

# Saddleback Butte State Park



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### Saddleback Butte State Park

43230 172nd Street

East Lancaster, CA 93534

(661) 727-9899

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*The desert . . . "reveals its true character only to those who come with courage, tolerance, and understanding. For those, the desert holds rare gifts."*

- Randall Henderson  
"On Desert Trails"



In the western Mojave Desert, Saddleback Butte overlooks an alluvial plain—vast blankets of decomposed granite, sand and silt shed from mountains that eroded over millions of years. About 15 miles east of Lancaster, the park protects the butte and the contorted Joshua trees dotting the high desert landscape. The photogenic shapes of these venerable trees stand tall amid the fragrant creosote bushes.

The February through May spring season brings breathtaking displays of wildflowers. Summer temperatures can range from 95 to 115 degrees. October and November are usually mild, but can change suddenly. Frost and temperatures below freezing are common in winter.

### PARK HISTORY

#### Native People

Archaeological evidence reveals that this area has been used by various native groups for at least 10,000 years, when lakes covered large portions of Antelope Valley. These groups lived nearby until dramatic climate changes dried up the lakes, forcing the people to adapt their living patterns to desert conditions. Although natives lived in the area, no evidence exists of them dwelling within the park boundaries.

#### Antelope Valley Settled

After the 1848 gold discovery, gold, silver and other minerals were mined in Antelope Valley.

When the railroad came to the valley in 1876, new towns sprang up and led to widespread land speculation. Successive wet years produced new settlements based on livestock and agriculture, but a series of dry years caused many to lose their land and animals.

Following World War II, new irrigation technology allowed access to Antelope Valley's groundwater supplies. Water-hungry crops such as alfalfa and onions now grow throughout the valley, even during dry years. Since the end of World War II, defense and aerospace industries have dominated the region.

### NATURAL RESOURCES

Saddleback Butte is a 3,651-foot solitary mountain dating to the Cretaceous geologic period, roughly 70 million years ago. The 2,955-acre park preserves habitat for disappearing native plants and animals.

Daytime visitors may see foxes, rabbits and desert tortoises—a burrowing reptile and threatened species. Beware of desert rattlesnakes searching for rodents in the evenings. Among rattlesnakes, Mojave "green" rattlers have the most toxic venom while Mojave sidewinders have the least toxic venom.



Desert tortoise



Mojave desert rain clouds

Joshua trees shelter desert night lizards, wood rats, ladder-backed woodpeckers, yucca moths, termites, and night snakes. All of these creatures live in a mutually beneficial relationship within the Joshua tree, a member of the agave family.

Bird watchers will find many migratory species; permanent avian residents include golden eagles, hawks, owls, cactus wrens, shrikes, and horned larks.

### RECREATION

**Visitor Center**—The visitor center has colorful displays and hands-on exhibits on the area's natural and cultural history. Call (661) 727-9899 for visitor center hours.

**Hiking**—2.5-mile Little Butte Trail begins at the day-use area. At the butte's base, the trail merges with 2-mile Saddleback Butte Peak Trail. The main park road links these two trails in a three-mile loop, or climb to





Campsites at sunset

the peak and enjoy a 360-degree view over Antelope Valley and the Mojave desert.

**Camping**—The family camp has 50 non-reservable sites with tables, barbecue grills, fire rings and shade ramadas. RVs and trailers up to 30 feet are welcome; a sanitation station is available.

The Joshua group camp holds up to 30 people. Call (800) 444-7275 for reservations, or visit [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov).

**Picnicking**—There are 27 picnic sites with tables, barbecue grills and shade ramadas. Drinkable water and restrooms are nearby.

**Equestrians**—A 4.5-mile horse trail skirts the north and west bases of the butte. Please stay on the trail, which is outlined by rocks and a fence.

A 10-mile loop equestrian trail begins at the equestrian staging area and goes through the park, out the service yard gate and follows the south and east boundaries of the park along unpaved roads. The staging area has pull-through trailer access. Call (661) 942-0662 for gate access or to schedule group riding events.

Horses may use only the designated equestrian trails and staging area; there is no horse-camping area.

**Park Programs**—Call for group programs, events, nature hikes, or Junior Ranger program schedules.

#### ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

The park has accessible campsites and picnic tables. The visitor center, self-guided Downen Nature Trail, campfire center and restrooms are all accessible.

For updates, call the Saddleback Butte Visitor Center at (661) 727-9899 or visit the Accessibility site at

<http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

#### NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Antelope Valley Indian Museum, 20 mi. east of Lancaster, E. Avenue M between 150th and 170th Sts. (661) 942-0662
- Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve, 15 mi. west of Lancaster, Avenue I, (661) 724-1180 or (661) 942-0662
- Arthur B. Ripley Desert Woodland State Park, 5 mi. west of Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve via Lancaster Rd. (661) 942-0662



Photo courtesy of Eliane Macdonald

Riders enjoy the equestrian trail.

#### PLEASE REMEMBER

- All park features are protected by law and may not be disturbed. Do not burn dead Joshua trees or shrubs for firewood.
- Secure trash; the desert winds are unpredictable.
- Use only designated parking spaces and do not go off road. Speed limit is 15 mph.
- Pay fees upon arrival, using fee envelope posts at the entrance; place the completed receipt on your dashboard.
- Pets must be kept on a 6-foot leash during the day and within an enclosed tent or vehicle at night. Only designated service dogs are allowed on park trails.
- Loaded firearms, fireworks and loud, disturbing noises are prohibited.
- Fires are allowed only in the provided fire rings. Use portable barbecues and stoves only within your campsite. Be careful when burning anything; wildfires cause damage that takes decades to heal.
- Carry and drink plenty of water. By the time you feel thirsty, you are already dehydrated.
- Bring a hat, sunglasses, sunblock, cell phone, trail map, compass, flashlight, snacks, first aid kit, long-sleeved clothing, camera and above all, extra water.

This park receives support in part from a nonprofit organization. For more information, contact: Poppy Reserve/Mojave Desert Interpretive Association, P.O. Box 1408, Lancaster, CA 93534

