

POTHOLE CANYON (ALSO CALLED MIRACLE MAX CANYON OR CANYON 7)

Pothole Canyon is the very descriptive name given to this canyon by a friend who works in the park, who we did this hike with. This canyon is typically called Miracle Max Canyon by canyoneering groups, and it is currently listed as Canyon 7 on Steve Hall's Death Valley hiking website. It is located in the Cottonwoods range, and it is the 7th major canyon when counting south from the Cottonwood Canyon mouth. The spectacular dryfall just beyond the entrance to the canyon is considered by our friend who works in the park to be "one of the two most impressive dryfalls in the park which can be reached without canyoneering equipment" (the other being Widowmaker dryfall, located in Undertaker Canyon; see my report on Undertaker Canyon for more information). The hike to the base of the dryfall should be considered a moderately easy day hike, whereas the hike to the top of the fall and the narrows above it should be considered a strenuous day hike (due to the necessary route finding and the steep uphill climb across talus and rock). Attempting both in the same day is a good idea to fully appreciate the dramatic nature of this dryfall, but it makes for a long, hard day of hiking and should only be attempted with careful planning.

Google Earth map of this canyon:



Looking ahead towards Pothole Canyon (behind the brown ridge to the left of center in the photo), with the Canyons 5 and 6 wash in the center and Canyon 4 to the right:



Panorama as we approach Canyon 6; Canyon 5 is at the center of the photo, with Canyon 6 just left of center and the canyoneer route to the ridge just to the left of it:



Looking back across the valley at the Grapevines from here:



Up ahead is the entrance to Pothole Canyon, which, as can be seen from the Google Earth map above, cuts around and behind the brown ridge seen two photos ago:



A small wash coming down from the ridge, just before we enter the main canyon:



Panorama as we approach the canyon mouth; clearly this must be a major canyon with all of the outflow which can be seen from the mouth:



Looking back out at the valley after having just entered the canyon mouth:



Looking ahead at the wide entrance to the canyon:



Panorama looking up-canyon; the massive dryfall is just around the bend which can be seen beyond the shadow to the left of center in the photo:



Another panorama of the impressive cliffs at the beginning of Pothole Canyon:



Continuing up-canyon:



There was a lot of thick mudflow in the canyon wash; the remnants of this mudflow have bushes growing out of it with their roots bare:



Our first view of the impressive dryfall in Pothole Canyon:



Panorama from below this incredible dryfall; photos cannot capture its height or magnitude:



Looking up the fall from the lowest pothole:



Closer view of the cliffs to the right of the fall:



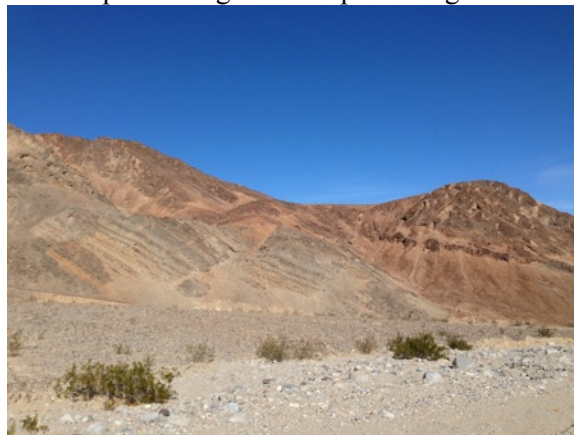
One last photo of this dryfall with its characteristic potholes from below; this appears to be the only instance of a fall with this kind of potholes in the park:



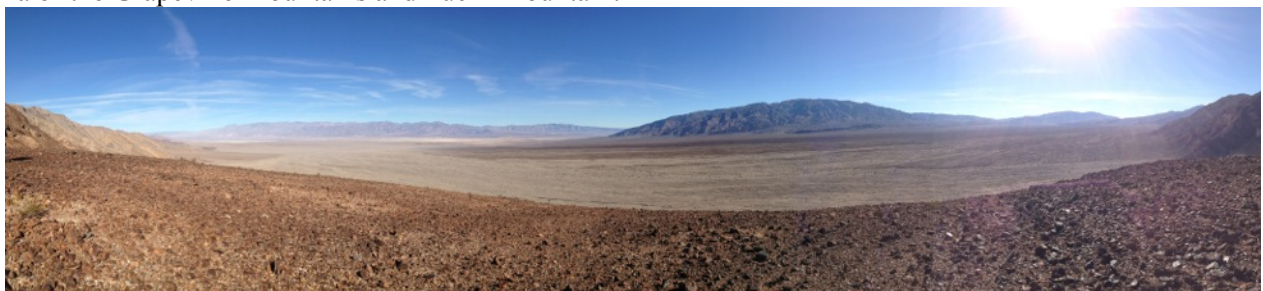
Looking out towards Black Point and Tucki Mountain on our way back out of this canyon:



We decided to head up towards the ridge to get another view of this massive dryfall; we ascended the gray ridge in the center of the photo, then went out to the bump to the right in this photo to get a view:



Panorama of the Grapevine Mountains and Tucki Mountain:



Panorama with the entrance to Pothole Canyon on the left and the route we took up the ridge to the right (we followed the notch just to the left of the furthest right brown ridge):



Looking down towards Tucki and where we just were from this route up:



Panorama looking back down from further up this ridge; we took the canyoneers route to the ridge on our way back, but we found this route we took on our way up to be easier:



Looking ahead up the ridge:



Panorama looking back at the valley after finally having reached a flat plateau:



Looking ahead across the plateau; we first headed towards the left in this panorama to get a view of the major dryfall:



Looking over and down at this incredible major dryfall of Pothole Canyon:



Panorama showing lower Pothole Canyon with the dryfall in the center; we ascended to the pointed peak to the right in this photo to drop into the upper canyon:



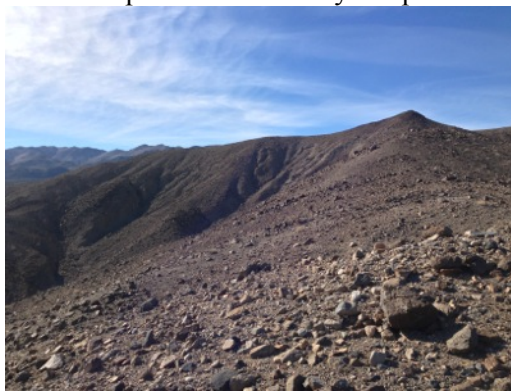
Another panorama from here, looking towards our route up to the pointed peak:



There was a field of interesting rounded rocks which we crossed on our way to the ridge:



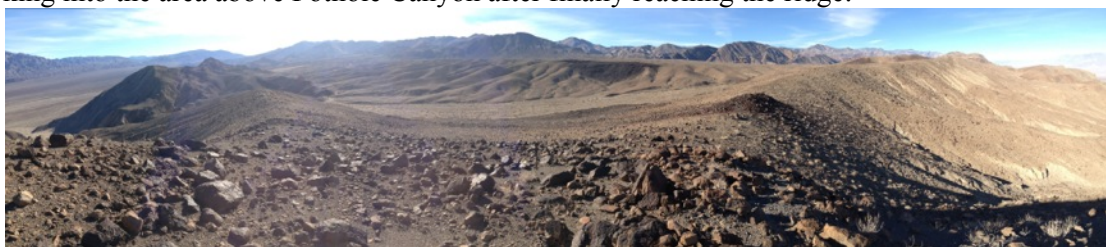
Looking ahead towards the pointed peak; the steepness here seemed to be deceptive to me, as the beginning stretch was not as steep as it looked while the last bit to the top was substantially steeper than I thought it would be:



Looking up at this peak; it starts to get really steep just before the top:



Panorama looking into the area above Pothole Canyon after finally reaching the ridge:



Panorama looking back down where we had come from; we ascended the ridge in the center of the photo, and the Pothole Canyon wash can be seen to the right of center in the photo:



Looking over towards the section of Pothole Canyon which is just above the major dryfall; from here, it does not appear that this narrow section of canyon could be passable to hikers, but it actually is easily hikable once this point has been reached:



We continued down the ridge a short distance, then dropped into the wash; note that this is actually the northern fork (or perhaps side canyon) of the part of Pothole Canyon above the major dryfall:



Looking back up the wash as it gets wider; it may be possible to also access this area from the Cottonwood Canyon Road:



Looking down the wash as it enters some volcanic rock:



We passed through a boulder jam, then came out into this interesting section of canyon; we were a little concerned about daylight, so we didn't stop for a lot of photos:



Continuing down-canyon as the wash opens up slightly:



Here we can see that we are approaching where this northern fork joins with the main canyon:



Looking up the other fork of the canyon; we did not have time to check out this part of the canyon:



Instead, we continued down-canyon, in hopes that we would be able to make some progress before being stopped by an unclimbable dryfall:



Heading down the wash into what looked to be a much narrower section of the canyon:



There were a lot of these small cacti in the wash, which reminded me of the tiny ones that always seem to be right where I want to put my hands when climbing except that these are a bit larger:



Continuing down-canyon, it seemed that there was no way that we could be able to see much of the canyon before reaching an impasse:



Looking back up-canyon towards where it forks:



The next four photos show our progress continuing down-canyon; around each turn, it seemed like we would encounter an impasse, but every time the canyon went through:

