

On the outskirts of Tucson, a small but vital part of the Sonoran Desert is preserved as Saguaro National Park. Here, the monarchs of the cactus world reach out to welcome you to this surprisingly lush and diverse land.



SAGUARO BLOSSOMS
NPS

SURVIVAL UNDER THE SUN

Gently sloping alluvial hills below the Tucson Mountains (lower left) create ideal habitat for saguaros, which grow in stands so dense they're called cactus forests. Seedlings have the best chance of survival when sheltered by "nurse trees" like mesquite, ironwood, or palo verde.

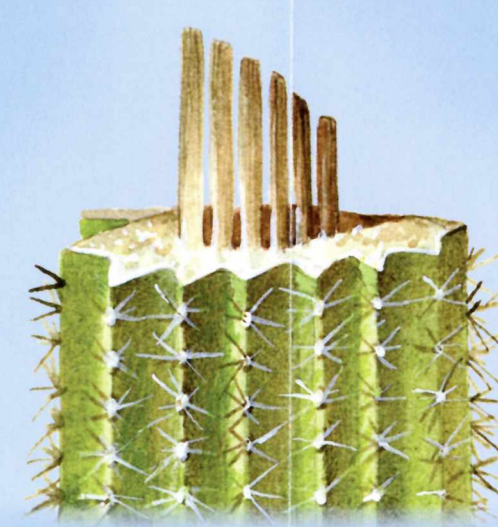
Saguaros grow very slowly at first—an inch or so during their first six to eight years. It may be 70 years before they sprout branches, or arms. They reach full height, 40–50 feet, at about age 150. The tallest may reach 75 feet. Long, woody ribs support their multi-ton bulk.



WHITE-WINGED DOVE FEEDING ON BLOSSOMS

Saguaros collect water through shallow roots extending about as far outward as the main trunk is tall. As saguaros soak up water, accordion-like pleats in the trunk and arms expand to allow for storage in the spongy flesh. Waxy skin reduces moisture loss. Spines shade the plant, shield it from drying winds, and discourage damage from animals.

Cream-colored flowers appear in early summer. White-winged doves, lesser long-nosed bats, honeybees, and moths feed on nectar and pollinate as they go. In July the deep-red fruit ripens, food for animals and humans. Doves, javelinas, bats,



CROSS SECTION SHOWS WOODY RIBS
LEFT AND ABOVE—NPS / ROBERT HYNES

and foxes are among the animals that eat the fruit, while pack rats and jackrabbits eat the flesh of the cactus.

Birds find not just food in saguaros, but homes as well. Gila woodpeckers and gilded flickers make nest holes in the trunks and large limbs. Others occupy abandoned holes or build nests in upper branches. Raptors perch on the tallest branches to spot prey.

Saguaros usually die of old age, but lightning, freezing, wind, and drought can kill them. Other threats are loss of habitat and invasive species like buffelgrass, which increases the threat of deadly fires.



PALO VERDE NURSE TREES SHELTER YOUNG SAGUAROS
NPS

DESERT FLOOR TO MOUNTAIN FOREST



Saguaro National Park ranges in elevation from 2,180 feet in the low-lying areas of the Tucson Mountain District to 8,666-foot Mica Mountain in the Rincon Mountain District. This remarkable range, along with sun and wind exposure and access to water, creates widely varied habitats.

Cactus species often have names that help identify them: hedgehog, barrel, staghorn, and fishhook. One cholla is called "teddy bear," but don't try to cuddle! The low desert also has creosote, catclaw, ocotillo, and trees like mesquite, ironwood, and palo verde.

This multicolored landscape is even more showy when winter rains bring blossoms like the gold poppy, blue lupine, and daisy-yellow brittlebush. In summer, people and animals search out prickly pear and other cactus fruit.

If you venture into the Rincon Mountains (right), you would climb through grasslands, oak-pinyon-juniper woodlands, and eventually to coniferous forest dominated by ponderosa pine, with southwestern white pine, Gambel oak, aspen, white fir,

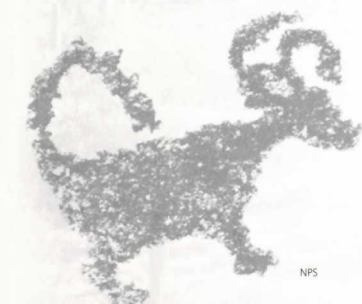
and Douglas fir—all typically found much farther north. High elevation and increased moisture (it can snow over 100 inches each year) support species not usually associated with the Sonoran Desert. Among the 200 bird species

are year-round residents: the Steller's jay, bridled titmouse, and pygmy nuthatch. White-tailed and mule deer are more common than mountain lions, black bears, and the white-nosed coati.

ABOVE, FROM LEFT—NPS, USFWS / CHRIS RONDQUALL NPS, © ILLICAS / CORSTEN, © WYNN ANDERSON / LITP, © ART GOLDENBERG, © JIMMY FINNEY / BILLINGS, © MICHAEL WEBSTER, USF

PEOPLE OF THE SONORAN DESERT

Like the plants and animals of the Sonoran Desert, people have found ways to cope with its extremes for thousands of years. People of the Hohokam culture left their mark on what is now the park—literally in the form of petroglyphs—between 450 and 1450 CE. They gathered and hunted food and devised irrigation systems for farming. Designs they pecked and scraped into rocks (right) are still visible.



Newcomers came to southern Arizona in the 1500s. Spanish explorers sought riches and missionaries sought converts. Their mission and presidio in the Native village of Stjukson eventually grew into modern Tucson (below). Some Native groups resisted the encroach-

ment: Apache raids on local communities continued to the end of the 1800s.

Southern Arizona became a US territory in 1854, and the 1862 Homestead Act opened up land for those willing to settle here. The dry, rocky bajada of the Tucson Mountains wasn't suited to farming, but prospectors worked silver and copper mines. Most were just exploratory holes in the ground, long since filled or fenced for safety.

Settlers also established cattle ranches on their land claims. By the early 1900s most of the ranches were consolidated into

large holdings. You can hike through the site of the Freeman Homestead in the Rincon Mountain District.

In 1933, with pressure from local conservationists, a 62,000-acre section of the Rincon Mountains became a national monument. From 1933 to 1942 the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) constructed picnic areas, roads, and water-control dams in the park. See many of these structures at the Tucson Mountain District, added in 1961.

Saguaro became a national park in 1994. East and west of Tucson you can experience the Sonoran Desert, getting to know its past and present—and helping to protect its future.



TOHONO O'ODHAM SUMMER HARVEST OF SAGUARO FRUIT; LEFT: SAGUAROS NEAR SIGNAL HILL
ABOVE—NPS, LEFT—NPS / JANE HANNA



MANNING FAMILY SUMMER CABIN IN THE RINCON MOUNTAINS, 1905; RIGHT: TRAIL IN RINCON MOUNTAINS; BELOW: MICA MOUNTAIN OVER TUCSON SKYLINE
ABOVE—NPS, RIGHT—DAVID BAKER, BELOW—BRIAN NEUBERG



YOUR GUIDE TO SAGUARO NATIONAL PARK

GENERAL INFORMATION

VISITOR CENTERS
Information, exhibits, films, maps, books, souvenirs, and other sales items. Closed on Thanksgiving and December 25. Hours change seasonally; please check the website. This part of Arizona does not observe daylight saving time.

WATER, TOILETS, PICNIC AREAS
Water is available only at visitor centers. Carry and drink at least one gallon per day, even if you don't feel thirsty. Visitor center restrooms have sinks and flush toilets. Pit toilets are at all picnic areas except Mam-A-Gah. Picnic areas have at least one shaded table. **Fires**—in

designated grills only—must be closely attended and extinguished after use.

FOOD, LODGING, CAMPING
Tucson and other nearby communities have food and lodging; neither is available in the park. Car camping prohibited in park; ask at a visitor center about nearby campgrounds. **Backcountry hike-in sites** (minimum 5- to 6-mile hike) are in Saguaro East District only. Permits and entrance fees are required for camping; get your camping permit at www.recreation.gov.

SCENIC DRIVES
Both park districts have roads designed for sightseeing. No

off-road driving. Obey speed limits. Share the road. **Bicycles** may be used on all roads and two short trails in East District. No rental facilities in park.

TRAILS
The park has over 175 miles of trails. Get hiking maps at visitor centers or park website. No off-trail hiking below 4,500 feet. Maximum group size is 18 persons. Hiking in extreme heat can be hazardous; pace yourself. Watch for prickly plants and venomous animals. Never put hands or feet in places you can't see. Lightning and flash floods are frequent in summer and possible year-round. **Horses** permitted on many park trails; no rental facilities in park.

PETS
Welcome on roads, in picnic areas, and on Desert Discovery and Desert Ecology paved nature trails. Must always be on leash no longer than 6 feet.

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

REGULATIONS
Federal laws protect natural and cultural features in the park. Do not damage, collect or disturb them. Regulations, including for firearms, are on the park website.

Emergencies call 911

MORE INFORMATION
Saguaro National Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at www.nps.gov.

Saguaro National Park
3693 South Old Spanish Trail
Tucson, AZ 85730
520-733-5158 (West)
520-733-5153 (East)
www.nps.gov/sagu

Use the official NPS App to guide your visit.

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

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RIDERS IN THE CACTUS FOREST
© B. RILEY

SAGUARO EAST—RINCON MOUNTAIN DISTRICT

3693 S. Old Spanish Trail
Tucson, AZ 85730
520-733-5153

CACTUS FOREST LOOP DRIVE
This 8-mile scenic drive winds through a saguaro forest and offers a close and leisurely look at a variety of Sonoran Desert life. This paved, one-way road begins at the visitor center. Open 5 am to 8:30 pm year-round. The paved, 0.25-mile **Desert Ecology Trail**, off Cactus Forest Drive, lets you explore desert life. This self-guiding trail is wheelchair-accessible.

PICNIC AREAS
There are two picnic areas in the Rincon Mountain District, both off Cactus Forest Drive. Each has picnic tables, fire grills, and pit toilets. There is no water.

BACKCOUNTRY
Several longer trails lead into the remote backcountry. Few people experience this part of the park because you can get to it only by foot or horse. Unlike the lowland cactus desert, the Rincon Mountains have scrub oak and pine woodlands and ponderosa pine and Douglas fir forests.

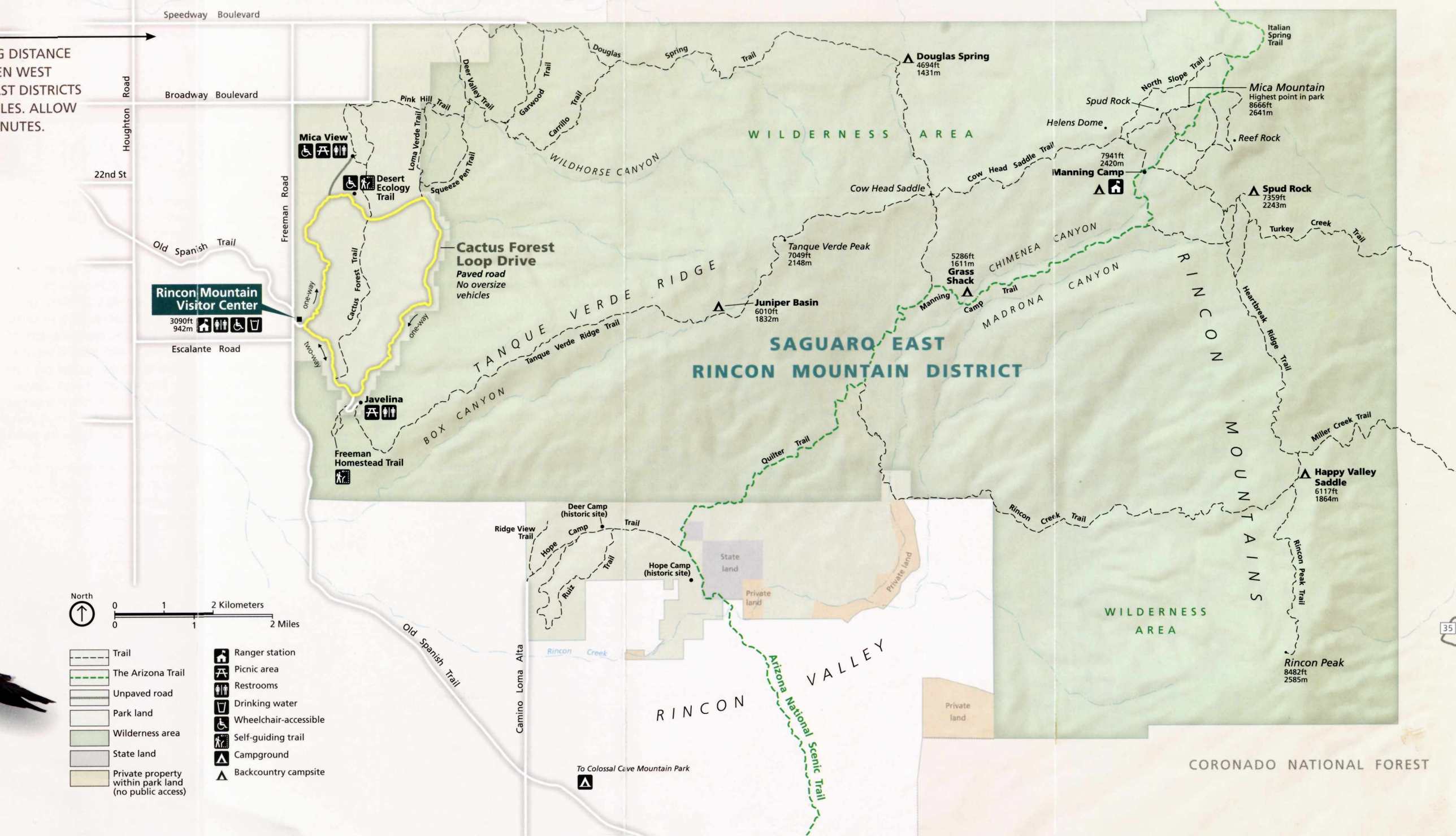
Because many backcountry trails intersect, you can plan trips of varying lengths.

Horseback riding is allowed on most trails. Before hiking or horseback riding in the Rincon Mountain District, check on trail status and conditions with a park ranger.

Backcountry camping is permitted only at designated sites. Get your backcountry camping permit at www.recreation.gov. Entrance pass and backcountry permit fees apply.



WESTERN DIAMONDBACK
RATTLESNAKE
© CODY CONWAY



CORONADO NATIONAL FOREST

SAGUARO WEST—TUCSON MOUNTAIN DISTRICT

2700 N. Kinney Rd.
Tucson, AZ 85743
520-733-5158

CACTUS GARDEN TRAIL
Just outside the visitor center is the Cactus Garden Trail, a wheelchair-accessible walkway through a variety of desert plants. A short, unpaved trail follows a sandy wash behind the visitor center.

PICNIC AREAS
Four picnic areas are along park roads. A backcountry picnic area is reached by trail; please pack out all trash from this site. Each area has tables, grills, shade ramadas, and pit toilets, but no water. There are no toilets at Mam-A-Gah.

DESERT DISCOVERY NATURE TRAIL
This flat, paved, and accessible 0.5-mile loop through a stand

of large saguaros begins at a parking area 1 mile north of visitor center.

BAJADA LOOP DRIVE
This 5-mile loop drive includes Hohokam Road and part of Golden Gate Road. Roads are unpaved but suitable for passenger vehicles. It is not recommended for motor homes, buses, or vehicles pulling a trailer. Open to vehicles from dawn to dusk. Along the drive is the **Valley View Overlook Trail**, 0.8-mile roundtrip with views of the mountains, desert, and saguaro forests.

PETROGLYPHS
A 0.3-mile roundtrip trail at the Signal Hill picnic area leads to dozens of drawings etched into rock that date to the Hohokam period, 450–1450 CE. The trail is unpaved with rock steps.

WILDERNESS
You can hike trails in Saguaro's wilderness. Since 1976 Congress has protected over 70 percent of Saguaro National Park as wilderness under the 1964 Wilderness Act. The designation protects forever the land's wilderness character; natural conditions; opportunities for solitude; and scientific, educational, and historical values. Learn more at www.wilderness.net.



ROADRUNNER; LEFT: PETROGLYPHS
AT SIGNAL HILL

SPRUEL—NPS; PETROGLYPHS—NPS / JANE HANNA;
ROADRUNNER—© JEFF BLEAM

North
0 1 2 Kilometers
0 1 2 Miles

- Trail
- The Arizona Trail
- Unpaved road
- Park land
- Wilderness area
- State land
- Private property within park land (no public access)
- Ranger station
- Picnic area
- Restrooms
- Drinking water
- Wheelchair-accessible
- Self-guiding trail
- Campground
- Backcountry campsite