

Close-up: Providence Mountains State Recreation Area featuring Mitchell Caverns

Providence Mountains State Recreation Area (SRA) [SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY] is home of Mitchell Caverns, which feature spectacular and intricate limestone formations. The recreation area is located in the eastern Mojave Desert, 60 miles west of Needles on Interstate 40, 100 miles east of Barstow, and 17 miles northwest of I-40 near Essay on Essex Road.

Located at an elevation of 4,300 feet, the park is surrounded by one of the newest National Parks, Mojave National Preserve.

Providence Mountains State Recreation Area has dramatic mountain ranges, full of cactus, creosote bush, and other desert plants, as well as vistas of broad valleys below. The park has a visitor center.

The Mary Beal Nature Trail, located near the park's visitor center, is a self-guided moderate walk through the desert. A brochure describing desert plants and animals is available. Another, more strenuous, mile-long trail leads to a spring above the visitor center. There are also cross-country hikes to the many peaks in the 5,900 acre Providence Mountain State Recreation Area.

The best weather occurs in the Spring and Fall, but, because of the 4,300 foot elevation at the visitor center, temperatures usually remain moderate throughout the year. Temperatures inside the caverns are at a constant 65 degrees.

Mitchell Caverns are located in the heart of the State Recreation Area. The caverns' limestone formations include stalagmites, stalactites, helictites,

shields and drapery. Some of the narrow passageways are lined with calcite crystals, which give the illusion of sparkling gems covering the walls. First opened for tours by Jack Mitchell in 1932, the caverns were purchased by the State in 1954.

They are the only limestone caverns in the State Park System.

Trips through the caverns are conducted by guided tours only and last about 1 1/2 hours. Although the tour is not strenuous, there is a half-mile walk to the cave entrance from the visitor center and another half-mile walk through the caverns on uneven ground. Group tours can be arranged at least three weeks in advance.

Camping in the park is on a first come, first served basis. There are six campsites with tables and fire rings. There is also a picnic area for day time use. Both areas have superb views of the Mojave desert. Additional camping is available in near-by Mojave National Preserve areas.

Providence Mountains State Recreation Area is a Watchable Wildlife Site.

For more information, call the park at (760) 928-2586.



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