

DAY TRIP TO THE SAND DUNES

To many people, sand dunes are the essence of the desert, but in Death Valley National Park they occur in only a few locations. The dunes near Stovepipe Wells are the easiest to visit and among the most beautiful in the park. This scenic drive will take a half day to visit, but a full day may be necessary if longer hikes are included.

Travel north of the **Furnace Creek Visitor Center** on Highway 190. In one mile you will come to the historic **Harmony Borax Works**. During the 1880s, borax “cottonballs” were gathered from the nearby salt flat and processed here before being transported out of Death Valley in the famous twenty mule team wagons. Continuing from the parking area, the improved dirt **Mustard Canyon Road** loops through yellow badlands to rejoin Highway 190 in one mile.

Salt Creek

Distance ... 14 miles from Furnace Ck.

Time1/2 hour or more

Back on the main road, you will skirt around the flat expanse of Cottonball Basin, pass the junction with the Beatty cut- off road, then arrive at the short dirt road leading to **Salt Creek**. An easy, half-mile boardwalk trail loops around the home of the rare Salt Creek Pupfish. The tiny fish are usually best seen in the springtime when it is their mating season. Watch for the blue-colored male pupfish actively defending their territories. Interpretive signs along the trail allow a self-guided tour of this unique environment.



Salt Creek. Photo Courtesy of NPS.

Sand Dunes

Distance..... 22 miles from Furnace Ck.

Time1/2 hour or more

Highway 190 continues north, passes the road junction to Scotty’s Castle, then swings west across the valley. The highway passes through the **Devil’s Cornfield** where clumps of arrowweed plants growing on mounds of soil somewhat resemble corn shocks. Wind has swept soil from around the plants, while at the same time depositing sand in the branches, forcing them to grow higher.



Devil’s Cornfield. Photo Courtesy of NPS.

Soon the **sand dunes** come into view north of the road. There are no established trails into the dunes, but trails are not necessary. Park your car where the road seems closest to the tall dunes and walk where you please. A popular goal is the highest dune about 2 miles out. An interpretive sign (5· miles west of the Scotty’s Castle road junction) provides more information on the dunes. Winds laden with sand are slowed by nearby mountains, forcing them to drop their gritty load onto this area. Although the individual dunes are constantly shifting, the dune field as a whole remains in the same general location. The many ripples and sinuous wind patterns in the sand are best seen either early or late in the day.

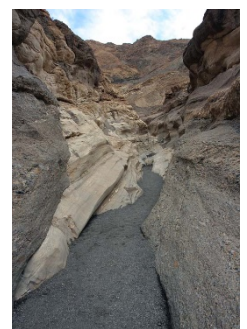
Mosaic Canyon

Distance 26 miles from Furnace Ck.

Timeone to two hours

The tiny oasis of **Stovepipe Wells Village** provides a bit of shade as well as fuel, food, lodging, and camping. Just beyond the village is the two mile long gravel road climbing up to **Mosaic Canyon**. Hike up this beautiful canyon a short distance to see the half-mile-long narrows with its smoothly eroded marble walls. You may continue your hike beyond the narrows another 1· miles to a cliff, which blocks further access up canyon.

To return to Furnace Creek, follow Highway 190 directly back.



Mosaic Canyon by Bob Greenburg.