

**100**

**CLASSIC  
HIKES** in TM

**ARIZONA**

**Second Edition**

**Scott S. Warren**

# Onyx Bridge



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## 15

## ONYX BRIDGE

**Distance:** 4 miles round trip**Difficulty:** easy**Hiking time:** 3 hours**Elevation:** 5,800 to 5,500 feet**Management:** Petrified Forest NP**Wilderness status:** Petrified Forest WA**Season:** year-round**USGS map:** Kachina Point

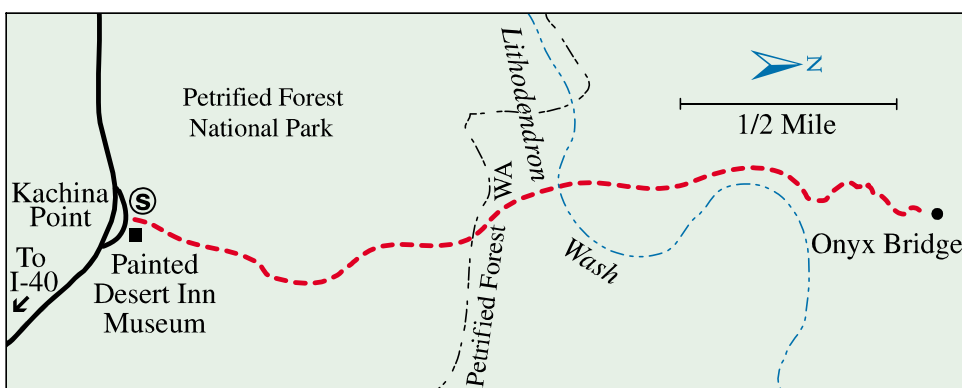
Situated in the starkly beautiful northern region of Petrified Forest National Park, Onyx Bridge is one of many petrified logs strewn across this desolate reach of Arizona. It earned its name because it spans a small wash. Certainly as interesting are the countless other pieces of fossilized wood found along the hike. Most of this hike falls within an established wilderness area, and the hike mostly cuts across open terrain rather than following an actual trail.

From the park's north entrance off Interstate 40, drive 2.4 miles to the Southwest-style Painted Desert Inn Museum at Kachina Point. Built in 1924, this structure was rebuilt by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930s. It is now a National Historic Landmark. The hike begins behind the museum. Before you start, be sure to check with the ranger inside for complete directions. He or she can point out the location of the bridge in the distance and offer directions.

Dropping down the mesa from Kachina

Point, a well-established trail accesses the flats below but fades after 0.5 mile, leaving you to follow small streambeds for the next 0.5 mile north to Lithodendron Wash. Because no trail exists beyond the 0.5-mile mark, it is important to keep a close eye on the landscape at all times. Upon crossing the wash bottom, the unmarked route cuts across a broad meander before reconnecting with the usually dry waterway. Follow the wash for another 0.25 mile to where it begins bending to the right, or east. A small side canyon or arroyo cut into a hillside on the left comes into view near there. Follow this arroyo upstream a short distance to where it splits. Keep to the right and follow the main channel past a scattered pile of petrified logs. Less than 100 yards beyond, a 15-foot-high pour-off is reached. Climb the steep bank to the left to find the bridge just above.

Like the countless other mineralized logs in the park, Onyx Bridge was washed to this former flood plain during the Triassic Period—



Hiking in this badlands terrain has its own rewards.



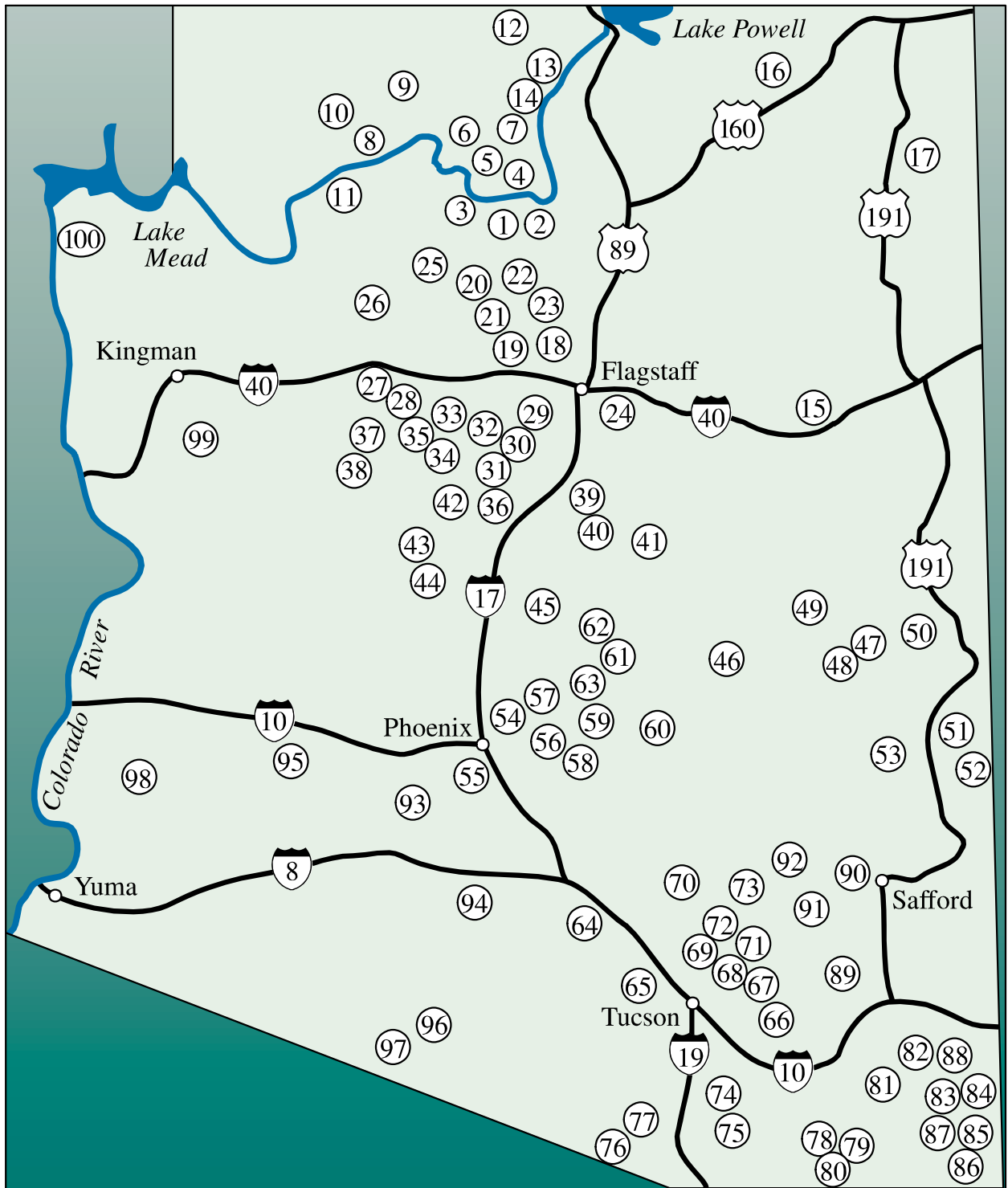
### *Onyx Bridge*

about 225 million years ago. After being covered by mud, volcanic ash, and silt, the original wood fiber was slowly petrified by silicon-enriched groundwater. It is interesting to keep in mind that these trees, now jettisoned in a parched and desolate desert, are a product of an era when early dinosaurs roamed lush forests. Just as fascinating, though, is the fact that the entire region was subsequently inundated by a vast freshwater lake, and that enough time has since passed to allow erosion to expose this geologic story.























Although finding the bridge may prove difficult, you are not likely to get lost, because the Painted Desert Inn Museum at Kachina Point is plainly visible at all times. Because water is not available along the hike it is important to bring

plenty, especially in the summer, when temperatures can top 100 degrees Fahrenheit. A hat and plenty of sunscreen are also advisable. Watch for lightning during afternoon showers in the summer months and flash floods after heavy rain showers. Also keep an eye out for the rattlesnakes that inhabit the area.

You don't need a permit for day hiking, but one is required for overnight stays. The park typically closes around sunset, though budget constraints may shorten the hours. If you want to witness the Painted Desert at dusk, plan on backpacking in. Of course, removing pieces of petrified wood or any other natural material is strictly prohibited. Prehistoric artifacts are protected by law, as well.



# MAP LEGEND

	Main trail		Spring
	Secondary trail		Rapids or falls
	Paved road		Saddle or pass
	2WD gravel road		Building
	4WD road		Cave
	Canyon rim		Point of interest
	Intermediate stream		Summit
	Perennial stream		Campground (CG)
	River		Picnic site
	Boundary		Tank, pond, or lake
	Start of hike		Bridge

## USING THIS BOOK

All of these hikes follow either designated trails or, at the very least, established routes of travel such as canyon bottoms. Cross-country excursions are avoided so as to lessen impact on the environment. Most of these hikes either access a particular point of interest or follow a loop route. Attention has also been paid to representing the variety of terrains and ecosystems found in Arizona and to providing as wide a geographical representation as possible. Some of the hikes presented here are quite popular and should be avoided on weekends and holidays, but there are a great many other excursions that are not as heavily visited.

### Information Blocks

Each hike begins with an information block designed to provide pertinent facts and figures at a glance. By scanning these headings, you should know right away what to expect during each hike.

In all but a few cases the *Distance* figure refers to the hike's round-trip distance. If a particular trail is 3.2 miles long, the distance figure will indicate "6.4 miles round trip" to let you know the total number of miles to be hiked. In a few cases where it is impracticable to retrace the entire route, the distance figure will read "one way." For these hikes a shuttle is required.

The *Difficulty* of each hike is calculated mostly by the trail's elevation gain and overall grade, and rated as easy, moderate, or strenuous. One short, extremely steep pitch may not necessarily bump a hike into the "strenuous" category, but continuous steep grades would. Hiking conditions such as the presence of deadfall, loose rock, and so on were also considered. Some routes that are not too steep may still be rated strenuous because of obstacles along the way. For the most part the hiking terrain involves established trails, although some short stretches may require scrambling skills.

The *Hiking times* presented are for persons of moderate hiking ability and strength who enjoy stopping occasionally to rest and take in the scenery. They take into account such factors as

distance, elevations, grade changes, and trail conditions. These times will not fit every hiker's purposes, and are provided simply as a guide.

The *Elevation* entry shows the range in elevation that the hike covers. The first figure indicates the trailhead elevation, while the second is that of either the high or low point of the hike. In most cases this is also the destination of the hike. If this second entry is lower than the first, the hike descends in elevation (typical of most canyon hikes). If the second figure is greater, the hike climbs in elevation. In some instances, additional climbing may be required in the course of the hike. This added elevation gain is included in the hike descriptions.

The *Management* entry indicates which government agency or private group holds title to portions or all of the route. Entries include: the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), national forest (NF), national park (NP), national monument (NM), national historic site (NHS), national recreation area (NRA), national wildlife refuge (NWR), state park (SP), county park, or a city park; or owned by an organization such as The Nature Conservancy. These entities may offer additional information about a particular hike, including maps.

The *Wilderness status* entry indicates whether or not the hike enters an established wilderness area (WA) or primitive area (PA). Such information is helpful in determining what rules and regulations apply.

The *Season* entry points out the best times of the year to attempt the hike. Where high mountain hikes are concerned, that means the months when the trail is free of snow. In the lower-elevation deserts, the optimal months for hiking are when the danger of heat exposure is not too great.

Many of the hikes in this book are possible year-round. Before setting out, however, you should check with the managing agency about the road conditions leading to the trailhead and the trail conditions beyond. During certain times of the year rainy conditions may, in fact, preclude access.

The *USGS maps* entry indicates which 7.5-minute topographic map or maps cover the



hike. Keep in mind that these are often outdated in terms of trails. Some routes may not have been in existence when the maps were drafted, while other trails have since been rerouted. Nevertheless, topo maps come in handy, especially in combination with updated management-agency maps.

### **Maps**

Each hike in this book is illustrated by a map. While every effort has been made to include all pertinent information, each of these simplified maps is meant to serve as an introduction to a particular hike. It is advisable to bring along more detailed maps showing contour lines, elevations, secondary access roads and trails, and other features.

The simple style of these map sketches does not allow them to show the many twists and turns and elevation losses and gains in the route. Therefore the length of the hike shown on the map (as calculated by multiplying the length of the route shown by the indicated scale of the map) may not appear to match the distances given in the text. The distances provided in the text and information blocks can be trusted to be accurate.

### **Hike Descriptions**

Each description begins with an introductory paragraph, followed by specific directions on how to reach the trailhead. This is followed by a running narrative of the route itself, which includes a description of grades, cardinal directions, possible hazards, and general trail conditions. Most major trail junctions are mentioned, as well as vegetation found along the way. Possible wildlife sightings are sometimes discussed, as is the geology of an area. A historical perspective may also warrant mention on occasion. These discussions of the natural and human history of each hike are extremely brief, and additional research will only enhance your hiking experience. Each description ends with a summation of such technicalities as water availability, specific hazards, and regulations.

## **A NOTE ABOUT SAFETY**

Safety is an important concern in all outdoor activities. No guidebook can alert you to every hazard or anticipate the limitations of every reader. Therefore, the descriptions of roads, trails, routes, and natural features in this book are not representations that a particular place or excursion will be safe for your party. When you follow any of the routes described in this book, you assume responsibility for your own safety. Under normal conditions, such excursions require the usual attention to traffic, road and trail conditions, weather, terrain, the capabilities of your party, and other factors. Keeping informed on current conditions and exercising common sense are the keys to a safe, enjoyable outing.

**The Mountaineers**



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