

Death Valley National Park Wilderness Fact Sheet

In 1994, the California Desert Protection Act added 1.3 million acres of BLM land to Death Valley National Monument, bringing its total acreage to approximately 3.4 million acres. The additions extended the monument in all directions except northeast. The monument's status was changed to Death Valley National Park, and most of the land was designated Wilderness. Though broken up by roads into at least 35 smaller wilderness sections it is the largest named Wilderness area in the lower 48 states. The wilderness contains acreage in both California and Nevada. Annual rainfall measures slightly less than two inches, and for six months each year, heat sears the valley floor, with July temperatures averaging 116 degrees Fahrenheit, making it the lowest, driest, hottest spot in North America. During the other six months, the climate is very hospitable and considered the best time to visit.

Yet there is far more to the park than dry heat. Once you've adjusted your mental palette to the area's harsh, subtle beauty, wonders abound. Telescope Peak rises to 11,049 feet, higher than any other point in the park, and, with much of the Panamint Range, stands white under winter snow. (In fact, the climb up to Telescope Peak, where temperatures are cooler, is one of the few hikes considered reasonable in the heat of summer.) Contrast this with nearby Badwater, 15 or so miles to the east as the crow flies, where the earth lies almost 300 feet below sea level, the lowest terrestrial point in the North America. Vast fields of sand dunes shimmer in the sun, and rock outcroppings are carved into shapes of staggering beauty, especially striking at dawn and dusk. Colorful cliffs stand above endless flats of creosote bush. More than 1000 species of plants have been identified within the park, and nights come alive to the scurrying of small mammals. Coyotes, gray and kit foxes, bobcats, jackrabbits, and desert tortoises thrive here, as do a plethora of bats, birds, lizards, and snakes. Desert bighorn sheep live in the canyons and lower mountains while mule deer live in the high Panamints, where you can sometimes tramp through a dry forest of piñon, juniper, mountain mahogany, and a few bristlecone pines. Wildflowers bloom in spectacular variety when enough rain falls during the winter and spring. Ubehebe Crater opens 2,400 feet in diameter, marking where a "maar" volcano erupted less than 500 years ago.

You are free to hike the Wilderness, limited only by your courage and ability to carry water. Camping in the front country is only allowed in designated locations but in the wilderness, camping is allowed just about anywhere. Visitors are requested to obtain a free backcountry camping permit from any visitor center.

Information provided by Wilderness.net.

Wilderness.net is an Internet-based tool connecting the natural resource workforce, scientists, educators, and the public to their wilderness heritage through ready access to wilderness information. Through Wilderness.net and its partners, you'll find access to general information about wilderness, stewardship and educational resources, scientific information, agency policies, relevant legislation, communication tools to connect you with others in the wilderness community and more.