



HIKING & BACKPACKING



Because of the desert's association with intense heat, strong winds, limited water, and venomous wildlife, many people shy away from exploring it on foot, and fail to seek out the backcountry as they might at mountain lakes or redwood forests. It's true that no one should venture on even a day hike in the desert without basic survival skills, ample water, a map, and a knapsack full of supplies that can sustain you overnight. What's not true is that the California desert is a flat, boring place absent of awe-inspiring scenery.

The desert holds snow-covered mountains over 11,000 feet, cascading waterfalls, volcanic formations, hot springs, and a deep, resounding quietude that will sharpen the senses as the hours pass. These natural features and sightings of bighorn sheep, deer, tortoise and wild coyotes are best experienced away from the roadways, away from the ranches, and away from the bright lights. To become part of the undisturbed settings and rock canyons of the desert requires more than an hour or two. So set aside some modern conveniences and challenge yourself to rely upon body and mind.

Plan to hike along established, public trails or create your own California desert journey on public lands that encourage exploration. Consult the abundance of books, maps, and trail pamphlets available at local outfitters, BLM district offices, state and national park gift shops, and of course, the Internet. Desert trails may not be well

marked, and even though footprints can remain undisturbed in the desert for decades, it's a good idea to carry along trail maps and guidebooks to flora and fauna.

The regional trail systems with the most significance are the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, the Pacific Crest Trail, the Old Spanish National Historic Trail, and the California Riding and Hiking Trail, of which thirty-five miles pass through Joshua Tree National Park.

For the more casual hiker, several lush palm oases are only a short walk from a main road. The National Natural Landmarks in the desert region are administered by NPS, and worth exploring on foot. You can walk among the springtime wildflowers in bloom anytime from February to June, depending upon rainfall and elevation. Among the most popular areas to view flowers are the Antelope Valley Poppy Reserve and the Anza-Borrego State Park.

Responsible hiking and backpacking begins with the principles of Leave No Trace (see sidebar, page 5). In the open desert, the soil structure includes a protective crust that retains moisture, resists the establishment of non-native weeds, and enables the transfer of nutrients. This crust, if damaged, does not readily reconstitute itself. Wherever possible, stay on trails, and limit camps to bare rock or sandy areas that are already disturbed. And camp far away from natural springs and sources of water so you don't discourage visits by the wild animals that depend upon them.

ABOVE

Spectacular view from Pinto Mountain in Joshua Tree National Park

PHOTO BY HOWARD GROSS

PERSONAL PROFILE

Jeff Baierlein

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BOOJUM INSTITUTE FOR EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Jeff's extensive interaction with nature and the desert has instilled a life-long love of wild places. "The desert is a magical place," Jeff said. "The open vistas and wonderful starry nights give desert explorers a spiritual renewal." Jeff is proud to point out that in 31 years, the Boojum Institute has challenged over 70,000 young adults to participate in its outdoor education, rock climbing, challenge course, canoeing and backpack programs in locations such as Joshua Tree National Park and the public lands along the Colorado River.

He knows firsthand the value of giving young people access to the desert national parks and providing them the opportunity for a hands-on investigation of natural history and problem-solving in the outdoors. Jeff recalls one student, Joanna, from an urban center of Los Angeles who took a high school trip with Boojum to Joshua Tree National Park. "After camping out in the desert and rock-climbing in the Park, she felt like she could do anything in the world. Her self-confidence and love of nature just exploded, and she later applied to be an Outdoor Education Intern at the Institute to study our experiential, hands-on method of education. Now Joanna is completing her doctorate in Experiential Education and is the principal of an environmental high school in Los Angeles. It's inspiring to see generations of youth profoundly and positively effected by their experience in this special National Park."

BELOW LEFT

Young urban hikers enjoy desert adventures

PHOTO BY BOOJUM INSTITUTE

BELOW RIGHT

Lost Palms Oasis in Joshua Tree National Park

PHOTO BY HOWARD GROSS

[HTTP://WWW.NPCA.ORG / DESERT_RECREATION / HIKING.PDF](http://www.npca.org/desert_recreation/hiking.pdf)





HIKING & BACKPACKING CONTINUED



ABOVE LEFT

Golden Canyon in Death Valley National Park

PHOTO BY DAVID P. ANDERSON



ABOVE RIGHT

Wildflower season showcases color in Joshua Tree National Park

PHOTO BY D. A. DEMEO

WILDERNESS AREAS

A backpacking trip of any duration will likely include some time in a designated wilderness area. Although the California desert is home to approximately 75 wilderness areas, some of the largest and most easily accessed areas are found within the state and national parks. You can reach all the wilderness areas without a four-wheel-drive vehicle, though it may mean hiking or mountain biking along rough roads that lead to the wilderness boundary. Unlike open recreation areas, wilderness areas prohibit the use of motorized or mechanized travel so that these spaces can be preserved for future generations. Also, depending upon the season of the year and the public land agency, additional restrictions may be in place to protect wildlife breeding or prevent wildfires. Please check on the local rules, allowable recreation types, and backcountry permits associated with the places you plan to visit.

Backcountry hiking generally includes few established trails. Hikers need to possess advanced skills and enjoy the challenges of traversing the lesser-known terrain. In the national parks, aircraft are usually restricted from the wilderness spaces, which means you can encounter absolute solitude and be transported to another period in our nation's history.

After a hard day of hiking, who wouldn't enjoy a trip to a mineral hot spring? Many of these springs have been turned into private resorts, but there are still a few on public lands, including the Tecopa Hot Springs County Park, just north of Tecopa, off CA 127; the Saline Valley Hot Springs near Olancho, in Death Valley National Park; the Agua Caliente Hot Springs County Park near Anza-Borrego State Park; and the Desert Oasis Hot Spring Spa, east of Holtville, managed by the BLM.

Books and Online Resources for Hiking and Backpacking can be found at http://www.npca.org/desert_recreation/hiking.pdf and on page 46 of this report.



[HTTP://WWW.NPCA.ORG / DESERT_RECREATION / HIKING.PDF](http://www.npca.org/desert_recreation/hiking.pdf)



ABOVE LEFT

Backpacking excursions can provide unexpected rewards
PHOTO BY BOOJUM INSTITUTE

ABOVE RIGHT

Seasonal waterfall, Rattlesnake Canyon in Joshua Tree National Park
PHOTO BY HOWARD GROSS

LEFT

Little San Bernardino Mountains in Joshua Tree National Park
PHOTO BY D. A. DEMEO

HIKING & BACKPACKING BOOKS AND ONLINE RESOURCES

SUGGESTED BOOKS:

Adventuring in the California Desert, Lynne Foster, Sierra Club Books, 1987

California's Wilderness Areas: The Complete Guide: Volume 2, The Deserts, George Wuerthner, Westcliffe Publishers, 1998

BLM Wilderness Areas National Parks and Preserve Maps and Information: California, Bureau of Land Management, 1994

The Explorer's Guide to Death Valley National Park, T. Scott Bryan and Betty Tucker-Bryan, University Press of Colorado, 1995

On Foot in Joshua Tree National Park: A Comprehensive Hiking Guide, Patty A. Furbush, M.I. Adventure Publications, 2001

WEB SITES:

American Hiking Society (<http://www.americanhiking.org>)

Antelope Valley Poppy Reserve (http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=627)

Anza-Borrego State Park (<http://www.anzaborrego.statepark.org>)

California Riding and Hiking Trail (<http://www.elcr.org/default.aspx?tabid=58>)

California Wilderness Coalition (<http://www.calwild.org>)

Desert USA (http://www.desertusa.com/Thingstodo/du_ttd_hike.html)

Digital trails & maps (subscription-based) (<http://www.trails.com>)

Hiker Central (<http://www.hikercentral.com/regions/us/california.html>)

Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail (<http://www.nps.gov/juba>)

National Center on Accessibility (<http://www.ncaonline.org/>)

National Natural Landmarks (http://www.nature.nps.gov/nnl/registry/usa_map/states/california/california.cfm)

Old Spanish National Historic Trail (<http://www.nps.gov/olsp/>)

Pacific Crest Trail (<http://www.pcta.org> and <http://www.fs.fed.us/pct>)

Palm Oases, listed (<http://www.desertusa.com/mag99/may/stories/fanpalms.html>)

Wilderness Institute (<http://www.wilderness.net>)

