



WILLOW SPRINGS - MOAB



Rating: Easy Hiking

Length: 2-3 Hours

Gear: Usual hiking gear.

Maps: Merrimac Butte, UT

Season: Any, although summers can be very hot. Fall can offer great colour with changing leaves.

Notes: Reaching the trailhead requires a high clearance vehicle, or preferably a 4x4.

Waypoints:

Trailhead

12S 618656mE 4284523mN

N38° 42' 05" W109° 38' 08"

Riparian

12S 617719mE 4282712mN

N38° 41' 07" W109° 38' 48"

Hype

A hike in Arches National Park that is seldom done? And doesn't result in seeing an arch? That's impossible?!?! No, that is Willow Springs, a lovely family suitable hike down a shallow canyon on the edge of Arches National Park. The canyon is not deep, and allows for easy exits whenever your inclined, but is punctuated with numerous deep potholes throughout it's length. This short hike is suitable for almost everyone, and provides a nice brief outing into a different side of Arches than most people see.

Tags: *hike, family friendly, access: high clearance*

Trailhead

Note: There is good primitive camping along the first part of the Willow Spring road, but it can be crowded on busy weekends.

To reach the trailhead, travel north out of Moab on highway 191 about 10 miles to milepost 138.6. This is the signed Willow Springs dirt road, on the east side of the highway.

- Reset your odometer as you leave the highway. There are many side roads in this area, stay on the main road. (12S 613152mE 4283940mN / N38° 41' 49" W109° 41' 56")

- At 1.3 miles you reach a junction. Go left here, as the road crosses a deep, wide, sandy wash. This is the most difficult section of road, and can be very tricky depending on what condition the sand is in. (12S 615218mE 4283960mN / N38° 41' 48" W109° 40' 30")
- Continue after the wash, passing a large trailhead at 1.9 miles for Sovereign Lands. At 3.8 miles you reach the signed Arches National Park boundary. Park here, this is the recommended trailhead. (12S 618656mE 4284523mN / N38° 42' 05" W109° 38' 08")
- The road can be driven an additional 0.6 miles to Willow Spring proper, but is best walked unless you have a 4x4. (12S 619373mE 4284442mN / N38° 42' 02" W109° 37' 38")

Route

From the park boundary, walk or drive 0.6 miles to a small, old shed on the right. This is Willow Spring. Head down canyon past the shed. Initially the canyon is a bit wide and brush choked, persevere. Soon you pass a dripping spring on the left hand wall, magnificent!

The small stream that has accompanied you this far drops underground, and the canyon floor becomes dry and sandy. Continuing down the canyon is a mix of sand and slickrock floor, punctuated by short sections of slot and potholes. Some of these potholes are impressive, up to 4 m (14 ft.) deep. Fortunately a little route finding reveals easy paths around all of them on either the left or right.

30-45 minutes from the small shack, the canyon floor becomes slickrock and U-shaped. The stream springs up again here through solid sandstone to create an impressive riparian oasis in the desert. This section culminates in a clear, pool surrounded by lush vegetation. Continuing down past the pool is not recommended. It is a dense bushwack and not particularly interesting.

To return, there are 2 good options:

Option 1:

Return the way you came. This is the easiest option.

Option 2:

Head back up canyon, and climb out on the left (looking up canyon) at any one of numerous places. Once out, you are looking at a sea of petrified sand dunes. Your goal is to head north/northeast toward the striped sandstone domes in the distance. This can be a bit slow going, and there is much cryptobiotic soil to avoid. Continue wandering toward the domes, however. If you reach a fence, don't cross it, but rather follow it east, then continue your north/northeast course once around it. 30-45 minutes of hiking will bring you to the road you drove in on almost exactly at the park boundary.

