

A photograph showing several people climbing a steep, layered rock face. The rock is light-colored with distinct horizontal strata. The sky is clear and blue.

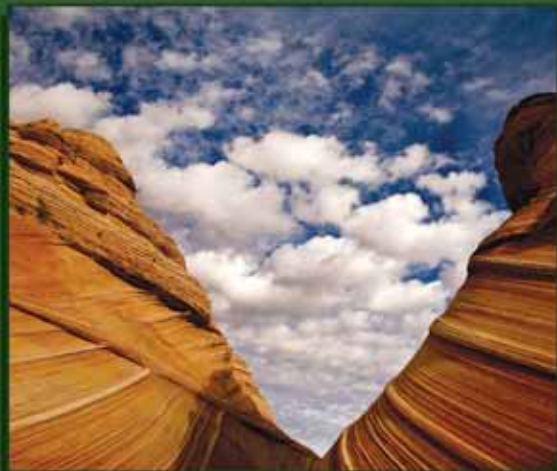
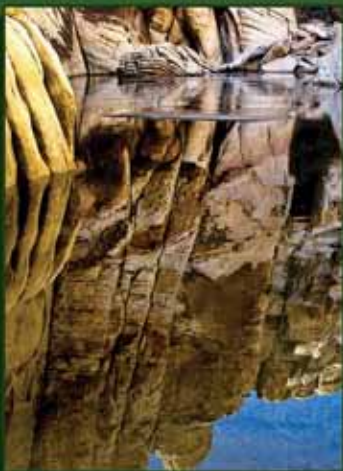
Hiking the Southwest

A photograph of a gnarled, ancient-looking tree with twisted, orange-brown bark and sparse, dark branches. The background shows a clear blue sky and some distant greenery.

The Best Hikes in
Nevada, Arizona,
Utah, and New Mexico

*Lake Mead • Mt. Charleston • Nevada Peaks • Red Rock
• Grand Canyon • Sedona • Bryce Canyon • Escalante
• Kanab • Zion National Park • Sangre de Cristo Range*

Branch Whitney



Hiking the Southwest

The Best Hikes in Nevada,
Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico

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Huntington Press

Las Vegas, Nevada

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Kathy.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following people for their guidance and knowledge: “Crazy” Kenny Amundsen, Mark “Throw Down” Beauchamp, Davis “Dead Horse” Finley, Ed Forkos, Luba Leaf, Richard Natale, Eva Pollan, and “Wrong Way” Richard Baugh. And thanks to the gang at Huntington Press. It’s great to work with people who want to do things correctly.

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Introduction to the Hikes

The book you hold in your hands contains the best hikes in the Southwest. No lame hikes here—those hikes are in the book next to this one. These are the hikes you'll be telling your grandchildren about over and over until you realize they left an hour ago. From the unbelievable turquoise water in Havasupai to the must-see phenomenon called the Wave, these are the hikes you'll want to cross off your bucket list.

For the first time in print, this book gives you crystal-clear directions to all the Southwest's favorite hikes, including detailed directions covering the backpack and hike to the Colorado River at Havasupai. No vague descriptions here. You'll never wonder if the author ever did the hike.

Are you into hardcore hikes? This book has you covered with Rim to Rim to Rim in the Grand Canyon. It's 45 miles in two days! Are you a highpointer? Then as Dwight Schrute would say, "You're an idiot!" Britton Hill in Florida, come on. However, this tome does have hikes to the highest peaks in Arizona, Nevada, and New Mexico. Like scenic hikes? Bryce Canyon is unbelievable. Want to try some canyoneering? The Subway in Zion is the perfect beginning canyoneer's adventure.

You're now (assuming you bought this book) in possession of the best hikes in the Southwest. You don't need to buy separate guidebooks for each area and you don't have to get used to different authors' writing styles. Hiking and peak bagging are the perfect activities in this econom-

ic down time. They're healthy, fun, and inexpensive. Why ever go back to work? So enjoy these hikes and remember: It's the route that makes a great hike.

How This Book Is Organized

Each of the 10 hiking destinations has a brief introduction, followed by the hikes. I don't bore you with a lot trivial and dull facts to crank up the page count (and the price). Driving directions are from the closest towns. You can obtain driving directions from where you live to the nearest town via the Internet. Each hike has information about the best season, difficulty of the hike, and other factors, so you can quickly determine if you're interested in the hike.

I don't write about the flora and fauna. Those are fancy words for plants and animals. It's not my thing and there's too much diversity. If you're interested, you can find information on the Web.

Format of the Hikes

Trailhead: Name of the trailhead and if the trailhead is marked.

Distance: Noted in miles. All distances are up and back, unless specified.

Elevation gain: How many feet you gain to the summit or destination.

Elevation of peak: Height of the peak. Listed only for hikes that go to peaks.

Time: Time it takes to complete the hike, up and back.

Difficulty: Scale 1 (easy) to 5 (very difficult).

Danger level: Scale 1 (safe) to 5 (use caution).

Class: Amount of climbing. Class 1 to Class 4. See below for more.

How easy to follow: Scale of 1 (well-maintained trail) to 5 (cross-country route).

Children: Is the hike appropriate for children (ages 5 to 11) accompanied with an adult?

Waypoints: USGS waypoints. WGS 84 datum.

Fees/Permits: If there's a fee or permit required, it's listed below with additional details.

Best season: In which season(s) to do the hike.

Driving directions: From the nearest town to the trailhead.

Permits: How to obtain official permission. Most hikes don't require permits.

Comments: Warnings, insights, and sometimes history about the hike.

Lodging: Information on where to find a motel room and campsite reservations.

The hike: Step-by-step guide to the hike.

Trails Versus Routes

The hikes in this book are classified as either trails or routes. Some hikes follow trails, then become routes once they leave the trail. There's a huge difference between trails and routes. A trail hike is very easy to follow and generally well-marked. To return, just retrace your steps on the same trail.

A route is much harder to follow. I have photos of key landmarks to look for and waypoints you can enter into your GPS unit. I realize not everyone has or uses a GPS. All of the hikes can be followed without a GPS, though using a GPS is very helpful. But it all comes down to common sense. People were doing these hikes long before anyone heard of a GPS or waypoints. You should never rely solely on a GPS unit. If it quits working, well, you're SOL.

An example of a trail hike is Angels Landing in Zion National Park. You'd have to work at getting lost. It's well-maintained and clearly marked. The hike to Black Velvet Peak in Red Rock Canyon is a route. Once you leave the trail, you navigate by landmarks. These types of hikes are much harder to follow and should only be attempted by experienced hikers. It's unlikely you'll see another hiker on a route.

Time Estimates

Time estimates are averages. Some hikers will finish the hike much sooner; others will take much longer. The rest of you will make me look like I'm psychic. Once you do a few hikes, you'll have a better idea of how my time estimates apply to you.

Dangers

Due to rock fall, some of the hikes in this book are dangerous. If hiking in a group, be very careful not to dislodge rocks. Test your handholds before committing to a move.

To minimize the danger, always hike in a group (four hikers are the best), tell someone where you're hiking and when you believe you'll be back. Cell-phone coverage is still spotty (boy, that's a surprise!), but you can always try to make a call.

Tip: Turn your phone off until you need it. Your battery will last a lot longer when it's not constantly searching for a signal.

Class Grades

Class 1—Like walking on a sidewalk.

Class 2—Hiking over uneven terrain. Hands are used for balance only.

Class 3—Climbing requires using hands and feet. Exposure is minimal.

Class 4—Climbing steep rock. Exposure can be significant. A rope is recommended.

Class 5—Technical rock climbing. Does not apply to hikes in this book.

Weather

Weather is a major concern. Hike the Subway during a flash flood and you'll no longer have to worry about taxes! This is pretty simple: Check the Internet before you hike. If not, you could be sweating in 110+ temperatures or freezing in below-zero temperatures. Come prepared for cold weather if hiking at high elevation. When you're higher than 12,000 feet, it can snow even during summer months.

The rule of thumb is weather forecasts aren't dependable more than three days out. There are several good websites for weather. I like www.wrh.noaa.gov/. You can pinpoint the elevation you will be hiking or camping at by clicking on the map.

Hiking Etiquette

Most hikers go to the mountains to escape the problems of the city. Let's not bring those same problems to the mountains. Always practice

no-trace hiking by using these guidelines.

1. Drive and ride (mountain bikes) only on roads and trails where such travel is allowed; hike only on established trails or paths, on rock, or in washes.

2. Help keep the area clean. Pack out your trash and recycle it, pick up trash even if it's not yours, and dispose of human waste properly. Bury all human waste at least 200 feet from the trail and at least six inches deep.

3. Protect and conserve desert water sources. Carry your own water. Leave pools, potholes, and running water undisturbed.

4. Allow space for wildlife. Teach children not to chase animals.

5. Leave historic sites, Native American rock art, ruins, and artifacts untouched for the future. Admire rock art from a distance. Stay out of ruins and report violations.

Change

Everything in this book is accurate and current, but things change. Trailheads can be relocated, trails can be altered, permit procedures can change, and websites can disappear. However, mountains don't move, even though I had a reader claim they did! My point is, do some research before leaving on that once-in-a-lifetime hiking trip. I've listed numerous websites throughout the book, but who knows how long they'll be around?

Companion Website and Blog

My own website, hopefully, will be around for many more years. It's located at hikinglasvegas.com.

Here you'll find more than 360 hikes you can download in PDF format for a small fee. There are photos of hundreds of peaks, slide shows of hikes, and even videos.

I write about hiking news on my blog: hikinglasvegas.blogspot.com/.

Well, that's about it. So, dear reader, take a hike!

NEVADA



Introduction to Classic Nevada Hikes

Although most people think of Nevada as nothing but desert, it boasts 314 mountain ranges, the most in the U.S. outside of Alaska. From knife-edge ridges to the highest peak, this book has the best remote hikes in Nevada. Since they're not close to each other, don't plan to do all these hikes in one trip.

Starting at the top, Boundary Peak is the highest in the state. At 13,140 feet, it commands a magnificent view of the Sierra Peaks, which are less than 40 miles away (as the crow flies). Moapa Peak stands near the Arizona boarder and has a knife-edge ridge that will get anyone's attention. Moving to the southern end of the state, Spirit Mountain is the best peak to bag. It overlooks Laughlin, Nevada, where cheap rooms and food await hungry and tired hikers in numerous hotel-casinos. Wheeler Peak is the highest in Great Basin National Park, the least visited national park in the U.S.

I'm not geographically challenged, so I realize Eagle Mountain, and Mopah and Umpah Points, are not in Nevada. They are, however, near the border of Nevada and fit better in this section than in any other. Eagle Mountain rises straight up out of the desert floor. It's the perfect winter hike. Mopah and Umpah Points are dramatic pinnacles that, at first glance, look impossible to climb without ropes. Remember, ropes aren't used for climbing mountains; they're used to hang people you don't like!

I'm pretty sure that's not illegal anymore. Check to be sure.

With the exception of Wheeler, these peaks are in the middle of nowhere. There are no fees, hours, or visitor centers. If you're looking for solitude, these hikes will satisfy. Even Wheeler Peak in Great Basin National Park doesn't have an entrance fee. The Visitor Center is located just north of the town of Baker, NV, on the west side of NV487. Hours are 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. daily. It's closed November until the end of March. If you have time, Lehman Cave tour is a great experience. More information: www.nps.gov/grba/planyourvisit/lehman-caves-tours.htm.

BOUNDARY PEAK



PHOTO 1

Boundary Peak and Montgomery Peak Trail and Route

Trailhead: At the end of dirt road, marked

Distance: 8 miles, Boundary Peak; 9 miles, both peaks, up and back

Elevation gain: Boundary, 4,200 feet; both peaks, 4,501 feet

Elevation of peak: Boundary 13,140 feet, Montgomery, 13,441 feet

Time: Boundary, 6–8 hours; both peaks, 7–9 hours, up and back

Difficulty: 5

Danger level: 5

Class: 2 to Boundary Peak; 3 to Montgomery Peak

How easy to follow: 3

Children: No

Waypoints (WGS 84): See page 16

Fees: None

Best season: Summer



Driving Directions

From the town of Dyer, NV, where you can buy gas, set your odometer to zero at the post-office sign (on the right side of the road). Continue another 17.4 miles on NV264 and turn left at the low-to-the-ground Trail Canyon sign. Drive 11 miles and turn right, then follow the road as it curves west (left). BB Mine lies just to the north. Turn right at 12.1 miles. There's a "Trail" sign at the turn. You'll pass a small manmade pond. At 13.7 miles, go left at the fork

and continue one mile to the trailhead (Waypoint 1). Your mileage may vary slightly.

Comments: Boundary Peak is the highest point in Nevada. Its sister, Montgomery Peak, stands across the imaginary Nevada/California border. From a distance, Boundary Peak is striking. However, once near the summit, it looks more like a pile of rocks on a ridgeline than a peak. In contrast, the closer you get to Montgomery Peak, the more intimidating it looks.

Even in August, it will be cold at night. Come prepared for cold weather if camping. If you're planning to do both peaks, the southern descent along the west side of Boundary Peak can be very cold during the morning hours. It's normal for snow to remain on the route until late-June.

I've given the details of the bad-weather gully descent. If caught in a storm, the gully descent is safer and quicker than the normal descent. It cuts the descent time by about one hour. You should be comfortable on loose scree if you choose this descent route. Photo 1 is Boundary Peak from the trailhead.

Lodging: No motels are nearby. There are no designated campsites. Undeveloped campsites are limited. The parking area at the trailhead is on a grade, making it a poor choice. The best campsite is found about 0.10 of a mile before the trailhead. Water is available in Trail Canyon Creek, which is close by.

The Hike: The trail begins at the kiosk, heads west up Trail Canyon, and passes a trailhead register. It narrows and crosses to the south side of the creek about 400 yards from the trailhead. As the trail pulls away from the creek, the saddle comes into view (see Photo 2).



Just beyond this point, you'll hike past a Boundary Peak Wilderness sign.

The trail stays to the south (left) of a dense growth of trees. Once beyond the trees, the trail crosses a soggy section of terrain. When the trail divides, go left. Eventually, the trail braids into dozens of small paths. Continue west through the sagebrush toward the trees. The trail stays on the south (left) side of the drainage. Once in the trees, a path leads to the saddle. Look for cairns on boulders when the path fades. It soon becomes defined again and travels to the saddle. The saddle (Waypoint 2) lies 2.2 miles from the trailhead. At the saddle, you're treated to a vista of the snowcapped Sierra to the west. Take a break, because you have 1,200 feet to gain in less than a half-mile. Follow the obvious trail as it heads SW up the extremely steep slope. A number of use trails develop the higher you climb. The trails stay to the west of the ridge. Eventually, one trail forms, stays well *below* the ridge, and heads toward a mound of talus at a small saddle. The steep north face of Boundary Peak comes into view at the saddle (see Photo 3).

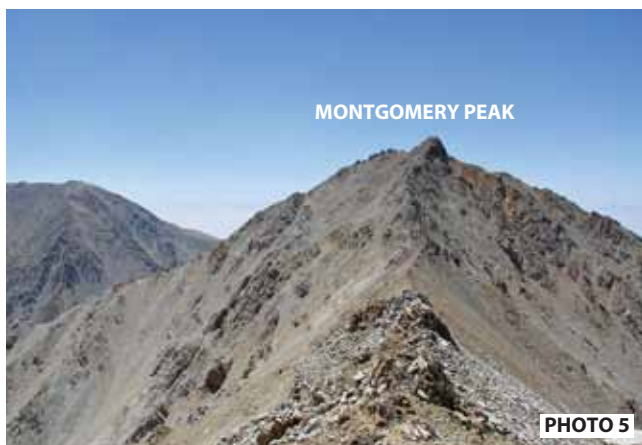


Follow the trail as it traverses SE across a west-facing slope. Once across the slope, the trail connects with the main ridgeline. Follow a path SW up the ridge aiming for the pile of talus (see Photo 4). If you get into loose scree, you're too low. Just before the talus, head east and walk over to the other side of the ridge. From here the peak lies 200 to 300 yards SW. Follow the path to the summit (Waypoint 3).



Congratulations! You're standing at the highest point in Nevada. The highest peak in Nevada also has some of the best views. To the south towers your next objective, Montgomery Peak. Beyond it is White Mountain (14,246 feet). To the west are the snowcapped Sierra. To the north some 6,500 feet below are Queen and Benton valleys. To the east you can see the winding gravel road you drove in on.

From Boundary Peak, Montgomery Peak looks tough. It's actually an easy class 3 climb (see Photo 5). Allow at least 90 minutes to climb Montgomery and return to Boundary. Take a good look at the sky before deciding to climb Montgomery. You should be off both peaks before noon. If you start hiking by 6 a.m., you should be at Boundary Peak by 10 a.m., Montgomery by 11 a.m., and descending before noon.



Start hiking to Montgomery Peak by heading SW down the ridge. Pass the first *major* outcrop to the west (right) and continue down to a saddle. Continue on the ridge to the last outcrop, drop down, and hike along a path on the east (right) side. Start your ascent to Montgomery by climbing back up to the ridge. Stay on the crest of the ridge. Although slightly exposed, the climbing is easy. Once within 150 yards of the peak, the ridge becomes technical. Stay to the east (left) and head up to the peak as shown in Photo 6.



There's no cairn at the peak (Waypoint 4), only an army box containing a register. Comparing the two registers, it's apparent Montgomery Peak is the lesser-climbed peak. To the south lies Middle Canyon, a possible alternate route to Montgomery Peak. Access into Middle Canyon is questionable at this time. The old access road into Trail Canyon, which is in many of the guidebooks, is closed. This appears to be the same road that forks and leads into Middle Canyon.

To Descend: Retrace your steps back to Boundary Peak. Follow the trail off the summit. Once near the pile of talus in Photo 5, head down the west side along the same path on your ascent route. Just beyond this point the ridge splits. You can continue retracing your steps or you can descend the East Ridge. A path begins along the ridge and curves north down the gully.

The path is a pleasant surprise. Follow it all the way into Trail Canyon. Here's how to find the trail and avoid hiking cross-country back to the

trailhead. When the path disappears, follow a small ridge *north* toward the middle of the canyon. When the ridge disappears, look east (right) for a large area of grass with a log. The trail lies about 70 yards east near the south (right) slope. Follow the trail east to the trailhead.

WAYPOINTS:

1. 37.8660N / 118.3088W
2. 37.86306N / 118.34602W
3. 37.84610N / 118.35379W
4. 37.83800N / 118.35693W