



*"Perseids Meteor Shower" -
Joshua Tree National Park's dark
skies are perfect for watching and
photographing meteor showers.*

The background of the entire page is a deep blue night sky filled with numerous small white stars. Several bright, colorful streaks of light, resembling meteors or shooting stars, are visible against the dark sky. In the bottom left corner, the dark, jagged silhouette of a rocky mountain peak is visible.

The Night Sky

OVER JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK

By Jeanne Scott

The Visitor Center in Joshua Tree

National Park sells souvenirs

bearing the slogan "Half the Park

is After Dark", suggesting that

visitors stay late enough to enjoy

its star-filled night skies, and what

magnificent skies they are!

*Dark night skies,
a rich cultural
history, and
surreal geologic
features add to
the wonder
of this vast
wilderness in
Joshua Tree
National Park.*

*"Arch Pano" – Early Spring allows
a panoramic capture of the entire
Milky Way arch.*

Light pollution may be the bane of the night photographer and Joshua Tree does not escape it entirely, given its close proximity to the population centers of Palm Springs and other cities in the Coachella Valley, but one can still find superb locations to capture the Milky Way or create long star trails in this International Dark Sky Park, a designation awarded by the International Dark Sky Association.

Joshua Tree National Park was named a National Monument in 1936 and renamed a National Park in 1994. The Park is just a two-to-three-hour drive from Los Angeles or San Diego in Southern California and straddles the border of the Mojave and the Colorado deserts. The western part of the park at elevations of 3,000 feet (914 meters) is the Mojave Desert, where visitors will find the spindly, spiky, odd-looking Joshua Tree, *Yucca Brevifolia*, which blooms in the spring with white-green flowers at the branch tips. Hike a bit into the Park and you may find abandoned buildings, vehicles and equipment, evidence of long-ago mining, cattle-grazing, and homesteading.

Night photographers will undoubtedly be drawn not only to the Joshua trees themselves but to the park's distinctive huge granite boulders that attract rock climbers from all over the world. The Joshua trees, the boulders, cacti, California Fan Palms and other flora offer opportunities to create lovely foregrounds for the star-filled night skies overhead. If the previous winter brought enough rain, spring brings lovely wildflower displays.

This Park never closes and, fortunately for us, has not banned light painting of its lovely trees, boulders, and other landscape features, so night photographers are free to shoot anywhere, except for a few areas that are designated "day use only" for the protection of wildlife. Numerous campsites offer opportunities for overnight stays that allow the photographer easy access to locations for night sky captures. I am especially grateful for the many unpaved roads that get me away from any intrusion of lights from headlights or campgrounds, allow me to park just about anywhere, and give me access to an almost





Snowy Joshua Trees: A rare high desert snowfall



All images
© Jeanne Scott

*Wildflowers: Winter rains
sometimes bring spring
wildflower blooms*

*Rock Climber: A climber ascends
a rock wall, a popular sport in
the Park*



limitless choice of lovely and interesting foregrounds for my photographs. A four-wheel drive vehicle is advised for some unpaved roads that may, seasonally in this dry desert area, have sections of deep loose sand that drivers of average vehicles are wise to avoid, but many unpaved roads in the park are groomed and firm enough for any vehicle throughout the year. If hotels are more your style than camping, the nearby town of Twentynine Palms offers several options.

Milky Way photographers wanting to shoot its beautiful, bright galactic core know that it is primarily a March through September activity here in the Northern Hemisphere. Though this popular park can get crowded with visitors during the day, crowding is never a problem after dark, perhaps with the exception of the Perseid and Geminid meteor showers in August and December respectively that attract legions of people.

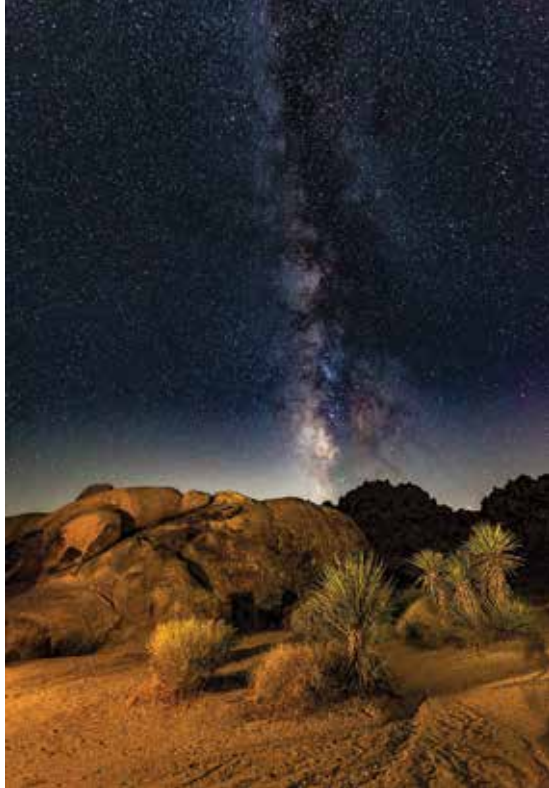


Abandoned car: The dry desert climate slowly claims this abandoned car

Nighttime visitors to Joshua Tree National Park need to be aware of the potential for very high temperatures in mid-summer and need to stay aware of their surroundings at all times to avoid unwelcome encounters with cactus. Cell service is limited.

You will ideally want to bring a full-frame camera with a bright (f/2.8 or brighter) wide-angle lens. A sturdy tripod is essential and an intervalometer can be useful. Most of my night sky shooting has been done with a Canon 5D Mark IV or 5D Mark III and either a Canon 16-35mm f/2.8 L lens or an Irix 15mm f/2.4

lens. I have used a variety of small LED light panels to illuminate foregrounds and avoid pure dark silhouettes. Shooting the night sky is often best when there is little or no moonlight, and this is a very dark environment, so be sure to carry a few sources of light like a headlamp and flashlights.



"PSA Milky Way with Yuccas" © In late summer, the Milky Way juts almost straight up into the sky.

Jeanne Scott

loves photographing the beauty of the world after the sun sets. Often that means capturing the wonders of the night sky in dark



wilderness areas, but also can mean enjoying the brilliant nighttime skylines of cities. She has enjoyed success in two gallery shows. A resident of Rancho Mirage in the Southern California desert, she is co-president of her local camera club, the Coachella Valley Desert Camera Club. Additional work can be seen at JeanneScottPhotography.com.



"Clouds" – While clouds can ruin night sky photos, they can sometimes create interesting effects.