

# Surprise Canyon

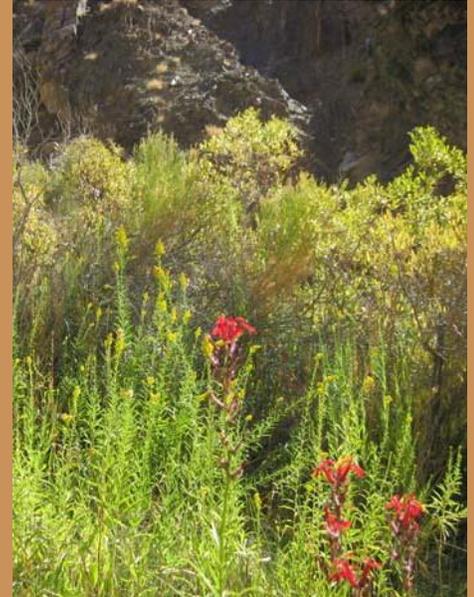
## Proposed Wild & Scenic River

**Size:** Approximately 6 miles long

**Management Agency:**  
Bureau of Land Management,  
Ridecrest Field Office

**Location:** Inyo County. From Los Angeles take I-15 North toward Barstow. Take the Highway 395 North exit and continue to the Trona-Wildrose Road. Head East, past Trona to Ballarat and follow signs for Surprise Canyon. Maps: BLM Desert Access Guide Darwin Hills

*Photos courtesy of Laurel Williams*



**Landscape:** Surprise Canyon is a true rarity in the California desert with a year-round flow of water, waterfalls, and thickets of willows and other riparian plant life. This narrow canyon has served as a trail through the Panamint Mountains for Native Americans for millennia and more recently in the last century for miners and explorers.

### **Wildlife**

**& Plants:** The canyon supports 15 square miles of Bighorn Sheep habitat, and the rare Panamint daisy among many other unique plants and animals.

### **Threats:**

ORV use is a main threat in the area. Over the last few decades ORVs were allowed to use the canyon to the point that portions of it became almost like a road. Heavy rains and flooding have since washed out the route, giving way to extensive riparian growth and an abundance of recovered animal and plant habitat. Despite this, the BLM allowed extreme ORV enthusiasts to continue driving up the canyon, even though they had to winch their vehicles up the falls. This caused severe damage to the plant and animal habitats from driving and from oil and fuel spills due to flipped vehicles and break downs. At peak use, about 120 ORVs attempted to go up Surprise Canyon in a year. The BLM has since closed the canyon to vehicles until an EIS can be completed, and since then approximately 500 day-hikers go through the canyon annually. Despite this, ORV enthusiasts continue to push for the canyon to be reopened.

### **Activity**

#### **Highlight:**

This area provides opportunity for bouldering. Exploring the well vegetated canyon, scrambling over the rocks, and getting your feet wet in the river is the ideal way to keep cool in the desert heat. For more adventurous hikers, the Panamint City ghost town is 7 miles up the canyon and provides a glimpse of the mining history of the area as well as a remote and primitive camp site.

### **For More Information:**

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