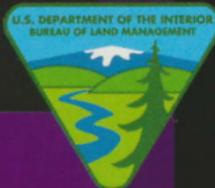
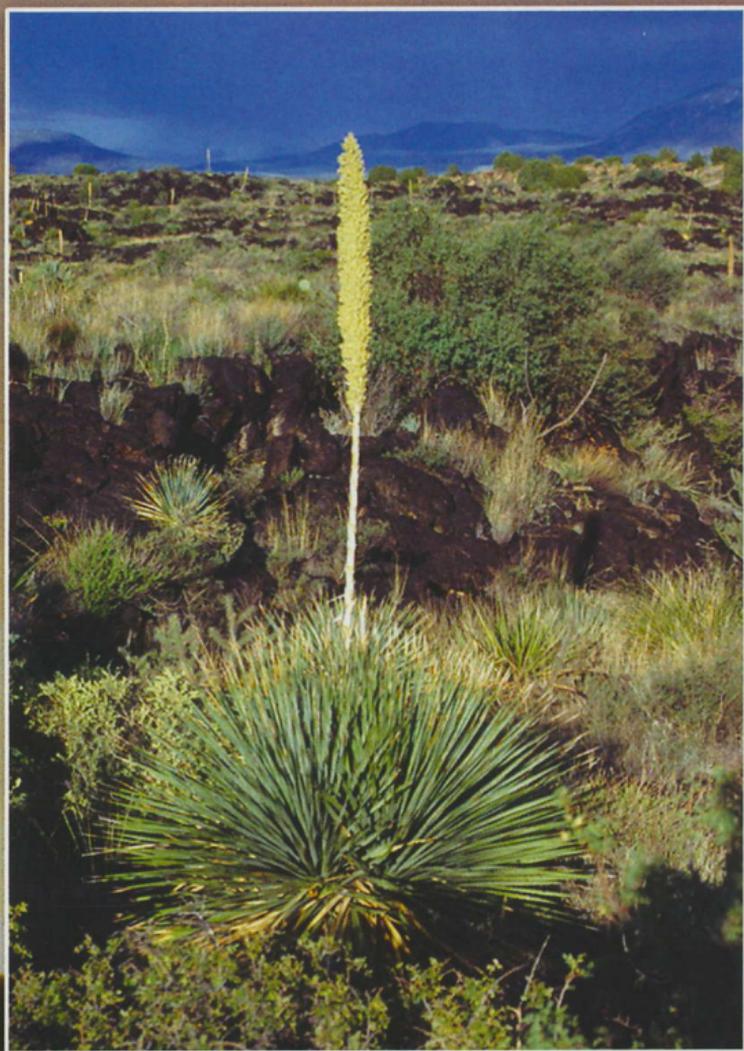


Valley of Fires Recreation Area

BLM

New Mexico • Roswell Field Office



GEOLOGY

As you look west from the campground, the Malpais dominate views of the Tularosa Basin. This may be the youngest lava flow in the continental United States. Scientific evidence tells us that the most recent flow occurred about 1,500 to 2,000 years ago.

The lava spewed from volcanic vents in the northern end on at least two occasions and flowed south along the floor of the Tularosa Basin for 44 miles (71 kilometers). As molten lava flowed southward, it covered the original valley floor of gypsum and stream gravel. Occasionally, it would surround areas of higher ground, forming islands. These islands or older rocks are kipukas. The recreation area's campground is on one of the larger kipukas and is composed of sandstone and soil.

Smooth or ropy-looking Pahoehoe (Hawaiian name for very fluid lava) covers over 125 square miles (32,000 hectares). Scattered throughout are a few small areas of a'a (pronounced ah-ah, a Hawaiian name for blocky lava). The lava is more than 160 feet (48 meters) thick near the center. Little Black Peak marks the origin of at least one major flow and its cinder cone is the result of an explosive episode that interrupted the steady outpouring of lava. The lava surface is so extremely rough and broken that it is impossible to cross except on foot. The lava contains pressure ridges, collapsed lava bubbles, extensive fissures, pits, collapsed lava tubes, and rock shelters. Little Black Peak has some intact lava tubes radiating out from it.

PLANTS AND ANIMALS

After the eruptions subsided and the lava cooled, wind-born soil settled into depressions and fissures in the lava to create pockets where plants could gain a foothold. Animals and wind deposited seeds in the lava. Because the rain penetrates the porous lava readily, there are fertile patches of soil in crevices and depressions. As a result, many plants flourish here in greater abundance and luxuriance than on the adjacent valley slopes. More than twice the number of grass species live on the lava

than in the outlying areas. Ferns grow in the bottom of some fissures and rock shelters where increased humidity and moderate temperatures exist.

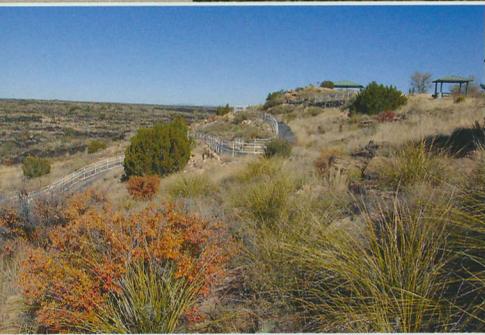
Mule deer live on the lava during all seasons, in addition to a small band of Barbary sheep. Predator species seen on the flow include coyotes, kit foxes, bobcats, and ringtail cats. A high diversity of bird species inhabit the Malpais year-long or seasonally. Vireos, warblers, jays, sparrows, and shrikes are regular inhabitants. Turkey vultures and great horned owls concentrate on the flow for nesting and breeding. Golden and bald eagles perch or hunt over the lava during the winter months.

An unusual aspect of some wildlife species living on the lava surface is their abnormally dark coloring (melanism). This evolutionary trait enables them to blend into the dark rocks of their environment. Twelve species have developed the darker coloration: six rodents, five lizards, and one snake. The same species occur on the gypsum sands of White Sands National Monument and have an abnormally light color.

HISTORY

Prehistoric humans found shelter here, collecting plants for food and fiber, hunting and trapping animals. Petroglyphs pecked and inscribed into the rock surfaces along the edges of the flows, and occasional bits of pottery and spalls of stone testify to visits by Native Americans of the Jornada branch of the Mogollon Culture (about 1400 A.D.). The region subsequently was to become the domain of the Mescalero Apache, whose resistance to intrusions of emigrant settlers led to the establishment of nearby Fort Stanton in 1855.





Photography: Paul T. Hoppel
Cartography and Graphic Design: Kludt Design



VISITOR CENTER

Maps, books, postcards, educational toys, and information about public lands in New Mexico are available at the Visitor Center. Book titles range from geology to the history of the area; guidebooks provide information about the flora and fauna of the region.

FACILITIES

The Bureau of Land Management maintains and manages the Valley of Fires Recreation Area. Located four miles west of the town of Carrizozo, NM, on U.S. Highway 380. Valley of Fires offers both camping and day use. The majority of the campsites have 30 amp electrical hook-ups, drinking water, sun shelters, tables, trash cans and barbecue grills. Three of the sites are wheelchair accessible as are the restrooms. Showers are provided in the main restroom.

An RV dump station is also available. Two group shelters are wheelchair accessible and available for use by reservation. The 3/4 mile accessible Malpais Nature Trail provides a close-up look at the lava surface. Trail guides are available at the Visitor Center.

Fees are collected for day use, camping, and electric hookups. All fees collected from the recreation area are allocated directly back to the recreation area for improvements in service to the area.



FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY WHEN HIKING IN THE LAVA FLOW

- Wear sturdy hiking boots or shoes, not sandals or tennis shoes.
- Nearly all desert plants have thorns. Watch where you put your hands and feet.
- Always carry an extra supply of water.
- Hike in the early morning or late afternoon.
- Watch out for lighting storms. Stay away from trees, high places and washes.
- Always tell someone where you are going and when you will be back.
- Watch out for rattlesnakes and scorpions.

GOOD CAMPING MANNERS

- Keep a clean camp and leave a clean camp.
- Dispose of gray water at the dump station.
- Motorized vehicles are restricted to the roads in the recreation area.
- Pets must be kept on a leash no longer than 6 feet.
- Please clean up after your pet and dispose pet waste in a proper manner.
- Pets are not allowed on the nature trails.
- Please do not bathe or wash dishes in the restrooms, at the faucets, or drinking fountains.
- Quiet hours are from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.
- Never leave a burning campfire and always put it out completely before you leave the campground.
- Please take only photos and leave only footprints.
- Earn the appreciation of those who follow you.

Bureau of Land Management
Valley of Fires Recreation Area
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