

(LOWER) KING MIDAS CANYON

King Midas Canyon is a canyon I have wanted to visit for a long time, so when the Keane Wonder Mine area reopened it was the first hike we did in that area. (Prior to the Keane Wonder Mine area closure, we had only hiked around the main Keane Wonder Mine.) This canyon is best accessed by heading southeast from the Keane Wonder Mine parking area (it is the first canyon southeast of the Keane Wonder Canyon). From there, one can hike up-canyon, past the start of the mule trail, the lower tramway station, and two dryfalls, to the base of a 100-foot fall. To bypass this dryfall, one can go back down-canyon and use the mule trail, which switchbacks up the southeast side of the canyon. The upper tramway station and the King Midas Mine can be accessed from this mule trail, although, due to strong winds in the valley, we were unable to complete the hike of the mule trail.

Besides the mining relics, there are three very interesting natural features of this canyon. One is the incredibly tall, sheer canyon walls just below the 100-foot fall, which can be seen from Highway 190 on the way to Furnace Creek. Another is the canyon wall just before reaching the lower tramway station, which has some amazing contorted bends in the rock. Lastly, the straight "corridor" of canyon just past the lower tramway station is also very impressive.

Although it was very windy in the main part of the valley on this day, once in the canyon we did not encounter much wind. However, when ascending the mule trail, for the first few switchbacks there was absolutely no wind. Then, I rounded a turn and was almost blown off my feet by a huge gust. Beyond that point, I encountered more wind, so I decided that would be a good place to turn around.

There is a good map of King Midas Canyon in Dignonnet's *Hiking Death Valley* book, in the Keane Wonder Mine section.

Looking up the "Keane Wonder Canyon" from the parking area:



Looking southeast towards the entrance to King Midas Canyon, which is located just before the small bumps seen in the center of the photo. Note that the old road to King Midas Canyon is visible in the lower right of center:



Panorama of the view of the valley from the parking area, with Tucki Mountain just right of center:



This is the old road leading up towards the Keane Wonder Mill. We checked it out briefly later in the day, after our hike to King Midas Canyon:



Dropping into the Keane Wonder Canyon wash, we could see the Keane Wonder Mill up-canyon on the hillside:



The old road to King Midas Canyon was initially very easy to find:



However, once it dropped into the King Midas Canyon wash it disappeared:



Panorama looking out towards the valley from the wash. The Mesquite Dunes are just barely visible to the right of center in this photo, as are the Death Valley Buttes to the far right:



This oil drum is located in the wash before reaching the canyon; it appears to have come from San Francisco:



Here we have just rounded the entrance to King Midas Canyon. Notice the colorful hillsides up ahead, which would be a common appearance in this canyon:



Just behind the first major rock outcropping in this canyon is an outhouse:



This structure seems to have been well located, since it has survived the water rushing down this canyon:



Continuing up-canyon, the wash remained wide:



We began to see more mining debris in the wash, including this well-preserved All-State tire:



On the side of the canyon, we spotted this small carved opening, which only went in a short distance:



Rounding a bend in the canyon, the wash began to get more narrow. Also note the "giant spool" in the wash here:



Looking back out towards the valley from this bend. This was a nice spot for second-breakfast, because it was mostly out of the wind:



Notice the nice colors on the canyon walls through here, which fortunately showed up well in this iPhone HDR photo:



There were some short tight sections in the canyon wash here:



This is another small carved opening in the canyon wall, which also did not go in very far:



Up ahead, we encountered a collection of very small polished dryfalls, mostly only a couple feet tall:



The rock here is a little slick, so it's wise not to try to use your camera while walking up it:



Notice the metal post sticking up out of the rock to the left in this photo, which unfortunately mars the pretty scenery here:



I'm not sure what this bent metal pipe might have been used for:



Here is a narrower section of this polished-rock section of canyon:



This is the only actual "dryfall" in this part of the canyon; it's about 8 feet tall. If it's too slippery to climb, it can be bypassed by an easier scramble to the right. Or, there is a section of the old road, which bypasses this entire section of canyon on the right side (which I photographed on our hike back down-canyon):



Once past this part of the canyon, the wash opened up, and we could see the switchbacks of the old mule trail far ahead (to the right in the photo, on the sun/shade border):



Note that there are many partially buried remnants of old tram-line in the canyon wash; these pose a serious tripping hazard for hikers who are looking at the scenery rather than at their feet:



Panorama of this spectacular bend in the canyon:



This large piece of metal must have washed down-canyon from some part of mining operation further ahead:



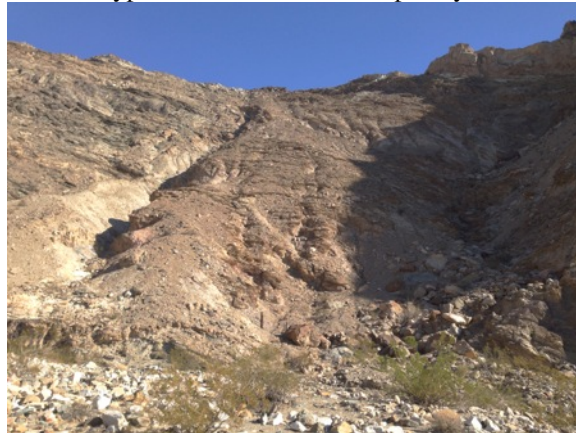
The rocks in this canyon are very impressive, and I would think this canyon might be a good place for a geology field trip:



Another unidentified mining relic in the wash:



Here is another view of the old mule trail, which bypasses the 100-foot fall up-canyon and leads to the King Midas Mine:



Here is part of an old truck:



This is the remains of an ore bucket:



The canyon then cuts left (north) and enters another narrower area:



This incredible wall of bent rock is on the west side of the canyon, just as the canyon starts to narrow again. This is one of the most spectacular geological formations I've seen in Death Valley (though unfortunately the sun angle was not good for photographing it at this time):



Further on in the canyon is more of the old truck:



Just as the canyon reaches its narrowest part is the remains of the base of the old tramway station:



Notice the tramway cable crossing above the canyon, and the wood beam spanning the canyon further down:



The metal posts of the tramway station have leached rust down the rock below them:



Notice how the rock has been cut to support the wood beam:



There is a second obvious cutout on the other side, so I'm thinking there must have been two wood beams here at one time. I'm not sure, however, what the use of these beams was:



Past the remains of the lower tramway station, the canyon enters a surprisingly straight corridor, with rock walls which actually reminded me of slot canyons in Utah's San Rafael Swell area:



At the end of this impressive "corridor," the canyon reaches a small boulder jam:



The boulder jam is relatively straightforward to climb, although there isn't much to grab on to at the top:

