

# Johnson Valley



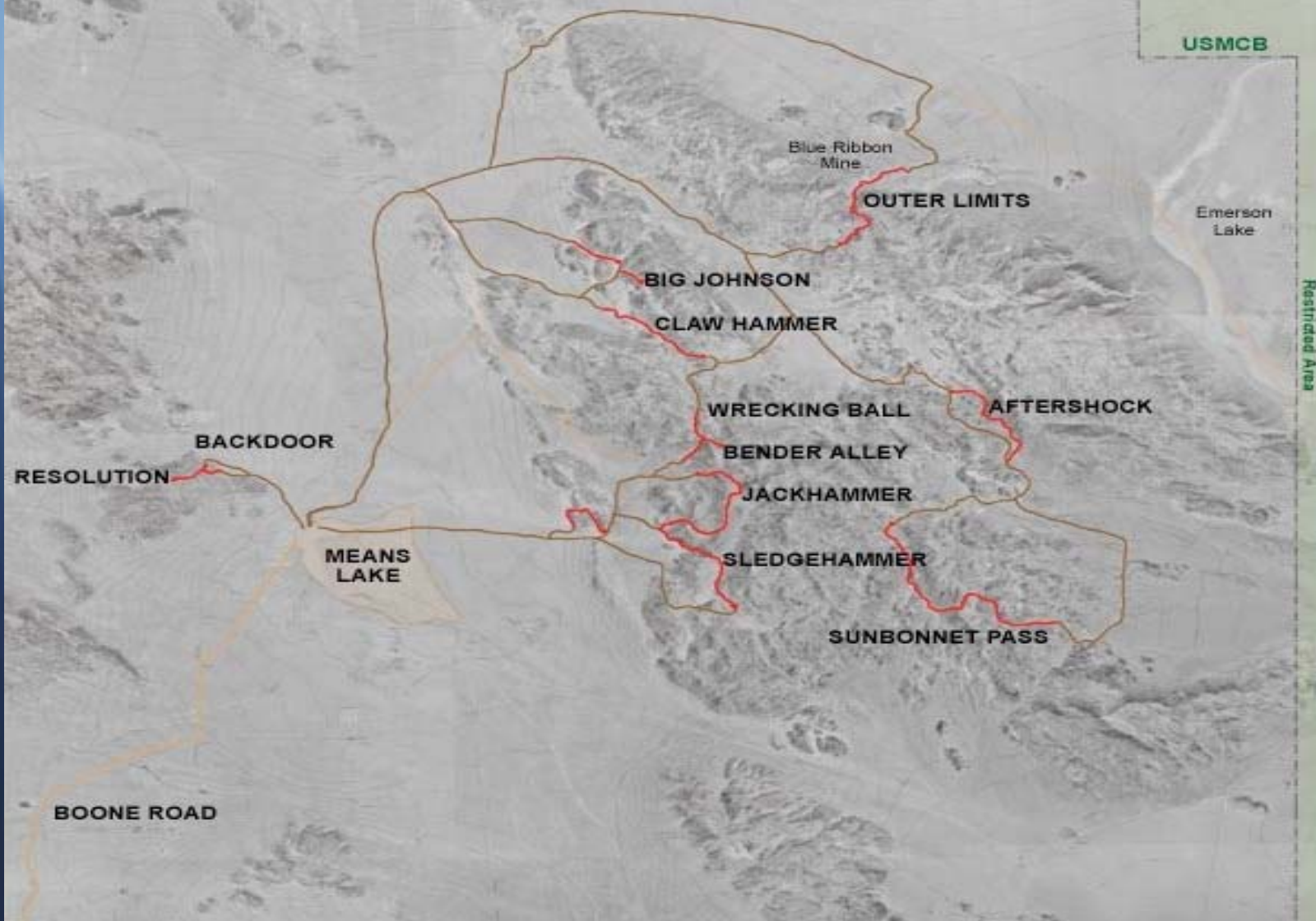
# Introduction

- Johnson Valley is a forbidding portion of the Mohave Desert with equally forbidding terrain. The trails that snake through the hills above the valley carry ominous names like Sledgehammer, intended to be descriptive of what your truck will look like it was beaten with by the end of the trail. The seven hardcore trails in the area are commonly referred to as The Hammers !!!
- You've no doubt seen event coverage in many magazines; it's one of the four-wheeling hot spots in the country that continues to hold the spotlight. I have put together a small summary of the trails in a way that will put you closer in touch with what they're like.
- Johnson Valley OHV is located between Lucerne Valley and Yucca Valley roughly 50 miles east of Victorville, California. The sparsely populated area is brutally hot in the summer, so the best time to experience the Hammers is between October and May
- The trails in Johnson Valley claim more tires in one weekend than at any other event. The jagged rocks are murder on sidewalls, and it's not uncommon to see half-foot gashes in the stoutest tires on the market. Always have a fullsize spare tire on hand, and it's strongly recommended that you bring a patch kit. As most Fun in the Desert veterans will tell you, more than a few people have blown two tires on one trail ride. (VRAM PAY ATTENTION)
- Due to the extreme nature of the trails in Johnson Valley, you should expect to put a few dents in your truck's sheetmetal. Although major dents can be avoided with careful driving, fender corners and rocker panels are often dinged on the rocky terrain. The damage can be kept to a minimum with proper body armor, including beefy bumpers and a set of stout rocker-panel protectors.

# The Trails

- **Crowbar**
- **Aftershock**
- **Clawhammer**
- **Outer Limits**
- **Jackhammer**
- **Riffel Canyon**
- **Wrecking Ball**
- **Sledgehammer**
- **Hell's Gate/Sunbonnet Pass**

# Map of Trails



# General Area Map



# Weather

- Weather should not be too bad as the average is showing 68/45 same as last trip to Dove Springs

Month	Avg. High	Avg. Low	Mean	Avg. Precip	Record High	Record Low
Jan	60°F	31°F	45°F	1.11 in.	80°F (1971)	-1°F (1949)
Feb	63°F	35°F	49°F	1.18 in.	86°F (1977)	11°F (1949)
Mar	68°F	38°F	53°F	1.14 in.	93°F (2004)	14°F (1958)
Apr	75°F	42°F	59°F	0.31 in.	100°F (2007)	25°F (1999)
May	84°F	49°F	66°F	0.23 in.	108°F (2003)	30°F (1953)
Jun	93°F	55°F	74°F	0.06 in.	111°F (1994)	36°F (1988)
Jul	99°F	61°F	80°F	0.16 in.	116°F (2002)	36°F (1987)
Aug	98°F	61°F	80°F	0.25 in.	112°F (2002)	42°F (1957)
Sep	92°F	55°F	74°F	0.33 in.	110°F (2007)	32°F (1948)
Oct	81°F	45°F	63°F	0.26 in.	101°F (1980)	21°F (1971)
Nov	68°F	35°F	52°F	0.36 in.	88°F (1980)	8°F (1964)
Dec	60°F	30°F	45°F	0.81 in.	85°F (1958)	6°F (1990)

#### Apple Valley, CA Weather Facts

- On average, the warmest month is July.
- The highest recorded temperature was 116°F in 2002.
- December is the average coolest month.
- The lowest recorded temperature was -1°F in 1949.
- The maximum average precipitation occurs in February.

# Aftershock

- Trailhead location: 34°25'16.5"N, 116°26'6.0"W  
Length: 1.1 miles  
Trail time: 1 hour 30 minutes

How to get there: From the lakebed, take the road north through the gap in the low ridgeline to the east. Follow the main road up and over a small rise. Follow the main set of tracks through a mining area where several fainter tracks turn off to both sides. You will pass right next to a 40's vintage car body sitting in the wash (This car marks the junction of the exit of Aftershock and the main road). Stay left at any trail junctions until the road drops into a large wash. Take a very sharp left turn here and head up the wash. The Aftershock trail follows this wash back up to the top of the hill (at the old car).

The trail: Aftershock is one of the oldest of the Johnson Valley trails, being created shortly after Sledgehammer as a long, fairly mild tour of the Hartwell Hills area. Aftershock is still considered to be one of the mildest routes in Johnson Valley, even after the deletion of all of the dirt road "tour" parts, but don't let that fool you into thinking it is easy. The trail is a bit less constricting than its brother routes as it follows a large, sandy wash as it heads back to the north. The rocks can be mobile as they are sometimes bedded in deep sand that offers little traction. There are numerous solid rock ledges to scale and the trail gets increasingly difficult as it progresses. The trail creators dubbed a spot near the end of the trail "Depreciation Knob". The name can be highly descriptive if the right line isn't followed as the route scales steep, tight sections with several tricky turns.

# Aftershock





# Clawhammer

- Trailhead location: 34°26'20.8"N, 116°28'40.6"W  
Length: 1.1 miles  
Trail time: 2 hours 30 minutes

How to get there: From Means Dry Lake bed, head north on the main road. You will be paralleling a low ridgeline to the east. Follow the road through the gap in the ridgeline and veer right after going through the gap. You will be driving along a smaller dry lakebed. There are tracks running every which way in this area but the trailhead is in the largest drainage to the southeast. As you head south and east, the tracks will eventually converge alongside a wash. Follow the wash and pick a good spot to drop in. The wash is the route to the trailhead. The trailhead GPS location above marks the point where the four wheeling starts to get rough.

The trail: Sometimes called the Baby Hammer, Clawhammer was the third of the "Hammer" trails built and is arguably the easiest of the three. The trail is pretty typical of the fare offered by Johnson Valley. Clawhammer snakes up a narrow watercourse that most people would not think of as a 4WD route. Of course, the 4WD routes in Johnson Valley were not created by "most people". As such, the trail creeps over, around, and through rocks ranging from basketball to washing machine sized. As this route was used for a rock-crawling competition in recent history, the trail sometimes offers multiple paths but is typically only one vehicle wide. There is a steep right turn over a ledge to be scaled about halfway up the canyon. The ledge can be a bit loose and stubborn. Once over the ledge, it is more rock crawling until the last two hundred or so yards of the trail. Here the character changes a bit as the trail becomes loose and traction can be hard to find in the powdery dirt and loose rock. Second gear is useful in several spots to get enough wheel speed to reach to the top of the hill. The trail ends in of a small saddle with the exit route from Wrecking Ball coming down from the right. Follow the trail straight ahead to exit down into the valley below.

# Clawhammer

# Sledgehammer

- Trailhead location: 34°24'52.6"N, 116°28'28.3"W  
Length: 1.5 miles  
Elapsed time: 2 hours 30 minutes

How to get there: From the lakebed, head east toward the mountains. Stay just to the right of the notch in the ridgeline/dunes. Once through the ridge, drop down into the wash and follow it toward the mountains. There is a sign marking the beginning of both Sledgehammer and Jackhammer in the wash.

The trail: Sledgehammer was the first trail created by the Victor Valley Four Wheelers in the area. It follows a narrow and often steep canyon up into the rugged mountains on a route that created the aura and mystique that still surrounds the trails of Johnson Valley. The initial part of the trail is rock crawling at its finest. The trail winds into the narrow wash and then heads UP on a series of steep climbs in a black defile. After climbing through a narrow notch, the trail fattens out and emerges into a much wider valley. There is a mailbox set at the base of a humorous signpost. Join the tradition and sign in at the mailbox. Stay to the right (the left is an alternate exit route coming down Jackhammer). The second section of Sledgehammer is not nearly as steep but the trail has a looser surface where traction is sometimes difficult to find. The canyon and trail veers to the left at the base of a loose rocky hill. The route straight up the hill is used as the escape route for vehicles that have suffered major breakage. Scaling the hill is almost as difficult as finishing out the rest of the trail. The trail goes left at the bottom of the hill, staying in the drainage. In less than half a mile, the route climbs out to the right of the dwindling wash and climbs up to the top of the ridge. Follow the road and it will lead you back down the mountain toward the lakebed. Be aware that there is a very steep and loose section on the way back down to the lake that can get you in trouble if you are not careful.

# Sledgehammer



# Outer Limits

- Trailhead location: 34°27'16.6"N, 116°27'6.3"W  
Length: 1.2 miles

Outer Limits is the right name as this trail is much farther out there than the rest. Once again, take the road north and then east through the gap in the ridgeline. Follow the main road until you reach a faint intersection at 34°27'23.7"N, 116°29'35.9"W.

Turn left and follow the road up over the saddle and down the other side. You will be descending into a broad valley and you will follow the road down the valley, staying to the right. When you reach 34°27'59.8"N, 116°26'45.4.3"W (near a very strange mound of rocks), take a right in toward the ridge. In the wash, look for a very faint track (it may be marked with flagging) on the left side of the wash near the base of the mound. Follow this track marked with cairns until you drop into a large wash. Turn left up the wash and follow it in.

The trail: This trail is a great one but doesn't get as much use as it is a little farther from the lake bed. The trail starts out in a fairly broad wash where tracks wander here and there on multiple lines as vehicles seek out challenges. As the canyon tightens, the challenges no longer need to be sought out, as the single available line is usually challenge enough. Many of the plentiful rocks are bedded in sand giving little usable traction. This canyon climbs rapidly, similar to Sledgehammer, and much of the fun is derived from fighting gravity in addition to the rocks. The route is definitely more of challenge for large or long vehicles as it is very, very tight and technical. There are numerous squeeze situations where sliding through on the rocker panels is the way to go if the vehicle is narrow enough. Wider vehicles will be forced to carve up and over large rocks on one side or the other. There are several big shelves to hop up and all of them feature menacing rock walls scant inches from the sheet metal. The last fork featured a lot of tracks to the left so one would believe that there is even more fun to be had if you are feeling adventurous. The right fork carries you up and over what is left of the ridgeline and back toward the main road.

# Outerlimits



# Hell's Gate/Sunbonnet Pass

- Trailhead location: 34°24'11.4"N, 116°26'3.1"W  
Length: 1.7 miles  
Elapsed time: 3 hours 30 minutes

- How to get there: This trailhead is somewhat more difficult to find, as it is a fair distance from the lakebed. There are at least two routes to the trailhead and this description defines the easiest, though not necessarily the fastest. From the dry lakebed, head north and then east through the gap in the ridge. Follow the main road through the mining area, past first the end and then the trailhead for Aftershock. Follow the wash for a short way but be watching for the road exiting the wash to the right. The road then wanders over a broad plain, crossing several smaller washes draining down from the west. It eventually drops into one of these washes and continues west. It will top out on a small saddle and then continue west down the hill. At 34°23'49.4"N, 116°25'57.5"W, turn right and follow the tracks. The route will shortly drop into a wash. Turn left up the wash, as this is the beginning of the first trail section.

The trail: This trail is actually three distinct trail sections: Hell's Gate, the Devil's Slide, and Sunbonnet Pass. The first, Hell's Gate, is typical fun Johnson Valley fare. It consists of a climb up a rocky watercourse through a seam in the hills. There are several narrow portions that favor small, short wheel base vehicles. The Hell's Gate section ends in a small saddle. The next section, the Devil's Slide is a short, but STEEP descent into the valley below. The route drops down numerous rocky ledges and undoubtedly feels better in a long wheel base vehicle. Once down into the broad, rocky wash below, a right hand turn will lead to Sunbonnet Pass. This route gets progressively narrower and steeper as it twists upward. There are two obstacles of note on this trail section. The first is a sharp left-hand turn in a narrow squeeze between two large rocks directly below a memorial plaque. It is very difficult to negotiate this turn without leaving paint behind if driving anything wider than a Jeep. The second spot was referred to as "Honda Hill" when we first experienced the trail (a Honda's hood was lying next to the trail at this spot). Honda Hill is an extremely steep climb with a sharp left hand turn in the middle. The exit at the top is over the top

# Hells Gate





# Wrecking Ball

- Trailhead location: 34°25'19.0"N, 116°28'26.1"W  
Length: 1.0 miles  
Elapsed time: 4 hours

How to get there: Wrecking Ball's trailhead is located one major drainage to the north of the end of Jackhammer. The trailhead is on the other side of the low ridge visible to the east from the lakebed. There are several ways to get there but the fastest is to follow the route toward the Sledgehammer/Jackhammer trailhead until you get past the ridge and then turn left along the ridge's base. Once into the small basin defined by the ridge and the main body of hills to the east, the wash that contains Wrecking Ball heads northeast up out of the basin.

The trail: Wrecking Ball was formerly known as the X-Trail and many aficionados consider it the most difficult trail in Johnson Valley. It is, without a doubt, an extreme trail. The rocks are bigger, the climbs are higher, the requirements for good stout equipment more pronounced. It would be pointless to try and describe the major obstacles, as they are pretty much a continuous event. In the few gaps between major obstructions, the trail is "paved" with rocks so large that high centering a differential or skid plate is a constant danger. Since a rock crawling contest was run over it last year, there are several locations with duplicate routes. It doesn't matter which one is chosen, none looked any easier. The trail difficulties end in a small saddle and the road continues up from there to a great viewpoint of Clawhammer. The road then drops off the point and joins the Clawhammer at its exit.

# Wrecking Ball



# Jackhammer

- Trailhead Location: 34°24'52.6"N, 116°28'28.3"W  
Length: 1.8 miles  
Elapsed Time:

How to get there: Take a left instead of a right at the sign! See Sledgehammer above.

The trail: Believe it or not, Jack may be more difficult than Wrecking Ball. Why? Tires are getting bigger! Jack is a bit different from Sledgehammer, its older sibling. Instead of running up a dark crack, Jack wanders up the side of the mountain in a small ravine. But don't let that fool you. The rocks are huge. And loose. And getting more loose. That is what the tire comment is all about. There have been so many 35"+ tires over Jackhammer recently that 35" shod vehicles are having increased difficulty, as the tires don't reach the bottom of the holes. That is our story and we are sticking to it!

Jackhammer gets your attention right away with some really ticklish sections (if you like your paint) just a few feet into the trail. There is a tricky off camber slab to scale (pick the wrong line and it can get ugly) and then the fun starts. The section under the memorial plaque can give you fits. This middle section of Jackhammer's ascent is an innocent looking incline through a jumble of rocks. The problems start with a severe lack of traction. The slope is so steep and loose that very little momentum can be generated. And momentum is needed because the holes are just deep enough to catch your differentials. Repeatedly. Larger tires would definitely help. With the dug out section behind, it gets a bit easier but Jackhammer wears on you and there are plenty of opportunities to make mistakes. Soon the route leaves the ravine and charges up a ridgeline. While this section isn't really difficult, it will tighten up those who don't like heights. The view from the top is great!

Once on top, Johnson Valley trails are supposed to end. Oops. Jackhammer now drops very steeply down the mountain in a kind of rocky-4WD-luge way. Now the trick is to keep the front knuckles

# Jackhammer



# **Crowbar Riffel Canyon**

- These are two new trails and are easy ones for those who are less adventureos

# Cougar Buttes



# BullFrog Trail



# Places to read more about the hammers

- <http://rubiconscat.com/Hammers/RocktoberHome-1.htm>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXQFq2ynEyo>
- <http://www.myjeeprocks.com/forums/showthread.php?t=15614>
- <http://www.pirate4x4.com/forum/forumdisplay.php?f=89>
- <http://www.fjcruiserforums.com/forums/trail-report-photo-section-gps-coordinates/95192-jv-fissure-mountain-sunday-oct-4th.html>