
Visitor Services Project Death Valley National Monument Backcountry

Report Summary

- This report describes the results of a backcountry visitor study at Death Valley National Monument during March 21-27, 1994. A total of 292 questionnaires were distributed and 262 returned, a 90% response rate.
- This report profiles Death Valley backcountry visitors. A separate appendix has visitors' comments about their visit; this report and the appendix contain a comment summary.
- Visitors were often in family groups (42%) or friends groups (29%). Groups often consisted of two people (45%). The most common visitor ages were 36-50 years old (36%), 21-35 years old (24%) and 15 years or younger (12%). Most (56%) were repeat visitors to the park. International visitors comprised 9% of all visitors. Forty-nine percent of international visitors came from Germany and 16% from Canada. United States visitors came from California (59%) and Oregon (20%) and many other states.
- Common activities for visitors were visiting at scenic areas (97%), day hiking on trails (74%), visiting mining ruins/historic sites (73%), picnicking (45%), driving dirt roads in vehicles other than 4x4's (45%) and driving dirt roads in 4x4's (44%).
- The community the greatest proportion of visitors drove through just before entering the park was Trona (29%). The most used backcountry areas were Titus Canyon and Mosaic/Grotto Canyons (each 43%). Of all backcountry areas, more visitors stopped first at Mosaic/Grotto Canyons (24%).
- Most visitors stayed two to four days in the Death Valley area (64%); 21% stayed 6 days or more. Visitors identified their reasons for visiting as seeing desert scenery (96%), experiencing wilderness and open space (82%), enjoying recreation (81%) and enjoying solitude and quiet (78%).
- The most important features to visitors' backcountry experience were hiking on trails (80%), restroom and garbage disposal facilities (63%), dirt roads passable by vehicles other than 4x4 (56%), open camping (55%), and developed campsites/campgrounds (55%). Several features were not considered important to visitors' backcountry experience: motorcycle riding (80%), using horses and pack animals (73%), and permitting pets in the backcountry (66%).
- Visitors were asked how the number of people they saw in the park's backcountry compared with what they expected. The largest proportion of visitors said it was "about as crowded as I expected" (37%).
- Visitors rated road directional signs and the park brochure/map as the most used and most important services.
- Most visitors (64%) said maps would be the most useful informational item during a future visit. The educational topics most visitors said would be important to them during a future visit were geology and history.
- Visitors made many additional comments.

<p>For more information about the Visitor Services Project, please contact Dr. Gary E. Machlis, Sociology Project Leader, University of Idaho Cooperative Park Studies Unit, College of Forestry, Wildlife and Range Sciences, Moscow, Idaho 83844-1133 or call (208) 885-7129.</p>
