

Rainbow Basin Natural Area

A National Natural Landmark

Rainbow Basin Natural Area is located 8 miles north of Barstow, California in the San Bernardino County. This is an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) due to outstanding landscape features and significant paleontological resources in the area. The terrain varies in elevation from 2,900 feet in Fossil Canyon to more than 3,900 feet in upper Owl Canyon. Many visitors come to see exciting multi-colored rock formations and walk the scenic canyons. A variety of desert adapted wildlife are found here, including the desert tortoise.



Rainbow Basin offers recreation opportunities for camping, hiking, photography, sightseeing and horseback riding. Vehicle touring is also appropriate in this area, keeping in mind that it is a **limited use area** and vehicle travel is restricted to a designated route system. The staging of off-highway vehicles (e.g. ATVs) is not allowed in the Rainbow Basin area or at Owl Canyon Campground.

Rainbow Basin is a desert environment and most summers are very hot and dry. Bring sufficient water, food, clothing, equipment and first aid supplies for your activity.

Prior to your visit, please check our website at:

www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/barstow/basin.html



BLM

Barstow Field Office

Recreation Opportunities

Directions

From Main Street, in Barstow, travel north on First Avenue and turn left on Irwin Road. Proceed north on Irwin Road until you see the sign for Rainbow Basin. Turn left on Fossil Bed Road and follow signs either to Owl Canyon Campground or the Fossil Canyon Loop Road

Hiking and Sightseeing

Rainbow Basin has a diverse landscape of hills, canyons and washes. Multicolored rock walls and mesas are accented by changing light conditions, making for many photographic opportunities. The washes are good hiking trails for experiencing the area's natural beauty.

Wildlife viewing is best during early morning and evening hours. In Fossil, Coon, and Owl Canyons, birds tend to gather in thick vegetation; Vegetation is critical for wildlife water, food, and shelter so washes in Rainbow Basin are closed to vehicle travel to protect these areas.

Camping

There is a campground in the Rainbow Basin Natural Area that is managed by the BLM Barstow Field Office. Owl Canyon Campground is a first-come first-served campground requiring a \$6.00 per night fee for each unit. There are designated sites with picnic tables, fire rings, barbecues, and shade armadas. There is a single tap centrally located for potable water that is brought in weekly by truck. It is advised to bring your own drinking water. There are vault toilets, but no dump facilities. Holding tanks can be emptied at facilities in the towns of Baker and Barstow. Please take all trash out with you.

Horseback Riding

Riding is allowed anywhere in Rainbow Basin. Please stay on the trails to minimize impacts to the environment. There is a large group campsite located in the Owl Canyon Campground that is perfect for a staging area to off load your horses.

Vehicle Touring

Within this ACEC, routes are posted with "open" route markers. Use of passenger vehicles and 4-wheel drive vehicles is permitted only on designated and signed open routes. The staging of off-highway vehicles (e.g. ATVs) is not allowed in the Rainbow Basin area or at Owl Canyon Campground. The Fossil Canyon Loop Road is an interesting route for vehicle touring. Keep in mind that this one-way narrow dirt road is best driven with a high clearance or 4-wheel drive vehicle.

Points of Interest

Geologic History of Rainbow Basin

Lying beneath the sedimentary rocks exposed in the Rainbow Basin-Mud Hills area is an extensive batholith of Cretaceous quartz monzonite. In the arid desert environment this rock disintegrates mechanically to form granitic sand and ultimately form a subdued topography. During the Cenozoic (last 65 million years) a basin termed the Barstow-Bristol trough was formed. This elongate trough, 50 miles long by 10 miles wide began filling with conglomerates, sandstone, lacustrine clays, and volcanic rocks to a depth of more than 6,000 feet. The basin then underwent a period of compression and uplift, followed by an episode of extension, in which the sedimentary rocks were broken by a series of northwest-trending faults. Many of these faults are currently active.

The oldest sedimentary rocks exposed within the Mud Hills are Tertiary in age. These rocks are divided into three separate formations based on lithology and stratigraphic position. In ascending order they are the Jackhammer, Pickhandle, and Barstow Formations. These rocks were deposited within the Barstow Basin between 23 and 13 million years ago, during early to middle Miocene time. Each unit is separated by a minor unconformity.

Paleontology

Paleontological research within the area began in the early 1900's when J.C. Merriam, of the University of California, Berkeley, identified the Rainbow Basin and the Mud Hills as a location of significant fossiliferous deposits. Later work revealed that the fossil-bearing sediments contained extensive fossil assemblage that spanned four million years of geologic time. These fossils are designated as belonging to the Barstovian Land Mammal Age of North America, and have been correlated with deposits in Jackson Hole, Wyoming and within Yellowstone Valley, north of Yellowstone National Park.

These deposits have yielded at least 17 previously unknown species of mammals. Fossils found in the Barstow Formation include camel, three-toed horse, do-bears, sabre-tooth cats, mastodons, pygmy rhinoceros, condors, flamingos, plus true cats, dogs, tortoise, deer, antelope, peccaries, rodents and birds. The Rainbow Basin-Mud Hills area is the cornerstone for dating and interpreting Miocene continental deposits throughout the nation.

Emergency Services

If **Emergency Services** are required, your first response should be to call **911**. The nearest Ranger can be contacted by calling the **Federal Interagency Communication Center (FICC)** at **(909) 383-5651** or **(888) 233-6518**.

Lost Person

If a member of your party becomes lost, don't panic. Make a note of where the person was last seen and at what time. Call 911 to report the situation.

Injured Person

It is usually best not to transport an injured person away from an accident scene before medical personnel arrive. Moving a victim improperly can make an injury worse, particularly when the injury is to the head, neck, or back area. If possible, send someone or call 911 to report the incident.

Nearest Hospitals

Barstow Community Hospital
555 S. 7th St.
Barstow, CA 92311
(760) 256-1761

St. Mary Medical Center
18300 Highway 18
Apple Valley, CA 92308
(760) 242-2311

Victor Valley Community Hospital
15248 11th St.
Victorville, CA 92392
(760) 245-8691

Phone Numbers

BLM Barstow Field Office	(760) 252-6000
Group, Event, Permit Information	(760) 252-6000
Filming/Photography Permit Information	(951) 779-6700
BLM Volunteer Program	(760) 252-6011

Managed By;

United States Department of Interior
Bureau Of Land Management
2601 Barstow Road
Barstow, California 92311