On the Right Path—Desert Hiking

Millions of people visit America’s national parks to experience their natural wonders. Some of the most popular national parks to visit are desert areas, such as Death Valley (California), the Grand Canyon (Arizona), and Zion (Utah). Visitors marvel at towering cliffs, rock arches, and other amazing formations as they hike along the pathways of each park. Every year, however, hundreds of visitors suffer from heat-related illnesses and accidents. Sadly, some of them don’t make it out alive.

That’s why it’s important to learn about safety in desert areas. Careful planning before you begin a desert hike is the best way to stay safe and enjoy the land. Here are a few tips to remember:

• Map out your route in advance and carry a trail map at all times. Let someone know which route you will take.

• Stay on the trail. Beware of dangerous drop-offs or ledges; they may be slippery or unstable, and you could fall.

• Don’t hike alone. Having a partner can save your life if you have an accident or need help.

• Don’t depend on a buddy or family member to carry water for you. Every person should carry his or her own supply—at least one gallon of drinking water per person per day.

• Hike at sensible times. An early-morning or late-afternoon hike will be cooler (and safer) than hiking beneath a midday sun of 100+ degrees. Winter hikes in the daytime are also a smart choice.

• Wear protective clothing. Long pants and sleeves are a good defense against sunburn and scratches from desert plants. A sun hat is also a must to keep your head cool.

Desert hikes are a terrific way to see America’s beauty. Follow posted safety rules and use common sense to ensure a great visit.

Reading Passage (BLM 9)
Word Study & Vocabulary 2: Unit 20: Unaccented initial syllables a-, de-, be-