

YOUR GUIDE TO LIVING IN SOUTHERN NEVADA

# desert

C O M P A N I O N<sup>®</sup>

APRIL 2011

## 15 Great HIKES

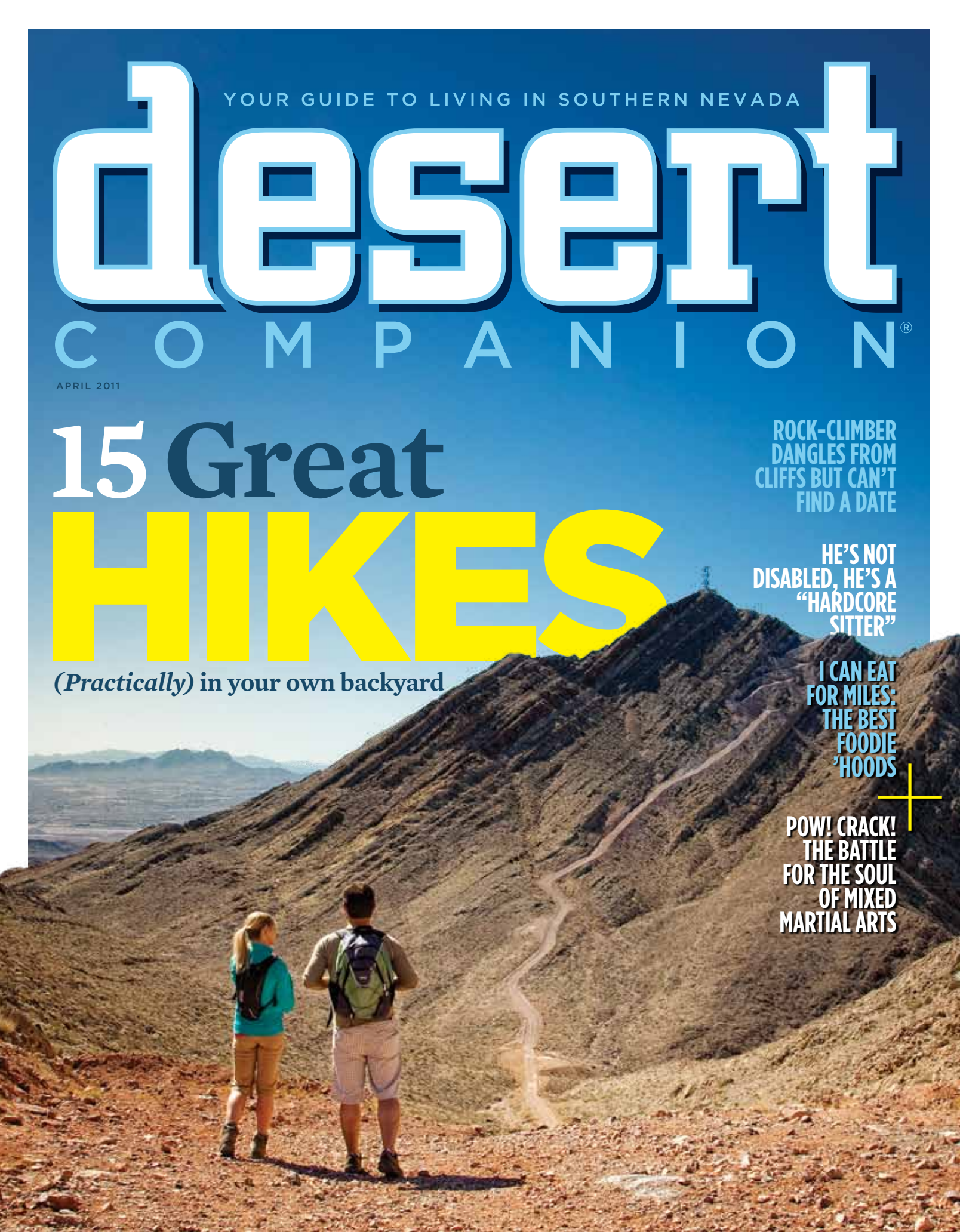
*(Practically)* in your own backyard

ROCK-CLIMBER  
DANGLES FROM  
CLIFFS BUT CAN'T  
FIND A DATE

HE'S NOT  
DISABLED, HE'S A  
"HARDCORE  
SITTER"

I CAN EAT  
FOR MILES:  
THE BEST  
FOODIE  
'HOODS

POW! CRACK!  
THE BATTLE  
FOR THE SOUL  
OF MIXED  
MARTIAL ARTS



A photograph of a desert landscape featuring prominent red rock formations in the foreground and middle ground. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

# 15 Great Hikes

*(Practically)  
in your own  
backyard*

BY HEIDI KYSER AND  
ANDREW KIRALY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
CHRISTOPHER SMITH

**JUST IMAGINE.** An hour from your couch, you can be on a lake, rock face or ski slope — not a claim most other cities can make. Consider tackling these trails demonstrating just that: From just about any neighborhood in Southern Nevada, you can squeeze in a hike on your lunch hour.

Got time to venture farther afield? Check out our Hidden Treasures for the truly intrepid.

## Fire Canyon

VALLEY OF FIRE STATE PARK

**LOOK DOWN:  
IT'S GEOLOGICAL  
WONDER UNDER  
YOUR FEET!**

**GETTING THERE:** On north Interstate 15, approximately 32 miles from North Las Vegas, take exit 75. Go south on Route 169. The park is 15 miles ahead.

**TIP:** On this 3-mile round trip, you'll be treading on or near 150 million-year-old sandstone and sand dunes.

Everything in the Valley of Fire is gorgeous, so it's something to say this is (reputedly) the prettiest hike there. Start at the Rainbow Vista Trailhead and make your way to the vantage point of Silica Dome, and take in the deep red sandstone of Fire Canyon. Visit [parks.nv.gov/vf.htm](http://parks.nv.gov/vf.htm) to find times for interpretive tours.

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## Historic Railroad Tunnel Trail

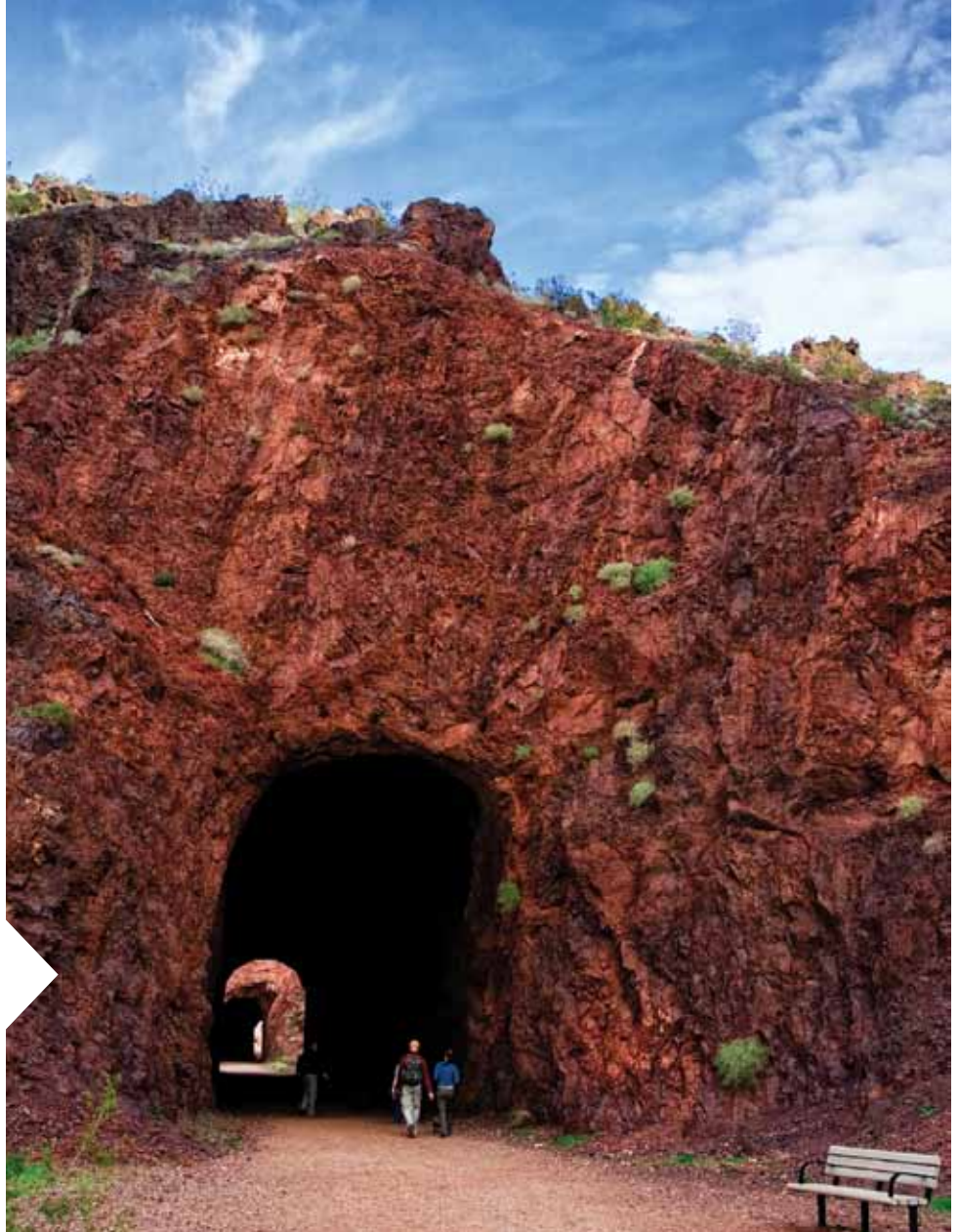
BOULDER CITY

**MAN VERSUS NATURE ON THE COLORADO RIVER. IT'S A TIE!**

**GETTING THERE:** Take Highway 93 to Boulder City and follow it toward Hoover Dam. Look to your left for the turnoff at Lakeshore Road to the Allan Bible Center (Lake Mead Visitor Center). Parking and the trailhead are here.

**TIP:** Great views plus interesting local lore make this flat 8-mile roundtrip excursion a good one for visiting friends or relatives.

The best part of this trail isn't the fact that you can walk or ride your bike along the flat, elevated railroad bed — it's the history. Parts of it are believed to be pioneer trails, used during the construction of Hoover Dam. The hike takes you through five different railroad tunnels, filled with remnants of the past, and some ruins from arson fires.



## Wetlands Park Nature Preserve (Las Vegas Wash)

HENDERSON

**ENTER A TWITTERSPHERE OF THE AVIAN KIND**

**GETTING THERE:** Go all the way to the east end of Tropicana Avenue, and continue east on Wetlands Park Lane. The entrance to the park is on your left at Hollywood Drive.

**TIP:** The complex of easy trails, mostly one-half mile to one mile each, is more about environmental conservation than recreation.

Still relatively unknown to most Las Vegans, this area is undergoing big renovations to improve trails and add an information center. Although the flat or only slightly sloping paths don't offer much of a workout (unless you run them), it's a good place for bird-watching, picnicking or just enjoying the soft sounds of nature. If you close your eyes, you may even forget you're right on the edge of a major urban center.



## 4 Red and Black Mountain

BOULDER CITY

### ENJOY THE BLOOM BEYOND THE RIVER MOUNTAIN TRAIL

**GETTING THERE:** In Boulder City, take Highway 93 toward Hoover Dam. Go less than a mile, then turn left onto a short access road at the “River Mountain Trail Parking” sign. Follow this road to the parking lot and trailhead.

**TIP:** It’s a moderate, one- to six-mile round trip, depending on which diversions you take. In spring, the trail is dotted with wildflowers.

Choices, choices: Near the beginning of the hike, it splits into the Red Mountain Trail on one hand, and the Black Mountain Trail on the other. A little farther on, there there’s an optional path for mountain biking. If you follow the signs to the Black Mountain Overlook, you’ll get a great view of the canyon below, as well as Boulder City.

## 5. RIVER MOUNTAINS LOOP TRAIL

HENDERSON

### DON'T HIKE THIS TRAIL, RUN IT — AT NIGHT

**GETTING THERE:** Take Boulder Highway south past Horizon Ridge to 2800 S. Boulder Highway (before Equestrian Drive).

**TIP:** There are multiple start and stop points, and dirt trails off the paved path for a variety of distances. It’s easy to get lost, so use a map (see [www.RiverMountainsTrail.com](http://www.RiverMountainsTrail.com)) or go with someone who knows the area. You may also encounter pests like coyotes and ATVs.

**“Anybody who has joint issues from running on the pavement should definitely try trail running. It’s so much easier on your joints. ... I’m part of a group that puts on weekly trail runs in the evening. It’s fun, standing out under the stars at night, listening to the coyotes in the background, trying not to trip over rocks.”**

— Dana Clark, runner whose recent feats include finishing the Red Rock Recover from the Holidays Fat-Ass Trail Marathon. Dana leads trail runs two or three times a week at various points around Boulder City and South Red Rock. (You can meet her group Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. in Bootleg Canyon.)



**X Hidden Treasures**  
Shhh! Secret spots of local adventure addicts

RIVER MOUNTAINS LOOP TRAIL: JOHN HOLMAN

## 6. BIG FALLS

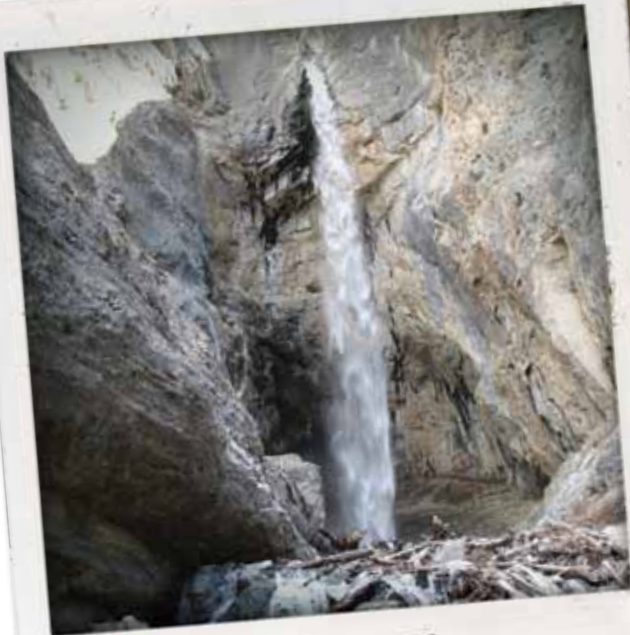
MT. CHARLESTON

### WHEN IT RAINS, IT REALLY POURS

**GETTING THERE:** Take the 95 to State Route 157 and drive 20.6 miles, veering onto Echo Drive at the hairpin curve. Turn left at the sign for Mary Jane Falls, and go two-tenths of a mile to the parking lot. The trailhead is at the far north of the lot.

**TIP:** Parts of the trail beyond Mary Jane Falls have no signs. The hike to Big Falls is three-and-a-half miles out and back.

**“Mary Jane Falls (which is better known) is OK, but Big Falls is much, much better, especially in late April, early May. It’s a 100-foot waterfall that flows in the spring, but is dry in the summer. It will be great this year, because of all the precipitation we’ve had.”** – Branch Whitney, local hiking celebrity and author of “Hiking Las Vegas” (as well as the website [HikingLasVegas.com](http://HikingLasVegas.com)). Branch has led a couple thousand people through the mountains of Southern Nevada, including the 20 peaks he named in Red Rock Canyon and the dozens of trails he covers in his book.



**X** Hidden Treasures  
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## Las Vegas Overlook (aka Muffin Ridge)

BLUE DIAMOND

### IT'S LIKE RED ROCK FOR INSIDERS

**GETTING THERE:** Eight miles west of Red Rock Casino on Charleston Boulevard, look for the entrance to Cowboy Trail Rides. The trailhead is there.

**TIP:** This relatively easy, four-mile hike includes one of those “Look! I’m holding the Stratosphere in the palm of my hand!” photo ops.

Besides its length and low difficulty level, what makes this hike accessible is that it’s in Red Rock, but it’s outside the scenic loop, which in nice weather gets jammed with tourists and weekend warriors. The trail leads up and around Blue Diamond Hill. From the top of the hill, to the east, you can see Las Vegas sprawling across the valley.

BIG FALLS: BRANCH WHITNEY

## 8

## ICE BOX CANYON

RED ROCK  
CANYON NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION AREA

**A SHORT BUT  
ARDUOUS TREK  
TO POOLS OF  
REFRESHMENT  
(AHH!)**

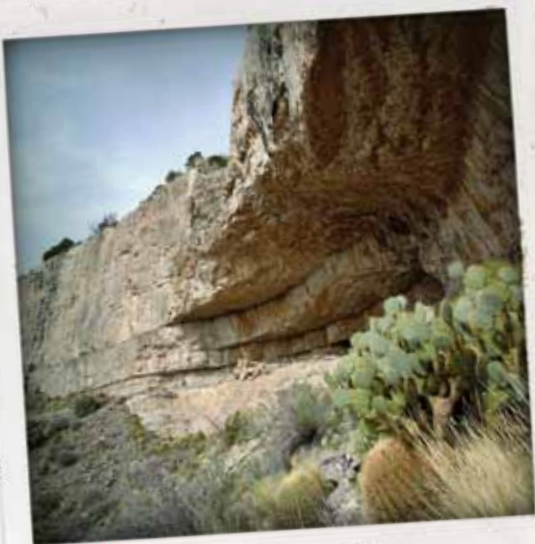
**GETTING THERE:** Take Charleston Boulevard west until it turns into State Route 159. Take a right at the sign for the Red Rock visitors center and pay the nice people. The trailhead for Ice Box Canyon is about halfway through the scenic loop.

**TIP:** If you don't have crazy prehensile monkey feet, wear shoes with traction — the rocks are slippery.

Duck! Now leap!  
And DUUUCK! After switchbacking through scrubby desert, you'll leapfrog up a chattering creek and squeeze through shrubby jungle gyms for this strenuous hike's big payoff (a payoff besides your wobbly, jellied knees): A trickledown waterfall that feeds two rippling pools, the second accessible only to those with a love of rock-scrambling and the fortitude to OH MY GOD NOT LOOK DOWN. Bring a jacket — the sun just grazes this narrow canyon even at high noon, but the chills are worth the thrills.



**BONUS** For more hikes both near and far — and incredible photos — check out [www.desertcompanion.com](http://www.desertcompanion.com)



## X Hidden Treasures Shhh! Secret spots of local adventure addicts

### 9. CLEAR LIGHT CAVE/ PORCELAIN WALL

MT. POTOSI

#### A CHALLENGING CLIMB AMID STONY SOLITUDE

**GETTING THERE:** Take Route 160 west of Las Vegas, toward Pahrump. As you ascend the mountain pass, watch for a dirt road on the left (south) with a sign indicating the Boy Scout Camp. Take that road for a couple miles, past the camp to a small parking area on the right.

**TIP:** You'll need a high-clearance vehicle and the guidebook "Islands in the Sky" by Dan McQuade to find routes, which are best October through May. Most climbing here is the sport variety and for intermediate-level climbers. You'll need quickdraws (makes handling your rope easier) and plenty of energy for the hike.

**"The area is secluded with beautiful rock and cactus gardens. It offers gorgeous views of neighboring limestone cliffs. ... It's really breathtaking, and I feel a million miles away from the city when I'm there."** — Stephanie Forte, rock-climbing rock star. Since her first encounter with a rock climbing wall at the Aspen, Colo., gym where she worked 20 years ago, Forte has not stopped climbing. She moved to Las Vegas for its world-renowned climbing. In 1999, Forte became one of fewer than 10 women in the world at that time to have climbed a route graded 5.14a (translation: terrifyingly vertical rock) at Mt. Charleston.



### 10 Frenchman Mountain EAST LAS VEGAS

#### THINK OF IT AS MOTHER NATURE'S STAIRMASTER

**GETTING THERE:** Drive east on Lake Mead Boulevard nearly two miles past North Hollywood Boulevard. As you enter the canyon between Sunrise and Frenchman Mountains, look to your right for a dirt road leading up the side of Frenchman Mountain. This is the trailhead.

**TIP:** You'll burn more calories than you think on this steep, eight-mile round-trip hike. Pack a snack to enjoy at a rest point on the first saddle.

Warming up is for pansies. This hike starts with a bang, taking you up a steep gravel road with hardly so much as a stray stick for scenery. By the time you get to the first saddle, you're ready to quit. But wait! There's more. You're not officially at the summit of Frenchman Mountain until you reach the radio towers. Fortunately, the surroundings get prettier with each step, culminating in a spectacular view of the city.

CLEAR LIGHT CAVE/PORCELAIN WALL: PATRICK OLSON



# Sloan Canyon

HENDERSON

## AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL TREASURE ON THE EDGE OF ANTHEM

**GETTING THERE:** From Interstate 15, take exit 25 and turn east on Sloan Road. Go north (left) on Las Vegas Boulevard for about one-tenth of a mile, then turn right on a dirt road (four-wheel drive needed). Follow this road for four miles to a road signed “Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area” and turn right. After one mile, the road will fork; stay to the right. The road ends at the entrance to Petroglyph Canyon.

**TIP:** There are some moderate dips and climbs in this five-and-a-half mile loop, but the most important thing to remember is your camera.

Saddles, scrambles, volcanic cliffs, winding washes filled with interesting plant life — maybe even a glimpse of bighorn sheep. This hike promises almost everything you could want from a jaunt in our area, but the best part is the petroglyph gallery in Sloan Canyon proper. In the straight section of the canyon, you can see abundant examples of the ancient art on nearly every boulder to the left and right of the trail.



15 Great Hikes

## 12. ELDORADO CANYON

NELSON, NEVADA

### ARRIVE BY BICYCLE — THEN KAYAK FURTHER IN

**GETTING THERE:** Take the 95 south toward Searchlight. Watch for the signed turnoff on Highway 165 toward Nelson. It's about 12 miles to Nelson and another six miles to Lake Mojave. You can take just about any mode of transport. Cyclists can adjust the distance by varying starting points and/or arranging to be picked up in Nelson.

**TIP:** There may be ghosts. Besides the abandoned Techatticup gold mine, Nelson was also the site of the 1974 Nelson's Landing flash flood that washed away a marina on the shore of Lake Mojave, killing nine people.

**“The road to Nelson is a quiet little two-lane road, nice and smooth with a gentle climb. ... Just outside town, there's a real nice area with kayaking and other activities. Then there's the gold mine, a museum, restaurant — scenic as heck. Ride your bike out and have your family meet you there. You can wander around and look at relics all day.”** — Scott Dakus, a former Category 1 cyclist who holds the time records for traversing both Nevada north-to-south (528 miles in 34 hours) and Utah east-to-west (335 miles in 20 hours). A firefighter, Dakus does a 343-mile ride every Sept. 11 in honor of the 343 firefighters who died in the terrorist attacks of 9/11.



**X** Hidden Treasures  
Shhhh! Secret spots of local adventure addicts

# 13. KEYHOLE CANYON

BETWEEN BOULDER CITY AND SEARCHLIGHT

## A MOUNTAIN RIDE TO A HIDDEN OASIS

**GETTING THERE:** Take the 95 south toward Searchlight. Almost 16 miles past the 93-95 junction, go left (east) on a dirt road. Follow that for a couple miles, then go right (south) on the second power line road. Another two miles and you're at the Keyhole cutoff, where you go left (east). The canyon is about a mile ahead.

**TIP:** A high-clearance vehicle is helpful. It takes about two and a half hours and six beginner- to intermediate-level rappels to go all the way into the canyon. More terrestrial types have plenty of hiking options and can admire the abundant petroglyphs at the mouth of the cave.

**"It doesn't stand out among canyons, but it's near Vegas, it's away from people, and once you're in there you think, 'Wow... This is out here?' In the canyon, you find slick rock walls with fluted waterfalls, whereas everything leading up to it is big open mountains. The contrast is nice."** — Luke Gallyan,

author of *BluuGnome.com*. A lifelong hiker, backpacker and camper, Gallyan found his calling when he discovered canyoneering three and a half years ago. His accomplishments include descending Inlay and Heath Canyons in Utah's Zion National Park, and discovering (naming) Strike Two in Utah's Capitol Reef National Park.

KEYHOLE CANYON: LUKE GALLYAN



**X** Hidden Treasures  
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## 14

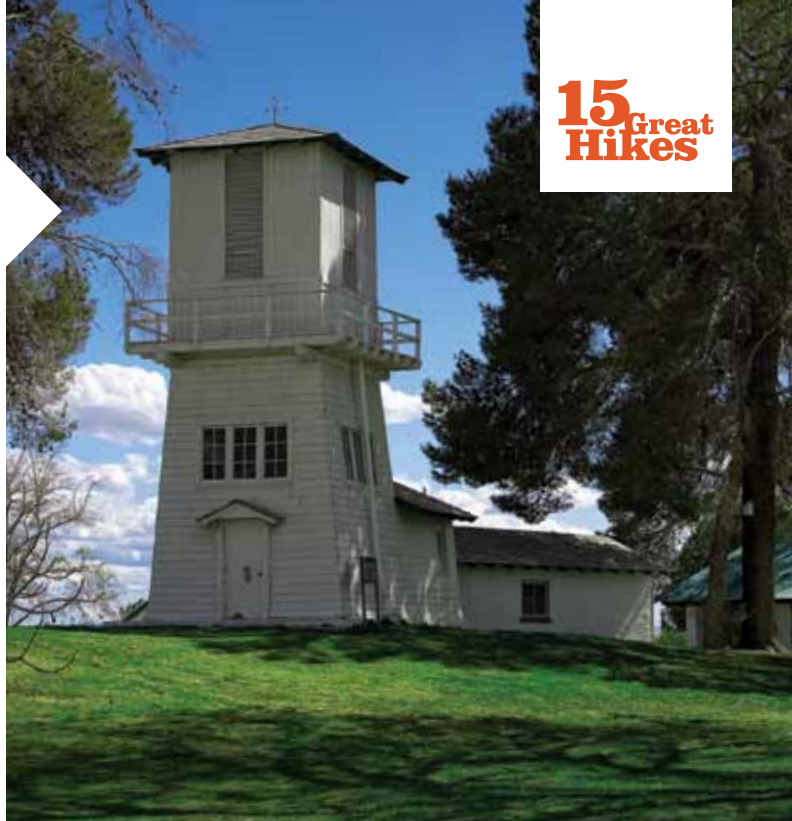
## Floyd Lamb Park at Tule Springs

CENTENNIAL HILLS

AN OASIS OF DESERT PLANTS AND ANIMALS. AND HEY — FISH!

**GETTING THERE:** Take Highway 95 north and exit east on Durango Drive. Follow it as it curves north, and takes you directly to the western edge of the park. Take a right on Brent Lane and enter the park.

**TIP:** Date attire acceptable. You won't even break a sweat on these easy walking trails, no more than one mile each.



Like the Wetlands, Floyd Lamb Park is more for relaxing than breaking a sweat. After surveying the grounds of Tule Springs Ranch, your first reaction will be, “Wow, grass ... and water!” Prehistoric animals had the same reaction, judging from

the high number of fossils that have been found in the area. Mammoth, giant sloth and other animals loved to lounge here — a tradition that humans continue today, thanks to facilities for barbecuing, fishing, picnicking, and playing horseshoe and volleyball.

## Summerlin Peak

SUMMERLIN

CARE FOR SOME WORKOUT WITH YOUR WORKOUT?

**GETTING THERE:** From the north 215 Beltway, take the Cheyenne Avenue exit and go east on Cheyenne. It quickly turns into Cliff Shadows Parkway. Go about one-quarter mile and turn left on an unnamed paved street. Park and begin the hike.

**TIP:** Advanced hike. I repeat: ADVANCED HIKE. It's a steep five miles round trip that includes scrambling up a hillside in zero shade. I repeat: ZERO SHADE.

Summerlin Peak has the accessible location and steepness of Lone Mountain, but with a little extra distance to boost its fitness cred. As if that weren't enough, there's no actual trail here. You follow a wash to the base of the peak, then scramble the rest of the way up, gaining 1,600 feet in less than a mile. Not for the faint of heart, this hike calls for food, water, a partner — and a good bit of resolve.

### FROM THE ARCHIVES

Read these related stories at [www.desertcompanion.com/archives.cfm](http://www.desertcompanion.com/archives.cfm)

**May/June 2010:** “You run this town.” Introduce your feet to these fun urban runs

**January 2011:** “Heal (and pamper) thyself.” After your trek, unwind at one of the valley's more exotic spas