

3 Pine City Area Hikes~Joshua Tree National Park

Text and Photos by Pat Flanagan

While the terrain of Joshua Tree National Park can challenge the most ambitious of hikers, it is also an excellent place for those whose major ambitions lean towards tracking lizards and watching birds. The Pine City area in **Joshua Tree National Park** www.nps.gov/jotr/ provides a rich variety of habitats for viewing wildlife and vegetation while putting you in touch with some of the mining history that is such a rich park of the Park's legacy.



In addition, to compliment these walks and to appreciate what intelligence, ingenuity, and hard work purchased 100 years ago, be sure to take the Ranger led Keys Ranch tour. Sign up at the Oasis Visitor Center at the corner of Utah Trail and National Park Drive in 29 Palms.

Destination	Distance	Time (not including nature watching)
Desert Queen Mine	1.2 miles round-trip	40 minutes—2+ hrs for the additional trails
Pine City	3.0 miles round-trip	1.5 hours
Lucky Boy Vista	2.5 miles round-trip	1.2 hours

All hikes are **rated easy** with minimum elevation gain. The trails are old mining roads. You will see footprints but rarely other hikers.

Best time for hiking is October to April but because you are at 4,400 feet elevation you can enjoy these hikes in the early hours of the day or take advantage of the long evenings during the summer. Besides being cooler, the setting (or rising) sun highlights the rock formations, bringing out wonderful details--be sure to bring a camera.

Warning! Open Mine Shafts

When hiking around old mines, be alert. Mine shafts are dangerous and it is your responsibility to take care. There are 600 open shafts in the park and although some have been fenced off, this fencing can be old and failing. Many shafts have not been fenced and are extremely dangerous. Fencing at the Desert Queen Mine is designed to protect the bats roosting in the shafts, as well as the reckless visitor.



Directions: From Twentynine Palms Highway (Highway 62) turn right (south) on Utah Trail. After you stop at the Entry Kiosk continue another 4.8 miles, staying to the right on Park Route 12 when the road forks left to Cottonwood Station and I-10. You will pass Jumbo Rocks on your left before seeing the sign for Geology Tour Road. Turn right, the opposite direction to GTR, and proceed on the excellent dirt road for 1.4 miles. Do not take that hard left toward Barker Dam but continue straight a few more yards to the Pine City Trailhead and Backcountry Board. Both Pine City and Desert Queen Mine trails leave from this point. There are restroom facilities.

Desert Queen Mine



Foundations of rock cabin close to the trailhead

Of the three mining areas described in this series, the Desert Queen Mine has the most colorful and violent history. As you walk down the trail, feeling a soft wind tickling your skin or listening to the melodic song of a Scott's oriole dancing on the breeze, contrast this silence and peace with the tensions of gold lust felt during the mid 1800s.



Spinv Lizard

Frank James discovered the mine in 1864. His good fortune was short lived when (according to one story) a cowboy working for the McHaney brothers gunned him down. The McHaney took over the mine, made a fortune (either 2 million dollars or \$100,000, depending on the story teller) and then wasted it on the usual things. Ultimately, the mine was purchased and then later acquired by Bill Keys, a local rancher and prospector, in payment for back wages. Operating from 1895 to 1961, the Desert Queen Mine was one of the richest strikes in the Park, as well as one of the longest operating mines.

All that remains of the mining operation today is a huge pile of ore tailings; the foundations of a rock cabin, two cyanide tanks, miscellaneous machinery, and fenced off shafts. At the fork in the trail bear left to an overlook of the mining area and an interpretive sign. Return to the fork and follow the other trail to the old stone cabin. Past the cabin, on your way to the mine area, there is a short stretch with small loose rocks--alert children to take care as they make their way down. Be on the lookout for colorful rocks in the tailing piles adjacent to the highest shafts. The colors are best seen in the morning light. There are trails leading in all directions from the main trail. You will benefit from exploring any of them but remember to always check your landmarks to prevent getting lost.



Main tailings at Desert Queen Mine



Bat friendly mine shaft covering



Abandoned machinery built by the Chicago Pneumatic Tool Company



Pine City

The scenic trek to the now extinct Pine City is a gentle walk over an old mining road.

Richly vegetated with pinyon pine, oak, Joshua trees, Mojave yucca and nolina, there are also numerous cactus and shrub species.



During late spring, following good

rains, this is a wild flower garden. Scott's orioles and black-throated sparrows are commonly seen and horned and whiptail lizards are apt to scurry across the road. Spiny lizards can be seen posing on the rocks of the boulder field reached midway into your walk. The trail circles the boulders and continues to the north to a viewpoint overlooking Pine City Canyon and Valley Mountain on the desert floor. Be sure to allow time for exploring in the rocks and the upper edges of the canyons. The return trip provides views to the west of San Jacinto and San Gorgonio, the tallest mountains in southern California,



Pictures clockwise: boulder pile and pinyon pines near Pine City site; Joshua Tree fruit; view north toward Valley Mountain in Wonder Valley; aplitic dike in granite boulder with nolina in front; natural garden with Mojave yucca, barrel cactus, pancake cholla, blackbrush, and rocks.

Lucky Boy Vista

The trailhead is reached .9 miles after turning right from Park Route 12 in the direction of Pine City. There is a small parking area and backcountry sign. This is the gentlest of the three walks described here. Although the sandy road is covered with footprints, the fresh rabbit dust baths and quail tracks prepare you for a solitary walk. The trail, leading to the Elton Mine, climbs through a boulder and pinyon tableland.

During late spring and early summer this area can be a wild flower garden. A mile in you will walk around a gate and in another .2 miles there is a series of unfenced and (collapsing) fenced

mine shafts to your right. Explore but take care since the vertical shafts are dangerous. A short distance beyond the mine area is a beautiful overlook.



Early evening walk to Elton Mine through boulder gardens



View to the southeast from the Lucky Boy Vista



Mineshaft with protective

Guide Books available at Oasis Visitor Center

74485 National Park Dr. 29 Palms

Pre- order from the Joshua Tree National Park Association <https://www.joshuatree.org>

Best Easy Day Hikes, Joshua Tree. Bill Cunningham and Polly Burke. Falcon Press.

Day-hiking California's National Parks. Ann Marie Brown. Foghorn Press.

Growing Up At the Desert Queen Ranch. Willis Keys and Art Kidwell. Desert Moon Press.