Guadalupe Mountains

National Park
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Backpacking

With over 80 miles of trails and ten backcountry campgrounds, Guadalupe Mountains National Park offers outstanding backpacking opportunities. All trips require preparation. Improper equipment, poor conditioning, and disregard for unpredictable weather changes can result in an unpleasant or dangerous outing. Respect for the land you hike through will help protect the park for you and future visitors.

Permits

All overnight backpackers must obtain a free Backcountry Use Permit, issued at the Headquarters Visitor Center and Dog Canyon Ranger Station. Permits must be obtained in person, the day of or the day before a proposed trip. The permit reserves a campsite at one of ten backcountry camping areas. Normally, plenty of campsites are available, but they may fill during spring break, fall colors, and holiday weekends.

Camping Areas

Backcountry camping areas are clusters of five to eight campsites. Each campsite consists of a level space, often outlined by wooden logs and marked by a numbered stake. There are no water, restroom, or trash collection facilities in the backcountry. Pack out all trash. Camping areas are located a short distance off the trails. Signs mark routes to these areas.

Planning Your Trip

There is *no water* available in the backcountry. Water is available *only* at the Headquarters Visitor Center and Pine Springs Campground, McKittrick Canyon Contact Station, and Dog Canyon Ranger Station. Carry a gallon per person per day in hot weather. Those wishing to spend several days in the backcountry should consider including a hike to Dog Canyon to refill water bottles as part of their itinerary. A camping fee is charged at Dog Canyon.

Pets are not permitted on trails or in the backcountry.

Most backcountry trips begin with a hike to the high country, a climb of more than 2,000 feet. This is a strenuous hike. Allow one hour per mile for ascent.

You *must* camp on leveled sites in one of ten established backcountry camping areas. Plan accordingly.

The gate to the McKittrick Canyon trailhead is locked each night. If your trip will begin or end at McKittrick, be sure to find out what time the gate will be locked.

The park brochure contains a map showing all trails. A more detailed topographic map and trail guide may be purchased at the Headquarters Visitor Center, Dog Canyon Ranger Station, or by mail. Call (505)785-2486. Consult Park Rangers for specific information about routes and campsites.

Weather

Spring-High winds with gusts up to 80 miles per hour are common. The warming trend begins in late spring.

Summer-Locally severe thunderstorms accompanied by dangerous lightening strikes and possible flash flooding in canyons. Moderate to hot temperatures. High country low temperatures in the 50's.

Fall-Crisp clear days, possible cold nights and high winds.

Winter-Mild, cool days and cold nights are the norm. High winds and freezing rain are common in the high country, and snow accumulations of three to six inches may occur. High country low temperatures in the 20's.

Equipment Considerations

Stove: Fires, including charcoal fires are not permitted anywhere in the park. Bring a backpacking stove if you plan to cook.

Tent and rain gear: Rain can occur any time of year. Afternoon thunderstorms are common in July, August, and September.

Boots: Trails are rugged; wear sturdy boots.

Hat, sunblock, sunglasses: Protect yourself from the sun.

Clothing: Be aware of weather forecast and dress/bring appropriate clothing.

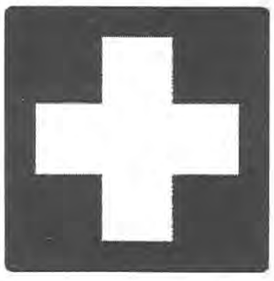
No Trace Camping

One objective of your trip should be to leave no evidence of your passing. This will contribute to a more pristine experience for future visitors.

* Camp only in established camping areas. This policy concentrates the impact of camping into small areas.
* No fires are permitted. Be especially careful with camp stoves in windy weather.
* Smoking is not permitted when the danger of fire is high; watch for posted closures.
* Bury human waste six to eight inches deep, well away from trails and camping areas.
* Pack out all trash, including toilet paper, cigarette butts, and biodegradable materials such as apple cores and orange peels.
* Do not disturb or collect any plants, animals, rocks, or other natural or historical objects. Do not feed deer or other wildlife.
* Pets are not allowed on trails.
* Cutting across switchbacks causes erosion; *stay on established trails.*
* Firearms are not permitted on park trails.

Safety

Carry a first-aid kit including tweezers for spines, band-aids and adhesive pads for blisters, compresses for severe cuts, and a triangle bandage, which can be put to many uses.



Drink plenty of water to prevent heat-related illness. A weak rapid pulse, dizziness, nausea, and headache are signs of heat exhaustion. Get into the shade, drink small sips of water, and sponge face and neck with water. Rest until fully recovered.

Watch for rattlesnakes. If you see one, don't disturb it; just walk around it. Watch where you put your hands and feet. A bite is an unlikely possibility. If bitten, apply a two-inch wide restricting band above the bite. The band should be loose enough to slip a finger under. Remain calm and seek help as quickly as possible.