

**Hike:** Charleston Peak — up and back or open loop (car shuttle required) Trail # 146

**Trailhead:** North Loop Trail along State Route 158.

**Distance:** 22 miles — round trip

**Elevation gain:** 3,554 feet.

**Elevation Peak:** 11,918 feet

**Time:** 9-12 hours.

**Difficulty:** 5

**Danger level:** 3

**How easy to follow:** 1

**Children:** no

**Map:** Charleston Peak, NEV See Page 6

**Fee:** None

**Directions:** From the Mirage Hotel and Casino on Las Vegas Boulevard (the Strip) go north 1.5 miles and turn west (left) onto Sahara. In less than one mile, turn north (right) onto I-15. Take I-15 two miles to US 95 north. Take US 95 north 14 miles to State Route 157. Turn left on 157, drive 17.7 miles and turn right onto State Route 158. Drive five miles to the North Loop trailhead sign, which is located on the left (west) side of the road.

**Overview:** The **trail** starts in a northerly direction climbing to the North Ridge Rim and then heads south to the base of Mt. Charleston Peak. A one-mile killer trek puts you at the highest spot in southern Nevada.

**Comments:** If you want to feel on top of the world, this is the hike. The area's only treeless peak that engenders the feeling of standing at the top of a real mountain. You must come prepared for this all-day hike. A shorter route begins at Trail Canyon and meets up with the North Loop trail at the junction. This route is 16 miles, round trip. See the last page for details.

**The Hike:** The trail starts off at an easy grade wandering past ponderosa pine, pinion pine, and mountain mahogany. To the east on Angel Peak rests a large, white, ball-shape observatory. The trail has a few moderate switchbacks before reaching a plateau. At the plateau look to the NE for a good view. Several bristlecone pines are scattered throughout this area indicating you are above 9,000



**Photo 1**

feet. After 12 moderately steep switchbacks, the trail climbs to 10,200 feet. It then descends 150 feet over the next 0.33 of a mile. Looking west you can see glimpses of Mummy Mountain. The limestone cliffs of Mummy's Toe are hovering directly in front of the trail. Raintree, the giant bristlecone pine, is over 3,000 years old and acts as a dividing point. A wooden sign next to Raintree indicates your options and the distances. Continue another mile and a half to the junction of Trail Canyon. (See Photo 1.)

From the junction the North Loop Trail heads NW around Mummy Mountain. The grade is moderate as you enter the dead forest. This "people-caused fire" in the late 1940s burned more than 500 acres. Scattered throughout the dead forest are aspens that turn orange and yellow in the fall. Look to the left (south), for a great view of Kyle Canyon; directly in front looms Charleston Peak. (See Photo 2.)



**Photo 2**

About a mile from the junction is Cave Springs. (See Photo 3.) Water runs into a horse trough and a path goes up to a cave-like overhang above the horse trough. The North Loop Trail



**Photo 3**



**Photo 4**

continues southerly through the dead forest and aspens, as the grade becomes steeper. It makes a horseshoe bend and heads NE before switching back and heading west toward the North Rim Ridge. A little less than a mile from the horseshoe bend, a series of bluffs to the left of the trail offers great views of Kyle Canyon. The aspens disappear up here, since the elevation is more than 10,000 feet.

The trail flattens as it heads SW around the series of bluffs. Charleston Peak goes in and out of view as the trail starts to imitate a roller coaster. The trail flattens out again and cuts through a forest of bristlecone pines. Three overlooks to the north (right) offer the first views of the Sisters, Mack's Peak, and McFarland Peak. The third overlook also has a great view of Charleston Peak and Kyle Canyon, making this one of the best views in the Mt. Charleston area. The trail continues in a SW direction as it winds along the base of cliffs. A few short but steep switchbacks bring you to the North Rim Ridge. As the final switchback turns to the left, a short path to the right leads to the ridge. Plan to spend a few minutes catching your breathe while you take in the fantastic view of all the northern mountains of the Mt. Charleston area.

The trail remains flat as it heads SE below Devil's Thumb. (See Photo 4.) Mt. Charleston comes in and out of view as the trail traverses the rocky ledges. Trees are scarce since the elevation is over 11,000 feet. The trail heads around a few bluffs; it seems to take forever to arrive at the base

of Charleston Peak. It makes one switchback and climbs around a final bluff before the near mile-long trek to the peak.

The last part of the trail is a series of steep switchbacks. The grade is 17%. It's important to drink plenty of water before and during this section. One cause of altitude sickness is a lack of water!

Congratulations, you're standing, or lying down questioning your sanity, at the highest point in southern Nevada. Take a moment to experience the silence, breath the clean air, and be thankful you're in good enough shape to be standing on the peak. The peak offers a fantastic 360-degree view of southern Nevada, eastern California, and southern Utah. An Army box contains a sign-in book. A dug out fort is a favorite resting spot before starting back down.

**To Descend:** You can retrace your steps or follow the South Loop Trail **east** back to its trailhead. If you choose to hike down the South Loop Trail, turn east (left) at the trail sign before Griffith Peak. From there it's four miles back to Kyle Canyon, the trailhead for the South Loop Trail.

**To return to the North Loop trailhead:** Drive 3.4 miles down State Route 157. Turn left onto State Route 158 and drive five miles to the trailhead.

**To return to Trail Canyon trailhead:** Go north a half mile down the paved road (State Route 157) to Echo Drive. Turn west (left) on Echo Drive and continue another half mile to your car.

### **Starting the hike from Trail Canyon:**

Distance: 16 miles Time: 7 to 10 hours

From the Mirage on Las Vegas Boulevard (the Strip) go north 1.5 miles and turn left (west) onto Sahara. In less than one mile, turn right (north) onto I-15. Take I-15 two miles to US 95 north. Take US 95 north 14 miles to State Route 157. Go left on 157 for 20 miles and turn onto Echo Drive at

the hairpin curve. Drive half a mile to the trailhead sign for Trail Canyon. There is limited parking at the trailhead.

**The Hike:** Follow Trail Canyon Trail two miles to the intersection of the North Loop Trail. Head west (left) on the North Loop Trail. Follow the above directions from the intersection of these two trails.

