



A Hidden Treasure in the California Desert

In the shadow of Mexico's Mount Signal, the Yuha Desert unfolds like the canvas of a treasured piece of art. Deep within its expansive fabric visitors discover ancient patterns that give clues to the people and organisms that lived and thrived in this immense landscape. The Yuha Desert provides a picture of humans working with, and struggling against, one of the most challenging environments in the world.

Whether it is the Kumeyaay people who lived off the land for thousands of years, or the Spanish settlers who crossed the vast plain, the Yuha Desert tells their story. It is a portrait of animals and plants uniquely adapted to survive in an environment where years can pass between any measurable precipitation. It offers a sketch of what life might have looked like here millions of years ago. The Yuha Desert paints a unique picture of an often ignored but tremendously rich resource stretching across the California border.

An Important Piece of a Much Larger Picture

The Yuha Desert is a distinct section of the much larger Sonoran Desert. One of the hottest of the North American deserts, this portion of the Sonoran averages just under three inches of rain a year. It benefits typically from a summer monsoon and more gentle winter rains. The Yuha portion stretches from the Jacumba Mountains to the historic West Side Main Canal near El Centro, and from Plaster City to south of Mount Signal. Due to its proximity to the mountains and the Gulf of California, distinctive species of animals and plants call this area home. The rare crucifixion thorn can be found growing in this area, as well as the flat-tailed horned lizard.

After centuries of relative obscurity, the Yuha Desert is now visited by increasing numbers of people. Long renowned as an off highway vehicle (OHV) area, the desert is now meeting different types of visitor needs. Whether in search of desert solitude, unexplored areas, or an education about the animals, plants and geology, thousands of annual visitors are now seeking out the Yuha Desert. This increase in visitation and the impacts associated with vehicles and camping are putting tremendous new strains on this desert ecosystem. This brochure will help explain some of the new regulations protecting the Yuha Desert, as well as other ways people can explore this treasure.

You Can Help Protect Your Yuha Desert

Unrestricted off-road vehicle use and camping has greatly affected the Yuha Desert. In 2003, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued special policies and regulations to help protect the Yuha from impacts from unrestricted activities. Complying with these rules will help protect the desert.

- ◆ Vehicles can travel in the Yuha only on marked BLM *designated routes*. Route 346 (California Backcountry Discovery Trail), Route 274, and Route 308 (Anza Trail) are open to all vehicles. All other designated routes are limited to street legal vehicles.
- ◆ Camping in the Yuha is limited to designated camping areas. Refer to the map on the reverse for the location of four of the designated six campgrounds within this area.
- ◆ Overnight unoccupied vehicles are limited to the area adjacent to the Jacumba Wilderness Area for overnight backpackers.
- ◆ All Native American sites and artifacts are part of our shared cultural heritage and protected by federal law. Report any looting immediately to the BLM.
- ◆ Visitor's may collect up to five gallons of fossilized invertebrate. Commercial collectors must obtain a collection permit.

Exploring the Yuha Desert Area of Critical and Environmental Concern

Vehicles Limitations

All vehicles are allowed to travel on the Designated Open Routes - the Anza Trail (Rt. 274 and 308) and the CDBT (Rt. 346-high clearance, 4x4 recommended). All other routes in the Yuha Desert are Limited Use Routes and are open to street legal vehicles.

Camping- Non Wilderness

Hikers, equestrians, and vehicles must be in one of four designated areas: 1. Anza Camp, 2. Overlook Camp, 3. Shellbeds Camp, and 4. Dunaway Camp.

Camping -Wilderness

Hikers and equestrians to the Jacumba Wilderness Area may leave their vehicles overnight on roads adjacent to the area.



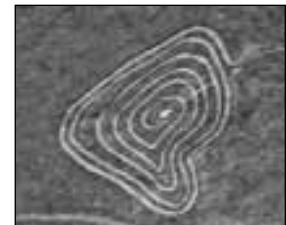
The Anza Trail - The Yuha Desert is home to a twenty mile stretch of the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail. The 1,200 mile route is administered by the National Park Service and retraces the journey of the first group of Spanish settlers to make an overland expedition to California from Mexico. In the winter of 1775, Anza led 300 men, women and children across the Yuha on their way to San Francisco. Through freezing temperatures and blinding snow, the group struggled forward and succeeded. Today, visitors travel the Anza route in the Yuha to get a feel for what the expedition entailed.



Yuha Well

Yuha Well - Yuha Well was a crucial watering stop both for Native Americans and immigrants passing through the Yuha Desert. For the Anza expedition, it was the first truly dependable water source since leaving the Colorado River. Indians and explorers could easily spot the hummock of water loving mesquite to help them locate the water source. No water is available at the site today.

Yuha Geoglyph - Centuries ago, the Kumeyaay people and other native peoples in the Yuha Desert set out tremendous images across the desert floor. Unrecognizable to those on the ground, these images made of rocks stretch for hundreds of yards across the desert in a variety of abstract shapes. These glyphs remained largely intact for centuries until recently when vandals destroyed a large portion of them. After extensive rehabilitation, the glyphs now approximate their original form and are currently fenced off. Please respect this tie to the past by not disturbing these rocks.



Aerial view of glyph

Fossilized Shells - Although the Yuha is now a desert, over the vast expanse of geological time it has supported many different ecosystems as continents shifted and climates changed. One of the more recent ones has been an inland shallow sea. Visitors along the road may see evidence of this time period through an abundance of exposed fossilized oysters and barnacles. Dating from the late Miocene Epoch, these six million year old fossils are part of the Imperial Formation and can be collected in limited quantities for personal use.



Flat Tailed Horned Lizard

Desert Life - The community of animals and plants in the Yuha Desert is extremely well adapted to their environment. **Crucifixion Thorn** is devoid of leaves that could lose moisture and converts sunlight to energy through its sharp thorns. The **Flat Tailed Horned Lizard** lives almost exclusively off a diet of harvester ants - an organism shunned by most others as a food source. **Mesquite** roots can grow over 50 feet in search of ground water.

Protect Yourself - For all of its beauty, the Yuha Desert can be unforgiving for those unprepared. **Always carry at least one gallon of water per person.** Be prepared to take care of yourself. If you break down, **seek shade near your vehicle so that others may easily find you.** Smuggling activity occurs regularly near the international border. **Use good judgement. Do not attempt to cross the international border except at a designated Port of Entry.** Assist other travelers in need. **Call 911 for help.** Cell phone coverage is not complete in this area - change locations to get better reception.

The Yuha Desert is administered by the El Centro Office of the Bureau of Land Management. 1661 South Fourth Street, El Centro, CA 92243, (760) 337-4400. Contact the visitor center during normal business hours for more information. The Juan Bautista de Anza Trail is administered by the National Park Service, 1111 Jackson, Oakland, CA 94607, (510) 817-1438. Contact that office or the BLM El Centro Office for additional information about the trail.

