

BACKPACKING IN ARCHES NATIONAL PARK

Backpacking in Arches National Park is both feasible and enjoyable. A backcountry permit should be obtained prior to beginning any overnight hiking trip. This permit assists the National Park Service in keeping track of the amount of use the Park receives. It also allows visitors to inform Park Rangers of their plans in the event of an emergency. The backcountry permit can be obtained at the Visitor Center located near the Park entrance. The on-duty Ranger will be able to provide current information on backcountry conditions and can offer trip suggestions based on your hiking experience. When obtaining a permit, certain regulations designed to protect and preserve the Park's environment will be explained. These include the following:

- 1) Carry out all your trash- DO NOT BURY OR BURN IT. Wild animals will dig it up and, in the arid desert climate, nothing decomposes very quickly (including fruit peels).
- 2) ALL wood gathering is prohibited (including dead and downed branches). Some of the dead trees have been standing for over 100 years and are protected as much as any living vegetation.
- 3) You must camp at least 1/2 mile away from AND out of sight of any road or trail
- 4) Burn your toilet paper- again, because of the arid climate, paper does not readily decompose and can remain for years.
- 5) Leashed pets are allowed in the Park, but they are NOT permitted on any maintained trail.
- 6) Avoid walking on cryptogamic soil. This lichen-like organism resembles a black crust on the ground and is alive and very fragile. Footsteps on it can take years to heal. Stay in the dry washes or on the slickrock wherever possible.
- 7) Avoid camping in washes. Infrequent thunderstorms can turn sandy streambeds into a raging torrent in a matter of minutes.

OTHER INFORMATION

While at the Visitor Center, it is advisable to obtain a topographic map, since most backcountry use will involve hiking cross-country, off designated trails.

The desert is a very fragile ecosystem, no matter how harsh it may appear. Large groups of hikers can have a devastating effect, especially on cryptogamic soil. Because of this, group size should be limited to a maximum of nine persons.

The factor which restricts backcountry hiking the most at Arches is water- there isn't any (not much, at least). There are very few perennial and potable springs in the Park. Most of the year, the only reliable source of water will be that which you carry on your back. When summer temperatures reach 100°F and a gallon of water per person per day becomes an absolute necessity, trip distances and length of stay should be planned accordingly. Remember: 1 gallon of water = 8 pounds.

Only one kind of rattlesnake is found at Arches and it is rarely seen and is fairly timid. Its venom, however, is just as potent as its larger relatives. View them from a distance. There are also several types of poisonous scorpions, the black widow spider, and cone-nosed kissing bug. Ask a Ranger for details.

The brown rock dominating the landscape is commonly called slickrock. It is called that for good reason. Sandstone is a soft rock and breaks easily. This makes climbing sandstone more dangerous than climbing harder rock such as granite. Numerous accidents and rescues have resulted due to unsuccessful attempts to climb on the rock. On some occasions death has been the final outcome. Use extreme caution. Climbing on named features is prohibited.

For most visitors, Arches is an intriguing and different landscape. To fully enjoy the unique beauty of this area, further reading would be helpful before attempting a backcountry trip. Ignorance may be bliss, but knowledge and understanding helps bring the small and large details into focus.