Newberry/Dead Mountains Scenic Backcountry Drive

The 10-mile one-way drive is on Bureau of Land Management public lands. However, it is better to take this as a loop trail (see directions) so you don’t have to backtrack and can see other attractions. Although the road is gravel, it is in good condition and can be navigated by 2-wheel drive sedan vehicles, although high clearance is preferable.

This particular scenic drive offers a wide range of vistas. Looking north are the Newberry Mountains with the prominent and sacred Spirit Mountain looming above the horizon. Looking south are the Dead Mountains which are also sacred to the native Indian tribes in the area. To the west are the granitic crystal hills with interesting rock formations. To the east is the Colorado River Valley and the high peaks of the Hualapai Range in Arizona as backdrop. The green fields along the Colorado River in this area are part of the Fort Mojave Indian Reservation. The Fort Mojave Indian Reservation covers nearly 42,000 acres in the tri-state area of Arizona, California, and Nevada. The Mojave Indians are Pipa Aha Macav — “The People By The River.” Mojave culture traces the earthly origins of its people to Spirit Mountain.

Prior to the arrival of white settler to the region, the Mojave Indians were prosperous farmers with well-established villages and trade networks that stretched as far away as the Pacific Ocean. In the 16th Century, the time the Spanish arrived in the territory, the Mojave’s were the largest concentration of people in the Southwest. With the ever-growing insurgence of non-Indian people to the region traditionally occupied by the Mojave Indians, a United States military outpost was established in 1859 on the east bank of the Colorado River to give safe passage to American immigrants traveling from east to west. Initially, this outpost was called Camp Colorado, but it was soon renamed Fort Mojave. After the military fort was closed in 1891, the buildings were transformed into a boarding school, which operated until 1930. Ruins of Fort Mojave still exist today as a reminder of the once-troubled historic relationship between the Mojave and American civilization. The ruins are located on a bluff overlooking the Colorado River just south of the boundary of present-day Bullhead City.
The prominent feature along the southern part of the drive is the Dead Mountains which is a designated wilderness area. This area encompasses the jagged, steep, rust-colored Dead Mountains and the alluvial fans sweeping to the west towards Piute Valley and east towards the Colorado River. Centered in the northern half of the wilderness is its highest point, Mount Manchester at an elevation of 3,598 feet. The area was established primarily to protect the cultural features of the area which includes many petroglyphs and other sites important to the Indian tribes in the area.

The vegetative cover along the drive is quite diverse, including some significant stands of Teddy Bear Cholla, also called “Jumping Cholla.” Since this species usually makes no viable seed, it relies on detached segments to form new plants by rooting and growing. The Teddy Bear Cholla earned its nickname because of the seemingly soft blanket of silver, white spines covering its branches. These one inch spines are actually anything but soft and, in fact, form an impenetrable fortress around the cholla, preventing animals from eating its flesh. Teddy Bear Cholla buds provided food for Native Americans historically. The young cactus branches, or buds, were plucked and then cooked. Once cooked, the Teddy Bear Cholla could be dried and stored food stores. Spines were also employed as needles for sewing.
Directions: From Las Vegas, head south on U.S. 95 towards Searchlight and Laughlin until you get to Nevada Highway #163 (Laughlin cutoff road). Head east on #163 towards Laughlin. Just past mile-post 3, there is a dirt road that takes off to the right. Turn right on that road which starts the backcountry drive. The road goes approximately 10 miles until it intersects with the Needles Highway which is just south of Laughlin. You can either backtrack the way you came on the 10-mile long dirt road or turn the adventure into a loop tour. If you choose the loop tour, turn left on the paved Needles Highway and take that road all the way to the intersection with Nevada Highway #163. Turn left on #163 and go back to Las Vegas the way you came using U.S.95.