



GUADALUPE MOUNTAINS

Visitor Use

RESOURCE BRIEF

Importance

Use by visitors is both a primary reason for the establishment of national parks and a factor in the condition of many of the resources that the parks are intended to protect. The opportunity for visitors to enjoy our natural and cultural treasures remains a primary purpose of our parks; however, careful management of visitor activities and potential impacts is also necessary if we are to preserve these treasures for future generations. While some visitor impacts have immediate consequences (e.g., vehicle collisions with wildlife), most impacts are less obvious. Visitor activities and associated infrastructure may affect many park resources, including air and water quality, the natural soundscape, wildlife and their habitat, and archeological sites and other cultural artifacts.

Status and Trends

Guadalupe Mountains National Park (NP) contains the world's best example of a fossilized reef, the tallest point in Texas, and West Texas' only officially designated wilderness. The mountains, as an ancient limestone reef, rise more than 5,000 feet (1524 meters) above the surrounding desert floor. The streamside woodlands, rocky canyons, and mountain-top forests provide excellent habitat for numerous species of plants and wildlife. Opportunities to explore this 86,416-acre park include hiking on the 80 miles of trails, backpacking, horseback riding, looking at fossils, and stargazing. The park has two campgrounds accessible by vehicle, one with 39 tent/recreational vehicle (RV) sites and the other with 13 tent/RV sites; two group campsites are also available.

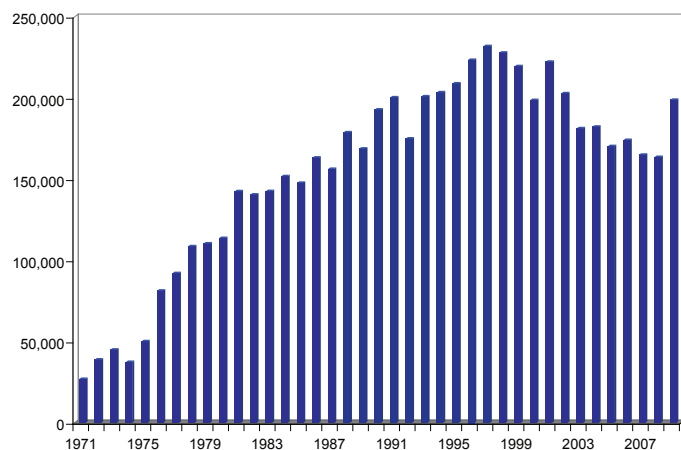


Figure 1. Annual visits to Guadalupe Mountains NP, 1971-2009.



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El Capitan at Guadalupe Mountains NP

Recreational visits to Guadalupe Mountains NP increased fairly steadily between 1971 and 1997 (Figure 1). The number of visits peaked in 1997 with over 230,000 visits. Except for 2009, visitor numbers have been somewhat lower in more recent years, with a low of about 163,700 in 2008. The following year (2009) saw nearly 200,000 visitors. The number of overnight stays (campers) per month varies substantially over the year. In 2009, the greatest number of overnight stays was in March (3,173); most of the campers in that month were in tents, followed by RVs (Figure 2). The heaviest use of the ten hike-in, backcountry campgrounds occurred in March, October, and November.

Information Source

NPS Stats, National Park Service Public Use Statistics Office, URL: <http://www.nature.nps.gov/stats/index.cfm>.

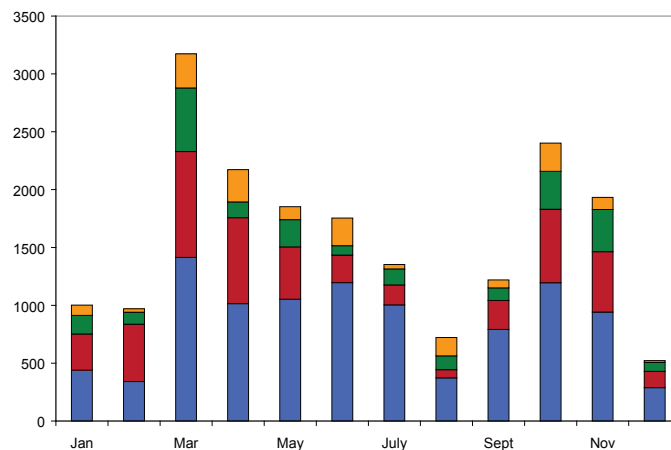


Figure 2. Monthly camping stays in 2009 (tents [blue], RVs (red), backcountry [green] and misc. [orange]).