

# Ryan Ranch and Vicinity ~ Joshua Tree National Park

Text and photos by Pat Flanagan

**Destination**

Ryan Ranch

**Distance**

.5 miles from parking area

**Time**

1 hour to ½ day

Ryan Ranch parking area is located between the Ryan Mountain trailhead (east end) and the turnoff for the Ryan Campground (west end) — 18 miles from the Oasis Visitor Center in Twentynine Palms and 16 miles from the west Entrance in Joshua Tree.

The level sandy trail is appropriate for children and there are boulders areas offering gentle slopes as well as more difficult pitches. There is an historic adobe remains to explore as well as evidence left by the Indians called the valley home. During the winter, especially when there are clouds in the sky to provide interesting shadows, is a good time to explore the area. During the summer months anytime exploring at dawn or later in the day, grading into the evening, will offer both release from the heat on the valley floor and good photographic opportunities.



**Reference:** The interesting story of this area is provided in *Joshua Tree National Park - A Visitor's Guide* by Robert B. Cates. It is available in the park Visitor Centers or through the Joshua Tree National Park Association <http://www.joshuatree.org/>

Much of the early history of Joshua Tree National Park is triggered by the names of popular destinations, trails, and canyons. In 1895 the Ryan brothers, Thomas and J.D. “Jep” bought three quarters of the interest in the Lost Horse Mine and began development of the diggings in earnest. To insure a water supply for their mine the brothers homesteaded at Lost Horse Well at the base of Ryan Mountain. Today a “melted” adobe, the water tank, and several other newer buildings are the most visible footprint of their successful ranching and mining operation.

More subtle, and rewarding to find, are the grave sites marked by circles of stones and one large boulder which notes the resting place of James- 1893 and Lopes-1894.





There are reported to be at least 8 gravesites, can you find that many?



Indian habitation remains include several rocks with grinding holes or morteros and on a small rock art panel with three figures tucked away in one of the boulder piles.



For those wanting to see more it is possible to access a portion of the California Riding and Hiking Trail as it winds past Ryan Campground. The trail goes through a low divide to the east. Be sure to consult the expanded map of this area in the Park Guide, available when entering the park.



“Headstone Rock” —signature monolith between Ryan Ranch and the Campground



West of the adobe are several large flat granite boulders that have been used as an artists canvas in the not too distant past.



Please do not disturb them or add to them. Removing rocks from the surrounding areas will eliminate habitat for small critters and possibly change the flow of water across the landscape causing new erosion patterns. As you look around notice also that rocks often provide sheltering “nurseries” for plants, including cactus.





Following is a visual description of the area with its low scrub vegetation supported by a thin soil and gravel layer atop the granitic bedrock punctuated by dramatic boulder piles or insulbergs. The taller plants include Joshua trees of many ages and sizes and its relative the Mojave yucca, oak, pinyon pine, and juniper. Many species of cactus grow here with exceptional stands of the silver cholla.



Occasionally native bunch grasses are seen but heavy cattle grazing in the past has generally replaced them with exotic annual grasses. The annual grasses now provide a continuous ground cover, which has fueled fires of unprecedented size.

