



# THE FORT MOJAVE INDIAN SCHOOL

BY KIM GARRISON MEANS



Courtesy of NRM, Ron Ross Collection.

*"My grandfather told us a lot of the parents would take their kids and hide them at Grapevine Canyon. One day the government men caught my grandfather and forced him back to the school only for him to run away again like a lot of the others did. They caught him and they took him into school but he ran off and he got caught again, then took off again. A good place to hide was at Grapevine Canyon, and his family took him over there. There's that little forest way back in there, and in those days, it didn't look like this. It was all trees. It was just trees, trees, trees. He got wandering around and came out playing around and the officials saw him and they took him back and of course he took off again. Many of the*

*runaways were never caught because they knew where to hide and could easily live off the land way back in the mountains or near the river."*

— Paul Jackson Jr.

From November 2024 to February 2025, the Pipa Aha Macav Culture Society, in collaboration with volunteers from Friends of Avi Kwa Ame, held private sessions with Fort Mojave Tribe members to gather stories about the Fort Mojave Indian School. These testimonies, given mainly by descendants, were recorded in a digital archive for future use by the Culture Society, and also used to inform this article. Our shared goal with this project was to reach out to neighbors and listen with humility to

acknowledge the pain and suffering the policies of this era caused to families and multiple local communities.

SCHOOL continued on page 6

## SPRINGTIME FOR BIRDS in AVI KWA AME

BY SPENCER GIESEMANN

AS NIGHT BREAKS and the morning sun shines over the mountain ranges, filling valleys and canyons with light, beautiful melodies of bird song are carried by crisp spring winds. Each bird, in each setting of Avi Kwa Ame, from mountains to washes or cholla gardens, has a completely different set of strategies and skills they use to navigate life in the harsh Mojave Desert. Since the beginning of humankind, we've recognized these unique behaviors, and birds have played significant roles in our culture and our connections with nature, transcending time and geographic boundaries. Birds have been our teachers and our scientific and creative muses. We have always been inspired by them, and strive to innovate from their examples, propelling humanity forward.

Avi Kwa Ame is home to many unique and wonderful birds for us to find and enjoy. In the spring, migration routes carry countless species through this landscape, some passing through, and others intent on raising their next generation of young in the canyons, valleys, and arroyos within the monument. Watching birds closely, we can observe their stories of adversity and resilience, playfulness and companionship, and

BIRDS continued on page 10

A Yearly Publication Of  
**FRIENDS OF  
AVI KWA AME  
NATIONAL  
MONUMENT**

## INSIDE OUR INTERCONNECTIONS IN AVI KWA AME

### ISSUE:



### TRAIL GUIDES AND MAPS

### AREA HISTORY

### PLANTS AND ANIMALS

### ART AND CULTURE

### SCIENCE AND DISCOVERY

### INFORMATION ON AVI KWA AME NATIONAL MONUMENT

### WISDOM AND ADVICE

### LOCAL PICKS

### FUN

Preview Version



ALWAYS FREE!

## ARTICLES and FEATURES:

COVER STORY  
THE FORT MOJAVE INDIAN SCHOOL

SPRINGTIME FOR BIRDS IN AVI KWA AME, P. 1

FINDING AWE IN AVI KWA AME, P. 3

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY, AVI KWA AME, P. 3

MOAB TO MOJAVE CONSERVATION CORRIDOR MAP, P. 4

HONORING LANDSCAPE INTERCONNECTIVITY, P. 5

REX BELL'S NEVADA LEGACY, P. 8

NATURE'S PERFECT PAIR, P. 11

CACTUS CORNER, P. 12

ASK THE PROFESSOR, P. 13

THE CELESTIAL CARTOGRAPHER, P. 14

CAMELS IN AVI KWA AME, P. 15

CASTLE MOUNTAINS GRASSLANDS HIKE, P. 16

UNCLE IVAN'S DESERT VHS PICK, P. 18

LOCAL RESOURCES, P. 18

SAFE TRAVELS, P. 19

MAP OF AVI KWA AME, P. 20

# WELCOME TO THE SEARCHLIGHT GOLD BEAM!

THROUGH 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 hope to share our deep affection for this part of the earth with you through science, art, history, and culture. Each year, we offer a free version of the Gold Beam, at locations in and around the East Mojave, and a deluxe, full-color, annual publication for a \$20 donation to Friends of Avi Kwa Ame. There is also bonus article info, resources and online features available at [www.goldbeam.org](http://www.goldbeam.org).

## THE INTERCONNECTIONS IN AVI KWA AME ISSUE

WHAT UNSEEN SYSTEMS ARE CONNECTING EVERYTHING TOGETHER in this beautiful place we call Avi Kwa Ame National Monument? What delicate influences create a Joshua tree heavy with fruit, tie a family to their home, or introduce a new species to the landscape? How are we, visitors and locals, bound to each other— to earth and sky and community, and to this time and space?

Countless elements make up what we now know of as the East Mojave. In this issue, we explore the linkages between and within this marvelous ecosystem, map movements across the broader Southwestern region, look for pathways between cultures, stories and timelines, and describe a small portion of the endless chain of influence at work on this fascinating desert world.

The visual style for this issue (embodied in its full glory in our full-length color issue) is inspired by book design from the 1930s (that's almost 100 years ago, folks!), when text was straightforward, fonts were bold, and adventure books that romanticized the American desert west abounded, populated with colorized photos, line drawings and color block illustrations that evoked the wonders of the western landscape. We're pretty fond of this landscape too, and hope you enjoy this tribute.

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

THE GOLD BEAM IS THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF  
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The Gold Beam is published by Friends of Avi Kwa Ame, a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of the ecological, cultural, historic and recreational resources of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument. You can find out more about Friends of Avi Kwa Ame and support their efforts by visiting [friendsofavikwaame.org](http://friendsofavikwaame.org)

# FINDING AWE IN AVI KWA AME

BY MORRIGAN DeVITO  
*Illustration by Kyle Larson*



A SQUEAKY, RATTLING SONG pierces the clear sky in the Wee Thump Joshua Tree Wilderness. I peer between stiff clusters of yucca leaves until I see the singer perched in a Joshua tree. He is a woodpecker called a Northern Flicker, and his black bib and spotted belly rise and fall with each punch of his staccato song. At first he attracts a rival, who he descends on in fiery fury, black and red-streaked wings beating through the air until the stranger zips across the sprawling, prickly landscape. The flicker resumes his song, and this time a female flies over to join him. Without preamble, they mate quickly and part ways, a new pulse of life and death forming inside her. I forget myself in this conception, immersed in the lives of other beings.

Why does awe matter? Why try to describe it? The limitations of language entangle me, but the longing to share this feeling pulls me back to the blank page again and again. I can only circle back to writing after I've had months to sit with the image of flickers fighting and mating, blinking in and out of my memory while countless other lives were unfolding, unseen, at the edges of my awareness. I do not come to Avi Kwa Ame in search of awe specifically. But when the world seems duller, when my thoughts are louder than birdsong and wind-song, I know I must come to the open desert. Standing among ancient Joshua trees, blackbushes, and creosotes, awe flows through the blue pointillist sky, sweeping through my senses, slowing my breath and heartbeat to a present stillness.

One of the foundational scientific studies of awe by researchers Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt identifies this feeling as a sense of vastness, physical or mental, and a need for accommodation in our mind. I confront that need for accommodation on the blank page, where I try to invoke the awe I conceived in the desert—formless and shapeshifting in my mind. Many of the spaces and creatures in Avi Kwa Ame trigger this awe, and although the scientific study of awe is only about fifteen years old, Keltner and Haidt hypothesize that awe may be as old as our species, originating in song and

*AWE continued on page 13*

## HAPPY ANNIVERSARY, AVI KWA AME! THE MONUMENT'S SECOND YEAR.

WE HAVE MADE A LOT OF PROGRESS together since Avi Kwa Ame was designated as Nevada's fourth national monument on March 21st, 2023. There is now a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) monument manager, a tribal liaison, an interim management plan, and the official Monument Advisory Committee is scheduled to have its first meeting later this year.

Friends of Avi Kwa Ame is hosting monthly 1st Saturday events at Walking Box Ranch and regularly leading hikes and conservation activities around the monument. We are especially proud of the work being done to catalog the ecological and historical resources along the back roads within this 800 square mile area, which we are compiling into hiking and scenic driving route recommendations.

We also started several oral history projects, including one about the history of the monument campaign, and another in collaboration with the Fort Mojave Pipa Aha Macav Culture Society, on the history of the Fort Mojave Indian Boarding School, which you can read about in this publication. The return of Walking Box Ranch's original collection of furniture and tools, and the excellent volunteer work being done there each month to present additional interpretive information on the ranch and the monument is another reason to celebrate.

One of our most fun recent projects has been a collaboration

with the Las Vegas Astronomical Society to highlight the monument's dark night skies, and work toward becoming a designated Dark Sky Park. This project involves many components, including monitoring light pollution, assessing the monument's outdoor lighting, and best of all, getting together for multiple public dark sky events throughout the year.

While it feels wonderful to see the monument taking shape with more resources for the public, there is also much cause for concern as we enter our third year. Administration changes have reduced National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management staff, cut their spending budgets to \$1, and frozen or shut down federal grants relied upon by researchers. Congressional bills have been introduced that threaten the integrity of the Antiquities Act that was used to designate Avi Kwa Ame as a permanently protected public landscape, and recent executive orders have made it clear that national monuments are on the chopping block to be privatized or leased to corporate industry.

As our Avi Kwa Ame community continues to grow, and we celebrate science and biodiversity in our first-ever Avi Kwa Ame spring bioblitz event, this is also the time for everyone to stand up and speak out for the public lands we love and want to see preserved for future generations, so that monuments like Avi Kwa Ame can have many happy anniversaries to come.

# MOAB TO MOJAVE

## CONSERVATION CORRIDOR

### FEDERAL LANDS

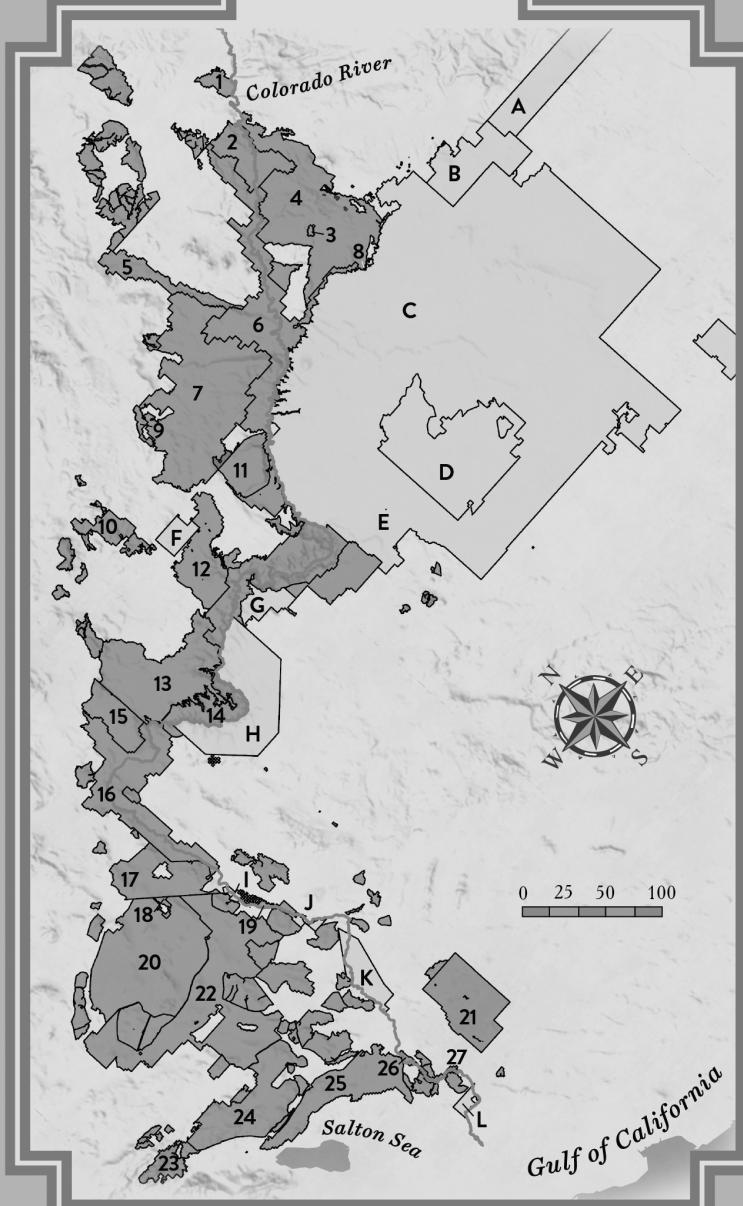
NATIONAL PARKS,  
NATIONAL MONUMENTS  
WILDLIFE REFUGES  
& NATIONAL PRESERVES

- 1 - ARCHES N.P.
- 2 - CANYONLANDS N.P.
- 3 - NATURAL BRIDGES N.M.
- 4 - BEARS EARS N.M.
- 5 - CAPITOL REEF N.P.
- 6 - GLEN CANYON N.R.A.
- 7 - GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE N.M.
- 8 - RAINBOW BRIDGE N.M.
- 9 - BRYCE CANYON N.P.
- 10 - ZION N.P.
- 11 - VERMILLION CLIFFS N.M.
- 12 - BAAJ NWAAVJO ITAH KUKVENI - ANCESTRAL FOOTPRINTS OF THE GRAND CANYON N.M.
- 13 - GRAND CANYON-PARASHANT N.M.
- 14 - GRAND CANYON N.P.
- 15 - GOLD BUTTE N.M.
- 16 - LAKE MEAD N.R.A.
- 17 - AVI KWA AME N.M.
- 18 - CASTLE MOUNTAINS N.M.
- 19 - HAVASU NATIONAL W.R.
- 20 - MOJAVE NATIONAL PRESERVE
- 21 - KOFA NATIONAL W.R.
- 22 - MOJAVE TRAILS N.M.
- 23 - SAND TO SNOW N.M.
- 24 - JOSHUA TREE N.P.
- 25 - CHUCKWALLA N.M.
- 26 - CIBOLA NATIONAL W.R.
- 27 - IMPERIAL NATIONAL W.R.

### TRIBAL NATIONS

TRIBAL LANDS ADJACENT TO CORRIDOR PROVIDE ADDITIONAL CONTINUITY IN THE LANDCAPE

- A - SOUTHERN UTE INDIAN TRIBE
- B - UTE MOUNTAIN TRIBE
- C - NAVAJO NATION
- D - HOPI TRIBE OF ARIZONA
- E - SAN JUAN SOUTHERN PAIUTE TRIBE
- F - KAIBAB BAND OF PAIUTE INDIANS
- G - HAVASUPAI TRIBE
- H - HUALAPAI INDIAN TRIBE
- I - FORT MOJAVE INDIAN TRIBE
- J - CHEMEHUEVI INDIAN TRIBE
- K - COLORADO RIVER INDIAN TRIBES
- L - QUECHAN INDIAN TRIBE



Data Source: ESRI, TomTom, GARMIN, FAO, NOAA, USGS, BLM, EPA, NPS, USFWS, CGIAR

**“THE LARGEST CORRIDOR OF PROTECTED LAND IN THE CONTINENTAL UNITED STATES”**

THE MOAB TO MOJAVE CORRIDOR covers nearly 18 million acres and stretches approx. 600 miles, from Bears Ears National Monument and Canyonlands National Park in Southeast Utah to Joshua Tree National Park and the newly established Chuckwalla National Monument in Southern California.

# HONORING LANDSCAPE INTERCONNECTIVITY

## THE MOAB TO MOJAVE CONSERVATION CORRIDOR.

BY KEVIN BEREND

**G**RÉETINGS from Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument, your neighbor a few hundred miles to the northeast. Did you know that our monuments are connected through a new landscape corridor?

Water, earth and air do not adhere to lines drawn on a map. Plants and animals do not respect conceptual boundaries, and they often require much larger landscapes than humans allow. As climate change continues to alter the Earth's ecosystems and the behavior of wildlife, planning for connectivity through the creation of landscape corridors can preserve the pathways that plants, animals and insects need as they travel northward in latitude and upward in elevation to reach more desirable temperatures. To stay healthy, landscapes require interconnection.

In my day job, I work as the Conservation Programs Manager for Grand Staircase Escalante Partners, and I spend my free time enjoying the beautiful landscape of Southern Utah and its surroundings, so I'm excited to see that the need for connectivity has led to the rise of landscape-scale conservation. Ecological corridors recognize the extensive natural interconnectivity of our nation's ecosystems, and prioritize large-scale connectivity across jurisdictional boundaries such as national parks and monuments.

Landscape-scale conservation includes working to reduce and mitigate pollution, create safe passage for wildlife across roads and fences, and ensure healthy riparian (streamside) habitats for fish, birds, and insect pollinators.

Such efforts are already underway in North America, including the well-known Yellowstone to Yukon corridor in the Rocky Mountains and the Algonquin to Adirondacks corridor in the northeast.

In January, as one of his last actions before leaving office, President Joe Biden signed an executive order establishing the Moab to Mojave Conservation Corridor (M2M), which spotlights landscape connectivity in the Southwest. The Moab to Mojave Corridor covers nearly 18 million acres and stretches approximately 600 miles, from Bears Ears National Monument and Canyonlands National Park in Southeast Utah to Joshua Tree National Park and the newly established Chuckwalla National Monument in Southern California. The corridor links five national parks with 12 national monuments, The Mojave National Preserve and Glen Canyon and Lake Mead

National Recreation Areas. According to the National Parks Conservation Association, it is the "largest corridor of protected land in the continental United States."

The M2M corridor already includes some of the most heavily visited tourist destinations in the country, but due to rapid population growth, the Colorado River and its sub-basins are experiencing some of the heaviest demand of any natural resources in the nation. As pressures for commercial and industrial development mount across this arid landscape, the connectivity of the greater Colorado River will be crucial to maintaining both biological integrity and human habitability.

For example, in the Southwest, big game such as mule deer, pronghorn, elk, and desert bighorn sheep undertake daily and seasonal migrations, navigating urban sprawl and frequently crossing treacherous roads and highways. Riparian ecosystems harbor the region's greatest biodiversity, and are crucial habitat for birds, fish, and rare plants. Riverscapes, therefore, demand attention as a whole to keep them healthy, rather than seeing them as a series of disconnected parts. By offering a framework for

land managers, tribal nations, non-profit partners and community groups to work holistically on creative solutions to the challenges of habitat connectivity, M2M can strengthen ecological links between public land units, and act as a crucial bridge to the future.

The Moab to Mojave corridor will also help preserve tribal sovereignty for the many Native American nations that call the Colorado River home. Much as nature does not adhere to arbitrary borders, the history and stories of native peoples weave a complex fabric that permeates ancestral territories across this entire landscape. For tribal nations who have been repeatedly stripped of land and rights—and for whom history is literally written into land itself—M2M provides an additional basis for the protection of cultural heritage sites within the context of the natural landscape.

Finally, the Moab to Mojave corridor seeks to promote wise commercial and industrial development, including housing, renewable energy projects, and oil & gas production. Since recreation is a major economic driver across the corridor's natural landscape, unobstructed viewsheds are one of its prized assets. Land-

*MOAB continued on page 11*



A photo of the Escalante River within Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument.  
Photograph by Kevin Berend.

SCHOOL continued from p. 1

*"They did not attend. They were forced. They didn't ask to go to these schools. My Aunt said, when they took the kids, they came and they just grabbed them. And when the parents tried to fight for them, they would beat them and say that this was for their doing."* — David Oechsner

From 1890 to 1931, there was a U.S. funded boarding school on the Arizona side of the Colorado River, south of Bullhead and north of Needles, on land which is now part of the Fort Mojave reservation. This school was in reality an internment camp for Native American children, who were taken forcibly from their homes, families and communities. The children were forced to adopt a foreign language, religion and customs, and punished if they spoke their language or practiced their own culture. This school was one of more than 500 US schools that abducted over 100,000 children in order to "kill the Indian, save the man," as quoted by Capt. Richard H. Pratt, who established the primary model of all early American Indian schools.

*"It was really impactful on my grandmother. Her family would hear the horses coming and so they would all run and hide. In fact, she went to the river at one point and dug a hole and put my mother and my aunt in there because she didn't want them taken."* — Charlotte Knox

By the 1880s, the U.S. reservation system was in full swing, and the Mojave, like people in tribal communities all over the country, had been held as prisoners, used as slave labor, and forced off of large portions of their lands. They were prevented from practicing their traditional ways of farming and hunting, but also excluded from the American economy, having to become dependent on government food rations and supplies from the Fort Mohave military installation. Then in 1883, Congress banned all ceremonies, dances, songs, and the practices of medicine persons, and gave authority to use force, imprison or withhold rations to stop Native American cultural practices, in an attempt to eradicate all aspects of native culture.

*"They didn't have enough to eat, or they would get oatmeal but it would be burnt, and that's all they had. If they found orange peelings or any kind of peelings they would all save those and soak them in water and eat them. All the kids tried to scrounge around and find whatever food they could. It wasn't a good experience for any of them."* — Mary Howe

By 1890, the Fort Mohave military installation was disbanded and the buildings used to house a new tool for subjugating the people of the area: the Fort Mohave Industrial School. Under a number of different names, this school operated until 1931, forty-one years later, and all Fort Mojave boys and girls between the ages of six and eighteen (some as young as four) were compelled to live at this school, or if the school was full to capacity at 250 students, to attend one of the other Indian boarding schools, far removed from their homelands.

*"I believe most or all of our elders who attended the school are all gone now to the spirit world. However, our parents and grandparents that went to the school would often talk about how life was living there. As for myself, I had uncles and aunts who were forced to go there. My mother was supposed to be there also but the school was already filled up so the government sent her and others to a Catholic School in Tucson, AZ, while others were sent to other places all over the United States. There were other tribes that went to the school also, like the Southern Moapa Paiutes, the Walapais, some Hopis and Navajos. That is just a very small*

*part of the history of the school -- not to mention many, many kids died there. To this day we do not let anyone know where their graveyard is located due to vandalism and grave robbers."*

— Paul Jackson Jr.

While the official focus was on education, life in the Fort Mojave Indian School was similar to a prison labor camp. Conditions were harsh and food was scarce, sometimes rotten or infested with bugs. The children cleaned the facilities, worked in the laundry, helped in the kitchens, dug ditches, and maintained fields of crops.

*"She said that they marched them in lines, and that a lot of the older ones would take care of the younger ones, protect them. She said they slept in the upstairs of the dormitory, and she said it was cold. She said they really didn't have enough blankets. The conditions overall were somewhat harsh."* — Diane Montoya

Besides the basic instruction of reading, writing, and arithmetic (all entirely in English to children who knew only their native languages, after a US law passed in 1887), the schools focused on teaching manual labor trades. Girls learned house cleaning, laundry, cooking, baking, sewing, and serving, while boys practiced carpentry, agriculture and other hard labor activities. Parents were largely prevented from visiting their children during the school year, and students were stopped from returning home in the summer, when special "trade programs" would transport them to places like Southern California, New York and Chicago to work as domestic servants or farm laborers, with the money made going back to the school.

*"My late grandma was there and then they sent her to Los Angeles, because I guess they did that for the girls to go get training in housekeeping and things like that. So that's where she went, to Los Angeles and I guess then they relocated them over there."* — Angie Alvarado

Children were required to wear militaristic uniforms and adopt new English-language names and surnames. They were punished if they used their clan names or Mojave nicknames. Their new names were chosen at random from a list of surnames that included those of their teachers and school officials, the military personnel of the former fort, and US presidents and generals. Some names, like the surname Jackson, were named for political leaders who inflicted some of the worst atrocities on native communities in US history.

*"And then when they adjusted and they learned the English, -- then they still were treated bad. They had to do all the work. They were the ones that were cleaning up in the yard. And they're the ones that cleaned up the buildings. They were like slaves."* — Wanda Jenkins

Children who couldn't speak English were punished if they spoke the only language they knew, and they were forbidden to touch or hug each other, even siblings. Students were severely punished or tortured if caught violating any of the cultural rules, and these punishments included beatings, hair-cutting, being tied up, being locked in cupboards or basements, additional hard labor, and going without food. In some cases, at the Fort Mojave school and elsewhere, severe punishments and physical, mental and sexual abuses of power on the part of those in charge resulted in children being murdered. Children also died from malnutrition and neglect, injuries, and infectious diseases. They were buried on the school grounds or hidden in graves in the nearby mountains, never to be returned

to their families for a traditional funeral. In some cases, families were not even informed that their child had died. Mojave tribal members practice traditional cremation ceremonies to ensure the proper travel of the deceased to the afterlife, and these children being buried without consultation or ceremony remains painful to the community to this day. Children from other tribes were also prevented from returning home for proper funerals with their communities.

*"My grandmother went when she was six years old, taken from her aunt and her uncle and they were told if the children learned and were educated that we would get our land back. So that's what they were told. We heard her talk about the mistreatment of the children and how there was corporal punishment and sexual abuse and physical abuse and emotional abuse. And they really couldn't do anything because they were so young, they were children. Some of the older ones tried to help them the best they could." — Mary Howe*

One of the most hated practices of all was the cutting of the children's hair. Upon arrival, children were scrubbed, their heads doused with kerosene and hair cut short. While this also minimized the spread of lice, the main goal of this exercise was to erase the traditional custom of long hair and braids. To the Mojave and many other tribes, women's and men's hair was always kept long, and only cut as an act of mourning. To cut another's hair without permission is an especially egregious act.

*"We interviewed several elders, me and a friend, in college, and I remember the former chairman and his sister-in-law, they attended the school, and I remember him saying that his grandparents hid him, they didn't want him to go to the school, so they hid him, but one day, he had to go. His sister-in-law said she remembered how they were very strict, and she said, I'll never forget (and by this time she was in her late 70s) but she said, they would say, I'll shake you till your teeth rattle down your throat." — Christina Otero*

The abuses of power and the confusion that ensued from it during the Fort Mojave Indian School period has had deep and lasting effects on the Mojave community. While attending the school, children, their siblings and their parents were often assigned different surnames from one another. Community members no longer grew up knowing their clan names or who their relatives were, and it was not until the second half of the 20th century, when the Pipa Aha Culture Society was formed, that the Fort Mojave community was able to start piecing together the history of their kinship relationships again, with the help of a forgotten school ledger.

*"I'm proud that we Mojave have a unique culture, and that I'm able to pass it on to those that are younger than me, like those who taught me. It makes me proud that I'm still continuing what we thought was once lost, and still finding new things that I can bring out to the new generations." — Bianca Otero*

Today's Mojave youth now come to the Pipa Aha Macav Cultural Center, newly opened in 2021, to learn about their clans, their family histories and their traditional stories. They also come to learn more about the Mojave language, which was almost lost forever, but is now also being taught to kids in Fort Mojave schools. Much more work still needs to be done in the coming years to continue to protect and honor the language and culture of the Mojave people.

*"I do believe children should know about this. I think they need*

*to know about the whole continuum from the creation point to now. And to understand who we are and appreciate our home. We're very fortunate that at least we're still within the range of our original homelands—you know, that's pretty significant. A lot aren't. And that's what we're working on now through our cultural and tribal values and language and way of life ." — Diane Montoya*

The Fort Mojave Indian School was closed in 1931, along with a number of other Native American schools, after the US changed its policies. Native American boarding schools continue to be an educational option, but families now have the right to choose whether to send their children away from their communities or keep them at home. This fundamental right did not come about until 1978 when Congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act. The second half of the 20th century also saw other long-overdue rights. The Indian Self-Determination and Assistance Act of 1975 enabled tribal nations to establish their own community schools and take over the management of education programs. This meant that not only were communities given more choices of how to educate their children, but also their children's education could include learning their traditional language, culture, and history. In the late 1970s, the right of native communities to openly practice their religious ceremonies, dances, and songs was also finally restored, as well as the right to speak their own languages.

*"All kids should know about this and what really happened because they have to know the truth. They have to know the truth of what all Native Americans went through because we don't have the only boarding school here. There are others every place else and they need to know that. You can't just keep it hidden—they have to know." — Angie Alvarado*

In the five decades since these more favorable laws, the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe and native communities across the country have been working hard to repair the damage done from the Indian boarding school era. Just a few months ago, in October 2024, President Biden visited the Gila River Indian Reservation, outside of Phoenix, Arizona, to deliver an address to all Native Americans: "I formally apologize as President of the United States of America for what we did," Biden said. "It's long overdue." "The federal Indian boarding school policy, the pain it has caused, will always be a significant mark of shame, a blot on American history." The president's apology, along with the work that his Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland led to officially document the damage, is shedding some light on this dark period of history that has been largely swept under the rug until now. With that light, in Fort Mojave, up and down the Colorado River, in sovereign tribal nations, and all across America, may there be more healing for families in the years to come.

*"One of the terms that we have is "Mojave Strong". And we are, you know, because of what we went through. I'm really, really proud of our people to have that strength to continue on. That's what we try to bring to our children when we get together, like at our Mojave Days festival, when we bring all our culture together -- our singing, our dancing, our beadwork, all the things that we enjoy doing. That's a part of us that was not taken away. And it's wonderful to just be together, to love one another, and to continue growing together, to keep that strength within us. We are still going, still going strong." — Wanda Jenkins*



# FROM STARDOM TO SAGEBRUSH: REX BELL'S NEVADA LEGACY

BY N. RON SAFRAN



*A movie still of Rex Bell. Walking Box Ranch Photograph Collection, 1880-1979. PH-00346. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Nevada.*

**I**N THE SWELTERING SUMMER OF 1931, as Rex Bell's Lincoln Roadster kicked up dust along the primitive road to Searchlight, Nevada, a transformation was about to take place. Behind the wheel, Rex, known to millions as the star of their favorite Western films, knew himself to be a man ready for reinvention. The Hollywood movie sets, with their painted backdrops and choreographed action, lay behind him. Ahead stretched acres of raw, unexplored Nevada desert—where no cameras rolled, and no director would yell “cut.” At last, he was not merely playing a part.

This article is a portrait of a cowboy film star who pursued his passion to be a real cowboy, businessman, and politician. Rex Bell's life was a journey where his love for Nevada would catalyze his success in many ventures and help forge the state's modern identity.

## SUCCESS IN THE WESTERNS

George Francis Beldam Jr. embodied the intersection of Hollywood glamor and frontier authenticity that helped define Nevada's unique character. His contributions as one of the first prominent characters in Nevada represent far more than a simple career change. They embody the very essence of what Nevada offered in those transformative years: the chance to shed prescribed roles and write one's own story in the vast emptiness of the desert.

Beldam was born in Chicago in 1903. He and his family moved to Hollywood in the 1920s, where his rugged good looks and natural charisma as well as his skill with horses made him the perfect fit for the booming Western film genre. He was soon offered a contract with Fox studios. His name, however, did not have the right cowboy ring to it, so he chose the stage name “Rex Bell”. Soon, he was a recognizable face in dozens of Westerns, including “The Cowboy Kid” (1928) and “They Had to See Paris” (1929). However, the film that would change his trajectory was “True to the Navy” (1930), a romance where he starred alongside the vivacious “It Girl” of the silent film era, Clara Bow.

## THE COWBOY BEHIND THE SCREEN

Rex Bell's life took a dramatic turn when he met Clara, sparking a whirlwind romance that led them to elope in Las Vegas in 1931. Their marriage marked the beginning of a new chapter that would leave its mark forever on Nevada. Now intertwined with Hollywood's most beloved silent film star, Bell's fame reached new heights, with one newspaper noting that the “former melodrama star and husband of Clara Bow, [had] won the unanimous praise of theater audiences” (News Observer, 1934). While he was often introduced in the tabloids merely as “Clara Bow's husband,” Bell began creating a reputation of his own and building his bona fides into something remarkable at the location that was eventually to become known as Walking Box Ranch.

The name came from the box-shaped motion picture cameras used in Hollywood; the 400,000 acre-ranch in Searchlight, Nevada became a bridge between two worlds—where the glamor of the entertainment industry met the grit of frontier life. Here, Bell would live the dream that Westerns are made of. “It is a great relief to get away from Hollywood,” Clara Bow had told the Las Vegas Age in 1933, “I can really feel free and enjoy myself. I love the desert and hope to spend every available day on the ranch.” Nevada represented respite for Clara, but for Rex, it represented that and something more—opportunity.

While Clara sought refuge from the relentless publicity and litigation that had nearly broken her spirit, Rex saw the potential to transform his Hollywood persona into something authentic and lasting. Raising his cattle, riding horses, and tending to their rock gardens, Rex found himself and his purpose in being a real cowboy. Though Clara subsequently retired from acting, Rex continued to travel back to California over the years to star in dozens of productions from “Broadway to Cheyenne” (1932) and “Idaho Kid” (1936), to his final film “The Misfits” (1961), also starring Marilyn Monroe. Even with frequent visits to Hollywood, the allure of the Mojave Desert prevailed and home would perpetually mean Nevada to Rex Bell.

Dr. Michael Green, UNLV History Professor, notes this crucial distinction. “Rex Bell and Clara Bow were really the first, or at least most prominent, Hollywood stars to play a role of any significance in Nevada. This was before gambling spread widely and big-name entertainment became part of the equation.” Their Spanish Colonial-Revival home quickly became a celebrity retreat during a time when nearby Las Vegas had a population of only 5,000. Western film icons like William “Hopalong Cassidy” Boyd, Red Rider, Roy Rogers, and other Hollywood luminaries like Clark Gable and Carole Lombard found their way to Walking Box Ranch. Though the location was obscure for the time, for many years Walking Box was Nevada's second-largest ranch, playing an integral role in the state's economic development. This stands in stark contrast to what originally drew Bell and other stars to Nevada—the allure of privacy and simplicity—as opposed to the bright lights that define the region today.

## BUSINESS MEETS NEVADA BRANDING

As the pair embraced their ranching lifestyle over the years, raising their two sons Rex Jr. and George, Rex's entrepreneurial spirit could not be tamed. He pursued many new ventures in Nevada's relative infancy, launching Rexco Inc. in 1944. Under the Rexco umbrella were multiple souvenir shops in Las Vegas and Reno, as well as the clothing label, Walking Box Brand—a tangible blend of Western authenticity and show-business flair. UNLV Professor and fashion historian Deirdre Clemente explains “[The brand] was an extension of Rex Bell's celebrity and it capitalized on a movement in American culture at the time that was celebrating Western clothing and a Western aesthetic to not



just the West, but to the country at large."

The distinctive western wear featured designer Viola Grae's hand-embroidered desert flora and fauna, celebrating Nevada's natural heritage. "The craftsmanship made them great," Dr. Clemente emphasizes. "A lot of the motifs of the clothing are cacti and flora that are specific to Nevada, so [Bell] really did make sure that we spoke to the environment from Nevada." Rex Bell's Western Wear store on Fremont Street became a landmark in early Las Vegas, offering not just clothing but a taste of authentic Western lifestyle and a way visitors can take home a piece of Nevada.

#### POLITICAL ASPIRATIONS UNFOLD

As Clara Bow retreated further from the public eye, Rex Bell's new businesses expanded, and in turn, his profile rose. Marking yet another evolution, Rex's natural charisma and genuine connection to Nevada's people led him into politics. This transition was exciting for him. However, being thrust back into the limelight took a toll on Clara, contributing to their split in the mid-40s (the couple never divorced but lived separate lives). When Bow moved back to California, Bell maintained his passion for Nevada and his political presence continued to flourish. He was a leader in the Republican party and active in the Nevada Chamber of Commerce and Boy Scouts. Most prominently, Bell served as Lieutenant Governor from 1954 until his death in



*Left: an interior view of Bell's westernwear store. Right: Rex (on the right) in front of a hat display. Walking Box Ranch Photograph Collection, 1880-1979. PH-00346. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Nevada.*

1962, bringing his characteristic authenticity to public service. As he told the Nevada State Journal in 1954, "Nevada needs leadership that understands both its heritage and its future potential. I've lived that heritage, and I believe in our future."

"Fewer celebrities entered politics themselves when he start-

ed out," Dr. Green explains. "His first campaign was more than 20 years before Ronald Reagan ran for governor of California. It's also worth remembering that in the era in which he was part of Nevada politics, it was easier and possible to know a lot of constituents by name and to meet much of the voting populace. He liked that part of the political game and the people liked him." Bell's approach to politics was distinctly Nevadan in that it was practical and personable. Because he truly "walked the walk" at Walking Box Ranch, he had great appeal to Nevada's voters.

"His business helped reduce any distance between a big-name celebrity and the average Nevadan, making Bell even more likable." Green notes that even Democrats would comment on what a nice guy he was regardless of his party affiliation, an incredible feat by today's standards. His pervasiveness was cut short, however, in 1962, when Bell suffered a fatal heart attack while filing his candidacy for Governor. Dr. Green reflects poignantly, "He had a better chance than anyone in his party did of defeating the incumbent, Democrat Grant Sawyer. Had Rex Bell lived, it's interesting to ponder how far he might have gone."

#### REX BELL'S ENDURING IMPACT

Bell's influence on Nevada extended far beyond his lifetime. His vision of Nevada as a place where Western heritage could coexist with modern progress helped shape the state's development philosophy. Today, the Rex Bell Elementary School in Las Vegas bears his name, and the Walking Box Brand clothing line remains a collectible that encapsulates the spirit of Nevada's Wild West—an era that is rapidly fading as modernization reshapes the landscape. Perhaps offering us the most insights today into Bell and Bow's past is Walking Box Ranch. As part of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument, their special retreat and many of their belongings have been preserved, serving as a living laboratory for cultural research, and further emphasizing Bell's significance to Nevada. Artifacts from the lives of Rex Bell and Clara Bow also reside at the Nevada State Museum, The Clark County Museum, the Searchlight Museum and UNLV.

In the collection of artifacts from Walking Box Ranch is one of the most personal and lasting symbols of Rex Bell's connections to Nevada—his cream-felt cowboy hat and case. Signed by Rex, Clara Bow, and their movie star friends, this hat is covered in handwritten messages that echo Rex's warm, genuine

relationships with those he met in Nevada and beyond. The hat stands as a timeless memento of Bell's impact, memorializing the friendships and legacy he left in the state he loved, with autographs including; "Best Wishes Rex Bell, Clara Bow," "The Westerner," "Tonto, 'Getum up Scout,'" "The Lone Ranger 'Hi Ho Silver,'" "Little Beaver 'You Betum, Red Ryder,'" "California Carlson," and "Hopalong Cassidy."

The stories of Rex Bell's many roles and connections, born out of the unlikely town of Searchlight, serve as a beacon of inspiration and guidance: in

Nevada, one need not choose between preserving the past and embracing progress, between publicity and simplicity, or between dreaming and doing. As Rex Bell demonstrated, it is possible to embody all these facets and more, making life's journey far more compelling than any Hollywood script. \*



*BIRDS continued from p. 1*

learn from the joy, peace and connections with their surroundings that they demonstrate on a spring day.

From the center of Searchlight to the farthest boundaries of Avi Kwa Ame, mourning doves, black-throated sparrows, great-tailed grackles, and Gambel's quail are easily the most common and widespread of all the birds found in the monument. Mourning doves are perhaps the most prolific bird in North America. They aren't difficult to find, as their characteristically simple gray-brown plumage with black spots on the wings, and their long tails make them easily identifiable. Their



Illustration by Kim Garrison Means

name suggests a measure of sorrow but is appropriately likened to the soft descending coo of their song. While exploring the monument, one might also hear a sharp whistle of their wings as they speed like bullets overhead.

Black-throated sparrows are undoubtedly the most common bird in Avi Kwa Ame; they are one of the most striking birds in the Mojave, known for their bold black throat, contrasted by two white facial stripes: one above the eye and the other below on an otherwise soft gray-brown body. These sparrows sing like tinkling bells. They nest in all sorts of low shrubs, cacti, or other dense and well-protected plants, but can be seen foraging on the ground for seeds, which are the primary source of their water. Washes often serve as a bountiful year-round cache for seeds that gather there from rain and wind for the black-throated sparrow to survive on through times of drought.

The great-tailed grackle is a cacophonous bird often found in noisy groups, creating a harsh and audible chorus for nearby observers to enjoy. As their name suggests, they have a large, broad tail: in flight it looks as though it slows their momentum, making it difficult to fly, but the tail's main purpose is for attracting mates.

One of the most endearing birds is the Gambel's quail. They are most often spotted scurrying along in trailing family groups of up to 15 newly hatched chicks behind their trusted parent. There is safety in numbers for these birds. When they hatch, Gambel's quail leave no kin behind. As the first chick begins to escape its egg, it lets out light pips, signaling its brothers and sisters to follow suit. The chicks then peck small windows in their shell, and patiently wait for all their siblings to signal their readiness. And then all at once, the dozen or so chicks break through their shells at once, taking in their first breaths, ready to run.

Walking Box Ranch lies in the heart of the monument, west of Searchlight and just south of the impressive Wee Thump Wilderness. The ranch has stood strong since the early 1930s, when Clara Bow and Rex Bell moved in, but an older chronicle exists of the birds that now inhabit the eaves structures there. A likely sighting at the ranch is the Say's phoebe, they're quite familiar with man-made structures, as they rely on overhanging cover from roofs for nesting. A fly-catching species, Say's are small, gray birds with cinnamon bellies and a pale gray throat. They can be seen as they sally from fence posts and low bushes to catch their insect prey.

Flickers, on the other hand, are obliged to nest in cavities, the large and dense Joshua tree forest surrounding Walking Box is their most suitable home. In Avi Kwa Ame, it's possible to see two different species of flicker: northern and gilded. The two birds are very similar in appearance, with hefty, slightly curved bills, and large bodies covered in black spots or bars. As the name suggests, gilded flickers are bright yellow under the wings and tail, while northern flickers display rich, orange-red hues. The flicker makes its presence known through a distinctive kyeer call. Catching a glimpse of a gilded flicker is a rare and precious encounter; like finding gold in the desert.

The cavities carved by flickers and woodpeckers are also the perfect home for the smallest falcon in North America, the American kestrel. A slate-blue and rufous colored bird, kestrels can be seen along highways or in the open shrublands of the desert on a high perch, or while hovering in midair, almost perfectly still, as they scout the land for grasshoppers, rodents, or small birds. Soaring higher over the valley, one can spot the red-tail hawk as it flies aloft columns of hot air while scanning the landscape for prey. In flight one

can see its white wings with dark shoulders and a prominent, rufous red tail. When the light hits its tail just right, it seems to glow with a bright flame.

People don't often appreciate the flat, far-reaching desert that is the Piute Valley; just south of Searchlight, it's woven with sandy washes lined with creosote and cholla, perfect habitat for dozens of species. Phainopepla are the romantics of the desert. A glossy black bird with white patches on its wings, phainopepla evolved closely with desert mistletoe and even display a stunning red eye to match the plant's quintessential berries. To most birds, the vibrant red berries are toxic, but to phainopepla, it's a primary food source high in nutrients. They ingest the fruit and deposit the seed in acacia or mesquite across the desert, ensuring a secure food source and nesting sites in years to come. Curiously, phainopepla exhibit a great deal of flexibility in mating behavior. Nesting in the desert in the early spring, mating in the higher elevation oak-scrub woodlands in summer, or possibly both, or neither, depending on resource quality and conditions.

A vocal species, ash-throated flycatchers move into the valley during the spring, taking advantage of the abundance of flying insects. Ash-throated are small songbirds, with a characteristically ashy gray throat, a darker gray crest, long cinnamon tail, and a muted yellow belly. They blend in well with their perches, but are curious about people and will occasionally perch near a hiker to investigate.

\* \* \*

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# NATURE'S PERFECT PAIR: THE JOSHUA TREE & THE YUCCA MOTH

BY PAULA JACOBY-GARRETT

**I**N THE VAST, ARID LANDSCAPES OF THE MOJAVE DESERT, an unlikely partnership has flourished for millions of years between the visually arresting Joshua tree, with its shaggy branches and bold clusters of spiky leaves, and its pollinator, the small, unassuming, but infinitely interesting yucca moth. The mutually beneficial relationship between these two organisms is an extraordinary example of what ecologists call “coevolution,” where each species has evolved unique adaptations over time that benefit the other. The survival of each depends on its partner, and their delicate relationship offers a glimpse into the complex interconnections that shape desert ecosystems like those in Avi Kwa Ame National Monument.

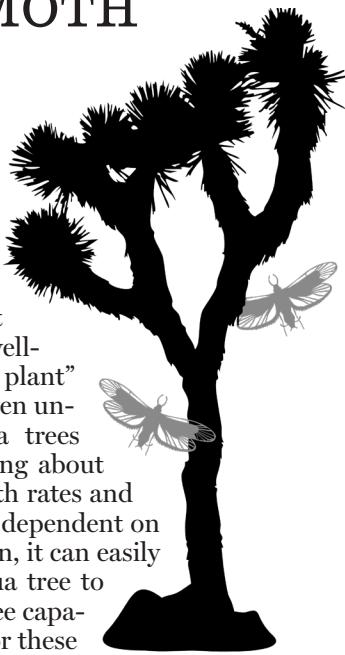
## THE JOSHUA TREE

There are over 70 species and subspecies of Yucca plants, including the Mojave yucca, the banana yucca, and the world-famous Joshua tree. Joshua trees (*Yucca brevifolia*) are unique to the Mojave Desert, where they stand as an iconic symbol of resilience and beauty. Named by Mormon settlers who thought the trees’ branches resembled the biblical prophet Joshua with his arms raised in prayer, these ancient plants are deeply rooted in desert culture and ecology. Ecologists estimate that the development of the Joshua tree as we know it dates back six million years, and over time, the tree has become specially adapted to withstand extreme heat, scarce water, and poor soil. Two subspecies of Joshua tree currently exist: *Yucca brevifolia brevifolia* found in the western portion of the Mojave, and *Yucca brevifolia jaegeriana*, found in the eastern portion, including in Avi Kwa Ame.

Joshua trees, particularly in the Wee Thump Wilderness area within the monument, are robust and create a dense desert forest habitat. They are essential to the desert ecosystem, providing shelter and food for many desert animals. The elevation in this area ranges from 4000-5000 feet, and with that higher elevation, cooler temperatures and more rainfall allow for healthy trees. Some Joshuas are estimated to be over 900 years old, with many being 30' or more in height. In fact, the term Wee Thump in the Southern Paiute language

means “Ancient Ones”, a fitting description of these elders.

Despite their robustness, Joshua trees are relatively fragile in their early stages. Seedlings need specific conditions to grow successfully, including sufficient rainfall, mild temperatures, well-drained soils, and usually a “nurse plant” to provide moisture and cover. Even under ideal circumstances, Joshua trees have a slow growth rate, averaging about half an inch annually. Both growth rates and flowering are highly variable and dependent on rainfall in the area. For this reason, it can easily take many decades for the Joshua tree to go from a seedling to a mature tree capable of flowering. Reproduction for these trees is especially challenging, as they rely on a single, specialized group of pollinators: yucca moths.



## THE YUCCA MOTH

Yucca moths are small, light, slim creatures. There are at least a dozen species (and likely more that are undescribed) belonging to the genera *Tegeticula*, *Parategeticula*, and *Prodoxus*. Amazingly, every different species of Yucca moth has evolved to mutually benefit a corresponding species or subspecies of Yucca. Two species, *Tegeticula synthetica* and *Tegeticula antithetica*, co-evolved alongside the Joshuas, with each moth corresponding to one of the two varieties of tree. *Tegeticula synthetica* is slightly larger and collaborates with the western Joshua tree, and *Tegeticula antithetica* is slightly smaller and collaborates with our eastern tree. Most scientific studies of Joshua tree pollination have only focused on the western trees, and *Tegeticula antithetica* was only discovered in 2013; its specific pollination of the eastern Joshua, *Yucca brevifolia jaegeriana*, was only confirmed in 2017!

*PERFECT PAIR* continued on page 12

*MOAB* continued from p. 5

scape-scale connectivity allows for preservation of the natural aesthetic experience that local communities and tourists alike hold dear. This does not mean blocking all development; rather, the recognition of the larger landscape corridor can be an additional tool to help bring communities into the decisions about the lands that affect the shape of their lives and livelihoods.

The goal of landscape-scale conservation is to find balance in how we engage with the land for short-term and long-term benefits that aid both

humans and the environment. Designation of national monuments, such as Baaj-Nwaavjo I’tah Kukveni and Avi Kwa Ame, both established recently by President Biden, focus on protecting land that is historically, culturally and ecologically important to local communities and the nation. Designation of the Moab to Mojave corridor does not preclude existing land uses such as grazing, hunting, OHV use, or rockhounding. These issues are discussed extensively with local communities as part of the designation and management plan process, and reflect

the wants and needs of each area’s residents.

It remains to be seen how the Moab to Mojave corridor will be implemented on the ground, but it does begin to orient federal policy toward a broader, more inclusive view of what public lands are for and how best to steward them. This landscape-scale concept may also help galvanize support across its geography among nonprofit partners and the general public, allowing greater cooperation on shared conservation initiatives and goals in the future.

I was lucky enough to visit Avi Kwa Ame last November, when I camped among Joshua trees at the Wee Thump Wilderness and hiked through a rugged, narrow canyon. Though the views were different from Utah, I was reminded of the timeless continuity of water, rock, and life across this vast desert. I invite you to visit Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and experience another part of this boundaryless landscape for yourself! \*

**PERFECT PAIR** continued from p.11

Unlike most generalist moths that feed on the nectar of many different types of plants (and inadvertently pollinate flowers as they do so), both species of Joshua tree yucca moths have a unique and highly specialized relationship with their type of Joshua tree. The eastern yucca moth is the only species easily capable of pollinating the flowers of the eastern Joshua tree, and the tree, in turn, is the only place where the yucca moths can reproduce. This exclusivity is rare in nature and forms the backbone of their mutually dependent relationship.

The life cycle of the yucca moth is perfectly synchronized with the flowering cycle of the Joshua tree. When the Joshua tree's waxy, creamy-white flowers bloom in early spring, female yucca moths emerge from their underground pupae and seek out these blossoms. Here, the moths have an essential job to perform, one that no other insect can do.

The Joshua tree's flowers, with their white color, strong scent and tubular shape, are uniquely adapted to attract only yucca moths. Other pollinators, like bees or butterflies, are not interested in the flowers, as they do not offer nectar. This exclusion ensures that only yucca moths are responsible for pollination, strengthening the bond between the two species. Yucca moths have similarly evolved to pollinate their specific Joshua tree. Their specialized structures allow them to carry and deposit pollen in a way that other insects cannot replicate. In the few weeks that the moths live, they do not eat, focusing instead on finding other moths around the Joshua tree flowers with which to mate, and then depositing their fertilized eggs in the flowers' ovaries.

### POLLINATION

The pollination ritual of the yucca moth is remarkably complex. Upon finding a Joshua tree flower, a female moth collects pollen by scraping it into a small ball with specialized tentacle structures on her face—a trait unique to yucca moths. She then flies to another flower on a different Joshua tree to deposit the pollen. This behavior ensures cross-pollination, a rare phenomenon among insects, as most simply gather pollen incidentally while feeding.

Once at the new flower, the moth carefully places her pollen ball onto the plant's stigma (the flower's female reproductive part), initiating fertilization. In an extraordinary act of precision, she then deposits her eggs directly into the flower's ovary. This placement allows the hatching larvae to feed on developing seeds while leaving enough seeds for the Joshua tree to spread. The mutual adaptations between tree and moth go even further; the thickness of the flower stile leading to the flower's ovary exactly match up with the length of its companion moth's ovipositor (the long, knife-like appendage that cuts through the ovary wall and makes depositing the eggs possible), allowing the moths to successfully implant their eggs in the most advantageous part of the ovary, and making viable cross-species pollination between Joshua trees and their non-partner yucca moths extremely rare.

There is a delicate balance at play in the relationship between plant and animal here—if the moth lays too many eggs, they could consume all the seeds, reducing the tree's ability to reproduce. There is also evidence that the Joshua tree has evolved the ability to ascertain how many eggs have been laid in each flower ovary, and if that number is too high, the tree rejects that flower all together, rather than putting its energy into developing it for the sole benefit of the moth larvae. This relationship, with all of its checks and balances, has ensured that both the tree and the moth benefit from this interaction.

The tree and the moths also seem to have evolved ways to communicate with one another. The yucca moth's mature larvae emerge from the Joshua tree seedpod that gave them food and shelter during the first part of their lives, and make their way down to the desert floor below (one USGS researcher has witnessed them jumping from

the trees en masse), where they burrow into the sandy soil. In good years, when trees are preparing to flower in the spring, the yucca moths somehow receive a message from the tree so they know when it's time to emerge as moths and begin the process anew.

### CHALLENGES AND CONSERVATION EFFORTS

The relationship between the Joshua tree and the yucca moth is a testament to nature's resilience and interconnectedness. This mutually beneficial partnership has weathered millions of years of environmental changes and continues to define the Mojave Desert's unique ecosystem. However, as human impact on the planet increases, this ancient relationship faces unprecedented challenges. Climate change, habitat loss, and human activities have placed unprecedented pressure on Joshua tree populations, and now endanger the survival of both the trees and their pollinator partners.

Climate change is the most significant threat to this delicate partnership, as Joshua trees require specific conditions to reproduce and grow, including winter freezes that help germinate seeds and rainfall to sustain young trees. Rising temperatures and prolonged droughts in the Mojave Desert make it harder for Joshua trees to survive. Recent studies predict that Joshua trees may lose up to 90% of their current range by the end of the century without intervention. As Joshua trees decline, so does habitat for yucca moths. Without enough trees to provide food and a place for egg-laying, moth populations are also at risk. This loss could also trigger a domino effect, affecting numerous other species of plants, animals, insects and birds that rely on Joshua trees for habitat and resources.

Researchers are working to find ways to protect both the Joshua tree and the yucca moth from environmental threats, and studying these organisms to better understand how they work together and what they need to be successful is key. Places such as Wee Thump Wilderness Area in Avi Kwa Ame National Monument play a crucial role in conserving large populations of Joshua trees and promoting public awareness of the species' ecological importance. Research into transplanting and cultivating Joshua trees at higher altitudes with cooler temperatures is underway to help the species adapt to climate change.

In the end, the Joshua tree and the yucca moth remind us that survival often depends on cooperation. Protecting one means protecting the other, and in doing so, we help preserve the intricate web of life that makes our world so diverse and resilient. It is also a reminder of how important places like Avi Kwa Ame National Monument are in maintaining the interconnectedness of the greater Mojave ecosystem that so many organisms call home. ♦



Buckhorn Cholla, Compare with Actual Buck Horns

**CACTUS CORNER:** Buckhorn cholla (*Cylindropuntia acanthocarpa*) is an open and branching, woody cactus of the Mojave, Sonoran and Colorado deserts that can grow over 7 feet tall. Their forked branches are a favorite of nesting birds, and in spring they are topped with large, yellow to crimson flowers. New growth tips are tender and can be roasted and eaten like asparagus or dried and stewed.

*AWE continued from p. 3*

storytelling. We created awe, and awe created us. This feeling, difficult as it is to define and describe, courses through our mythology in cross-cultural themes of creation, destruction, and rebirth in nature. We are reminded of our smallness when we face the cosmos, wild animals, thunderstorms, floods, and fires, to name a few.

Avi Kwa Ame is one place where we can experience the awe that shaped our species. A friend and I come to one of Avi Kwa Ame's scars at a burn site from the 2023 York Fire. Wind pounds the charred skeletons of burnt Joshua trees, and only our crunching footsteps break through its unrelenting voice. The Joshua trees are not fire-adapted, and as our world becomes hotter and drier, these woodlands are more vulnerable to fires like this. The yellow heads of desert marigolds stipple the earth, poking in and out among the dead. I bend over a singed barrel cactus, its blackened spots like dots on a Northern Flicker's breast. Has she laid her eggs now? Will her children flit through this hot, burnt land?

Those fallen Joshua trees will not regrow. The universe circles on and on with or without them— with or without us. Awe reminds

us of this truth, though our sense of self may not always like it. The word “awe” comes from Old Norse “agi” and Old English “ege”, both words conveying feelings of terror and dread. But we must know these feelings are good for us, because so much of the American land conservation movement was built on the foundation of protecting landscapes that invoke awe. This appreciation goes back to transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau who sought “the sublime” in American wilderness. Inspired by the Romantic movement of European literature, art, and philosophy, which often portrayed the sublime as experiences of beauty with hints of divine terror in nature, American transcendentalism carved out a unique nature philosophy emphasizing wilderness as places to experience awe, and therefore worthy of protection.

Early southwest nature writers like Mary Hunter Austin and John C. Van Dyke sought to portray awe borne from the desert, conceiving it beneath the milky way in the company of coyotes, cotton-tails, and quails. “Go as far as you dare in the heart of this lonely land, you cannot go so far that life and death are not before you,” Austin writes in Land of Little Rain. When I am in awe of the same cycles

Austin witnessed, I am not alone in grappling for the right language. “There is no tale or text or testimony to be tortured out of the blue sky,” writes Van Dyke. “It is a splendid body of color; no more.”

The southwest was different for Austin and Dyke, who wrote in the early 1900s. Although they too faced many uncertainties, today our reality is shaped by impending scarcity, loss, and uncertainty of a different kind— megadrought, wildfires, bird declines, habitat loss, hotter temperatures... does awe still matter in this environmental reckoning? I return to the Wee Thump Wilderness one autumn night when I am lost in this question. I wonder if coming here is just a distraction from the work that needs to be done to protect our desert. I settle in, standing at a crossroads between the setting sun and the rising full moon. I breathe the dry air in and out for six seconds each, turning to the last light on my exhale and to the moon on my inhale. Black-throated Sparrows twitter, unseen. As the moon climbs higher and higher, I kneel, holding myself. Saturn, Venus, Polaris. Creosote, blackbrush, yucca. Too many Joshua trees to count. The moonlight penetrates— I cry, pouring more salt into the earth. What's left is stillness. Presence.

Awe is a conception between ourselves and the world. What is born is openness. Keltner and Haidt have found that those who experience awe also feel more interconnection, gratitude, and wonder in their daily lives. When we carry the landscape of awe inside ourselves, we are never alone. If Avi Kwa Ame had not been protected through the hard work and advocacy of so many people, there would be one less place to come to. I carry Avi Kwa Ame back with me to Las Vegas in my body and memory. There are Northern Flickers and full moons in Las Vegas, too.

Somewhere in Avi Kwa Ame, a beavertail cactus blooms in the spring sunshine. Opening twenty-four fuchsia flowers as bright as flames, the cactus beckons pollinators to come. I peer into one flower. Within its petals, a dozen tiny red-and-black beetles teem and twitch between the anthers, spreading white pollen with each step. One crawls on top of another and they mate slowly. Soon, their children will hatch and crawl through more cactus blooms. Soon, this flower will wilt and the cactus will beckon new creatures with its sweet fruit. Perhaps the beetles will be food for flickers. Again I forget myself, immersed in the lives of other beings. ☀

## ASK THE PROFESSOR

*Professor Emeritus,*

*I am planning to take a Mojave road trip with my elderly neighbor and am trying to decide what to take. He's too old to drive now and so all the prep is up to me. He says I need one of those canvas waterbags that you hang on your headlight. What are those bags even for? Is it water for the car or for me? And is there anything else I need? — I.M. TRIPPIN*

Well for starters, it's been many years since cars had headlights that you could hang anything from. The bags you refer to functioned as canteens and were used to quench the thirst of everything from horses to people to cars. They have been largely usurped by plastic water bottles but if you want to be a 7th level Route 66 geek, purchase one on eBay and hang it out your window, or around your neighbor's neck.

*You can enlighten yourself with more sage advice from the professor in our full-length Gold Beam magazine.*



**PROFESSOR EMERITUS**  
*has opinions on all things desert-related, and shares them freely and frequently ad nauseum. Send queries to: searchlightgoldbeaminfo@gmail.com*

# THE CELESTIAL CARTOGRAPHER: UNCOVERING INTERCONNECTIONS IN THE NIGHT SKY

BY FRANCISCO SILVA

**T**HE NIGHT SKY has always been a source of fascination for humanity, inspiring cosmic drama and stories, legends, and cultural beliefs that span across time and civilizations. As we gaze up at the star-studded expanse of the night sky, it is fascinating to explore the threads that weave together seemingly disparate cultures and mythologies. Let us journey through time and space in this article, tracing the connections between ancient civilizations and the celestial ballet that has captivated human imagination for millennia.

I will speak of Ursa Major, the Great Bear. In modern times, it is often referred to as the Big Dipper, due to light pollution obscuring some of its stars. It is one of the most familiar and visible constellations in the Northern Hemisphere, and it's worth noting that Ursa Major has played a significant role in the different cultures of the human race.

The ancient Sumerians, who hailed from Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq), were keen observers of the night sky. They developed one of the earliest known systems of celestial division and associated various constellations with their myths and gods. The Sumerians saw a divine shepherd guiding his flock through the heavens, while the Babylonians interpreted Ursa Major as a cosmic wheel, symbolizing time and destiny's ever-turning hand.

Across Asia, Ursa Major has played pivotal roles in several culture's belief systems and traditions. In Chinese culture it is known as "The Great Chariot," symbolizing the celestial charioteer with a wheel formed by seven stars from Ursa Major. It also represents justice (Li) and wisdom (Zhi). In Japanese mythology, Ursa Major is linked to the story of the celestial weaver, who uses her loom to create the fabric of reality itself. In Vietnamese mythology, it is known as the The Big Rudder. The imagery of a rudder suggests a navigational tool, emphasizing the role of these stars in guiding travelers across the night sky.

In India, the constellation is associated with the Sapta Rishis, the seven sages. Meanwhile, in African cultures, Ursa Major is linked to the myth of the "Wild Hunt," where a group of celestial hunters, led by a charioteer, ride across the sky.

One fascinating thing about this group of stars is how many different cultures have seen a bear in them. Moreover, these interpretations often overlook the bear's short tail and depict a long tail instead, adding to the mystery of how these stories came to be, how they have been passed down from person to person, and how they have traveled and evolved into new tales.

Before the Romans named the constellation Ursa Major, the Greeks called it Aratos, meaning bear. Interestingly, this word also links with the English word 'Arctic,' referencing the northern regions where Zeus and Callisto's story unfolded. It is in the Arctic where Zeus discovers and seduces the beautiful young Callisto, and they have a kid called Arcas. When Zeus' wife, the goddess Juno, finds out, she tries to punish Callisto and Arcas, but Zeus protects them by disguising them as bears and placing them in the heavens.

In the Americas, many indigenous stories include Ursa Major as a bear. Inuit groups saw a bear in the constellation, with the handle representing its tail. In Miemac and Algonquin mythology, Ursa Major represents a bear being hunted by seven hunters. The Lakota view Ursa Major as Wicasa, a powerful hunter who leads the constellation. And the Pawnee believe it's seven brothers who



Illustration by Patrick Zolp-Mikols

were cast into the sky. The Iroquois see the movement of Ursa Major across the heavens as part of the story of their changing seasons. They tell tales of hunters chasing the bear; in autumn, the bear is caught and its blood turns the leaves red.

Let's now move to the deserts of North America, and explore the stories of indigenous peoples in the Great Basin region. The lower Colorado River Valley, which includes parts of Arizona, California, and Nevada, has a rich cultural heritage that dates back thousands of years. The ancient cultures of this region have long been connected by trade networks, ceremonial traditions, and mythological narratives that span vast distances.

To the Mojave people, the big dipper is the fisherman throwing a large net into the water to catch the fish in the Milky Way. The Navajo have Náhookos Bika'ii, The Northern Male. This figure is a man lying down on one of his sides, representing the father and protector of the home.

Aztec mythology tells a different story about Ursa Major. This star cluster depicts Tezcatlipoca, the cunning sorcerer who was also Quetzalcoatl's troublesome brother. A door slammed shut on him, costing him one of his legs. When his mischief went too far, Quetzalcoatl turned him into a three-legged jaguar and banished him to the night sky. Bound to an eternal dance around Polaris, Tezcatlipoca hops on one leg in the east, walks on his hands near the west, and crawls on his back when high above us. We can hear the echoing of these sacred stories in the relatives of the Aztecs, the people of the Great Basin. For example, the Shoshone and Paiute tribes have tales about a three-legged deer or coyote. These stories often revolve around themes of transformation, balance, and the cyclical nature of life.

As we gaze upon the Ursa Major this spring, let us remember that its stories are not just distant echoes, but vibrant threads connecting humanity across time and space. Each culture's interpretation is a unique lens through which we can better understand ourselves and our place in the universe, and view the interconnectedness of all things.

## STARGAZING TIPS

Ursa Major will be visible in the northern sky this spring, with its seven bright stars forming an inverted ladle shape. You can find Polaris (the North Star) shining brightly near the top of constellation. As you look at the Big Dipper part of Ursa Major, the two bright stars at the end of the dipper's "cup" will point you to Polaris, which is the star that forms the tip of the handle of the Little Dipper constellation. This star marks the celestial pole and is a helpful navigational aid.

# THERE WERE CAMELS IN AVI KWA AME

BY MARK HALL-PATTON

**T**HE GREAT ARID LANDS of the Western United States beckoned explorers, exploiters, and settlers throughout the nineteenth century, and one recurring issue was the need for efficient transportation. The vast mineral wealth of the area was of little value unless supplies needed by the miners could get efficiently to the mines, and ore could get from the mines to the smelters.

One of the more unusual animals to be introduced into the Southwest to meet this need was the camel. Horses, mules, burros, and oxen were all widely known and understood, and had been used to haul loads in the U.S. for centuries, but they had their limitations in the harsh desert environment. For this reason, the camel, an icon of the deserts of the Middle East, was used as a form of transport in a grand experiment by the U.S. government starting in the 1850s. Camels were imported across the Atlantic in ships, for use from Texas to California and from Canada to Mexico, and even here in Avi Kwa Ame National Monument.

Camels had been widely studied and proponents in the American government such as Senator Jefferson Davis and Lt. Edward Beale stated the case for their effective use in extreme temperatures and areas with little water resources. These proponents were, in effect, harkening back to prehistoric times, when the camelops, the ancient ancestor of the camel, roamed the ancient southwest.

These military camels had initially entered the US at Indianola, Texas, in two shipments, the first in May of 1856 and the second in February 1857. The camels were used by the government in a number of experiments,

most notably the laying out of what became known as Beale's Road, the route later followed by Highway 66 across northern Arizona.

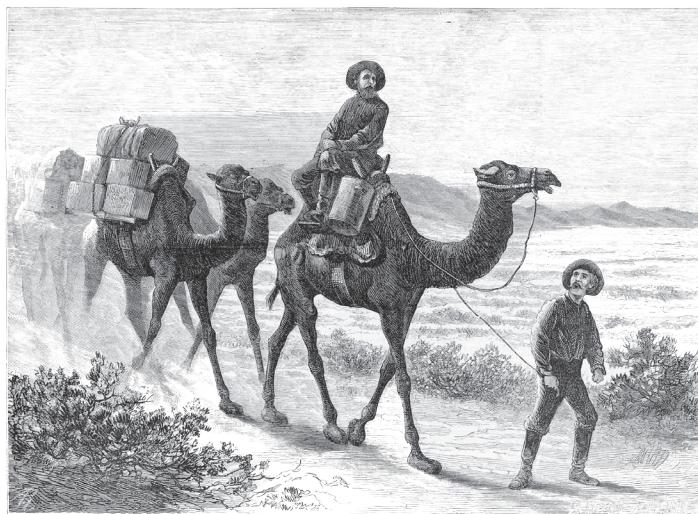
In addition, they were used in experimental runs to haul mail between Camp Fitzgerald at Los Angeles and Camp Mohave at the Colorado River. These army experiments in 1859 and 1860 showed they were not good for prolonged fast runs, but they were faster than wagons. In 1861, three camels also helped with the California Nevada Border Survey. All of these efforts brought them through today's Avi Kwa Ame lands.

The army also employed traders as civilian freighters

Beaver Lake, at the extreme southern tip of today's Nevada, and there was a ford over the Colorado at this site.

Even though the traders only had their pistols and a few rifles, and couldn't accurately fire, they were riding camels. A camel at full gallop runs at about 40 miles an hour, and presents an unforgettable sight as it is charging you. The forty camels made it to the river in the only known camel charge in US history, and continued on across the Colorado River to Arizona, in what must have been an amazing sight to all who witnessed it.

One of the reasons camels were useful as beasts of burden was their willingness to



CAMEL TRAIN IN NEVADA.—DRAWN BY FRENZENY.—[SEE PAGE 502.]

HARPER'S WEEKLY, *Journal of Civilization*. June 30, 1877.

who used the army's camels to carry supplies to troops coming over Beale's Road. On one trip in 1859, the Mohave Indians (over whose land the party was traveling) decided they had had enough disrespect from the barrage of settlers that the California Gold Rush had encouraged, and banded together with Paiute and Yuma warriors to attack the freighters. When it became clear there were hundreds of Native Americans in their path preparing to attack the camel express train, the goods were offloaded and sent back or buried, and the men boarded their camels and charged for the Colorado River about two miles away. This was at

eat plants no other pack animal would eat. As far back as 1856, when the first government camels were brought into Texas, this ability was discovered. Because of a lack of wood, a corral had been built of cactus which would hold any of the regular pack animals. The camels, it was soon discovered, found the cactus quite edible, eating most of the corral and making it necessary for another of less tasty materials to be constructed.

The efficacy of the camel's use for military purposes was ultimately less than what was desired, however, and the government's experiment spanned only a few years, approximately 1855 to 1864, at which time all camels still in

the possession of the US military were sold.

Camels were also of interest to entrepreneurs working in the far west. As early as 1859, Otto Esche, a merchant in San Francisco, saw an opportunity in their importation. Salt was needed in the mines (especially in the famous Comstock Lode) for processing ore, and since most of it was being shipped by mule train, it was quite expensive. A camel could carry significantly more than a mule, as much as 1,000 pounds vs. 400 pounds. It could forage on desert plants no other animal would eat, and could go long periods without water. With freight costs running \$120 per pound, Esche saw a decided opportunity for profit.

Esche, working with some partners, left for the Orient in 1860. His trip was long, but upon arrival in Siberia, he started out overland to buy camels. He was able to buy thirty-two camels, of which fifteen survived the trip to the Siberian coast, to be loaded on the Caroline E. Foote for transport to San Francisco.

These were Bactrian, or two hump, camels, as opposed to Arabian Dromedary, or one hump, the type the army had imported. They were shipped back to San Francisco, even as Esche went back out to buy more. The trip over the Pacific was not easy, but all fifteen survived to be off-loaded in San Francisco in July of 1860.

Eventually, Esche would be involved in importing almost 200 camels on different voyages. These would provide another source for camel entrepreneurs. Camels would be used from the Fraser River gold fields in Canada to as far south as Mexico, and as far east as New Mexico, but it would be Nevada which would be the center for their use.

Most Nevada camel lines were run by either Frank Laumeister or the Chevalier brothers. They all had originally purchased camels from

CAMELS continued on page 17

# Treasures of the Trail

## CASTLE MOUNTAINS GRASSLANDS TRAIL

By Alan O'Neill

**TYPE:** Loop trail

**TOTAL TRAIL LENGTH:** 5 miles

**TRAIL SURFACES:** Unmaintained gravel, sand, rock

**DIFFICULTY:** Easy to moderate

**RESTROOMS:** None

**PARKING TYPE:** Pull-out

**VEHICLE ACCESS TO PARKING:** All-types

**DOGS:** Allowed on Leash

**GUIDES:** No trail markers

**ACCESSIBILITY:** Not wheelchair accessible

**ACTIVITIES:** Walking, Mountain Biking, Horseback Riding

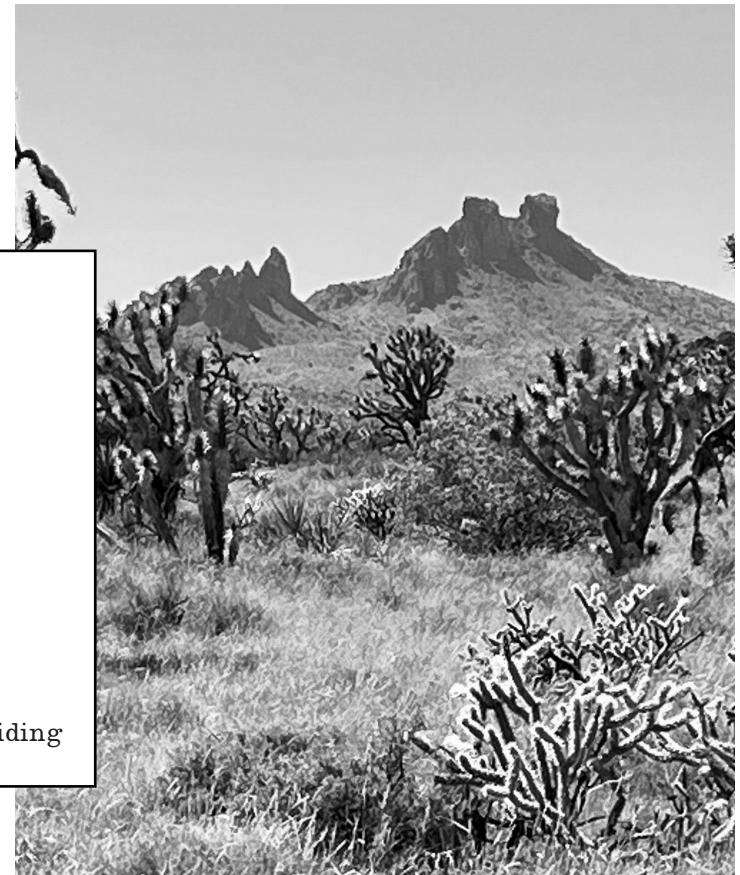
### OVERVIEW

The Castle Mountains Grasslands Trail traverses a dense Joshua tree forest, boasts spectacular views of the surrounding landscape, and intersects the historic Barnwell and Searchlight Railroad line. The trail is actually a little-traveled, narrow back-country road, and is easy walking with an elevation difference of only around 300 feet. The trail ends at the base of a volcanic ridge that is part of the Castle Mountains. This trail is 5 miles round trip, but can be made into a 3-mile trail by turning back at the intersection with the old railroad line.

### ABOUT THE ROUTE

This trail is a biologically diverse gem and one of the best places to see rare Mojave Desert grasslands. As you walk past the corral and parking area and begin down the trail on the left, you will notice the jagged Castle Peaks to the right (south). Composed of early Proterozoic gneiss and foliated granites, overlain by thick volcanic deposits, the rugged Castle Mountains are emblematic of the Mojave landscape. Hart Peak is the prominent feature in the Castle Mountains skyline at 5,543 feet and is visible throughout the hike. As the trail opens up out of the foothills, you will also spot the New York, Eldorado and Newberry mountain ranges, with Spirit Mountain (Avi Kwa Ame) facing you to the southeast.

The terrain surrounding the trail is a hotspot of botanical diversity, and provides a critical linkage for plants, animals, and water between mountain ranges. The unique plant assemblage includes 28 species of native grasses (about half of which are rare), including galleta, burro grass and false buffalo grass. These perennial grasses are the keystone species in this part of the Mojave Desert, and play critical roles in soil stabilization, carbon sequestration, nutrient cycling, water regulation, and erosion control. The native grasses also provide shelter and food for a wide range of animals. A herd of desert bighorn sheep lives on the steep, rocky slopes of the Castle Mountains. They and other wildlife traverse the area between the Castles and the New



Photograph by Alan O'Neill.

York Mountains. Numerous bat species live in rock crevices and mine remnants in the area, and the grasses provide food and shelter for many species of insects, which are important pollinators and decomposers. Many species of birds can be spotted here, including red-tailed hawks, northern flickers, black-throated sparrows, crissal thrashers, verdins, and kestrels. Wildlife species of special concern found in the area include the Townsend's big-eared bat, California leaf-nosed bat, Swainson's hawk, golden eagle, desert tortoise, Bendire's thrasher, and gray vireo. The Castle Mountains area contain important cultural resources that reflect a long history of human use. Prehistoric rock markings and archeological sites are found throughout the area at sites of significant cultural importance to both the Fort Mojave and Chemehuevi Tribes. At the 2-mile mark, the trail intersects with the historic Barnwell and Searchlight Railroad line which connected Searchlight, Nevada to Barnwell, California and the larger rail network of the Mojave Desert. Rather than continuing straight ahead, the trail takes a hard right at this intersection and goes 1.7 miles to the Walking Box Ranch Road. Along this section, you get outstanding views of the volcanic Castle Peaks to the northwest and pass a wash area with desert willow trees. When reaching the Walking Box Ranch Road, take a right and follow that road for 1.3 mile segment of the trail to where you started the hike at the corral.

### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

This hike is located in a remote, back-country area and cell service is spotty. The closest restrooms and services are 15 miles away in Searchlight. Fill your gas tank, bring plenty of water and snacks, and be prepared for temperature extremes. The corral parking area and trail are easy to find, but there are no trail signs. Long pants, hats, and sturdy walking shoes are recommended.

## DIRECTIONS AND PARKING

- The coordinates for the trailhead are 35.397812, -115.085446.
- From Las Vegas, drive south on U.S. Highway 95 to Searchlight.
- Turn right onto Hwy 164 (Joshua Tree Highway) and drive west for 7 miles.
- Turn left on Walking Box Ranch Road.
- Drive 8 miles to the old cattle corral and park on the right.
- The trail (an unmaintained, unmarked narrow road) is on your left.
- Walking Box Ranch Road is a well-maintained, wide dirt road that will accommodate all vehicle types.



There's more to explore!  
**MORE ABOUT THIS TRAIL  
AND OTHER HIKES & DRIVES**  
available on our website



*CAMELS continued from p. 15*

Esche, and when no longer needed, were let go in the Nevada desert. When the Army sold their camels in 1864, some were also sold for commercial use, and some also eventually made it to Nevada where they would be released when not needed. The camels apparently found this to their liking, as they did slowly multiply, becoming a known sight to prospectors and others who frequented the deserts.

The camels were released because of their ability to live off the land, and they could be found and rounded up when next needed. In the early 1870s, Laumeister created a new camel express to bring timber from Mt. Charleston to the Eldorado Canyon mines near Nelson and later one to bring salt to Pioche. He also ran a camel express south through today's Avi Kwa Ame to bring supplies to Arizona mining areas.

When in use, camels seemed to scare other animals, like horses and mules. They smelled bad, and had

a tendency to force other animals off public roads. Though those leading the camel caravans claimed that the camels were not the cause of the problems, teamsters leading mules or oxen did not like the one or two humped beasts and often complained about their use.

This led to one of the more unusual Nevada Statutes. The following law was passed on February 9th, 1875:

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**AN ACT TO PROHIBIT CAMELS AND DROMEDARIES FROM RUNNING AT LARGE ON OR ABOUT THE PUBLIC HIGHWAYS OF THE STATE OF NEVADA.**

*The People of Nevada represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:*

**Section 1.** *From and after the passage of this Act it shall be unlawful for the owner or owners of any camel or camels, dromedary or dromedaries, to permit them to run at large on or about the public roads or highways of this State.*

**Section 2.** *If any owner or owners of any camel or camels, dromedary or dromedaries, shall, knowingly or willfully permit any violation of this Act, he or they shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and shall be arrested, on complaint of any person feeling aggrieved; and when convicted, before any Justice of the Peace, he or they shall be punished by a fine of not less than twenty-five (25) or more than one hundred (100) dollars, or by imprisonment of not less than ten or more than thirty days, or by both such fine and imprisonment.*

---

The public roads of Nevada were finally safe from camels.

Camels began to be phased out from regular use as beasts of burden in the latter 1870s. While they still ran free, they did begin to disappear for a number of reasons. Many were caught and sold to circuses, sideshows, and zoos. In fact, the last of

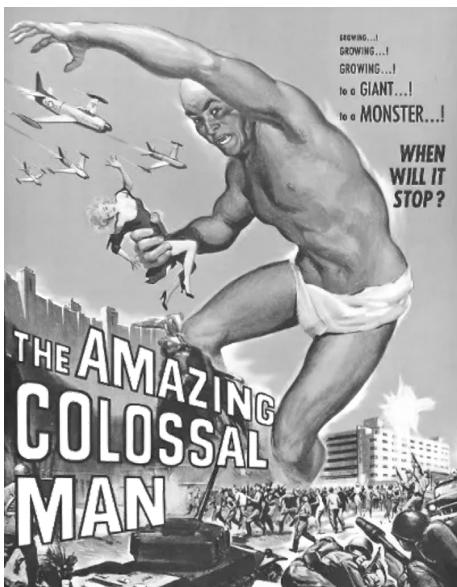
the army-imported camels was identified as dying in the Los Angeles Griffith Park Zoo in 1934. Others were killed for food. It turned out that many people, indigenous and settlers, found them good eating. The last known Nevada sighting of wild camels in Nevada was in 1905 near Silver Bow, a short-lived mining camp northeast of Rachel, Nevada.

The experiment was over by the early twentieth century, and further sightings of camels in Avi Kwa Ame National Monument were not to be. But their memory should not be lost. However briefly, modern camels were a part of the history and heritage of this land. They were here for a time and found the land to their liking.



# UNCLE IVAN'S DESERT VHS PICK

THE AMAZING COLOSSAL  
MAN (1958)



Colonel Glen Manning is a large, corpulent white dude desperate to keep from wedding his petite, long-suffering fiancé Carol. This he finally accomplishes by exposing himself to a deadly plutonium blast and becoming a 50ft tall, bald, pudgy, white dude in diapers, and proceeding to wreck Las Vegas. In the finale he falls from Boulder Dam and clogs up Black Canyon, much to the relief of everyone involved.

NOT RECOMMENDED.

## LOCAL RESOURCES

### FOOD

Nearby restaurants in Searchlight include McDonalds, Denny's & Terrible's Bar. Nipton no longer has a store or restaurant but the Habberdashery Thrift Shop has snacks. Cottonwood Cove Cafe in the Lake Mead National Recreation Area is open Saturday and Sunday from 8AM-3PM

### CONVENIENCE STORES

Convenience stores are located in Searchlight, CalNevAri, Cottonwood Cove & Palm Gardens.

### SUPPLIES and SERVICES

Searchlight Treasures Thrift Store, The Habberdashery Thrift Store in Nipton, and the Cottonwood Cove Marina Store sell clothing, hats and other necessities. Searchlight also has a laundromat and post office. Water is not available in the monument so make sure to bring your own.

### LODGING

Searchlight, Nev. - El Rey and BV Motels, Cree's Mobile Home Park overnight RV stays.

CalNevAri - Blue Sky Motel & RV Park.

Cottonwood Cove - Campground, RV Park, Resort Motel

Primm, Nev. - Various hotels

Nipton, Cal. - No lodging or services.

Additional lodging can be found in Boulder City and Laughlin.

### CAMPING

Primitive camping is available throughout the monument - no facilities are available. Check fire restrictions before the event and remember to pack it in, pack it out.

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# 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!*

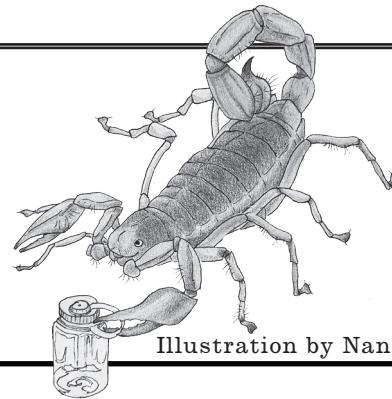


Illustration by Nancy Ko

## TOP 10 TIPS FOR SAFE and RESPECTFUL DESERT EXPLORING:

**1 PLAN & 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.

**2 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.

**3 CHECK 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.

**4 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.

**5 TAKE CARE ON ALL DESERT ROADS.** Watch for BLM (Bureau of Land Management) signs and make sure to 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 in your travels when a road looks unsafe. Roads can often get worse as you go further in, and there is no AAA tow service away from the highway.

**6 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.

**7 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. Snake-bite 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.

**8 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.

**9 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.

**10 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



WESTERN  
**CONSERVATION**  
FOUNDATION



CONSERVATION  
LANDS  
FOUNDATION



PALMS

The Gold Beam is made possible through the time, energy and love of many contributors, with funding through Friends of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument, and additional collaboration and support from the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, the San Manuel Gaming and Hospitality Authority, the Western Conservation Foundation, and the Conservation Lands Foundation.

