



direct sun in the afternoon. My favorite photographs have been taken in the morning with a dark arch against a light sky for better contrast. In less than a quarter mile, at a small metal sign describing Arch Rock, leave the trail and continue straight ahead, into a narrow passageway between tall walls of light pink granite. To reach the best spot for your tripod, you must squeeze between several boulders and then step up to the next level where you will find a wider passageway. You'll be on the west side of the arch, which is silhouetted in morning light. You might prefer the direct lighting you'll find late in the afternoon, or the more diffused light of an overcast day.

Arch Rock has an opening about thirty-five feet wide and about fifteen-feet high. If you are good at rock scrambling, you might find a better spot for your tripod. Remember that it's always easier to climb up onto a rock than to climb back down. Pack a lens in the 12-24mm range for this composition. If you are going to be camping in Joshua Tree, there are eight campgrounds with almost five hundred campsites in this park. White Tank is my favorite campground.

## **Barker Dam**

The 1.2 mile loop trail, with only a 40' elevation change, to **Barker Dam** is one of the best and most used short paths in Joshua Tree National Park, encountering a variety of interesting scenery: open flats, granite boulders, a seasonal reservoir, a cliff bearing Indian petroglyphs, and many species of desert plants including plenty of Joshua trees. The path begins along the paved road past the **Hidden Valley campground**, on the north side of Lost Horse Valley; another trail links with the camp to allow for a longer loop hike of 3.5 miles. Barker Dam is built across a small, transient stream between boulders at the edge of the **Wonderland of Rocks**, the weathered, convoluted landscape that extends several miles north towards Indian Cove. Besides the excellent scenery this is also a popular rock climbing location, as the sheer granite boulders provide many short but challenging pitches, and there are several notable sites a short distance along the trail.

Trail to the Dam: The path begins at a good sized parking area, shared with another short (unmaintained) trail to **Wonderland Wash**, a little further east. It first crosses a sandy area then runs between some big granite rocks, along the course of a dry wash, and soon reaches a larger clearing, location of the reservoir. Interpretive notices along the path describe some of the plants en route, which include several types of flowering cactus though there are no Joshua trees in this section. Although up to ten feet deep and quite extensive in winter, the reservoir dries up almost entirely in summer, replaced by a field of green grass; the high water mark is evident by a dark ring all around the enclosing cliffs. In summer, the grass grows thicker closer to the dam, and gives way to mud flats next to the residual pool - a little water persists even in the hottest weather, though this is then shallow, muddy and home to numerous flies. Barker Dam is a small concrete structure, about 2 feet thick and 20 feet high in the middle; it was built by local cattle ranchers at the start of the 20th century and now appears on the National Register of Historic Places.

## **Skull Rock**

It is probably one of the most photographed rock formations in Joshua Tree NP. It is accessible from Park Boulevard. You can park along Park Boulevard and see Skull Rock from the road. Walking a hundred feet to the formation, you can photograph its distinctive shape from a few different angles. You can also walk across the road, following the trail, and climb a small rock formation to the left of the trail and photograph Skull Rock with a 300mm lens in order to compress and isolate the skull. The impressions in the rock that form the eye sockets in the skull shape are called tafoni (singular: tafone). A tafone is a small cave-like feature or honeycombed pockmark in a rock's surface. Rainwater accumulates in these impressions and bit-by-bit, erosion occurs and the tafoni become deeper. The 1.7-mile Skull Rock Trail, with no elevation change, begins at the Jumbo Rocks campground amphitheater and winds through the tors and boulders to rounded Skull Rock. Signs along the trail explain desert plants and geology. Past the rock the trail crosses the road and slices through bedrock canyons.

## **Wall Street Mill**

From Oasis Visitor Center, Follow Twentynine Palms Highway (62) westward to Joshua Tree. In Joshua Tree turn left on Park Boulevard, which becomes Quail Springs Road after crossing Alta Loma Drive. Follow Quail Springs Road to the improved road that leads to Hidden Valley Campground. Continue driving past the campground entrance about 1.5 miles to an unmarked dirt road. Turn left on this road that is the first road past Barker Dam parking area. Drive .25 miles to the trailhead.

The Wall Street Mill Trail leads into the Wonderland of Rocks from the northeastern end of Hidden Valley. This route has the highest concentration of mining era ruins of any trail in the park. It leads north from the trailhead .75 miles, passing a house foundation, historic site marker, a windmill and stamp mill. Visitors interested in the industrial history of the area will enjoy this short trek.

## **Camera Equipment**

Camera body with extra batteries

Lenses with sun shades, tele-extendors, extension tubes  
Filters: ND filters, Polarizing filter  
Lots & lots of CF or SD cards, whichever your camera uses  
Tripod  
Flashlight, Headlamp

### **Food & Water**

Lunch: bring a sack-type lunch with you  
Bring plenty of drinking water with you

### Several things you need to be aware of:

1. It will be cold in the early hours, wear warm clothing. Layer your clothes, it will warm up as the day goes on. We will walk several trails and your body temperature will rise if you can't remove a layer of clothing. When we walk trails, we will walk VERY SLOWLY. A friend has a very truthful saying: "Walk Slow and Read". If you walk too fast, you will miss many photo opportunities. And, we can talk photography as we walk.
2. Bring a lunch with you.
3. Bring PLENTY of water. There are plenty of restrooms in the park but no known water.
4. There will be considerable driving while we are in the park so be sure your fuel tank is full as there is NO fuel in the park.
5. On Saturday evening I may try some "Painting with Light" on Arch Rock so bring a flashlight or a flash with gels. Color on Arch Rock always looks good. Also bring a small LED flashlight or a headlamp for the walk back out to the vehicles.
6. Cholla Gardens is a very special place to photograph at sunrise. If you have a macro lens, bring it. You will also need a tripod. Several of us will have a pair of pliers because a few of you will get the spiny spears in your clothing or skin and they ONLY come out with pliers. BEWARE of the spiny spear (they call them the "jumping cholla" for a good reason). Also... bring a black cloth to use as a background for your macro photographs.
7. Regarding lenses. You will want a wide angle lens (16-35mm range), a normal lens (24-105mm range) and a longer lens (70-200mm range). If you have a fish-eye lens, a macro lens or extension tubes, bring them along.
8. Bring a very sturdy tripod with you !!!
9. A pair of knee pads or a blanket you can fold up to kneel on is a good idea. Just don't do it in Cholla Gardens!
10. If you are staying overnight, I would suggest a motel in 29 Palms. Or you can camp in one of the many campgrounds at the park.
11. Most of all, this photo shoot is about socializing with other photographers, learning from each other and HAVING FUN.