

= Interstate 15 in Arizona =

Interstate 15 (I @-@ 15) is an Interstate Highway , running from San Diego , California , United States , to the Canadian border , through Mohave County in northwest Arizona . Despite being isolated from the rest of Arizona , in the remote Arizona Strip , and short in length at 29 @. @ 43 miles (47 @. @ 36 km) , it remains notable for its scenic passage through the Virgin River Gorge . The highway heads in a northeasterly direction from the Nevada border northeast of Mesquite , Nevada , to the Utah border southwest of St. George , Utah .

The south portion of I @-@ 15 's route was built close to the alignment of the old U.S. Route 91 (US 91) , but the northern section , through the Virgin River Gorge , was built along roadless terrain . The southern section of the highway was complete and open in the early 1960s , but the gorge section was inaccessible until 1973 . When it opened , the Virgin River Gorge passage was the most expensive section of rural Interstate per mile .

= = Route description = =

The highway is signed and designated the Veterans Memorial Highway , a designation which continues into Utah . Traffic volume along the Arizona section of I @-@ 15 is approximately 23 @, @ 000 vehicles per day . The highway is also a part of the CANAMEX Corridor , a trade corridor in North America linking Edmonton , Alberta in Canada and Mexico City .

The highway enters the state in Mohave County northeast of Mesquite and Las Vegas , Nevada , paralleling the old US 91 heading northeast on an alignment north of the Virgin River . I @-@ 15 parallels the Virgin River for its entire length in Arizona , but the terrain abruptly becomes more rugged at mile 13 , where the Virgin River Gorge begins . The first interchange is exit 8 at Littlefield , where old US 91 turns north to avoid the gorge . I @-@ 15 crosses the river for the first time just beyond Littlefield , and soon passes another interchange serving local roads eastwards . This exit , exit 9 , is a right @-@ in / right @-@ out design with frontage roads , constructed after the initial opening . Access under I @-@ 15 is provided just south of the ramps .

Beyond exit 9 , I @-@ 15 enters the Virgin River Gorge , first passing through " The Narrows " . Here , the gorge features limestone cliffs that are as high as 500 feet (150 m) above the highway . Several pulloffs allow access to these cliffs . Within the canyon , through which it ascends northbound and descends southbound , five bridges cross the river . The highway generally follows the winding course of the river , but several rock cuts bypass bends .

The canyon opens up slightly at the Cedar Pocket interchange (exit 18) , allowing for a rest area . This rest area was turned over to the federal Bureau of Land Management in 2002 which maintains the nearby Virgin River Gorge Recreation Area . The rest area was demolished in 2009 . I @-@ 15 continues to parallel the Virgin River , but begins to deviate more . Trees here include tamarix , ash , cottonwoods , willows and Joshua trees . Wildflowers such as globemallow , marigold , and sand verbena dot the route in springtime . At mile 22 @. @ 5 , the highway crosses the Virgin River for the final time , continuing east along the smaller Black Rock Gulch before then turning slightly northeast into a flatter area . The final interchange (exit 27) provides local access .

A weigh station / port of entry formerly served both sides of the road near mile 28 before the Utah state line . The weigh station / port of entry are now combined into a joint Arizona / Utah facility just north of the state line staffed by the Arizona Department of Transportation (DOT) Motor Vehicle Division and Utah DOT Motor Carrier Division . I @-@ 15 continues on into Utah providing access to St. George as well as Salt Lake City .

= = History = =

The Old Spanish Trail from Southern California had two routes through northwestern Arizona , splitting at Littlefield ; one went north towards central Utah , and the other went northeast through the Virgin River Gorge , straddling the state line to the Four Corners area . When the Arrowhead Trail was marked in the 1920s , and U.S. Route 91 in 1926 , automobile travelers between Nevada

and Utah followed the northerly routing , turning east in Utah to reach St. George .

When the Interstates were planned , federal authorities decided to save 12 miles (19 km) over US 91 and pass through the Virgin River Gorge to take advantage of its scenery and lower grades for trucks . Construction was completed first , in the early 1960s , on the portion between Nevada and the gorge . The bridges over Big Bend Wash were completed in 1962 . The bridge over the Virgin River near Littlefield was completed by 1964 . By 1965 , the overpass over Black Rock Road (northwards) was finally complete .

Construction through the gorge was slower and much more difficult , and the segment could not fully open until December 14 , 1973 . To help quicken construction , the state of Utah loaned a portion of their federal highway funds to Arizona . Even though the highway is of little importance to the transportation needs of Arizona , as it does not link any Arizona communities , it does serve as a vital link between Salt Lake City and Las Vegas and Los Angeles to the southwest . Despite extra funding , however , challenges remained . Flash flooding and quicksand in the gorge repeatedly caused problems , with equipment and materials apparently disappearing overnight . Worse , the project was to claim a life , when in October 1969 , a helicopter performing reconnaissance on the gorge crashed due to wind , killing the pilot . To help navigate the gorge 's rugged and unforgiving terrain , a special piece of equipment called a swamp buggy had to be brought from Texas . Even with this help , the route still demanded construction of four bridges over Virgin River . The westernmost bridge and the bridge carrying the northbound lanes at the third bridge location from the west were completed in 1972 . By 1973 , all five bridges were finally complete .

Even before its opening , it was promoted as the most scenic highway in the state ; a 1988 article in Arizona Highways said that the project " enhanced rather than distracted from Nature 's handiwork " . The Virgin River was rechanneled 12 times in what was the most expensive rural freeway in the country , at the price of approximately \$ 10 million per mile (\$ 6 @ , @ 200 @ , @ 000 / km) or \$ 49 million per mile (\$ 30 @ , @ 000 @ , @ 000 / km) in 2007 dollars .

= = Exit list = =

The entire route is in Mohave County .