

1 Calico Basin/Red Spring Interpretive Trail

CALICO BASIN OFFERS A MIXED GRILL OF THE RED ROCK AREA'S BEST, INCLUDING riparian habitat, meadows, springs, and even some cultural resources, all within the area's signature Aztec sandstone landscape.

An easy way to taste it all is to take the Red Spring Interpretive Trail, which starts directly behind the picnic area. This will take you up a small rise and to the grassy bench above. From here the trail makes a one-half-mile loop around the perimeter of the meadow. This trail is accessible for wheelchairs and baby strollers.

The boardwalk was installed in 2005 as part of a restoration project to protect the environmentally sensitive areas. This way, visitors can still enjoy the area without disturbing the fragile ecosystem. Outside the boardwalk there is a fence to keep burros and horses from trampling these areas.

As you travel along the boardwalk, stop and read the interpretive signs. Be sure and take time to sit quietly a while on one of the many benches

Calico Basin in the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. A boardwalk installed in 2005 (not seen in this photo) protects this area from being trampled.



along the way, listening and looking for wildlife. Because of a permanent supply of water, lush vegetation, and surrounding canyons, many animals thrive here. More than one hundred species of birds have been recorded and the area is also home to mountain lions, kit foxes, coyotes, rabbits, ground squirrels, desert tortoises, and ringtail cats. I even had the good fortune of seeing a gray fox on one early morning visit.

There are three springs in this vicinity. Ash Spring, Calico Spring, and Red Spring provided reliable and vital water sources to humans for thousands of years. American Indians used this area and were followed by homesteaders and ranchers. As you make your way around the walkway and over to the sandstone cliffs, keep an eye out for rock art. There are two types in Red Rock Canyon, *petroglyphs* and *pictographs*. Here you will be seeing petroglyphs, which have been pecked into the surface of rock, whereas pictographs have been painted on the surface. Some of this rock art is thought to be over five thousand years old.

Once you reach the far end of the boardwalk from where you started, you will see the waters of Red Spring itself, flowing from a small tunnel or cave. If you look carefully you will see the many water-loving plants such as the

stream orchid, watercress, Nevada blue-eyed grass, and black-creeper sedge. The boardwalk protects not only these plants but also local inhabitants like red-spotted toads and Pacific chorus frogs.

A few biologically sensitive species also call this area home including the Spring Mountain springsnail, *Pyrgulopsis deaconi*, which is only found in three other local springs. The alkali Mariposa lily, which grows in the surrounding alkaline riparian meadow, is found only in a few other places in Southern California and Nevada. The largest population in Nevada is said to be the one here.

If you visited this area before the boardwalk was installed, you might remember being able to drive almost up to the base of Red Spring, and park there. As you travel along the boardwalk it's worth a look in that area to see how it has



been transformed. The old road has been covered over and replaced with native vegetation. It's on its way to restoration as original habitat.

Although this is an excellent place to go when your time is constrained, there are hiking trails just outside of the boardwalk area that are well worth exploring when you have more leisure. There is also a picnic area, with restrooms.

Calico Basin At A Glance

Best season: September–May.

Length: One-half mile loop.

Difficulty: Easy boardwalk.

Elevation gain: Minimal.

Trailhead elevation: 3,600 feet.

Jurisdiction: Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area.

Directions: From Red Rock Canyon's main entrance drive east on Charleston Boulevard (Route 159) for 1.4 miles. Go left onto Calico Basin Drive and drive about one mile to the signed parking area and trailhead.

2 Calico Tanks Trail

THE MAIN ATTRACTION OF THE CALICO TANKS TRAIL IS A LARGE *TINAJA* — A NATURAL waterhole or tank weathered into native rock. But the whole hike is interesting, taking you through a vegetated canyon within a white-and-red sandstone landscape.

Unless you arrive first thing in the morning you will probably find dozens of cars in the parking area. Although the hike is one of the most popular in the park, those cars did not all bring visitors to the tank. The parking lot also serves as the trailhead for Turtlehead Peak, and this is a popular area for rock climbers as well. It is also a favorite for those who come to just take a short and easy stroll around the colorful formations, and perhaps see the remnants of a historic sandstone quarry and an agave-roasting pit.

From the parking area head north along the wide and obvious trail. After