

# Desolation Canyon

Death Valley National Park  
California / Nevada



**Length:** 3.6mi (5.8km) round trip, out and back.

**Difficulty:** Moderate with over 600 feet in elevation gain. There is no trail and there are no signs, follow the canyon. Scrambling over 6ft to 8ft high (1.8m to 2.4m) dryfalls is required after one mile.

**Location:** Desolation Canyon Road is located 3.7 miles (5.9km) south of CA Highway 190 on Badwater Road. There is no sign, but the 0.5 mile (0.8km) gravel road is generally passable to sedans.

**Highlights:** Wilderness solitude in beautiful yet remote canyon narrows made of colorful badlands formations similar to those found at Artist's Palette.

**Before You Go:** Check the weather and road conditions prior to your trip. There is no cellular coverage in Desolation Canyon. Carry water at all times. Bring a map, compass, and GPS device to assist with navigation. Get free GPX files for your GPS or smart devices:

[nps.gov/deva/planyourvisit/hiking.htm](https://nps.gov/deva/planyourvisit/hiking.htm)

**Route Description:** From the parking area there are two obvious canyon drainages. Avoid the small canyon to the south; instead begin hiking east toward the Black Mountains. Within minutes an obvious and much longer north/south drainage veers to the right (south) revealing the presence of a major canyon.

Entering the canyon, the colorful walls quickly grow high above as the wineglass shaped canyon begins to take shape and constrict around you.

Venturing gradually uphill through the corridor of the main canyon, many interesting but short side canyons offer opportunities for exploration. The maze of canyons provides hours of possibilities for adventure, but may also become confusing. **Hint:** This canyon has been shaped by flowing water, generally downhill is the way back to safety.

One mile into the main canyon, you encounter an 8ft (2.4m) followed soon after by a 6ft (1.8m) high dryfall.

Climbing up may seem easy, but proceed with caution, especially when hiking alone. Climbing back down is always more difficult.

The remainder of the hike shares many features of its neighbor Artist's Drive. Colorful walls and unique geological formations define the horizon.

Be sure to keep right at the next two canyon intersections before following the gradual route up to the ridgeline for the expansive view of Death Valley over 600ft (183m) below. Artist's Drive is the paved road below you. Return via the same route.

## Rock Rainbow:

Shades of color are due to a mix of minerals, mostly forms of iron.

- *Red/Orange = Hematite*
- *Yellow = Limonite*
- *Green/Blue = Chlorite, Nontronite*
- *Purple = Hematite*

## Common Flora:

- *Desert Holly (Altriplex hymenelytra)*
- *Rock Nettle (Eucnide urens)*

