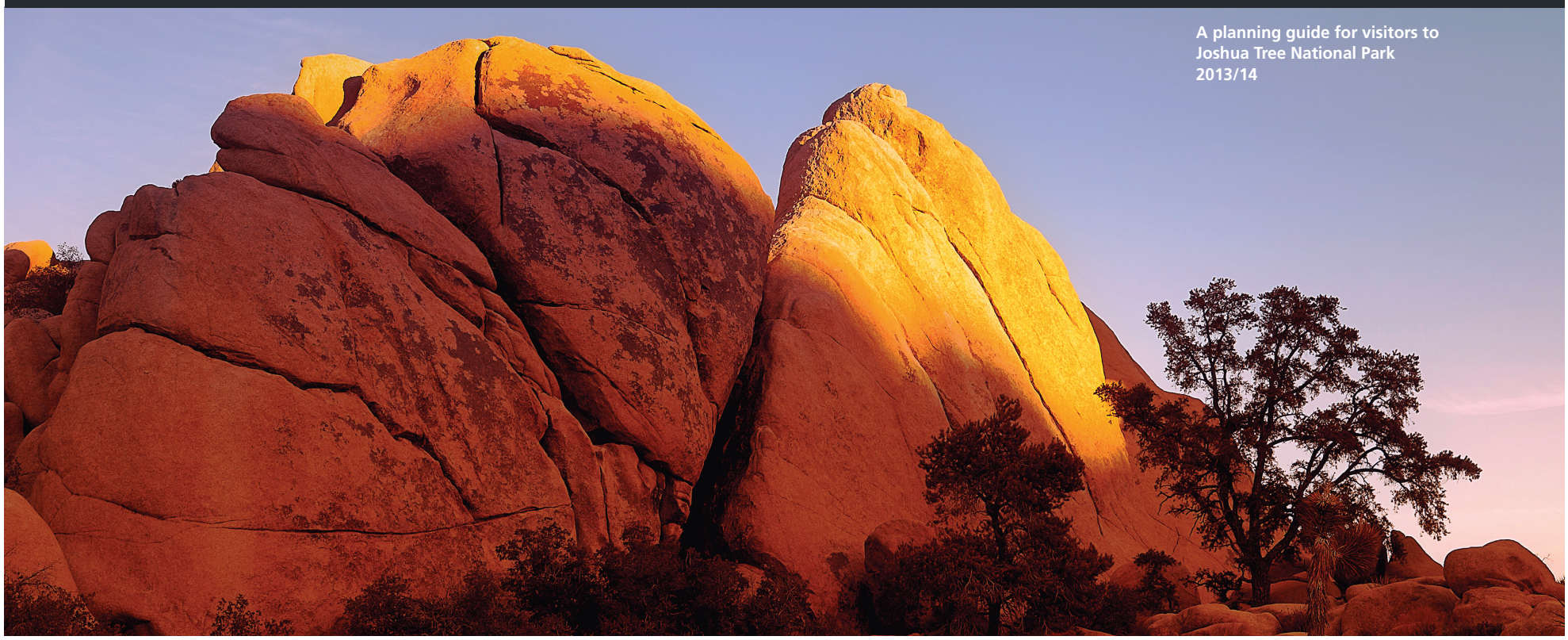
Joshua Tree Guide

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Joshua Tree National Park

A planning guide for visitors to
Joshua Tree National Park
2013/14



Paul Reiffer

Entrance Fees
The park entrance fee is $15 per vehicle. It is good for seven days. The cost of a Joshua Tree annual pass is $30. If you plan to visit several parks or other federal lands this year, an interagency annual pass is available for $80 (The interagency pass is free to active military).

Campgrounds
Black Rock, Cottonwood, and Indian Cove campsites are $15 per night; Belle, Hidden Valley, Jumbo Rocks, Ryan, and White Tank campsites cost $10 per night. Reservations are available for Black Rock and Indian Cove and for all group sites. See page six for additional information.

For Kids
Stop at an entrance station or visitor center and pick up a Junior Ranger booklet; it is free. Complete the activities and return the booklet to a ranger at an entrance station or visitor center to receive a Joshua Tree Junior Ranger badge.

Ranger Programs
Ranger-guided walks, talks, and evening programs are a good way to increase your appreciation of the plants, animals, geology, and cultural features of the park. Program schedules are available at visitor centers and entrance stations, and at www.nps.gov/jotr.

Keys View
This popular destination, perched on the crest of the Little San Bernardino Mountains, provides panoramic views of the Coachella Valley and is well worth the 20-minute drive from Park Boulevard down Keys View Road. The lookout is wheelchair accessible, or take the .2-mile-loop trail up the ridge for especially nice views.

Weather
Temperatures in the park vary widely from season to season. Spring and fall temperatures are most comfortable, with an average high/low of 85 and 50°F (29 and 10°C) respectively. Winter brings cooler days, around 60°F (15°C), and freezing nights. It occasionally snows at higher elevations. Summers are hot, over 100°F (38°C) during the day and not cooling much below 75°F (24°C) until the early hours of the morning.

joshua tree national park
74485 national park drive
twentynine palms, ca 92277

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Visitor Center Hours

Oasis	8 am – 5 pm
Joshua Tree	8 am – 5 pm
Cottonwood	8 am – 4 pm
Black Rock	October – May
Daily (except Fridays)	8 am – 4 pm
Fridays	Noon – 8 pm

Emergencies
Call 909-383-5651 or dial 911 or contact a park ranger. Cell phone coverage in the park is spotty.

Photo above: Shadow & Light On Boulders.
Photo left: Morning Walk Around the Oasis of Mara.

Important information

accessibility
The nature trails at Bajada, Cap Rock, and the Oasis of Mara are accessible. Keys View is accessible and Site 122 at Jumbo Rocks Campground is wheelchair accessible.

all terrain vehicles
ATVs may not be used in the park.

bees
Bees may attack when their hives are threatened; listen for buzzing and stay away. Bees looking for water are attracted to any moisture source, including human perspiration. Don't swat at them; they might sting you. Keep drinks and food inside your vehicle. Keep car windows rolled up and use caution when exiting.

bicycling
Bicycling is permitted on public roads, both paved and dirt, but not on trails. There are no bicycle paths and many roads are narrow, so ride cautiously.

campfires
Campfires are permitted in campgrounds and in picnic areas where fire grates are provided. Campfires are not allowed in the backcountry. Collecting vegetation, living or dead, is prohibited, so bring firewood.

climate
Days are typically clear with less than 25 percent humidity. Temperatures are most comfortable in the spring and fall, with an average high/low of 85 and 50°F (29 and 10°C) respectively. Winter brings cooler days, around 60°F (15°C), and freezing nights. It occasionally snows at higher elevations. Summers are hot, over—sometimes well over—100°F (38°C) during the day and not cooling much below 75°F (24°C) until the early hours of the morning.

commercial filming
When filming or photography involves advertising a product or service, the use of models, sets, props, or the use of a restricted site, a film permit is required.

day-use and restricted areas
Some areas within the park are privately owned; others protect wildlife or historical sites. Entering these areas is prohibited. Closed from dusk to dawn, day-use areas are set aside to protect sensitive populations of wildlife.

dehydration
It is easy to become dehydrated in arid desert environments. Even if you only plan to drive through the park, you should have some water with you. If you are going to camp, we recommend one gallon per person per day. If hiking or biking, you will want to take along two gallons per person. Drink the water and do not economize. When the water is half gone, it is time to turn back.

emergency phones
In an emergency call San Bernardino Dispatch at 909-383-5651. Call collect. Cell coverage is very limited inside the park. Emergency-only phones are located at the ranger station in Indian Cove and at Intersection Rock near Hidden Valley Campground.

entrance fees
Admission to the park is $15 per vehicle and is good for seven consecutive days. A Joshua Tree Pass may be purchased for $30 and a Federal Lands Pass, which is good for all federal recreation sites, costs $80. (This pass is free to active military personnel.) Both are good for 12 months. A Senior Pass may be purchased by any U.S. citizen 62 or older for $10, and it is good for life.

firearms and weapons
Firearms may be possessed in accordance with California state and federal laws; they may not be used in the park. Fireworks, traps, bows, BB guns, paint-ball guns, and slingshots are not allowed in the park.

food, lodging, services
There are no concessions within the park. However, surrounding communities can fulfill most visitor needs. Contact local chambers of commerce for information. Their contact information is listed on page six of this publication.

food storage
Store food in hard-sided containers or in your vehicle to prevent ravens, coyotes, and other wildlife from eating it.

getting to the park
The park is located about 140 miles east of Los Angeles via I–10. Entrances to the park are located off CA HWY 62 (Twentynine Palms Highway), at the towns of Joshua Tree and Twentynine Palms. A third entrance is located about 25 miles east of Indio, via I–10.

horses
Horseback riding is a popular way to experience the park. Because of the special requirements for stock in desert areas, you will want to request the publication on horse use before you come.

international visitors
Park information is available at visitor centers and entrance stations in Dutch, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

keep wildlife wild
Feeding coyotes and other animals weans them from their natural food supplies and turns normally shy creatures into aggressive ones as they lose their fear of humans. It is also illegal!

leave no trace
During your visit please pick up trash around campgrounds and trails. Your actions will inspire other park visitors.

lost & found
Report lost, and turn in found, items at any visitor center or ranger station. Lost articles will be returned if found.

off-road driving
Vehicles, including bicycles, are prohibited off established roads. The desert ecosystem is fragile. Off-road driving and riding creates ruts, upsets delicate drainage patterns, compacts the soil, and leaves visual scars for years. Plants are crushed and uprooted. Wildlife shelters are destroyed, and food and water supplies are altered or obliterated.

overnight parking
There is no overflow parking in the park, at visitor centers, or park headquarters. Unattended vehicles may not be parked outside of campgrounds and backcountry boards between 10 pm and 6 am.

parking
Park roads, even the paved roads, are narrow, winding, and have soft, sandy shoulders. Accidents occur when visitors stop along the road to admire a view or make a picture. There are many pullouts and parking lots, so wait until you get to one before stopping.

pets
While pets are allowed in the park, their activities are restricted. They must be on a leash at all times and cannot be more than 100 feet from a road, picnic area, or campground; they are prohibited from trails, and they must never be left unattended.

potable water
Water is available at the visitor center in Twentynine Palms, at Black Rock and Cottonwood campgrounds, at the entrance station south of Joshua Tree, and at the Indian Cove ranger station.

rock climbing
Climbers may replace existing unsafe bolts, and new bolts may be placed in non-wilderness areas using the bolting checklist. Bolting in wilderness requires a permit.

social media
You can stay in touch by following us on Twitter @JoshuaTreeNP and on Facebook: search Joshua Tree NP.

stay out and stay alive
Mining was an important activity in this area and numerous mining sites can be found within the park. If you choose to visit them, use extreme caution and do not enter old mine workings.

sun safety
That old desert sun can damage eyes as well as skin. Wear a hat and sunglasses and use sunblocking lotion liberally.

take only pictures
Over 1.25 million people visit Joshua Tree National Park each year. If each visitor took just one rock or one plant, the park, our national heritage, would soon be gone. Removal, disturbance, destruction, or disfigurement of anything in the park is unlawful.

trash
Our dry desert climate cannot quickly decompose such things as orange peels, apple cores, egg shells, and other picnic remains. Loose paper blows into bushes creating an unsightly mess, and plastic six-pack rings can strangle wildlife. Dispose of your trash in a responsible manner and recycle whatever you can.

vehicle laws
Park roads are narrow and winding. Some areas are congested. Speed limits are there for your safety and well-being. State and federal vehicle laws apply within the park.

visitor activities
Ranger-led programs are offered on the weekends from mid-October through mid-December and from mid-February through May. Schedules are available at visitor centers, at entrance stations, and on campground bulletin boards.

visitor centers
The Oasis Visitor Center is located in Twentynine Palms and is open 8 am to 5 pm. The Joshua Tree Visitor Center, located in Joshua Tree Village, is also open 8 am to 5 pm. The Cottonwood Visitor Center serves the southern entrance to the park and is open from 8 am to 4 pm, and Black Rock Nature Center, located in Black Rock Campground, is open October through May.

wildflowers
Spring blooming periods vary with elevation, temperature, and the amount of moisture in the soil. You can find current information on the park website: www.nps.gov/jotr.

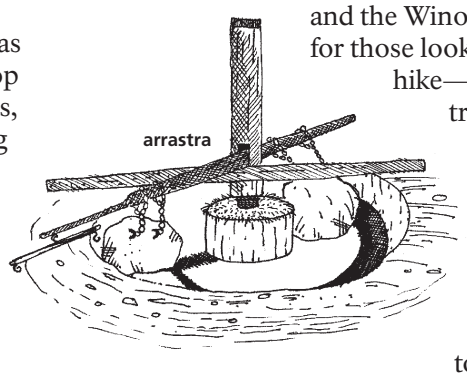
wildlife viewing
It is a thrill to see wild animals in the park, but this is their home and they should not be disturbed. This includes the use of artificial light for viewing them.

world wide web
If you are "connected," check out the National Park Service publications on the web at www.nps.gov. We are adding more information all the time.

you are responsible
You are responsible for knowing and obeying park rules. Check at visitor centers, at entrance stations, on bulletin boards, and on the park website: www.nps.gov/jotr to find out what they are. When in doubt, ask a ranger.

Where in the Park is Cottonwood Spring?

Cottonwood Spring Oasis, one of the best kept secrets in Joshua Tree National Park, is just seven miles from the southern entrance to the park. The spring, the result of earthquake activity, was used for centuries by the Cahuilla Indians, who left bedrock mortars and clay pots, or ollas, in the area.



Cottonwood Spring was an important water stop for prospectors, miners, and teamsters traveling from Mecca to mines in the north. Water was necessary for gold processing, so a number of gold mills were located here. The remains of an arrastra, a primitive type of gold mill, can be found near the spring.

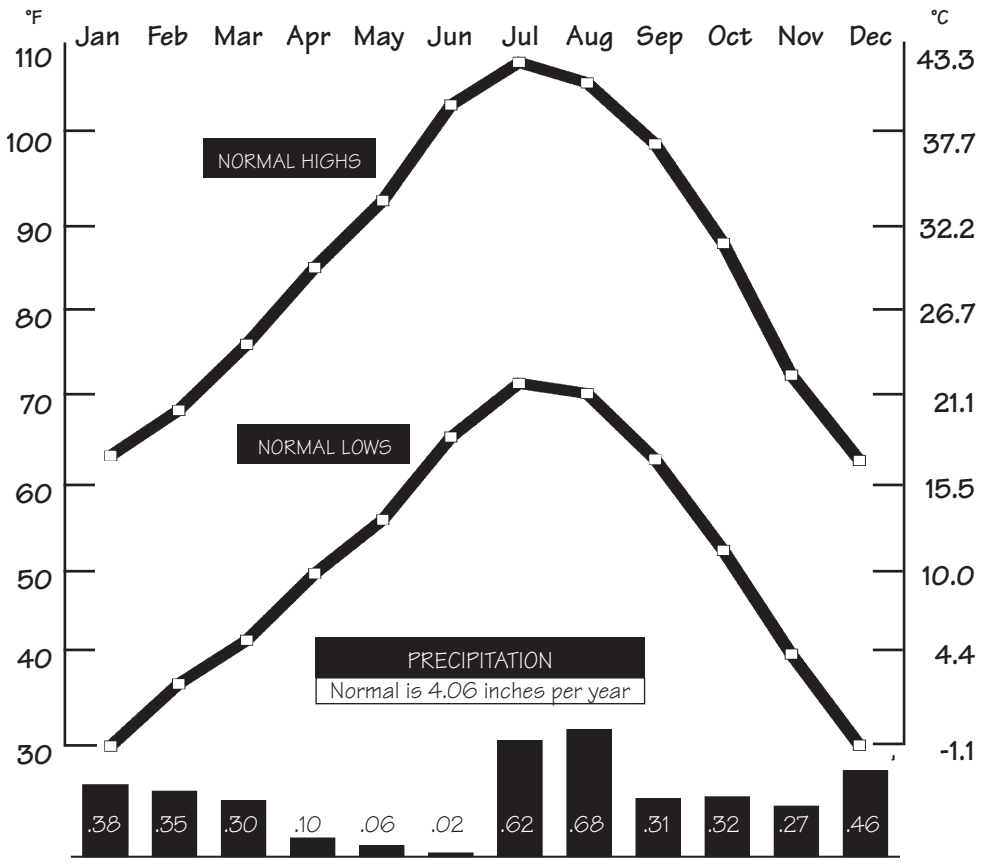
Cottonwood Spring was first mentioned in a gold mine claim filed in 1875, indicating that the trees are native. Fan palms first appear around 1920, perhaps growing from seeds deposited by a bird or coyote.

A number of hikes begin at the spring. An easy walk down Cottonwood Wash leads past a second oasis to a dry falls. In wet years, the falls can become a scene of rushing water and red-spotted toads. Bighorn sheep often come up the wash for water in the early hours. The three-mile loop trail to Mastodon Peak offers spectacular views, interesting geology, the Mastodon Mine, and the Winona Mill Site. And, for those looking for a longer hike—eight miles round trip—and the largest stand of fan palms in the park, the Lost Palms Oasis trail is a sure winner.

But you don't have to hike to enjoy Cottonwood Spring. This is one of the best birding spots in the park, so bring your binoculars and sit a spell.

The campground, which has water and rest rooms, is located one-half mile from the spring via a signed trail. To learn more about the plants, animals, and history of this fascinating place, stop at the visitor center or join a ranger-led hike, walk, or evening program.

The Weather



Measurements were taken at 1,960 feet. You can expect seven to 12 degrees cooler temperatures and 3.5 inches more precipitation at higher elevations.

Rockpiles

The geologic landscape of Joshua Tree has long fascinated visitors to this desert. How did the rocks take on such fantastic shapes? What forces sculpted them?

Geologists believe the face of our modern landscape was born more than 100 million years ago. Molten liquid, heated by the continuous movement of Earth's crust, oozed upward and cooled while still below the surface of the overlying rock. These plutonic intrusions are a granitic rock called monzogranite.

The monzogranite developed a system of rectangular joints. One set, oriented roughly horizontally, resulted from the removal, by erosion, of the miles of overlying rock, called gneiss (pronounced "nice"). Another set of joints is oriented vertically, roughly paralleling the contact of the monzogranite with its surrounding rocks. The third set is also vertical, but cuts the second set at high angles. The resulting system of joints tended to develop rectangular blocks. (figure 1) Good examples of the joint system may be seen at Jumbo Rocks, Wonderland of Rocks, and Split Rock.

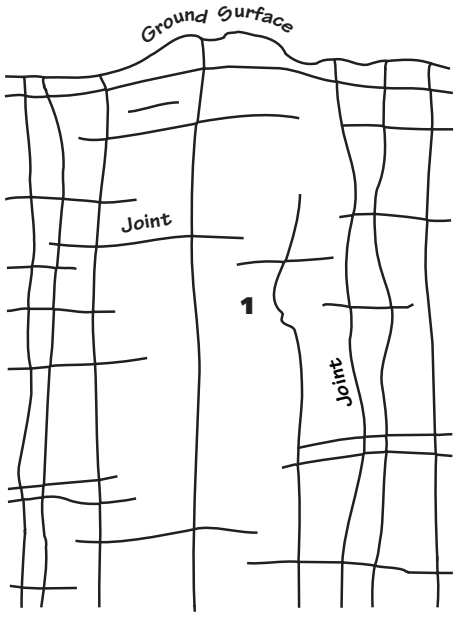
As ground water percolated down through the monzogranite's joint fractures, it began to transform some hard mineral grains along its path into soft clay, while it loosened and freed grains resistant to solution. Rectangular stones slowly weathered to spheres of hard rock surrounded by soft clay containing loose mineral grains. Imagine holding an ice cube under the faucet. The cube rounds away at the corners first, because that is the part most exposed to the force of the water. A similar thing happened here, but over millions of years, on a grand scale, and during a much wetter climate. (figure 2)

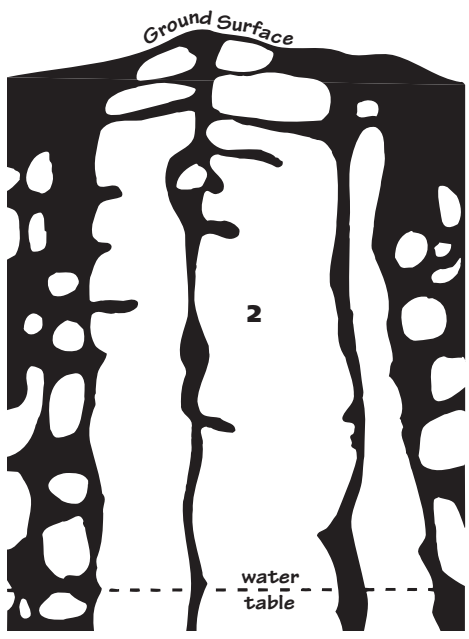
After the arrival of the arid climate of recent times, flash floods began washing away the protective ground surface. As they were exposed, the huge eroded boulders settled one on top of another, creating those impressive rock piles we see today. (figure 3)

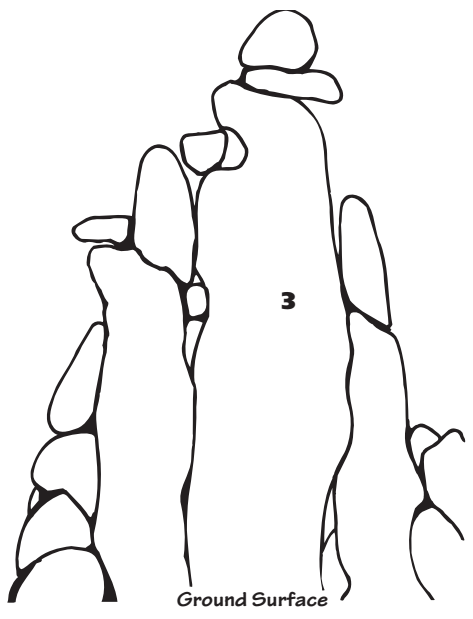
Visitors also wonder about the "broken terrace walls" laced throughout the boulders. These are naturally occurring formations called dikes. Younger than the surrounding monzogranite, dikes were formed when molten rock was pushed into existing joint fractures. Light-colored dikes formed as a mixture of quartz and potassium minerals cooled in these tight spaces. Suggesting the work of a stonemason, they broke into uniform blocks when they were exposed to the surface.

Of the dynamic processes that erode rock material, water, even in arid environments, is the most important. Wind action is also important, but less so than the action of water.

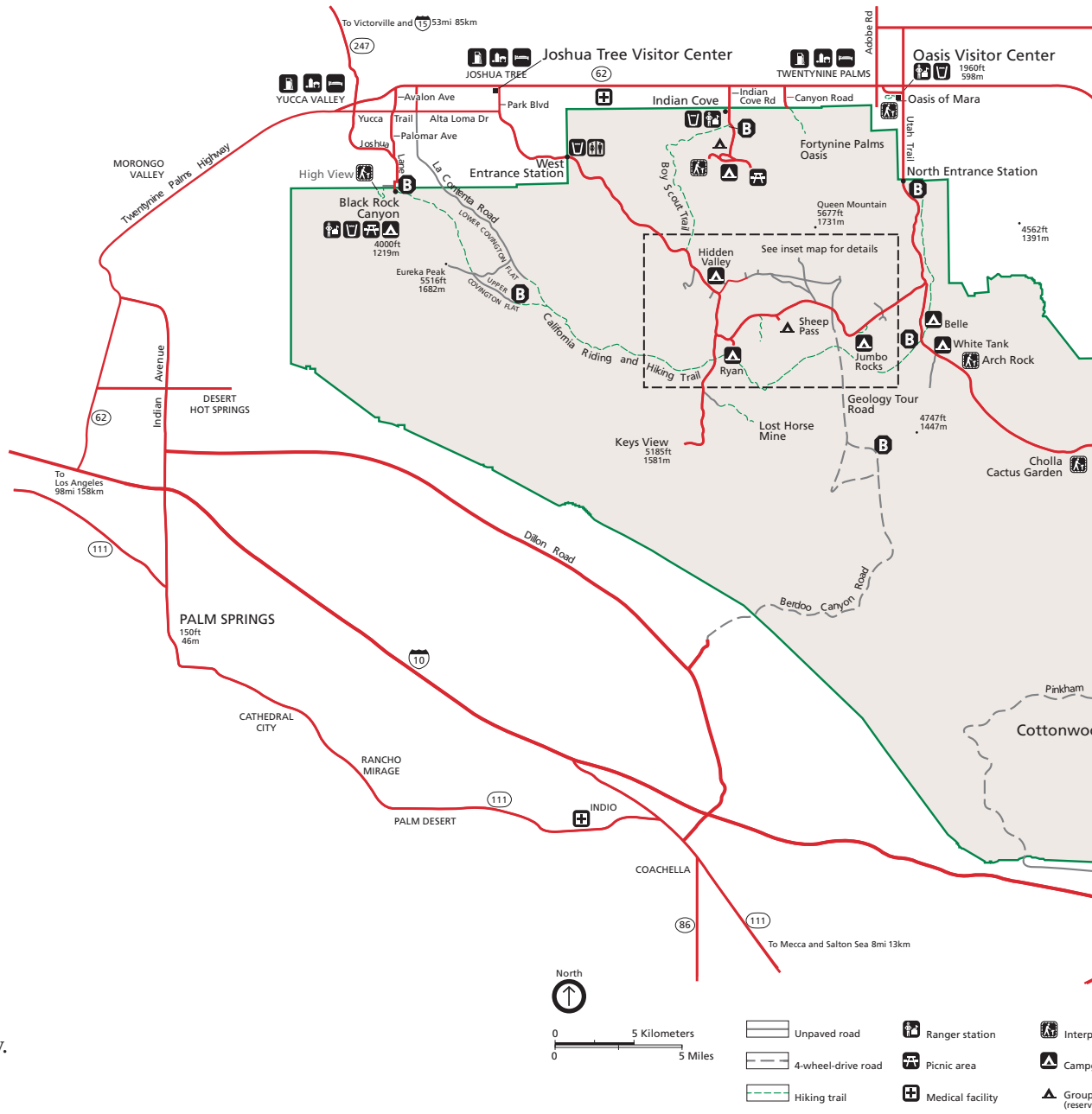
The processes operating in the arid conditions of the present are only partially responsible for the sculpturing of the rocks. The present landscape is essentially a collection of relic features inherited from earlier times of higher rainfall and lower temperatures.







How Far Is It?	Oasis VC	Cottonwood VC	Joshua Tree VC
Belle Campground	9	28	28
Black Rock Canyon	25	65	9
Cap Rock/Keys View Road	19	40	16
Cholla Cactus Garden	18	20	36
Cottonwood Spring	38	0	56
Geology Tour Road	13	35	21
Hidden Valley	20	42	14
Indian Cove	10	48	8
Interstate 10	45	7	63
Jumbo Rocks Campground	12	34	23
Keys Ranch Tour	22	44	16
Keys View	24	45	21
Oasis of Mara	0	38	34
Pinto Basin Road/Park Blvd.	8	30	26
Ryan Campground	18	39	16
Sheep Pass Campground	16	37	19
White Tank Campground	11	27	29



Area Information

Contact the following chambers of commerce for information about accommodations and attractions:

Desert Hot Springs
11999 Palm Drive
Desert Hot Springs, CA 92240
760-329-6403
www.deserthotsprings.com

Indio
82-921 Indio Blvd.
Indio, CA 92201
760-347-0676
info@indiochmbr.org
www.indiochamber.org

Joshua Tree
P.O. Box 600
Joshua Tree, CA 92252
760-366-3723
www.joshuatreechamber.org

Palm Springs
190 W. Amado Rd.
Palm Springs, CA 92262
760-325-1577
PSChamber@worldnet.att.net
www.pschamber.org

Twentynine Palms
73484 29 Palms Highway
Twentynine Palms, CA 92277
760-367-3445
www.29chamber.org

Yucca Valley
56300 29 Palms Highway.
Yucca Valley, CA 92284
760-365-6323
chamber@yuccavalley.org
www.yuccavalley.org

Ranger Programs

Keys Ranch tours,

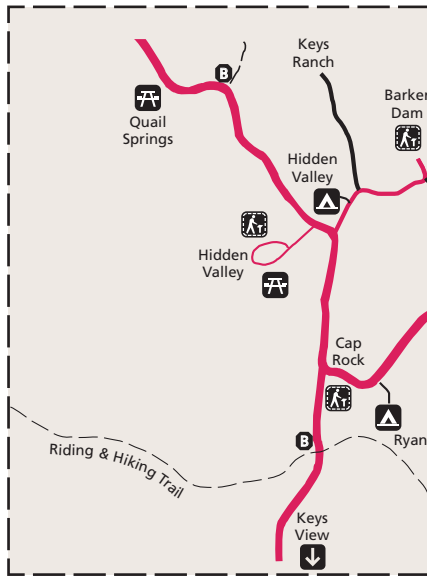
Evening campground talks,

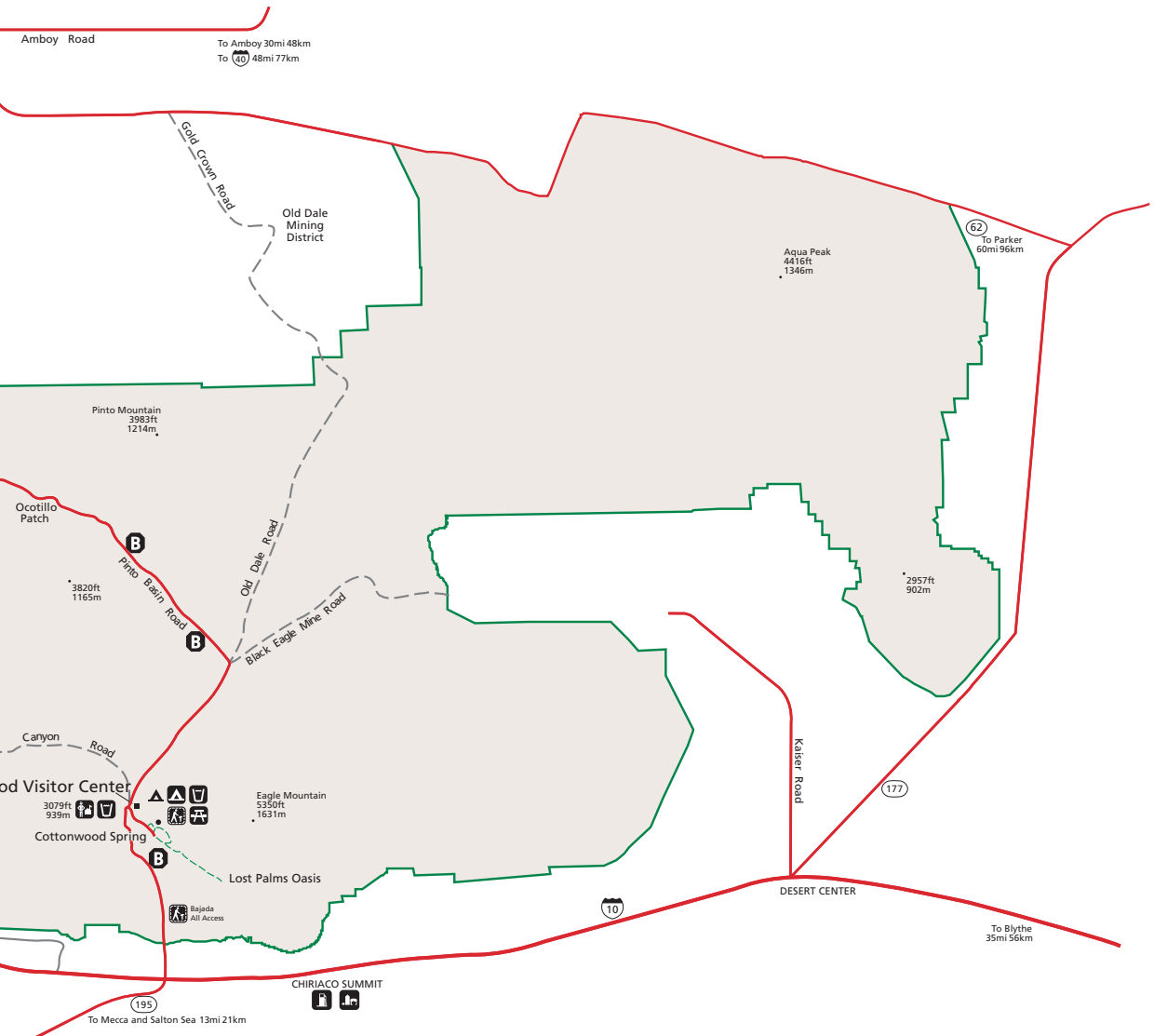
Discovery walks,

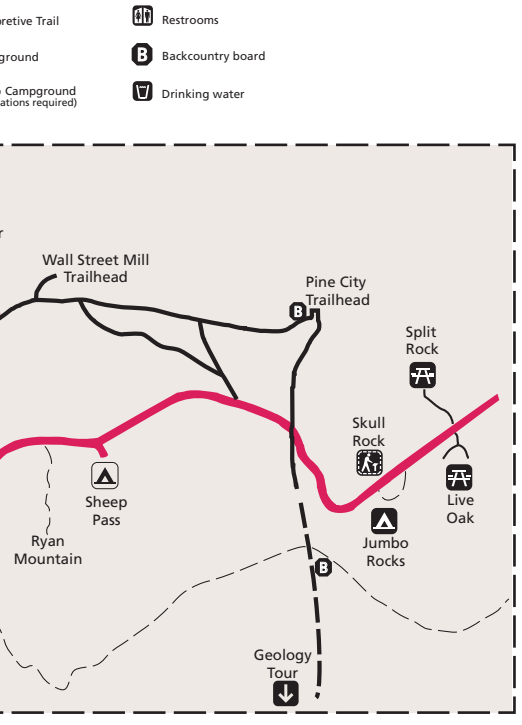
Night sky viewing

And much more.

Pick up a current schedule at an entrance station or visitor center; or look on campground bulletin boards. We also publish program schedules on our website: www.nps.gov/jotr.







NATURE TRAILS

Trail	Mileage	Starting Point
Arch Rock	.3-mile loop (.5-km)	White Tank Campground, opposite site 9
Bajada All-Access	.25-mile loop (.4-km)	South of Cottonwood, one-half mile from the southern entrance to the park
Barker Dam	1.1-mile loop (1.8-km)	Barker Dam parking area
Cap Rock	.4-mile loop (.6-km)	Cap Rock parking area, at the junction of Park Blvd. and Keys View Road
Cholla Cactus Garden	.25-mile loop (.4-km)	20 miles north of Cottonwood Visitor Center
Cottonwood Spring	1-mile (1.6-km)	Cottonwood Spring parking area
Hidden Valley	1-mile loop (1.6-km)	Hidden Valley picnic area
Hi-View	1.3-mile loop (2.1-km)	Northwest of Black Rock Campground
Indian Cove	.6-mile loop (1-km)	West end of Indian Cove Campground
Keys View	.25-mile loop (.4-km)	Keys View
Oasis of Mara	.5-mile loop (.8-km)	Oasis Visitor Center, Twentynine Palms
Skull Rock	1.7-mile (2.7-km)	Jumbo Rocks Campground

The Joshua Tree Guide is produced by the employees and volunteers of Joshua Tree National Park and Joshua Tree National Park Association.

HIKING TRAILS

Trail	Round-trip Mileage	Time	Starting Point	Trail Description
Boy Scout Trail	16 miles 25.8km	1-2 days	Indian Cove backcountry board or Keys West backcountry board 0.5 mile (0.8km) east of Quail Springs Picnic area	Scenic trail through the western most edge of the Wonderland of Rocks. See backcountry board for information on overnight use. Moderate.
49 Palms Oasis	3 miles (4.8 km)	2-3 hours	Parking area at end of Canyon Road, 4 miles (6.4 km) west of Twentynine Palms off Hwy 62	Several stands of fan palms, evidence of past fires, and pools of water are found at the oasis. The plants in this area are especially fragile, so walk lightly. Moderately strenuous.
Lost Horse Mine/Mt.	4 miles (6.4 km)	3-4 hour	Parking area 1.2 miles (1.9 km) east of Keys View Road	Site of ten-stamp mill and foundations. Summit elevation: 5278 feet (1609 m). Moderately strenuous.
Lost Palms Oasis	7.2 miles (11.6 km)	4-6 hours	Cottonwood Spring or Cottonwood Campground	A canyon with numerous palm stands. A side trip to Victory Palms and Munsen Canyon involves boulder scrambling. Moderate to oasis overlook, then strenuous.
Mastodon Peak	3 miles (4.8 km)	2-3 hours	Cottonwood Spring or Cottonwood Campground	Excellent views of the Eagle Mountains and Salton Sea. Summit elevation: 3371 feet (1027 m). Moderate.
Ryan Mountain	3 miles (4.8 km)	2-3 hours	Ryan Mountain parking area or Sheep Pass Campground	Excellent views of Lost Horse, Queen, and Pleasant Valleys. Summit elevation: 5461 feet (1664 m). Moderately strenuous.

Thirty-five miles of the California Riding and Hiking Trail pass through the park. Access to the trail is at its junction with Covington Flats, Keys View, and Squaw Tank (Geology Tour) Roads; at Ryan Campground; south of Belle Campground; and near the north entrance to the park. This allows for shorter hikes of 4, 6.7, or 11 miles (6.4, 10.7, or 17.6 km). Two to three days are required to hike the entire length of the trail.

Campgrounds

Campgrounds	Elevation	Sites	Fee	Group Sites	Group Fee	Horse Camp	Water	Flush Toilets	Chemical Toilets	Tables	Fire Grates	Dump Station
Belle	3800′	18	$10						*	*	*	
Black Rock	4000′	100	$15			$15	*	*		*	*	*
Cottonwood	3000′	62	$15	3	$30		*	*		*	*	*
Hidden Valley	4200′	45	$10						*	*	*	
Indian Cove	3200′	101	$15	13	$25/40				*	*	*	
Jumbo Rocks	4400′	125	$10						*	*	*	
Ryan	4300′	31	$10			$10			*	*	*	
Sheep Pass	4500′			6	$25/40				*	*	*	
White Tank	3800′	15	$10						*	*	*	

Campsites are limited to six people, three tents, and two cars. Group sites accommodate ten to 60 people.

Obtain reservations up to six months in advance for sites at Black Rock, Indian Cove, and all group sites by calling 1-877-444-6777. Other campgrounds are first come-first served. Camp only in designated campsites.

There are no hookups for recreational vehicles. At Hidden Valley and group sites, recreational vehicles may not exceed 25 feet in length. At White Tank, the 25-foot limit includes the towing vehicle.

Water is available at Oasis Visitor Center, Indian Cove Ranger Station, West Entrance, and Black Rock and Cottonwood campgrounds. Showers are not available.

Store food in containers capable of preventing access by wildlife, or in your vehicle. Any scented or odorous items must be similarly stored.

All vegetation in the park is protected. If you want to make a campfire, bring your own firewood.

Quiet hours are from 10 pm to 6 am. Generator use is limited to six hours a day: 7 to 9 am, noon to 2 pm, and 5 to 7 pm.

There is a 30-day camping limit each year. However, only 14 nights total may occur from October through May.

Be an inspiration to others; leave your campsite cleaner than you found it.

What To See And Do

Viewed from the road the desert may appear bleak and drab. Closer examination reveals a fascinating variety of plants and animals and surreal geologic features. Joshua Tree National Park offers visitors endless opportunities for exploration and discovery. Depending on the number of hours you have to spend, your interests and energy, here are some ideas to consider:

IF YOU HAVE FOUR HOURS OR LESS, begin your tour at a park visitor center. Park staff will be happy to provide you with current information about conditions in the park as well as answers to your questions.

With limited time you may want to confine your sightseeing to the main park roads. Many pullouts with wayside exhibits dot these roads. A list of nature trails and short walks appears in this publication. Consider experiencing at least one of these walks during a short park visit.

On clear days the vista from Keys View extends beyond Salton Sea to Mexico and is well worth the additional 20-minute drive.

IF YOU PLAN TO SPEND AN ENTIRE DAY, there will be time to walk several nature trails or take a longer hike; several are listed on page 7 of this publication. A ranger-led program will add enjoyment and understanding to your visit. Check at visitor centers and on campground bulletin boards for listings. Or, call ahead and reserve a spot on the popular Keys Ranch guided walking tour.

Some visitors like to experience the desert from the seat of a mountain bike. The park offers an extensive network of dirt roads that make for less crowded and safer cycling than the paved main roads. A selection of road trips is included in the article titled Backcountry Roads in this publication.

Joshua Tree has gained international attention as a superb rock-climbing area. Many visitors enjoy watching the rock climbers in action.

WITH MORE THAN ONE DAY IN THE PARK, your options increase. There are nine campgrounds and backcountry camping is permitted. You will find information concerning camping and backcountry use elsewhere in this publication.

Books and topographic maps give information needed for longer hikes. For “peak baggers,” the park has ten mountains over 5,000 feet (1,524 m) in elevation. Or make it your goal to hike to all the park oases. Other trails lead you to remnants of the gold mining era, a colorful part of the park’s cultural history.

Whatever you choose, your time will be rewarding. The desert holds much more than what is readily apparent to the casual observer. *A note of caution:* The desert, fascinating as it is, can be life-threatening for those unfamiliar with its potential dangers. It is essential that you carry water with you—even if you are only driving through. Cars break down; keys get locked inside; accidents happen.

Backcountry Roads

for mountain bikes and 4-wheel-drive vehicles

Mountain bikes and 4-wheel drive vehicles are welcome in the park. For your own safety and for the protection of natural features, stay on established roads. Tire tracks on the open desert can last for years and will spoil the wilderness experience of future hikers.

Paved roads in the park are narrow with soft shoulders. Curves, boulder piles, and Joshua trees restrict the vision of bikers and motorists. The unpaved roads in the park are safer for bikes and offer many opportunities to explore the area. Here is a sampling:

Pinkham Canyon Road

This challenging 20-mile (32.4-km) road begins at Cottonwood Visitor Center, travels along Smoke Tree Wash, and then cuts down Pinkham Canyon. Sections of the road run through soft sand and rocky flood plains. The road connects to a service road next to I-10.

Black Eagle Mine Road

Beginning 6.5 miles (10.5 km) north of Cottonwood Visitor Center, this dead-end dirt road runs along the edge of Pinto Basin, crosses several dry washes, and winds through canyons in the Eagle Mountains. The first nine miles (14.5 km) are within the park boundary. Beyond that point is Bureau of Land Management land and a number of side roads. Several old mines are located near these roads. Use extreme caution when exploring old mines.

Old Dale Road

This 23-mile (37.3 km) road starts at the same point as Black Eagle Mine Road. The first 11 miles (17.8 km), cross Pinto Basin, a flat, sandy dry-lake bed. Leaving the basin, the road climbs a steep hill, then crosses the park boundary. A number of side roads veer off toward old mines and residences. The main road leads to CA HWY 62, 15 miles (24.3 km) east of Twentynine Palms.

Queen Valley Roads

A network of roads, totaling 13.4 miles (21.7 km), crosses this valley of boulder piles and Joshua trees. A bike trip can begin at Hidden Valley or the dirt road opposite Geology Tour Road. Bike racks have been placed in this area so visitors can lock their bikes and go hiking.

Geology Tour Road

An 18-mile motor tour leads through one of the park’s most fascinating landscapes. The road turns south from the paved road two miles (3.2 km) west of Jumbo Rocks Campground. There are 16 stops and it takes approximately two hours to make the round trip. The distance from the junction to Squaw Tank is 5.4 miles (8.8 km) This section is mostly downhill but bumpy and sandy. Starting at Squaw Tank, a 6-mile (9.7 km) circular route explores Pleasant Valley. A descriptive brochure that highlights each stop is available at the beginning of the road.

Covington Flats

The dirt roads in Covington Flats offer access to some of the park’s largest Joshua trees, junipers, and pinyon pines. From Covington Flats picnic area to Eureka Peak is 3.8 miles (6.2 km) one-way. The dirt road is steep near the end, but the top offers views of Palm Springs, the surrounding mountains, and the Morongo Basin. Your trip will be 6.5 miles (10.5 km) longer if you ride or drive over to the backcountry board, a starting point for excellent hiking.

Backcountry Camping, Hiking, and Horseback Riding

Joshua Tree National Park is a backpacker's dream with its mild winter climate and interesting rock formations, plants, and wildlife. It embraces 794,000 acres, of which 585,040 acres have been designated wilderness. By observing the guidelines below, your venture into the backcountry should be safe and enjoyable. If you have questions, ask a ranger. It is your responsibility to know and abide by park regulations.

Registering

If you will be out overnight, register at a backcountry board. The map in this publication indicates the location of the twelve backcountry boards. An unregistered vehicle or a vehicle left overnight somewhere other than at a backcountry board is a cause for concern about the safety of the vehicle's occupants. It is also subject to citation and towing.

Hiking

It is easy to get disoriented in the desert: washes and animal trails crisscross the terrain obscuring trails, boulder piles are confusingly similar, and there are not many prominent features by which to guide yourself. Do get yourself a topographic map and compass or GPS unit and learn how to use them before you head out. Cell phones are often not usable inside the park.

Know your limitations and don't take risks. You should not attempt to climb steep terrain without adequate equipment, conditioning, and training. Accidents can be fatal.

Carry a minimum of one gallon of water per person per day just for drinking, two gallons in hot weather or if you are planning a strenuous trip. You will need additional water for cooking and hygiene. And don't forget the other essentials: rain protection, a flashlight, a mirror and whistle, a first-aid kit, pencil and paper, a pocket knife, and extra food.

Locating your camp

Your wilderness camp must be located one mile from the road and 500 feet from any trail. Make yourself aware of any day-use areas in the vicinity (they are indicated on the maps at the backcountry boards) and make certain to camp outside their boundaries.

Washes may seem like inviting places to sleep because they are relatively level, but it is important to realize that they got that way because flash floods "bulldozed" the rocks and vegetation out of the way.

Domestic issues

Water sources in the park are not potable and are reserved for wildlife, so you will have to carry an adequate supply for drinking, cooking, and hygiene. You will want to give some thought to the trade-off between the water required to hydrate dried foods and the heftier weight of canned and fresh foods. If you want to heat something, you will need to pack in a stove and fuel, as open fires are prohibited in the backcountry.

Bring plastic bags to hold your garbage, and pack it out. Buried trash gets dug up by animals and scattered by the wind; it is not a pretty sight. Do bury human waste in "cat" holes six-inches deep. Don't bury your toilet paper; put it in plastic (zip-locks work nicely) and pack it out. Leave no trace, as they say.

Coping with the weather

That old desert sun can damage eyes as well as skin. Wear a hat and sunglasses and use sun-blocking lotion liberally.

Temperature changes of 40 degrees within 24 hours are common. Bring a variety of clothes so you can layer on and off as conditions change.

Although rain is relatively rare in the desert, when it does come it can really pour down. Even when it isn't raining where you are, rain in the mountains can run off so fast as to cause flash floods. Stay alert.

Horseback riding

Horseback riding is a popular way to experience the backcountry and there are 253 miles of equestrian trails that traverse open lands, canyon bottoms, and dry washes. Because of the special requirements for horses, care should be taken in planning your trip. You may call 760-367-5500 and request that additional information be mailed to you.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Joshua Tree National Park

Superintendent: Mark Butler

Designations
National Park – 1994
Biosphere Reserve – 1984
National Monument – 1936

Size
792,623 acres

Park Information
760-367-5500

Web Site
www.nps.gov/jotr/

Social Media
twitter.com/joshuatreenp
facebook.com/joshuatreenp

E-mail
jotr_info@nps.gov

Mailing Address
74485 National Park Drive
Twentynine Palms, CA 92277

Fax Number
760-367-6392

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Black Rock Canyon Offers Good Hiking and More

Located in the northwest corner of the park, the road to Black Rock Canyon dead-ends at the campground. Campsites are located on a hillside at the mouth of the canyon surrounded by Joshua trees, junipers, cholla cactus, and a variety of desert shrubs. Spring blooms usually begin with the Joshua trees in late February followed by shrubs and annuals through May.

This quiet, family campground is a good introduction for first-time campers. Each campsite has a picnic table and fire ring with rest rooms and water nearby. If you forget to bring your firewood, shopping facilities are only five miles away in the town of Yucca Valley. Campsites vary in size and can accommodate both tents and RVs. A day-use picnic area and a dump station are also available. For horse owners, a separate area is provided for camping or for staging a ride.

Campers register and pay camping fees at the nature center located in the middle of the campground. The staff at this small visitor center can help you plan a hike or other activity. Maps, books, nature guides, and children's activity books may be purchased there.

The hills behind the campground offer a variety of hiking trails including the Hi-View Nature Trail. The interpretive guide for this trail, available at the nature center, identifies the vegetation along this scenic 1.3-mile walk. For those looking for longer trails, Eureka Peak, Panorama Loop, and Warren Peak take hikers to ridge lines overlooking the often snowy peaks of San Jacinto and San Gorgonio. The trailhead for a 35-mile section of the California Riding and Hiking Trail is located at Black Rock. Backpackers can register at the backcountry board here for overnight wilderness trips.

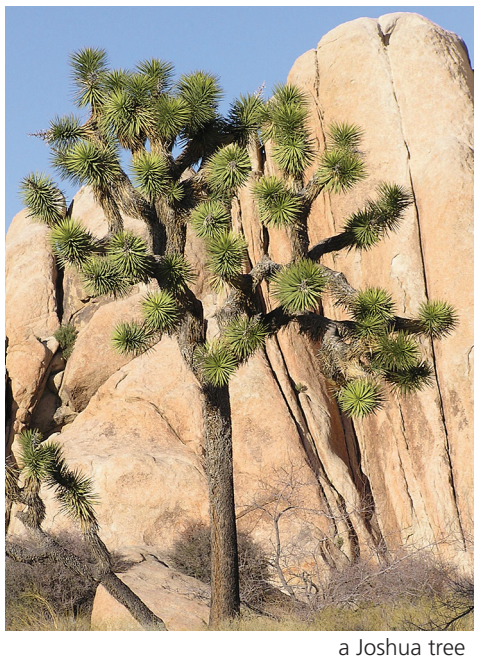
But you don't have to hike to enjoy the Black Rock Canyon area. Wildlife sightings are frequent in the campground. Visitors often encounter ground squirrels, jackrabbits, and cottontails. Frequent bird sightings include cactus wrens, Gambel's quail, great horned owls, scrub-jays, and roadrunners. A lucky birder might be rewarded with a glimpse of a Scott's oriole, pinyon jay, or LeConte's thrasher. More elusive species such as bobcat, bighorn sheep, mountain lions, desert tortoises, and mule deer have all been seen in the area. As the sun sets, listen for the "singing" of coyotes living on the outskirts of the campground.

Please do not feed wild animals in Joshua Tree National Park. People food is unhealthy for them and they could become aggressive and harm you.

Enjoy animals at a distance.
Never feed or approach them.
Store food and trash properly.

"I Speak for the Trees" *Dr. Seuss, The Lorax*

Surrounded by twisted, spiky trees straight out of a Dr. Seuss book, you might begin to question your map. Where are we anyway? In wonder, the traveler pulls over for a snapshot of this prickly oddity; the naturalist reaches for a botanical guide to explain this vegetative spectacle; and the rock climber shouts "Yowch!" when poked by dagger-like spines on the way to the 5.10 climbing route.



a Joshua tree

Known as the park namesake, the Joshua tree, *Yucca brevifolia,* is a member of the Agave family. (Until recently, it was considered a giant member of the Lily family, but DNA studies led to the division of that formerly huge family into 40 distinct plant families.) Like the California fan palm, *Washingtonia filifera,* the Joshua tree is a monocot, in the subgroup of flowering plants that also includes grasses and orchids. Don't confuse the Joshua tree with the Mojave yucca, *Yucca schidigera*. This close relative can be distinguished by its longer, wider leaves and fibrous threads curling along leaf margins. Both types of yuccas can be seen growing together in the park. The Joshua tree provides a good indicator that you are in the Mojave Desert, but you may also find it growing next to a saguaro cactus in the Sonoran Desert in western Arizona or mixed with pines in the San Bernardino Mountains.

a Mojave yucca

Years ago the Joshua tree was recognized by American Indians for its useful properties: tough leaves were worked into baskets and sandals, and flower buds and raw or roasted seeds made a healthy addition to the diet. The local Cahuilla have long referred to the tree as "hunuvat chiy'a" or "humwichawa"; both names are used by a few elders fluent in the language.

By the mid-19th century, Mormon immigrants had made their way across the Colorado River. Legend has it that these pioneers named the tree after the biblical figure, Joshua, seeing the limbs of the tree as outstretched in supplication, guiding the travelers westward. Concurrent with Mormon settlers, ranchers and miners arrived in the high desert with high hopes of raising cattle and digging for gold. These homesteaders used the Joshua tree's limbs and trunks for fencing and corrals. Miners found a source of fuel for the steam engines used in processing ore.

Today we enjoy this yucca for its grotesque appearance, a surprising sight in the landscape of biological interest. The Joshua tree's life cycle begins with the rare germination of a seed, its survival dependent upon well-timed rains. Look for sprouts growing up from within the protective branches of a shrub. Young sprouts may grow quickly in the first five years, then slow considerably thereafter. The tallest Joshua tree in the park looms a whopping forty feet high, a grand

a Joshua tree bloom

another Joshua tree

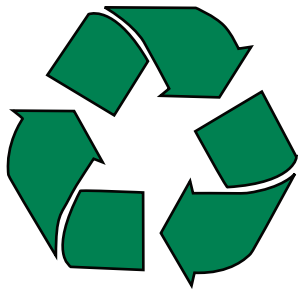
presence in the Queen Valley forest; it is estimated to be over 100 years old! These "trees" do not have growth rings like you would find in an oak or pine, which makes aging difficult.

Spring rains may bring clusters of white-green flowers on long stalks at branch tips. Like all desert blooms, Joshua trees depend on just the perfect conditions: well-timed rains, and for the Joshua tree, a crisp winter freeze. Researchers believe that below freezing temperatures may damage the growing end of a branch and stimulate flowering, followed by branching. You may notice some Joshua trees grow like straight stalks; these trees have never bloomed—which is why they are branchless. In addition to ideal weather, the pollination of flowers requires a visit from the yucca moth. The moth collects pollen while laying her eggs inside the flower ovary. As seeds develop and mature, the eggs hatch into larvae, which feed on the seeds. The tree relies on the moth for pollination and the moth relies on the tree for a few seeds for her young—a happy symbiosis. The Joshua tree is also capable of sprouting from roots and branches. Being able to reproduce vegetatively allows a much quicker recovery after damaging floods or fires, which may kill the main tree.

Many birds, mammals, reptiles, and insects depend on the Joshua tree for food and shelter. Keep your eyes open for the yellow-and-black flash of a Scott's oriole busy making a nest in a yucca's branches. At the base of rocks you may find a wood-rat nest built with spiny yucca leaves for protection. As evening falls, the desert night lizard begins poking around under the log of a fallen Joshua tree in search of tasty insects.

You may be at ease with pine or hardwood, or find shade under the domesticated trees in your city park, but in the high desert, Joshua is our tree. It is an important part of the Mojave Desert ecosystem, providing habitat for numerous birds, mammals, insects, and lizards. Joshua tree forests tell a story of survival, resilience, and beauty borne through perseverance. They are the silhouette that reminds those of us who live here that we are home. Like the Lorax we speak for the trees, but often the trees speak to us.

By Jane Rodgers



Think Globally, Act Locally

Bring your aluminum and metal cans, glass, and plastic to a campground recycling center.

Share or recycle this Joshua Tree Guide when you have finished reading it.

Participate in recycling in your community.