

Not Officially Winter Yet, But Plenty of Snow in Mount San Jacinto State Park



Coachella Valley Families Waste No Time Playing in Snow-Covered Long Valley

By Aleta Walter
Park Aide, Mount San Jacinto State Park

Long Valley Atop Mt. San Jacinto , Nov. 11, 2011 -- Winter doesn't officially begin until December 22, but winter confirmed its potential on Mount San Jacinto week when it blanketed the mountain's peak with more than two feet of snow. Long Valley, at the top of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway, recorded six to eight inches of snow by Sunday evening and more precipitation is predicted for this weekend. At the height of winter, Long Valley can record as much as six to eight feet of snow.

While northern "snow birds" flock to the valley to escape winter's cold and snow, Coachella Valley residents flock into Mount San Jacinto State Park's Long Valley where they can play in the snow and frolic in the cold. About 2,650 visitors rode the Tramway up to Long Valley last weekend.

"Visitors like to come up to the park because they can get to snow without having to drive for hours. No treacherous roads, no snow chains," said Garratt Aitchison, sector superintendent for Mount San Jacinto State



Pine boughs are drooping heavily following the first snowy weekend of the year.

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Long Valley in the winter is a great place for kids and kids at heart. © California State Parks, 2012

Park. "When they have their fill of snow, they can be back to warmer weather in just 10 minutes."

Long Valley in the winter is a great place for kids and kids at heart. Snowball fights, sculpting snowmen, swishing snow angels and even picnicking are popular activities. The valley's Desert View Trail is also open and offers spectacular views of the Coachella Valley and surrounding snow-covered sub-alpine forests and granite boulder canyons.

Although there is no downhill skiing on the mountain, you can sled, snowshoe and cross-country ski throughout Long Valley. Visitors may bring their own snowshoes, cross-country skis, sleds and toboggans, however, inflatable sleds and sleds with blades are not permitted.

There is an Adventure Center in Long Valley where visitors can rent snowshoes and cross-country skis when snow conditions are right, generally late November. For more information about the Adventure Center, and to confirm it is open, call (760) 325-1391.

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The park's wilderness trails and campgrounds are also open all winter for hearty hikers and snow campers who want to experience the forest's winter solitude; listening to the trees singing in the wind while they silently drop clumps of snow and pine cones to the ground. Mount San Jacinto State Park has about 48 miles of designated trails that intersect with trails within the San Bernardino National Forest. A permit is required for winter wilderness hiking and can be obtained at the Long Valley Ranger Station. Wilderness hiking permits are free. For trail conditions, please call (760) 327-0222. For more information on wilderness hiking, go to http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=636.

Snow camping also requires a permit. Permits are only \$5 per person for up to 14 days. Campers have their choice of 50 campsites within four campgrounds: Round Valley, Tamarack Valley, Little Round Valley and Strawberry Junction. More camping information can be obtained at the Long Valley Ranger Station or by going to: <http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/636/files/dpr409.pdf>.

Safety First

"Although it is warm and sunny in the Coachella Valley, visitors to Mount San Jacinto State Park should dress for winter weather conditions," said Aitchison. "It is beautiful in Long Valley in the winter, but it can be cold, windy, snowy and sometimes icy."

Visitors choosing to remain within Long Valley should dress in layers and wear snow boots, gloves, a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen. Wilderness hikers and snow campers should be prepared for changing weather conditions by also dressing in layers and wearing sturdy, winter hiking boots, sunscreen and sunglasses. Hikers and campers should also carry:



Park Aide Aleta Walther says being safe on the mountain begins with being prepared for the worst, but hoping for the best.

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- water
- food
- map & compass
- whistle
- rain gear & extra clothing
- fire starter or matches
- knife or multi-purpose tool
- flashlight & extra batteries.

Hikers going to the top of Mount San Jacinto would be wise to carry snowshoes, crampons and an ice ax as conditions on the peak can be icy and slick. For more information on the *10 Essentials of Hiking*, visit:

http://www.americanhiking.org/uploadedFiles/Hiking_Resources/10EssentialsofHiking.pdf

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