

DISTANCE: XXX miles

ELEVATION GAIN: XXX feet

ROUTE TYPE: XXX

Summary

Kofa National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1939 and is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The refuge encompasses 665,400 acres of pristine desert that is home to the desert bighorn sheep and the California palm, the only native palm in Arizona. Two hikes in this large area are described below. A steep climb to Signal Peak, the highest point in the area, and a short, on trail, hike up Palm Canyon. In case you were interested, the name 'Kofa' comes from a contraction of 'King of Arizona', which is the name of a profitable gold mine in the area which was operated between 1896 - 1910.

Directions

From Phoenix, take I-10 west about 120 miles to the strange little town of Quartzite (RV and snowbird capital of the world). Head south on US 95 for about 18 miles to between mile markers 86-85 and turn left (east) at the sign for Palm Canyon. Drive 3.3 miles on this good dirt road to the entry sign and information kiosk.

Palm Canyon: Continue straight on the good dirt road for 4 miles to its end.

Signal Peak: Turn left just past the entry sign at the sign for Queen Canyon Road #19 (zero your odometer here). The road is in decent shape for the first 4.6 miles, then becomes 4WD where it bends left to enter a rocky wash. Drive another 3 miles in the wash (the road is braided in places, choose the route that looks best to you) and park next to a rock cairn at the mouth of Ten Ewe Canyon (see below for gps coordinates).

Length

Palm Canyon: 1 mile

Signal Peak: 3 miles

Palm Canyon: From the road end, simply walk up the well defined trail into the canyon. There is a sign 0.5 miles up the path pointing into a side drainage where a cluster of palm trees (the only native palms in Arizona) are located. There are two theories as to why these California Fan Palms exist in the desert.

1) They are descendents of palms growing in the region during the last periods of North American glaciation. As the climate warmed to desert conditions, the trees spread into protected canyons, the only place they were able to survive.

2) The trees were spread from other palm groves by birds or coyotes carrying seeds in their digestive tracts.

I vote for the 'bird poop' theory. There doesn't seem to be a large enough population of the palms to have allowed them to survive as an isolated group for so long (but what do I know).

When ready, return the way you came.

Signal Peak: There is no maintained trail to the top of Signal Peak, but hikers have created a fairly well defined path that is marked at frequent intervals with cairns. This hike is best suited to those familiar with off trail hiking and route finding. The route is steep (climbing 2000 feet in 1.5 miles with sections of loose rock. Be careful of your footing, particularly during the descent. From the mouth of Ten Ewe Canyon, hike up the dry wash for 5-10 minutes looking for a cairn on the right side (GPS point S1).

Climb out of the main wash to the right and begin ascending moderately beside minor dry wash (which will be on your left). The path becomes more defined as you ascend and soon begins climbing steeply, eventually bending to the right to reach a flat spot above Indian Canyon which will be on your right (S2).

Looking upwards you be faced with a large amphitheater shaped drainage. The trail ascends up the left side of this drainage aiming for a spot to the right of Ten Ewe Mountain (the large blocky mountain above you and to the left). The path becomes rockier as you ascend and there may be a few spots where you have to use your hands. Near the top of the drainage the trail bends right to reach a saddle overlooking a bowl shaped drainage (S3).

The path drops down slightly as it contours the bowl clockwise to the left. After crossing a dry wash the path begins climbing steeply again to the left of another wash. Eventually, the path drops into the wash before climbing out on the right to follow yet another dry wash (at this point Ten Ewe Mountain will be behind you and a large unnamed triangular rock peak will be on your right). As you leave the brush and enter a rocky section, the path fades away. Continue straight up the dry rocky wash and soon you'll locate a few cairns and faint sections of trail. The trail becomes more defined as it climbs up to a saddle (S4).

From here, it's relatively easy walking as the trail skirts the shorter of the two peaks of the hill then climbs the remaining short distance to the top of Signal Peak (S5, 4877 ft). From the summit you'll have terrific 360 degree views of the Kofa Mountains to the east and the barren expanse of the La Posas Plains to the west. When ready, return the way you came.

Signal Peak GPS Coordinates (UTM)

Park: 773361 mE, 3696019 mN

S1: 773037 mE, 3695626 mN

S2: 772734 mE, 3695323 mN

S3: 772495 mE, 3695201 mN

S4: 771622 mE, 3695031 mN

S5: 771442 mE, 3694915 mN

Todd's Desert Hiking Guide - Kofa National Wildlife Refuge

