



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Death Valley National
Park

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Death Valley News Release

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Desert Heat Claims 3rd Life in Death Valley National Park

For the third time this summer heat has been the contributing factor in the death of a visitor to Death Valley National Park. The latest victim was 6-year old boy who died of heat related causes on Wednesday, August 5th. The mother, Alicia Sanchez of Las Vegas, Nevada, her son and their dog were found on Thursday, August 6th. Ms. Sanchez and the family dog were rescued by park staff with the assistance of the China Lake military search and rescue team, Inyo and San Bernadino County Sheriff's Departments. The three started out on Saturday, August 1st for an overnight camping trip into the park. Their vehicle got stuck in a remote area in the southern part of the park bordering the China Lake Naval Weapons Area. Temperatures in the park during that 5-day period averaged 117° F. They had taken a case of 16 oz water bottles, some snacks and sandwiches. During the summer months few visitors travel the park's backcountry roads due to the extreme heat and often rough road conditions.

Late Wednesday afternoon the park started receiving phone calls from concerned family members that Alicia had not returned from her trip. The last they had heard from her was a text message sent August 1st stating she was changing a flat tire in the desert. The park was able to piece together a rough travel plan, but it was not specific enough to narrow the search. The information provided said she was going camping in Death Valley and staying at one of the free campgrounds. She was also planning on visiting Scotty's Castle and Eureka Dunes at the northern end of the park. An immediate search of the campgrounds where fees are not charged was conducted that evening with no positive results. Due to darkness, the search was postponed and resumed the next morning at 6:00 a.m. A military helicopter from China Lake was dispatched to assist in the search. With the knowledge that she wanted to see Scotty's Castle and Eureka Dunes the park focused its search toward the north. The search then worked its way south. In the meantime two rangers were sent to search the park backcountry roads from the south.

A park ranger traveling along what is known as the Owl Hole Spring Road on the park's southern boundary, found a flat tire and water bottle along side the road. Tracks indicated

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the vehicle had continued west further into the park. Near the western end of the road the tracks led off the main road following an abandoned route that is now within the designated wilderness area of the park. The ranger proceeded to follow the tracks, until she finally came across Ms. Sanchez and her family. Her vehicle was stuck in the bottom of a gravel wash. She had apparently driven her vehicle over an animal burrow. The collapse of the soil buried her wheel in the soft gravel. The ranger provided immediate first aid and comfort to Ms. Sanchez. She was airlifted to Sunrise Hospital in Las Vegas.

This is the third heat related death in Death Valley National Park this year. Two other individuals died hiking in the sand dunes near Stovepipe Wells Village earlier this summer. In those two incidents insufficient, or total lack of water, not heeding the park warnings of avoiding hiking at the lower elevations in the park during the summer, and hiking out well beyond their physical abilities ended in deadly consequences. In the most recent case, a number of small mistakes led to some unfortunate decisions.

It is important for park travelers to be prepared and respect the natural hazards that exist in the desert. Things to remember include:

- Plan your visit ahead of time. Search the park's web site. Maps, suggested routes and places to see by season; and safety recommendations are all posted in ***planning your trip*** section of the site. Feel free to call the park, and even better, stop in and chat with the rangers to find out about current road conditions, weather, and any other tips for safely enjoying your visit.
- Bring plenty of water and DRINK it. We recommend 1-2 gallons a day per person. Stay hydrated.
- Bring along food stuff. You might find yourself waiting some time before someone comes to help.
- Have a first aid kit and a tarp that can be used to create additional shade.
- Inspect your vehicle before you come. Ensure you have a good spare (or two). Do you have the equipment to change a tire and do you know how to change a tire? Should you only have one spare, it is highly recommended that if you end up using it, turn around and head back to paved roads and civilization. Death Valley backcountry roads are no place to be without a spare.
- Cell phones for the most part do not work in Death Valley National Park. Do not depend on this technology alone.
- Tell family and friends, in as much detail as possible, your itinerary and when you are expected back.
- Stay to the paved and well traveled roads during the hot months of the year. Few travelers go out on the backcountry roads of the park during the summer. The heat and rough road conditions keep most people off these roads. Should you break down, it is more likely someone else will be traveling the paved roads.
- If you break down, stay with your car. It is much easier to spot a vehicle than a single person wandering across the desert.
- Watch for signs of trouble: If you feel dizzy, nauseous, or a headache, get out of the sun immediately and drink water or sports drinks. Dampen clothing to lower body temperature. Be alert for symptoms in others

A lot of this sounds like common sense. For many who have not lived in the desert for long, or have never been in the desert before, a simple thing like getting a flat tire while in or near a town can be taken care of by a quick phone call to a friend or AAA. However, the same simple flat tire can lead to dire consequences in Death Valley's wilderness.

As a final note, the extreme heat in Death Valley will continue for the next 2 months. The park is a great place to explore. We invite you to come see its many wonders. Please come prepared. Think of your safety and those with you. Follow the recommendations above and you will find your visit exhilarating and rewarding.

For detailed information go to the park's web site at www.nps.gov/deva, or call 760-786-3200.

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