

# Backpacking: Beyond the Boyscout Trail

## Information

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Dates: Apr 6-8, 2023

Meeting time/location: 9am, Thursday Apr 6 at Indian Cove Boy Scout Trailhead

Instructor: Sarah Witt, Director, Desert Institute

## Overview

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Backpacking in the desert? Yes, it's possible! Spend a few days out in the backcountry with DI director Sarah Witt and learn how to plan your own dry-clim outing while traveling the picaresque boundary-lands of the Joshua Tree National Park wilderness. We'll trek 22.5 miles on this 3-day, 2-night trip that loops through the northwest corner of the park. With little elevation gain and mostly flat terrain, the pace of this trip will be steady at around 2 miles per hour. We will take regular breaks for snacks and stretching, and will adjust our tempo to meet the needs of the group.

We will start at the Boyscout Trailhead backcountry registration board off Indian Cove Road in 29 Palms. The first half of the morning we'll make sure everyone has all of the correct gear, going over safety information, and backcountry wilderness ethics. There will be time to re-pack your bags to make sure everything is distributed evenly for a comfortable first day. From there, we'll travel east through the Wonderland of rocks to our first water cache, and then continue on to our first night's camp where we will have time to prepare a hot meal before the sun sets. The following day we'll pack up camp and hit our second water cache. This will be the longest day clocking in at 11 miles. But we'll be primed for a quick departure in the morning with a mere 3.5 mile final descent through the Wonderland of Rocks back to where we began on Friday the 3rd. In total, we will walk 22.5 miles!

This outing is great for all level of backpackers, but especially beginners who have a streak for adventure and aren't quite ready to go on their own. Participants are responsible for their own equipment and meals. Please note that this trip requires participants to be in excellent physical condition, with the ability to carry a pack that ways 30-40lbs for the entire duration of the trip. Participants will not have access to public restrooms or shelter other than their tent, and will be exposed to a range of elements that can include extreme heat as well as below-freezing temperatures at night. Desert Institute will be doing pre-trip phone calls to make sure participants are well-prepared.

# Itinerary

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## Thurs, Apr 6th, 9am: meet at Boy Scout Trailhead off Indian Cove Road

- Equipment check, re-pack bags 9am-10:00 am
- safety and leave no trace protocol, 10:00-10:30am
- Hike to first night's camp, 10:30am to 4p (8.4 miles)
- Set-up camp, dinner, 4p to dark

## Fri, Apr 7th

- Pack up camp, breakfast
- Depart camp 9:30a
- Hike to second night's camp, 9:30a to 4p (10.9 miles)
- Set-up camp, dinner, 4p to dark

## Sat, Apr 8th

- Pack up camp, breakfast
- Depart camp by 10am
- Hike back to trailhead and cars, arrive by noon (3.3 miles)

# What to pack

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## Essential

- hiking boots or appropriate athletic shoes for long days of walking with weight on the back
- water bladder and/or water bottles (you must have capacity to carry at least 4L of water with you.)
- headlamp or small flashlight, extra batteries
- tent
- 55L or larger overnight backpacking pack
- sleeping pad—this is for warmth from the cold ground, not comfort. It is not negotiable!
- sleeping bag—it is recommended that if you sleep cold, to bring a 20F bag or warmer. Temperatures will be down below freezing at night
- hand sanitizer
- If making warm beverages and food, small camp stove, fuel canister, and lighter
- backpacking bowl and utensils, mug if you plan to drink warm beverages (long spoon is the best!) *if cooking, a bowl that doubles as a cooking vessel is best*
- Meals: 2 camp lightweight breakfasts, 3 trail lunches (or snacks), 2 camp lightweight dinners
- any snacks and other food items you need between meals. Nuts, trailmix, jerkies, chocolate, salty things with calories are best! Snacks are often the way to go instead of lunch, for quick, no-fuss energy on the trail.
- personal medications
- appropriate clothing (suggested list is on following page)

## Strongly Suggested

- sunscreen
- sunglasses
- sun hat or visor
- bandana

- lightweight camp shoes
- running gaiters (to keep dirt out of shoes while hiking)
- electrolytes to stay hydrated
- minimal toiletries: tooth care, hygienic wipes in place of soap, moisturizer or after-sun lotion
- phone/camera
- power bank
- dry sack for electronics
- lighter or matches

## **CLOTHING (what Sarah brings, so not right for everyone, but a good place to start)**

### **For daytime and being out in the elements:**

- Fleece, lightweight own jacket, or warm insulating layer
- outer shell layer (this can be a wind jacket or rain jacket—check forecast, as rain is a possibility)
- rain pants (if rain looks possible), I like full-zip, as they can be put on quickly
- one midweight top layer
- 1 pair hiking pants (preferably not cotton, moisture wicking or quick-dry materials recommended)
- 1 base layer (can be a short-sleeved or long-sleeved moisture wicking shirt)
- 1 white or light-colored hiking shirt or sun hoody, to protect arms from sun if it is warm
- 2 pairs hiking socks that are NOT cotton (smartwool and darntough are great!)
- 2-3 pairs underwear, as you see fit (I love icebreaker wool undegarments)

### **For nighttime and sleeping:**

- long underwear/base layers (either mid or heavy weight depending on weather)
- down jacket for insulating layer
- gloves
- beanie (hooded insulating layers are great so you don't have to bring one)

### **Optional (not necessary but you might like to hike with these)**

- Knife or multitool
- trekking poles
- first aid kit (DI will carry two FA kits)
- Compass and GPS system, such as Alltrails or GAIA (download maps of area ahead of time to use while phones are in airplane mode in the park)
- Paper map of JTNP

## **Fitness Requirements**

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**ACTIVITY LEVEL: Extreme (22.5 miles over rough terrain with 40lb packs, 2 overnights in backcountry)**

Participants must be in excellent physical condition for this strenuous overnight backpacking trip. It is recommended that if you have not been backpacking before (or recently), that you train by walking/hiking with a weighted pack 3-4x a week leading up to the hike. Start with 15-20lbs in the pack, and gradually increase the weight by 5lbs every week until you reach 30lb. Aim to hike for 3-5 miles each time you go out, and gradually increase the distances you hike until you feel comfortable carrying a pack for 8-10 miles a day at its full weight.

## **Instructor Biography**

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Sarah is a grassroots educator, artist, and chef who values an exploratory, hands-on approach to how we perceive and interact with the world around us. Sarah moved to the high desert in 2016, and her natural curiosity about the environment sparked several projects that brought people together to explore our relationship to the land through botany, food, and hiking. In collaboration with the non-profit High Desert Test Sites, Sarah founded the monthly community wild-plant dinner and discussion event High Desert Test Kitchen, which later generated Hole in the Sand, her immersive platform for informal desert educational events focused around plant-identification hikes, overnight desert backpacking trips, and seasonal pop-up dinners. Most recently Sarah's been teaching culinary arts at Copper Mountain College and College of the Desert, and she's so excited to collaborate with the community and broaden her outreach by joining the team at JTNPA as Director of Desert Institute!

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\* The Desert Institute staff/instructors will attempt to accommodate participant's needs; however we reserve the right to deny a student participation in the course due to concerns regarding health and safety issues.