

Mosaic of Desert Landscapes: Mojave National Preserve



Three of North America's four desert systems—the Great Basin, Sonoran, and Chihuahuan—meet in this national preserve. You may also encounter traces of the Chihuahuan Desert.

Rippled sand dunes sing an eerie chorus. Cactus flowers bloom after a spring rain, jewels against buff-colored earth. Salt-bush borders a dry lakebed, and countless Joshua tree limbs reach toward the sky. A bounty for the senses, Mojave is all these scenes and more.

Mojave National Preserve was established by the 1994 California Desert Protection Act. The 1.6-million-acre park encompasses much of the Mojave Desert, as well as transitional elements of the Great Basin and

Sonoran deserts. About half of the park is congressionally designated wilderness. Wilderness areas, marked by signs, are open to hikers and horseback riders but off-limits to motor vehicles and bicycles.

Summer temperatures often exceed 100°F; yearly rainfall ranges 4–14 inches. Elevations range from 800 feet near Baker to 7,929 feet atop Clark Mountain. A spine of mountains bisects the park north to south. Cinder cones, lava beds, sand dunes, the Soda Dry Lake, and

Cima Dome attest to the geological forces at work through the ages.

Many variables—elevation, moisture, soil composition, exposure to sunlight, shelter from the wind, and the effects of human habitation—create at least 30 identifiable habitats for plants and animals. The habitats do not have hard boundaries and

often overlap; they are grouped below into general categories. Their locations are also noted on the brochure map (see *other side*). You will encounter different habitats within a short distance of each other.

Mojave lacks many of the visitor facilities you might expect in a national park. This creates both inconveniences and opportunities. Nearby communities offer lodging and other services, so plan ahead. Be prepared to observe, explore, discover, and reflect.



Goldenbush
© JON MARK STEWART

Great Basin sagebrush
© ROBIN MITCHELL

Indian paintbrush
© ROBIN MITCHELL

Prickly pear
© STEPHEN INGRAM



© JEFF GNASS

Pinyon-Juniper Woodland

At higher elevations, particularly on north-facing slopes, pinyon and juniper trees cling to rocky, shallow soil. Look for this habitat in the Clark, Granite, New York, and Providence mountains. You can camp among these trees at Mid Hills Campground.

Pinyon nuts and juniper berries have long provided food for humans and wild animals.

Ranchers built fences from junipers; you can still see remnants at abandoned homesteads.

This habitat has sagebrush, wildflowers like Indian paintbrush, goldenbush, and the Mojave prickly pear—one of several species of prickly pear found in the park. Also look for scrub jays, blue but not crested, and antelope ground squirrels.



© JEFF GNASS

Another clue to the high elevation is the bighorn—a wild sheep that feeds on grasses and other plants. They are best spotted by water sources. Hooves adapted to steep, rocky terrain allow them to escape predators like mountain lions.



Bighorn sheep
© EDA ROGERS

Joshua Tree Woodland

Joshua trees tell you you're truly in Mojave country. Though they can grow 40-feet tall, they are not really trees but a species of yucca. They prefer flat areas or gradual inclines. The world's largest concentration of Joshua trees grows on the slope of Cima Dome near Teutonia Peak. Compare them with other yuccas that grow nearby.

Banana yuccas grow up to five feet and have long blue-green, curved spines. Mojave yuccas can reach a height of 20 feet.

One of Mojave's many lizard species, the desert night lizard,

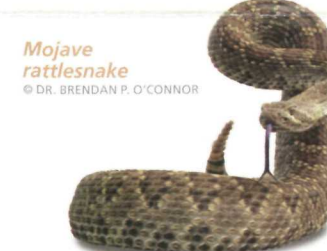


Desert night lizard
© JOHN S. REID

Cactus-Yucca Scrub

Cactus, or mixed-desert, scrub includes the spiny succulents that fulfill the popular notion of "desert." Barrel cacti are prominent on south-facing slopes, like southwest of Hole-in-the-Wall. They germinate only in years with favorable rainfall, so barrel cacti growing near one another are usually of the same age. If you visit Mojave in spring you may see the desert plants in brilliant bloom.

The greenish gray Mojave rattlesnake blends in easily with this habitat. It is the most aggressive



Mojave rattlesnake
© DR. BRENDAN P. O'CONNOR



Beavertail cactus
© JOHN S. REID

Barrel cactus
© TOM BEAN

Mojave yucca
© TOM BEAN

Buckhorn cholla
© JOHN S. REID



© DAN SUZIO

Desert Dunes

Prevailing winds carry sand from Soda Dry Lake, the Mojave River Sink, and Devil's Playground to the base of the Granite Mountains, creating dunes up to 700 feet high. At first the Kelso Dunes appear barren, but look

closely: evening primrose (cover photo, left), blazing star, and other plants find sufficient moisture. In favorable conditions dunes may be covered by Indian ricegrass.



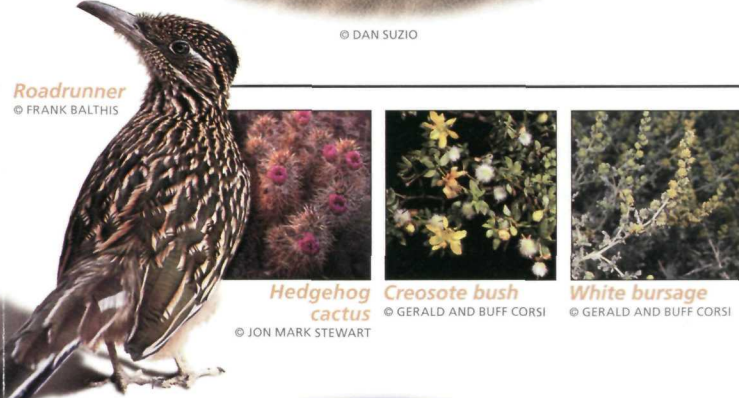
Colorado Desert sidewinder
© MICHAEL CARDWELL

Creosote Bush Scrub

Strong-scented creosote bush and bursage dominate much of the park. These widely spaced shrubs cover low-lying expanses. Creosote bushes are said to be the world's oldest living things; some colonies here are 11,500 years old! Other plants in this zone are desert mallow, brittle-bush, and hedgehog cactus. Of the several types of cholla here, the diamond (pencil) cholla is most abundant.

Roadrunners nest in this type of scrub. You may see one dart between areas of cover at up to 15 miles per hour. They can fly but seem to prefer running.

This is the home of the desert tortoise, which uses its sharp claws to dig nests in the sandy soil. Designated a threatened species, desert tortoises and their habitat are protected by federal law. Drive carefully and



Roadrunner
© FRANK BALTHIS

Hedgehog cactus
© JON MARK STEWART

Creosote bush
© GERALD AND BUFF CORSI

White bursage
© GERALD AND BUFF CORSI



© STEPHEN INGRAM

Desert Wash

Washes generally flow intermittently after heavy rains—a feast or famine of water that creates specific plant communities. Roadside water runoff can also create a miniature habitat of its own. Sacred datura, also called jimson weed or thorn apple, thrives in this water runoff, making the plant stand out along roads.

Unlike the sparse vegetation in most of the park, plantlife in washes is lush and deep-rooted. Plants range from shrubs like the catclaw acacia, cheesebush, four-wing saltbush, and bush senecio (left) to taller trees like desert willow and cottonwood.

Look on the branches of the shrubby catclaw acacia for clumps of desert mistletoe, a parasitic plant. Mistletoe



Indian ricegrass
© JIM STEINBERG

Blazing star
© JOHN S. REID

Desert chicory
© JIM STEINBERG

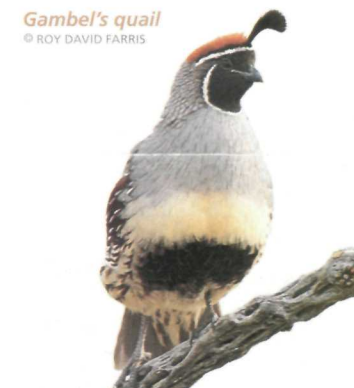
Hairy sand verbena
© JIM STEINBERG



© TOM BEAN

and highly venomous of the three kinds of rattlesnakes found in the park. This snake is most active at night and in early morning, so be careful where you place your hands and feet.

Early morning is a good time to spot a Gambel's quail feeding on cactus seeds and berries. These birds nest in abandoned nests of roadrunners, thrashers, and cactus wrens.



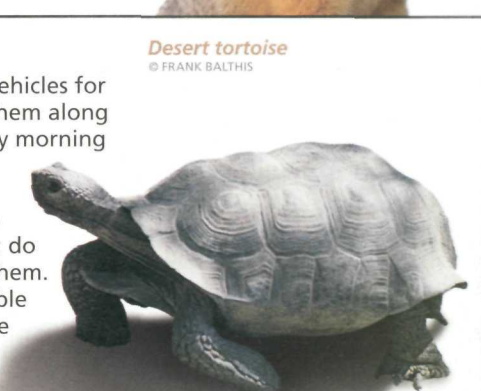
Gambel's quail
© ROY DAVID FARRIS

Perhaps you will see a Mojave fringe-toed lizard skitter across the dunes. Look for tracks, especially of kangaroo rats and their main predators, kit foxes. Kit foxes are most often seen at dusk in open desert. They are about the size of a housecat with agility to match. Fur-covered toes give them traction in sand. Also look for the tracks of the sidewinder, which glides along with a rapid, two-part motion, barely touching the sand.



Kit fox
© FRANK BALTHIS

check under parked vehicles for tortoises. Watch for them along park roads in the early morning and after rainstorms, especially in spring and summer. Observe them from a distance; do not touch or bother them. Tortoises are susceptible to diseases that can be transmitted through human contact.



Desert tortoise
© FRANK BALTHIS

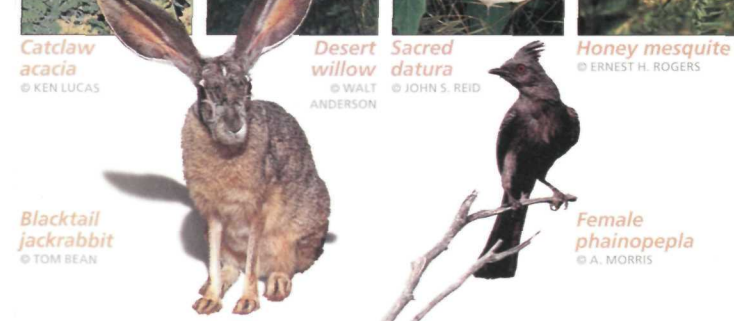


Catclaw acacia
© KERN LUCAS

Desert willow
© WALT ANDERSON

Sacred datura
© JOHN S. REID

Honey mesquite
© ERNEST H. ROGERS



Blacktail jackrabbit
© TOM BEAN

Female phainopepla
© A. MCORRIS

attracts phainopepla, a small, tufted black bird that eats—and disperses—its berries. Water attracts many birds, like migratory finches, orioles, and tanagers, and other animals like the red-spotted toad. The blacktail jackrabbit, recognized by large, black-tipped ears and a black-topped tail, is generally nocturnal. As fast as jackrabbits are they may not be able to outrun a coyote, one of their few natural predators in this region.

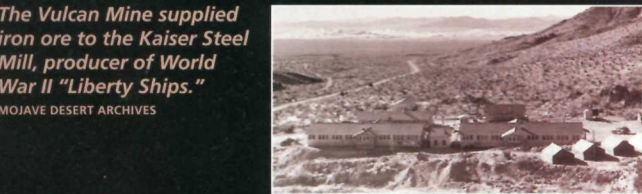


Coyote
© JOHN S. REID

The Mojave Road

Skirting mountains and other natural barriers, the Mojave Road follows the most natural travel corridor through the desert. It runs east-west from the Colorado River to Camp Cady, near Barstow, roughly bisecting the park. The trail is still visible, especially where it intersects modern roads, and is popular with hikers and four-wheel-drive enthusiasts.

American Indians like the Paiute, Mojave, and Chemehuevi used the corridor for travel and trade. They guided Spanish explorers along the trail in the 1770s. As westward exploration and settlement increased during the 1800s, the US Army improved the road and established outposts for the safety of supply wagons, mail, and travelers. Fort Piute, built to protect Piute Spring, dates from the 1860s. Not everyone passed through; some found ways to make a living from the desert's natural resources. The coming of the railroad in the 1890s made mining and ranching profitable for a time—and immediately replaced the Mojave Road as the preferred method of travel through the desert.



Plan Your Visit

Mojave National Preserve is in southeastern California between I-15 and I-40. The nearest large cities are Las Vegas, NV, and Barstow, CA. To make the most of your visit, stop first at the Kelso Depot Museum or the Hole-in-the-Wall Information Center. More details are on the park website.

Camping Two small campgrounds open year-round, first-come, first-served (fee), have pit toilets, picnic tables, fire rings, trash cans, and drinking water. The road to Mid Hills Campground is not recommended for trailers or large RVs. Black Canyon is only for group or equestrian camping—reservations required; call 760-252-6101. Backcountry and roadside camping are allowed in previously used areas.

Wilderness Nearly half of the park is designated wilderness. Please respect all wilderness boundary markers. Motorized and mechanized vehicles are prohibited in these areas, but we encourage you to explore on foot and horseback. The park has trails of all varieties. Before you set out, read and heed "For a Safe Visit" (far right).

Regulations Off-road driving is prohibited. • Off-highway vehicles (OHV) must be street legal in accordance with California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) requirements. • Federal law protects all plants, animals, rocks, and cultural features. • Pets must be on a leash at all times. • Licensed hunting per California Fish and Wildlife regulations is permitted, but target shooting and plinking are prohibited.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

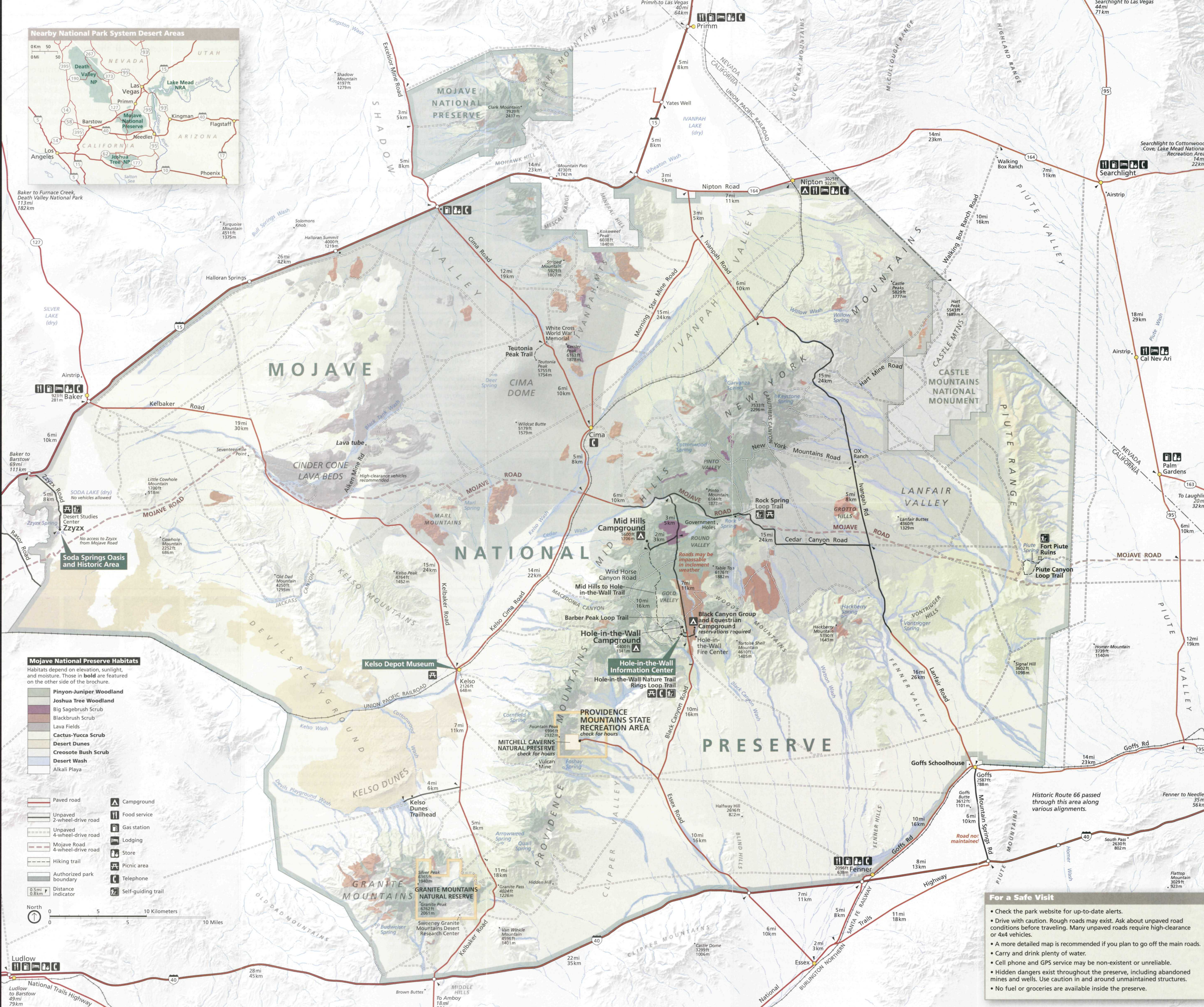
Mojave National Preserve and Castle Mountains National Monument are two of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more, visit www.nps.gov.

MORE INFORMATION

Mojave National Preserve
2701 Barstow Rd.
Barstow, CA 92311
760-252-6100
www.nps.gov/moja

Castle Mountains National Monument
2701 Barstow Rd.
Barstow, CA 92311
760-252-6100
www.nps.gov/camo

National Park Foundation.
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org



For a Safe Visit

- Check the park website for up-to-date alerts.
- Drive with caution. Rough roads may exist. Ask about unpaved road conditions before traveling. Many unpaved roads require high-clearance or 4x4 vehicles.
- A more detailed map is recommended if you plan to go off the main roads.
- Carry and drink plenty of water.
- Cell phone and GPS service may be non-existent or unreliable.
- Hidden dangers exist throughout the preserve, including abandoned mines and wells. Use caution in and around unmaintained structures.
- No fuel or groceries are available inside the preserve.