

# Valley of Fire aflame with color



**OUT BACK**  
with Doug Morgan

Winding through sun-scorched hills, the first thing you notice are the colors. In the distance, traces of red, yellow, and cobalt blue splash the barren landscape.

As you drive closer, the ground swells and the colors grow more and more vibrant. It's about this time that you curse yourself for forgetting the Instamatic.

Before you know it, you're lost in the drama of the hills: forbidding walls of blood-red rock close in, arches threaten overhead.

At any moment you expect the hills to come crashing down around you. But they don't. Their craggy faces have looked that way for a million years, and will probably look that way for a million more.

It's springtime in the Valley of Fire and signs of new life are everywhere.

Flooding the foothills and basins are streams of yellow and indigo, the run-off hues of blossoming marigolds and mallow.

The gentle flow of gold sweeps the broken base of the crimson bluffs and windswept canyons where a raven soars a thermal, wheeling and gliding with the pleasant heat.

High in the rocks above, a big-horn ram surveys the brilliant valley below, perhaps seeing the small coyote with its litter of pups hiking across the lowlands, the same coyote you caught a glimpse of only moments ago. Whatever the wonderful sights, your eye is always drawn back to the sumptuous colors.

They weren't kidding when

they named this place the Valley of Fire. Dedicated in 1935, the Valley, Nevada's oldest state park, takes its name from the dazzling red sandstone formations created 150 million years ago from the gigantic sand dunes of the Jurassic Period.

Much of what visitors see today are the eroded remains of those dunes, sculpted over time by the wind and the rain.

The fierce reds and blacks of the hills provide a stark contrast to the surrounding desert while the remote canyons hold a fascinating clue to prehistoric life for those willing to hike a bit.

"Of the 270,000 people who visit the Valley of Fire each year, most start their tour at the park's west entrance," said Tory Lyles, a park service ranger who leads guided trips through the valley. "That's because a number of interesting finds such as the Beehives, Atlatl Rock, and some classic examples of petrified wood are found here."

The Beehives derive their name from the odd way these sandstone formations have been shaped by the elements. Atlatl Rock is the site of ancient Indian petroglyphs, one of many areas in the park where examples of Indian rock art can be found.

The prehistoric Indians used the atlatl, a predecessor of the bow and arrow, to add speed to a thrown spear, and it is at the rock that visitors can find depictions of the device.

Nearby are interpretive trails that lead to the petrified wood remains. 225 million years ago these logs and stumps washed ashore from ancient forests and were buried under layers of silt.

Over time, the wood was replaced by crystallized rock, leaving behind what we know today as petrified wood.

After these sites, a stop at the visitors center is in order. The center offers several exhibits on the geology, ecology and history of the park and can provide maps which point out the park's principle features. Several park rangers are on hand to answer questions about the park.

Hikers who wish to strike out on their own should inquire at the visitors center for suggestions as to

the best areas. Drinking water and restrooms are also available. The center is open daily from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

From the center, Petroglyph Canyon is right up the road and is a definite must-see.

The half-mile long, self-guiding trails twists through a spectacular chasm and it is here that some of the park's best petroglyphs can be found. Trail markers point out entire walls covered with drawings, some dating back more than 2000 years.

Each petroglyph tells a story: tales of great chiefs or great hunts or great disasters; each symbol bears mute testimony to a time and people long past.

With great, towering precipices of rock looming overhead and those strange symbols emblazoning the sheer walls, you get a strange sensation as the wind rushes through the canyon. With a little imagination it's easy to still hear the Indians.

Traveling east of the visitor center, Seven Sisters should be your next stop.

A fascinating natural formation of weathered stones, the Sisters are a unique spot for a picnic during a tour of the valley.

The last stop in the valley is a must: the Cabins. According to Lyles, these intriguing sandstone cabins were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's as shelter for weary travelers. The Cabins are located near the park's eastern entrance.

The Valley of Fire is one of those places where beauty and relaxation go hand in hand. Without the DO-IT-NOW! crowds of Lake Mead or Mt. Charleston, this park is truly a marvel of nature. Little wonder that visitors to the valley write comments in the registration book like Fabulous!, Great!!, Wonderful! and Very Peaceful.

Still, it's always the colors that bring you back.



photos by Doug Morgan

## Valley of Fire for a hot spring break

By Doug Morgan  
YELLIN' REBEL

Access to the Valley of Fire is simple via I-15. Only 55 miles north of Vegas, take the Valley of Fire/Rt. 40 exit and continue east 18 miles. The road is ruggedly cracked and pitted, so make sure your vehicle is in good repair before heading out.

Because food and water are hard to come by in the area it may be a good idea to pack a lunch. There are a number picnic grounds throughout the park which provide gorgeous overlooks of the valley

and its fascinating sandstone reliefs; drinking water can be had at the visitors center, but make sure you bring along lots of ice for the water is not chilled.

There is so much to see and do in the Valley of Fire you may want to camp over for the weekend. There are two campgrounds with 50 units near the west end of the park. Campsites are equipped with tables, grills, water and restrooms. There is a nominal fee to use the area which is payable at the campground.

Keep in mind that over Spring Break lots of city weary students

may be visiting the Valley of Fire so campsites may be at a premium. Your best bet is to make your trip during the week (avoid the weekends at all costs) and to get there early.

The state park is also located near Overton and overlooks the Overton arm of Lake Mead. Boating, fishing, and sightseeing are all close by. For those interested in Indian culture, the nearby Lost City Museum in Overton features fine displays of Indian artifacts and reconstructions of original pit dwellings and pueblos found in the Moapa Valley.

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