



Backcountry Camping

Call of the Wild

*There's a whisper on the night-wind,
There's a star a gleam to guide us,
And the Wild is calling, calling... let us go.*

—Robert Service



Wilderness

Congressionally designated wilderness "... where earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain..." provides a haven from urban pressures, a place in which to experience quiet and solitude. Increasing numbers of park visitors are answering the "call of the wild" by hiking and camping in the nearly 600,000 acres of Joshua Tree National Park wilderness.

You can help protect the pristine qualities of Joshua Tree's backcountry by practicing—and sharing with others—appropriate outdoor ethics. The principles listed below are tenets of Leave No Trace outdoor ethics that are endorsed by the National Park Service. The included guidelines will help you to experience a safe and enjoyable trip while limiting your impact on Joshua Tree's fragile desert environment.

Plan and Prepare

You should carry a map and compass when venturing into the backcountry. You may purchase hiking maps at park visitor centers or order them from the Joshua Tree National Park Association, on the Internet at www.joshuatree.org.

There are 13 staging areas for backcountry camping trips in the park. Each location provides parking space for your vehicle, an information panel featuring a map of the adjacent area (please note that some areas are restricted to day use only), and the backcountry permits that are required for all overnight camping outside of park campgrounds. Leave the bottom portion of the permit on your vehicle and take the top portion with you.

Unregistered vehicles left overnight are subject to citation and/or towing.

Plan to carry all the water you will need; at least one gallon per person per day is recommended, two in summer or if you will be hiking strenuously. Natural water sources are scarce, easily polluted, and should not be used.

Campfires are prohibited outside of government-provided fire rings. They leave long-term scars on the land and can ignite destructive wildfires. Plan to use a stove or carry pre-cooked meals. "Down and dead" wood is protected in the park and cannot be collected for any purpose.

Travel and Camp On Durable Surfaces

Even the soil beneath your feet is fragile when you are traveling in the backcountry. By learning to recognize biological crusts, you can help preserve pockets of life that contribute nutrients and organic matter to desert soils and help absorb rainfall. Typical mature crusts are bumpy and dark-colored due to the presence of lichens, mosses, and bacteria. By walking around them, you will avoid breaking delicate filaments that may take years to heal. To reduce the damage of your passage through the desert, hike on trails, expanses of rock, or in washes.

There are no designated campsites in the backcountry but you are encouraged to select the most durable possible location. Sleeping and cooking areas should be on flat rocks, in sandy washes (except in the case of flash flood threat), or under trees.

Campsites must be at least one mile from any trailhead or road and 100 feet from water sources (seeps, springs, oases).

Pack It In, Pack It Out

It is your responsibility to clean up after yourself. Pack out all trash, left-over food, and litter. Waste disposal involves pre-planning and some initiative in wildlands. Bury human waste in "cat holes" six to eight inches deep and at least 200 feet away from water sources, campsites, and trails. Don't leave

human waste under rocks or in alcoves where it decomposes slowly, and is unsightly and unsanitary. Plan ahead to pack out used toilet paper in a plastic bag.

Respect Wildlife

It is tempting to feed wild animals; don't do it! People food is not healthy for them and an animal habituated to begging can become aggressive and dangerous.

Pets are prohibited on trails and in the backcountry. The presence of carnivores, such as domestic dogs, impairs the feeding, travel, and reproductive cycles

of animals struggling to survive in the wild. Even leashed dogs cause extra stress on wild animals and are only allowed in campgrounds and within 100 feet of designated roads.

Avoid making your camp near animal burrows or nesting sites.

Be Considerate of Others

Please maintain a low profile when hiking and camping in groups. Limit the size of your group to 12 people in wilderness areas of the park and 25 people in the backcountry. Taking rest breaks a short distance from the trail and breaking up into smaller camping groups will minimize the impact of your group.

Moving off-trail when you encounter horse riders (they have the right-of-way) and talking quietly

will reduce the likelihood that the horses will be frightened by your presence.

Because we share park lands with people who have different recreational pursuits, a cooperative spirit is required. Radios, electronic games, and bright lights disturb those recreationists who wish to enjoy the dark night sky and listen to nature's sounds. Please minimize their use in the backcountry.

Leave What You Find

Leaving everything just as we find it helps scientists understand the natural balance of the landscape and allows us to share the experience of discovery with those who follow. Visit cultural sites with care and respect. Let photos, drawings, and memories be your souvenirs. Collecting natural and cultural objects is strictly prohibited. All plants, rocks, wildlife, and historic and prehistoric materials are protected in the park including wildflowers.