



HIKING LAS VEGAS



**The All-in-One Guide to
Exploring Red Rock Canyon,
Mt. Charleston, and Lake Mead**

Branch Whitney



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Kathy Kelbel.

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Introduction to the Hikes

It has been 15 years since I first started writing *Hiking Las Vegas*. I had no idea the impact the book and companion website (hikinglasvegas.com) would have on hiking in southern Nevada. Before the book, there were only two main hiking clubs. Now there are more than I can keep track of, some with thousands of members. Thousands have used the book and website to guide them to peaks and destinations.

Before the book, summits like Pine Creek, Bridge Point, and White Pinnacle hadn't been named and no one was hiking and scrambling to these seemingly impossible peaks in Red Rock. Now hundreds of people have stood at these and other high points not known 15 years ago. This is a good thing.

Hiking Las Vegas details 83 hikes (23 more than the first edition!) in Red Rock Canyon, Mt. Charleston, and around Lake Mead. None of the hikes require technical climbing abilities; however, some of the hikes include class 3 and 4 climbs (explained on pg. 6). If you haven't hiked before or you're not in shape, don't attempt the tougher hikes. Start with the easy ones (there are plenty) and progress to the more difficult. People who are in good shape will find many of the harder hikes challenging and enjoyable.

No matter what kind of shape you're in, hiking is fun, inexpensive, and relieves stress. It also improves cardiovascular fitness, not to mention being one of the best ways to enjoy nature. *Hiking Las Vegas* takes you beyond the lights, congestion, and confusion of Las Vegas to a place where clean air, open space, and magnificent sights await you.

This book differs from the first edition in three main ways:

- Color Photos
- GPS Waypoints
- New and updated hikes

Color photos make it easier to identify key landmarks, which is critical for many of the hikes. GPS waypoints help guide hikers to their next destination. Using a GPS unit is *not* mandatory to follow the hikes, but it helps. After leading over 4,000 hikers to over 100 peaks in southern Nevada, I have learned which hikes are their favorites. That's why there are 19 new hikes in Red Rock, five new hikes in Mt. Charleston, and 13 new hikes

around Lake Mead. Most of the new hikes in Red Rock do not require an entrance fee, since they are not accessed via the Scenic Loop. This not only saves you money, but also time, since you do not have to drive the Scenic Loop.

The Purpose of this Book

The goal of *Hiking Las Vegas* is to help you enjoy the hikes in Red Rock Canyon, Mt. Charleston, and around Lake Mead. Many of these hikes are much more advanced than hikes in other guidebooks. This is why you'll find very detailed hike descriptions.

I've rated the hikes according to three different criteria to help you make an accurate assessment of each one: time (up and back), difficulty (1-5), and how easy it is to follow (1-5). I've provided explicit directions to the trailheads, photographs of key landmarks on the hikes, and listed waypoints. I've covered all 83 hikes from start (getting to the trailhead) to finish (getting back to the trailhead safely).

How This Book is Organized

Hiking Las Vegas is divided into three geographical areas: Red Rock Canyon, Mt. Charleston, and Lake Mead. All are an hour or less driving time from the Strip. Driving directions to all areas are provided in text form and on a map at the beginning of each section.

Red Rock Canyon

Red Rock Canyon, a mere 18 miles from downtown Las Vegas, is the Bureau of Land Management's recreation showcase in southern Nevada. It's nearly 200,000 acres of multicolored sandstone, canyons, peaks, washes and waterfalls, and a variety of flora and fauna. More than one million people visited Red Rock Canyon in 2010. Most people who go to Red Rock don't hike. Instead, they drive around the Scenic Loop, a 13-mile, one-way, paved road that runs in a horseshoe shape around the canyon.

Unlike many other popular hiking locales, the advanced hikes in Red Rock Canyon are not crowded. You'll be lucky (or unlucky, depending on your point of view) to see another person while scrambling to the majority of the peaks. Permits are not required for day hikes.

The Visitor Center at Red Rock is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily; 702/515-5350. Inside, you can avail yourself of bathrooms, water, a short film about Red Rock Canyon, and numerous exhibits. There are also books to buy and use for reference. Other than in the Visitor Center, pit toilets are located at all the major parking areas along the Scenic Loop road.

Camping is available at the Red Rock Campground, located about a mile before

the turn-off to Red Rock Canyon on the south (left) side of State Route 159. Water, pit toilets, fire pits, trash collection, and picnic tables are furnished. Camping is also allowed above the 5,000-foot level, but you need to obtain a permit by calling the Visitor Center at 702/515-5350 at least one day in advance. The permits are good for one night. Leave the permit in the glove compartment of your car. Currently, there's a \$7 entrance fee per car to drive the Scenic Loop road. You can also purchase a yearly pass for \$30 and all national park passes are accepted. Many of the hikes in this book are accessed via the Scenic Loop, but there are 17 hikes in this book that are located elsewhere and are not subject to an entrance fee.

All mileage figures to the trailheads start from the Scenic Loop gate. All of the parking areas and pullouts are well-marked. The Scenic Loop gate is open from 6 a.m. to dusk. You should plan to finish your hike before dark, as hiking after dark can be very dangerous and isn't recommended.

Red Rock hikes are done in the spring (lots of water in the canyons), autumn, and winter until there's too much snow or ice. Rock-scrambling hikes are extremely dangerous when there's snow or ice on the rock. Due to the heat, you should not hike in Red Rock during the summer.

Mt. Charleston Area

The Spring Mountains are the mightiest mountain range in southern Nevada, hemming in the west Las Vegas Valley for 50 miles. The range gets its name from the 30 inches of precipitation that the high peaks grab from the moist winds that reach it from the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of California.

You may have heard of Toiyabe National Forest, the Spring Mountains, Mt. Charleston, Kyle Canyon, Lee Canyon, and other hiking areas near Las Vegas—it can get complicated. Toiyabe National Forest, the largest national forest in the continental United States, covers 3,855,960 acres. It spans an area from eastern California to southern Nevada. Within the Toiyabe lies the 316,000-acre Spring Mountains National Recreation Area (SMNRA), which contains the Mt. Charleston Wilderness Area. Kyle Canyon, Lee Canyon, Mt. Charleston, and Bonanza Mountains are part of the Mt. Charleston Wilderness Area. It's managed by the US Forest Service. The only entrance fees are at the campgrounds and Cathedral Rock Picnic area.

Campgrounds are located in various areas in Mt. Charleston. To make a reservation call 877/444-6777 or visit the website: reserveusa.com. Camping starts at \$19 per night. Amenities vary by campground.

The warmer months are the best time to hike Mt. Charleston due to the higher elevation (7,000 to 11,918 feet). Beginning in late April, hikers can start doing the lower elevation hikes in Mt. Charleston, such as Fletcher Canyon, which will have lots of water, and Big Falls, the best waterfall in Mt. Charleston. The hiking season usually ends in October, unless you are into cold weather or snowshoeing.

Lake Mead

Lake Mead National Recreation Area (LMNRA) encompasses 1.5 million acres, which is twice the size of Rhode Island. The lake caters to boaters, swimmers, sunbathers, fishermen, and visitors taking a tour of Hoover Dam—a must-see attraction. The surrounding desert provides hikers with a lifetime of exploring. This seemingly barren desert has many treasures waiting for hikers to discover.

I have divided Lake Mead into northern and southern areas. Seven of the hikes are located in the northern section, including Anniversary Narrows, one of the premier family hikes in the southwest. Millions of years of wind and water have created a hundred-foot-high slot through the mountain. Don't forget your camera.

The six hikes in the southern section feature Gold Strike Hot Springs and Arizona Hot Springs. The hot water will soothe sore muscles. The pools vary and some might be dry, but there are always a few pools waiting for hikers to relax in.

Campgrounds are located in various areas around Lake Mead. To make a reservation, call 877/444-6777 or visit the website: reserveusa.com. Camping starts at \$19 per night. Amenities vary by campsite.

LMNRA is managed by the National Park Service. Permits are not required for hiking and there are no restricted hours; however, some hikes do have a \$10 entrance fee per car, which is good for seven days. National Park Passes are accepted. The Alan Bible Visitor Center (4 miles northeast of Boulder City on U.S. 93 at Nevada 166) is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily.

The winter months are the best time to hike around Lake Mead due to the lower elevations. Beginning late October, hikers can start experiencing all Lake Mead has to offer. The season usually ends in March due to the heat.

Important: The rock breaks very easily in the Lake Mead area. Please test all hand and footholds before climbing on the rock.

The Format of All the Hikes

Every hike in this book is introduced in the format below.

Hike: Name of the hike and whether it's a trail or route.

Trailhead: Location of the trailhead. The word "marked" if there's a sign identifying the trailhead.

Distance: Round-trip distance, noted in miles.

Elevation gain: How high the trail climbs, expressed in feet.

Elevation of peak: The height of the peak. If no peak, the highest point on the hike.

Time: The time it takes an average hiker to complete the hike.

Difficulty: Scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the easiest. This rating takes into consideration the distance, elevation gain, and the amount of scrambling (class 1-4).

Danger level: Scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the safest.

Class: How much climbing is involved (class 1-4).

How easy to follow: Scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is a well-maintained trail and 5 is cross-country route.

Children: Designates whether it's safe for children (ages 5-11) to hike the trail with adults.

Waypoints: (WGS 84).

Fees: Entrance fee.

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

Driving directions: Explicit instructions on driving to the trailhead.

Comments: Interesting points and sights along the trail, warnings, and guidelines.

The Hike: The step-by-step guide with text, photos, and waypoints.

Trails, Paths, and Routes

The hikes in this book follow trails, paths, routes, or combinations of the three.

A *trail* is normally well-maintained and easy to follow. Trails in Red Rock are maintained by the BLM and have official trailhead signs, but might be missing signs at intersections. In Mt. Charleston, the Youth Correctional Facility maintains the trails, which also have trailhead signs, but also might be missing signs at intersections.

A *path* is not maintained and might be hard to follow in certain spots. Paths have usually been created by hikers. They range in quality from being as distinct as a trail to being nearly impossible to follow due to lack of use. Paths sometimes begin along established trails, and then splinter off to travel to a different destination. On some of the more obscure paths, cairns mark the way. On some of the paths cairns have been placed to guide hikers; however, they do get knocked down. It's easier to follow an obscure path by looking ahead a few yards, rather than down at your feet.

A *route* is the least distinct of the three; no trail or path exists. A route is hiked by walking from one landmark to the next. All of the rock-scrambling and bouldering hikes in Red Rock are routes. When following a route, it's necessary to remember distinctive landmarks on your way up. This is best done by turning around often so you can see what things will look like when you come back down. Routes appeal to hikers who are adventurous and like to figure out the best way to a landmark. While hiking a route, you may be unsure you are going the correct way. Have faith, hundreds have followed these routes and made it to the peak.

Many of the hikes are combinations of trails, paths, and routes. Any time a trail goes over rock for a distance, it becomes a route until the trail resumes. Many routes start from established trails. An example of a combination of the three is the Juniper Peak hike. It starts on the Arnlight Trail, becomes a path in the canyon, and turns into a route once it leaves the canyon.

Distance and Time

In the quick-reference feature that begins all the hikes, the “Distance” and “Time” estimates are based on an “up and back” hike. An example is the Griffith Peak hike (pg. 255): the round trip distance is 10 miles, and it will take 6 to 7 hours to complete. This does not take into account time spent at the peak, waterfall, or other interesting points. If you are one who spends a lot of time at points of interest, make sure to add that into the time it will take to complete the hike.

Danger Level

The danger-level rating takes into account the possibility of falling, altitude sickness, and potential weather situations. It’s mandatory that you tell someone where you are going, which hike you are doing, and when you expect to return. You should always hike with at least one other person, but a party of four is preferred. In case of an accident, one hiker can stay with the victim and the other two can go for help. (See “Getting Lost or Stuck,” pg. 9.)

Climbing Grades

Class 1—Normal trail hiking (Bristlecone Trail, Las Vegas Overlook).

Class 2—Hiking over rough terrain. The hands are used for balance (Oak Creek, Big Falls).

Class 3—Hiking and climbing using hands and feet. The rock is steep, though exposure is not significant (Fletcher Peak, Bridge Mtn.).

Class 4—Climbing steep terrain. The exposure is significant and ropes are highly recommended (Pine Creek Peak).

Class 5—Rock climbing. Technical climbing skills are a must.

The more you learn about climbing, the better prepared you’ll be for the more difficult hikes discussed in this book.

Rock scrambling and bouldering can be dangerous and some of the hikes in Red Rock and Mt. Charleston require class 3 and 4 climbing skills. Especially in Red Rock, but also in Mt. Charleston, hikers fall regularly, causing serious injury, sometimes resulting in death. Do not hike alone. Some of the hikes go to such remote areas, it could be days before another hiker would find you.

Flora

Many of the plants in the Southwestern desert and mountains can be used as landmarks while hiking. By being able to identify plants and trees, you can use them as markers to retrace your steps back to the trailhead. The plants and trees I’ve used as landmarks in many of the hike descriptions are identified here.

bristlecone pine—Twisted, knotty pine found at elevations of 9,000 feet and above, with needles in clusters of five (Mt. Charleston).

catclaw—A dead-looking bush with catclaw-like thorns that will rip your clothes and skin (Lake Mead).

(desert) scrub oak—Spiny, many-branched, thicket-forming scrub; occasionally a small tree. Grows up to 20 feet tall. Leaves are irregularly shaped, with sharp pointy ends that tear clothing and skin (Red Rock).

juniper—A 15- to 30-foot-tall tree with scale-like leaves in clusters of three. They produce blue-black berries (Red Rock).

pinion pine—Short pine with short single needles on the twigs (Red Rock).

ponderosa pine—Towering trees that can grow up to 100 feet tall, with long needles in clusters of three and lots of bark (Red Rock and Mt. Charleston).

manzanita—Small shrub with red-barked branches and green non-spiny leaves (Red Rock).

yucca—Has a clustered trunk with very sharp, thick, bayonet-like leaves 18 to 24 inches long and white and purple flowers (Red Rock).

Fauna

Red Rock and Mt. Charleston have a variety of animal life, but except for snakes—which are rarely seen or heard—the danger level from animals is almost non-existent. The remote hikes starting from Bonanza Trailhead in the Mt. Charleston Area offer the best chance of seeing larger animals. Some of the more interesting animals you might see while hiking are discussed below.

The **mountain lion**, also known as the cougar, puma, or panther, is the second largest North American cat. Mountain lions live up to 20 years and can weigh as much as 165 pounds. They're found around the cliffs in Red Rock and in the mountain ranges of Mt. Charleston. Mountain lions are nocturnal. If you're lucky enough to see one, don't run—cats love to chase things. In the 15 years I have been hiking I have never seen a mountain lion.

Bighorn sheep are brownish-gray with heavy curling horns. They're one of the desert's most adaptive animals. These animals are amazing to watch as they run straight up the mountain slopes, sometimes leaping 20 feet from cliff to cliff. Herd sizes range from about a half dozen to more than 20. During the hot months they stay near water sources. One of the best ways to get a glimpse of bighorn is to look for movement. When standing still, they blend into the environment.

Pronghorn look like deer, only they're smaller, with black markings on their faces. They're often mistakenly thought to be part of the antelope family. They're about four-and-a-half feet long, with tails ranging from three to six inches, and black horns less than a foot long. They weigh from 80 to 105 pounds and travel in bands from a dozen to more than 100. They're fast, and can be seen running at more than 40 mph at Red Rock.

Desert mule deer are the most common large mammal found in southern Nevada. They're gray with a darker strip along their back and have a black-tipped tail. Their large, wide ears resemble the ears of a mule, which distinguishes them from other types of deer. Late in the day and at night are their active times. In Red Rock they are found among the thick growth along washes.

Burros are sometimes seen along State Route 159 between Red Rock Canyon and Spring Mountain Ranch State Park, 2 miles west. They're tame and friendly, and will approach cars that park along the side of the highway to view them. You might be tempted to feed them, but it's not a good idea for the wild burros to get too dependent on handouts.

Wild horses (mustangs) are less common, but are occasionally spotted near Cold Creek in Mt. Charleston.

Snakes are seldom seen or heard in Red Rock, and almost never in the Mt. Charleston Area. Most snakes in Red Rock and Mt. Charleston are not venomous. Southern Nevada is home to only five species of venomous snakes, all of them rattlesnakes. The most active months for snakes are April and October, and the most active times are early morning and evening. Rattlesnakes normally make a rattling sound to alert enemies before they come too close. If you hear this sound, walk in the opposite direction. In the 15 years I have been hiking, I have seen only eight rattlesnakes, and I've never met anyone who was bitten by a snake while hiking. The rule of thumb is watch where you're placing your hands and feet.

Cautions

Weather

Who said it's always sunny in Las Vegas? It is most of the time, but the "monsoon" season begins in mid-July and continues through August. Many days, Mt. Charleston starts with clear skies, only to give way to afternoon thunderstorms. These thunderstorms can be very dangerous; they're often accompanied by lightning and sometimes hail. Being on top of a mountain in a lightning storm is not fun. The trails often turn into streams, and walking in water increases your chances of being struck by lightning. Your best defense is to pay attention to the weather forecasts and begin your hikes early; many storms don't get going until after noon. Still, sometimes it's a tricky call. On many occasions I've been on a mountain when it looked certain that it would storm, only to have the dark clouds pass over without a drop of rain. Just use your common sense and watch the sky carefully.

Flash flooding is a serious problem at Red Rock, though it does not happen often. Much more likely is rock breaking from being saturated with water. Wait at least 24 hours after it rains to do rock-scrambling hikes in Red Rock. Trail hiking is okay, but you will get muddy. Climbing class 3 and 4 rock when the rock is wet is stupid and dangerous.

Red Rock hiking season normally runs from mid-September to mid-May. Tempera-

tures in the summer months exceed 100 degrees. If you hike Red Rock during the summer months, choose the short hikes and go early in the morning. Temperatures before 9 a.m. rarely exceed 90 degrees. Most people hike Mt. Charleston during the summer.

Dehydration is a serious problem at Red Rock. If you're not acclimated to the desert climate, bring twice as much water as you think you'll need. A *minimum* of half a gallon for a four-hour hike is recommended. The old adage "Drink before you get thirsty" is doubly important in the desert. Any water found on the hikes must be treated before drinking. Use a water filter or tablets to purify it.

It's brutally hot around Lake Mead in the summer. Do *not* hike Lake Mead during summer months. Virtually every summer, someone dies of heat stroke while hiking around Lake Mead. Head up to Mt. Charleston during summer months.

The Essentials

Since all of the hikes are day hikes, little is needed besides the essentials: this book or some kind of hike description, water, food, headlamp, extra clothing, sunglasses, sunscreen, first-aid supplies, pocket knife, matches, balaclava, poncho, and cell phone.

Recommended Hiking Shoes/Boots

Red Rock Canyon is unique and therefore calls for a special type of hiking shoe/boot. If you are doing rock-scrambling hikes, you need to have Stealth Rubber-type shoes. The soles of these types of shoes give you the maximum amount of friction on sandstone. They will improve your rock-scrambling skills. Currently (March 2011), we are wearing Five-Ten-Marvel shoes. They are true to size and comfortable. Models do become obsolete, so if they are not available when you read this book, go for shoes with Stealth Rubber. Do not wear these shoes in Mt. Charleston or around Lake Mead. The rock will quickly ruin Stealth Rubber.

Regular hiking shoes are fine for trail hikes in Mt. Charleston. For cross-country hikes, a medium-weight hiking boot is fine. Regular hiking shoes are fine for Lake Mead hikes.

Getting Lost or Stuck

It's nearly impossible to get lost on the trails in Mt. Charleston. It's easy to get lost—or more correctly stuck—at Red Rock. The sandstone terrain looks amazingly similar and there are no trails across the sandstone, so finding your way down can be confusing. But there's always a safe way down; if you got up safely, you can get down safely. Remember to pay close attention to the landmarks and turn around often to see what the view will look like when coming down. Using cairns on exploratory hikes is a good idea. You can always remove them on the way down. Carrying 40 feet of rope or webbing can safely get you out of many jams.

Though getting lost in Red Rock Canyon is difficult (you can almost always see a road, a trail, or the mouth of a canyon), getting stuck in a place from which you don't

know the way down is much more common. Some of the routes up the sandstone traverse multiple ledges. If you forget where you climbed up to a ledge, you might get stuck until you remember the way back down. If you follow the directions and study the photos in this book, turn around frequently, and pay attention to landmarks and cairns, you'll rarely have a problem. If you do get stuck, the first rule is: don't panic. Study the landscape carefully, back track if you need to, and look for the last place you recognize. You'll soon be back on track.

If it's getting dark and you're still stuck, you can call Search and Rescue, but only after you have exhausted other possibilities. Obviously if you are in a life or death situation, call Search and Rescue.

Several hikes in this book are easy, safe, and follow well-marked trails. I have detailed a wide range of hikes. Many hikers start with the easy hikes and gain confidence. They soon progress to the difficult hikes. This book includes enough advanced hikes to satisfy those people who are looking for challenges.

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.

Drive and ride. Mountain bikes are allowed only on roads and trails where such travel is permitted; hike only on established trails or paths, on rock, or in washes.

Help keep the area clean. Pack up 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.

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

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

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

Volunteering

If you enjoy hiking in Red Rock or Mt. Charleston and want to volunteer your time and skills, there are a number of ways to do it.

Red Rock

Friends of Red Rock—This is a not-for-profit corporation of volunteers who assist the BLM to protect the natural and cultural resources of the area. A number

of volunteer positions are available. Call Jim Sudduth at 702/515-5366 or send an email to: jim@friendsofredrockcanyon.org.

Mt. Charleston

Contact the U.S. Forest Service at 702/515-5400, to sign up for the following volunteer programs.

Adopt-a-Trail Program—This is a monthly trail clean-up.

Backcountry Ranger—Volunteers help patrol the high elevations during weekends and holidays. The emphasis is on trail surveys, fire prevention, and firefighting.

Campground Maintenance—Volunteers can help clean up the campgrounds in the Mt. Charleston Area.

Information Education—Volunteers answer phones, provide visitor information, and assist in preparing informational literature.

Lake Mead

To volunteer call 702/293-8714 or visit: getoutdoorsnevada.org/events.htm.

Group Hiking

Clubs

meetup.com/Hiking-Las-Vegas—The premier hiking club in Las Vegas and home to the 52 Peak Club. It's organized by the author, Branch Whitney. You can actually hike with Branch. There's no cost to join or go on the hikes. Many of the hikes are based on this book and the website: hikinglasvegas.com.

Las Vegas Mountaineer's Club—Offers hiking and climbing outings in southern Nevada. They also offer classroom and field instruction in rock climbing, ice climbing, backpacking, GPS, and more. Visit their website: lvmc.org.

Guide Service

Hike This—Private guided trail hiking and rock scrambling in Red Rock Canyon. Contact them at 702/393-Hike (4453) or visit them at hikethislasvegas.com.

The “Bests” of the Hikes

Best Waterfalls (seasonal)

Lost Creek Waterfall—Red Rock

Big Falls—Mt. Charleston

Best Views from the Summit

The Park—Red Rock
Griffith Peak—Mt. Charleston
Fortification Hill—Lake Mead

Coolest Summits

White Pinnacle Peak—Red Rock
Cockscomb Peak—Mt. Charleston
Northshore Peak—Lake Mead

Toughest Hikes

Mt. Wilson—Red Rock
Charleston Peak via Big Falls—Mt. Charleston

Natural Wonders

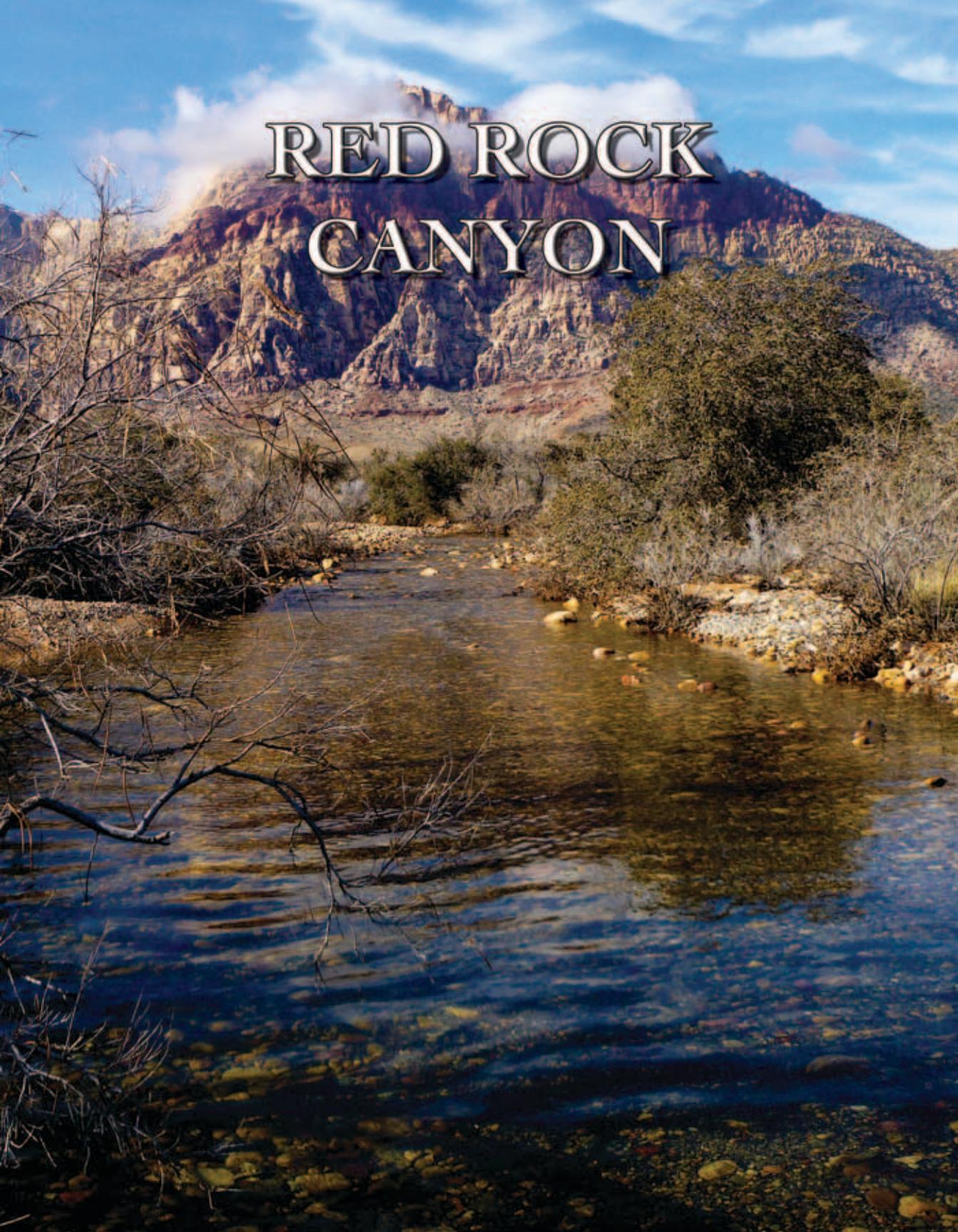
Turtlehead Jr. Double Slot Route—Red Rock
Calico Tank—Red Rock
Bridge Mtn.—Red Rock
Anniversary Narrows—Lake Mead
Gold Strike Hot Springs—Lake Mead
Arizona Hot Springs—Lake Mead
Liberty Bell Arch—Lake Mead

Best Family Hikes

Calico Tank—Red Rock
Fletcher Canyon—Mt. Charleston
Anniversary Narrows—Lake Mead

Wildlife Viewing

Mescalito Peak (Bighorn Sheep)—Red Rock
Bonanza Peak (horses)—Mt. Charleston



RED ROCK CANYON

FAST FACTS

Location: 18 miles west of Las Vegas, and less than 30 minutes from the Strip.

Driving directions: Drive west on Charleston Boulevard (State Route 159). Turn right into Red Rock Canyon.

Best seasons: Spring, autumn, and winter

Scenic Loop: Hours are 6 a.m. to dusk. It's a 13-mile one-way paved road that provides access to many of the trailheads. Open every day of the year.

Visitor Center: Open daily 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; 702/515-5350

Fees: \$7/car, \$30/yearly pass. All National Park passes accepted.

Permits: None needed for day hiking

Camping: About 2 miles before the entrance to Red Rock on State Route 159 is the Red Rock Campground. \$10/night. Water and toilets available. Closed during the summer.

Website: redrock.org

Elevation range: 3,394 feet (1,034 m) to 7,092 feet (2,161 m)

Size: 195,610 acres

Hikes: Less than 1 mile to 12 miles; all difficulties

Dogs: Must be on a leash

Horses: Designated trails only

Bicycles: Allowed on Scenic Loop

Mountain bikes: Designated trails only

Firearms: Not permitted

Gasoline: None available

Managed by: BLM; 702/515-5000

Food: Bonnie Springs located along State Route 159, about 5 miles beyond the turn-off for the Scenic Loop.

DIFFICULTY INDEX

Okay, it's time to hike. This Difficulty Index will help you determine which hikes are best suited for your level of experience. If you're a first-timer, choose from the "Easy" category. If you have some experience (or are a first-timer with a high fitness level seeking more than an entry-level challenge), check out the "Moderate" category. Experienced hikers can go right to the "Advanced" hikes. A similar index listing for Mt. Charleston is found on pg. 250 and Lake Mead's chart is on pg. 330. Happy hiking!

Easy Hikes: 20

Calico Hills I Overlook: pg. 49

Calico Hills I Peak: pg. 53

Calico Hills II Overlook: pg. 57

Calico Hills II Scramble: pg. 60

- Calico Tank and Peak: pg. 64
- Cowboy Cave: pg. 190
- Fern Canyon: pg. 155
- First Creek Waterfall: pg. 198
- Fossil Ridge: pg. 193
- Ice Box Canyon: pg. 108
- Keystone Thrust: pg. 77
- Kraft Mountain Loop: pg. 33
- La Madre Springs: pg. 97
- Las Vegas Overlook (aka Muffin Boulders): pg. 195
- Lost Creek Canyon/Children's Discovery Trail: pg. 83
- Lost Creek Cave: pg. 85
- Lost Creek Overlook: pg. 90
- Oak Creek Canyon: pg. 170
- Pine Creek: pg. 110
- Turtlehead Jr./Red Cap: pg. 69

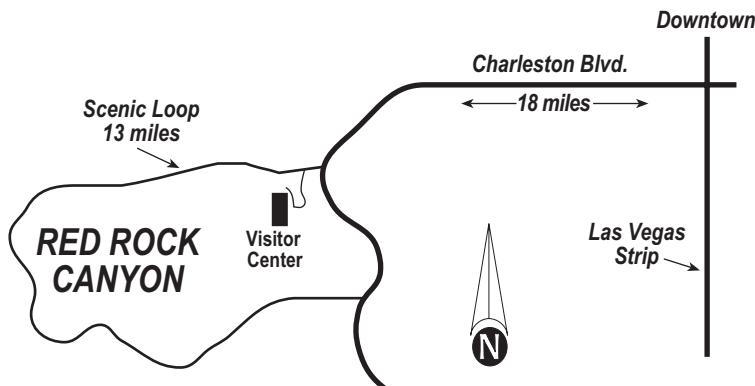
Moderate Hikes: 12

- Calico Hills Loop: pg. 17
- Calico Hills Traverse: pg. 22
- First Creek Overlook Peak: pg. 243
- Gray Cap Peak: pg. 42
- Kraft Mountain: pg. 29
- Magic Mountain and Crabby Appleton: pg. 113
- Oak Creek Overlook: pg. 177
- Terrace Canyon: pg. 120
- The Park: pg. 246
- Turtlehead Jr./Red Cap—Double Slot Route: pg. 36
- White Rock Hills Loop: pg. 94
- White Rock Springs Peak: pg. 79

Advanced Hikes: 16

- Black Velvet Peak: pg. 236
- Bridge Mountain via North Peak Wash: pg. 102
- Bridge Mountain via Fern Canyon: pg. 145
- Bridge Vista: pg. 159
- Decision Peak: pg. 208
- First Creek Peak: pg. 200
- Gunsight Notch Peak: pg. 139
- Juniper Peak: pg. 172
- Mescalito Peak: pg. 123
- Mt. Wilson: pg. 219

North Peak via North Peak Wash: pg. 99
Pine Creek Peak: pg. 130
Rainbow Wall via Oak Creek Canyon: pg. 184
Turtlehead Peak: pg. 74
White Pinnacle Peak: pg. 215
Windy Peak: pg. 228



DRIVING DIRECTIONS TO RED ROCK CANYON

Driving to Red Rock is easy. From the Las Vegas Strip, head west on Charleston Boulevard, which becomes State Route 159 as you approach Red Rock Canyon. About 18 miles from Las Vegas Boulevard, you'll see a "Welcome to Red Rock Canyon" sign. Turn right into Red Rock Canyon. Once beyond the toll booth, veer right onto the 13-mile **one-way** Scenic Loop road. The Visitor Center is located less than 400 yards from the start of the Scenic Loop road.

Note that a number of hikes start from outside the loop road; in other words, you don't have to pay the entrance fee and travel the loop.



PHOTO 1

Calico Hills Loop

Closed Route

Trailhead: Calico Basin, marked

Distance: 4 miles, up and back

Elevation gain: 1,000 feet

Elevation of peak: None

Time: 2-3 hours, up and back

Difficulty: 2

Danger level: 2

Class: 2

How easy to follow: 3

Children: Yes, if experienced hikers.

Waypoints (WGS 84): See page 21.

Fees: None

Best season: All but summer



From the signed Calico Basin/Red Springs Road, drive 1.1 miles and turn left by the Red Springs sign into the parking lot. Park at the far end of the lot near the picnic tables (Waypoint 1).

Comments: This hike has everything: rock scrambling, great scenery, and no entrance fee. It's one of the best level 2 hikes in Red Rock Canyon. Once on the south side of Calico Hills, you'll see a lot of people if hiking on a weekend.

The Hike: The trail starts along the right side of the parking lot; see Photo 1. The trail divides after 40 yards. Take the right fork. Your first destination is the saddle in Photo 2. It's about a mile away and a 600-foot ascent. Follow any of the paths that head toward the saddle; they eventually merge into one main trail. The grade increases as you follow a vague path along the left side of the gully below the saddle. You'll encounter some class 2 scrambling in the gully. Before reaching the saddle, the gully flattens temporarily. At the saddle (Waypoint 2), you get a good view of White Rock Hills Peak, the Scenic Loop Drive, and the Grand Circle Trail.

Your next destination is the boulder in Photo 3. It's a third of a mile away and you lose about 300 feet in elevation. Follow the path that stays along the right side of the gully about 350 yards until you're forced to the left side of the gully by a large boulder (Waypoint 3). Continue about 200 yards to the boulder in Photo 4 (same boulder as in Photo 3).

Now the route heads south (Waypoint 4) on a path for 30 yards to a major wash; see Photo 5. You're now on the south side of Calico Hills. Your next destination is Calico Hills 1 Overlook. It's 1 mile away and you'll ascend 350 feet, but lose over 500 feet.

This part of the route is a little tricky to follow. After the first 100 yards in the wash, you'll see Calico Hills II Overlook up the hill to your right. Once you see the Overlook, look for a path on the right side and follow it about 50 yards and then drop back into the wash. Once back in the wash, walk 40 yards on a large slab of red sandstone (Waypoint 5). Continue another 150 yards on slabs and paths to the small



PHOTO 2



PHOTO 3



slot in Photo 6 (Waypoint 6). A path resumes at the top of the slot and curves to the left and climbs the ramp to where the hikers are in Photo 7. Once at the top of the ramp (Waypoint 7), Calico Hills 1 Overlook comes into view and the rest of the route is easy to follow.

You are now on the unsigned Grand Circle Trail. When the trail divides, take the left fork. You soon come to a high point where you can see the trail leading to Calico Hills 1 Overlook; see Photo 8. Continue SE to Calico Hills 1 Overlook (Waypoint 8).

Go left (away from the parking lot) onto the Calico Hill 1 Overlook trail and follow it 30 yards to a trail just before and to the right of the







wooden fence; see Photo 9. Follow the trail back down to the wash as seen in Photo 10. Once in the wash, the walls narrow and you come to a 6-foot pour-off. Once down (Waypoint 9), head SE in the wide wash.

In 60 yards, scramble over boulders to avoid brush. When you come to the next set of boulders, go left for the easiest way around them. The final down climb is best tackled from the right side. In about 30 yards from the final down climb a trail starts on the left side of the wash (Waypoint 10).

As soon as you ascend the trail, you'll see telephone lines off in the distance. Follow the path taking the right fork. The path becomes hard to follow for a few yards. Once the path becomes easy to follow again (Waypoint 11), head for the ridge that's straight ahead. Just before the ridge, turn left onto an old jeep trail. At the high point of the jeep trail, the parking lot is visible. Follow the trail down to the parking lot (Waypoint 1).

WAYPOINTS:

1. 36.14663N / 115.41918W
2. 36.15338N / 115.43232W
3. 36.15463N / 115.43563W
4. 36.15553N / 115.43762W
5. 36.15292N / 115.43671W
6. 36.15187N / 115.43552W
7. 36.15150N / 115.43442W
8. 36.14666N / 115.42976W
9. 36.14521N / 115.42782W
10. 36.14287N / 115.42438W
11. 36.14165N / 115.42037W