

VIEWS FROM JUST NORTH-WEST OF BORAX BENCHMARK

For this hike, we had intended to ascend the reddish mound marked "minor peak" in the below Google Earth map. There are three small mounds visible to the north-west from Borax Benchmark, which (from left to right, or west to east) are colored red, orange, and gray. The reddish one should have excellent views of the main part of Death Valley, as well as views looking down into the upper part of the canyons between Desolation Canyon and Artists Palette.

We initially tried to directly ascend the reddish mound from its south-east side; this does appear to be possible, but the terrain was too slippery (sharp rocks, but generally not "ball-bearing" like) for some members of our group, so we did not successfully complete that route. However, I was able to ascend part of the way and get some photos looking towards the reddish mound. Then, we successfully ascended the gray mound from its southeast side; I personally found this route to be just as slippery as the route I'd taken towards the reddish mound, but opinions vary on what kind of "slippery" terrain is easier or harder (the rocks were mostly "ball-bearing" like, but the underlying ground was softer and more mud-mound like).

From the top of the gray mound, we had good views to the north, towards the "40-Foot Canyon" drainage (my unofficial name; there are other unofficial names for this canyon), and to the east and south. I think it should be fairly straightforward to get to the top of the reddish mound from the top of the gray mound, but as it was getting late in the day we decided to head back from there. We descended to the northeast of the gray mound, which was just walking down the hillside rather than scrambling, then looped back through a badlands-like area to the flat terrain below Borax Benchmark.

For information on accessing the flat area below Borax Benchmark, see my other trip reports on this area. We had previously visited this area in December 2015 ("Beyond Borax Benchmark"); see this report for a TOPO map and more detailed photos of the route) and January 2012 ("Borax Benchmark").

Google Earth map of this area (note that the red line is for a previous hike in this area); our goal for this hike was the location marked "minor peak":



Looking across the Mesquite Sand Dunes towards the lower Grapevine Mountains on our drive from Stovepipe Wells to Furnace Creek. Somehow we seem to end up doing hikes in the Borax Benchmark area when the clouds and sky are particularly photogenic:



Parking near a wash just past the Twenty Mule Team exit:



There are some mining relics near the wash that we follow up towards Borax Benchmark, such as this old ladder seen to the right in the photo:



We spotted this cave-like formation (it's just a recessed dryfall) further up the wash:



Panorama with the wash we're following to the left and USMM 2191 (which is often referred to as Monte Blanco) to the right:



Continuing up this wash we follow to the Borax Benchmark area (see my previous reports on this area for more details on the route):



Looking back from further up this wash, and over towards Corkscrew Canyon:



Impressive formations on the hillside southwest of USMM 2191 which are really standing out in the morning lighting:



These mud-mound formations at the base of Borax Benchmark are especially interesting, since they appear to have been formed when water rushed off of the steep slopes of the benchmark (I think this is the uppermost part of Twenty Mule Team Canyon):



The small dryfall in the drainage we follow is easier to climb this time, since dirt has washed down to form a steep slope at the bottom of it:



Looking back out at the formations west of USMM 2191 from here:



This rock has some interesting bumps on it, and I'm wondering if they might have some geological significance:



This castle-like formation is right next to the drainage we're following up towards Borax Benchmark:



Panorama from the flat area below Borax Benchmark:



Taking a closer look at where we are heading today, rather than going to Borax Benchmark. The red mound to the far left is where I'd hoped to get to, and the gray mound to the right of center is where we ended up getting to:



We hiked back through the convoluted area to the right of the gray mound, seen in the center of this photo, after getting to the top of the gray mound:



First, we headed straight for the red mound:



This photo was taken near the divide where water on the west side flows into the Artists Palette Canyon 2 drainage, while water on the other side flows down into Twenty Mule Team Canyon:



We decided to first get a view from the top of the dryfall leading into the area behind Artists Palette:



Panorama with a short narrow section before the dryfall (to the left), and the wash we will follow next in the center of the photo:



Here we are walking through this short narrow section before the top of the dryfall:



Looking straight down this multi-stage dryfall which leads down into the area behind Artists Palette:



Looking out at the main part of the valley from here; the brown mound on the right is the big brown mound behind Artists Palette:



I had forgotten how much interesting canyon there is between this section of dryfalls and the impasse at Artists Palette:



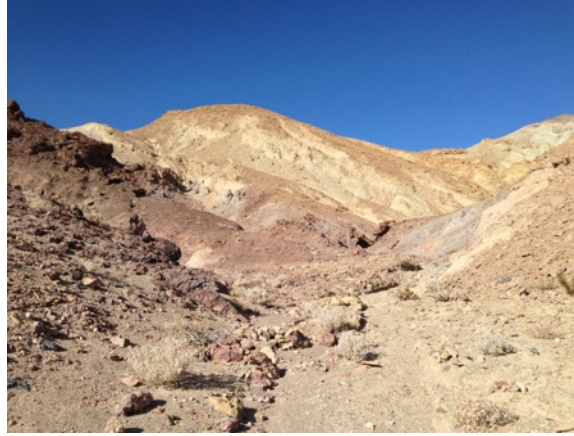
Looking back out this short narrow section, at an impressive reddish-purple wall:



Notice how vividly colored the reddish-purple rock I'm standing on here is:



From here, we headed back up the wash a short distance, then turned off into this small drainage:



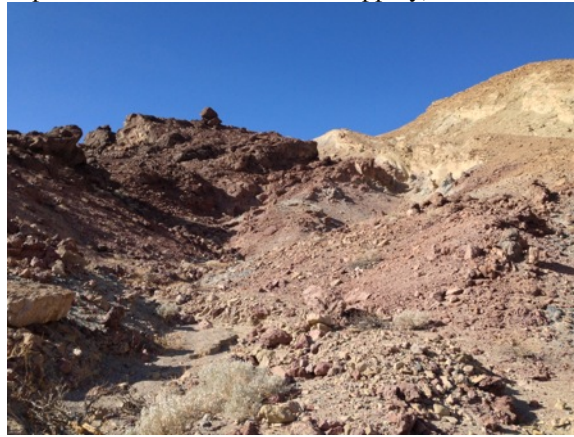
The first drainage from the hillside to the left would not be a good one to follow, since it reaches cliffs near the end. Note the pile of three rocks seen at the skyline to the right in this photo; it's a good landmark to keep in mind for the next few photos:



Panorama of this interesting area, with the reddish hillsides to the left and the orangish-brown ones to the right (the gray hills are further to the right, out of sight in this photo):



This drainage, which can also be seen in the center of the previous photo, is the one we followed up (and it does seem to work for getting to the ridge, but the rest of the group found the terrain to be too slippery):



This is the first stretch of rocky terrain, leading to the saddle seen left of center in this photo. From there, I continued on to the right, towards the pile of three rocks mentioned earlier:



This section of the ridge has some small, sharp rocks that make it hard to ascend. I headed just right of the pile of three rocks, now seen to the left of center along the skyline:



This was the worst stretch, since everything in this chute is loose. I'm not recommending this route, but it works:



Looking back towards USMM 2191 and the flat area below Borax Benchmark from here:



This is the pile of three rocks mentioned earlier. Note the impressive arch seen just to the left:



The goal of this hike is so close at this point; from there, I'd hoped to look down into the upper reaches of the canyons between Desolation Canyon and Artists Palette:



The views from this point are spectacular, and different from those seen at Borax Benchmark. I'm guessing the views from the peak seen above (which is to the far right in this photo) are probably even better:



The orangish-brown mound seen to the far left in this photo is between the red mound that was our goal for this hike and the gray mound that we would ascend later in the day. The ridge I'd just hiked up is to the right of center in this photo:



This photo shows the view looking out to the main part of the valley (left of center) and our intended goal, the red mound, to right of center. I'm not entirely sure what the best route would be from here, as I didn't spend much time in this location because the rest of the group was waiting below the slippery stretch. I'm thinking it would probably either be best to continue along the ridge seen to the far right in this photo, then veer off to the left before reaching the dark brown cliff bands, or to try to descend straight ahead then re-ascend the reddish-blue section of hillside. However, looping around this collection of three bumps and ascending from the north-east side, which is how we descended later in the day, would probably be better than trying to access this peak from here:



Looking across at Borax Benchmark from here; it's the conical point at the skyline to the left in this photo:



Looking down from the top of the route I'd taken up; notice the drainage we'd followed is just below center, and the flat area below Borax Benchmark is just above center. USMM 2191 is visible above that, with Pyramid Peak beyond it. Borax Benchmark can be seen to the right:



Looking back at the arch and rock-pile from here; it looked like the area under the rocks had been used as a den:

