

HELLFIRE CANYON (REVISITED)

Hellfire Canyon is the next major canyon north of Natural Bridge Canyon. We first visited this canyon in January 2009, and my trip report from that hike contains a TOPO map of this canyon (unfortunately, I did not get many good photos on that trip). We also hiked the ridge just north of this canyon in December 2016 (see my report "Ridge North of Hellfire Canyon"), to get views into the second (northern) side canyon of this canyon. We revisited this canyon in December 2017 to check out access to the first two (major) side canyons, neither of which we were able to explore. The narrows in the main canyon, between the two side canyons, and the colorful canyon walls further up-canyon, make this a worthwhile hike, even without having been able to see the two side canyons.

The first side canyon, on the south side, has a small boulder jam at the entrance, and it may have some colorful narrows further on (I'm not sure). The boulder jam was easy for me to climb, but one member of our group was unable to climb it because the boulders were crumbly, so we were unable to check out that side canyon on this trip. The second (main) side canyon, on the north side, which we looked down into in December 2016, appears to have some very (!) nice narrows. This side canyon is blocked by a 12-15 foot tall dryfall, which would be tricky to climb. As of December 2017, when we did this hike, I am not aware of any hikers or canyoneers having visited either of these two side canyons which we were unable to see.

Google Earth map of the Hellfire Canyon area:



Looking across at the impressive clouds above Tucki Mountain on the drive from Stovepipe Wells:



Looking at the interesting peaks above "40-Foot Canyon", just north of Desolation Canyon, while driving to the parking area for Hellfire Canyon:



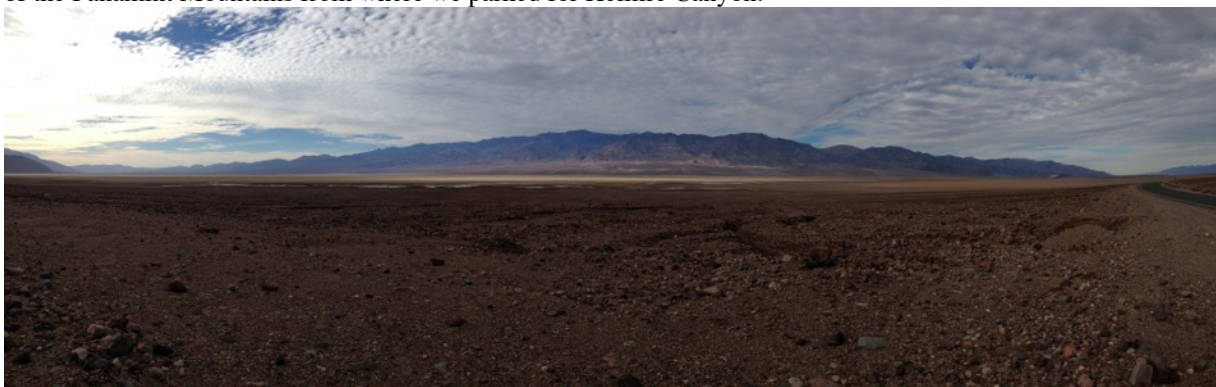
In this cloudy lighting, the small mounds near Artist's Drive looked like a mix of chocolate and mint ice cream:



The colors near Brimstone Canyon also really stood out on this cloudy day:



Panorama of the Panamint Mountains from where we parked for Hellfire Canyon:



Looking towards the mouth of Hellfire Canyon (to the right in this photo); we had hiked the ridge just north of this canyon the previous year, in December 2016:



Panorama of the Hellfire Canyon wash as we approach the mouth of this canyon:



Looking south towards Badwater; notice the clear patch of sky which seems to be just above the southern end of the salt flats:



The walls begin to increase in height as we continue further up the wash:



Looking across the valley from here at what must be the Trail Canyon Road. We haven't driven that road for at least ten years:



This is a small side-drainage on the southern side of the canyon, which appears from the Google Earth map to lead into some reddish hills:



Reddish hills also appeared on the north side of the canyon:



This balancing rock is located near where the side-drainage joins the main canyon:



Further up-canyon is this crack in the wall, which goes in many feet:



The canyon walls are now noticeably steeper and taller:



I had forgotten just how colorful this part of the canyon is:



Notice the bluish-green colors in the canyon walls here; further up-canyon, we would see purple and red colors in the rock, too:



This is where the first (major) southern side canyon takes off. There is a small boulder jam at the entrance, which was too difficult for one member of our party to ascend when we visited this canyon, so we did not get to explore this side canyon on this trip:



Looking back down-canyon towards the road from here. Notice how steep the canyon wash is; that's something else I'd forgotten about this canyon:



Once past the small boulder-jam in the side canyon, it appears to continue unobstructed for a long distance, and reaches some reddish hills where I'm guessing there will be narrows and/or impasses. I certainly hope to finish exploring this side canyon someday:



Back in the main canyon, the wash appears to make a sharp bend up ahead:



Another small side-drainage joins the main canyon here:



This formation on the southern (right) canyon wall reminded me of a castle; we would see more castle-like formations in this canyon later in the day:



Here we are approaching the major bend in the canyon:



Up ahead, we are starting to get a better view of some of the tall peaks of the Black Mountains (which appear to be unnamed):



Looking back down-canyon, Telescope Peak is neatly framed between the canyon walls:



Continuing up-canyon, we see that we are approaching a narrower section of canyon:



On the right side of the canyon is another reddish castle-like formation:



Panorama of this pretty spot in the canyon:



Here is yet another small side-drainage joining the main canyon. Notice the deep chute carved by the water flowing down from the nearby (tall) ridges. I think the Google Earth maps and our hike down the ridge to the north of the canyon indicated there may be some nice (steep?) narrows above this chute:



The canyon wall to north here is surprisingly vertical:



The canyon walls are more shades of red here, but there are also some blues and yellows:



Panorama looking back down-canyon from here:



This canyon had already been more impressive than I'd remembered, and the best narrows were still yet to come:



Looking up the north wall of the canyon, towards the ridge we had hiked down in December of 2016:



Looking back out at the ridge leading towards Telescope Peak (far distance, against the sky). This canyon proved to be unexpectedly photogenic:



Here we have reached the start of the narrows. The canyon wash was getting steeper here, too, and the gravel was making walking slow (which just allowed for more photo opportunities):



The reddish colors in the conglomerate rock walls showed up well in this lighting:



Notice the big, darker rocks in some parts of the conglomerate rock here; other parts of the conglomerate had much smaller rocks embedded in it:



I think this might be yet another small side-drainage on the south side of the canyon:



These narrows continued much longer than I'd remembered, and they were much nicer:



Looking back out at the Panamint Mountains again:



These narrows aren't as narrow as some of the other canyons in Death Valley, but they are very scenic:



Panorama of an impressive bend in the canyon wash near the start of the narrows:



Here a large chunk of canyon wall has broken off and formed a narrow passageway to walk through:



Notice the reddish mud-drippings on the canyon wall here:



A closer image of these mud-drippings, which are redder than the surrounding conglomerate rock:



Looking back at the narrow passageway we'd just walked through:



The walls of the canyon are getting a little bit taller here:



The canyon stayed moderately narrow for some distance, not slot-like but certainly narrow:



Notice how the water coming down the canyon wall has formed a sort of "stalagmite" in the lower center of this photo:

