

Guadalupe Mountains

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Guadalupe Mountains
National Park



Guadalupe Peak Hike



The hike up Guadalupe Peak is a rewarding, although very strenuous 8 ½ mile round trip hike with a 3,000 foot elevation gain. It will take from 6 to 8 hours to complete the round trip hike. The hike provides fantastic views from the highest point in the state of Texas (8,749'). It also introduces hikers to several of the park's ecosystems including the high desert and the high elevation forests.

The trail starts at the RV section of the Pine Springs Campground (1/2 mile from the Pine Springs Visitor Center – check in at the visitor center, then turn right out of the visitor center parking lot). Follow the signs for Guadalupe Peak Trail. Follow the hiker trail; the horse trail will add about 1 extra mile to the trip (although it is less steep).

You will encounter the steepest part of the hike in the first mile and a half, as the trail switchbacks up the first steep slope. Be sure not to cut across the switchbacks, as this causes accelerated erosion. The views will get better with every switchback you climb.

After about a mile and a half, the trail will become less steep as it passes a cliff and then turns around to the north-facing slope. Here, hikers will discover a small forest of pinion pine, south-western white pine, and Douglas fir. The forest exists here since on a north-facing slope there is not as much sunlight. The slightly cooler, shadier climate allows these pines to survive.

After nearly three miles the trail will top out at a false summit. It is still a little more than a mile to the actual summit. The trail will flatten out for a short distance as it passes through a sparse forest of ponderosa pine. The backcountry campsite for overnight backpackers is on this summit.

After passing the backcountry campsite, the trail descends slightly and crosses a wooden bridge. After the bridge, the trail begins the final climb to the summit. After only a few switchbacks, the top of El Capitan will dominate the view to the south. Eventually you will pass the horse hitching posts and arrive at the summit, where on a clear day you will be rewarded with a tremendous view of the surrounding mountains and desert. A monument commemorating overland stage and air travel marks the summit. The monument was installed in 1958, before this became a national park. Stop for a while and enjoy the view before beginning the hike back down.

Safety Concerns

- Much of the trail is over steep, rocky terrain. Hikers should wear comfortable hiking boots with good traction, and that are well broken in.
- Hikers should carefully monitor the weather. Afternoon thunderstorms are common through the summer months. Lightning can be especially dangerous at high elevations on the exposed peak. Watch the sky. If storms develop, seek a lower elevation.
- Winds can be high on the peak, especially in winter months. Winds in excess of 80 miles per hour are not uncommon. Check at the visitor center for the current forecast.
- There is little shade along the trail. Summer temperatures can be quite hot. Bring plenty of water, at least one gallon per person, per day. Also come prepared with sunscreen, a hat, and protective clothing.
- The 8.4 mile hike to the summit and back takes the average hiker from six to eight hours round trip. Plan to start the hike early in the morning, especially in the summer when high temperatures and afternoon thunderstorms are a concern.
- Bring enough warm clothing. Even in the hottest weather, thunderstorms can cause the temperature to drop significantly.

What To Bring

- 4 quarts of water per person
- good, comfortable, broken-in hiking boots (or at least sturdy shoes with ankle support and good traction)
- light jacket/rain jacket (even in summer)
- lunch/snacks (bring plenty of food – it is a physically demanding hike that will require plenty of energy)
- plastic bag for trash (be sure to pack out all litter)
- sunscreen
- hat (for sun protection)
- lots of warm, layered clothing/hat/gloves (for cooler months)
- first aid kit/band aids/mole skin for blisters (at least one per group)
- trail map (at least 2 per group – these are available at the visitor center)

Milages

Trailhead at Pine Springs Campground	0.0 miles
Intersection with Horse Trail	0.7 miles
North-facing Slope (forest).....	1.5 miles
Backcountry Campsite	3.25 miles
Summit	4.25 miles

Map

