Avi Kwa Ame National Monument
Backcountry Scenic Driving Routes

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Important Message for Backcountry Road Use

These tour routes are intended to help you navigate and experience some of the special resources of the proposed Avi Kwa Ame National Monument. Most of the tours require a high clearance vehicle but not all. Also, some require a 4-wheel drive vehicle as well. Each tour will indicate what is recommended. Please know that conditions on these roads can vary depending on whether there may be any washouts from recent rains.

Taking a vehicle off-highway can be a tremendous adventure -- but it can also be a complete disaster, unless you first take the time to prepare yourself and your vehicle for the backcountry route. You should be prepared before venturing out. The desert can be a dangerous and lonely place, if you find yourself stuck or broke down and without help. You can google a number of sites that can tell you what emergency supplies you should consider taking along as a precaution. Cell coverage is mixed on some of these routes depending on the provider.

Another good rule is to always know where you are, and where you're going. Take good maps along, and consider getting a GPS. You should always let someone know where you are going, and set a time to contact them to let them know you are okay. If you do get lost or break down, then the people at home should know when and where to start looking. That person should have the phone number of the nearest sheriff, Park Service or BLM office (depending on who has jurisdiction over the land you're traveling on). You need to be aware that cell coverage is spotty in some locations, depending on the provider.

Another important element is to be aware of the damage you and your vehicle can do to the desert environment. Absolutely, don't blaze a new trail. Stay on the established backcountry designated road. We all need to Tread Lightly and follow the “Leave No Trace” principles. The first reason is, we are all visitors in someone else's home when we're out on the desert; be aware that many animals live above, on and under the sands, and we don't really have a right to destroy their homes.

Also, much of the Avi Kwa Ame lands have a biological (cryptobiotic) soil crust. This biological soil crust is a living soil that's comprised mostly of cyanobacteria, as well as lichen, moss, fungi, and other bacteria. Cryptobiotic soil has been dubbed the 'protector of the desert'. The slow-growing cyanobacteria move through wet soil to form a complex web of sticky fibers. This web is what fuses soil particles together, creating a thick, hard layer for new growth, which also helps to prevent erosion. And, this layer has maximum water absorption thanks to its sponge-like make up. This function helps to regulate water runoff and reduce evaporation.

As a result, this increase in human activity and disturbance to the crust could lead to significant damage due to wind and water erosion, as well as nutrient loss. When damaged, the colony of organisms could take several hundred to 5,000+ years to recolonize and reform in arid places (you read that right.) Biological soil crust is the lifeline of the desert because it plays a vital role in soil stability, moisture, and nutrient cycles. Without it, nothing can grow and the plant and animal life that rely on this, would not survive. Also, humans would not be able to fare well in the desert without this intelligent soil crust.

The Bureau of Land Management does allow for dispersed camping on the public lands. There is no fee for dispersed camping, but there is a limit of 14 days one may camp before having to move at least 25 miles from the original spot. You should choose sites that are already established, use existing fire rings, and camp at least 200 feet from water sources. You also need to check current fire conditions. You should dispose of human waste properly (away from water and in a 6” or deeper hole.)
Hiko Spring Canyon

Hiko Spring Canyon is a scenic 3-mile long canyon that is easily accessible only a half mile on a dirt road off Nevada State Route 163 (Laughlin cutoff). Hiko Spring is a natural spring and a hike through the canyon downstream takes you through some spectacular scenery and some ancient Native American petroglyphs. It is particularly beautiful in the spring with all the flowering yellow brittlebush adorning the canyon walls and hillsides and other wildflowers and flowering cactus.

Hiko Spring is located at the trailhead and there are a series of petroglyphs surrounding the spring. There are also petroglyphs at several locations in the canyon, the most prominent series located about a mile down the canyon on the south side. The petroglyphs here are pecked into vertical cliffs of granitic rock covered with a dark patina called desert varnish. Because the formation of desert varnish is a very slow process, it suggests that these etchings are quite old. There are also some historical etching, one from 1898.

You can see the power of the water that runs through this wash, with the way the rock has been carved and the amount of tangled up debris. In the spring there is running water through much of the canyon. At other times of the year, the water disappears underground.

While visiting, please respect the traditions of the people who still consider this area to be sacred to their lives and culture. Do not deface the petroglyphs. Even touching them can cause damage. Archeological artifacts and sites are protected in National Parks. It is illegal to remove or damage archeological materials. Disturbance of these resources destroys our heritage. Please do not climb on the rocks and panels. Look, observe, imagine. Be still and listen. Let the rocks speak. And if you are lucky, you might see an eagle or a desert bighorn sheep.
Warning: be sure to take plenty of drinking water. There is none available along the trail. Be prepared for summer temperatures that can be as high as 120 degrees F.

**Directions:** From Las Vegas, you head south on I-11 (U.S. 95 south) towards Boulder City. At the junction of I-11 and U.S. 95, turn south on U.S 95 toward Searchlight and Laughlin. You then turn left (east) on Nevada Highway 163 (Laughlin Hwy). After driving 8 miles on Highway 163, there is a fairly open area on the right where a lot of people go four wheeling. About two miles beyond this area the road runs straight downhill. Just before the guard rails where the road makes a sharp left turn, there is an unmarked exit to the right that turns into a dirt road. Turn right and the Hiko Spring is about a half-mile where the road ends.
**Cottonwood Cove/Six Mile Cove Roads**

The paved 14-mile Cottonwood Cove Road starts in the town of Searchlight and provides access to Cottonwood Cove on Lake Mohave. There is a 3,000' drop in elevation from Searchlight to Cottonwood Cove. The 6-Mile Cove Road is a branch dirt road off the Cottonwood Cove Road just past the Lake Mead entrance station. About half of the drive on both roads is through lands included in Avi Kwa Ame National Monument and the other half in Lake Mead National Recreation Area.

One of the best kept secret in Nevada is Cottonwood Cove on the shores of Lake Mohave. Lake Mohave has around 250 miles of shoreline and is noted for its high water quality, warm water and sandy beaches. Lake Mohave boasts high water year round and hundreds of beaches.

The Cottonwood Cove area is very scenic and offers a full range of services for the visiting public. The National Park Service offers two campgrounds and picnic areas, a boat launching ramp and public dock. There are swimming areas, both adjacent to the public boat dock and at the Resort. Cottonwood Marina and Resort is a full service facility with a large marina, motel, café, store, fish cleaning station, boat repair, boat decontamination services, auto/boat fuel, dry boat storage, and a full-service RV Park. A full range of boat rental is available from smaller fishing boats to ski boats, patio boats, personal watercraft and houseboats. Houseboat rentals are available from 2 to 7 or more days and are available in 3 sizes and 6 configurations.

Historically, Cottonwood Island, quite lush with grasses and cottonwood trees, was a perfect place for the miners to raise their stock. In 1867, the Army made the island an outpost. They pastured their cattle and assigned a small detachment to tend them, but a flood the same year drowned or scattered most of the herd. None of the cattle was found.
Gold was discovered around Searchlight in 1897. The first claim became known as the Duplex Mine. The Quartette Mining Company built a 20-stamp mill on the Colorado River at Cottonwood Cove, and in 1901 and 1902, constructed a 16-mile narrow gauge railroad from the Quartette Mine to the mill. Railroad equipment was brought in by barge from Needles. The locomotive carried ore to the mill and, occasionally, passengers rode down to the steamboat port. The locomotive could run on oil from Searchlight or driftwood from the Colorado River. Operations of the mill and railroad stopped when a new mill was built in Searchlight. In 1906, the river mill was relocated at Searchlight, next to the new building. The rails were sold to J. F. Kent, removed, and used on the Yellow Pine line from Jean to Goodsprings in 1910. The foundations of the river mill are about 30 feet below the surface of Lake Mohave in Cottonwood Cove harbor.

In the 1930's, the Homestake Mine in the Newberry Mountains operated an amalgamation and cyaniding plant on Cottonwood Island for processing gold and silver ore. Mining operations ceased in 1953 as Davis Dam was completed. The Island is also under Lake Mohave waters.

The "Arivada" was a river boat which provided ferry service across the river from 1916 to 1920. It was located 2 1/2 miles south of Cottonwood Cove. There was also an aerial cableway built one mile north of the present Cottonwood Cove. It transported automobiles across the river on a rickety framework. It was said once you crossed the river to the other side, you would never come back. It was in operation until the 1930's. The "Searchlight" was a river steamer that plied the Colorado from its mouth as far upstream as the former town of Callville near present day Callville Bay.
Six-Mile Cove is accessible from the paved Cottonwood Cove Road about 7 miles east of Searchlight. You turn south on Lake Mead Backcountry Road #31 and go 6 miles to the Lake Mohave shoreline. Lake Mead #31 is a wide dirt road and maintained but high clearance vehicles are recommended. There is a wide sandy beach here and the area is popular for camping, picnicking, swimming, fishing and boating. You can launch paddle craft from this location. There is no fee.
Crescent Peak Scenic Drive

The Crescent Peak Scenic Drive is on the east side of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument near the Nevada/California boundary. Crescent Peak, at 5,997 is the dominant peak in the area. Access to this area is off Nevada Highway #164, the Joshua Tree Highway about 12 miles west of Searchlight. Turn (left) south on the Crescent Peak Road which is 2 miles before you get to the California State line. You go 3 miles on the Crescent Peak Road to the end where there is a sign restricting travel past that point as it is private land. There is a backcountry road that takes off to the right at that location that goes 2 miles through a beautiful Joshua Tree Forest with views of the backside of the Castle Peaks and the New York Mountains and Clark Mountain in the Mojave National Preserve. That road is in good shape but you should have a high clearance vehicle but do not need 4-wheel drive.

The area has a rich mining history, particularly turquoise mining. There is a history of turquoise mining in the Crescent Peak area by Frank R. Morrissey inside a report titled, “Nevada Bureau of Mines – Report 17 by Vernon E. Scheid.” According to the report, the turquoise mine at Crescent Peak was “re-discovered” in 1889 or 1890 by a George Simmons. Following a trail up the side of Crescent Peak, he came to the source which proved to be the abandoned remains of a mine worked by the aborigines. Larger fragments of turquoise lay scattered about, together with abandoned stone chisels, wedges, and hammers. According to the report, archaeologists estimate the mine must have been worked and abandoned 200 years before Columbus reached America.

Simmons cleared out the pits and found the vein of turquoise, which turned from the vertical and dipped at a considerable angle. The aboriginal miners had followed this vein until the overhanging roof became a menace. There was no provision for safety in aboriginal mining. The usual way of extracting the ore was to build
a fire against the face of the rock, then throw water on the hot stone, causing it to crack. Wedges were then driven into the cracks until the mass broke away. Simmons dug a quantity of turquoise from the mine and took it to London for appraisal. Assured of the quality and the probable price he could expect, he returned and expanded operations.

Around 1894 an area centered around Crescent Peak, became known as the Crescent Peak Mining District. In 1896 Simmons sold the mine to his partner, J.R. Woods who renamed it The Turquoise Mine. He abandoned it when the ore dwindled to a point where it could no longer be mined profitably at decreased prices. Over the years, a number of miners worked the veins and abandoned them. The mines at Crescent Peak have been known by a variety of names, including the Simmons Mine, the Turquoise Mine, the Aztec Mine, Right Blue Mine and the Crescent Peak Mine.
During early operation of the Simmons mine, numerous occurrences of turquoise were prospected for a radius of about a mile from the main mine area. The next registered owner and operator was O. R. Spear who bought the original claims at a tax sale. Spear died in 1965. After that it was worked by various people who purchased leases on the claims. It is not known whether the current owners are actively mining.
Wee Thump Joshua Tree Backcountry Loop Drive

One of the really fascinating areas to visit within the proposed Avi Kwa Ame National Monument is the Wee Thump Joshua Tree Wilderness Area. If you are not a hiker or backpacker, a wonderful alternative way to enjoy this wilderness area is to take the backcountry loop drive that follows the boundary of the wilderness area, allowing you to make a 15-mile loop around the entire area. When establishing the wilderness, the boundary included only those lands that had no roads. Much of the adjacent lands have the same density of Joshua Trees and habitat but do have some backcountry roads. In travelling through the area, you are struck by the lush desert vegetation and rich biodiversity.

The Wee Thump Joshua Tree Wilderness Area is relatively small for a designated wilderness, at just 6,050 acres. But what it may lack in size, it more than makes up for in stunning natural history. The name Wee Thump, or “ancient ones” in the Paiute language, tells the story of these Joshua trees. Growing just half an inch per year on average, the stand is home to some of the oldest and largest Joshua trees on the planet. These ancient ones have grown tall in the silence of the desert, some rising to more than 30 feet over 900 years.
This impressive stand of Joshua trees makes for fascinating bird watching, and the gentle slope of the land allows for relaxed hiking. The area through which the loop trail traverses has also been designated by National Audubon and Bird Life International as an “Important Bird Area,” a national designation recognizing its importance for bird conservation. Birdwatchers may spot gilded flicker (known to occur in Nevada only in this location), northern flicker, ladder-backed woodpecker, black-throated sparrow, red-tailed hawk, crissal thrasher, golden eagle, loggerhead shrike, and cactus wren. Other wildlife roaming the area include desert tortoise, desert bighorn sheep, coyote, desert cottontail, black-tailed jackrabbit, valley pocket gopher and desert wood rat.

There is only one designated trail in the Wee Thump Joshua Tree Wilderness, and that trail is along the southern edge of the area on an old wagon trail known as the "Eldorado Trail." The Eldorado Trail was built to serve the mining areas in the Eldorado Mountains near Nelson back in the day. The off-trail hiking isn't hard but you may want a compass with you: it's easy to become disoriented in hiking through the Joshua tree forest and there are very few landmarks to steer by in this flat piece of Mohave Desert.

**Directions:** The Wee Thump Loop Drive starts off Nevada Highway #164 (Nipton Road) about 9 miles west of Searchlight and 1.5 past the turnoff for the Walking Box Ranch Road. The dirt road follows the east boundary of the Wee Thump Wilderness boundary and then the north boundary. That road then connects to the transmission line maintenance road and follows along the west boundary of the wilderness area, connecting back to Highway 164 about 5 miles west from the starting point. The entire loop tour is around 15 miles, 10 miles on dirt roads and 5 miles on a paved road. A high-clearance vehicle is recommended, but four-wheel drive is not necessary.
Looking at the map, the area doesn't look like an obvious candidate for wilderness. It's an almost completely flat, relatively small triangular area surrounded by a power line, highway and dirt roads. Once you take the loop drive or get out and hike into part of the area, however, you'll see immediately the value this area holds. In addition to Joshua Trees, visitors can also find blackbrush, Mojave yucca, buckhorn cholla, creosote bush, white bursage, banana yucca, bunch grass, matted cholla, and prickly pear cactus along the loop drive. Wee Thump was the first unprotected tract of public land to be designated wilderness in Nevada.
Oakland Mine Stamp Mill Drive

The Oakland Mine Drive is located two miles east of Searchlight off of the Cottonwood Cove Road. It is part of the historic Searchlight Mining District. Many of the Oakland Mine original structures are still standing, including the stamping mill, headframe, water tanks, and pumps. Gold & silver was mined at the site. This historic mine site was purchased by the Bureau of Land Management several years ago and the area is under restoration to restore the habitat in the area.

The key structure on the site is the Stamp Mill. A stamp mill is a large mechanical device used to crush ore and extract the desired metals from the rock – the host material. In this case it was gold and silver. It uses heavy steel stamps to pound and break apart rock, releasing the valuable metals from worthless rock, allowing for the extraction of gold and silver for further refining. This facility was used during mining to crush rocks that were pulled from the mines. In simple terms, a stamp mill functioned like a mortar and pestle that had water and ore put on one side as heavy stampers crush onto the gold ore.

The ore would be brought to the mill by a ore car using a winch, it would then be grated by a metal grate known as a grizzly into fine and coarse material. The finer material would move to the ore chute while the larger pebbles would be directed to the ore crusher until they are crushed into fine gravel.

Initial discoveries of predominately gold ore in the Searchlight area were first made on May 6, 1897. G. F. Colton filed the first claim, later to become the Duplex Mine. The Searchlight Mining District was founded
July 20, 1898. Searchlight began to boom in 1902. The Quartette Mining Company, formed in 1900, became the mainstay of the Searchlight District, producing almost half of the area's total output. In May, 1902, a 16-mile narrow-gauge railroad was built down the hill to the company's mill on the Colorado River.

On March 31, 1907, the 23.22-mile Barnwell and Searchlight Railroad connected the town with the then main Santa Fe line from Needles to Mojave. By 1919 trains were operating over the B and S Railroad only twice a week. A severe washout on September 23, 1923, halted traffic completely and train service was never restored.

In the 1900's, Searchlight was a typical busy mining town of a reported 5,000 residents by its peak year of 1907. At this time, they were larger than Las Vegas. It had 44 working mines, a telephone exchange, and numerous businesses, including over a dozen saloons and half dozen bordello. There were many gold and silver mines that were good producers in the Searchlight mining district. The "Mines of Searchlight" map dated October 1906, shows that there were well over 300 mining claims in the area at that time. Eventually, the gold and silver production cost went up and the grade of ore went down, so people started to move on. By 1927, there were about 50 people left in Searchlight.

Today the Searchlight community has approximately 300 residents and about 50% of them are retired. The other 50% are an eclectic mix of miners, ranchers, small business owners and artists. Several of the mines are reopening and starting production with the higher price for gold on today’s markets. The Monument honors existing mining claims in its boundary.

Directions: Turn left on the Cottonwood Cove Road in Searchlight. At mile marker #2, turn left on the dirt road about 100 yards from the mile marker. The road is in good shape and generally can be done in a sedan. The stamp mill is about a quarter mile on that road.
Newberry Mountains Scenic Backcountry Drive

This 3-mile-long backcountry drive is accessed off the Christmas Tree Pass Road and follows the southwest side of the scenic Newberry Mountains. The Newberry Mountains, which rise to an elevation of 5,600 feet, offer a cool refuge from the heat of the surrounding desert lowlands. The Newberry Mountains are rugged and volcanic in origin and are mostly composed of crystalline granite. Deep, mazelike canyons slice through the mountains. The mountains along the route to the west are part of the Bridge Canyon Wilderness Area, a land strewn with rugged granite boulders, steep canyons and intermittent springs and seeps. Spirit Mountain is part of the Newberry Mountain chain.

The route follows a stunning rugged landscape which harbors unique plants and animals. Sculpted granite rock formations rise impressively from the landscape, which is home to a cross-section of Sonoran, Mojave and Great Basin plant communities. Along the route you see a diverse vegetative mix with the lower Mojave Desert species giving way to juniper and some pinyon pine trees.

There are panoramic views looking west to the Piute Mountains, Castle Mountains, and Castle Peaks. This is an excellent drive to experience stunning sunsets because of the distant vistas. There is also a historic grazing ranch. The wildlife in this area is quite diverse. You may encounter a Desert Bighorn Sheep along the drive. Other mammals include, mule deer, cactus mouse, canyon mouse, desert woodrat, long-tailed hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, pere-
cactus wren, Costa's hummingbird, Crissal thrasher and Bell's vireo. The desert tortoise finds critical habitat here as well.

Reptiles include western chuckwalla, fence lizard, Great Basin gopher snake, leopard lizard, Southwestern speckled rattlesnake, large spotted leopard lizard, Great Basin whiptail, desert iguana, zebra-tailed lizard, yellow-backed spiny lizard, Great Basin collared lizard, Mojave patch-nosed snake, Mojave rattlesnake, desert banded gecko, Western long-nosed snake, Mojave shovel-nosed snake and red coachwhip. Sensitive species include the California leaf-nosed bat, banded Gila monster, Townsend's big-eared bat, and Yuma myotis.

The Newberry Mountains are popular for their spectacular wildflower displays during wetter years. In February and March of most years, the open areas of white granitic soil produce a very diverse mix of wildflowers often dominated by Mexican poppies, creating bright patches of yellow-orange color within the green mixed-shrub landscape.

This region is sacred to Native American peoples. Please respect it as you would your own place of worship. Please do not touch, alter or destroy any archaeological resources. They are protected by law and irreplaceable. Once they're gone, they're gone forever. Please follow the regulations in place for this area, and use Leave No Trace techniques when visiting to ensure protection of its unique natural and experiential qualities.
Directions: From Las Vegas, head south on U.S. towards Searchlight and Laughlin. Several miles south of Cal Nev Ari is the turnoff for Christmas Tree Pass. Turn left and go about 5.5 miles. There will be a dirt road that takes off to the right. Take a right and follow that road for 3 miles to the BLM gate. That gate restricts travel on the rest of the road which goes to the communication site on top of the mountain. This drive requires a high clearance vehicle and, preferably, a 4-wheel drive.
Spirit Mountain West Scenic Backcountry Drive

Tranquility and quiet amongst the spectacular west face of Spirit Mountain await you on this backcountry drive. Spirit Mountain is the highest point in the Newberry Mountains at 5,639 feet and appears whitish-pink in color, making it stand out in an otherwise dark mountain setting. This is probably the most impressive view of the sacred mountain from any direction. There are also impressive views looking both north and west to the Piute Range, Castle Mountains and Castle Peaks. The Newberry Range is Nevada's southernmost named mountain range and connect with the Eldorado Mountains to the north.

Avi Kwa Ame is the Mojave Indian name for Spirit Mountain. The mountain is a sacred place to the Mojave Indian Tribe and the nine other Yuman tribes in Southern Nevada, California, Arizona, and Mexico who consider the mountain the beginning of creation and the spiritual and geographical center of the world. Tribal elders refer to the mountain as, “The place where shamans dream.” Mojave oral traditions describe long and detailed narratives of traditions of the actions of the Creator and other spirit beings who create and interact with this peak and landscape features. The Mojave Tribe is considered the caretakers of the Mountain.

Grapevine Canyon on the Lake Mead National Recreation Area side of Spirit Mountain is recognized as the spiritual gateway to Spirit Mountain, a place in which spirits and spiritual forces travel to and from the Mountain. The petroglyphs and pictographs are believed to have been created as part of rituals associated with spirit quests at Spirit Mountain. For thousands of years, the Mojave Tribe has called this area their home.
The cosmological significance to tribes are encoded in songs that describe events from the past. These songs are known as Salt Songs, which describe the experiences of ancestors and spirit beings, while referencing particular places on the landscape. Many of these songs are sacred and used at memorials and other ceremonies for cultural and spiritual purposes. Hundreds of Salt Songs are sung by Mojave, Chemehuevi, Kaibab, and other Southern Paiute (Nuwuvi) tribes.

The Mojave, Chemehuevi and other Southern Paiutes possess creation songs and Salt Songs that describe the movements of spirit beings that travel across the desert, marking places and providing the features, such as water, natural resources, or rock features, that make these places distinctive.

Salt Songs are not only a ritual song cycle, but an actual physical imprint. The sacred landscape along its route exist in dreams and the spirit world and also in the natural world—a cultural landscape linked by a network of connected physical trails. In geographical terms, the song cycle describes travel from landmark to landmark through the desert, starting at the Colorado River, moving northeastward into the deserts of Arizona, circling into south-central Nevada, to the eastern face of the southern Sierra, to the San Bernardino Mountains, then to the Old Woman Range and back to the Colorado River country.

You can find brittlebush, Mojave yucca, buckwheat, solitary barrel cactus, Mormon tea, hedgehog cactus along with creosote bush and bursage on the slopes at lower elevations along the drive. Look for California juniper, single leaf pinyon, shrub live oak and Nolina as you get towards the Christmas Tree Pass Road.
With a keen eye, you may be able to spot desert bighorn sheep, pocket mice, Merriam's kangaroo rats, and even desert woodrats. Coyotes, desert cottontail rabbits, and desert tortoise call this area home, while Western chuckwalla, side-blotched lizard, Gila monster and a variety of snakes vie for the burrows and shade of the occasional shrub. Western scrub-jays, black-throated sparrows, phainopeplas, red-tailed hawks, golden eagle, cactus wrens, Bell's vireo, and Costa's hummingbirds interact as they go about the daily business of survival in this diverse desert.

This region is sacred to Native American peoples. Please respect it as you would your own place of worship. Please do not touch, alter or destroy any archaeological resources. They are protected by law and irreplaceable. Once they're gone, they're gone forever.
Directions: The drive can start at either the Christmas Tree Pass Road or the Empire Wash Road. The Empire Wash Road starts in the small community of Cal Nev Ari on U.S. Highway 95 south of Searchlight. Turn left on the Empire Wash Road (also called the Loran Station Road) and head east for 5 miles past the mothballed Loran Coast Guard Station. The station was closed on February 8, 2010, as a budget cut. The station, and all of the others, were considered to be obsolete with the general availability of GPS systems. Turn right on the dirt road at about the 5-mile mark and head south. This 3-mile road connects to the Christmas Tree Pass Road. Turn right on the Christmas Tree Pass Road and drive the 7 miles back to U.S. 95.

If you are taking the Spirit Mountain West Backcountry Road from the Christmas Tree Pass side, you travel south of Cal Nev Ari for two miles until the intersection with the Christmas Tree Pass Road. Turn left and travel around 7 miles. Before you get to the mountain edge, there will be a dirt road that head north. Turn left and go 3 miles to its intersection with the Empire Wash Road (Loran Station Road). Turn left and take that road 5 miles to its intersection with U.S. 95.
McCullough Spring Backcountry Drive

This backcountry drive provides a diverse experience, including the opportunity to see a natural spring environment. The first section of the drive is along the transmission line maintenance road that travels through the valley that bisects the Highland Range and the South McCullough Range. This route is through the heart of the northwest section of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument. In addition to the Desert Tortoise, the area is also home to several dozen other Nevada Special Status Species flora and fauna species.

The lower elevations along the route are dominated by Mojave Desert Scrub (Upper Sonoran Life Zone), where Creosote Bush, Mojave yucca, Banana Yucca, Buckhorn Cholla, and low-growing shrubs are common. Scattered Honey Mesquite occur in washes, as do more common Catclaw Acacia and Apache Plume.

As you get closer to McCullough Springs at a little higher elevation, you get more blackbrush and larger yuccas, barrel cactus, prickly pear cactus, hedgehog cactus, some Joshua Trees, and scattered juniper and pinyon pine trees. There is an unusually large number of barrel cactus in this section of the drive and some of the yuccas are nearly 10 feet tall.

The view looking east along the drive is the Highland Range. The volcanic Highland Range is about 10 miles long and remarkably rugged and ragged. The multicolored volcanic peaks tower several thousand feet above the surrounding valley and are remarkably scenic. The area is critical desert bighorn sheep habitat.
The view looking west along the drive is the South McCullough Mountains which also provides a unique and beautiful backdrop. The South McCullough Mountains are formed primarily of 1.7-billion-year-old foliated metamorphic rocks, the second oldest rocks in Nevada. Most of the ridges have weathered to a gently rounded tops with steep sides, but rocky outcrops of layered metamorphic rock and quartzite are common. Near the crest of the range, the ridges themselves are steep, even though they retain broad, gently rounded crests. The base of the mountains on the east side is around 4,500 feet. McCullough Mountain, at 7,026 ft, is the tallest peak in the range.

The United States Congress designated 43,996 acres here as the South McCullough Wilderness in 2002. All of this wilderness is located in Nevada and is managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The landscape ranges from approximately 3,000 to 7,000 feet in elevation and displays a thriving Mojave Desert filled with creosote bush, Mojave yucca, banana yucca, buckhorn cholla, catclaw acacia, apache plume, blackbrush and Joshua trees. At the higher elevations, you'll find single-leaf pinyon pine, Utah juniper, various kinds of cholla, prickly pear cactus, hedgehog cactus and California juniper.

McCullough Spring is an important water source for special status desert Bighorn Sheep and other wildlife. It also habitat for yellow two-toned penstemon which is also a special status species. The year-round spring flows right out of the base of a cliff into a manmade pool, spilling over the side and eventually disappearing beneath the sandy wash several feet beyond. The parcel is owned by the Wilderness Land Trust and is currently available for purchase by the BLM. This is adjacent to the wilderness boundary and surrounded on three sides by wilderness. Even visiting the edge of the wilderness area provides a great introduction to this wonderful and wild place.
Mammals in the McCullough Spring area include Desert Bighorn Sheep, Mule Deer, Black-tailed Jackrabbits, Desert Cottontail Rabbit, and White-tailed Antelope Squirrel. Reptile species include Gila Monsters, desert woodrats, chuckwallas, desert horned lizards, desert tortoises, Mojave green rattlesnakes, yellow-Backed spiny Lizards, Western Fence Lizards, Zebra-tailed Lizards, Side-blotched Lizards, and Long-nosed Leopard Lizards.

Raptor species include Golden Eagles, Prairie Falcons, Red-tailed Hawks, and Swainson’s Hawks. One known active prairie falcon nest site has been observed on McCullough Mountain. Gambel’s Quail and the non-native chukar comprise the game birds. Black-throated Sparrows, Burrowing Owls, Cactus Wrens, and Horned Larks can be found in the creosote bursage scrub and Mojave desert scrub along the bajada slopes on the route. Phainopeplas have been observed within the mesquite stands in the canyon near McCullough Spring. Scott’s Orioles and Red-Shafted Flickers have been observed in the pinyon-juniper adjacent to the spring. Chipping Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Crissal Thrasher, and other songbirds have been observed in the area. McCullough Spring is known to support red-spotted toads.

Unfortunately, there are some wild cows that also use the McCullough Spring area. Grazing was eliminated a number of years ago but there are still cattle that were never removed from the previous allotment and are running wild. Be careful, because they are not used to people and there are several bulls among the 8 or 9 which still utilize the area.
**Directions:** This drive starts at the intersection of U.S. 95 and the Eldorado Substation Road about 11 miles south of Railroad Pass. Turn right on the paved Eldorado Substation Road. Proceed 2 miles to the end of the pavement. Turn left on the Transmission Line maintenance road heading south. Travel south on the transmission line road for 11 miles. There will be another transmission line road about halfway that heads south-easterly. Do not take that road. Stay on the line that travels southwesterly. At around the 11-mile mark, there will be a BLM designated road that takes off to the right. Take a right on that road and go 2 miles. The road splits at this junction. Take the road that goes to the right. Travels 3 miles to you arrive at the spring. There is an old corral facility when you first enter the property and the spring is about a hundred yards further up the road.
Highland Range South End Backcountry Drive

This backcountry road is the only road into the far south end of the Highland Range. The volcanic Highland Range is about 10 miles long and remarkably rugged and ragged. The multicolored volcanic peaks tower several thousand feet above the surrounding valleys and are remarkably scenic. The area is critical desert bighorn sheep habitat.

The drive starts in a Joshua Tree Forest through gently rolling terrain before it enters the south end of the Highland Range. Once in the Highland Range, the topography becomes more dramatic with sweeping vistas in all directions. The landscape is mostly volcanic in origin and there are some significant granite formations in sections along the route, particularly near the end of the route. There are also impressive views looking west and southwest of the Castle Peaks, Castle Mountains and the New York Mountains.

Most of the vegetation along the route is called Mojave Desert Scrub with a diverse mixture of Joshua Trees, shrubs, cacti, white bursage, Fremont’s dalea, jointfir, salt brush, desert-thorn, spiny hopsage, Mormon tea and rabbitbrush. There are significant stands of both Mojave yucca and banana yucca as well as barrel cactus, cholla, pricklypear cactus, hedgehog cactus, and pincushion cactus. You can see Utah Agave in some of the rocky areas. Mammals in the area include Desert Bighorn Sheep, Mule Deer, Black-tailed Jackrabbits, Desert Cottontail Rabbit, and White-tailed Antelope Squirrel. Reptile species include Gila Monsters, desert woodrats, chuckwallas, desert horned lizards, desert tortoises, Mojave green rattlesnakes, yellow-Backed spiny Lizards, Western Fence Lizards, Zebra-tailed Lizards, Side-blotched Lizards, and Long-nosed Leopard Lizards. Birds include Gambel's Quail, Chukar, Juniper Titmouse, Spotted Towhee, Bushtits, Red-tailed Hawks, Common Raven, Golden Eagle, Northern Flicker. Raptor species include Golden Eagles, Prairie Falcons, Red-tailed Hawks, and Swainson’s Hawks.
Directions: The route starts on Nevada Highway #164 (Joshua Tree Highway) about 7 miles west of Searchlight, Nevada. When you get to the turnoff to the Walking Box Ranch Road, there is a dirt road that takes off to the right, just across from the junction of Highway #164 and the Walking Box Ranch Road. Take that road for about 2.5 miles. There will be a junction with another dirt road. Take the road to the left. Follow that road for several miles into the heart of the Highland Range. There are several other roads that take off from this road that you can explore if you have time. There is a particularly nice granite rock formation in the area that is worth exploring. Few people know of this route so you are not likely to see many other users along the way. Therefore, be prepared with food and water in case of emergencies. A high clearance vehicle is necessary, and preferably a 4-wheel drive vehicle.
North Highland Range Scenic Drive – Boulder City Conservation Area

The Northern Boundary of the proposed Avi Kwa Ame National Monument borders the Boulder City Conservation Area (BCCA). This area was established in 1995 by a partnership between Clark County and the City of Boulder City. Managed by the Clark County Desert Conservation Program, the BCCA was created to protect habitat for desert tortoises and other species covered by the Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Program (MSHCP). The BCCA conserves 87,268 acres of desert tortoise habitat and serves as mitigation for impacts to desert tortoises resulting from private-land development activities within the County. The management goal prescribed for the BCCA is to ensure that the property is retained in a natural condition, and to prevent any uses that would impair the conservation, protection, restoration and enhancement of the natural resource values, especially those values associated with habitat for the desert tortoise and other indigenous flora and fauna.

One of the recommended drive within the Conservation Area is the North Highland Range Drive. From this drive, you get good views of the North McCullough Mountain Range (back side of Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area), the South McCullough Mountain Range, the Nelson Hills and the Highland Range. This is an excellent place to go to view spring wildflowers.

Management focus of the Conservation Area is protection of desert tortoise and desert tortoise habitat but is also managed to protect other Mojave Desert flora and fauna species as well. Even though the route seems
distant from Boulder City, it is all within the City limits and managed according to the Boulder City Code and ordinances. The BCCA is currently available for non-consumptive recreational uses including hiking, bird watching, bicycling, horseback riding, photography, OHV use, and sightseeing along open roads.

The drive offers outstanding vistas of the north side of the volcanic Highland Range. This range is remarkably rugged and ragged. The multicolored volcanic peaks tower several thousand feet above the surrounding valley and are remarkably scenic. The area was set aside by the Bureau of Land Management for the protection and propagation of desert bighorn sheep.

Most of the North McCullough Mountains are included within the 48,438 acre Sloan Canyon National
Conservation Area. The Boulder City Conservation Area is currently available for non-consumptive recreational uses including hiking, bird watching, bicycling, horseback riding, photography, OHV use, and sightseeing along open roads. Only roads designated by an "Open Designated Road" sign can be legally used within the Conservation Area. Open roads are marked by signs with green arrows showing the travel route. "Private Road" signs are open for BLM right-of-way (ROW) holders only and are not open to the public.
Keyhole Canyon Backcountry Drive

If you are looking for an easy outdoor excursion that might be close to home, head just south of Boulder City to Keyhole Canyon. Keyhole Canyon is located about halfway between Las Vegas and Searchlight. Keyhole Canyon is a narrow canyon in the western foot of the Eldorado Mountains that culminates in a smooth dry waterfall. The canyon is filled with petroglyphs and a few pictographs. The place has a unique, romantic and almost magical and spiritual feel. It’s a great place to spend a morning or afternoon and exploring the canyon itself is an easy, short hike that just about anyone can enjoy. The route goes through part of the Boulder City Conservation Area and the wildflowers are quite showy in the spring. A high clearance vehicle is necessary but 4-wheel drive is not required.

While overlooked as a tourist site when compared to places like Red Rock Canyon, Valley of Fire and Grapevine Canyon (Lake Mead National Recreation Area), Keyhole is a unique site because of the unusually large, round, geometric glyphs that cover several rock faces in the canyon. While visiting, please respect the traditions of the people who still consider this area to be sacred to their lives and culture. Do not deface the petroglyphs. Even touching them can cause damage. Archeological artifacts and sites are protected on federal public lands. It is illegal to remove or damage archeological materials. Disturbance of these resources destroys our heritage. Please do not climb on the rocks and panels. Look, observe, imagine. Be still and listen. Let the rocks speak.
The drive into Keyhole Canyon goes through a section of the Boulder City Conservation Area (BCCA). This area was established in 1995 by a partnership between Clark County and the City of Boulder City. Managed by the Clark County Desert Conservation Program, the BCCA was created to protect habitat for desert tortoises and other species covered by the Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Program (MSHCP). The BCCA conserves 87,268 acres of desert tortoise habitat and serves as mitigation for impacts to desert tortoises resulting from private-land development activities within the County. The wildflower in the spring are quite showy.
Castle Mountains Backcountry Drive

This drive enters the heart of the rugged Castle Mountains through an area that boasts impressive Joshua tree stands, unbroken natural landscapes, rare desert grasslands, and rich human history. The remoteness of this drive offers visitors the chance to experience the solitude of the desert and its increasingly rare natural soundscapes. The drive requires a high clearance 4-wheel drive vehicle. Remember this is a very remote area and cellular service is spotty. There are no services along the drive so make sure to fill up with gas before heading out and make sure your vehicle is in good operational condition with a full-size spare tire and a jack.

Shaped by millions of years of geologic forces, the rugged Castle Mountains are emblematic of the Mojave landscape. The Castle Mountains rise to a height of over 5,000 feet, presenting a picturesque skyline along the route. Hart Peak is the prominent feature in the Castle Mountains skyline at 5,543 feet. The Castle Mountain landscape is formed of early Proterozoic gneiss and foliated granites overlain with deep volcanic deposits, presenting some striking geologic features.
The Castle Mountains area provides a critical linkage for plants, animals, and water between two mountain ranges, the New York Mountains to the northwest and the Piute Mountains to the southeast. The area's high quality desert habitat includes some of the finest Joshua tree stands in the Mojave Desert. **The route goes through perhaps the Mojave Desert’s best grasslands.** The area's native desert grassland is a hotspot of botanical diversity. The unique plant assemblage includes several dozen species of native grasses, a number of which are rare, including burrograss and false buffalograss. **The area also has the only stands of diverse C4 perennial grasslands west of the Colorado River,** a subtropical grassland that is normally found in the Sonoran Desert uplands in Arizona and Mexico. Grass species common in this plant community flower and seed during the warm seasons of summer and fall, especially after strong monsoon rainfall events.

Roaming amidst it all are desert bighorn sheep, mountain lions, coyotes, and bobcats. A herd of desert bighorn sheep lives on the steep, rocky slopes of the Castle Mountains. They traverse the area between the Piute Mountains and the New York Mountains. Numerous bat species live in rock crevices and mine remnants in the area. **Wildlife species of special concern include the Townsend's big-eared bat, California leaf-nosed bat, Swainson's hawk, golden eagle, desert tortoise, Bendire's thrasher, and gray vireo.**

Ranchers historically grazed cattle in the area. By 1894, the Rock Springs Land and Cattle Company had consolidated its holdings in the eastern Mojave Desert. Features of this and other grazing enterprises of the era can still be seen along the route.
The Castle Mountains area also contains other cultural resources that reflect a long history of prehistoric and historic human use. Prehistoric rock art and archeological sites are found in the area. The rock art indicates sites of significant cultural import to both the Fort Mojave and Chemehuevi Tribes, marking routes through the Castle Mountains likely traveled by both tribes. The Castle Mountains area links places to the south, like Piute Spring, to areas north, such as an obsidian collection site. When the right combinations of rains fall during the year, the drive can be a great spot for colorful wildflowers and blooming cactus.

DIRECTIONS: This drive starts at the Nevada/California boundary off the Walking Box Ranch Road at milepost 10. The Walking Box Ranch Road is accessed off of Nevada Highway #164 about 7 miles west of Searchlight. Turn left on the dirt road at entrance sign to Castle Mountains National Monument. Go 1.5 miles on this road which takes you back into Nevada. There will be a junction with another dirt road. Take a right on this road and go about 2 miles which takes you into the heart of the Castle Mountains. There are several short spur roads that you can also take that access some interesting geologic features. You will return to the Walking Box Ranch Road the same way you came in.