Hiking Death Valley National Park and Red Rocks of Southern Nevada

April 14, 2018 – April 22, 2018 (trip# 1831)

Death Valley and the Panamint Mountains, as viewed from Zabriskie Point

We are glad that you are interested in this exciting trip! Please read the information carefully, and then contact us if you have specific questions about this trip: Bill Wheeler 860-324-7374; bwheelsjr@cox.net or George Schott 203-223-1677. For general questions about AMC Adventure Travel, email AMCexcursions@outdoors.org.

SUMMARY

Fire and Ice! Death Valley was designated a National Park in 1994 and is the largest in the Lower 48 states. Located in the Mojave Desert, it’s named after the prominent valley in the region and boasts temperature and elevation extremes. There are few places in the U.S. where one can explore a desert floor and a few hours later summit a mountain peak covered in snow. Death Valley National Park offers that opportunity! On this 9-day adventure, we'll explore the canyons and peaks of Death Valley, as well as the beautiful red rock areas near Las Vegas.
After arriving in Las Vegas, we'll spend a day getting used to the heat by visiting the incredibly scenic Valley of Fire State Park, Nevada’s oldest, and another day hiking Turtlehead Peak in Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. After two nights in Las Vegas, we'll leave the glitz behind and drive to the scenic and historic desert town of Stovepipe Wells in Death Valley. We'll enjoy moderate to challenging hikes ranging from 5 to 10 mi. per day. We'll see wildflowers and wildlife, historic abandoned ghost towns and mines, rocky peaks, sheer cliffs and experience the unique terrain and mountain air above 9,000' as we climb high desert peaks in eastern California. Our group will hike to the scenic summits of Wildrose Peak (9,064’), Rogers Peak (9,994’) and Bennett Peak (9,980’) in Death Valley. We will also hike and explore Mosaic Canyon and the maze of canyons to Zabriskie Point. We will experience the striking contrasts of “sand dunes and snowfields” while visiting desert terrain below sea level and the late-season snows high above the desert floor. Late afternoons can be spent relaxing at our motel pool, visiting nearby historic mining and town sites or other attractions in the Park.

We will spend our last night back in Las Vegas and enjoy a farewell dinner before departing for home.

TYPICAL PARTICIPANTS

You should enjoy traveling and be comfortable traveling in areas which are unfamiliar to you. You should recognize that you may find yourself in closer quarters or be less comfortable than you are used to at home. You should make it a priority to help others on the trip and contribute to their having a great time. If you do that, we are confident that you will have a great time.

This trip is being rated a 3 / 4 on the AMC Adventure Travel’s Trip Rating System. The hiking will be Active-Medium (3) with some Vigorous (4) tendencies. The trip is designed for experienced hikers. You must be able to hike 5 to 10 miles per day at a moderate pace easily, with moderate elevation gains between 500 and 2,500 feet over the course of 4 to 6 hours, while carrying enough equipment to keep you safe in the event of bad weather or injury. Hikes are at altitudes between -282 and 10,000 feet.

Death Valley National Park is a land of harsh environs! There will be lots of Sun exposure, with temperatures of 80 – 100 degrees in the valleys, while only 30 – 50 degrees on the high peaks. We’ll stay hydrated with 3+ liters of water per day and focus on pacing up the peaks to avoid altitude sickness. They may be covered in snow, requiring the use of micro-spikes to achieve these summits. The terrain will at times require the use of hands to scramble over scree, slick rock and dry falls within narrow canyons. Despite these challenges, with careful planning, preparation and teamwork, we’ll endure the conditions and have fun exploring the vast beauty this region has to offer!
ITINERARY

Day 1, SAT 4/14:
Fly to Las Vegas, Nevada (2,000’) where we will rent cars, gather supplies, have dinner and spend the next two nights.

Day 2, SUN 4/15:
We begin our adventure with a one hour drive northeast to Valley of Fire State Park. The landscape features bright red Aztec sandstone outcrops nestled in gray and tan limestone. Several short hikes bring us to Balancing Rock, White Domes, Fire Wave, Rainbow Vista and Elephant Rock. Today will total 5 to 6 miles and 600 feet elevation gain.

Day 3, MON 4/16:
The 4.5 mile hike of Turtlehead Peak is not to be taken lightly. This 6,323’ peak, just 30 minute drive from Las Vegas, in Red Rocks National Conservation Area requires scrambling up steep sections of rocky trail, to climb the 2,000 feet to its summit. We'll stop by the Visitor Center to learn about the area and some of the pullouts along the scenic Rim Drive. After the hike, we drive 2 hours to Stovepipe Wells, CA (10’) where we spend the next five nights.

Day 4, TUE 4/17:
Today we explore the Furnace Creek area of Death Valley NP. The 7.8 loop hike with 834’ elevation gain, through Golden Canyon, Gower Gulch and the Badlands to Zabriskie Point, may be the most popular in the park. We'll weave our way through a maze of towering golden walls, colorful badlands and canyon narrows. The route involves minor rock scrambling, climbing over ledges and ducking under overhangs. Before or after the hike, we’ll spend up to an hour at Badwater Basin, at -282 feet, the lowest point in North America! We’ll also observe Devil’s Golf Course and Artist’s Drive, two scenic stops in the area. Get your National Park Passport stamped at the Furnace Creek Visitor Center.
Day 5, WED 4/18:
We leave the valley floor for the Panamint Mountains. Our destination is 9,054’ Wildrose Peak. This 8.4 mile hike with 2,200’ elevation gain starts at the Charcoal Kilns, which converted lumber to charcoal for silver miners. Impressive views start just ¼ mile into the hike. From the summit, we’ll see expansive views of Badwater Basin, desert landscape and surrounding mountains.

Day 6, THU 4/19:
This morning, we explore Mosaic Canyon, known for its smooth, wavy white marbleized walls and “mosaic breccia” conglomerate rock. This 4 mile hike gains 750’ elevation and requires some scrambling around boulders and over dry falls. The afternoon will offer various options - a drive to Panamint Springs and 2 mile hike to Darwin Falls, a visit to the ghost town of Rhyolite or simply lounge by our hotel pool. After dinner, we may have an opportunity to walk on the Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes.

Day 7, FRI 4/20:
Our return to the Panamint Mountains will be for a 6 mile hike to Rogers and Bennett Peaks. We’ll first hike to Arcane Meadows, a 9,600’ col. From there, we’ll summit either or both 9,900’ peaks for grand vistas of Death Valley to the east and the Sierra Nevada Mountains with 14,450’ Mt. Whitney to the west. Today’s hike gains 2,270’ elevation. Only if conditions are ideal, may we consider hiking to Telescope Peak (11,049’) for a 14 mile, 3,500’ day.

Day 8, SAT 4/21:
On our return trip to Las Vegas (2.5 hour drive), we’ll have the opportunity for one last hike. We may explore Desolation Canyon or return to Red Rocks NCA, either of which will be no more than 5 miles and 1,000’ elevation gain. Tonight will be our Farewell Dinner to reflect upon the week’s activities.

Day 9, SUN 4/22:
Fly Home.
**Group Size**
A minimum of 14 and a maximum of 16, including leaders. A waiting list will be established if more than 14 people apply for the trip.

**Expectations/Experience Level for Participants**
In order to participate in this excursion, you must consider and agree to the following:

**Ability:** You must be able to hike an average of 7 miles per day at a moderate pace easily, with moderate elevation gains, while carrying enough equipment to keep you safe in the event of bad weather or injury.

**Group Dynamics:** You must participate as part of a group and abide by the leaders’ decisions and right to change the itinerary. You must work towards the group having a good time, be prepared to help your fellow hikers and spend time with other participants on the trip. In doing so, you will enjoy the trip to the maximum.

**Group Safety:** Group safety will be our Number 1 priority. **We will never feed or approach any wildlife for any reason.** We will follow the Parks’ recommendations with regards to wildlife.

**Driving:** Some participants will be asked to share in the driving, which requires a check of your driving record. Please inform the leaders if you would like to do this.

**National Park Rules:** We will obey the rules and regulations of the National Park that we will be hiking in.

**ACCOMMODATIONS**
Three nights at an airport hotel in Las Vegas, NV

Five nights at Stovepipe Wells Village, a hotel in Stovepipe Wells, CA

Accommodations are two to a room in the hotels. Rooms will be simple, yet comfortable and budget friendly with two beds and private bath, along with a mini-fridge and microwave, if possible.

**MEALS**
All dinners are included. Each evening, we will discuss plans for the next day and review the events of the previous day. Breakfasts and lunches are the participant’s responsibility. The hotels may offer a free continental breakfast. Lunches will be purchased at supermarkets in Las Vegas and the General Store in Stovepipe Wells.
TRIP LEADERS

Trip Leader Bill Wheeler joined the AMC in 1995 with a goal of summiting the 48 New Hampshire 4,000 footers, which he achieved in 2009. He has also climbed all of New England’s 100 highest peaks. Bill became a hike leader for the Connecticut Chapter in 2005 and has led over 120 day hikes, as well as lead or co-lead on 12 weekend trips to New Hampshire’s White Mountains. He has completed the SOLO basic First Aid Course and Heart Saver CPR Course. Bill has traveled to 6 Canadian provinces, 7 European countries, India, New Zealand and Peru. He has climbed several high peaks in the Western U.S., including 14,497 ft. Mt. Whitney, the highest point in the contiguous 48 states. Bill has led and co-led 10 Adventure Travel trips since 2010 to Bulgaria, Texas/New Mexico, Oregon, Wyoming, Canadian Rockies, Austrian Alps, Colorado, Utah and Washington. Death Valley is on his bucket list and this AMC trip has successfully been run several times. Bill can be reached at 860-324-7374 or bwheelsjr@cox.net.

Trip Co-Leader George Schott is a Connecticut Chapter Hike Leader certified in SOLO Wilderness First Aid, AED and CPR. He also completed AMC Mountain Leadership School. He co-led AMC Adventure Travel trips to Big Bend National Park in 2012 and Saguaro National Park / Tucson Mountains in 2014. Over the past six years, he led or co-led hut hikes in the White Mountains and Adirondacks, and led day hikes on all sections of the AT in Connecticut and Massachusetts. Prior to leading, George was an avid hiker (since age 11) with family and friends in the Adirondacks, Colorado Rockies and Yosemite National Park. During the 10 years he lived with his family in Europe, he hiked the Lake District of England, Scottish Highlands, Wales and Switzerland. George can be reached at 203-223-1677 or geosteven@aol.com.
TRIP COST

The cost for the trip is $1,800. This will cover the following items:

All lodging as specified above
All dinners excluding alcoholic beverages
Continental breakfasts included at the hotel in Las Vegas
Car rentals and gas
Park entrance fees
Emergency medical and evacuation insurance coverage
AMC Adventure Travel Fee (20% of land costs)

Not included:

Airfare from Boston or New York to McCarron International Airport, approx. $500
All lunches and some breakfasts
Individual travel insurance coverage

The approximate cost for the excursion is based on quotes at the time the trip was submitted to the Adventure Travel Committee (June 2018). The final cost of the trip will be adjusted in accordance with any savings we might enjoy or increases we might have to endure.

While Adventure Travel trips are not-for-profit, please be aware that in accordance with AMC policy, you are subsidizing some of the leaders’ costs, but not all of them. Any unspent funds will be refunded to all participants. The trip fee also includes an AMC overhead charge to cover the administrative expenses of offering Adventure Travel trips.

HOW TO PROCEED

If you would like to go on this trip, complete the Application Form and enclose a check for the $500 registration fee made out to the Appalachian Mountain Club and mail to:

Bill Wheeler, 2506 Mill Pond Drive, South Windsor, CT 06074

If you are accepted onto the trip you will also be asked to fill out and mail back an Acknowledgment and Assumption of Risks & Release & Indemnity Agreement, and a Confidential Medical Form both of which will be emailed to you.

The balance of $1,300 is due by January 14, 2018.

When registration is complete, the trip leader will send all participants the names, addresses and telephone numbers of those going on the trip. Trip leaders prefer to use email as a primary source of communication.
CANCELLATIONS

The AMC cancellation policy is based on the simple precept that your cancellation shall not raise the cost of the trip to any of the participants or the leaders. Therefore, if you cancel, your refund will be all that you have paid, less expenses already incurred and future expenses which cannot be avoided. You may forfeit the amount budgeted for your lodging, car rental and trip overhead, which is most of the trip fee. If you cancel and the trip still fully books, then your fees will be refunded in full with the exception that, after airline tickets have been purchased, you own the tickets and that part of the fee cannot be refunded.

EXPERIENCE AND RISKS

This trip is designed for experienced hikers. On the day hikes, you must be able to hike an average of 7 miles per day at a moderate pace easily, with easy to moderate elevation gains, while carrying enough equipment to keep you safe in the event of bad weather or injury.

People wishing to participate in this trip must have previous hiking experience at the intermediate level or higher. Although the hiking will be at a moderate pace, this is not a trip for beginners or people who have not hiked during the past year. This trip is not the right time for getting into shape. You should already be in good physical condition by the time you arrive in Las Vegas.

Hiking in both dry desert climates and high peaks will require extra precautions. Once above 8,000 feet, hiking can be physically demanding, especially for people who generally reside at or near sea level. Although the elevations for the most part are not high enough for contracting altitude sickness, the combination of physical exertion and lower oxygen levels will require that we pace ourselves carefully and pay close attention to proper nutrition and hydration. In April, daytime high temperatures in Death Valley average 90 degrees while overnight lows average 60 degrees. Mornings we start our climbs of the peaks may be in the 30’s.

When you participate in this activity you should be both physically and mentally prepared and equipped with the appropriate gear. You should always be aware of the risks involved and conduct yourself accordingly. We are not responsible for your safety: you are.
REQUIRED GEAR

Here is a list of suggestions for what to bring to have a good time on the trip. Most of the items are things you would bring for a day hike in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

Day pack
Pack rain cover or plastic trash bags
Personal first aid
Rain gear (both jacket and pants)
2 one liter water bottles
Wool or pile hat or balaclava
Wool or pile gloves or mitts (mornings on the peaks will be cold)
Extra pile or wool layer for warmth
Comfortable hiking boots and socks
Micro-spikes (possibly need them for summiting the high peaks)
Long pants - wool or synthetic
Hiking shorts (zip off pants highly recommended)
Cotton or synthetic T-shirts
Long sleeve synthetic shirt
Sunglasses
Sun hat
Sun protection lotion
Lip protection balm
Leisure clothes for travel and restaurants (moderate amount)
Personal toiletries
Toilet paper
Head lamp with extra batteries

Optional recommendations:
Bathing Suit (pools in Las Vegas and Stovepipe Wells hotels)
Camera
Ear plugs
Short gaiters to keep mud/dust out of boots
Small knife (be sure to pack in check in luggage, not carry on)
Compass
Extra shoelaces
Zip lock bags
Reading material for breaks in the action
We strongly recommend hiking with a pole or poles, but if you don’t like them, that’s fine.

Trip Application can be found below.
Application for Adventure Travel Trip to Hiking Death Valley NP and Red Rocks of Southern Nevada

*Please print everything legibly*

Name: ______________________________ AMC Member? __________

Address: __________________________________________________________________________

City, State, Zip: _____________________________________________________________________

Phones: Daytime: ___________________ Evening: ___________________

Date of Birth (mm/dd/yy): __________ Gender: ________________ Smoker? ______

Email Address: ____________________________

Health or disabilities: (Please note any medical or physical restrictions) ______________
________________________________________________________________________________

Name, address, and phone number of person to contact in case of emergency:
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

Have you done mountain hiking previously? When and how often?
________________________________________________________________________________

Please print a brief summary of your recent hiking /backpacking experience on the back of this application.
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

How would you describe your physical condition and stamina? ______________________
________________________________________________________________________________

Please print a description of how you maintain your physical condition on the back of this application. For example, I run 5 miles four times a week.
________________________________________________________________________________

Have you gone on other AMC Adventure Travel trips? _____ If so, who were the leaders?
________________________________________________________________________________

If this trip is filled, do you wish to be placed on a waiting list? ______________________
Are you willing to be a car driver on the trip? ________