

SURFIN' ARIZONA

HOURLY-OR-SO DRIVE WELL WORTH IT FOR THIS 4-MILE HIKE

BY TYSON HUGIE



Mom was a victim of her first cactus attack on this trip. The cholla, or “jumping,” cactus is famous for its ability to seemingly jump out and cling to passersby. Worse, it’s tough to pull out and only wants to latch on to anything (or anyone) that attempts to remove it. The solution? Just ask Chris, the seasoned hiker who joined us for this excursion. He whipped out a hair comb and was able to extract the needles safely without putting anyone else at risk—a clever survival tip for the desert Southwest.

All of this came about from our decision to hike to one of the Superstition mountain range’s most unique geologic features: a sandstone rock in the shape of a large wave.

See me surfing up there? The cave’s remoteness and difficulty have kept some hikers away, but we tackled the four-miler with confidence and enjoyed basking in some of Arizona’s prime spring weather for a few hours on a Saturday morning.

Reaching the Peralta Trailhead took about an hour from Central Phoenix, and while I would have been perfectly fine subjecting either my Acura ILX or SLX to a few miles of dirt, we decided to take Chris’s Jeep Cherokee.

Our first stop was the drive-thru at Starbucks. You can’t go out into the wilderness unprepared, after all. Frappuccinos in hand, we were ready to conquer nature.

The trail itself seemed to intensify in difficulty as we worked our way up the 800 or so feet in elevation. Though the cave itself was visible from the trailhead, it required scrambling up a few stretches of jagged rocks, with patches of loose gravel, all flanked by prickly cacti—definitely the type of environment where adequate and stable footing is a necessity.

The view was worth it. From the interior of the cave itself, we were able to gaze across the landscape for many miles in the distance. With temperatures in the high 60s and a light breeze, conditions were optimal to hang out and enjoy the scenery before beginning our descent. Round-trip travel time was about three hours, and we rewarded ourselves for a job well done by having lunch at Costa Vida. ■