

Geology of the National Parks Death Valley Field Trip

We will meet at 8:00 am on Friday, March 22, and depart at 8:30 am. PLEASE be on time - if you are not present and ready to go at 8:30, we will leave without you and you will fail this course (I am *not* kidding!). We will plan to return in the evening of Tuesday, March 26, probably around 9 pm.

Equipment

Note: Please pack your gear as compactly as possible. Packing the vans, and finding your stuff, is much easier if you put the things needed during the day (notebook, clothes, water bottle, lunch) in a small backpack that you keep with you, and your camping gear in a duffel bag, etc., that can be packed away in another vehicle. External frame backpacks, and fragile things like paper bags, don't work too well.

Required:

notebook or pad of paper, pens, pencils
water bottle (at least 1 quart capacity)
lunch for the drive down on Friday
cash for dinner on Friday (e.g., pizza) and on the drive back to San Francisco
hat for sun
sunglasses
sun screen
rain jacket (it might...)
clothes for hot weather (maybe in the 80's or even 90's in DV)
warm clothes (it may get very cold at night - bring clothes you can layer)
sleeping bag and sleeping pad (e.g., thermarest, foam pad, etc.)
plastic or metal bowl, plate, cup, spoon, fork (we will bring disposable dishes, but we'd prefer to minimize their use)
flashlight (a real camping necessity!)
sturdy shoes or light weight hiking boots (we will be doing some walking through trail-less areas)
toilet paper (we may have to spend one or more nights camping in areas with no rest room facilities, although the facilities in Death Valley National Park are fancy)
any medications that you need

Optional (bring if you have it...)

camping stove and fuel (we will need to share stoves and fuel so bring extras if you've got 'em)
backpacking-type tent (if you're worried about rain or creepy-crawlies, you should bring a tent or arrange to share one with someone else)
camera and film
camping-proof musical instruments
footballs, Frisbees, etc...
bathing suit and towel (swimming pool at DVNP)
Tupperware, etc. to carry lunch in.

Health risk warnings

This is a pretty safe trip, with the biggest dangers undoubtedly those of freeway driving. However, we do need to warn you about a few things:

Rattlesnakes: Rattlesnakes are common in most mountain and desert areas of the Western U.S. A rattlesnake bite probably won't kill you, but it may make you really sick and can cause painful and even permanent tissue damage. If you see (or hear) a rattlesnake, avoid it. Especially during cold and hot parts of the day, snakes often hang out in holes and under rocks. So: don't stick your hand in holes; be careful if you turn over a large rock!

Scorpions: Poisonous scorpions may be present in some of the areas where we'll be. Again, avoid scorpions if you see them; don't poke your hand into hidey-holes. Experienced desert campers usually carefully shake their shoes out before putting them on in the morning, and don't leave their sleeping bags lying around when they aren't in them.

Other critters: You may see relatively tame squirrels and other rodents in some of the places where we camp. Don't feed them. Don't try to touch them. They are wild animals and may bite. Even worse, they sometimes carry rabies and even bubonic plague (no joke!). In some areas of the West, other nasty diseases (e.g. Hanta virus) can be contracted from the droppings, etc., left by rodents. If you find a pack rat nest in an old cabin or rock pile, for example, leave it alone.

Dehydration: In past years, several students on this trip have become quite ill because of dehydration. Unusually hot, dry desert weather, can contribute to this problem, but so can long drives, limited bathroom stops, and consequent cutback in drinking of fluids. Pay attention to your fluid intake (and output): if either seems below normal, drink more water or soft drinks, etc. Carry a full water bottle with you in the vehicle and while hiking.

"Wandering off": In general, don't wander off by yourself. While we're doing field trip activities, please do not wander off by yourself except for short "calls of nature." If you go for a walk from camp, go with someone else or tell someone else where you are going and when you expect to be back. Be especially careful if you leave camp in the evening: it gets real dark at night in the desert, and it's easy to get lost in the complex road and trail systems around some of our campgrounds.

Cliffs and climbing: Be smart when climbing around on rocks - take care to choose a safe route, solid rocks. If you dislodge a rock and it starts to roll down the hill, yell "Rock!" to warn others to get out of the way. It's also not smart to climb up behind someone else - they may slip and fall or dislodge a rock and you won't have time to react (this has happened on a field trip and resulted in a broken leg).