

Field Trip Planning Guide

Mojave rangers offer free, ranger-led field programs based at Hole-in-the-Wall, Zzyzx or Kelso. Field trips offer students an opportunity to learn about desert ecology and California history. Most field trips are day trips; however, rangers can accommodate a limited number of overnight field trip requests.

To begin making arrangements, contact Linda Slater at (760) 252-6122 or Linda_Slater@nps.gov. Ranger availability is not guaranteed until you receive a confirmation from a ranger.

Transportation for both day and overnight trips:

Schools make their own transportation arrangements with their own funds. “EnviroBus Bucks” Transportation Grants are available through the Mojave Environmental Education Consortium (MEEC). Get more information at <http://www.meeconline.com/teachers/busbuck/> Application deadlines are in October of each school year.

Allow plenty of time for transportation both to/from the park and to/from various park locations, especially if traveling by school bus. While a ten hour field trips sounds like lots of time to explore, chances are that it will take a minimum of four hours to get to/from the park plus at least two hours of travel time inside the park; Mojave National Preserve is 1.6 million acres in size!

DO NOT use GPS devices to supply directions; on several occasions, bus drivers have used GPS and ended up at the wrong location. Make sure bus drivers and parents follow directions provided by the ranger.

Fill up gas tanks before leaving town, as there are no gas stations within Mojave National Preserve. Gas is available at Baker and Primm on I15 and Ludlow or Fenner on I-40.

Day Trips

A typical field trip might include a guided walk at Hole-in-the-Wall, a guided walk at Kelso Dunes or the Joshua tree woodland with lunch at Kelso Depot Visitor Center, or a tour and learning activity at Zzyzx Desert Studies Center. The bus ride from nearby communities average about two hours one-way, so plan to leave early and return home late in the day.

Food: Teachers should ensure that students bring sack lunches and water. Picnic areas with restrooms are available.

Wear: a short-sleeved shirt plus a jacket, long pants, tennis shoes or other close-toed shoes, a ball cap or other hat with a brim.

Bring: Sun screen, lunch, water, day pack if you have one.

Activities: Due to long transportation times, generally only one or two activities fit into a one-day field trip. Rangers will work with teachers to develop schedules tailored to your needs. A list of popular activities is included in this guide.

Overnight Field Trips

Overnight field trips provide for a richly immersive desert experience. Students are exposed to the desert in a new way and try out camping as a recreational activity, something many have never participated in before.

Examples of activities for longer overnight trips include conducting field surveys of endangered species, a service project such as a litter cleanup, guided walks at different locations, tours of Kelso Depot Visitor Center, learning about careers by working with an archeologist or biologist, and night programs such as star viewing or night hikes. Each itinerary is custom-designed to meet the group's schedule and interests as well staffing availability.

Overnight trips present a host of logistical challenges and therefore require careful planning and preparation. Once at Mojave there are no opportunities to shop, so groups should pack and prepare carefully. Teachers, rangers, chaperones, and students must all pitch in and carry out their assigned roles if the field trip is to be a success.

Pre Trip Classroom Visit

Depending on staff availability, students will visit the classroom a week before the field trip. During a ranger visit, students learn how to set up tents as well as camping ethics and etiquette. Chaperones and other parents are invited to attend.

Accommodations

Two options are available.

1) Black Canyon Group and Equestrian Campground at Hole-in-the-Wall

This campground is located on the east side of the preserve. Amenities include picnic tables under a covered pavilion, a large tenting area, large BBQ grill, potable water, fire ring, and two vault (non-flush) toilets. There is no electricity at the site.

Rangers supply tents, sleeping pads, some cooking utensils and some other camp supplies. Students bring their own sleeping bags or bed rolls and pillows.

2) Zzyzx Desert Studies Center

Located 5 miles south of I-15 near Baker, CA. Two large dormitory rooms accommodate boys and girls separately, along with a teacher and chaperone. A bath house with flush toilets and showers is nearby. Other facilities include a dining hall, BBQ grill, potable water and fire ring. The Zzyzx Desert Studies Center is managed by California State University at Fullerton. This residential learning center is busy during the spring months, so plan ahead and book early.

Students bring their own sleeping bags or bed rolls and pillows and sleep on bunk beds.

Food

Teachers or group leaders plan meals and purchasing food and snacks. Rangers may be able to assist with food planning. Typically, each participant pays \$15 to the school or PTA to cover food purchases.

Zzyzx Desert Studies Center offers catering. This option simplifies a stay at Zzyzx. Catered meals can also be packed into ice chests for transport to Black Canyon Group and Equestrian Campground.

Typical Menu:

Day 1

Lunch- Students bring their own brown bag lunches.

Snack- granola bars, fruit

Dinner- Prepared beef or pork barbeque on hamburger rolls, prepared cole slaw and potato salad.

Desert- S'mores (graham crackers, chocolate bars, marshmallows)

Day 2

Breakfast- cereal, milk, fruit, juice, bagels, creamed cheese, coffee for teachers and chaperones

Snack- fruit, peanut butter or cheese crackers

Lunch- Sandwiches, chips, juice, fruit, cookies

Snack – granola bars, fruit

Student packing list

Bring:

- short sleeved shirt
- Jacket
- Underwear
- Long pants
- Sturdy shoes (no open toed shoes or sandals)
- Hat with a brim such as a ball cap
- Pajamas
- Notebook and pen or pencil
- Toothbrush & paste, hairbrush, etc.
- Flashlight
- Sunscreen
- Flip flops for camp-wear
- Water in a refillable container
- Daypack or book bag

Don't bring: Students should be advised NOT to bring electronic games, music players, video players, computer tablets, etc. Leaders should determine in advance the limited periods when cell phone usage will be permitted.

Group Camping Gear - some of the items listed can be provided by the ranger.

Tents
Sleeping pads
Cooking pot to heat food
Utensils
Plates, cups, silverware
Dishwashing containers (pack kitchen items in plastic tubs that can then be used for wash and rinse tubs.
Dish towels, pot holders
Coolers
Camp stove and fuel
Lanterns
Water containers
Clean firewood (no nails; no treated lumber)
Sticks for toasting marshmallows if a campfire is desired.

Possible Activities:

Leave No Trace (LNT) – Students learn how to enjoy the outdoors responsibly. Leave No Trace is the most widely accepted outdoor ethics program used on public lands. Taught at campsite (30 minutes)

Guided Hike at Kelso Dunes – Learn where all the sand came from and how the dunes formed. Conduct an experiment to learn about the mineral composition of the sand. Examine animal tracks and burrows to find out what animals live on the dunes. Students are given an opportunity for sand play. (1.5 hours does not include transportation time)

Tour Kelso Depot – View exhibits; participate in ranger-led programming. A great lunch break spot. (30 minutes- 1.5 hours depending on activity. Does not include transportation time) Flush toilets, picnic table, lunch counter, bookstore.

Guided hike at Rock Spring - Tour a historic cabin and learn about some of the characters who settled in this desolate area. Walk to a desert spring, site of an army outpost in the 1860s. Along the way see desert plants, learn about geologic features of the desert, and search for rock art from both ancient and modern times. (1.5 hours does not include transportation time)

Service projects- Clean up an abandoned home site, pull invasive weeds, or rake out trails. Students have an opportunity to participate in a service project to improve our park lands (1.5 hours does not include transportation time.

Night hike- Turn off your flashlight and see how revealing moonlight can be. (1 hour)

Scorpion hunt (Zzyzx only when weather is warm) Students hike to a sandy area and use black lights to search for scorpions (2 hours)

Guided hike at Rings Loop Trail. See ancient tribal petroglyphs, learn why cacti have spines, look for tent caterpillars, and find the hawk's nest. Hike culminates in free play time among the holes of Hole-in-the-Wall, then climb up Banshee Canyon on the metal rings that give the trail its name. (1.5 - 2 hours)

Ranger talk on rocks and geology at Hole-in-the-Wall Information Center. Learn about the volcanic activity that created the dramatic backdrop of Hole-in-the-Wall. (30 minutes)