

## 23 A Nature Lovers Cathedral: Cathedral Gorge State Park

*General Description:* An easy hike exploring the moonscape-like eroded cliffs, spires, mini-canyons, and formations of this amazing Nevada state park.

*Trailhead Access (Roads) and Vehicle Recommendation:* Easy access in a standard vehicle.

*Average Hiking Time:* Slightly less than two hours at a leisurely pace with much exploring.

*Distance:* 3 ¼ miles round trip.

*Fee and Permits:* \$7 per vehicle for out of state residents with a \$2 discount for Nevada residents. Managed by Cathedral Gorge State Park.

*Elevations:* The trailhead is approximately 4,780 feet elevation with less than a 100 feet elevation change.

*Best Season:* September through June.

*Trail Rating (Difficulty):* Easy.

*Type of Hike:* Loop.

*USGS Topographic Map(s):* Panaca, Nevada Utah Quadrangle: 7.5 minute series, 2014.

**Finding the Trailhead:** Begin by traveling north from St. George on Highway 18 past Vejo and Enterprise. At Beryl Junction turn left (west) onto Highway 56 which becomes Highway 319 in Nevada. The miles (almost 46 of them) passed quickly from Beryl Junction through Panaca, Nevada, and then to the intersection with Highway 93. Turn right (north) onto Highway 93 and less than a mile later turned left (west) into the Cathedral Gorge State Park entrance.

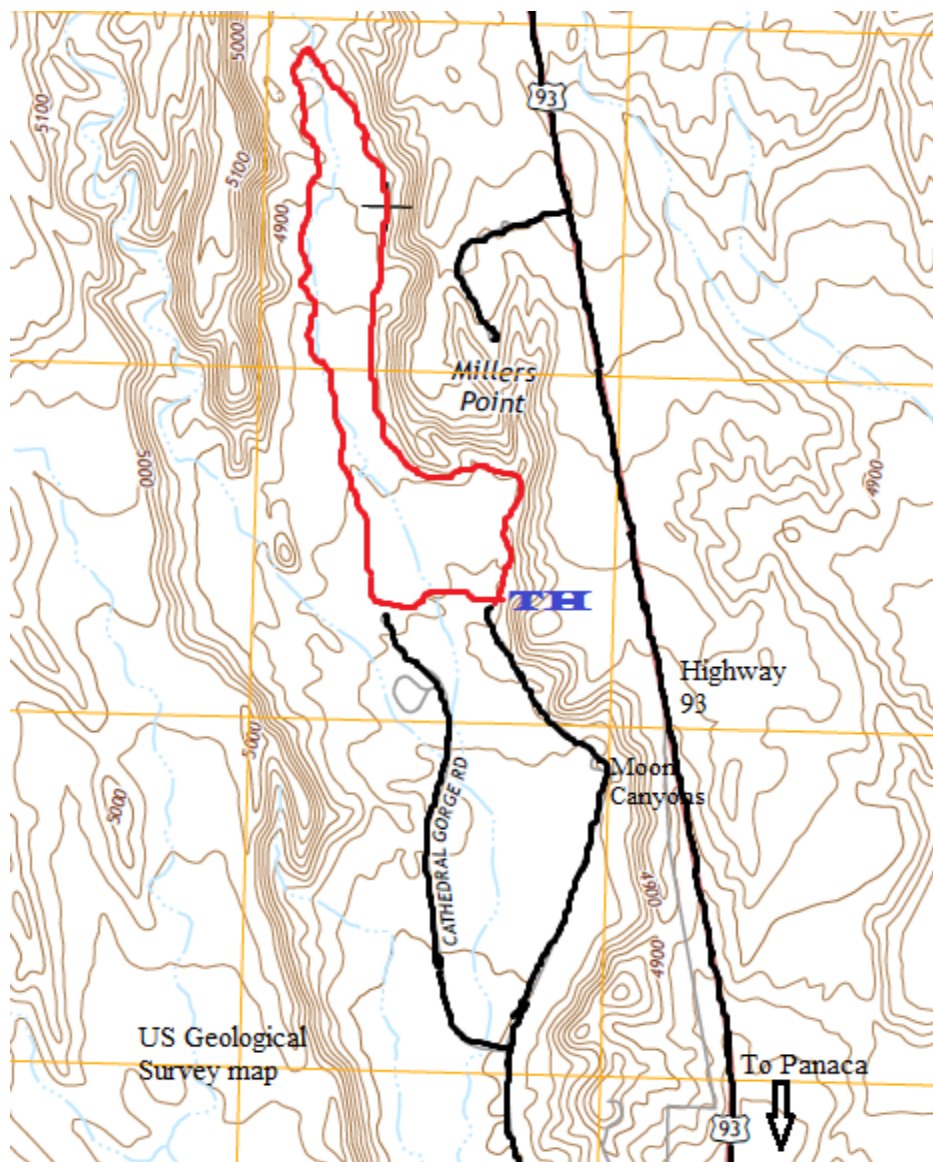
From Las Vegas, take Interstate 15 north and exit onto Highway 93 north. Stay on Highway 93. After a 2 1/2 hour drive, enter the outskirts of Panaca and follow the directions above.

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Not all cathedrals are man-made. Cathedral Gorge State Park in Nevada with its dramatically eroded cliffs and spires deserves the name. The park's grayish-tan-orangeish formations are bentonite-like clay deposits, sculpted by wind and water, from a prehistoric (Pliocene-era) lake bed. The variation in rock layers and sediment indicate fluctuating lake levels and river and stream flows depositing silt and clay (along with occasional volcanic eruptions depositing ash) into the lake. As much as anything encountered in nature, these formations evoke images of a medieval gothic church's spires. The park has many narrow cloister-like mini slot canyons—mudstone labyrinths.

In 1935 Cathedral Gorge became, along with three other areas, one of Nevada's first four state parks. This Lincoln County park contains 1,608 acres of buff-colored cliffs and spires. It has long been a favorite of humans—early Native Americans utilized the area for seasonal hunting and gathering as long as 10,000 years ago. Around the time it became a state park, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built the original picnic facilities that are still used today along with a still standing (but not longer in use) water tower and restrooms. The park's campground has 24 sites for those seeking a multi-day vacation.

### Juniper Draw Loop Trail



Our—my wife Deb, me, and our friends Ben and Cathy Barber—adventure began in mid-May by traveling north from St. George on Highway 18 past Vejo and Enterprise. At Beryl Junction we turned left (west) onto Highway 56 which becomes Highway 319 in Nevada. The miles (almost 46 of them) passed quickly from Beryl Junction through Panaca, Nevada, and then to the intersection with Highway 93. We turned right (north) onto Highway 93 and less than a mile later turned left (west) into the Cathedral Gorge State Park entrance.

As with almost every trip north on Highway 18, we saw a few small herds of deer between Central and Enterprise. Most simply watched the passing cars, although one jitterbugged onto the pavement ahead of us. Lucky for us (and him) he darted back to the brush before a collision. Are these juvenile deer testing their mettle?

We arrived at the park about 11:00 am. Our first stop, and it should be yours, was the Regional Visitor Center. Here we paid the \$7 entry fee and found information not only about Cathedral Gorge, but many eastern Nevada state parks. The rangers were friendly and helpful.



Moon Canyons area under threatening sky, Cathedral Gorge State Park

Then it was on to the moon canyons area along the paved road. The valley floor elevation is approximately 4,750 feet and the temperature in the mid-60s—perfect for exploring. Moon canyons contains many mini-slot canyons and rocky towers embedded in the oddly eroded silt and clay cliffs. We traversed a couple of very narrow slots, like oversized hallways with delicately texture walls, to their end—dramatic openings with vertical walls at least 50 feet high. A bonus was the much cooler air in the slots.

Our next stop was the end of the paved road—the trailhead for Juniper Draw Loop Trail. Here is the day use picnic area with shaded tables and an old rock and concrete water tower and restrooms built by the CCC in the 1930s. The close-by cliffs presented another opportunity for examining the majestic cliffs and tiny canyons with spectacular spires and columns.



Stand-alone spire under dark clouds along Juniper Draw Loop Trail,  
Cathedral Gorge State Park

Juniper Draw Loop Trail is an easy three mile hike with little elevation change that winds through the valley between walls of spectacular formations. Along almost the entire hike our little troop was shadowed by a noisy raven with attitude. I'm sure he was waiting for one of us to fall by the wayside, providing him with lunch. Borrowing from Edgar Allen Poe we answered his calls with a hearty, "nevermore, nevermore."

We ended our adventure by driving about one mile north of the park entrance to the signed Miller Point overlook. You should either hike the two mile (roundtrip) Miller Point Trail or drive to the overlook as we did. The panoramic views of the gorge are spectacular, and you get a bird's eye view of the magic erosive power of wind and water.

We took the long way home through Mesquite—first south on Highway 93, then the Highway 168 shortcut to Interstate 15, and northeast to Mesquite. We ended the day with some well deserved grub and games of chance at a Mesquite establishment.

I highly recommend this day trip. In an area—southwest Utah and southeast Nevada—filled with many natural wonders, the deeply incised mini-canyons and sculpted formations are unique. While we encountered about a dozen other visitors, Cathedral Gorge is a place of solitude—seemingly cut off from the outside world. This truly is a cathedral for nature lovers and photographers.

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This story was first published (print) under the title “A Special Cathedral for Nature Lovers” by the *Mesquite Local News* on June 4, 2015.

**Resources**

The American Southwest website. “Cathedral Gorge State Park.” Last modification unknown.

[http://www.americansouthwest.net/nevada/cathedral\\_gorge/state\\_park.html](http://www.americansouthwest.net/nevada/cathedral_gorge/state_park.html)

Nevada State Parks website. “Cathedral Gorge State Park.” Last modification unknown.

<http://parks.nv.gov/parks/cathedral-gorge/>

Wikipedia website. “Cathedral Gorge State Park.” Last modified January 25, 2018.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cathedral\\_Gorge\\_State\\_Park](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cathedral_Gorge_State_Park)