

# [ FAVORITE PLACES ]

Text And Photography By Chuck Graham



## Carrizo Plain National Monument CALIFORNIA

### Location

Situated in California's Central Valley, the Carrizo Plain National Monument is the last of the state's historic grasslands. Photo opportunities abound in what's known as "California's Serengeti" for its rich wildlife and sweeping landscapes. The plain stretches for 50 miles along Soda Lake Road bordered by the Caliente Mountains to the west and the Temblor Mountains to the east. The plain lies 50 miles east of the coastal town of San Luis

Obispo. From there, take Highway 101 north to Highway 58 east and turn right on Soda Lake Road to enter the monument. There are two free campgrounds in the monument at Selby Rocks and KCL Campground. Due to the remoteness of Carrizo Plain, you'll need to bring all your own supplies. Closest services are approximately 50 miles away.

### Weather

During the summer, the Carrizo Plain is one of the hottest locations in California, easily reaching triple digits. Fall temperatures are mild, in the 60s and 70s. Winter highs are in the 50s, but dip into the low 20s and high teens, while spring high temperatures are usually in the 70s and 80s, with nighttime lows in the 40s and 50s. The Carrizo Plain doesn't receive a lot of rain and needs at least 10 inches for a good wildflower season.

### Photo Experience

A wide-angle lens in the 12-24mm range is needed for the grand landscapes of the Carrizo Plain, especially during the spring wildflower season, and for Soda Lake, one of the largest natural alkaline wetlands in the state. A good polarizer is ideal to cut the glare off the lake and enhance the blue skies and dramatic cloud formations that hover above the plain.

A wide-angle also is essential for the abandoned ranches scattered across the plain. A 600mm telephoto lens is a must for working with distant pronghorn antelope and tule elk, but also for skittish wildlife like the San Joaquin Valley kit fox and a variety of ground squirrels. Burrowing owls, golden eagles, Belding's savannah sparrows, roadrunners, migrating sandhill cranes, kangaroo rats and black-tailed jackrabbits also are strong

possibilities in the area. A 70-200mm lens is great for Pacific rattlesnakes abundant throughout the plain from March through summer and the endangered blunt-nosed leopard lizard typically found on Elkhorn Plain located in the southeastern portion of the monument. Soda Lake Road is the main road in the monument, but there are many old cattle roads leading to endless photo opportunities.

### Best Times

Typically, spring is an ideal time to visit, as the Carrizo Plain is one of the best wildflower destinations in the state. Guided tours are available every Saturday from April 1-May 29. Painted Rock is an important Native American site and is open to the public from July 16 through the end of February. The rest of the year a permit is required, although fall and winter are excellent for bird photography, and the landscapes are breathtaking at sunrise and sunset.

**Contact:** Bureau of Land Management, Bakersfield Field Office Carrizo Plain National Monument Goodwin Education Center, (805) 475-2131, [www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov). **OP**

## Essential Gear...



Expansive landscapes like the Carrizo Plain are ideal for panorama photography. If you're not careful with the individual exposures of your panorama, you can lose a lot of the image when you're assembling it in the computer. Use a bubble level like the new **Novoflex Arca-compatible plate with crossed bubble levels** to ensure that your camera is perfectly aligned, and you'll not only save yourself the time and effort of tedious cropping and rotating in Photoshop, but you'll also ensure that you don't have to cut out a lot of detail. **Contact:** HP Marketing Corp., (800) 735-4373, [www.hpmarketingcorp.com](http://www.hpmarketingcorp.com).



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