow the easy ridge to the 4416-foot summit. Climbing Aqua is also worthwhile because it offers good views to help you plan your path to the other summits. Otherwise, go south to the plateau. From the plateau, Aqua is located to the north, Spectre to the southwest, and Dyadic to the east, all within a quarter mile but hard to distinctly identify until you start to climb out of the hole. The easiest climb to Spectre is via the north face or northeast ridge. Dyadic has a challenging summit fin that is best accessed by any of several options from the south side. Descending the north face is not recommended; it involves very loose





Dyadic Peak from Aqua

downclimbing and some bad rappels. All of the summits have awesome views of the rugged Coxcomb Mountains and desolate Pinto Basin.

You can return the way you came, but an enjoyable loop option is to follow the drainage east from the summit plateau. The wash drops down a step, then becomes wide and sandy, then descends a dry waterfall in the narrows, then becomes easy again. After 1.0 mile of boulder hopping, the wash dumps into a main northwest/southeast trending wash. You may find signs of a shortcut use

trail that leads north 100 yards over a low ridge, into the wash leading northwest. If you miss the shortcut, continue into this main wash, turn left, and follow its serpentine path northwest to where you may see a cairn marking the other end of the shortcut. In any event, continue 0.4 mile northwest to the distinctive saddle that you approached early in the trip, then 1.4 miles down rejoin the jeep road where it exits the left side of the wash. Finally, follow this road 3.6 easy downhill miles back to the highway.

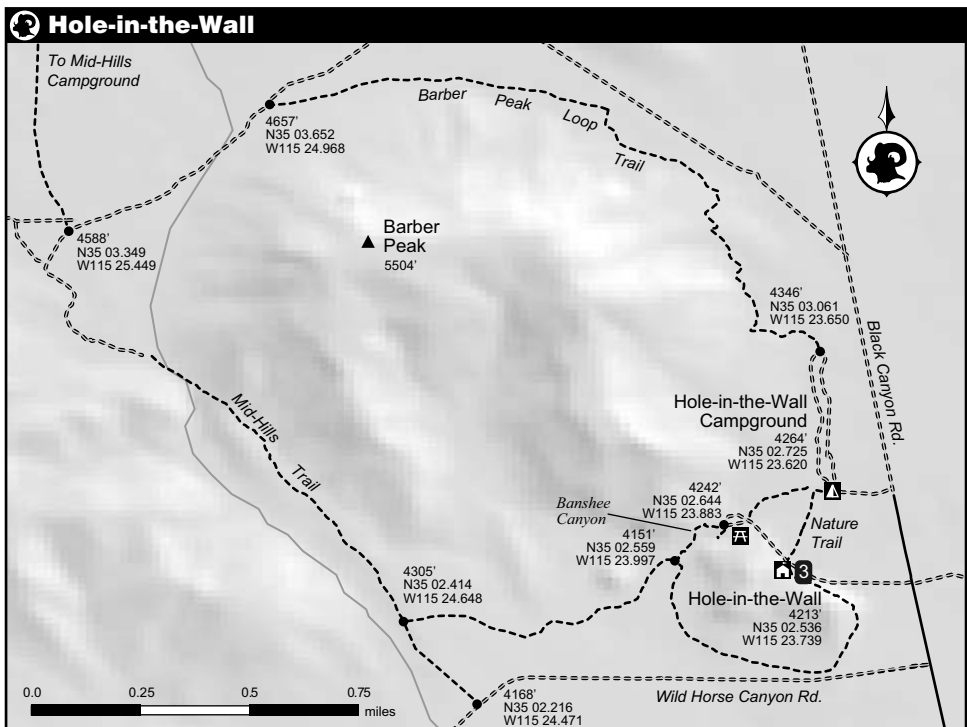
trip 16.3 Hole-in-the-Wall

Distance	1.5 miles (loop)
Hiking Time	1 hour
Elevation Gain	200'
Difficulty	Easy
Trail Use	Dogs, good for children
Best Times	September–May
Agency	Mojave National Preserve
Optional Map	Trails Illustrated <i>Mojave National Preserve</i> or <i>Columbia Mountain 7.5'</i>

DIRECTIONS From Interstate 40, 50 miles east of Ludlow and 43 miles west of Needles, take Exit 100, Essex Rd. Drive north 10 miles to a junction, then stay right on Black Canyon Rd. and continue another 10 miles. Turn left on a good dirt road at a signed junction for the Hole-in-the-Wall Ranger Station, and park at the ranger station.

A volcanic eruption 18 million years ago in the Mojave Desert emitted dense blasts of super-heated ash. The ash, dust, and volcanic gas from the eruption compacted and cemented together as it cooled, forming what is known as volcanic tuff. This popular loop hike explores the narrow Banshee Canyon that snakes through the

fascinating and colorful rock formation. Gas trapped in the ash created pockets in the tuff resembling eternally moaning mouths, and the wind howls as it blows through the canyon. The hike descends a short vertical section in the narrow slot canyon; metal rings have been set in the rock to provide holds. A person of ordinary physical ability





Banshee Canyon

can negotiate the rings, but young children may need a boost and some hikers may find the slot claustrophobic. Dogs must be lifted or pushed up the two narrow chutes where the rings are located.

VARIATION

Hole-in-the-Wall is located next to a popular campground. A quarter mile nature trail leads from the south end of the campground to the ranger station. This is a worthwhile walk for those staying at the campground and it is a good way to learn to identify the cacti, yuccas, and bushes common to the eastern Mojave Desert.

From the trail marker at the ranger station parking area, curve east and then south around the base of the volcanic formation, passing close by Wild Horse Canyon Rd. As the trail passes some upthrust rocks, look carefully for several small petroglyphs. Skin oils can stain the rock art, so do not touch or damage the petroglyphs. The trail continues through a lush desert landscape of Mojave yuccas, buckhorn chollas, and barrel cacti. It curves to the right and comes to a junction.

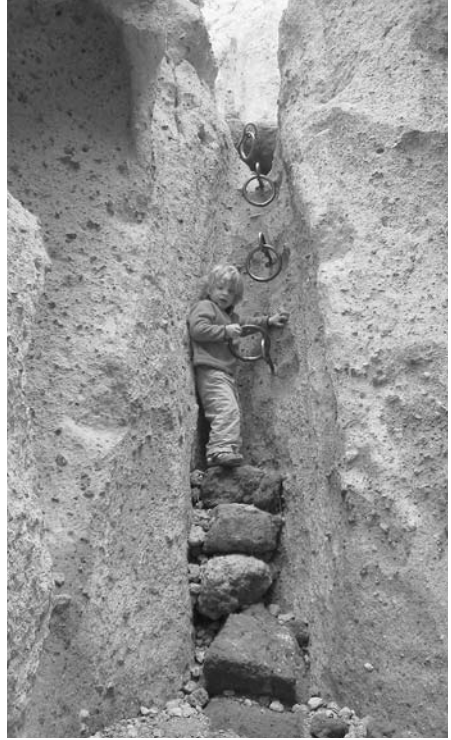
VARIATION

The left fork leads 8 miles across the desert to Mid-Hills Campground. This is a good one-way hike or round-trip backpack for those who love solitude. The trail is marked with brown posts and cairns. It gains 800 feet of elevation. Because this is one of the higher parts of Mojave National Preserve, it tends to be cooler (and can be downright cold in the winter). The trail passes through a pinyon-juniper woodland that burned in the catastrophic 2005 Hackberry Fire, and reaches the road opposite the entrance of Mid-Hills Campground (at GPS coordinates N35 07.388 W115 25.967 5485').

This trip follows the right fork into the spectacular Banshee Canyon. Take a few minutes to explore the many holes in the wall. A trail marker indicates the narrowing of the canyon and the approach to the vertical slots. Climb the rocks leading to the two chutes, and use the metal rings for hand and foot holds. Continue up the rocks to reach a picnic area. A short side trail to the right leads to an overlook into Banshee Canyon. When you are done, follow the dirt road 0.2 mile back to the ranger station.

VARIATION

The Barber Peak Loop Trail was constructed in this area in spring 2008, too late to be included in this edition. The 6-mile trail circles Barber Peak, the dramatic volcanic formation immediately west of the campground. This trail starts at the north-east end of the picnic area above Banshee Canyon and leads to the nature trail at the south end of Hole-in-the-Wall Campground. Follow the campground road to the extreme north end of the campground, where the trail resumes adjacent to the tent camping sites. The trail climbs to a rise with good views, drops down a stone staircase, and circles around the rhyolite cliffs of Barber Peak until it can follow the Mid-Hills to Hole-in-the-Wall Trail back to Banshee Canyon and up the slot. The loop traverses spectacular country and is a worthwhile longer hiking alternative. The total elevation gain is about 1000'.



Rings Trail

trip 16.4 Mitchell Caverns

Distance	1 mile (out-and-back)
Hiking Time	1.5 hours
Elevation Gain	100'
Difficulty	Easy
Best Times	September–May
Agency	Providence Mountains State Recreation Area
Optional Map	Trails Illustrated <i>Mojave National Preserve</i> or <i>Fountain Peak 7.5'</i>



DIRECTIONS From Interstate 40, 50 miles east of Ludlow and 43 miles west of Needles, take Exit 100, Essex Rd. Drive north 10 miles to a junction. Stay left and continue another 6 miles to park at the Providence Mountains State Park Ranger Station.

Mitchell Caverns is a spectacular system of limestone caves in the Providence Mountains. Visitors to the caverns will see stalactites, stalagmites, shields, draperies, soda straws, and other rare and beautiful formations. Cavern tours run at 1:30 P.M. daily and last 1.5 hours. Additional tours are offered at 10:00 A.M. and 3:00 P.M. on

weekends and holidays between Memorial Day and Labor Day. School and special groups must make reservations one month in advance by calling (760) 928-2586. Reservations for the general public are not required, but are recommended on busy weekends and holidays because there is a limit of 25 visitors per tour. The cost is \$5