Death Valley Backcountry & Wilderness Access

Death Valley National Park
National Park Service

Death Valley is the largest national park outside of Alaska, with a great mix of both Wilderness recreation and backcountry driving opportunities. The park is over 93% federally protected Wilderness and has more than 1,000 miles of paved and dirt roads. This map provides information to help you access the backcountry safely while protecting this spectacular resource.

Backcountry Safety

Hazards

- Most areas of the backcountry do not have cell phone service.
- Mine shafts, tunnels, and buildings are extremely hazardous to enter.
- Watch for rattlesnakes, especially near old structures and vegetated areas near water.
- Hantavirus, a potentially fatal disease, is spread through feces, urine, and saliva of rodents. Avoid disturbing or camping in confined areas where there are signs of rodent activity. Backcountry cabins may be unsafe to enter.
- Watch for Illegal marijuana grows near remote natural springs. If discovered, get out immediately and report location to a ranger.

Weather

- Heat and very low humidity create extreme dehydration and heat stroke potential during summer. We do not suggest lower elevation hiking between May and October.
- Do not camp in dry washes or drainages due to the possibility of flash floods.
- In winter, the higher elevations can have snow and ice conditions that may require special safety equipment.

Trails

- Death Valley National Park has few maintained trails and no established campsites in the Wilderness. Since most hiking here is cross-country, it is important to hike on areas where your footsteps will have the least impact. Avoid trampling vegetation, fragile soil crusts, aquatic habitats, and animal burrows.

Water

- Natural spring sources are unmonitored and often unreliable. Illegal marijuana grows and feral burros occasionally contaminate water sources. Consider carrying all water needed for the trip, stashing it ahead of time, or making other contingency plans. Any water obtained in the backcountry should be purified before drinking.

Dispersed (Backcountry) Camping

Camping is allowed one mile away from any developed area, paved road, or "day use only" area. Specific areas closed to camping include:

- On the valley floor, from Ashford Mill in the south to the north end of the shifting sands of the Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes
- On the Eureka and Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes
- Within one mile of Greenwater Canyon
- Darwin Falls Trail
- "Day Use Only" dirt roads: Titus Canyon Rd, Mosaic Canyon Rd, Natural Bridge Rd, Mustard Canyon, Grotto Canyon, Piñon Mesa, West Side Rd, Wildrose Rd, Skidoo Rd, Aguereberry Point Rd, Keane Wonder Mine Rd, Cottonwood Canyon Rd (first 8 miles only), Racetrack Rd (from Teakettle Jct to Homestake Dry Camp), Desolation Canyon Rd, Historic Stovepipe Well Rd, and Salt Creek Rd.

- **CAR CAMPING** — park adjacent to the dirt road, on the shoulder, and in previously disturbed areas
- **BACKPACKING** — camp at least 100 feet from any water source
- **GROUP SIZE** — is limited to 12 persons and no more than 4 vehicles
- **PERMIT** — when spending the night in the backcountry, please fill out a voluntary overnight Backcountry Permit at Furnace Creek Visitor Center or Stovepipe Wells Ranger Station during open hours
- **BACKPACKER PARKING** — vehicles may be parked off pavement along the shoulder of any park road. Vehicles left for more than 10 days along Highway 190 may be impounded

Unpaved Road Definitions — *Subject to change. Weather will impact road conditions, including the possibility of ice and snow at higher elevations in the winter months.*

1 ECHO CANYON
High-clearance first three miles, 4WD required beyond. Lees Camp Road, which connects to Amargosa Valley, is rough 4WD, requiring short-wheelbase, narrow vehicles. Experienced 4WD drivers only. Vehicle damage is possible going over the dry fall. Within Echo Canyon's narrows is the Eye of the Needle, a natural arch. The Inyo Mine's (private property) old structures and mining equipment are found in the upper canyon.

2 HOLE IN THE WALL ROAD
High-clearance first four miles to the Hole-in-the-Wall, then 4WD the next two miles to the road's end due to deep gravel and rocks. 400' deep gap in wall-like ridge.

3 CHLORIDE CITY ROAD
High-clearance first 2.2 miles to Monarch Canyon spur road. 4WD required beyond to Chloride City and Chloride Cliff due to rocky bedrock steps, off camber sections, and deep ruts. High-clearance on the segment to Amargosa Valley. One of the earliest sites of mining in Death Valley can be reached via this drive.

4 TITUS CANYON ROAD
High-clearance due to steep grades, deep gravel, and ruts. Often closed due to flood damage and mud after storms. No RVs, campers, or trailers. The most popular backcountry road in the park is one-way from east to west. Winding through the Grapevine Mountains, the road passes a ghost town, petroglyphs at Klare Spring, and finishes through spectacular canyon narrows. A short two-way section at the west end of the road provides hikers access to the narrows of Titus Canyon and nearby Fall Canyon.

5 PHINNEY CANYON ROAD
High-clearance first 15 miles off Hwy 95 (road is not signed), then 4WD last 3 miles. 4WD section is very rough, narrow, and has a steep technical section. Impassable in winter due to deep snow. Strozzi Ranch Road is a dead-end spur road that requires 4WD on the last 3 miles due to sections of sand. Entering the "Nevada Triangle" of the park, this dirt road provides access to the high woodlands of the Grapevine Mountains and historic Strozzi Ranch.

6 COTTONWOOD CANYON ROAD
High-clearance first 8 miles due to deep sand and rough washboard. No sedans or low-clearance vehicles. 4WD necessary after the road drops into the wash due to deep gravel and large rocks. Cottonwood Canyon is named for the tree-lined stream beyond road's end. Marble Canyon spur road is marked by a metal post about 2 miles above the drop into Cottonwood wash and ends at the first narrows.

7 LEMOIGNE CANYON ROAD
4WD. Very rutted, crossing numerous gullies. The old road up the canyon is closed beyond the 4.4 mile point. This rarely visited canyon in the southern Cottonwood Mountains was once the home of prospector Jean Lemoigne.

8 TUCKI MINE ROAD
4WD due to large rocks, deep gravel, and multiple slanted dry falls 3 to 4 feet high. The road enters Telephone Canyon. 2.5 miles from the canyon mouth, a short walk up the right fork leads to a natural arch. The road continues up the left fork to the ruins of Tucki Mine.

9 SKIDOO ROAD
High-clearance. Steep grade with protruding rocks at 3.5 miles. Sedans risk undercarriage damage. Subject to snow and mud conditions. Early 1900s ghost town site. One of the largest and best preserved stamp mills in the park.

10 AGUEREBERRY POINT ROAD
High-clearance due to rock outcrop in road at 3.5 miles and steep, rocky final 0.5 mile to viewpoint. Subject to snow and mud conditions. Dramatic view of Death Valley at road's end. The historic Eureka Mine is located at 1.7 miles.

11 UPPER WILDROSE ROAD
Most vehicles on unpaved road section to kilns, then high-clearance on final 1.6 miles to Mahogany Flat. 4WD often necessary beyond kilns due to steep, narrow sections and deep ruts. No RVs or trailers. Often closed in winter due to snow and ice. High elevation road leads to historic Charcoal Kilns, pinyon pine forest, campgrounds, and Telescope and Wildrose Peak trailheads.

12 LAKE HILL ROAD (Big Four Mine)
High-clearance first 5 miles off Hwy 190, then 4WD for washed out section to mine site. Access for hikers to Panamint Dunes.

13 RACETRACK ROAD
High-clearance with off-road tires due to loose gravel, deep washboard, and sharp rocks. Flat tires are very common. No RVs, sedans, or low-clearance vehicles. May require 4WD due to changing road conditions and irregular maintenance. The Racetrack is a dry lakebed famous for its mysterious moving rocks. Driving on the lakebed is prohibited. Do not walk on surface when wet.

14 LIPPINCOTT ROAD
Rough 4WD. Very steep, exposed, and winding with cliff edge washouts. Uphill traffic has right of way. Lower part has very narrow section that is difficult for wide vehicles. Experienced 4WD drivers only. Incredible views into Saline Valley and historic mining sites.

15 HIDDEN VALLEY - HUNTER MOUNTAIN ROAD
High-clearance through Hidden Valley due to washboard, patches of soft dirt, rocks, and dips. Subject to flooding, impassable mud, and standing water after rains. Spur roads to White Top Mountain and various mine sites 4WD due to steep slopes, ruts, and rocky areas. 4WD over Hunter Mountain due to steep slopes and washouts. Often impassible in winter and early spring due to mud, ice, and snow. Road traverses through an open valley and then climbs steeply onto a high plateau with wooded pinyon-juniper forest. Springs and historic mining sites abound.

16 SALINE VALLEY ROAD
South Pass Section (Hwy 190 to Warm Springs junction) High-clearance. County-maintained dirt road. Section from Hwy 190 to Lee Flat has been surfaced for 8 miles, but is very potholed. From South Pass through Grapevine Canyon the road can be rocky and rutted. Expect heavy washboard. Occasionally closed due to rockfall and washouts.
North Pass Section (Big Pine Rd to Warm Springs junction) High-clearance. County-maintained dirt road. Expect heavy washboard. Washouts common during rain. Occasionally closed due to rockfall, snow and ice at high elevation pass (7200ft).
Warm Springs Road High-clearance due to sandy stretches and uneven road surface. May be impassable after heavy rains. Long, remote dirt roads lead to sand dunes, historic salt trams, and clothing-optional hot springs. Maintained soaking tubs and primitive campground increase the draw of this area. Lee Flat has some of the healthiest Joshua Trees in the Mojave Desert.

17 STEEL PASS ROAD
Rough 4WD with sustained technical sections. Vehicles must be able to navigate narrow, steep bedrock steps, with careful wheel placement to avoid vehicle damage. Travel is easier north to south. Experienced 4WD drivers only. One of the most remote corners of Death Valley. Joshua Trees, panoramic vistas, and solitude greet the adventurous traveler.

18 SOUTH EUREKA VALLEY ROAD
High-clearance. County-maintained road to Eureka Dunes. Heavy washboard and deep sand near dunes. Beyond the dunes the road turns into the Steel Pass Road and becomes rough 4WD. Eureka Dunes are the highest sand dunes in California at nearly 700 feet.

19 NORTH EUREKA VALLEY ROAD
High-clearance. County-maintained road. 4WD often required to reach Hwy 168. Provides access to Sylvania Mountain Wilderness outside northern park boundary. The Cucomungo Canyon Road forks to the east leading to Hwy 266 in Nevada.

20 BIG PINE / DEATH VALLEY ROAD
High-clearance. County-maintained road. Expect dust, heavy washboard, and large drainage dips. The final section from Eureka Valley west to Hwy 168 is paved. Occasionally closed due to snow and flood damage. Access road winds past towering mountains, Joshua Trees, and historic sulfur mines to reach jumping off points for longer 4WD adventures. Not recommended for sedans or low-clearance vehicles.

21 GREENWATER VALLEY ROAD (FURNACE CREEK WASH ROAD)
High-clearance due to washboard. County-maintained road. Spur roads to Gold Valley, Deadman Pass, and historic townsites of Greenwater and Furnace. Spur roads often 4WD due to deep, loose gravel and/or rough rocky sections.
Deadman Pass Road is an alternative 4WD route to return to pavement, connecting Greenwater Valley directly to Hwy. 127 to the east. High-clearance to the pass, then 4WD to the highway due to deep, loose gravel. Greenwater Valley is best known for impressive displays of late spring wildflowers. Once bustling during mining booms, little remains of the ghost towns.

22 WEST SIDE ROAD
High-clearance due to washboard, deep gravel, and sand. Amargosa River crossing at southern end may be impassable when flowing. Historic route of the 20-mule team wagons, this road skirts the west side of Badwater Basin.

23 TRAIL CANYON ROAD
High-clearance first 4 miles to top of the alluvial fan, then 4WD beyond. Passage is slow going with many large rocks. Leads to a spring and old mining area at the forks of the canyon.

24 HANAUPAH CANYON ROAD
High-clearance first 5 miles to top of alluvial fan, then 4WD to end of road due to very rocky and rough conditions. From the summit of Telescope Peak to the salt flats, this canyon has the greatest vertical drop. One of the largest springs in Death Valley creates a desert oasis.

25 JOHNSON CANYON ROAD
High-clearance first 6 miles to mouth of canyon, then 4WD the last 4 miles in the rocky wash. Last 0.1 mile of road is overgrown. Beyond this road's end a 2 mile hike leads to Hungry Bill's Ranch, with fruit trees planted in the late 1800s.

26 WARM SPRINGS CANYON ROAD
High-clearance first 10 miles to Wam Springs Camp, then 4WD to Butte Valley due to deep ruts, rocky areas, and bedrock steps. Rough 4WD over Mengel Pass between Butte Valley and Goler Canyon. Expect large rocks, challenging boulder fields, and sustained technical sections. For experienced drivers only.
Goler Canyon Road continues west into Panamint Valley. Rough 4WD. For experienced 4WD drivers only. Section over both sides of Mengel Pass is challenging, steep and rutted. Canyon narrows at west end is sometimes impassable after floods. Butte Valley is famous for it's isolation, unique cabins, and mining history. Large piles of white talc in Warm Springs Canyon attest to one of the most profitable mining operations in park history.

27 PLEASANT CANYON ROAD
Rough 4WD. Washouts, large boulders, steep sections, and narrow passages through vegetation. For experienced 4WD drivers only. South Park Canyon Rd. enables prepared groups to make a loop. Named features like "Telephone Pole Bridge" and "Chicken Rock" attest to the extreme exposure and high consequence of this road. Access to high-mountain valleys, mining history, and spectacular views down into Butte Valley.

28 HARRY WADE ROAD
High-clearance due to washboard. May be impassable when Amargosa River is flowing. Muddy areas develop quickly during times of heavy rainfall. Access through the expansive southern end of Death Valley.

29 OWLSHEAD ROAD
High-clearance first 9 miles due to washboard. 4WD to roads end due to deep washouts and drainage crosscuts. Do not enter military base. Active bombing and unexploded ordinance present significant hazards. Access to a remote and seldom-visited corner of Death Valley.

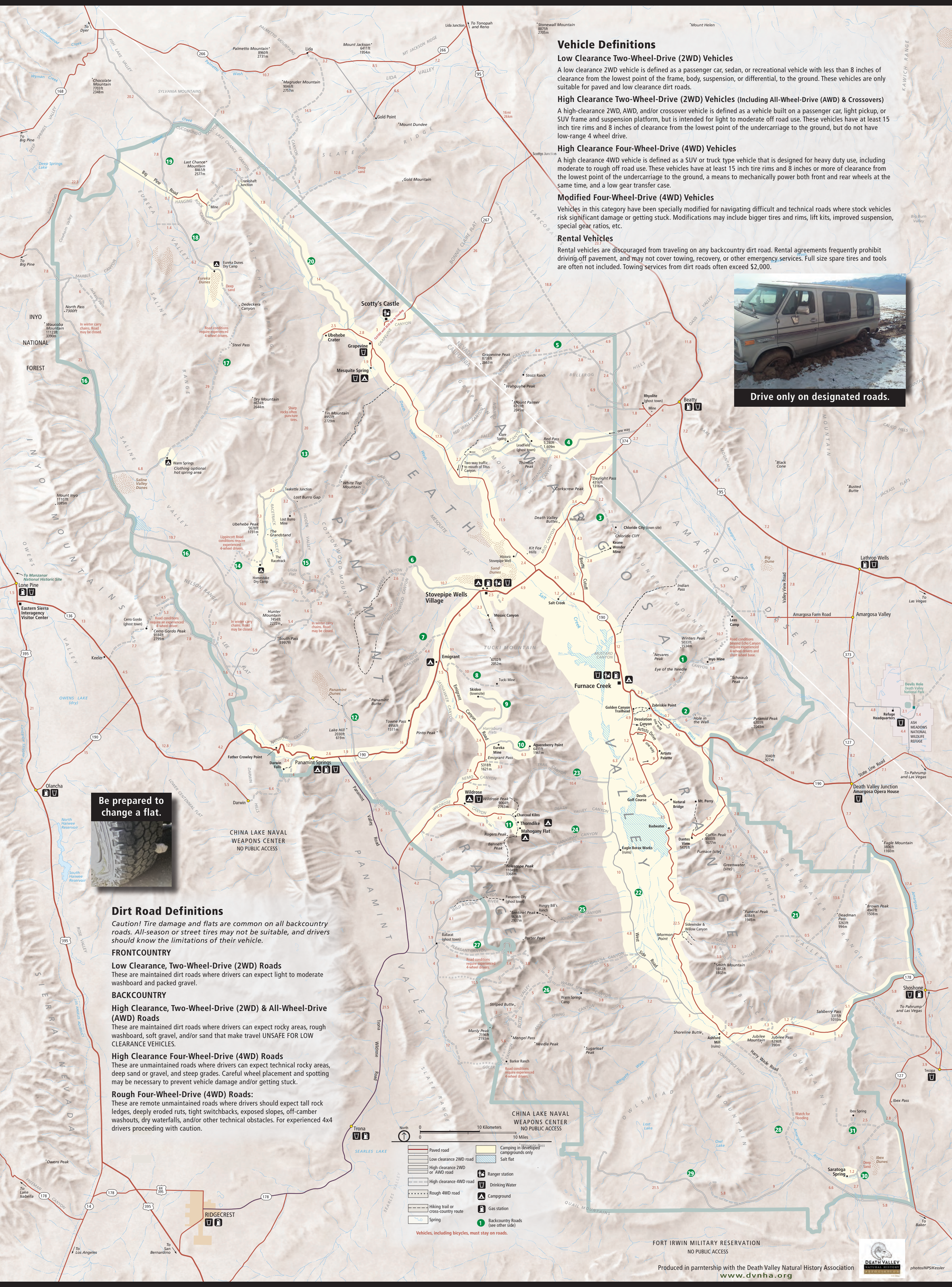
30 SARATOGA SPRING ROAD
High-clearance due to washboard. May be impassable when Amargosa River is flowing. Large springs create a haven for birds and other wildlife. Historic mines dot the surrounding hills.

31 IBEX SPRING ROAD
High-clearance 2.8 miles west from Hwy 127 to signed junction. 4WD west to Ibex Spring and Buckwheat Wash, and south to Saratoga Spring Road. Frequent gully crossings, deep washouts, off camber slopes, and/or deep sand make travel slow. Historic mines, verdant springs, remote roads, and towering sand dunes.

Rules and Regulations

- **Drive only on designated roads. Obey the speed limits and other rules of the road. Only street legal vehicles are permitted, no OHVs.**
- **Pack animal use is allowed except in developed campgrounds, paved roads and interpretive trails. Forage is scarce, so grazing is not allowed. Weed free feed only.**
- **Campfires are only allowed in NPS-provided firepits. Gathering firewood is prohibited. Check for fire restrictions before camping. Campstoves and gas burning backpacking stoves are allowed.**
- **Properly dispose of human waste, or better yet, pack it out! Propane cylinder recycle bins are located in most campgrounds. Do not leave even "biodegradeable" trash, pack it out!**
- **No camping is permitted within 100 feet of a water source. Springs are a vital for desert animals and home to fragile plant species. Reduce your time spent in these sensitive habitats.**
- **Bicycles are permitted on paved and dirt roads. Bicycles and other mechanized means of travel are not permitted off roads, on trails or closed roads, or in the Wilderness.**
- **Pets are permitted, (on leash, 6ft max.), on dirt and paved roads, and in developed areas. They are not allowed in the Wilderness, on trails, or in buildings. Owners are responsible for cleanup.**
- **It is illegal to discharge a firearm anywhere in Death Valley or to bring one into a federal building. Hunting and trapping are illegal within the park.**
- **Feeding animals is illegal and dangerous. Animals will be encouraged to hang out near the roads once fed by people, which endangers the animals and visitors.**
- **Leave what you find. Rocks, plants, animals, and historic objects in Death Valley are protected just like in a museum. Vandalism and theft are prohibited.**
- **Despite being legalized by the States of California and Nevada, possession or use of marijuana is not legal on federal lands, including Death Valley National Park.**
- **The use of drones is prohibited.**

Backcountry & Wilderness Access Map


Scotty's Castle
Furnace Creek
Stovepipe Wells Village
Panamint Springs
Lone Pine
Beatty
Lathrop Wells
Amargosa Valley
Death Valley Junction
Amargosa Opera House
Shoshone
Trona
Olancha
Darwin
Keeler
Emigrant
Wildrose
Thorndike
Mahogany Flat
Grapevine
Mesquite Spring
Ubehebe Crater
Eureka Dunes Dry Camp
Homestake Dry Camp
Warm Springs
Clothing optional hot spring area
Furnace Creek Ranch
Furnace Creek Inn
Furnace Creek Campground
Furnace Creek Visitor Center
Furnace Creek Wash
Furnace Creek Golf Course
Furnace Creek Airstrip
Furnace Creek Campground
Furnace Creek Ranch
Furnace Creek Inn