

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

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 (far right).

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 (left), 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, bats, jave-



CROSS SECTION SHOWS WOODY RIBS

lina, and fox 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

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 climb through grasslands, oak-pinyon-juniper woodlands, and eventually to coniferous forest dominated by ponderosa pine, with southeastern white pine, Gambel oak, aspen, white

fir, and Douglas fir—all typically found much farther north. The high elevation and increased moisture—it can snow over 100 inches annually—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 black bears, mountain lions, and the white-nosed coati.

ABOVE, FROM LEFT—NPS, USWS/CHRIS KONDEAU, NPS, OLUCAS FORSTER, GWYN ANDERSON/UTTER, BART COLLEMBELL, USWS/RETT BILLINGS, © MICHAEL WEBER, USFS

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 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—BRYAN NIERENHOSE

YOUR GUIDE TO SAGUARO NATIONAL PARK

GENERAL INFORMATION

VISITOR CENTERS

Open daily 9 am to 5 pm Mountain Standard Time (this part of Arizona does not observe daylight saving time). Closed December 25. Information desk, exhibits, films, maps, books, souvenirs, and other sales items.

WATER, RESTROOMS, AND 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; not available in park. No car camping allowed in park; ask at visitor center about nearby campgrounds. **Backcountry hike-in sites** (minimum 5- to 6-mile hike) are in Saguaro East District only. Permits required, obtain at visitor center by noon of departure day.

SCENIC DRIVES

Both districts have roads designed for sightseeing. Obey speed limits. Off-road driving prohibited. Share the road.

Bicycles may be used on all roadways and on two short trails in the East District; no rental facilities in the park.

TRAILS

The park has over 175 miles of trails. Get detailed hiking maps at visitor centers or the 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 out 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** are permitted on many park trails; no rental facilities in the park.

PETS

Welcome on roadways, in picnic areas, and on the Desert Discovery and Desert Ecology paved nature trails. Pets must always be on a leash no longer than 6 feet.

ACCESSIBILITY

We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. Ask a ranger, call, or visit our website.

COLLECTING AND FIREARMS

Federal law protects all plants, animals, rocks, and cultural features. Do not damage, collect or disturb them. For a full list of regulations, including firearms information, visit the park website.

MORE INFORMATION

Saguaro National Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more, visit 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

Emergencies call 911

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

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 7 am to sunset. The 0.25-mile paved **Desert Ecology Trail**, along Cactus Forest Drive, provides an exploration of 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

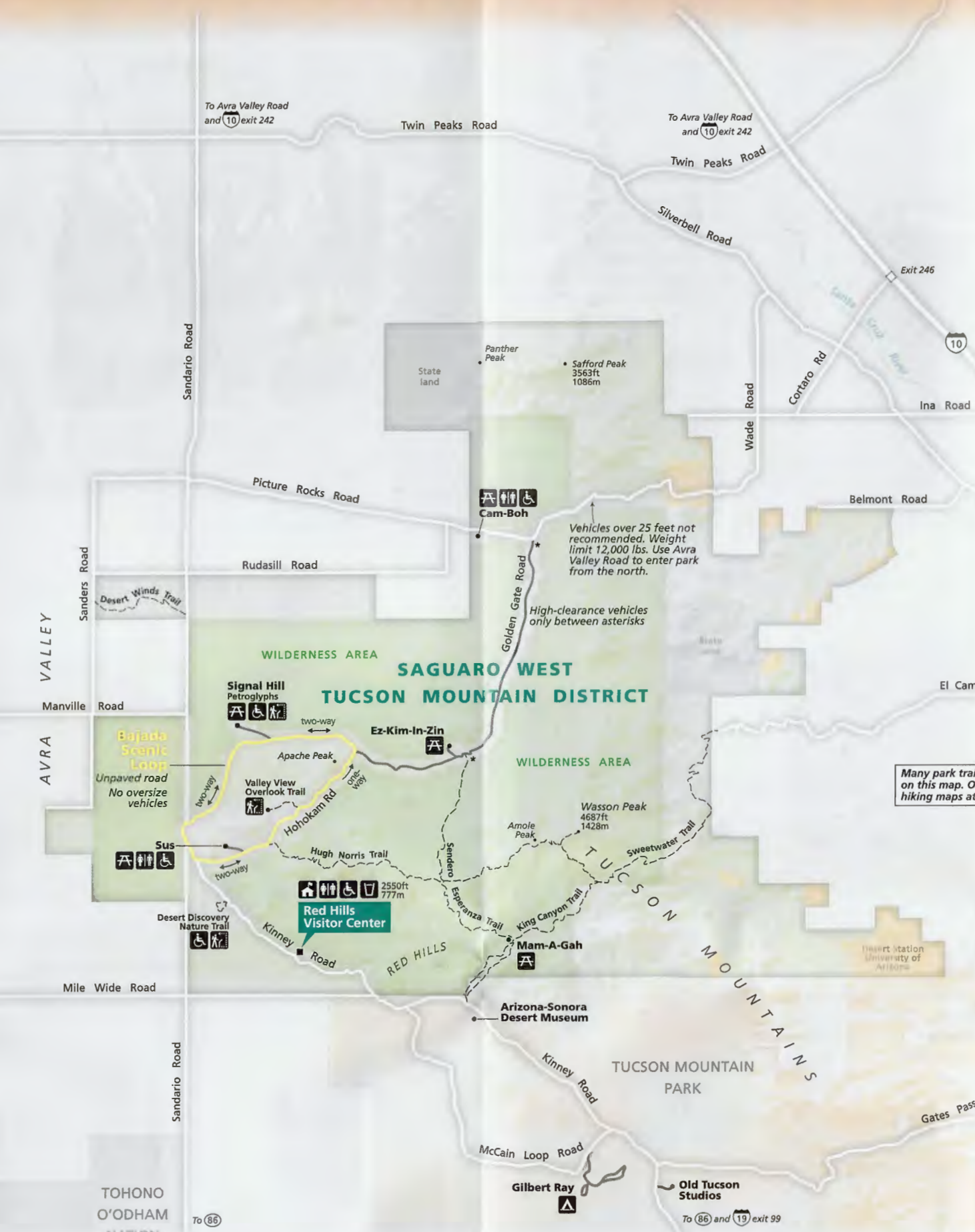
Several longer hiking trails lead into the remote backcountry, a part of the park few people experience because you can get to it only by foot or horseback. Unlike the low-land cactus desert, the Rincon Mountains have woodlands of scrub oak and pine and forests of ponderosa pine and Douglas fir. Because many of the trails intersect, trips of varying

length can be planned.

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 backcountry use permits at visitor center before taking an overnight trip. Camping permit fees apply.



WESTERN DIAMONDBACK RATTLESNAKE
©CODY CONWAY



SAGUARO WEST—TUCSON MOUNTAIN DISTRICT

CACTUS GARDEN TRAIL
Just outside the visitor center is the Cactus Garden Trail, a wheelchair-accessible walkway through a variety of desert plants. Another 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—WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE

Flat, paved 0.5-mile loop through a stand of large saguaros. Begins at parking area 1 mile north of visitor center.

BAJADA LOOP DRIVE

Includes Hohokam Road and part of Golden Gate Road to create a 5-mile loop drive.

Roads are unpaved but suitable for passenger vehicles. 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.

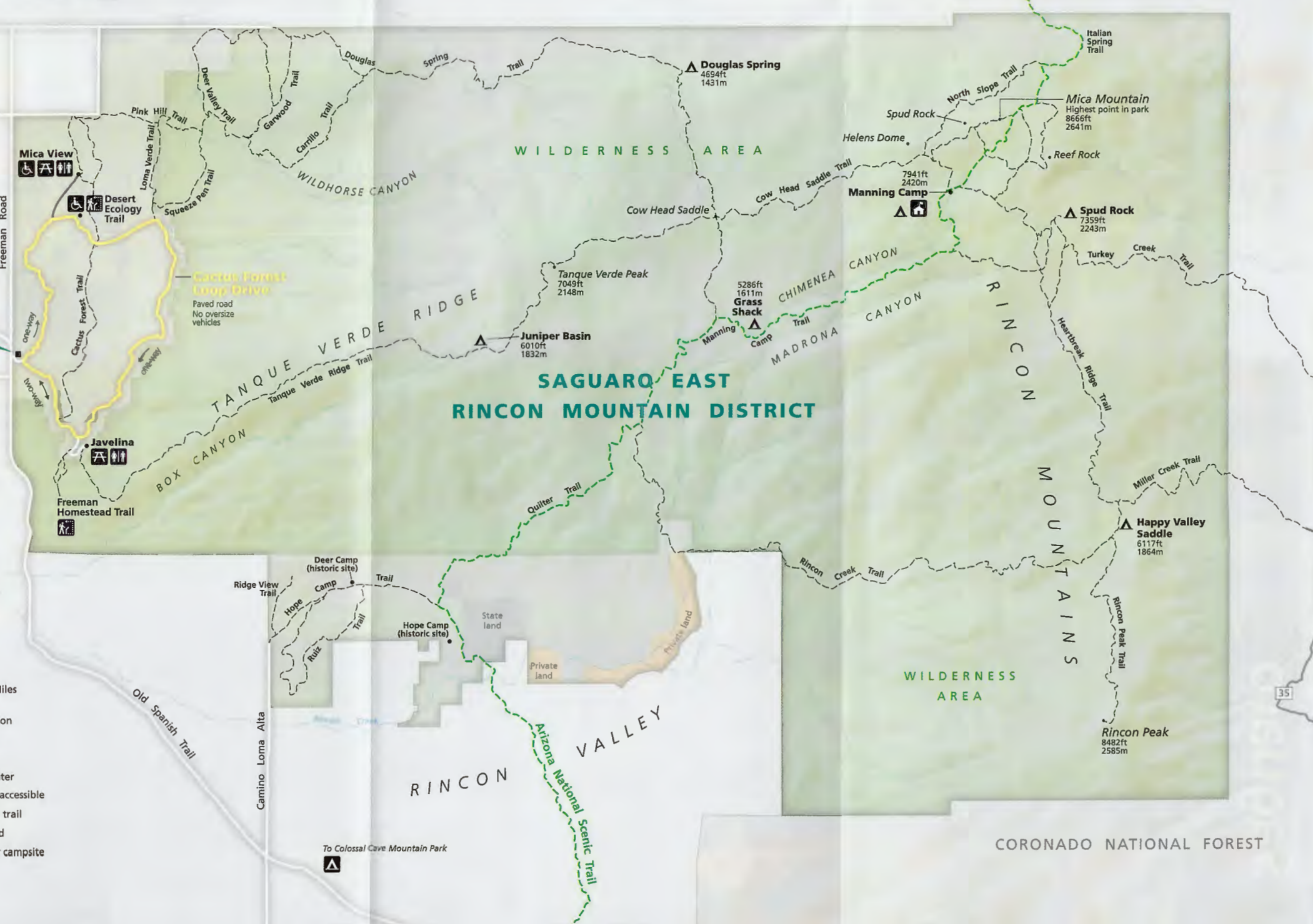
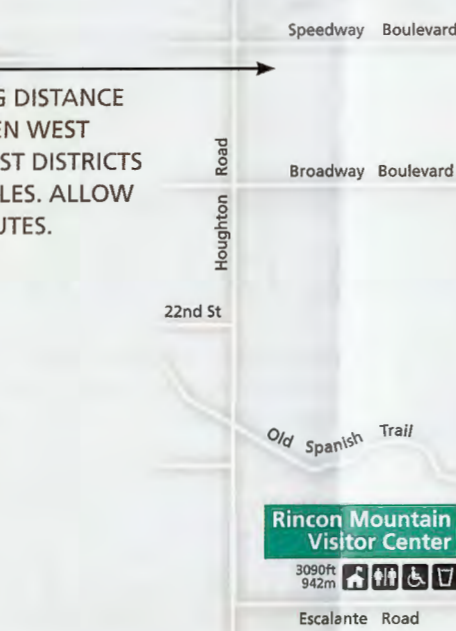
PETROGLYPHS

Located at Signal Hill picnic area. A 0.3-mile roundtrip

trail allows you to see dozens of drawings etched into rock. These date from the Hohokam period, 450–1450 CE. Trail is unpaved with rock steps.

WILDERNESS

In 1976 Congress designated over 70 percent of the park as a wilderness area, preserving the land's natural conditions. Many trails allow you to hike in Saguaro's wilderness. Please visit www.wilderness.net.



ROADRUNNER; LEFT: PETROGLYPHS AT SIGNAL HILL.
SHAGBARK PETROGLYPHS—NPS/JANE HARRIS; ROADRUNNER—JOEY BLUM

