



Backcountry Safety: Plants and Animals

Sequoia National Forest

The backcountry is beautiful place to visit, but also primitive and you will be on your own! We want you to enjoy your backcountry visit, and we want you to venture as safe as possible. These are some tips to remember. First and foremost, tell someone of your planned route and time of return before you travel into the backcountry!

Poison Oak

Poison oak, which produces an unpleasant, itching, blistering rash, grows up to about 5,000 feet elevation. The plant can grow in bush or vine form, with leaves either of green or red from ½" to 4" in size, resembling an oak leaf but in clusters of three. If you do come in contact with poison oak, wash the site with lots of fresh, cool water, and avoid spreading the oil that causes the rash. Carry an appropriate ointment for treating the rash in your first aid kit.



Stinging Nettle:

Stinging Nettle can grow from 2 to nearly 10 feet in height. Stinging nettle is found commonly along stream banks, on the edges of wet meadows, in shaded, moist waste places in a variety of plant communities, below 10,000 feet in elevation. Plants may appear "velvety" because of a covering of small, bristly, stinging hairs over much of the leaves and stems that can cause redness and a temporary burning sensation. If you come into contact wash thoroughly with soap and water, and lightly scraping the skin to remove the bristles.



Snakes

Rattlesnakes may be found up to 8,000 feet elevation and sometimes higher. Be especially careful crossing rocky areas or stepping over downed trees. If you come across a rattlesnake, stand well out of striking range and wait for it to move off the trail. If you happen to get a rattlesnake bite, walk out and get to a hospital as soon as possible for medical treatment. **DO NOT** cut the bite with a knife and attempt to suck out the poison as this makes the situation worse.

Rodents

Avoid setting-up camp in an obvious rodent community. In some cases their fleas carry an infectious disease called the Plague and can be transmitted to humans. They may also carry **Hantavirus** which can be transmitted through urine, saliva, and droppings. A person may be exposed by breathing dust after cleaning or stirring dust near rodent droppings or disturbing nests.

Bears

The North American Black Bear is the only species of bear found on the Sequoia National Forest. They can be brown, blonde, or gray, as well as black. Black bears are generally shy and will avoid people. If you should encounter a black bear on the trail, back away slowly while facing the bear. If the bear shows signs of aggression, make yourself look big (wave arms, gather your group together) and shout. If the bear attacks, fight back, and report all aggressive bear activity. To avoid bear encounters, always store your food and other scented items properly. For more tips, contact the nearest ranger station or go to www.sierrawildbear.gov



Ticks

Lyme disease is an infection carried by deer ticks and can be transmitted to humans and animals. Ticks wait on grasses and brush in order to attach to their host. Ticks will then typically hop on your feet and legs and then crawl upwards on your body. Use insect repellent and stay on the trail and avoid walking through long grass. Check your body when you can. Wearing long pants and shirts can help. Tucking your pant legs into your socks or wearing gaiters is also recommended.



Horses & Pack Stock

When encountering travelers who have horses or pack stock, move off the trail on the downhill side and let them pass. Horses are easily frightened and have the right-of-way on trails.



Pets

Pets must be on a leash in developed recreation sites (at trailheads, in picnic areas, and in campgrounds). On trails, pets must be on a leash or under voice control. Pets must not be allowed to chase or disturb wildlife or other trail users. Make sure your pet has an ID tag on its collars.

During the Fall Hunting Season

We recommend that you don't hike alone during hunting season and that you stay on established trails. All hikers, as well their dogs, should wear at least one piece of florescent orange clothing during hunting season. Contact the California Department of Fish & Game for hunting season dates and for additional tips at 559.243.4005.

Practice a Leave No Trace! Ethic.

When you leave your campsite,
Take all garbage, large and small.

PACK IT IN!
PACK IT OUT!

Emergencies

If you become lost, stay calm and don't panic. Use your head and not your legs and "Hug a Tree." In other words, stay where you are until help can find you. Carry a whistle and small mirror for emergency use. Threes of any sight or sound (shouts, whistle blasts, flashes of reflected light from a mirror) is a sign of distress. At the first signs of illness start on your way out of the mountains, as a minor illness can become serious at high elevations. Most areas in the mountains do not have cellular telephone service. Call 911 once you can reach a pay phone or drive to a location where you can use your cellular phone.

Conclusion

These are tips and suggestions for traveling into the backcountry and should no way take the place of proper instruction and experience. This list is not an exhaustive list of situations to be aware, rather they are common concerns to be aware of. For more education about backcountry travel, contact your local college or university and enroll in theory based outdoor courses. Render the services of an experienced guide to teach practical and hands-on skills in outdoor travel. And yet another is to read books, watch videos, and media material to educate yourself about outdoor environments.

As always contact the managing agency of the area you intend to visit and ask about current conditions and issues for backcountry travel.

Thank you for your help in making forest visits enjoyable and safe! Plan ahead by obtaining a National Forest map at one of the following offices:

Hume Lake Ranger District
35860 East Kings Canyon Road
Dunlap, CA 93621
[559-338-2251](tel:559-338-2251)

Kern River Ranger District
11380 Kernville Rd.
Kernville, CA 93238
[760-376-3781](tel:760-376-3781)

Western Divide Ranger District
32588 Hwy 190
Springville, CA 93265
[559-539-2607](tel:559-539-2607)

Forest Supervisor's Office
220 E Morton Ave
Porterville, CA 93257
[559-784-1500](tel:559-784-1500)

