



Sidewinder & Willow Canyon



Death Valley National Park

Sidewinder Canyon

dark slot canyons hide natural bridges

Distance 2 miles one-way

Elevation gain 800 feet

Type of hike gravel wash / rocky scramble

Road access paved road / all vehicles

Where to start drive Badwater Road 31.4 miles south of Furnace Creek or 1.7 miles north of Mormon Point. Park along paved road or turn east onto short dirt road leading to old gravel pit.

Topo map Gold Valley 7.5 min.

The hills at the western base of Smith Mountain seem uninteresting from a distance, yet tucked deep within them are some of the narrowest slot canyons in Death Valley. From the southern end of the old gravel pit, walk up the large alluvial fan to the south that leads to a shallow canyon with poorly cemented gravel walls. About a mile in, a major drainage joins from the right and the main canyon narrows abruptly. At this point look to the right and you will see the mouth of the first slot canyon where you can climb through the boulders. The walls squeeze down to just a few feet wide and may be more than 100 feet high in places. Hidden within the dark, mysterious passageways are natural bridges, and pour-offs that may provide a challenge to scramble up. These slot canyons were carved by the occasional flash flood pouring off Smith Mountain, so be sure to check the weather before entering. Other slots further up the main drainage system offer more opportunity for exploration. Making your own discoveries is half the fun.

Willow Canyon

seasonal waterfall at head of dark narrows

Distance 2.5 miles one-way

Elevation gain 1000 feet

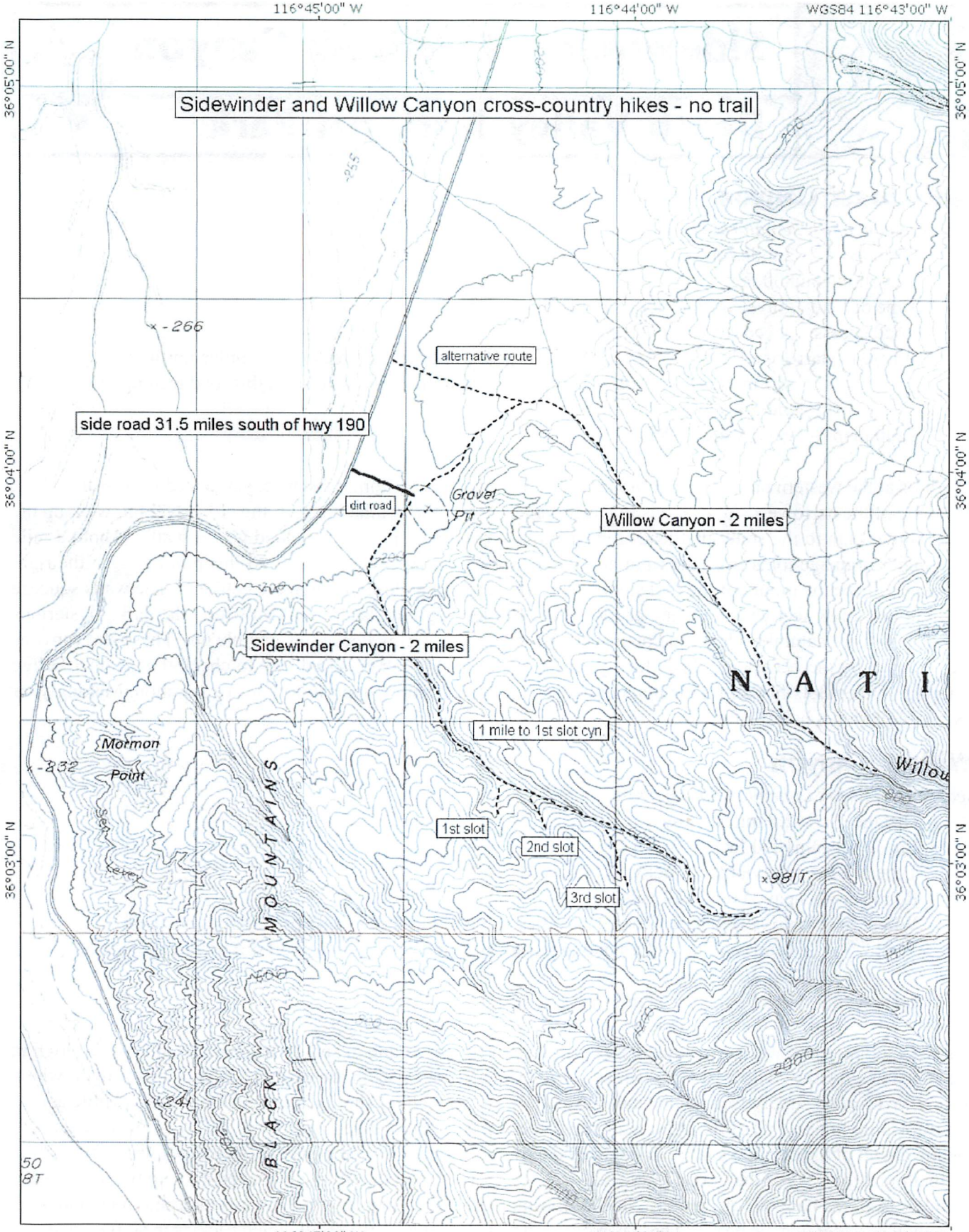
Type of hike alluvial fan / rocky, gravel wash

Road access paved road / all vehicles

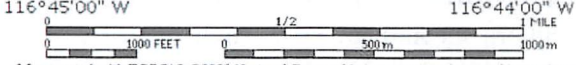
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Topo map Gold Valley 7.5 min.

Willow Canyon south wall forms the grand north face of Smith Mountain and drains remote Gold Valley, high in the Black Mountains. The canyon is named for the waterloving trees in the upper section of this canyon which have a year round supply from abundant springs. A walk all the way through this canyon is not possible as it is interrupted by impassable cliffs. Although you can enter the upper canyon from Gold Valley (4X4 road access), the lower end of the canyon is more dramatic and easier to visit. From the gravel pit on the Badwater Road, hike north around the base of the gravel hills. Skip the small gullies coming off the hills, and hike up the major wash draining from the canyon. At the base of Smith Mountain enter a narrow gorge of metamorphic rock and soon the sound of water may be heard. These narrows end at a 50 foot high waterfall which trickles in all but the driest years. With luck you may see the bighorn sheep that use this area.



TN * MN
13 1/2°



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