Exploring the Lonesome Triangle

By Phillip Gomez, Park Ranger

Known as “the Lonesome Triangle,” Mojave National Preserve offers much more for the curious desert traveler than a speedway shortcut between Palm Springs and Las Vegas. Take the time to slow down and smell the creosote.

Traveling from I-40 north on Kelbaker Road toward the Kelso Depot Visitor Center, visitors can see a lot of what’s out there by reading this guide and looking out their car windows. More can be learned by going to the visitor center and touring the museum.

For the purposes of this guided trip, carefully pull off the highway to read these written descriptions and enjoy the scenic views, take in aspects of the landscape, and get your bearings of the lay of this strange land.

1. First up, as you head northwest on Kelbaker Road are the Granite Mountains on the left side of the highway. Ahead you’ll soon be crossing Granite Pass and heading downhill toward the oasis of Kelso.

2. You’ll soon notice in the distance the Kelso Sand Dunes on your left. In six or so miles you’ll come to the turn-off to the dunes. The trailhead to the dunes, with parking and restrooms, is three miles down this gravel road. These dunes are the third highest, and the second largest (in extent), in North America. Originating as eroded mountain sediment carried by the Mojave River for 100 miles from the San Bernardino Mountains, this sediment was deposited in the river’s natural sink at Soda Dry Lake to the northwest. The blow sand was bounced along the “streets” of the Devil’s Playground which then settled to the ground after coming up against the backdrop of the Granite Mountains. The sand accumulated here, shaped by the prevailing northwest wind.

3. Continuing toward Kelso, look to the west, where you might see the Great Soda Dry Lake brightly glistening 30 miles away, though it is hard to find on the horizon. This is where the sand dunes originated. The mountain man and renowned explorer Jedediah Strong Smith, along with eight others, found life-saving water in holes they dug near here in 1827 on a journey that secured their position in history as the first Americans to cross the continent from the Missouri River settlements to the Spanish mission frontier in southern California. You can still see these holes at Zzyzx.

4. Ahead is the railroad siding of Kelso and the Kelso Depot Visitor Center across the tracks. Kelso, elevation 2,126 feet, originated as a dusty rail siding (No. 16) in April 1904. By 1924 the siding had evolved into the Spanish Mission Revival-styled structure you see here. The Mission Revival style was born of an architectural movement around 1898, drawing its inspiration from the early Spanish missions in California.

5. Almost four miles up Kelso-Cima Road you arrive at a good place to observe major landforms on the other side of the highway. Here, the sweeping expanse of Kelso Wash can be clearly seen. This large wash drains Cedar Canyon on the south and Cima on the east of any precipitation, emptying into the sands of the Devil’s Playground lying to the west.

6. The massive Providence Mountains—seen to your right beginning about 10 miles into the Preserve—divide the park diagonally. They were named by early travelers who thanked Providence when they found precious spring water in rock crevices between vast deserts on either side of the mountain range. The highest peak in the range is Edgar Peak, at 7,203 feet. Fountain Peak, southwest of Edgar Peak, reaches 6,996 feet.

7. Continuing up Kelso-Cima Road, you’ll come to the intersection with the Cedar Canyon Road after 14.6 miles. This road was called the Mojave Road in wagon days. Look to your left for the concrete monument in the creosote bushes. Erected in 1896, the monument is dedicated to Smith and Fray Francisco Garces. Father Garces was the first European to visit the Mojave. Smith came to the Mojave 50 years after Fray Garces, in 1826 and again in 1827. Here, the Mojave Road crosses the highway and, to the west, you can see its faint trace across the desert. To the east (your right) the road climbs Cedar Canyon through its mountain pass. One would be hard pressed to read this inscription on the monument in this remote spot without feeling wonder and regard for these intrepid explorers.

8. Continue to Cima (which means “summit” in Spanish) on the highway. Go through Cima, crossing the railroad to a spot where the roadway curves and forks, Cima Road going off to the north (left) and the Morning Star Mine Road to the east (straight ahead). If you want to visit Teutonia Peak, go left; the parking area is about six and a half miles down the road on the left. The hike is a level one through the densest Joshua tree woodland in the Southwest. The fastest and shortest route to Las Vegas is the Morning Star Mine Road, which arguably is also the more scenic route, offering long-distance vistas of the Ivanpah Valley.

9. The three-mile stretch of roadway between the spot where you turn off Morning Star Mine Road onto Ivanpah Road, before reaching Nipton Road, is prime tortoise habitat. In the spring, summer, and fall, especially after a rainfall, you are likely to see a desert tortoise crossing the road. That’s the reason for the blinking “Watch for tortoises” sign. A new desert tortoise research facility is ahead near the junction with Nipton Road. Constructed by Chevron Oil Company, the facility is staffed by researchers working to protect baby tortoises from predators until their shells harden. This takes about five years from birth. In the meantime, the facility monitors the animals in order to raise their survival rate. The research facility is not open to visitors.

Welcome to Mojave!

With mild temperatures and longer days, spring is an inviting time to visit the Mojave. Desert dwellers monitor winter rains carefully, hoping that enough falls at the right time to produce a good spring bloom. This year’s winter has been relatively dry, so flowers have not been abundant. Recent spring rains might trigger more flowers later in March through May.

Nevertheless, a range of activities are available here to suit diverse interests and capabilities. For those driving through from the low desert to Las Vegas, our cover story in this issue offers information about what you’ll see along the way. Backcountry campers will want to read about Caruthers Canyon and the backcountry experience that is unique to Mojave. Families can pick up a Junior Ranger booklet to help kids learn about the desert and enjoy their visit.

Gateway communities like Nipton offer additional services for park visitors. Learn about these activities and more in the pages of this park guide.

For every visitor, I recommend a stop at the Kelso Depot Visitor Center. This mission-revival style train station now serves as the park’s principal information center. Explore exhibits, view an orientation film, shop for maps, postcards, and books, and have lunch at the Beamery, Kelso’s old-fashioned lunch counter. Rangers on duty offer trip-planning advice.

Many adventures await you at Mojave National Preserve. Welcome, and enjoy your visit!

Stephanie R. Dubois
Superintendent

Essential Information...2

Exploring Mojave...3

Camping...6

Hiking...7

Mojave National Preserve Map...8

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Essential Information

Dates and Hours of Operation
The preserve is always open. Information centers (see below) maintain regular hours of operation.

Fees and Reservations
There are no entrance fees. See page 6 for information about campground reservations and fees.

Information Centers
These information centers provide orientation, information, and trip-planning advice. Park rangers are on duty. Western National Parks Association (WNPA) bookstores offer books, maps, and more.

Kelso Depot Visitor Center
Located 34 miles south of Baker, Calif. on Kelbaker Road. Open daily, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

Hole-in-the-Wall Information Center
Located near Hole-in-the-Wall Campground. Winter hours (October–April): Wednesday through Sunday, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. Summer hours (May–September): Saturday, 9 a.m.–4 p.m.

Headquarters Information Center
Located at 2701 Barstow Road, Barstow, Calif. Open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Food: The Beaurey & Kelso
The concessioner-operated lunch room offers hot and cold beverages, soups, salads, sandwiches, and snacks. Located at Kelso Depot Visitor Center. Open daily, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Water
Drinking water is available only at Kelso Depot Visitor Center, Hole-in-the-Wall Information Center, Hole-in-the-Black Canyon campgrounds and Mid-Hills Campground.

Gasoline
There are no gasoline stations within Mojave National Preserve. Gasoline can be purchased along I–40 at Needles, Fenner, and Ludlow, Calif., along I–15 at Baker, Calif., along the Cima Road exit, and Primm, Nev., and along U.S. 95 at Searchlight, at the Nev. 163 junction south of Cal Nev-Ari, Nev.

 Lodging
There are no motels within Mojave National Preserve. Lodging might be available in Barstow, Nipton, Ludlow, Needles, Baker; and Twentynine Palms, Calif., and in Primm and Searchlight, Nev.

Bicycles
Bicycles are allowed in parking areas, on paved roads, and on existing, open dirt roads. Bicycles are not allowed in Wilderness Areas or for cross-country travel.

Pets
Though not allowed inside information centers, pets are welcome elsewhere. They must be leashed and never left unattended. Dogs used during hunting activities must be under the owner's control at all times. Pet excrement must be collected and disposed of in garbage receptacles.

Permits
Permits are required for all organized events, group events (more than 15 individuals or 7 vehicles), and commercial activities such as filming. Fees apply. Proof of insurance and posting of a bond might also be required. Call 760-252-6107 or visit www.nps.gov/moja for more information.

Hunting and Firearms
Hunting is permitted in accordance with state regulations. All hunting activities require a license; additional permits and tags might apply. Visit the California Department of Fish & Game website at http://www.dfg.ca.gov for more information.

Target shooting or “plinking” is prohibited. All firearms transported within the preserve must be unloaded, cased, and broken down, except during lawful hunting activities. No shooting is permitted within 1/2 mile of developed areas, including campgrounds, information centers, Kelso Dunes, Fort Piute, Sweeney Granite Mountains Desert Research Center, and the Desert Studies Center at Zzyzx.

Collecting and Vandalism
Disturbing, defacing, or collecting plants, animals, rocks, historic or archeological objects is prohibited. Leave these resources as you find them for everyone to enjoy. Metal detectors are not allowed.

Private Property
Private recordings are found throughout the preserve. Please respect the rights of our neighbors. It is your responsibility to obtain permission before hunting, hiking, or entering private property.

Cattle and Fences
Most grazing within Mojave National Preserve occurs on public land. This land is open to you to explore, but please don't disturb cattle, fences, or water tanks. Leave gates as you find them.

Firewood & Campfires
Wood is scarce in the desert. Cutting or collecting any wood, including downed wood, is prohibited. All firewood, including kindling, must be brought in. Firewood might be available for purchase at Baker, Fenner, Needles or Nipton, Calif. Campfires are allowed in campground fire rings and other established sites. To minimize your impact, use a firepan and pack out the ashes. Do not leave fires smoldering or unattended.

Essential Information
Avenues to Adventure

Mojave National Preserve

3.6 million acres, it is the third-largest unit of the National Park System in the contiguous United States. While much of Mojave’s wild and historic splendor is available only to those who travel its trails and unmaintained roads, the primary roads of the preserve offer endless opportunities for exploration (see map on page 8).

Kkelber Road


Cinder Cones & Lava Flows

No signs or services. About 14 miles southeast of Baker, Kelber Road traverses a 2,560-acre area of lava flows and volcanic cinder cones thought to range in age from 10,000 to 7,000 years old. In 1973, the area was designated as Cinder Cones National Natural Landmark due to its scenic beauty and exceptional geological value. Aiken Mine Road (19 miles southeast of Baker, Calif.) offers an interesting side trip through the heart of the area and access to a lava tube. High clearance and four-wheel drive recommended.

Kelso Depot Visitor Center

Information exhibits, orientation film, art gallery, bookstore, food (The Beany[e]r [Kelso], restroom), water, picnic area. Located 34 miles southeast of Baker, Kelso Depot began operation in 1924 and served as train station, restaurant, and employee housing on the Los Angeles and Salt Lake route of the Union Pacific Railroad. Now Mojave National Preserve’s principal information center and museum, extensive exhibits describe the cultural and natural history of the preserve. Historically furnished rooms offer a glimpse into Kelso’s past.

Kelso Dunes

Self-guiding trail, vault toilets, no water. About 42 miles southeast of Baker (8 miles south of Kelso Depot), then 3 miles west on a graded dirt road. Nearly 700 feet high and covering a 45-square-mile area, the Kelso Dunes were created over the course of 25,000 years by wind that was carrying sand grains from the nearby Soda Lake and Mojave River Sink located to the northwest. The Providence and Granite mountains served as barriers that trapped the blowing sand. The dunes produce a “booming” or “singing” sound when sand with the right moisture content slides down the steep slopes. Try it for yourself—run down a dune slope (but don’t trample vegetation!) to initiate the sound.

Granite Mountains

No signs or services. An imposing jumble of granite marks the south entrance to the preserve, 50 miles southeast of Baker on Kelber Road. Portions of the Granite Mountains lie within the University of California’s Desert Research Center; please respect the signs that mark the boundary. High clearance and four-wheel drive recommended.

Clark Mountain

No signs or services. The only portion of the Mojave National Preserve north of I-15, Clark Mountain is also its highest point, at 7,929 feet. A restless white fringe near the top is one of only three in the Mojave Desert. Check detailed maps or ask a ranger for access information. High clearance and four-wheel drive recommended.

Cima Road

About 26 miles west of Baker, Calif., the paved Cima Road connects I-15 with Cima, Calif., 16 miles to the southeast.

Cima Dome & Joshua Tree Forest

Self-guiding trail, no water. The near-perfect symmetry of Cima Dome rises 1,500 feet above the surrounding desert and provides ideal habitat for the world’s largest concentration of Joshua trees. Although the top of the dome is located west of Cima Road near the Tonopah-Palmdale Trailhead, this unusual geomorphic feature is best seen from a distance. Try the view looking northwest from Cedar Canyon Road, 2.5 miles east of Kelso Cima Road.

Cedar Canyon & Black Canyon Roads

Mostly unpaved, the 20-mile Cedar Canyon Road connects Kelso Cima Road in the west with Ivanpah Road in the east, paralleling (and sometimes joining) the historic Mojave Road. Black Canyon Road (unpaved north of Hole-in-the-Wall) connects Cedar Canyon Road with Essex Road, 20 miles to the south.

Rock Springs

Wayside exhibits, no services. A well-known watering hole for early travelers, Rock Springs is located 5.2 miles east of Black Canyon Road on Cedar Canyon Road, then 1.4 miles south on a sandy, unpaved road (four-wheel drive recommended). Camp Rock Springs, a military redoubt established in 1866, was one of the most isolated and confounded army posts in the West.

Mid Hills

Campground, trailshead, vault toilets, water. Not recommended for RVs. About 2 miles west of Black Canyon Road at the north end of Wild Horse Canyon Road, Mid Hills supports pinon-juniper woodland habitat. The effects of a fire that swept through the area in June 2005 are evident, although several close-ups in the campan cover still contain stands of pinon pinyon and juniper.

Hole-in-the-Wall

Information center, bookstore, campground, picnic area, trailhead, restroom, water, telephones. Just north of the junction of Black Canyon and the south end of Wild Horse Canyon Road, rhyolite cliffs riddled with holes and hollows are the backstop for Hole-in-the-Wall.

Piute Spring

About 3.1 miles south of I-15. Unmarked and unpaved, Piute Road, then 3.1 miles west on an extremely rough dirt road. High clearance and four-wheel drive recommended.

Fort Piute and Piute Spring

Trails, wayside exhibits, no signs or services. A half-mile section of Piute Creek. Fort Piute (still visible) was one in a string of military outposts built up the valley from Goffs, providing services to miners in the mountains beyond. While little evidence remains of homesteads that once dotted the valley, tracts of private property still exist. Please respect the rights of landowners.

Zzyzx Road

Six miles southwest of Baker on I-15, Zzyzx Road leads 5 miles south into the preserve along the western shore of Soda Dry Lake.

Zzyzx/Soda Springs

Self-guiding trail, wayside exhibits, vault toilets, non-potable water, picnic area. Historically known as Soda Springs and later renamed Zzyzx (pronounced ZYe-zix), this oasis is home to the California State University Desert Studies Center. The buildings and pond were developed in the 1940s by Curtis Springer, who operated a health resort at the site. Zzyzx is open to the public—still around Lake Tjaldand and along the shore of Soda Dry Lake. Please do not disturb participants when classes are in session.

Nipton, Ivanpah & Lanfair Roads

Eleven miles south of Primim, Nev., Nipton Road begins at I-15 and passes through Nipton, Calif., 11 miles east. Ivanpah Road (only the 10 northernmost miles paved) heads southeast of Nipton Road, through the Ivanpah and Lanfair valleys, eventually connecting with the paved Lanfair Road and the Fenner Valley. Together stretching 46 miles, Ivanpah and Lanfair roads connect the northern preserve boundary (Renamed Zzyzx Road) with the southern near Gooffs, Calif.

Hilton Nipton

Privately operated hotel, store, campground, & more; for information call 760-856-2335 or email at stay@nipton.com. Built in 1910, this charming hotel reflects the railroad, ranching, and mining history of the small community at Nipton.

Caruthers Canyon

Primitive camping, hiking, no signs or services. About 5.5 miles west of Ivanpah Road on New York Mountain Road, then 2.7 miles north on an unsettled road, Caruthers Canyon is located in the rugged New York Mountains. Surrounded by mountains rising over 7,500 feet, a botanical “island” of chaparral plants remains from wetter times of the past. High clearance and four-wheel drive recommended.

Sand & Mud Driving Tips

• Be sure to carry plenty of drinking water and emergency supplies.

• Engage four-wheel drive before entering deep sand or mud.

• Don’t gun the engine—this will spin the tires, dig you in deeper, and could bury your vehicle to the frame. Smooth, easy power is better than too much power; use low gearing and just enough throttle to maintain forward movement.

• If you detect a loss of traction, turn the steering wheel rapidly from side-to-side—this might help to generate traction.

• Your vehicle gets stuck, place solid materials (such as floor mats) under the tires to provide traction.

• If you’re really stuck, it’s best to stay with your vehicle. A stationary, stranded vehicle is much easier to locate than a person traveling on foot. Avoid strenuous activity during the heat of the day; stay in the shade of your vehicle.

Lanfair Valley

No signs or services. South of the New York Mountains along Ivanpah and Lanfair roads, this high valley shelters an impressive Joshua tree forest and was an early ranching and homesteading center. From 1893 to 1923, the Nevada Southern Railway ran up the valley from Goffs, providing services to homesteaders and ranchers in the valley and to miners in the mountains beyond. While little evidence remains of homesteads that once dotted the valley, tracts of private property still exist. Please respect the rights of landowners.

Dirt Road Driving

Prepare Your Vehicle

Ensure that your vehicle is in good condition: check tires, oil, and gas gauge.

Know the Rules of the Road

All vehicles operating within Mojave National Preserve must be street-legal in accordance with California DMV requirements, including current registration and tags, lights and turn signals, and valid insurance. California “Green Sticker” and “Red Sticker” programs are not recognized within the preserve.

Off-pavement travel is allowed only on existing, open dirt roads. Do not travel cross-country or create new routes. This rule is strictly enforced; violators will receive citations. Driving in washes is not permitted. Watch for and respect Wilderness Boundary signs; motorized vehicles and bicycles are not allowed in designated Wilderness Areas.

Check Road Conditions

Road conditions vary widely. Dirt roads might be rough, sandy, or muddy, rendering them impassable, and the unpaved motorist could be trapped many miles from help. Watch out for cattle, burns, and other wildlife on roadways.

Not all roads are shown on all maps; traces and incidental shorts add to the confusion. Carry a good map, and ask a park ranger for current road conditions.

Scenic Cima Road connects I-15 with Cima, Calif., traversing the world’s largest concentration of Joshua trees.
Visitors often ask about Hole-in-the-Wall, the name of the volcanic formations near the Woods Mountains. They want to know what the name signifies ... where it came from.

There were a couple of stories floating around about this name, passed from ranger to ranger, for years. When stories pass around like this, they often evolve. In fact, there is a name for this—Ranger Lore. This is when stories become fact mixed with fiction.

So, a call went out to Dennis Casebier, Mojave resident and Executive Director of Mojave Desert Heritage and Cultural Association.

According to Dennis, Bob Holliman, who lived in the Mojave from the early 1900s until his death in 1953, named the site after the natural geological formation in Wyoming that is located in the Big Horn Mountains of Northern Wyoming. The Wyoming site is widely described as a retreat for outlaws in the 1800s, including Butch Cassidy's gang.

Holliman had been to the already-famous Hole-in-the-Wall in Wyoming and thought our HITW looked like one in Wyoming. He had two sources for this. One is a book we sell in our Visitor Centers, "East Mojave Diary" by Bob Asumas. On page 143, Asumas writes about Holliman's decision to take up residence in the Mojave. "And more in he did, slicing off for himself a strip of 88 range extending from Cedar Canyon several miles south to some unique rock formations that he named 'Hole-in-the-Wall.'"

The second source is Betty Ordway. Betty was part of the homestead culture that existed in the Preserve in the early part of the century. Her sister Harriet married Lorenzo Watson (after whom Watson Wash is named), and Betty lived with her sister near there. She was well-connected with people in the area. Dennis says that interviews conducted with her are some of the best in his archives, and that she is an apparently accurate source of information. Betty knew Holliman well, and she states that Holliman named Hole-in-the-Wall. She said that Holliman had spent some time at Hole in the Wall in Wyoming and that he thought the volcanic mesas in the Preserve are similar to the Wyoming site.

One story that is not true: Neither Bob Holliman nor anyone else who was associated with the Preserve's homestead culture that existed in the Preserve in the early part of the century, and Harriet married Lorenzo Watson (after whom Watson Wash is named), and Betty lived with her sister near there. She was well-connected with people in the area. Dennis says that interviews conducted with her are some of the best in his archives, and that she is an apparently accurate source of information. Betty knew Holliman well, and she states that Holliman named Hole-in-the-Wall. She said that Holliman had spent some time at Hole in the Wall in Wyoming and that he thought the volcanic mesas in the Preserve are similar to the Wyoming site.

Holliman was a very interesting character. He was a gunslinger, homesteader, and enemy of the Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company, an early ranching outfit in the Mojave. He was in the Mojave by 1914 and homesteaded in the Round Valley and became very involved in events of the area. He was not a resident and Executive Director of Mojave Desert Managers Group and the Mojave Desert Ecosystem Program (MDEP) and Desert Managers Group. The information will be used in helping to track tortoise sightings. See the results so far at www.californiadesert.gov.

The app is free to download and works like this:

1. On your first installation you will be asked to respond to a five-question anonymous survey that is sent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service so that the public's understanding of the desert tortoise can be better understood.
2. Three options will then be made available: take a photo, review desert tortoise info, and credits.
3. When you see a tortoise, activate the app and select "take a photo". Take a picture from a safe distance so as not to startle the tortoise. Select "use" and a screen will appear asking for an optional name and note to be submitted with your photo so that you can share your discovery online if you like. Select submit and the app will then also record the time, date, and GPS location. That's it!

Your submission goes into a database where the information is shared with scientists tracking the recovery of this species threatened with extinction. Valid sightings are also posted at www.californiadesert.gov.

This app was developed in partnership with the Desert Managers Group and the Mojave Desert Ecosystem Program.
On January 1, 1900, S. D. Kears, a gold seeker from western Pennsylvania, staked a mining claim near the crossroads of two overland wagon trails in the Ivanpah Valley. The claim and nearby camp were named Nippeno, similar to the name of a township in western Pennsylvania. When the San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad was constructed through the camp in 1903, it soon became a town, and the name was shortened to Nipton.

For many years, the Nipton depot was a cattle-loading station for several local ranches including Yates Ranch, the Walking Box, and Rock Springs Land and Cattle Co. The town and depot also supplied copper ore and lead from the area, becoming a social center for the sparse population of the region. Community facilities included a school, post office, voter precinct, and several small businesses.

Harry Trehearne, a Cornish miner, settled in Nipton in 1913, and was the driving force behind community developments for the next 35 years. He built a new general store, renamed the Hotel Nipton, restored the first water well. Trehearne passed away in 1949.

Nipton lay nearly dormant until 1984, when the Gerald Freeman family purchased the town. The Freemans had a vision of developing a more diversified, sustainable community at Nipton. When Mojave National Preserve was established in 1994, Nipton became a gateway community for the new park.

The Freemans have renovated the Hotel Nipton and now operate the six-room inn as a bed and breakfast. Also in Nipton is the Trading Post, a gift and convenience store, and the restaurant. The Freemans recently renovated historic Nipton schoolhouse for use as a conference and education center.

Nipton is in the forefront of the green energy movement. In 2010, a municipal solar power plant was installed, providing roughly 85 percent of Nipton’s electricity needs—the highest percentage of solar electricity of any town in the United States.

“Sustainability is paramount to this endeavor,” said Gerald Freeman, Principal Administrator for Nipton. Freeman is planning for the development of energy-efficient housing, and the solar plant is designed to play a significant role in moving toward the goal of a sustainable community lifestyle in harmony with its Mojave Desert environment.” Freeman said.

Fans of the Junior Ranger program collect badges from parks across the country. After picking up a free Junior Ranger book at Kelso Depot Visitor Center, one recent prospective Junior Ranger could be heard urging his parents on. “Let’s go, let’s go,” he sang as he rushed his parents out the door.

How to become a Junior Ranger at Mojave

Step 1: Pick up a Junior Ranger Activity Booklet at any Mojave National Preserve Information Center.

Step 2: Complete activities, such as a scavenger hunt, mapping your trip, and tracking animals on the sand dunes.

Step 3: Take your completed activity booklet to any Mojave information center to review with a Park Ranger and get your Mojave Junior Ranger badge. For those whose travels make it impossible to return to an information center, booklets can be mailed in for review.

The Junior Ranger program is free, open to all ages, and available year-round. And remember: The more parks you visit, the more badges you can collect.

By Rana Knighten, Park Ranger

The Junior Ranger program is designed to engage kids in learning about the park in an active and enjoyable way. Aides learn about some of the plants, animals, and people that have called the desert home by completing the Junior Ranger activity booklet.

Becoming a Junior Ranger is an exciting way for kids to learn about the special places that make up the National Park System, and being a Junior Ranger has its advantages. Here at Mojave National Preserve, we set aside a special day each year to celebrate new and returning Junior Rangers. This year, April 21, marks the fifth year of National Junior Ranger day. It is an opportunity for young and old alike to “Explore, Learn, and Protect” in new or favorite national parks.

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Camping & Backcountry Travel

Backcountry Guidelines & Regulations

Backcountry travel and camping—backpacking, roadside camping, and horsepacking—require careful planning in order to ensure a safe and rewarding experience. Visitors should adhere to National Park Service regulations and are further encouraged to follow Leave No Trace guidelines to minimize their impact on the fragile desert environment. Additional regulations apply for roadside camping (see below) and horsepacking (talk with a park ranger or visit us online for more information: www.nps.gov/moja).

Leave No Trace principles are rooted in scientific studies and common sense. The message is framed under seven Leave No Trace Principles presented below with accompanying regulations and guidelines specific to Mojave National Preserve:

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
   • There is no permit or registration system for backcountry camping at Mojave National Preserve; be sure to notify others of your planned itinerary.
   • Few established trails exist; carry a good map and familiarize yourself with desert travel and survival skills before beginning your trip.

2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
   • Reuse existing campsites (required for roadside camping—see below).
   • Do not make camp in a dry wash—flash floods develop quickly in the desert.
   • Camping is limited to a maximum of 14 consecutive days per visit/day and 30 total days per year.
   • Campsites must be more than 200 yards from any water source.
   • Camping is not permitted within 1/4 mile of any paved road; within 1/2 mile of Fort Piute or Kelso Depot; within 1 mile north (i.e., the crest of the dunes) or 1/4 mile south of the Kelso Dunes access road. (Exceptions may apply for roadside camping—see below.)

3. Dispose of Waste Properly
   • Store all food and garbage in a manner that will prevent access by wildlife. Carry plastic bags and pack out all trash.
   • Bury human waste in catholes 6-8 inches deep, at least 200 feet from water, camp, and trails. Pack out all toilet paper and hygiene products.
   • Pet excrement must be collected and disposed of in garbage receptacles.

4. Leave What You Find
   • Disturbing, defacing, or collecting plants, animals, rocks, or historic or archeological objects is prohibited. As part of our national heritage, these resources should be left as they are found for all to enjoy. Metal detectors are not allowed.

5. Minimize Campfire Impacts
   • Campfires are allowed in established fire rings only, or with use of a portable firepan (be sure to pack out ashes). Do not leave fires smoldering or unattended.
   • Cutting or collecting any wood, including downed wood, is prohibited. All firewood must be brought into the preserve.

6. Respect Wildlife

7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

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Campgrounds

Hole-in-the-Wall Campground

Facilities: pit toilets, trash receptacles, portable water, fire rings, picnic tables, dump station; no utility hookups.

Reservations: $12 per site per night, $6 for America the Beautiful Senior/Access Pass holders.

Near Kelbaker Road: Rainy Day Mine Site

15.2 miles northeast of Kelbaker Road; then 0.3 miles northeast on the unsigned and very sandy road to the Rainy Day Mine. Four-wheel drive recommended; no RVs.

Granite Pass

6.1 miles north of i-40 on Kelbaker Road, just north of Granite Pass, then west on one of several access roads. Campsites are located just north of the granite spires. High clearance vehicle recommended; no RVs.

Kelso Dunes Mine

4.5 miles west of Kelbaker Road on the unpaved Kelso Dunes Road. One campsite is located south of the road, 1/3 mile past the marked trailhead. Several others are available 1/4 mile beyond, near a clump of trees. Except at these sites, roadside camping is prohibited along Kelso Dunes Road (including at the trailhead).

Near Cima Road: Sunrise Rock

12 miles south of i-15 on the east side of Cima Road. Trailhead for Tuletonia Peak Trail is nearby on the opposite side of Cima Road.

Near Black Canyon Road: Black Canyon Road (East)

4 miles south of Hole-in-the-Wall Information Center on the east side of Black Canyon Road, above a wash and near a hill with views of the Providence Mountains. Another site is located about 4 miles further south, near rock piles.

Near Ivanpah and Cedar Canyon Roads: Caruthers Canyon

5.5 miles west of Ivanpah Road on New York Mountains Road, then 1.5 to 2.7 miles north to campsite. High clearance and four-wheel drive recommended; no RVs.

Roadside Camping

Roadside vehicle camping is permitted in areas that have been traditionally used for this purpose. By reusing existing sites, you help protect the desert from further damage. Sites with existing rock fire rings should be considered disturbed and suitable for roadside camping. Many roadside camping sites cannot accommodate multiple vehicles; please don’t enlarge them. Do not camp along paved roads or in day-use areas, and stay at least 200 yards from all water sources.

The National Park Service encourages roadside campers to use the following, selected sites:

Near Kelbaker Road: Rainy Day Mine Site

15.2 miles southeast of Baker on Kelbaker Road, then 0.3 miles northeast on the unsigned and very sandy road to the Rainy Day Mine. Four-wheel drive recommended; no RVs.

Near Cima Road: Sunrise Rock

12 miles south of i-15 on the east side of Cima Road. Trailhead for Tuletonia Peak Trail is nearby on the opposite side of Cima Road.

Near Black Canyon Road: Black Canyon Road (East)

4 miles south of Hole-in-the-Wall Information Center on the east side of Black Canyon Road, above a wash and near a hill with views of the Providence Mountains. Another site is located about 4 miles further south, near rock piles.

Near Ivanpah and Cedar Canyon Roads: Caruthers Canyon

5.5 miles west of Ivanpah Road on New York Mountains Road, then 1.5 to 2.7 miles north to campsite. High clearance and four-wheel drive recommended; no RVs.

Nearby Camping Areas

Afton Canyon

25 miles southwest of Baker on i-15; has a BLM campground with tables and fire rings for $6 per night.

Commercial camping is also available at Baker, Barstow, Needles, and Nipton, Calif.

Black Canyon Equestrian & Group Campground

Facilities: corrals, pit toilets, trash receptacles, portable water, fire ring, grill, picnic shelter with tables.

Fees: $15 per group per night.

Reservations: required; call 760-928-2572 or 760-252-6104. Located across the road from Hole-in-the-Wall Information Center. Horses and riders are welcome at Mojave National Preserve! Permits required for large groups (see p.2 for permit information).

Mojave National Preserve
Hiking

Mojave National Preserve can enjoy a variety of challenges, with sweeping views, solitude, and over 80,000 acres of designated Wilderness.

Although there are few established hiking trails in Mojave National Pre-
serve, abandoned dirt roads, washes, and ridge lines offer an
abundance of cross-country hiking opportunities. Numbers on
map show general locations of trails and routes listed below.

All trails and routes listed below are shown on the National Geo-
graphic Trails Illustrated topographic map for Mojave National
Preserve. This and other maps are available for purchase
at all information centers (see page 2 for loca-
tions and other info.).

Developed Trails

1) Lake Tuendae Nature Trail
Trailhead: Zzyzx parking area, 5 miles south of I-15 on Zzyzx Road.
Enjoy an easy, self-guided, ¾-mile stroll around Lake Tuendae.
Wayside exhibits along the trail reveal the rich cultural and natural history of this
oasis on the preserve’s western boundary.

2) Teutonia Peak Trail
Trailhead: 12 miles south of I-15, or 5 miles north of Cima, Calif. on Cima Road.
Explore the world’s densest Joshua tree forest en route to a rocky peak with expansive views of
Cima Dome and beyond. 4 miles round-trip.

3) Hole-in-the-Wall Nature Trail
Trailhead: Hole-in-the-Wall Information Center and Campground, 20 miles north of I-15 on
Essex and Black Canyon roads.
Learn to identify desert plants on this easy, 1½-mile round-trip hike. Trailheads at Hole-in-the-
Wall Information Center and Campground

4) Rings Loop Trail
Trailhead: Hole-in-the-Wall Information Center parking area, 20 miles north of I-15 on Essex
and Black Canyon roads.
Discover how Hole-in-the-Wall got its name as you ascend narrow Banshee Canyon with the
help of metal rings mounted in the rock. The 1½-mile round-trip hike connects to the Mid Hills to Hole-in-the-Wall Trail (see below).

5) Mid Hills to Hole-in-the-Wall Trail
Trailheads: Entrance to Mid Hills Campground, and about 1 mile west of Black Canyon Road
on the south end of Mid Hills Horse Canyon Road.
Hike 8 miles, one-way, through a maze of
washes decorated with barrel and cholla cacti,
then through the Hackberry Fire burned area.
Total elevation gain is 5,120 feet. Watch care-
fully for trail route markers.

6) Barber Peak Loop Trail
Trailhead: Parking area for walk-in tent sites at Hole-in-the-Wall Campground.
The preserve’s newest trail, this 6-mile loop encircles Barber Peak just west of Hole-in-the-
Wall Campground, passes the Cima Cliffs, and returns to Hole-in-the-Wall via Banshee Canyon.

7) Kelso Dunes
Start: 3 miles west of Kelbaker Road on the
well-graded, bumpy Kelso Dunes Road.
Hikers at sunrise and sunset are treated to both
colder temperatures and the rose-colored glow of the dunes. The roughly 3-mile round-trip hike
might take several hours as you slog through the sand, then slide down the slopes.

Recommended Routes
Warning: the routes described below are not established trails; trailheads might be unidentifiable or nonexistent. Check a
detailed map or guidebook—available at all
information centers—and consult a park
ranger for route information.

8) Quail Basin
Start: 12.5 miles north of I-15 on Kelbaker Road, then 1 mile east on an unmarked dirt
road. Park at junction with closed dirt road
heading south. High clearance and four-
wheel drive recommended.
Follow the route to the south to a road that bends around a small valley. After walking the loop, return via the same route. The 6.5-mile round-trip route leads past jumbled rocks into a small valley of Mojave yucca and juniper sur-
circled by Bundle Distopping.

9) Keystone Canyon
Start: 18 miles south of Zzyzx on Kelbaker Road, then 2.5 miles west on an unmarked
dirt road. Bear left at the first fork, right at the
second, then continue to a parking area. Four-
wheel drive recommended.
Hike the descending road into Keystone Canyon, ascending the New York Mountains. Continue cross-country to the top of the ridge for spectacular views. Hike is 3 miles one way.

10) Caruthers Canyon
Start: 9½ miles east of Ryan Hot Springs on New York Mountains Road.
For excellent views of the castle peak spires, drive recommended.
Hike 4 miles one way through a rocky basin to an abandoned gold-mining area. Do not enter mine shafts or climb on abandoned structures; they are unstable and extremely dangerous.

11) Castle Peaks Corridor
Start: 4.9 miles east of kawbah Road on signed
Hart Mesa Road; left fork, then 0.9 miles, left at fork, then 3.4 miles, crossing an earthen berm; left at fork, then 1 mile more to where road ends. High clearance and four-wheel drive recommended.

12) Piute Creek
Start: 9.5 miles west of the junction of Lanfair
Valley and Cedar Canyon roads on a dirt utility road, then 0.5 miles north. High clearance and four-wheel drive recommended.

Mitchell Caverns to remain closed indefinitely

Visitors to Mojave’s Hole-in-the-Wall campground often include a tour of Mitchell Caverns as part of their activities…but no more. State budget problems have forced the shutdown of this beloved desert attraction.

Providence Mountains State Recreation Area, home to Mitchell Caverns, is a California State Park located within the boundaries of Mojave National Preserve. State park officials shut down operations in January 2011. Employee retrenchments coincided with the development of serious problems with the water system, and state officials decided to temporarily close the park until the system could be repaired.

Meanwhile, shortfalls in the California state budget caused lawmakers in Sacramento to ask that state agencies identify possible budget cuts. In May 2011, California State Parks released its closure list, and Providence Mountains was among the 70 parks included. Although closures for most parks on the list won’t go into effect until July 2012, California State Parks officials decided not to invest in repairs to the park’s infrastructure during a time of shrinking budgets, so Providence Mountains State Recreation Area remains closed.

Mitchell Caverns was initially developed as a privately operated tourist attraction by Jack and Ma Mitchell in the early 1930s. Jack Mitchell died in 1954, and his family turned the property over to the state. Providence Mountains State Recreation Area was added to the California State Park system in 1956.

Over the years, California State Parks has made many improvements to the caverns, including the development of a safe pathway through the caverns, a tunnel connecting the two principal caves, and installation of a lighting system. However, the caverns’ remote location and lack of connection to the electrical grid have contributed to the difficulties in its operation and maintenance. With continuing weakness in the economy and ongoing fiscal issues for California State Parks, the future of Mitchell caverns remains uncertain.
Map of Death Valley National Park with mileages and locations.