

Horse Use at Joshua Tree National Park

Horseback riding has long been a popular way to experience the unique setting of Joshua Tree National Park. Joshua Tree's unique desert environment presents special challenges for equestrian users, as well as special concerns for park resources. In recognition of the need to allow for the unique experiences that horse and stock use offers while ensuring that park resources are not impacted, Joshua Tree National Park addressed equestrian use in the Backcountry and Wilderness Management Plan, enacted in the spring of 2000. The Plan was developed in cooperation with many special interest groups and representatives of effected communities, including equestrian user groups from the surrounding community.

The final version of the plan created an extensive trail system, offering a wide variety of experiences to equestrian users. Joshua Tree National Park is currently working to implement the plan. In the coming months, equestrian users will likely notice gradual improvements in the park trails, including improvements in stability and grade, improved signing, and the rehabilitation of impacted areas. As this work progresses, Joshua Tree National Parks is seeking the assistance of the equestrian community in ensuring the smooth transition from old social trails, to the approved trail system defined in the Backcountry and Wilderness Management Plan. Please be aware of the special considerations and regulations that pertain to horse use in Joshua Tree National Park.

Camping and Backcountry Use

Ryan and Black Rock Campgrounds have designated areas for horses and stock animals. A \$10 per night fee is charged at Black Rock. Reservations may be make by calling DESTINET at 1-800-365-2267. Water is not available at Ryan Campground. There is no charge for camping at Ryan Campground, however reservations are required. Call (760) 367-5541, Mon-Fri, 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. for reservations.

In recent years, large fires, fueled in part by exotic species of grass and weeds, have destroyed large areas of the park. Please do your part to discourage the introduction of non-native grasses and weeds into the park. Horse manure must be removed from campgrounds and trailheads. The removal of manure from trails is encouraged. Grazing is not permitted in the park. While in the backcountry, stock animals are restricted to pellet feed.

Travel Restrictions

In areas where trail construction has been completed, horses and other stock must stay on established trails. In areas where trail construction has not yet occurred, riders should follow the existing footprint of trails defined by the Backcountry and Wilderness Management Plan, and avoid trails that have not been designated by the plan. A complete listing of designated equestrian horse trails is available at the 29 Palms, and Blackrock Visitor Centers.

Riders should use only designated access points when accessing the park. The following areas have been designated for equestrian access:

West Entrance Area

- West Entrance Station (North and South)
- Quail Wash
- Cactus Cove View
- Burrow Access

Blackrock Area

- Blackrock Campground
- High View Nature Trail Access
- Machris Wash

- Long Canyon
- Little Long Canyon

Additional Staging Areas

- Boy Scout Trailhead (Indian Cove)
- West Entrance Borrow Pit
- Lower Covington Flat Picnic Area
- Twin Tanks
- Geology Tour Road
- North Entrance

Horse Trailers are authorized in other parking areas provided they do not obstruct traffic.

Riders traveling through park entrance stations must pay the park entrance fee, \$10.00 per private vehicle for trailered horses, \$5.00 per person on horseback. An annual pass is available for \$25.00. Please approach the entrance station on foot, not on horseback. A hitching rail will be placed at the West Entrance Station in coming months to accommodate equestrian users.

While in the park, travel single file to reduce damage to vegetation. Be cognizant of riders traveling in the opposite direction, and locate areas where parties can pass without additional damage to vegetation and soils. Stock animals are not permitted within ¼ mile of any natural or manmade water source.