

Graffiti closes parts of Joshua Tree

By National Parks Traveler

A recent spate of vandalism has prompted Joshua Tree National Park officials to close the Rattlesnake Canyon area to the public for the near term.

Since January, individuals have defaced the day use and canyon area of Rattlesnake Canyon with graffiti. While this started as a few markings, the use of social media has appeared to spark numerous individuals' interest in adding to the vandalism of this scenic canyon.



Vandals have forced parts of Joshua Tree to close. Photo/National Parks Traveler

The continued malicious desecration of the national park has now impacted archeological sites, according to park officials. Limits to fiscal and personnel resources restrict the immediate remediation of the area. Therefore, to prevent continued damage to scenic, natural, and cultural resources, the entire day use area of Rattlesnake Canyon from the day use closure gate to the top of the canyon is closed to public entry.

The closure is in effect through midnight April 30 to allow evaluation and restoration of the site. This closure will be reevaluated after April 30.

Last fall there was another episode of vandalism in the park, in an area of Queen Mountain known as "the Underground Chasm." At the time, park officials discovered approach steps gouged into the rock, some climbing routes appeared to have been "enhanced and overly bolted," and there were "hundreds of illegally placed bolts, fixed rope, burnt Joshua trees, (and) stashed camping and climbing gear," an Access Fund release noted at the time.

While park officials could have moved to close the area to climbers, instead they reached out to the Access Fund and Friends of Joshua Tree to help right things at the Underground Chasm. The outcome was that officials decided to 1) Use the incident to educate climbers about proper wilderness ethics; 2) Evaluate the illegally established routes under the park's permit application protocol; and, 3) Only remove those routes that would not have been granted a permit.

Joshua Tree National Park reminds visitors that they appreciate your assistance in watching for and reporting acts of vandalism or suspicious activity to the nearest park personnel.