Backcountry – Be prepared for rugged beauty

What comes to mind when you think of wilderness? In the 1964 Wilderness Act, Congress defined wilderness as “an area where earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” Each individual tends to imagine and describe wilderness differently. To someone unaccustomed with the outdoors, nearly any area without paved roads and electric lines may seem like “wilderness.” For those seeking an outdoor “wilderness” experience, a hike in the park’s backcountry may provide solitude, solace, and views of remarkable scenery. Several kinds of habitat await. Most of the park’s 33,000 acres of designated wilderness is Chihuahuan Desert—rocky, dry, and spiny with little shade. In a few places, water seeps to the surface allowing numerous water-loving plants and animals to thrive. In higher elevations, one may see tall pines and the occasional elk. Compared to many parks, few people explore away from the pavement and developed areas. We encourage you to enjoy the wilderness, but be ready for harsh, unpredictable conditions and awesome beauty.

Leave No Trace is an ethic regarding awareness, appreciation, and respect of wild lands. To have a safe, enjoyable adventure and to protect the Carlsbad Caverns Wilderness, follow these park policies:

- Plan ahead and prepare – your safety is your responsibility.
- Carry and drink at least a gallon of water per person per day.
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces. Stay on established trails – short-cutting and cliff-climbing is dangerous and causes erosion.
- Dispose of waste properly. Human waste must be at least 300 feet from any cave, trail, or water source.
- Pack out all trash-your own and any you find, including toilet paper.
- Leave what you find. Do not collect or disturb any animals, plants, cultural artifacts, or minerals.
- Do not clear soil or vegetation, or dig trenches around tents.
- Camp at least 100 feet off established trails, ½ mile (1 km) from any road or parking lot, and at least 300 feet (100 meters) from any trail, cave, or water source. Be out of sight and sound of these areas, as well. (Overnight parking and camping is not permitted in parking lots or other developed areas.)
- Campfires are not permitted within park boundaries. Use a containerized fuel stove only when fire danger is low.
- Do not enter caves. A special permit is required.
- Pets are not permitted on park trails or in the backcountry.
- Carry and use a map. Trails are not well marked; watch for rock cairns (piles) to indicate the route. Maps available at the Caverns Bookstore or www.ccgma.org.
- Lock vehicles and carry valuables.
- Firearms are prohibited.

Hiking in the desert is a very rewarding experience. It can also be dangerous if you are unprepared or careless. Remember this:

- A free permit is required for all overnight use of the park’s backcountry. Get one at the visitor center.
- There is NO RELIABLE water source in the backcountry. Pack plenty of water, at least a gallon per person per day.
- Check the weather forecast. Expect temperature changes and possible thunderstorms. If lightening is nearby, avoid open areas and cave entrances.
- Carry a first aid kit and signal mirror. Consider that many things in the desert stick, sting, or bite. Give rattlesnakes plenty of space and do not harass them.
- Wear clothes appropriate for rough trails, weather conditions, sun exposure, and spiny plants.
- Saddle and pack stock are permitted only under special regulations. User must provide all feed, water, and care.
- Wheeled vehicles are prohibited.
- If you carry a cell phone, be respectful of other backcountry users and be aware that signal strength is rare and variable.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trail Descriptions</th>
<th>The park has an incredible diversity of plants and animals. A short walk along any park trail provides enriching experiences for anyone willing to move away from the parking lots and buildings. Most of the trails are marked only by rock cairns (rocks piled or stacked into a noticeable heap), so we recommend using a topographic map. Few of the routes loop back to their beginnings. Most have little shade or shelter from weather conditions. Trail difficulty is rated accessible, easy, moderate, and difficult. Trail lengths and elevation changes are approximate and hiking times are relative.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessible for All Day Use Only</td>
<td><strong>Chihuahuan Desert Nature Trail</strong> – mostly paved, ½ mile (1 km) loop, ½ hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy Hiking Trails, Day Use Only</td>
<td><strong>Old Guano Road</strong> – 3.7 mi (6 km) and 2 hrs one way, elevation change: 710 ft (216 m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Juniper Ridge</strong> – 3.5 mi (5 km) and 2 ½ hrs one way, elevation change: 800 ft (240 m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Rattlesnake Canyon</strong> – 3 mi (4.8 km) and 3 hrs one way, elevation change: 600 ft (183 m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Upper Rattlesnake Canyon to Guadalupe Ridge Loop</strong> – 6 mi (9.6 km) round trip, 4 hours to complete loop, elevation change: 670 ft (204 m) – map highly recommended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Guadalupe Ridge Loop</strong> – 12 mi (19 km) one way, over night recommended for entire length and return, elevation change ascend: 2,050 ft (625 m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Slaughter Canyon</strong> – 5.3 mi (8.6 km) one way from parking lot to intersection with Guadalupe Ridge Road, elevation change to ridge top: 1850 (564 m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Yucca Canyon</strong> – 7.7 mi (12.4 km) one way, elevation change: 1520 ft (464 m)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>