



Auto

PREVENT CAR BREAK-INS AT TRAILHEADS

The next time you load up the GORE-TEX[®] and granola for a hiking adventure, make sure an all-too-urban problem doesn't follow you into the backcountry. Car break-ins at trailheads plague many of our national parks and wilderness recreation areas. The prime targets: camera gear, CDs, and wallets.

You've probably heard old hikers' tales about how to discourage thieves – everything from making your car look like a garbage-strewn pigsty to leaving a note on the dash that says something like, “Bob – I went to check out the trail. Be right back. Wait here.” Or, “All valuables were removed from this car. Don't waste your time trying to rob me.”

But experts say the only sure way not to get ripped off is to leave nothing in the car to steal (and maybe leave the car at home). Additional tips:

- **Ask a local outfitter or friend to drop you off (and pick you up) at the trailhead.** Many outfitters charge only \$10 to \$20 for this service and allow you to park free at their facilities.
- **If you must drive yourself, park in a visible area** near other vehicles. Traffic discourages thieves.
- **Put your car in park (or first gear or reverse, if it's a manual transmission), then set the parking brake.** That makes it harder for a thief to tow away your car.
- **Secure everything.** That's especially true for car-top carriers, externally mounted spare tires, and removable pickup tailgates. Ignore advice to leave the car unlocked to prevent a broken window. You're more likely to lose your stereo or the entire car.
- **Clean out the inside and, if possible, the trunk.** To a crook, coats left innocently piled on the seat might look like they're cloaking treasure. If you have no choice about leaving valuables in the car, stow them in the trunk *before* you reach the trailhead, and don't open it when you get there. Some hikers cache valuables in a waterproof container somewhere up the trail and make sure they remember where they put it.
- **Empty your glove compartment and leave it open.** That can signal a thief that you've cleaned out your car, and he'll be more likely to pass it by. Be sure to remove the light bulb inside so you don't drain your battery.
- **Consider installing a stereo with a removable face plate.** It also removes temptation for a thief.

The parks and wilderness are yours to enjoy! With a little planning, you can truly “get away from it all” without worrying that a thief might be “getting away *with* it all.”

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