

Hiking Southwest Utah and Adjacent Areas

Volume Two

Introduction

Geographers define a desert as a region receiving less than 10 inches average annual precipitation (Wikipedia 2013)—an area of irregular and minimal rainfall. Meager rainfall means sparse vegetation and results in exposed geological features. One can think of the raw features as the earth without the makeup of vegetation. Deserts can be stark, creating a drama of space, color, relief, and sheer ruggedness. Despite the sparse vegetation, deserts in the southwest United States are full of life—hundreds of plant species, scores of bird species, and many other animals. The best way to observe the flora and fauna is on foot, far from urban areas.

This guide is about hiking and generally exploring desert areas, specifically southwest Utah and adjacent areas (southern Nevada and northern Arizona). There is no better way to experience the ruggedness, the history of settlement by Native Americans and later pioneers, and the solitude than by simply hiking and exploring. My purpose in writing this book is to enhancement the enjoyment of all who wish to sample the richness of southwest Utah and adjacent areas.

My wife, Deb Looker, accompanied me on every hike. This book is a testament to her love of the outdoors as much as mine. Through trial and error from scores of hikes, reading many hiking books, and much Internet research, we have become experienced desert hikers.

More than 25 years ago we began seriously exploring the American southwest. During the first several years we concentrated on areas fairly close to our then home in Santa Barbara, California—the Mojave Desert around Barstow and Baker and Death Valley. We later branched out to Joshua Tree National Park and Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in south central California. In the early 2000s Arizona became a favorite destination. Finally, we began exploring southern Utah in 2006. In the fall of 2009 we left California and settled in St. George, Utah. St. George is a great base camp for adventures in southwest Utah, southern Nevada, and northern Arizona.

While we much enjoy the grandeur of big name desert national parks—Death Valley, Zion, Bryce Canyon, the Grand Canyon, and others—our preference is hard to find, out of the bustle of humanity, slot canyons. Fortunately, the area we choose to live is full of slot canyons.

In May 2011 I began writing a one-a-month hiking story for the local St. George daily newspaper, *The Spectrum*. Nineteen of the hikes in this guide are based on those stories. Four of the hiking stories were first published in the *Mesquite Local News* (Mesquite, Nevada). And two were first published online at the *Southwest Beta* website.

For each published hike I identify the date it was first published in print or online. Some stories have been slightly edited from the published version to reflect current information and conditions along with an occasional edit for clarity.

I took all the photographs, including the cover photo, appearing in this book.

I wrote these stories to describe the natural beauty on our hikes, and as importantly to inspire people to get out and enjoy nature. Go outdoors and relax, leave the pressures of daily life behind for a few hours. These hikes are not hard-core three day backpacking treks through the wilderness. That is a great thing, but not for the vast majority of people, even those who enjoy the outdoors. There are many good hiking books with long, tough hikes—this is not one of them.

These are more of “get off the couch or out of your daily rut” and see what nature, plate tectonics, and erosion have given you. These stories and hikes are for the average person/family that understands the value of nature, but never quite gets out to enjoy it.

Kudos to the United States Geological Survey (USGS) for placing their topographical maps in the public domain. Most of the maps in this guide are from the USGS. I also am thankful to the Nevada State Parks for permission to use of their Valley of Fire State Park map, the Nevada Department of Transportation for the use of their Official Nevada State Highway Map (© 2015), and the Utah Department of Transportation for the use of their Utah Official Highway Map (© 2014).

My approach to writing is less formal than found in other hiking books. I’m not above making a joke out of slogging through loose sand or commenting on how rocks in a wash kept grabbing at my feet and that is the reason for my stumbles. Humor and not taking myself too seriously are important parts of my life, and these stories reflect that. At the same time, detailed directions for finding sometimes obscure trailheads, the hike itself, and where to look for interesting features are provided.

If you are over 62 (my wife and I were in our late 50s when my stories first began appearing in print) and at least occasionally visit national parks, buy an “America the Beautiful” (National Park Service 2014) senior pass. The onetime fee is \$10. It allows the holder and occupants of a single non-commercial vehicle free entrance into national parks for the lifetime of the holder. What a deal.

As you explore the American Southwest, remember that in most cases (except when hiking on private property) the land, artifacts, plants, and animals belong to all American citizens. We all need to share the responsibility of protecting the land and its inhabitants. Specifically, collecting or disturbing any animal, plant, rock or any other natural, historical, or archeological feature is unlawful—leave the area at least as good as you found it. I encourage you to experience this wonderful area, but do it in a responsible, low-impact manner.

I hope my book encourages many to experience the outdoors. Aristotle put it well, “In all things of nature there is something of the marvelous” (The Quotation Page 2013). Happy hiking!

References

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