



THE YORK FIRE: ENVISIONING WHAT COMES NEXT

**Interview with Emily Willard,
plant rehabilitation specialist**

Ghe York fire burned 93,078 acres of land (around 8,000 acres of it in Avi Kwa Ame National Monument) in July and August of 2023. It is considered the largest fire to date in the Mojave, surpassing the 43,273-acre Dome Fire in August 2020. Your Gold Beam editors recently had a chance to speak to plant rehabilitation specialist Emily Willard, who works for the Castle Mountain Mine within Castle Mountains National Monument, located adjacent to Avi Kwa Ame and the Mojave National Preserve, to find out more about what to expect in the years to come after the fire.

GOLD BEAM: Fire is an ecosystem catalyst, and it dramatically changes the look of a landscape. How much change is the area actually going through, versus what we see on the surface? Will the ecosystem grow back one day in the same way it was before, or will it become something new and different?

EMILY: It depends on time more than any other factor. The Joshua tree is one of the yucca species least adapted to fire, although research indicates variation; it is expected that this fire will not benefit them in the long run. Quick, low temperature fires may trigger vegetative growth in the form of “pups,” rosettes that grow from the base of a scorched trunk, however, many of the Joshua trees in this burned area suffered too much stress and will eventually expire, even though they had some green on them after the fire. The native, perennial bunch grasses have already regenerated, but whether the area will ever return to an old growth Joshua tree woodland is unknown. Maybe in a thousand years. We can hope to see Joshua tree and other yucca species recruitment (seedlings) within the next few decades. More immediately, we can expect to see a healthy, native ecosystem filled with perennial bunch grasses, cactus, shrubs, and wildflowers.

GOLD BEAM: Seeing fire reshape a place you are attached to is emotional. It’s hard to look at a burnt landscape and not feel that everything is dead. However, life does slowly return – How does this regenerative process work?

EMILY: The blackened scenery definitely affected our mood at the mine. The greens, blues, and golds found in nature were created to be naturally calming and uplifting for us as humans. The lack of birdsong and small animal life left a noticeable vacancy that felt lonely. However, beneath the surface is a living, dormant seedbed, waiting for solar exposure. The bare ground provided this window of opportunity. The gift of rain in late August and early September 2023 helped to nurture herbaceous plant life.

Many native and non-native plants jump at the chance to grow in bare ground situations, whether it be in a tire track, a rock fall, or a burn. These plants are called pioneer species. Their ecosystem role or “job” is to colonize open areas.

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A fire-damaged Joshua tree. Photo by Maria Volborin.

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SCIENCE AND
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from
the
editors

WELCOME TO THE SEARCHLIGHT GOLD BEAM!

Hrough this yearly journal, we share investigations of the cultural, ecological and historical treasures of the Avi Kwa Ame National Monument area and beyond, with the goal of providing resources to residents and visitors who are exploring the tip of Southern Nevada, and to build new connections within and between our local rural, tribal and urban communities.

We share our deep affection for this part of the world through science, art, history, and culture -- all wrapped up with a double dose of desert humor. Each year, we offer a free, black and white, newsletter version of the Gold Beam at locations in and around the East Mojave, and a deluxe, full-color, collectable magazine with over twice the content -- well worth the \$20 donation that helps keep this project going. We also have bonus info and online issues available on our website at goldbeam.org.

THE DREAMS AND VISIONS ISSUE

This year, as we celebrate the first anniversary of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument, we are sharing this region's fascinating historical dreams, highlighting its local mythic wonders, and exploring the natural world and our local communities. We investigate these topics with the idea that every living being exists with its own set of experiences and perceptions that make its vision of the universe unique from ours.

The style inspiration of this issue (and especially in the full-length color magazine) comes from the pre-printing press era of hand-written and illustrated books. During this time in European history, stories were illuminated by beautiful drawings and paintings, mystical symbols, medicinal plants, visual humor, and fanciful creatures, which lent a dreamlike quality to the pages. It was expensive to handwrite a book, and the information contained within was considered precious and important. We believe that the stories of this place are also precious and important, and merit the same treatment.

The 15th century was also a time of exploration, which means its imagery can sometimes be associated with colonialism, especially due to the fact that many European-based nature and cultural symbols continued to be used in America in later centuries, despite the fact that the same plants and animals were not present here. Our vision was to use what was useful in the structures of the medieval book, but to update the imagery to celebrate pride in our place, our time, our landscape, and our communities.

Twelve local illustrators and youth from the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe have filled these pages with desert scenes, native plants and animals, and Mojave geometric designs to delight the eye and illuminate our dreams of Southern Nevada. We hope you enjoy every detail.

Cheers!

*Kim Garrison Means, Steve Radosevich
Editors, Searchlight Gold Beam*

SEARCHLIGHT GOLD BEAM

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Consultant: Paul Jackson Jr.

The geometric Mojave illustrations you see throughout this issue were created by members of the Fort Mojave Tribal Youth Diversion Program and include work from Amelia Jackson, Cecilia Collier, Dennis Campos, Erin Torres, Maliya Russell, Nathan Richard, Noah Richard, RJ Jackson, Stephen Lopez, Vinnie Castillo, and Zach McCord

Introducing

FRIENDS OF AVI KWA AME NATIONAL MONUMENT

The Gold Beam is now published by the newly-formed Friends of Avi Kwa Ame non-profit organization, which helps ensure the protection of the ecological, cultural, historic, and recreational resources of the monument area. You can find out more information about Friends of Avi Kwa Ame at www.friendsofavikwaame.org



SEEING AMONG THE JOSHUA TREES

By Morrigan DeVito

Dam still a little bit shy around Joshua trees. When I visit them, I don't know what to write. Instead, my journal pages hold their long silences. But I want to be a good enough writer to honor them for taking care of the Mojave Desert, so I'm always trying. The raven says I'm silly, trying to use words. Life is feeling, not words, she says.

The raven's not so bad. Sure, she eats tortoise eggs and pesters the coyotes and golden eagles and shouts at me a lot in her wobbly voice, but she's the first friend I made in this desert. When I was a kid, we'd talk on my family's long drives to Southern California and Utah, me looking out the window and her gliding and dipping and diving as the creosote bushes and cars swirled and whirled in her dark eyes. We'd talk in the language of seeing, wordless but full of meaning, the desert gleaming.

Now, as I turn into the Wee Thump Joshua Tree Wilderness, ready to try and write something, she's rambling on and on telling me what that something should be: the ways that birds like to perch in the Joshua trees (the most horizontal branches are her favorite), or how so many birds nest in the Joshua trees (but not her because she likes to be different). And do not, she says, write about the golden eagles, gilded flickers, or Bendire's and Leconte's thrashers. I think she's a little

jealous of the attention they get. I tell her so and she guffaws and leaves me alone with the Joshua trees, at last.

I'm coming here tonight, August 30, to see the supermoon rise and watch over the desert. Now it's almost sunset, 97 degrees, and the desert is silent and still. If I had ears like a barn owl or a kit fox, I could perhaps hear the clicky chatter of harvester ants tunneling below my feet. Every now and then, there is the faintest breeze through the creosote and blackbrush, just barely enough to move their leaves. I thank the Joshua trees for letting me share this space with them.

As I wait for the sunset, sitting cross-legged in the gravelly sand, I flip through my bird field guide and scan the pages of all the birds I've seen here before. Western bluebird, red-tailed hawk, western meadowlark, Brewer's sparrow... but as I turn the pages, I realize, for all my birdwatching, I've hardly paid attention to any of their eyes. Had I ever really seen them, let alone seen the desert from their wordless, seeing language? So, feeling like I finally have something to say to the Joshua trees, I ask,

"How many birds have ever looked at you?"

They were quiet. It takes a long time to count something like that. I return to my silence as well.

The sky becomes powdered purple, the same shade as shadows stretching over the sand. With my back to the moonrise, I pull out a journal and try to draw the basic shapes of the Joshua trees. I understand their language better at dusk and dawn, when the shadows stir their cells and their limbs bend and stretch like silent dancers, waiting for the throngs of birds, yucca moths, and giant ground sloths to slow dance with them, their wordless partners across time. The raven once said all yuccas are shy about

their dancing, and that's why I've only seen their poses, as still as the mountains enfolding the valley.

When I turn around, giving them a chance to move, the moon's red eye gazes at me, unblinking in the deepening sky. Humbled, wordless, all I can say is that it glows. It rises over the gentle slope of the bajada as an unseen chorus of black-throated sparrows sing a moon song to the desert, pouring silver light from their voices. The sun dissolves.

And I, dissolving with it, feel the peering eyes of hundreds of unseen creatures across the desert, a language in their blinking, holding precious water in their eyes.

As I fall asleep that night, after much moon-gazing, I find myself in other bodies, seeing through other eyes. A nighthawk flies beneath Polaris, mouth agape, its black eye reflecting the moonlight and illuminating tiny insects to eat. A great-horned owl hoo-hoos

continued on page 7

Happy First Anniversary Aví Kwa Ame National Monument! ~



vi Kwa Ame was designated as a national monument by President Joe Biden on March 21st, 2023, after a bill was introduced into Congress and supported by our entire delegation of Nevada representatives. The national monument is approximately 506,000 acres that stretches from the California border in the west to Lake Mead Recreation Area to the east, and from the Boulder City limits in the north to the tip of Southern Nevada. That's around 800 square miles of protected public landscape for everyone to enjoy and appreciate.

With the Newberry and El Dorado mountains in the east and the New York, South McCullough, Castle, and Piute mountains in the west, these lands feature dramatic peaks, scenic canyons, natural springs, sloping bajadas covered with ancient Joshua tree forests, unique grasslands, and a rich history of rock art and other cultural sites.

The entire area is considered sacred by ten Yuman-speaking tribes as well as the Hopi and Southern Paiute. For the Yuman tribes, the area is tied to their creation, cosmology, and well-being. Aví Kwa Ame (also called Spirit Mountain) is located on the south eastern side of the monument. It is designated a Traditional Cultural Property on the National Register of Historic Places in recognition of its religious and cultural importance.

You can explore Aví Kwa Ame National Monument by taking a scenic drive down one of its 500 miles of backroads, or by taking a nature hike to experience the native plants, animals and birds. Or you can stay the night and enjoy wilderness camping and looking up at a myriad of stars in the dark night sky. Any way you decide to enjoy, be sure to pack smart, be safe, leave no trace and leave everything in its place for future generations of visitors.

More information about the monument can be found on the Friends of Aví Kwa Ame website: friendsofavikwaame.org

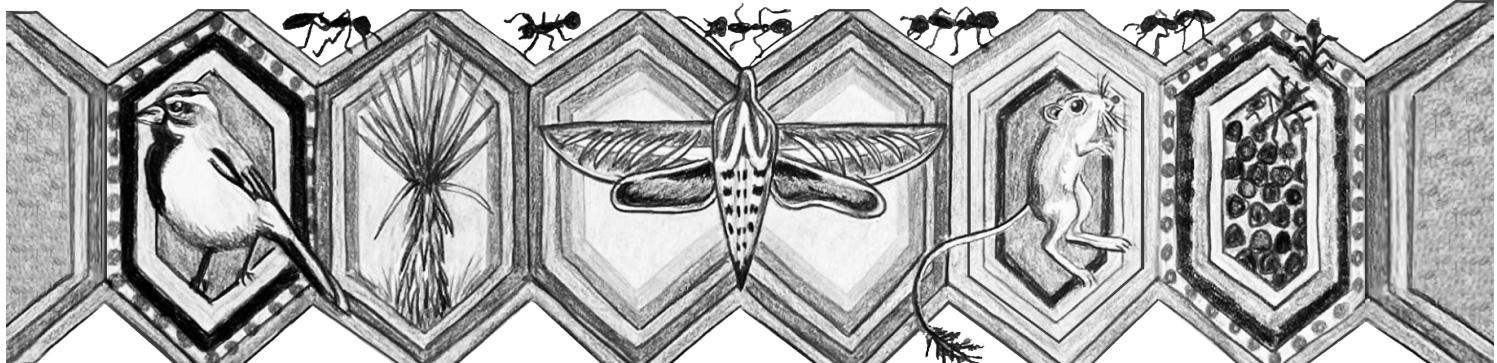


illustration by Maria Volborth

YORK FIRE - continued from p. 1

There are also species that are fire-adapted, meaning they may resprout or send out suckers (stump sprouts) after being burned, or fire-dependent, meaning their seeds require high heat to germinate. Many annuals prefer disturbance and pave the way for perennials and woody plants. So no, not everything is dead, in fact, many plants are feeling rejuvenated. A few weeks after the fire, we spotted a burned cactus at the edge of our nursery that was growing a new pad out of its charred stub; remarkable, really!

GOLD BEAM: What types of plants are you seeing emerge, and when?

EMILY: Twenty-four days after the fire I was surveying a burned fence when I noticed on the ground what I thought was green sand or an old, green, asphalt shingle. Upon closer inspection, I discovered the most minute plant sprouts, too tiny for me to identify. I was so excited and relieved! As a bonus, these sprouts did not appear to be invasive species like cheat grass.

In the subsequent weeks we received rain several days and nights in a row. Hopefully the El Niño weather will bring more precipitation that will keep the seed bed moist, and help injured plants grow new tissue. Heavy rains have the potential to do harm by washing away topsoil, but I believe the quick regeneration of perennials in August and September has already helped to stabilize much of the burned acreage. Some of the plants that have already regrown are big galleta, blue grama, and pink bush muhly grasses, Phacelia, desert marigold, Mojave aster, brittlebush, leafy fleabane, various buckwheats and rabbitbrush, mesquite trees, and desert willow (*Chilopsis*).

GOLD BEAM: How does a fire like this impact animals and birds as they look for food and shelter?

EMILY: On one of the fire nights, two of our miners responding to the fire saw a hawk resting on a berm. It appeared dazed and exhausted. They said they could have reached out and caught it in their hands. This is how I expect a lot of the birds felt; causes could be smoke inhalation, diurnal species having to move at night, dehydration, hunger, heat stress, exertion, or a combination of these factors. Nesting birds would have to abandon eggs and babies, which would cause

distress and affect future populations. I'm afraid that many animals were unable to outrun the York Fire. I hope that it burned quickly and cool enough not to deplete the oxygen in animal burrows; this would allow creatures like lizards, mice, badgers, and tortoises to escape the fire.

Burrowing animals dig new burrows in charred soil; the food supply is more of an issue since the habitat has been altered. Birds, especially woodpeckers,

burned hot, and many partially burned Joshua trees that initially survived have since perished; if the rosettes are not completely green following a fire, the plant likely has experienced too much stress to recover. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) conducted a hydrologic survey of the York Fire for their Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (ESR) program. Federal funding for noxious weed control will be provided in support of these post-



*Miners at the Castle Mountain Mine watch the York Fire approaching.
Photo by N. Rubio.*

will nest in burned trees, usually after the ash has washed away, and the lack of vegetative cover may help raptors hunt in scorched areas, but I noticed an absence of raptors at the mine for roughly 2 months following the fire. Lately, I have observed hundreds of small songbirds, such as white-crowned sparrows, house finches, and juncos. They seem overjoyed with the fresh new plant life and the water in our bird ponds. Many pioneer plant species are prolific seed-producers, an adaptation which serves various ecosystem functions, like topsoil conservation, but also provides food for small mammals and birds. New, tender plants feed herbivores such as pack rats and mule deer.

GOLD BEAM: The Dome Fire that happened in August 2020 gives an example of a similar area in recovery. What lessons are there for us from that area, and what are we studying now to help us understand and respond to future fire events in the Mojave Desert?

EMILY: The National Park Service has been planting Joshua tree seedlings on the Cima Dome burn, but the survival rate is low. I have heard that the Dome fire

production (seed). I will be running more heat treatment tests in the future.

I also want to explore the use of natural wildfire ash as a fertilizer for Joshua tree seed propagation, and compare the germination rates, growth rates, and establishment of seed from burned and unburned trees. This is an exciting time for discovery, especially since we have all these resources at the mine and a greenhouse facility in which to grow!

GOLD BEAM: What are some of the ways that desert fires start, and some things we can do to minimize the chances of contributing to a desert wildfire?

EMILY: Possible wildfire ignition sources are many, from lightning, the spark from a trailer chain on a rock, and recreational target shooting, to smoking, campfires, arson, fireworks, or the hot undercarriage of a vehicle. Fires may even be started from the magnification of the sun's rays through a broken piece of glass! As far as I know, the cause of the York Fire is still undetermined.

Our desert ecosystems are especially prone to invasion by non-native annual grasses like the bromes (e.g. cheat grass) and other flammable annual weeds like tumbleweeds (Russian thistle) and mustards. Each state has a noxious weed list with plants that require management by law because of their detrimental effects to agriculture, wildlife, and other valuable features of our landscape and economy. Many noxious weeds are pioneer species which readily colonize disturbed areas, reproducing and dying off quickly. Due to the flammable nature of dead annual weeds, fires are more easily started. Our desert soils are easily compacted, and with little rainfall, native reclamation is difficult. Therefore, it is vital that all vehicles remain on designated roads.

GOLD BEAM: We don't usually think of the desert as a place where a wildfire can spread. What are the factors that create this opportunity? The York Fire was even larger than the Cima Fire, so it seems as if recently desert wildfires are getting larger. Is there a reason for this potential trend?

EMILY: The Mojave Desert is a truly unique area with incredible plant and animal diversity. I have yet to work in a desert with more herbaceous plants in the understory than you will find in the Mojave National Preserve. Dry, dormant, or dead herbaceous

fire efforts.

At the Castle Mountain Mine, I am planning several studies on the relationship between the Joshua tree and fire. Our mine is special in that we already have research underway with Desert Research Institute (DRI) and the University of California Davis studying mycorrhizal bacteria, organisms which usually form a mutually beneficial relationship with their plant hosts. This research could expand into fire investigations; for example, how does fire affect the mycorrhizal structure and colonization on burned vs. unburned Joshua tree woodland sites? Very exciting stuff!

According to the Fire Effects Information System of the USDA Forest Service, Joshua tree seed germination is high following heat treatment at 190° Fahrenheit. I decided to test this myself and heat-treated two batches of seed in the oven at our on-site assay lab; I planted two batches of seed without treatment. The results were 90% germination after heat treatment and only 9% germination without heat treatment, which may indicate that fire promotes Joshua tree sexual re-

plant material is the perfect fuel for a fire and creates a pathway for the flames to travel to new areas. Mature Joshua trees often have a thick layer of dead leaf blades covering their trunks. This allows flames to climb higher and embers to blow greater distances. High winds over the first weekend of the York Fire also contributed to its spread.

A collection of different government jurisdictions in the immediate vicinity of a fire's epicenter can make allocating fire-fighting resources complicated. Increases in fire frequency and intensity have been widely documented across the West. Causes for this include long-term and extreme drought, the mismanagement of forest stands, invasive species, and increased human-landscape interaction. Wildfire research is constantly being updated.

GOLD BEAM: Working at Equinox Gold Corp.'s Castle Mountain Mine, what was your experience like as the York Fire was happening?

EMILY: At first, I thought the fire was exciting. I get a kick out of watching natural phenomena, like thunderstorms rolling in. Having worked for the US Forest Service in the past, there was that feeling that I describe as adrenalized communal spirit that you often get during the fire season. I think it is the anticipation of a fast-paced group effort and the opportunity to do something great as a team. Everyone was outside watching the smoke plume.

We were not evacuated but I did get a call from my boss on that Sunday recommending that I not come in to work on Tuesday due to the poor air quality. I anxiously checked the online fire maps in the meantime. Professionally trained fire fighters did not use Equinox equipment to fight the fire, but Equinox had our own volunteer fire fighters, of whom we are very proud. Our miners diligently combatted the flames with our water trucks and hand tools. Two of our Process Plant Operators, Phil Hoth and Nick Rubio, saved our greenhouse, North Nursery, and administration complex with shovels and fire extinguishers on the night of July 29th. They are my heroes!

The Castle Mountain Mine not only reported the York Fire, but we also played an integral part in preventing it from spreading eastward, despite our limited

water resources. We did lose approximately 300 acres to the fire, but no structures were damaged, or employees harmed. We wish that we had been permitted to drive our water trucks, which hold a combined 12,000 gallons, onto the Preserve to put out the initial blaze in Caruthers Canyon before it had a chance to spread and destroy our beloved old growth Joshua tree Forest.

GOLD BEAM: Thanks to everyone at the Castle Mountain Mine for their service. Are there things we can do to help the plants, animals, and ecosystem as a whole recover from the York Fire? What should we be doing, avoid doing, or be aware of that pertains to this landscape?

EMILY: As I touched on earlier, it is imperative that all motorized vehicles remain on designated roads and do not forge new trails. Please check your wheel wells and undercarriages for debris that may ignite or spread weed seeds before recreating on public lands. Ensure that trailer chains do not drag on the ground.

Keep an eye out for any invasive species on public lands and alert your public land man-

agers to their locations; GPS coordinates and photographs are especially helpful. Hand-pulling Sahara mustard is a quick fix. Volunteer to assist with weed control and revegetation efforts on your public lands; volunteers have accomplished so much!

Thoroughly douse your campfires with water before leaving a camp site. Follow fire restrictions, do not litter, and pick up trash when you can. Animal populations are often linked across wide areas, especially migrating bird species, so any changes made at home, even if you are a good distance away from your nearest public land, will help wildlife recover.

Do your research on landscape plants and try to select plant species that are native, or if non-native, are not invasive and provide food and nectar to wildlife. Control weedy and invasive species in your own backyard and contact your local government officials about weed control in your town or city. Efforts to control weeds in populated areas will decrease their spread into wilderness. Consider venturing into public lands on foot or on horseback, rather than on mo-

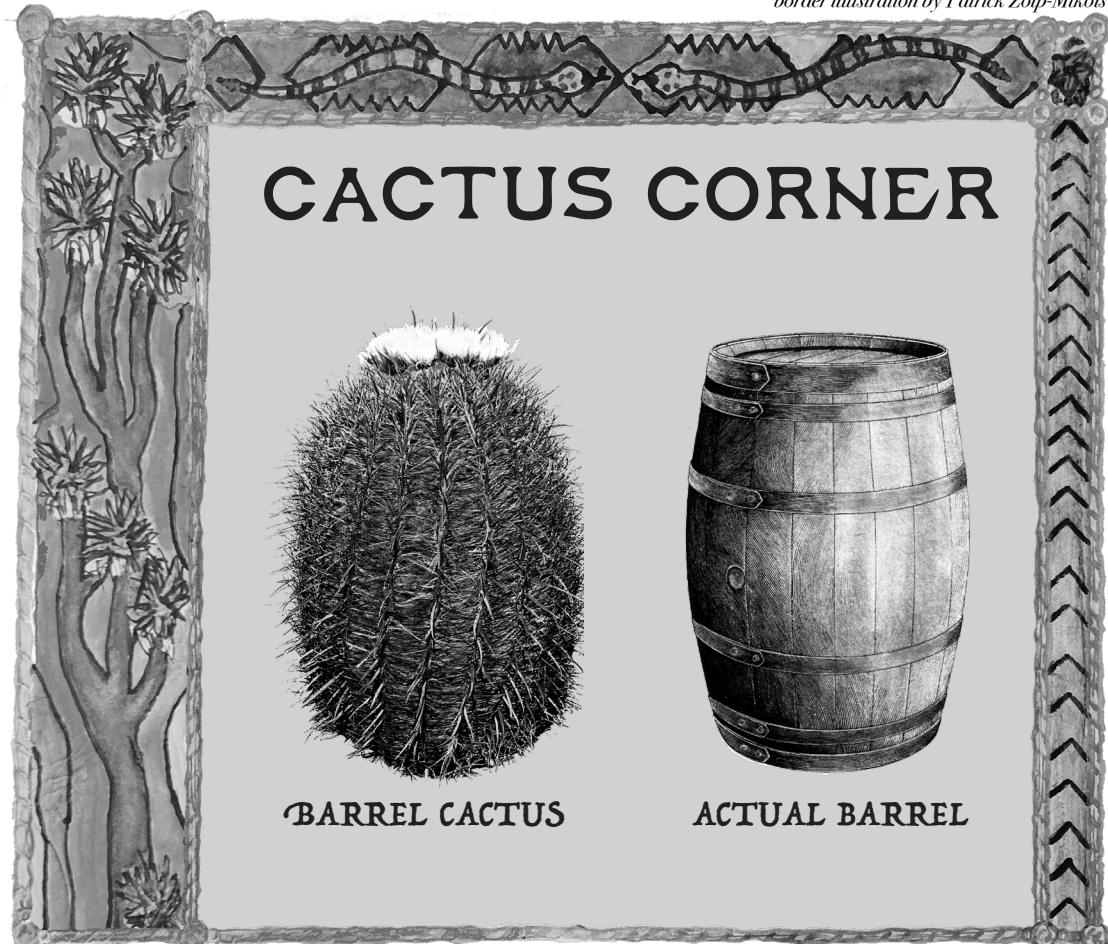
torized transportation (always go prepared). Be respectful of wildlife and observe them at a safe distance to minimize stress. We can gain so much by quietly watching animals going about their daily routines!

GOLD BEAM: What is your dream for this landscape's recovery, your vision for how it happens, what we learn, and how people are involved?

EMILY: I am already admiring the fresh regrowth of the perennial grasses and I am amazed by the wildflowers and grasses that have grown, flowered, and seeded for the second time this year! I can't wait to unravel the mysteries of Joshua tree regeneration, some of which will answer very practical questions relating to conservation and reclamation efforts, with and without fire. My dream for this landscape would be minimal noxious weed invasion and erosion, the return of reptiles, and an increase in desert tortoises. It would be awesome to find baby Joshua trees! I hope that folks will continue to enjoy nature and learn about the landscape while being mindful of their footprint and tire tracks. ☺

border illustration by Patrick Zolp-Mikols

CACTUS CORNER





Ask the Professor

PROFESSOR, WHAT IS YOUR RECOMMENDATION FOR A GOOD DESERT CHEESE?

~Bree Wheeler

I'm glad you asked. I have received many letters concerning *dessert* cheese, but the proper *desert* cheese is another story altogether. There are two philosophies on this subject. The first is to buy pre-sliced as the slices dry out very fast and are great replacements for the gaskets on your well pump. The other is to buy the stinkiest ones you can find to help rescue workers find you when you are lost in the desert. But just in case you meant *dessert* cheese, I highly recommend a good Stilton accompanying a glass of vintage port, which I would be happy to join you in.

PROFESSOR, MY NEIGHBOR TELLS ME THERE WERE A LOT OF MINES HERE IN SEARCHLIGHT BACK IN THE DAY, AND THAT THERE ARE MILES OF TUNNELS UNDERGROUND. JUST HOW MANY TUNNELS ARE THERE? I'VE SEEN "PAINT YOUR WAGON"... HOW WORRIED SHOULD I BE ABOUT SINKHOLES? ~Watching Every Step

First off, "Paint Your Wagon" is a work of fiction. I mean, they let Clint Eastwood sing. Searchlight is a real place and would never permit that. Nothing to worry about these days. By now the sinkholes have been forgotten and the people who fell in them covered up. I mean the sinkholes have been covered and the people forgotten.

Professor Emeritus, a well known sesquipedalian pontificator, has lectured domestically and internationally at universities and taverns. He is a recognized authority on trivialities, verbosity, and cryptids, with a specialization in personalis sententia. Send queries to:

SearchlightGoldBeamInfo@gmail.com



PROVISIONING YOUR AVI KWA AME ADVENTURE

There are several small communities dotted around the Avi Kwa Ame National Monument area that can meet your basic needs for food, gas, and lodging. Since it is quite a distance between nearby cities and these sites, it is good to plan ahead and know where you can go for resources.

Here is the scoop:

RESTAURANTS

Searchlight has a Denny's, McDonalds, and a Terrible's Casino bar that serves meals, and the Cottonwood Cove Café at Lake Mojave is open on a seasonal basis for breakfast and lunch.

GROCERIES

CalNevAri, Palm Gardens, Searchlight and Cottonwood Cove all have small provision convenience stores that sell snacks, some simple groceries and prepared foods.

GAS

Searchlight and Palm Gardens have gas stations and propane.

LODGING

Searchlight, CalNevAri and Cottonwood Cove have motels and RV hook ups. Cottonwood Cove also has a campground. Wilderness camping (no services) is available in many places throughout the monument, but there are no dedicated campgrounds, and all pull-over camping is on a first-come basis.

OTHER RESOURCES

Searchlight Treasures Thrift Store and the Haberdashery in Nipton are thrift stores that carry clothing and other supplies that might come in handy if you forgot something. Searchlight also has an historic museum, post office, laundromat and public library. Cottonwood Cove offers boat rentals on Lake Mojave.

More accommodations, grocery stores and restaurant options can be found in the nearby urban areas of Boulder City, Henderson, Laughlin, and Bullhead City, Arizona.

*SEEING AMONG THE
JOSHUAS continued from page 3*

from one of the Joshua trees, listening to the underbrush for scuffling kangaroo rats, pupils deep and wide like two pools of moonless water.

I follow the moonlight to other days, to other forms. I look across the desert from the eye of a greater roadrunner, as golden as the sunrise. The roadrunner coos and coos to the desert, to nearby mates and rivals. Suddenly, he flutters down, blinking. He pumps his tail and stands straighter, scanning the shadows beneath blackbrush and sunny rocks for lizards and grasshoppers. His stomach growls. He runs, parting salt and sand beneath his scaly feet, two toes forward and two backwards, like the paths crossing between dreaming and waking. He runs,

stops. Scans, runs. As he hunts, salt leaks from his solar eye. He continues to zigzag through the brush and cactus spines...

I fall away from the roadrunner, and the current of eyes carries me beneath blackbrush and into a creosote where ravens squabble overhead. A turkey vulture soars through the cloud of volcanic feathers, following the highway, looking for blood and guts against the tar with an eye as dark as a new moon. Thousands of feet below she finds a hairy splotch and sails down to a black-tailed jackrabbit, the buzzing flies talking into his ears. How to eat this? Guts first? She peers at the cloudless sky. Soon the ravens will come, hungry from all their creosote whirling. So she stabs her beak into the jackrabbit's eye, still wet, hazel like dappled light on a Joshua tree's stalk.

That hazel eye spills me down a sandy wash where the jackrabbit ran. Clumps of mistletoe hang in a thorny thicket of catclaw acacias and mesquites, a trio of Joshua trees on the horizon. Here, a slate Phainopepla warps from a hunched honey mesquite. The mistletoe clinging to its twisted branches is as red as the first flush of sunrise, as red as the Phainopepla's eyes. She flutters and gobble up some mistletoe fruit, red eyes eating red eyes. A male joins her, jet wings swooshing like a cloud's shadow over the land. They frantically eat and eat, eat thousands of berries every day. Blinking berries and dreaming berries, they eat as the honey mesquite grows heavy beneath the mistletoe, redder and redder each day. Its roots plunge into unseen waters, sifting through sand that holds traces of the ocean millions

of years ago...

A wave of awakening crashes over me and I stir beneath the Joshua trees. My eyes feel dry, as if they've been open all night. The first flush of sunrise is as red as a Phainopepla's eye. Unseen, the black-throated sparrows sing a sun song as rising rays restore the forms of living things. I pace and shuffle the sand around the Joshua trees, thanking them for letting me spend the night. I wonder where the raven is and what she'd say about my dreaming... she'd laugh at all this writing.

There is nothing more to write. The Joshua trees are still counting all the birds. They've reached the thousands now. In roots and eyes, wordless water flows.

* * * *

Editors' Public Service Announcement: CYRUS NOBLE WHISKEY HAS RETURNED TO SEARCHLIGHT!

Why is the availability of whiskey deemed a public service announcement, you ask? The answer is because this particular whiskey is strongly tied to Searchlight's history, tied to one of our most famous mines and to one of our most famous stories. During our mining boom of 1898 to 1910, Cyrus Noble was on the top shelf of every saloon in town (and there were dozens of saloons at that time). Just think of all the deals that were struck and claims that were celebrated over a glass of this stuff (or let's face it, sometimes over a whole bottle).

The Cyrus Noble mine was named after this famed whiskey. Mining claim names are often fanciful, and it wasn't unreasonable to pen one after everyone's favorite libation (or favorite pain killer, after a long day of digging). Nearby to the Cyrus Noble mine is the Little Brown Jug mine, for example. Unlike the Little Brown Jug, whose story and brand have been lost forever, the Cyrus Noble has a story behind it that became famous across the country, was published for years in national newspapers, and even made an appearance in a Ripley's Believe It Or Not comic!

There are many versions of this story, but it goes something like this: In 1901, prospector

Jim Coleman sited a group of claims that he named the Bird Nest Group (there's probably a good story there too). Coleman spent that year working the claim, trying to find his golden prize, but nothing was panning out for him, so to speak. In the fall he became ill, and was nursed back to health by his good friend: gambler and proprietor of his favorite saloon, Tobe Weaver.

Coleman gave up on his Bird Nest, and hoofed it out of Searchlight with his pack burrow, headed for other adventures, but not before he sold his potentially-worthless claim to his friend the bartender for one bottle of Cyrus Noble bourbon whiskey (for medicinal purposes). Soon, the lucky bartender's gamble paid off, the name of the claim was changed to the Cyrus Noble, and Tobe Weaver was offered \$100,000 by Judge Otis for the mine, which went on to produce millions of dollars-worth of ore in today's money.

At the end of a hard work day or week, the crew and management could head over to the bars and order their favorite drink, a glass of Cyrus Noble. Now we can do the same at Terrible's Roadhouse, where this delicious historical relic is available at the bar, and in bottles to take home. You might still be able to hear the distant din of Searchlight past if you drink some.

EDITORS' NOTE: Hearing the distant din of Searchlight's past may be a sign that you've had too much whiskey. Please drink responsibly.



A Glimpse into the History of WALKING BOX RANCH

By Paula M. Jacoby-Garrett.

Cattle ranching has been an integral part of Nevada's story for over 150 years, and has drawn people from all walks of life and many parts of the world. In the early 1930's, two Hollywood silent film stars left the bustling world of Hollywood for the stark, open landscape of the Mojave Desert. The legendary Clara Bow and her husband, Rex Bell, left their movie star lifestyle to become ranchers at the Walking Box Ranch just west of Searchlight, Nevada, now in the heart of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument.



Clara Bow and Rex Bell.

HOLLYWOOD FILM STARS

Rex Bell (born George Francis Beldam), a dashing leading man of the silver screen, starred in Western films during the 1920s and 1930s. His rugged good looks and on-screen presence earned him a dedicated fan base. His debut film was *Wild West Romance* in 1928 and he continued to make several films a year into the mid 1930s. Although he continued acting until 1961, he began chasing other pursuits which lead him to leave Hollywood.

Rex Bell's aspirations extended beyond his acting career. He came to Nevada to become a cattle rancher and later entered politics. He was elected Lieutenant Governor of Nevada in 1954. He later ran for the position of Governor in 1958 but was unsuccessful; he was running again at the time of his death in 1962. Rex Bell's political endeavors showcased his commitment to public service and his love for Nevada. Longtime Las Vegas residents may remember the Rex Bell Western Store downtown or be familiar with the Rex Bell Elemen-

tary School named in his honor.

Clara Bow was born in Brooklyn, NY, and lived an early life of poverty. After winning a contest in the early 1920s, she left her dismal childhood behind and moved to Los Angeles to become a silent film star. She was one of the most prominent actresses of the silent film era and was dubbed the "It Girl" of the roaring 20s. Her bubbly personality, infectious charm, and undeniable on-screen presence made her a beloved figure in Hollywood during the 1920s. She starred in fifty films, including *Wings* (1927), which won the first Academy Award for Best Picture.

Despite her immense popularity, Clara Bow's life was not without challenges. She faced scrutiny from the press and battled personal insecurities. Clara's stress and anxiety showed in her health, and Rex wanted to move Clara away from the bustling world of Hollywood, saying "this is the last time you are going to see Clara. I'm taking her out of this town, and she's not coming back. I am going to save her life."

THE BIRTH OF WALKING BOX RANCH

In the first decade of the 1900s, southern Nevada was booming with people looking to find their fortune in gold and silver. Searchlight was a hotbed of activity with one of the largest populations in the state. Gold mining was prosperous, and with the influx of people to the area, supporting businesses also sprang up, willing to sell their goods to the miners. The Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company responded to the need for food and other resources in Searchlight and the surrounding region. The operation quickly grew to one million acres of grazing land across Southern Nevada and California.

In 1927, when a multi-year drought greatly affected production, the Rock Springs Co. sold off their interests. Several smaller ranches from Rock Springs were formed: the O.X., Kessler and Valley View Ranch. The southern portion became the Woolf Ranch. In 1931, John Woolf sold his ranch to Rex Bell and Clara Bow, who continued to use the property as a working cattle ranch, and as a retreat to escape from the pressures of Hollywood life.

Rex and Clara married around the time they purchased the ranch, and began an ambitious building project. The couple lived in a shack onsite while

their Spanish colonial revival-style ranch house, Rancho Clarita, was built in 1931. In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) worked on improvements to the wells and water containment troughs on the ranch. Clara Bow and Rex Bell's vision was to create a place of beauty and respite, and they were well on their way to making it happen.

DAILY RANCH LIFE

With a desire for change away from the Hollywood scene, Rex and Clara quickly adopted the ranch life Rex had once dreamed about, made their home, and started a family. They settled in and were well-liked by the nearby ranch and town residents. A world away from the glamorous, high-pressure lifestyle they had left behind, Rex and Clara both embraced the local ranching effort and area activities. They sponsored and participated in a rodeo event held in Searchlight, and Clara even joined the local softball league. Searchlight resident Donna Andress remembers playing softball with Clara: "Clara Bow played in the field, and I was the short stop. We used to come to Vegas all the time, and we'd just beat the socks off all those softball teams."

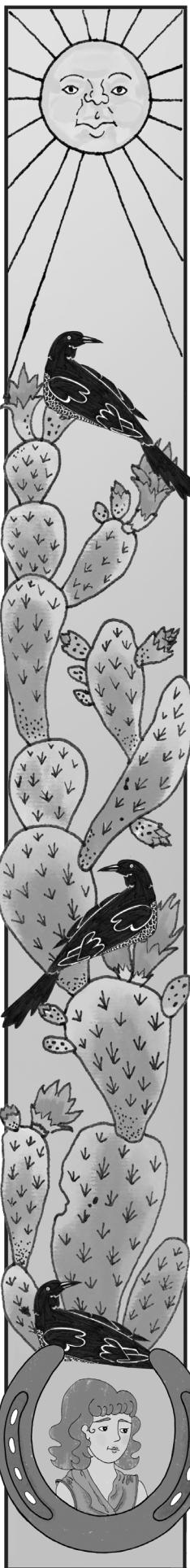
The quiet, natural setting provided the retreat Clara sought. Each day after breakfast with Rex, Clara spent hours



Ranch hands brand a calf at Walking Box.

in the desert hiking with their dogs. In the evenings, Rex and Clara would ride their horses to the base of the nearby mountain and watch the sunset. This was their home and, for a time, a happy one for both Rex and Clara.

While the Walking Box was most certainly a working ranch, a bit of the Hollywood lifestyle crept in. The Bells would host large parties for their Hollywood friends and even hosted General Patton's troops while they were



in the area training during World War II. Life at the ranch was hard and often lonely between the intermittent parties. Clara gave birth to two boys, Tony Beldam (who later changed his name to Rex Anthony Bell, Jr.) and George Beldam, Jr., who spent their childhoods on the ranch until their move to Las Vegas in 1945. Rex Bell Jr., speaking about growing up on Walking Box Ranch recalls, "We were taught to be young cowboys. I believe I had learned to fix a fence by the time I was seven years old. I was pulling wire and fixing fence. I was taking pack horses for two and three days and going out to the line shacks and fixing the corrals and doing different things like that."

REX AND CLARA PART WAYS WITH THE RANCH

Rex moved into the retail business as the boys grew, opening a store specializing in Western wear in Las Vegas. This venture and a series of health issues for Clara prompted the family to leave the ranch and move to Las Vegas. Later, each chose a separate life: Clara created a life of seclusion in California while Rex stayed in Nevada and became involved in politics. He served as Lieutenant Governor for eight years. Although separated for the remainder of their lives, Rex and Clara never divorced. Rex died of a heart attack in 1962 while running for Governor, and Clara died three years later at her home.

The Walking Box Ranch was leased and eventually purchased by Karl Weikel in 1945. The days of lavish parties were gone; the ranch was strictly a working ranch but a content place for Weikel and his family. Then, in 1990, the desert tortoise was listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service developed a recovery plan that essentially halted livestock grazing in the lower portion of the state. Their livelihood ended, and the Weikels sold the ranch.

Eventually, the Viceroy Gold Corporation purchased the ranch to use as a corporate retreat and headquarters for their gold mine in the nearby Castle Mountains. Corporation head Ross Fitzpatrick and his wife Linda took on the ranch as a personal project, pouring money and time into the now dilapidated buildings and structures. Their time and effort eventually led to the restored Walking Box Ranch being placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009.

WALKING BOX RANCH TODAY

In time, gold prices rose and fell, and the ranch was sold and bought sev-

eral times before the Bureau of Land Management purchased the ranch in 2004 using Southern Nevada Public Lands Management (SNPLMA) funds. After several years of renovations, the ranch is open for limited guided tours, hikes, star watching events and volunteer cleanups, managed by the BLM in collaboration with the non-profit organization Friends of Avi Kwa Ame. In addition, some of the items



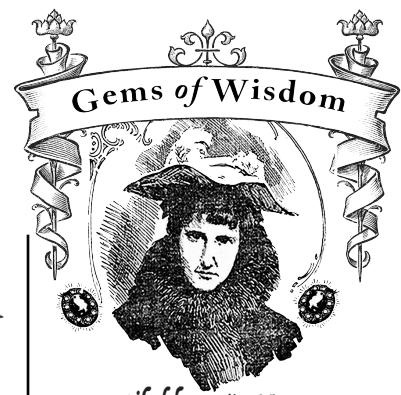
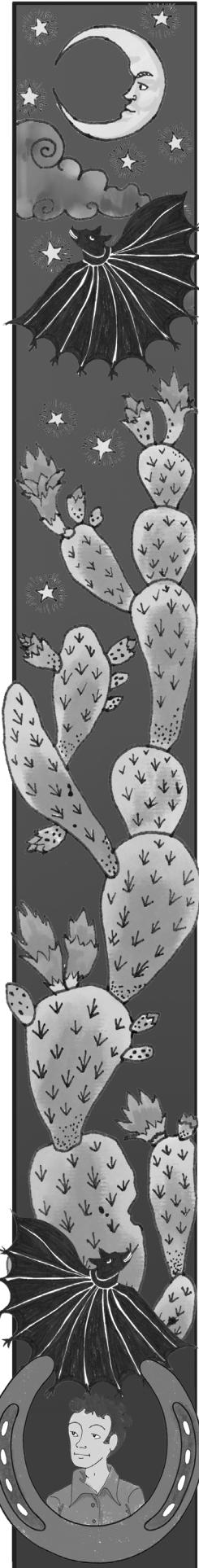
The exterior of Walking Box Ranch today.

from the ranch collection are now in the process of making their way back to the property to be displayed once again to the public.

The ranch also has had a long relationship with the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). History professors Andy Kirk and Dierdre Clemente have been instrumental in placing the ranch on the National Register of Historic Places and managing the artifacts donated to the university by Rex and Clara's son Rex Bell Jr. such as historical photographs, furniture, and ranching equipment. Claytee White and Barbara Tabach of UNLV's Oral History Research Center have worked hard to collect the oral histories of ranch residents Rex Bell Jr., Ron Marshall (son of ranch foreman), Carl Weikel (son of Karl Weikel), and the Fitzpatricks. These items and histories tell a tale of the journey to find solace and prosperity.

The Walking Box Ranch stands as a testament to the intertwined lives of Clara Bow and Rex Bell – two extraordinary dreamers who left their mark on Hollywood, Searchlight, Nevada, and beyond. They created a place of solace and beauty through their shared vision, dedication, and love for nature. Today, as we explore the ranch's history and the lives of these iconic figures, we gain a deeper appreciation for the connections between Hollywood's glitz and glamour and the desert landscape's tranquility. Walking Box Ranch stands as a reminder of our local area's rich ranching and mining history, and most of all, of the tenacity and drive of those who call Nevada home. *

illustrations by Rachel Hillberg



compiled by Patty Mayne

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

—MARY OLIVER

You must do the thing you think you cannot do.

—ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Ponder and deliberate before you make a move.

—SUN TZU

'Tis but a part we see, and not a whole.

—ALEXANDER POPE

Courage mounteth with occasion.

—WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Things are seldom what they seem.

—GILBERT AND SULLIVAN

You must be the best judge of your own happiness.

—JANE AUSTEN

MORE INFORMATION ON WALKING BOX RANCH

Scan the code for more information and resources about Walking Box Ranch.

You can also sign up to volunteer during one of Friends of Avi Kwa Ame's monthly cleanup events!





the story of the SEARCHLIGHT TREASURES MURAL

Conceived by the Searchlight Betterment Organization in 2021 as a beautification project on the Searchlight Treasures Thrift Store building, situated along Highway 95, this mural is the embodiment of an outpouring of community pride and love for our desert surroundings. It was designed by artists Kim Garrison Means and Steve Radosevich from the Searchlight Mystery Ranch desert research station, using imagery inspired by Searchlight's first community art exhibition in 2022, *Spirit of the Land*.

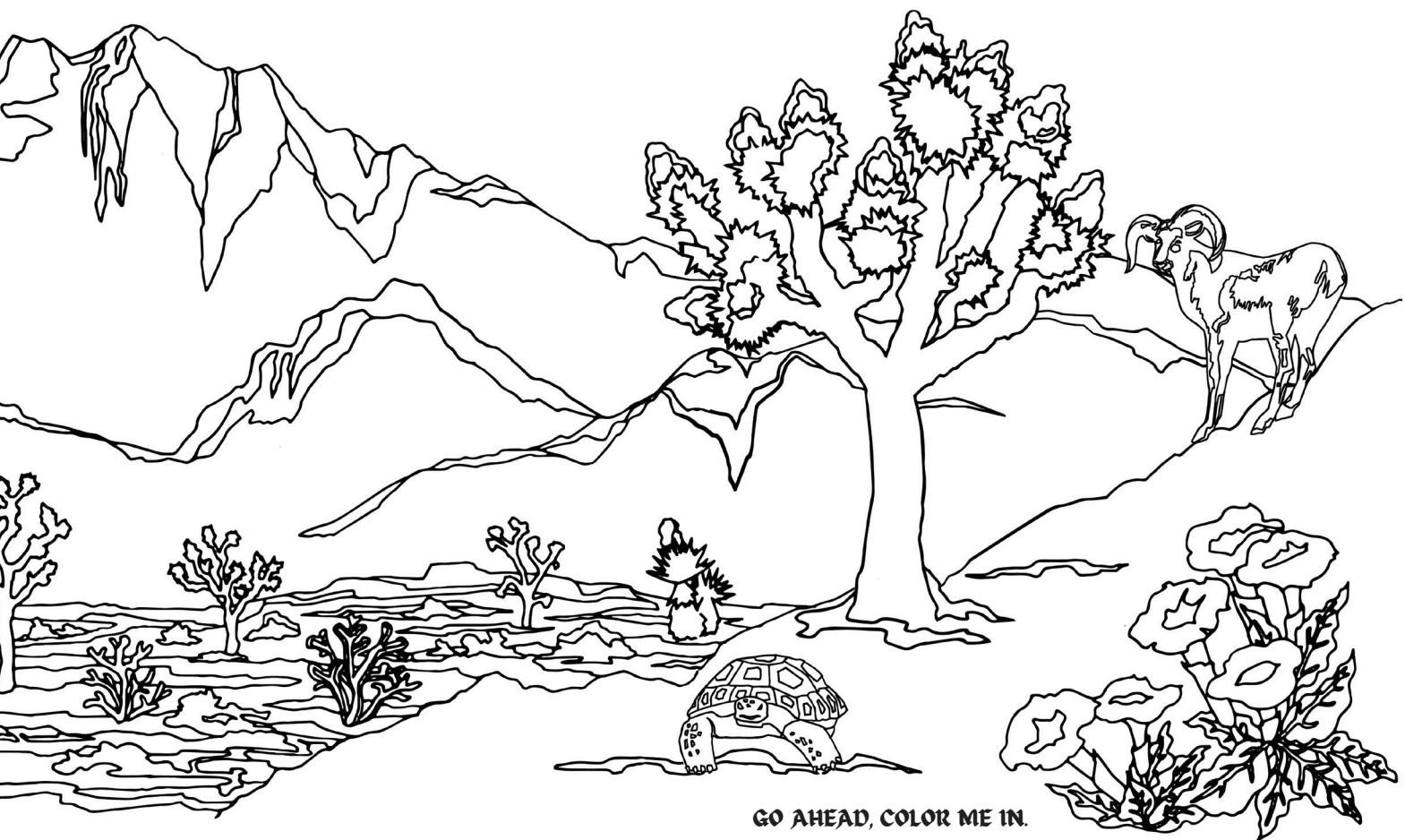
Over 200 postcard art entries were received for *Spirit of the Land* from residents and visitors, who admired the sweeping vistas, interesting geology, and unique Mojave plants, animals and birds. This beautiful set of images was displayed alongside the work of professional artists from around the country at the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art at UNLV, the Laughlin Library, the Searchlight Community Center and the Doyle Arts Pavilion at Orange Coast College. You can find the complete

collection of postcard art online at spiritoftheland.org.

While the Searchlight Treasures mural couldn't include all of the amazing desert imagery generated by the community, it does feature over twenty special features of our landscape. A gilded flicker sits atop a blooming Joshua tree, while a sphinx moth pollinates a stand of datura flowers, and a desert tortoise comes towards us curiously. A mighty bighorn sheep stands on a rocky ridge looking out over Spirit Mountain (Avi Kwa Ame), the Castle Peaks, Crescent Peak, Hart Mountain, and the hills near Searchlight, as a redtail hawk soars over desert marigolds, cholla and beavertail cactus, and a desert kitfox pads quietly by. Other animals include the burrowing owl, cottontail rabbit, and Gambel's quail.

The inspiration for the mural's style came from two sources: 1930's NPS posters, which emphasize bold, shape-based objects and heightened natural colors, and vintage postcards of the desert southwest showcasing plants and animals, all congregating together in slightly ridiculous proximity. The bold colors of the mural are designed to attract the eye and help the individual features read more clearly, as it is set back from Hwy 95.

After the design was completed and digitized, it was printed on a large-scale document printer by the architecture department at Orange Coast College. A volunteer group of students and faculty punched small holes in the outlines, attached the series of 21 printouts to the 61-foot wall, and forced acrylic paint through the holes to transfer the design, which was then traced with permanent sharpie



markers. Dunn Edwards in Henderson generously donated the exterior house paint, and a small team of lead artists added dabs of color to each enclosed shape, indicating how it should be filled by the community painters.

Six public painting days over two weekends brought out volunteers in droves, with about a hundred in total. Searchlight teens painted alongside members of the Fort Mojave Tribal Youth Council, and art students from the Las Vegas Equipo Academy public school came out to paint with Mystery Ranch artists and Searchlight residents. Members of the monthly Searchlight painting club were out multiple times, and even our fine Searchlight police officers made time to lift paintbrushes at the wall, or offer motivating words of encouragement from the loudspeakers of a squad car. The Searchlight Betterment Organization (SBO) not only funded this project (with additional support from the Nevada Conservation League, Searchlight Treasures Thrift and Mystery Ranch) but SBO volunteers also provided snacks, drinks and a delicious taco bar for the hungry painters from in and out of town.

While this mural was two years in the making, its completion in Spring 2023 coincidentally corresponded to a historic event for the Searchlight area – the designation of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument, permanently protecting over 500,000 acres of federal public land from industrial development, and ensuring our continued public access and enjoyment for generations to come. It's a big transition time for Palm Gardens, CalNevAri, and Searchlight, as

we are now gateway communities to this declared national treasure for visiting tourists. This is the perfect time for coming together with each other and our tribal and urban neighbors to celebrate our history, culture, and natural world, and work together with pride for the betterment of our communities and shared spaces.



*Members of the community paint the Searchlight Treasures mural.
Photo by Mikayla Whitmore.*

BORN FROM THE MIND'S EYE: DREAMS HAVE SHAPED THE SOUTHERN NEVADA LANDSCAPE

By Kim Garrison Means

The tip of Southern Nevada has inspired people's visions of who they are and what their future could be since time beyond memory, and dreams have shaped this area's story and changed the features of its landscape down through the millenia. Like the Mojave Desert itself, these dreams have been rugged, daring, beautiful and far-reaching; and all of them, no matter how desperate or ill-suited, are worthy of inspiring wonder in those of us who are lucky enough to hear of them. Many of these dreams quickly came to pass, and then just as quickly faded into the oblivion of unknown history, possibly leaving a remnant or two behind through artifact or story. Others were dreamt of and pursued, but never came to fruition, and fell away like sand escaping through the fingers of time and space.

In this article, we seek to highlight for you some of the more noteworthy and interesting examples of these historical adventures and misadventures wrought from dreaming. We share these few while we recognize the myriad of other dreams that must also have existed through the long history of this region, and that, while forgotten to us, have also impacted people's lives and the landscape we see today. As we marvel at these stories, let us also respect the courage and tenacity that it takes both to dream dreams, and to work to fulfill them.

AVI KWA AME, THE RIVER TRIBES AND THE CREATION OF THE WORLD

We should start, then, at the beginning of humanity's interactions with Avi Kwa Ame (Spirit Mountain) itself (which the larger monument is named after), and its relationship to the creation stories of the Mojave people and their relatives from the nine other Yuman-language speaking tribes, (or as they often prefer to be called, the River Tribes, as these communities name the Colorado River and its surroundings as their

birthplace and spiritual home).

For the River Tribes, Avi Kwa Ame, Black Canyon, the Needles, and the Colorado River are all part of a more extended spiritual landscape tied to the stories of the Creation of the World and the First Times. Mutavilya created the world's features and the first animals, plants, and people. He also taught the people how to survive, grow food along the river, how to treat each other and all beings with respect, and how to live and die. Reverence for Avi Kwa Ame has been passed down through tribal teachings: throughout the year, people in the River Tribes connect with

of knowledge and courage. They looked to dreams for the solution of finding a chief, war, gaining courage and furthering skills."

The Mojave Nation was the largest in the Southwest when the Spaniards arrived in the 1600s. During the 1800s, non-native American settlers were keen on crossing the Colorado River through the traditional land of the Mojave to get to settlements on the California coast. Because of disrespectful behavior on the part of some settlers, the Mojave people resisted, and fought off the invaders to protect their homeland and their sacred places. The U.S. army was called in to try to subdue

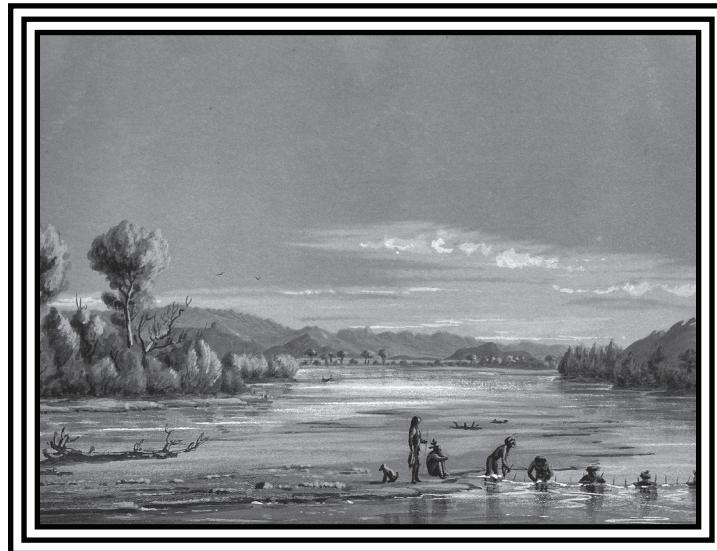
cooperate because they would not be able to defeat the U.S. forces in the long term.

Other tribal members refused to leave their ancestral homelands in the river valley at the base of Avi Kwa Ame. They held that as part of their Creation story, the Mojave had been charged to stay near the place of their creation and protect their sacred sites, while other peoples traveled. The descendants of this group are now known as the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe (FMIT). Splitting the tribe into two helped maintain the strong connection of all of the River Tribes to Avi Kwa Ame and their sacred landscape, while appeasing the U.S. government at the time.

Following the instructions of the Creator and the wisdom of the First Times, the Mojave people in both communities have worked tirelessly as stewards of the land, and now have a national reputation for being strong advocates for conservation. In the efforts to protect their ancestral lands from harm, all of the river tribes banded together to create a more powerful public voice, and this voice was a crucial part of the success of the effort to create Avi Kwa Ame National Monument, as well as in protecting other parts of their sacred landscape, such as preventing Ward Valley from being used as a toxic waste disposal site.

According to anthropologists, the ancestors of the Yuman-speaking River Tribes and the Mojave people have inhabited Arizona, Nevada, California and Northern Mexico for over 6,000 years. The earliest petroglyphs found at the base of Avi Kwa Ame, in Grapevine and Hiko Spring Canyon, for example, were made by these ancestors, and their descendants have continued the tradition of telling sacred stories and recording their dreams.

It is important to remember that the Mojave people and all the River Tribes continue to be alive and well in 2024, and that the connections between their spiritual practices and their sacred landscape, though impacted by years of religious and cultural persecution, are also unbroken. The tribal stewards of this landscape



Cottonwood Valley, c. 1857, watercolor by Heinrich Balduin Möllhausen, from the Joseph C. Ives expedition.

the wisdom of the First Times through ceremonies, events, and personal reflection, which includes taking time for dreams.

The sharing of these dreams has especially shaped the history of the local Mojave people and the landscape around them. In the 1970 book *Tales from the Mohaves*, by Herman Grey, of the Shul-Ya (Beaver) Clan of the Fort Mojave Tribe, Alice Marriott writes in the foreword: "Most Mohave religion is centered around the belief of a supreme creator and the significance of dreams. All the Mohave religion ceremonies of the past consisted of singing cycles of songs that came to the tribe members in a dream or vision. Dreams were their source

the Mojave, and during this period of conflict, the tribe was split into two groups because of two contrasting visions of the future.

One faction, led by Irataba, led people south to form what is now the Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT) reservation. Irataba had previously agreed to be a guide for the Sitgreaves (1851), the Whipple (1853), and the Ives (1858) expeditions, and had then had traveled to Washington D.C. to meet President Abraham Lincoln (1864). On these journeys, Irataba could see that the immigrant settlers were everywhere, were highly organized and had extensive military capabilities, and he dreamt that his people should

have graciously shared some of their history, culture, and stories with us, and we can visit the spectacular features of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument and gaze up at the awesome spires of Spirit Mountain.

We are visitors in these spaces, but for thousands of people who are part of these tribal communities, these are holy places that are actively a part of religious and cultural traditions, rooted back to the beginning of time, honored in the present, and tied to their dreams of the future.

"We only want to live and worship our creator, and tell our creation stories to our children, like others all over the world. We want to live as our grandparents did, and all our ancestors before them. We, as members of the River Tribes, don't go to some of the places on Avi Kwa Ame, because these are sacred places to us. We ask that visitors to Avi Kwa Ame love this land as we have, care for it as we have, protect it and respect it as we have. For the whole world is precious." Paul Jackson Jr.
Fort Mojave Tribal Elder

EL DORADO, STEAM SHIPS, AND FANTASTIC RIVER CROSSINGS

The name El Dorado was given to the mountains and canyon to the north and east of Searchlight by the Spanish explorers who prospect-

the dreams of the Spanish Conquistadores. Spanish explorers of Southern Nevada sought to find gold, silver and jewels, and El Dorado eventually became a popular name for any place where such treasures could be found in quantity.

In this case, the Spaniards found El Dorado in the form of gold and

of the fighting found their way into El Dorado Canyon and began mining the Techatticup, which would become Southern Nevada's largest historic gold mine, and continue operation until the 1940s – an exceedingly long life-cycle for a mine.

While most of the artifacts, buildings, equipment and mining sites from the El Dorado Mining District

was the Cocopah, which was 29 feet wide, over 140 feet long and had a shallow draft of only 19 inches. It could carry up to 100 tons of cargo. The last steamer afloat was the Searchlight, which began operation in 1903. Its primary job was to haul ore from the Quartette Mine in Searchlight to smelters downriver near Needles. It was



Mill in El Dorado Canyon, 1890.

silver, and temporarily established a small settlement and mining camp here near the edge the river. Ultimately, the Spanish were unable to continue mining these mineral deposits, but in the mid-

that survive today in Nelson and its surroundings date back to the classic Gold Rush era of the late 1800s/early 1900s, there is also local story floating around about the days of Spanish exploration. The story describes a prospector finding a cave that contained a cache of long-forgotten items, including a Spanish rapier and an armored breastplate, and then losing their way back to the location when they tried to find it again.

Meanwhile, another fantastic vision of the Gold Rush era would have been to catch a glimpse of one of the steam-driven paddle boats that navigated the Colorado River from the Gulf of California all the way to El Dorado and Black Canyon (near Hoover Dam), bringing supplies to the mining operations upriver and ore downriver to be processed. These riverboats also transported passengers, but they were not decked out with the same amount of comfortable accommodations as the steamboats on the Mississippi.

There are records of at least 19 of these boats that operated on the lower Colorado from 1852 to 1909, with names such as Mojave, Searchlight, Cocopah, Explorer, and Colorado. The largest of these

recorded as lost in 1916. With the construction of dams on the lower Colorado and the building of ore processing facilities in Searchlight, this form of transportation was no longer needed.

Travelers during the mining era not only had occasion to go up or down river, but also needed to get across it. The area near present day Cottonwood Cove was a popular spot, and was known as the Searchlight Crossing. A handful of boat ferry operations were in use around what is now Lake Mojave until the dams went in, including the Stones, Bonnells, and Arivada Ferries, but perhaps the most interesting of these was the Cottonwood Aerial Ferry. This contraption was not for the faint of heart, as it was suspended from cables strung across the banks of the Colorado River, and would propel travelers through the sky on a platform from the Searchlight Nevada side on the west to the Chloride Arizona side on the east. For a fee, the ferry would take cars, motorcycles, and trucks, but also horses, riders, stock and pedestrians for a transportation thrill ride that folks would not soon forget. ☺



Searchlight Aerial Ferry, 1938.

ed the area in 1775. El Dorado, (Golden One, in Spanish) is associated with a number of myths of South American origin that fueled

1800s, a new wave of dreaming prospectors found promising veins. During the American Civil War, soldiers deserting from both sides

Read the rest of this article in the full-length color version of the Gold Beam.

GETTING UNSTUCK IN THE DESERT:

INTERVIEW WITH SOUTHERN NEVADA OFF-ROAD RECOVERY [SNORR]



Gold Beam editors Kim Garrison Means and Steve Radosevich sat down with the executive board of SNORR to talk about their incredible organization. SNORR is a group of around 80 off-road enthusiasts who rescue stranded off-road travelers and their vehicles, bringing them safely home. Since their founding in 2018, SNORR volunteers have received close to 15,000 calls.

GOLD BEAM: How did SNORR come about?

JACOB: Six years ago, I had a crazy idea to start this non-profit to help out people who were stuck on off-highway excursions. I had been part of a Facebook group that would go out on trails, and people were getting stuck all of the time, and were posting to the group asking for assistance. People in the comments section were responding by wanting to charge them money or asking for something in trade for their help. That triggered something in my head to say, "Why are we charging our brothers and sisters like this? We should just go out, have fun with them and bring them home." So that is what started the whole thing.

GOLD BEAM: What kinds of situations happen to make people call you?

DANIEL: We receive calls from people who have run out of gas in the middle of nowhere, people who have flipped their trucks over on the side of a mountain, people who had their vehicles end up in the lake – you name it. Everything from getting stuck in the sand to injury accidents and everything in between. We even get calls for heat distress, and we try to get those to the 911 operator to get them evacuated by helicopter or other

means to get them to a hospital.

GOLD BEAM: What is the geographic range you are working in with these rescues?

JACOB: We go anywhere to 4 hours outside of Las Vegas, mainly in Southern Nevada but sometimes we make exceptions. We had a call recently that was in California, an elderly couple who were in a truck with a camper on it. They went up a steep incline to a mine, and somehow the vehicle slipped backwards on the terrain, started going sideways and backwards, hit something, fell onto the driver's side and slid into a tree, which stopped their fall. Luckily it was there, otherwise they would have kept going for another couple thousand feet or more.

GOLD BEAM: Your volunteers have off-highway equipped vehicles that can go some places that the emergency vehicles can't go. How do you get the calls from folks who need help?

JACOB: When someone calls 911 and needs help from a remote area, they are directed to us through the 911 operator or Lake Mead Communications Center. Those services will text or call us to ask for our assistance. Sometimes people also find us directly through Facebook or another social media platform.

GOLD BEAM: What happens after you get that initial call?

ANTHONY: First we try to figure out exactly where the person is. We have an app on our phones called Active 911, which is used by many volunteer services that assist with emergency services, and this helps coordinate people. We send out an alert on this app with the information that we are given, and we communicate on Facebook Messenger for photos and non-critical information related to the call.

GOLD BEAM: Tim, how did you start up with SNORR?

TIM: My son started me with this. One of his friends rolled an ATV out in the NW area of Las Vegas, and SNORR came and helped them out. No questions. They asked nothing. They came and got the vehicle, put the quad in the bed of their truck, and I thought it was the coolest thing when I heard about it. I work as a mechanic, so I can bring my skills to the team to fix things on the trail, and it's always rewarding to go out and help somebody that needs it.

GOLD BEAM: You brought up the "no questions asked" policy of SNORR. How does that work for the people who need help?

CARLOS: We aren't here to judge, just help people out. We work with other emergency services, and they may have to make decisions about the law, but that's not our job. The only thing I will say is that we won't put anybody that's under the influence back on the road.

DANIEL: One of the things that happens in those situations is that people's stress levels are way up, so it's important that we make them feel comfortable and convince them that we know what it's like, and bring their stress levels down.

ANTHONY: One thing I think a lot of people don't realize is, if they are in a situation where they have to call search and rescue, Metro, or the park service, they're going to pick up the people and get them to safety, but they're going to leave their backpacks, their cars, their dogs and their vehicles behind. That's where we can help with rescuing. But, it's important that people understand this and always prepare for the worst-case scenario when they are packing for a drive.

Illustration by Kyle Larson



GOLDBEAM: Getting stuck is perhaps a life-changing situation. It can be dramatic when you are far from civilization, don't have resources, and start to feel powerless in the great big desert.

ANTHONY: You are absolutely right. And part of the problem is bad information. People get a lot of information off YouTube – some good – but there is also a lot of wrong information out there, and people have the wrong gear with them, or not enough gas or water, or are otherwise not prepared for their situation. Also, people move from all over the country to Las Vegas, and what prepared them for their environment elsewhere doesn't always work here.

A great example is when the water in Lake Mead went down so much last year, it exposed a lot of mud, and people were getting stuck. Some of them had plenty of experience driving in Alabama mud or mud from wherever – but it's a completely different type of mud in a completely different type of environment here, and they just overestimate their ability.

EAN: Our biggest goal as an organization is not just to help rescue those in need, but more importantly, to be proactive in teaching others how to off-road safely, and how to utilize safe recovery techniques, so people know what to do when they get stuck, and how to assist themselves, and look out to assist others. When people go out adventuring in a group, we want there to be at least one person who is properly trained on what to do. Then they can self-recover and get home on their own. We've never turned down or had to abandon a recovery. We've recovered every single vehicle, and we've done it safely.

GOLDBEAM: How do you get funding for this great work?

JACOB: We are a non-profit organization, and we're able to receive donations from the people that we assist and from anyone who believes in our cause. We think it is important that the people we help have a chance to give back what they can afford, to help the next person who needs rescuing. It's a Karma thing. We've also received grants, so we've been able to bring in some income from that. Our volunteers also put a lot of time into each recovery mission, and a lot of effort and money into their own vehicles, fuel, equipment and training to do this, so when people who are rescued give back in some way, it really

helps boost everyone's morale.

GOLDBEAM: A lot of people in this area love off-roading. How can people become part of SNORR?

ANTHONY: We're always looking for new rescue team volunteers and people who want to come help us out in any way, full-time or part-time. We'd love to see more folks from the Searchlight, Nelson and Cottonwood Cove areas sign up, as we get quite a few calls from around those areas but don't yet have a lot of volunteers who know those places well and are close to them. We'd also love to see more women in the off-road community get involved.

Volunteering with SNORR is a good fit for people with a sense of adventure. That's why most of us have jeeps and trucks and vehicles that go off the pavement. Like Carlos said, you can go places you might not have thought to go to on your own, and you get to do it with your teammates and have a bit of an adventure for a good cause. There are also plenty of ways to volunteer with us that don't put you in charge of the technical rescues. You can help by bringing people who are stranded extra water or food, or help dig someone out of the mud, for example. And you don't always need a fancy rig to help out—we have volunteers with a bunch of different types of vehicles. We are always looking for anybody and everybody who has the willingness and the heart to go out and help others.✿

YOU CAN FIND OUT
MORE ABOUT SNORR,
EMAIL ABOUT CLASSES
OR VOLUNTEER
OPPORTUNITIES,
OR MAKE A DONATION
THROUGH THEIR
WEBSITE AT:
www.snorr.vegas



Call them at
702-706-2330 if
You are in need of a
recovery.

EXPLORING THE MILKY WAY

By Francisco Silva, Las Vegas Astronomical Society

Avi Kwa Ame National Monument is an excellent place to view the stars and planets of the dark night sky away from the glow of the city lights. On clear, moonless nights, our home galaxy, the Milky Way, is on spectacular display. The Milky Way is a majestic spiral of stars that houses our solar system. Everything we see with the naked eye in the night sky is part of this galaxy. The Milky Way has captivated and intrigued people around the world for millennia, and its impressive presence as a sparkling band of light across the night sky has inspired countless myths, legends and spiritual beliefs.

Various cultures, including the Chinese, Greeks, Zulu, Hopi, Navajo, and Mojave, have interpreted the Milky Way in their own way. In one Chinese story, it is known as the Silver River and associated with the romantic legend of the Cowherd and the Weaver. The cowherd and the weaver are separated by the Silver River and are only allowed to meet once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, during the Qixi Festival. In Greek mythology, the Milky Way was the product of milk spilled by Hera, queen of Olympus, while she was breastfeeding the mortal Hercules. This celestial milk gave rise to the galaxy we know today.

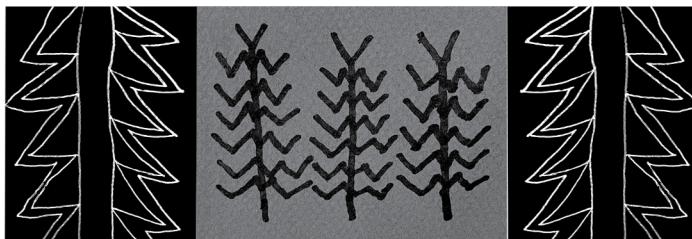
To the Zulu people of South Africa, the Milky Way is known as *inkanyezi*, which means stars. They believe that it is a path that spirits take to travel to the afterlife. The appearance of the Milky Way in the night sky is considered a sign of the presence of ancestral spirits watching over the living. In Hopi mythology, the Milky Way is the backbone of Mother Earth, and a symbol of the deep connection between the Earth and

its inhabitants. In Navajo stories, the Milky Way was the path full of challenges and trials, traveled by the First Man and the First Woman in their search for the Promised Land that finally brought them home.

According to Mojave elder Paul Jackson Jr., the night sky has always been a place of deep spiritual connection and ancestral wisdom to the Mojave people. The stars told the time and the directions to travel at night. The Milky Way represents an immense school of salmon travelling up river to where they were born in order to reproduce, and the Big Dipper is the fisherman throwing a large net into the water to catch the fish.

By observing the Milky Way in the night sky, we all connect with our past, present and future. It is a reminder of our place in the universe, a space for reflection and deep inspiration. Regaining the ability to see the Milky Way is a crucial step in preserving our connection to the cosmos and the cultural heritage that defines us.

Unfortunately, increasing light pollution threatens our ability to see the Milky Way. As urban areas continue to grow and artificial lighting becomes more prevalent, the problem of light pollution has increased. Light pollution occurs when artificial light from urban and industrial areas illuminates the night sky, obscuring the stars, and depriving us of this natural spectacle. If we want to guarantee that future generations can enjoy its beauty, light pollution must be reduced. We can use nighttime lighting responsibly by installing lights with tops that help cast the light downward, and by limiting the amount of lights we use in the evening hours. By modifying the lighting on our own properties and in our larger communities, we can ensure that others can experience the night sky's wonders in the years to come.✿



By Alan O'Neill.

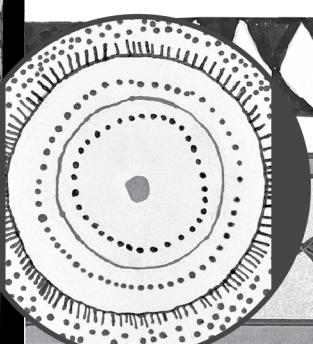
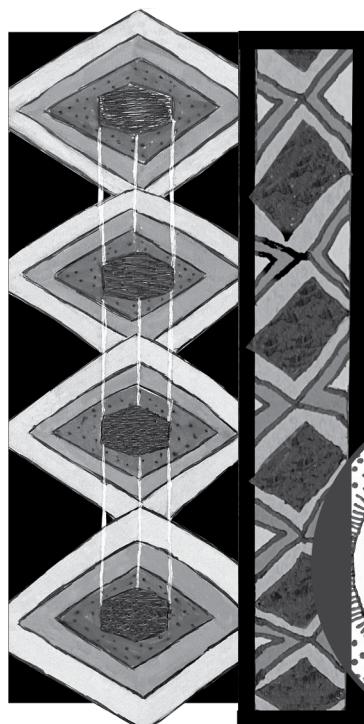
The Avi Kwa Ame landscape is sacred to at least a dozen indigenous communities who have held spiritual and cultural reverence over these lands since time immemorial. To the tribal communities with affiliation to the area, everything in this landscape has life, whether it is the mountains, rocks, water, plants, animals or soil – and, as such, is sacred. Everything in this land is connected and valued. As new visitors embrace Avi Kwa Ame National Monument, we need to value all the traditions that predate us, as well as the current rules and guidelines. And, as more people will now enjoy recreating on this landscape, we must act to minimize our impact upon it, and help sustain its health for future generations.

The rich human history revealed by Avi Kwa Ame coexists with the area's scientifically significant biological diversity, rare plants and animals, expansive views, natural quiet and dark night sky. Avi Kwa Ame National Monument can be enjoyed through many activities: as a place for hiking, camping, birdwatching, motorized touring, stargazing, hunting, climbing, and pursuing amateur geology. Here are some tips for visiting Avi Kwa Ame that are founded on the Leave No Trace principle.

DRIVE LIKE A TORTOISE. Travel slowly on backcountry roads to avoid running over or stressing the animals. Cars are a top killer of the slow-moving, endangered desert tortoise. We are all visitors in someone else's home when we're out on the desert; be aware that many animals live above, on, and under the sands. Loud vehicle noises can cause so much stress to some animals that they will move their homes away or refuse to care for their young.

DON'T BLAZE A TRAIL. There are over 500 miles of designated backcountry roads within the monument that provide access to the diversity of the landscape. All wheeled travel is required to be on designated routes only. Absolutely, don't drive off the road or create a new trail. Designated routes are clearly posted by Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service signage. Motorized travel of all kinds (including motorcycles and electric bikes) is prohibited on single track trails. If the route is wide enough to fit a car and is designated, you can drive on it.

DON'T CRACK THE CRUST. Much of Avi Kwa Ame's lands have a biological (cryptobiotic) soil crust. This "biocrust" is the lifeline of the desert because it plays a vital role in soil stability, moisture, and nutrient cycles. Without it, nothing can grow and



VISITING AVI KWA AME

the plant and animal life that rely on the biological crust would not survive. When damaged, the colony of organisms could take several hundred to 5,000+ years to recolonize and reform, so don't leave the road when driving, and stick to trails while hiking.

LEAVE IT THERE. Avi Kwa Ame is home to numerous significant prehistoric and historic resources. It is illegal to remove or damage archaeological materials, and disrespectful to the tribes who have direct ties to these sites. These sites include historic structures, rock art, and stone flakes left over from primitive tool fabrication. Leave artifacts where they are so that others can see the story of the past. Removing or vandalizing artifacts limits their scientific value and the experience of future visitors. Even touching petroglyphs or pictographs can cause damage. Just look, observe, imagine. Be still and listen. Let the rocks speak.

DON'T ADD YOUR MARK. Do not draw, paint, carve, tag, decorate, or leave your mark on any rock, tree, structure, or surface within the monument. Defacing petroglyphs or other sites is illegal, expensive to clean up (when it can be repaired) and requires many volunteer hours of work to address. Stacking or arranging rocks can harm the biocrust, is disrespectful to tribal communities who consider this area a sacred landscape, and detracts from the next visitor's experience.

DON'T DECORATE FOR THE HOLIDAYS. In the past, some families have enjoyed decorating the juniper trees along the road near the top of Spirit Mountain (Avi Kwa Ame). These days, we know that this practice is culturally disrespectful to people in the many tribal communities that consider this mountain one of their holiest of places. We also know that tinsel, ornaments, and garland have been found in the remains of deceased animals and birds, who have died after mistaking the bright colors and shiny surfaces for food and moisture, so there is double reason to leave these trees bare.

PACK IT OUT. Carry plastic bags and pack out all your trash, including toilet paper and hygiene products. Utilize toilet facilities whenever possible. Otherwise, pack it all out, including human waste. Dumping trash, furniture, tires, or anything onto federally protected lands is illegal and carries a heavy fine.

BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHERS. Symbolic rituals and practices are important components in this sacred landscape as they reflect local people's religious world views and cultural identity. Indigenous peoples use this landscape for important cultural, social, and ceremonial purposes. Please do not disturb others who are participating in these activities or quietly visiting this place. Avoid loud voices and disturbing noises to let nature's sounds prevail so others can enjoy.

RESPECT PRIVATE LANDS. There are some private lands and residences within the monument. It is essential to respect private property,

WITH RESPECT

road signs, and no trespassing signs. Some old buildings and mines are privately owned, and structures that look abandoned may actually be maintained as historic sites by the families. Cameras and security systems are common on private property and can be used to prosecute trespassers. These private landowners are key partners, working with the managing agencies in the stewardship and care of the monument.

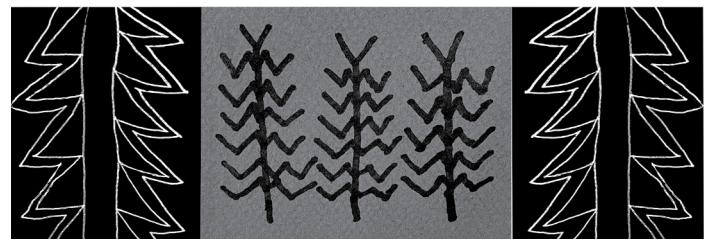
KEEP PETS SAFE AND RESPECTFUL. Control your pets at all times or leave them at home. Keep dogs on the leash whenever possible for their safety and to minimize stress on nearby wildlife, and observe leash rules where required (like Grapevine Canyon). Keep them away from animal burrows and rock crevices and pack out your pet's waste (dogs are predators and their waste is stressful to smaller animals and unpleasant for visitors).

RESPECT THE LOCAL WILDLIFE. Observe wildlife from a distance (binoculars are a good item to pack). Do not follow or approach animals, and never feed them. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters natural behaviors (habituates them to humans, which can be dangerous to humans and the animal), and exposes them to predators and other dangers. Fed wildlife is dead wildlife.

HUNT ONLY IN LEGAL AREAS. Hunting is legal in most areas of the monument with a Nevada hunting licence and in accordance with Nevada Department of Wildlife regulations. The exception to this is the Grapevine Canyon area which is closed to hunting. There is a Clark County ordinance that bans shooting within half a mile of a highway or within 500 feet of a public or private road or designated campground, picnic areas, or improved trail. The harvesting of wildlife is carefully regulated by the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service working with the Nevada Department of Wildlife to ensure equilibrium between wildlife and their habitats. Those hunting on monument lands must be safe and also pick up their spent ammunition and any trash.

WHERE AND HOW TO CAMP: There are no developed campgrounds in Avi Kwa Ame National Monument, but primitive camping is legal in most places and is limited to a maximum of 14 consecutive days per stay. Do not make camp in a dry wash – flash floods develop quickly in the desert. Campsites must be more than 200 yards from any water source, which are mostly the natural springs. Concentrate use on existing campsites where vegetation is absent and keep campsites small. In pristine areas, disperse use to prevent the creation of new campsites and trails and avoid places where impacts are just beginning. Camping is not allowed on the east side of Spirit Mountain along the Christmas Tree Pass Trail but is allowed on the west side.

KEEP FIRES SAFE. Small fires are permitted in the backcountry areas unless seasonal fire restrictions are in place. Use fires only when necessary to keep warm; otherwise enjoy the dark night sky without the added



light pollution of firelight. When a small fire is needed, use established fire rings, fire pans, or mound fires, and check wind conditions before you light. Only use dead wood from the ground that can be broken by hand. Do not throw trash, cans, or glass in the fire. To help prevent wildfires, never leave your campfire unattended. Burn all wood and coals to ash, put out campfires completely, then scatter cool ashes. Make sure it is completely out before you leave. Wildfires are a serious problem in the Mojave Desert, so be vigilant. Always check the monument's official web-pages before your visit, to see if a campfire ban is in effect.

KEEP YOUR SITE CLEAN. Dispersed camping in a motorhome is allowed on officially designated backcountry roads, but dumping black or gray water isn't allowed. Pack it in, pack it out. Inspect your campsite, food preparation areas, and rest areas for trash or spilled foods. Pull off in already established pull-outs – do not create new pullouts.

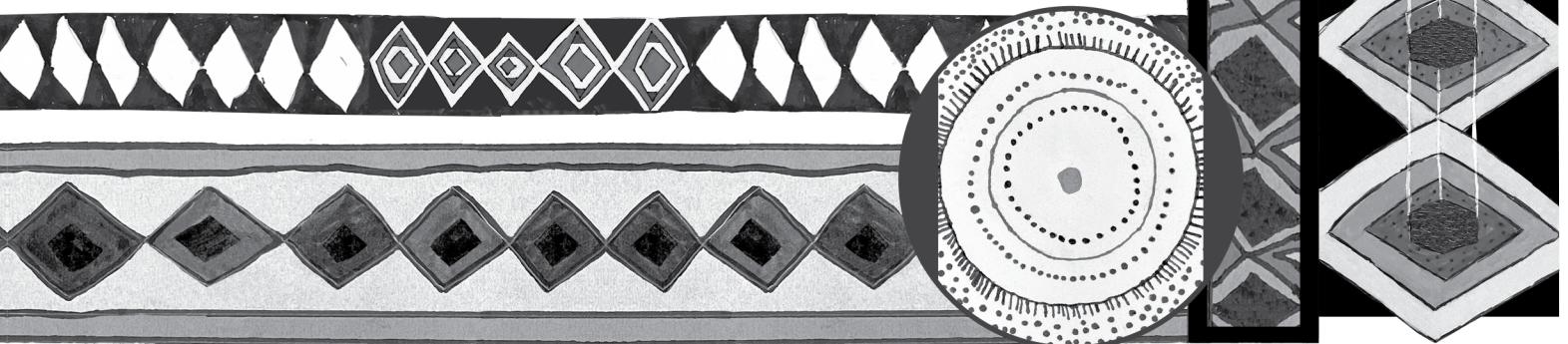
KEEP SKIES DARK. The monument's night skies are some of the darkest in the Lower 48. Before you deck out your camp with string lights or overpowering camp lights, remember you may be blowing out a fellow camper's night vision, and otherwise prime stargazing conditions. Help protect this disappearing, natural and culturally important resource by lighting your camp mindfully.

BONUS POINTS: The truest form of respect is to leave a place better than you found it, so consider carrying an extra bag to pick up trash on your excursions, and be sure to report anything you see that is potentially causing harm, including graffiti, dumpsites, permanent encampments, and other illegal activities.

Please note that the monument is managed by both the National Park Service (NPS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM); rules may vary between jurisdictional boundaries. If you have a question or concern, you can report it by calling the BLM/NPS emergency number at 702-293-8932 or the BLM's non-emergency number at 702-515-5300.

Your mindfulness while visiting and acts of appreciation will help keep Avi Kwa Ame clean, pristine and respected for everyone who visits in years to come.

Alan O'Neill is an avid nature lover, conservation advocate, and public lands expert. He is a founding board member of Friends of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument and the former superintendent of Lake Mead National Recreation Area.



TREASURES OF THE TRAIL

Christmas Tree Pass: Scenic Loop Drive

By Alan O'Neill



Cone of the most interesting drives within Avi Kwa Ame National Monument takes you over Christmas Tree Pass, near to the peaks of Avi Kwa Ame itself (Spirit Mountain), and past the entrance to Grapevine Canyon Trailhead. Christmas Tree Pass gets its name from the scattered forest of junipers and pinyons that grow among the rocky ridges of the Newberry Mountains.

For most of the 12-mile journey, the Scenic Road is flanked by the Spirit Mountain Wilderness Area on one side and the Bridge Canyon Wilderness Area on the other. The drive offers the best that southern Nevada landscapes have to offer. Sculpted granite rock formations rise impressively from the landscape, which is home to a cross-section of Sonoran, Mojave and Great Basin plant communities. Rock-studded canyons slope gently eastward toward the Colorado River. It is easy to spot animal and human likenesses in the jumble of rocks and boulders that abound in the area.

From the north, the drive begins about 14 miles south of Searchlight (2.3 miles south of CalNevAri), with a well-marked left turn onto a well-maintained dirt road. You'll see an information kiosk here on the right. The road takes you from the Piute Valley to the Newberry Mountain range, where you will enter a juniper forest. Many of the area's pine trees were cut down for use

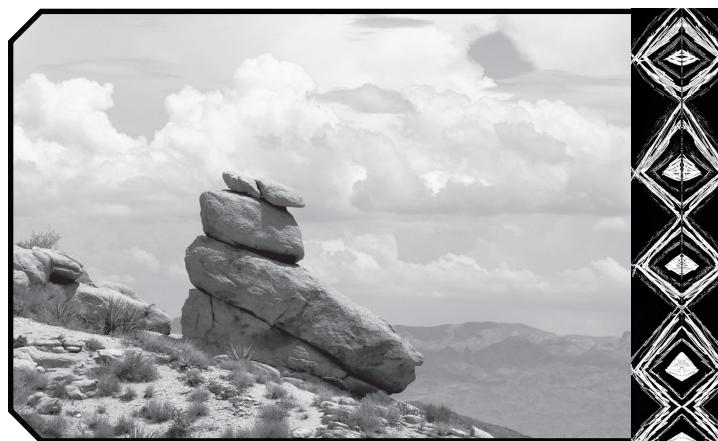
during the mining era of the early 1900s, but you can still see some piñon pine and scrub oak. Several turn-outs, side roads and wilderness camping spots are available on the west side of the mountain, and make good places to get out and take a walk or have a picnic.

As you drive over the crest of the Newberry range, you will encounter expansive vistas of the eastern side of the monument as it descends to Lake Mohave through the Lake Mead National Recreation Area, with views into

will pass some interesting shallow cave formations in the large rocky outcroppings on the south side of the road. Be on the lookout for a small thicket of scrub oak nearby. The road wraps around to the right toward the Grapevine Canyon Trail Road near this point, and soon you will notice a short side road on the right that leads to the trail, parking and restroom areas.

The entrance to Grapevine Canyon, as well as the foothills and canyons around Spirit Mountain, are home to one of the most significant and expansive petroglyph sites in the American Southwest. Archeological research of rock shelters in the area indicates that the ancestors of the Mojave and perhaps the Southern Paiute people camped here as early as AD 1100, using rock shelters for a few days at a time while they were utilizing the resources of the area.

A fresh water spring flows out of Grapevine Canyon in non-drought years, and provides life-giving water to a wide assortment of plants, such as Cottonwood trees, native grapevines, cattails and rushes. Animals who frequent the area include desert bighorn sheep, red-tailed hawks, chuckwalla lizards and desert iguanas. The lush plant growth on the canyon floor strongly contrasts with the stark rock formations of the canyon sides and the extensive petroglyph panels displayed against the dark desert varnished rocks.



Arizona on the other side of the Colorado River. As you descend, you'll get an awe-inspiring view of the tall, granite spires of Avi Kwa Ame rising majestically on the north side. There are a couple of right-side pull-outs in this area that you can use to safely stop and take in the scene.

Continuing to descend, you

available along the trail. Be prepared for summer temperatures that can be as high as 120 degrees F. The road is gravel and in most places is in good condition, but a high clearance vehicle is recommended. This entire area is sacred to a dozen local tribes, and its ceremonial use continues today. Please stay on designated roads and trails, visit with respect and leave the Christmas Tree Pass Loop Drive better than you found it.

Photographs by Alan O'Neill.

HOW TO ACCESS CHRISTMAS TREE PASS:

Drive south from Las Vegas on U.S. 93/95.

At Railroad Pass, head south on U.S. 95 through Searchlight.

About 2.3 miles south of Cal-Nev-Ari, turn left on the Christmas Tree Pass Road. There is a small road sign for the turnoff and a fairly large, covered information sign on the east side of the road that you can see in the distance.

The gravel road loop is around 12 miles and connects back to the Nevada Highway about two miles west of Laughlin.

Take 163 back to its intersection with U.S. 95 and head north on U.S. 95 back to Las Vegas.

THERE'S MORE TO EXPLORE

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON SPECIAL PLACES TO SEE WITHIN THE MONUMENT, VISIT THE FRIENDS OF AVI KWA AME WEBSITE



Explore online and join us for an upcoming event!

After passing Grapevine Canyon Trail Road, the Christmas Tree Pass Loop soon ends at Highway 163, about two miles west of Laughlin. You can head left down to the river area for lunch, or turn right (west) to take this road back to Highway 95.

Before you go: Take plenty of drinking water, as there is none

FOR SAFETY'S SAKE...

This is a remote area, and Emergency Fire and Ambulance services may take a significant amount of time (an hour or more). The nearest hospital is about an hour away in Henderson. Searchlight's small volunteer fire department receives over 300 calls a year on average. Frequent calls include car, motorcycle and boat accidents, as well as dehydration and heat exhaustion. Be cautious and aware of your surroundings at all times, so you do not need to call them for help!

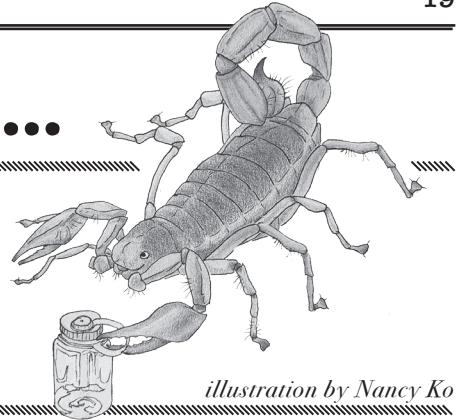


illustration by Nancy Ko

TOP 10 TIPS FOR SAFE DESERT EXPLORING:

TPLAN & COMMUNICATE. If you take a drive, walk, stroll or hike by yourself, always tell others where you are headed, and when you plan to return. Print or download area maps, as internet and phone reception may be spotty. Travel with a friend whenever possible. Keep your phone with you and fully charged at all times. If your phone battery is low and you are out on a walk or drive, it's time to turn back.

PREPARE FOR THE OUTDOORS. Always wear proper attire for outdoor activities. For off trail hiking, thick-soled boots or shoes, long pants, hat, sunscreen, water and snacks are a must. Take your medications, a first aid kit, and emergency water and snacks with you -- don't leave them at home or in the hotel room. Pain reliever, allergy medication, antiseptic cream, and tweezers might also come in handy. Bring more provisions than you plan to consume.

CCHECK THE WEATHER. It can change quickly and drastically, so bring layers for temperature changes. The high elevation of this area can get below freezing in winter, and strong winds amplify temperature extremes. Flash floods and lightning strikes are real dangers here, so skip adventuring in these conditions. In summer, do avoid hiking or exploring back roads in the heat of the day.

PREPARE YOUR VEHICLE FOR ADVENTURE. Fill your gas tank, check the tires, pack your gear and phone charger. If you plan to drive down dirt roads, make sure you have a full-sized spare tire and the ability to put it on if needed.

TAKE CARE ON DESERT ROADS. Watch for BLM signs and stay on designated off-highway routes, which will always be at least one car-width wide. Smaller trails are illegal for vehicles, and driving on them can harm plants and wildlife. Dirt roads may not be maintained, and some may be highly degraded or unpassable. Be willing to turn around at any point when a road looks unsafe. Roads often get worse as you go further in, and there is no AAA tow service away from the highway.



STAY FOCUSED ON YOUR SURROUNDINGS. Take your time and look around you with every step. We share this desert with rattlesnakes, scorpions, cone nose bugs, stinging ants and bees, spiders, rodents and many kinds of plants with sharp blade-like leaves, as well as slippery slopes, and uneven ground. And sharp, old metal things. Oh, yeah, and old mineshafts. Be calm and cautious when exploring. Do not sit, stand, reach or walk anywhere that you cannot see first.



KEEP CAREFUL WATCH OVER CHILDREN AND PETS. They are the most likely to get injured. Keep pets on leash outside – they may go from being mellow to chasing animals across the landscape in an instant. Check regularly for cactus needles in dog's feet, and watch for snakes, because your dog won't. Snakebite is a rare occurrence among humans, but sadly much more common in dogs. Keep in mind that if your dog or child gets bit by a snake, you will need to carry them to your car.



LIMIT DISTRACTIONS. Do not drink, smoke, or otherwise ingest mind-altering substances beyond a mild effect (including alcohol). You will need your wits about you to keep safe and healthy in this untamed environment! Do not hike or drive while intoxicated. Beautiful scenery, music, conversation, children and pets can also be distracting – make sure you are watching where you are going and how to get back.



QUIT WHILE YOU'RE AHEAD. Temperature extremes, lack of humidity, and elevation combine to dehydrate people more easily here. Sunstroke, windstroke, and exhaustion can happen quickly. Drink hydrating beverages that replenish electrolytes, eat snacks, and don't push yourself.

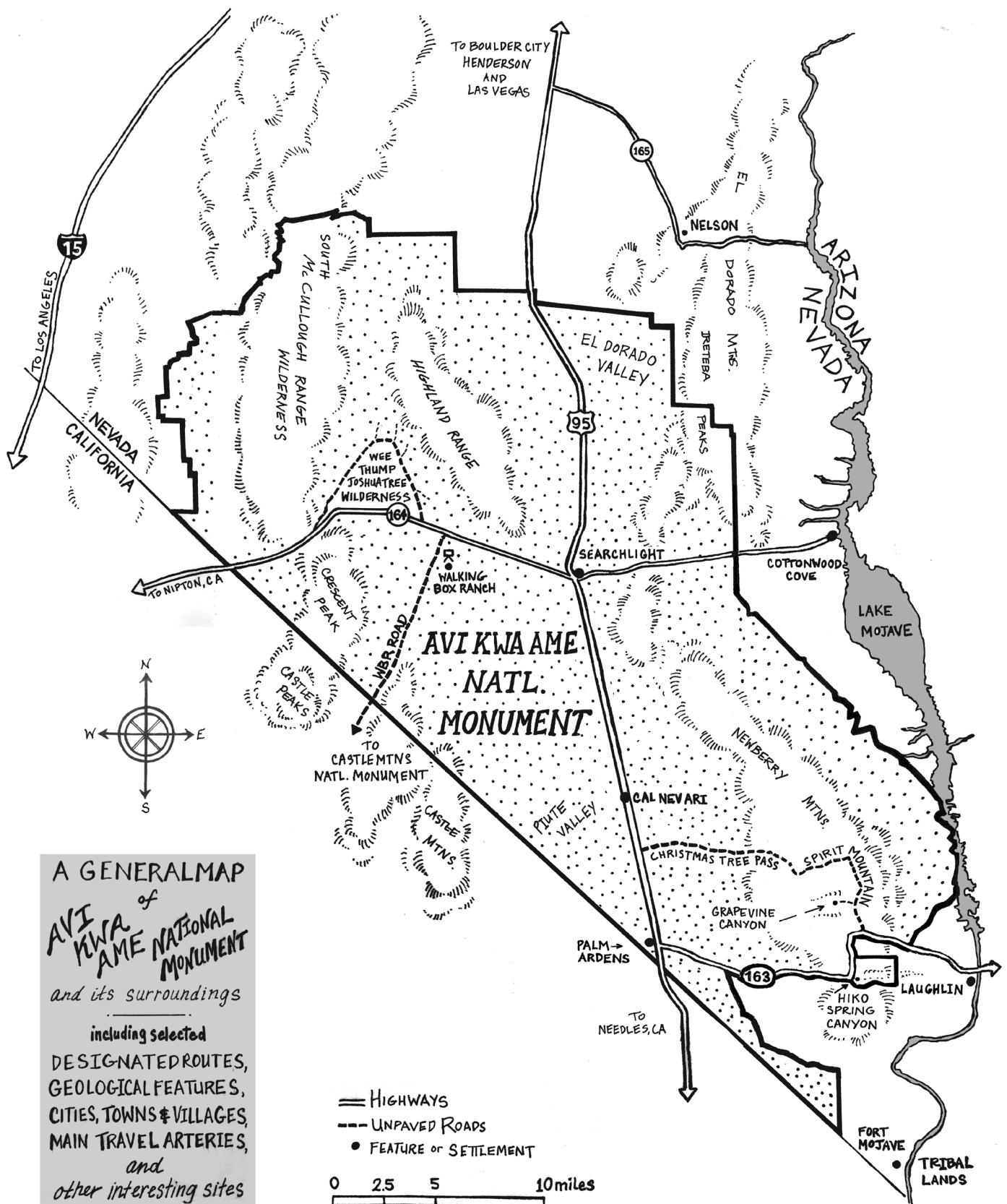


DO NO HARM. Drive on designated routes, and walk on trails whenever possible. This will help preserve the fragile soil biocrust. Do not feed the wildlife. If you want to help them, water some of the plants that provide them with food and shelter. Please do not stack rocks or otherwise alter the natural environment. Pack it in, pack it out, and leave no trace. Even better, leave it better than when you found it. Future generations of humans and wildlife will thank you for keeping their home safe too.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Gold Beam is made possible through the time, energy, and love of many contributors, with funding from Friends of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument, and support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Nevada Humanities, The Nevada Arts Council, The National Endowment for the Arts, The Searchlight Betterment Organization, Searchlight Treasures Thrift Store and the National Parks Conservation Association.





THERE ARE MORE THAN 500 MILES OF UNPAVED DESIGNATED ROUTES WITHIN AVI KWA AME NATIONAL MONUMENT. MOST OF THESE ARE UNMAINTAINED OR RARELY MAINTAINED. USE CAUTION AND CARE ON ALL UNPAVED ROADS, AND WATCH FOR HAZARDS. MANY ROADS ARE NAVIGABLE TO SOME EXTENT WITHOUT 4-WHEEL DRIVE, BUT BE PREPARED TO TURN BACK AT ANY TIME. WALKING BOX, CHRISTMAS TREE PASS, GRAPEVINE & HIKO ROADS ARE GENERALLY PASSABLE WITH HIGH-CLEARANCE VEHICLES, EXCLUDING AFTER WASH OUTS.