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Hike to the rock house in Rockhouse Canyon, near Anza-Borrego's Bow Willow Campground.

By [Jerry Schad](#) | Published Thursday, Dec. 6, 2007

A simple shack fashioned of rock, cement, and corrugated metal might be unremarkable anywhere else, but in the midst of thousands of acres of wild desert, it becomes a significant point of interest.

The semi-rugged hike to the rock house in Rockhouse Canyon includes some stretches of well-worn but poorly marked trails. Ducks (small piles of stones) and stake markers may be of some help in following the route. Topographic maps are very handy if you do go off course. A mandatory prerequisite for this and all other desert wilderness travel adventures is plenty of drinking water.

To get to the starting point from San Diego, first travel east on Interstate 8 to Ocotillo in Imperial County. Exit there and take County Route S-2 northwest, back into San Diego County, and also into Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. After 16 miles on S-2, look for the unpaved Bow Willow Campground access road on the left, at mile 48.4 according to the roadside mile markers posted at one-mile intervals. Drive 1.6 miles to the camping area at the end of the road.

On foot now, walk 0.5 mile up along the sandy wash in the wide Bow Willow Canyon. On your left (south) you'll see a small alluvial fan leading up to a rocky draw in the mountains. Clamber upward through this draw, passing a single palm tree and gaining about 200 feet of elevation. You'll come up to a sandy wash that winds upward to a gently sloping plateau area of broken rock formations. Hardy desert plants, like cholla cactus, ocotillo, and creosote bush, sparsely cover the ground. After you stay with the wash for about a mile, ducks and wooden markers further guide the way generally south-southwest over an almost imperceptible divide, then down more steeply onto the broad floor of Rockhouse Canyon.

Many years ago, off-road vehicles could navigate up the sandy bottom of Rockhouse Canyon toward the shack. Now, you simply choose your own path up-canyon for 0.5 mile to an elliptical valley thickly covered with cholla cactus and ocotillo. Nestled against the rocky hillside on the south side of this valley is the line shack, which leans against the face of a large boulder. The decrepit interior of the shack houses the remains of a fireplace and the usual rusty bedsprings.

East of the shack, at the mouth of a canyon, is a watering trough and the remains of a pipeline to a seasonal spring and waterfall 0.4 mile up-canyon. A pleasant hour or two can be spent exploring this canyon and the next canyon to the west.

The line shack marks the halfway point of the hike. Return by going directly over the low pass to the north into Bow Willow Canyon, using the remains of an old cattle trail. Once in Bow Willow Canyon, you turn right (down-canyon). Again, years ago, the canyon floor below this point once harbored a jeep road. Now it's mercifully quiet and you can enjoy a serene and leisurely descent back to Bow Willow Campground, nearly

three miles away.

This article contains information about a publicly owned recreation or wilderness area. Trails and pathways are not necessarily marked. Conditions can change rapidly. Hikers should be properly equipped and have safety and navigational skills. The *Reader* and Jerry Schad assume no responsibility for any adverse experience.

