

Desert Trail Known Issues

Carrizo Gorge Issues; Read partial journal entries to see what we encountered on two hikes of Carrizo Gorge:

2022 Carrizo Gorge: Day 1, Melanie & Yeti's attempt; You cross under the highway after about a mile and then walk along the other side on a sketchy hillside for a bit. It took a while for us to figure out a good route north/northwest as there was quite a bit of dense brush...all with thorns! Finally, we did find a spot that was more open and we headed cross-country in the general direction of Carrizo Gorge. The surrounding hills have strange boulders or rocks (see photo). Beautiful sunny day, started out a bit cool (32 degrees) but it warmed up and was quite pleasant. We did manage to find a bit of shade for lunch and proceeded on to find a way down into the gorge once we got about 7 miles in. We soon found a way down that looked do-able and not too steep. The railroad trestles were visible on the other side of the gorge high on the wall of the mountain. There were scores of people on the tracks: runners, a bicyclist, walkers and some backpackers...and it's technically illegal to be there. Zig-zagging down, we finally got to the bottom, where we found two good pools of water. We did fill our bottles - never pass up water in the desert! The entrance to Carrizo Gorge was horrendous: totally choked with dense vegetation, prickly and almost impassable. We tried to find a way through on the sides to avoid as much of the horrid tangle, trying not too successfully to find any game trails higher up. It was a tough and frustrating afternoon...we made hardly any progress, doing less than a mile in three hours! At that rate, we worried about our progress and discussed what to do. Finally, we simply found a good camp site with room for one tent. And, we decided to try for the railroad tracks in the morning. That way, we could have a good surface to walk on and make some miles. Good views of the gorge from up there too. The wall opposite where we camped looked steep but climbable and it looked as though we could attain the flat part of the tracks. We could hear water trickling in the weeds all night, though the creek was not visible to the eye. Exhausted, we fell asleep almost immediately.

Day 2; We got an early start. I was a bit worried about climbing that steep hillside and also simply crossing over to the other side of the gorge! It took us 45 minutes just to get to the other side...but we did find water. Up, up we went carefully picking our way up the steep, rocky slope. We had to traverse over past a bouldery section to get from the trestle part to the part of the tracks that was flat. We were thrilled when we stepped up onto flat ground on the tracks. I cooked us a hot drink to celebrate. Now, we could actually make some progress. A couple of runners passed us and they seemed to know the area well and told us that we should be able to get back into the gorge further on. Yeti's legs though were beginning to bother him. The disk issue which nagged at him before we left for the trip was rearing it's ugly head! But, we soldiered on enjoying the easier tread and the views down the canyon and the tracks! It was kind of interesting to be up on this abandoned track; though terrible to see all of the human dross and garbage that was left behind, including abandoned rail cars both on the tracks and down in some of the hillsides. Rusting reminders of our throw-away culture. We actually stopped at one time so we could do some stretching hoping that would help the disk problem for Yeti. Lovely cactus along the way. We did come across some budding flowers. It's so dry and stark, but the plants that manage to be there are quite remarkable. We saw some kind of phacelia and other small wild flowers. One of the spooky things was walking through the tunnels. The final one we did had a rock slide at the far end and we had to climb over

the rocks to get out of the tunnel! We'd met the runners again coming back in the other direction and we asked for some more advice about where the tracks bent away from the gorge and for a good place to descend. It looked like Goat Canyon might be the spot. From there, we looked ahead and most of the cliffs looked a bit forbidding, so Goat Canyon it was! The canyon was long, so not the short route. The beginning was steepish, and we had a rocky descent, having to pick our way from a cliff face to a better way down along a ridge. It was slow going. Have to be careful not to fall on the rocks. Eventually, the canyon got a bit less steep, but it still took over 3 hours to finally gain the floor of the gorge. Luckily, here it widened up and the vegetation was not dense as before. We found a nice sandy camp and slept the sleep of the damned!

Day 3; Up early as usual. Yeti and I headed off down the gorge, now partly sandy, partly rocky, some brush. Glad it was so much more passable. We wound our way as the walls of the gorge led us right or left depending on the course of the landscape. It always amazes me in these dry areas to see any plants surviving, but these hardy desert plants are not just pretty faces...no they are a prickly lot but beautiful in there own way. Bees buzzing, birds and slithery lizards were the only "wildlife" we saw this day. Progress was still not fast. Care had to be taken to pick our way through boulders, but eventually the canyon widened again and a faint jeep track was occasionally visible. Small cairns also helped guide the way on a used track. After about 3 or 4 miles, we got to the jeep road that comes in from Highway S2 near our cache 1. It was easy going from here.

2024 attempt by Yeti alone, Day 1; I headed out on the railroad tracks to avoid the heavily overgrown section we couldn't get thru in 2022. I had picked a spot to get back into the Carrizo Gorge earlier than we did in 2022 as it looked OK on satellite pictures. That actually turned out to be true BUT what you can't see on satellites are the boulder issues & how thick the brush actually is.

Two of the railroad tunnels on the tracks now have locked gates so I had to take the trails around them which added miles & used up time. After a very steep 1500 foot descent in the gorge with loose rocks I started to hike the gorge which is beautiful. However, after a while I ran into an area blocked by huge boulders with 20 to 30 foot drops. One had a slanting 20-foot drop into a deep pool so I didn't want to try it except as a last resort. After trying 3 others & not being able to get thru the thick brush I went back to the pool route. I put my phone in a zip lock bag & put it in my pack which I put in my lap & slid into the pool. Only butt deep so I lucked out although I lost 2 hours trying to get thru before. After that it was clear sailing until I got past where we had camped in 2022. There had been 2 places that could have been bad but someone had chopped a path.

Not good this year though as it was very overgrown. Doable for a while but slow. But then I ran out of luck and I could not go any further. I tried both sides, back-tracked & found a boulder to climb up on. There was a drop of about 10 feet into what looked like short fern-like bushes. I crashed thru a 3- or 4-foot-high plant that was worse than Alder. I landed on my back (fortunately) but could not move. I cursed myself for such a stupid decision. It took me 45 minutes just to get my pack off, break enough branches to extract myself, and stand up to put my pack back on. It had turned dark by then (6:30pm) so the rest of the day was by flashlight.

I finally found a way thru by hearing the frogs chirping in the creek & heading for that. I had long since run out of water so I got some more in the creek. By this time it was after 9pm so I wasn't going to make it out

today. It had taken me 3 hours breaking off branches to get thru 50 feet of brush! I then hiked as close to where a road starts as I could but gave up at 11:30pm (17 hours of the hardest hiking I have ever done.) Check out Melanie's photos of my hiking pants all bloodied from the knees down. Above the knees spots of blood all over the thighs. That's from hidden Cat's Claw & cactus.

In the meantime our Starlink quit working so Melanie was freaking out because she didn't know where I was. She drove back to Ocotillo to get WIFI & actually called 911 for help, which I have told her not to do - ever. I have a mini 2 & can ask for my own rescue if I deem it necessary. Fortunately, she got an old message I did not send that said Estimated Arrival 2 hours so she called the rescue off. Then she drove back to the jeep track and down the dirt road as far as she could & slept there. She got my All is Okay, in Camp message. I was hoping that she might drive in to meet me because I was so dehydrated that I could not eat & I saved one sip of water to take my morning meds. --- It turns out I DID send the ETA message but have no memory of doing it as I was hallucinating from extreme dehydration. I even heard Melanie saying "there's Yeti's tent" right after I got in the tent. I got out and yelled to her, but no one was there. The next morning we met after I hiked 1 ½ miles. She was 3 miles away from me last night. Fortunately, she had water & food with her so I was able to re-hydrate & get some food into me.

What had been cleared in 2022 had overgrown so bad by 2024 I barely made it thru so I don't recommend hiking Carrizo Gorge any more plus the tunnels are starting to get locked up on the railroad tracks although I found trails going around them to hike so that part was easy. However, the tracks bend away from the Gorge so you have to go back into the gorge unless you do the alternate route which I recommend instead.