

## Joshua Tree National Monument

California

June 30, 1941

### SUPERINTENDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT

This is the first annual report to be submitted from Joshua Tree National Monument. Although this area was established in August 1936, no administration was on the ground until September 1940 when the Superintendent was transferred from Yosemite National Park. Work for the first several months was confined to getting acquainted with the area and contacting various influential people and organizations in the neighboring communities. In January 1941, the permanent monument personnel was augmented with the appointment of a Park Ranger.

The primary purpose for the establishment of Joshua Tree National Monument, as its name implies, was for the preservation of important stands of Joshua Trees. Although these trees exist in other sections of the Mohave Desert, the Monument provides a unique setting not found elsewhere. The trees occur in the western part where huge masses of fantastically eroded granitic outcroppings provide an interesting and picturesque background for these gnarled sentinels of the desert. Of secondary importance, is the varied and profuse display of other desert flora which preliminary study indicates occurs in greater abundance in Joshua Tree National Monument than in any other comparable desert ranges.

In contrast to the higher, wetter western mountains and mesas, the Pinto Basin in the eastern part presents a characteristic expression of true desert. In the Basin the vegetation is sparse while the encircling mountains are practically devoid of vegetative cover. The monotony of the vast expanse of Creosote bushes is broken by the occurrence of isolated clumps of Cholla and an extensive garden of Bigelow Cholla. This is reported to be the largest remaining stand of this cactus which, because of its isolation, has escaped the destruction of commercial cactus hunters. During the early spring in favorable years a profusion of desert wildflowers bloom in Pinto Basin. As the season advances, this floral display progresses to the higher elevations in the western section of the Monument where wildflowers are enjoyed until the middle of June.

Considered as a whole the Monument is a land of vast distances and enormous panoramas with many superb desert view points. The outstanding accessible point is Keys' View. There from an elevation of 5, 175 feet one overlooks the Salton Sea with its surface 240 feet below sea level and the flat Coachella Valley which is in part also below sea level. Towering above this flat valley is the precipitous escarpment of Mt. San Jacinto. Dr. John C. Merriam, when he stood at this point, made the statement that in his opinion the Mt. San Jacinto escarpment was the outstanding display of its kind in the world and that it was seen to best advantage from Keys' View.

In its more intimate aspects, the Monument contains innumerable delightful valleys and coves. Some of these valleys are so encircled by granite ridges that entrance is gained only by climbing over or crawling under huge boulders. The coves provide many unusual camping sites located around oaves which former inhabitants of the area used as is indicated by mortar holes, pottery sherds and pictographs. An attempt is made to discourage indiscriminate camping throughout this scenic area, but due to the lack of adequate protection personnel and to the absence of a designated campground, but little success is being obtained.

The majority of winter camping is confined to Indian Cove (Rattlesnake Canyon). This area is not accessible by car to the scenic part of the Monument except by leaving the Monument and reentering it by one of the northern entrance roads. This isolation is beneficial as it limits camping to one area. There are the additional advantages, of an adequate supply of water during the camping season, of numerous natural sheltered oaves, of lower elevation consequently lower temperatures and of the fact that the Indian Cove area is in the center of an unsurveyed township thus all the land is controlled by the Government. To date, due to the lack of funds, surveys and plans no development other than road improvement has been made. No sanitary facilities are provided. At times there have been as many as 75 campers using this area.

Fall and spring camping will undoubtedly be popular and it is believed that when nearby residents become informed of the lower summer temperatures in the higher parts of the Monument there will be increased summer use. It is reported by reliable sources that summer temperatures there seldom exceed 87 degrees in contrast to temperatures of 100 to 120 degrees which prevail in adjacent areas. It is probably a fortunate circumstance that the deplorable condition of the roads kept these people from acquiring property and building

summer homes in the area now in the Monument. Now that the roads are improved this problem may arise because of all the private property which can be purchased in the cooler scenic part of the Monument.

The problem of alienated land is of major importance. When the Monument was established there were approximately 295,000 acres of alienated land. The Southern Pacific Railroad Company controlled 231,000 acres, the California State School Lands consisted of 43,000 acres and the remainder was made up of homesteads and other patented lands. In addition there were an estimated 11,000 mineral locations including mining claims of 20 acres each and mill sites of 5 acres.

The Southern Pacific holdings have been reduced due to Congressional action by which the company has relinquished its rights on unselected lands. The actual reduction of such holdings is not as yet known but it is estimated to be about 100,000 acres. Shortly after the Monument was created efforts were made to exchange Southern Pacific lands for other Government lands. The company was not interested at that time in exchanging lands and no effort has been made since and no negotiations are now pending toward the elimination of this problem. A similar condition prevails with regard to State School lands.

Considerable headway is being made toward decreasing the number of mineral claims. The Division of Investigations has adversely reported 3,170 mining claims to the Register of the General Land Office. There are an additional 600 cases which are practically complete but not yet reported. Notices of cancellation have been sent to 2170 claimants with only nine of them applying for a hearing before the Register. It thus appears that only nine claimants believe they have valid claims. Five of these are mill sites and of the five the Special Agent who made the investigations verbally reported that the claimant can hold only one. There are probably, in addition to the above possible valid claims, about a dozen that are not being cancelled.

This work of the Division of Investigations has been confined to the western third of the Monument. The results of the investigation are sufficient argument for extending the work to the eastern part providing no portion of the eastern section is being considered for deletion.

The only work project initiated was road betterment since that was the only program for which funds were provided. A total of 66 miles of desert auto trails have been improved. Work consisted of widening the old roads sufficiently so that two cars could pass, filling in ruts and rectifying the road surface with rock and clay across washes.

The Regional Headquarters has given very helpful and essential assistance in many ways. Region Four office handles all our fiscal and personnel matters thus relieving this office of a tremendous amount of clerical work. The engineering division has provided us with much engineering assistance including the assignment of an Engineering Aide to Joshua Tree for 5½ months, a survey party of three men for 3 months and a General Road Foreman (Road Surfacing) for one month. In addition to these few enumerated examples, there have been innumerable instances where we have requested and received assistance from Region Four.

The most important single factor bearing on the future use of Joshua Tree National Monument is the agitation by the mining interests through the Mining Association of the Southwest to reopen the Monument to prospecting and location of mining claims. Due to the efforts of this association, resolutions favoring mining in the Monument were adopted by organizations in Southern California and sent to Congressman who, in February 1939, introduced a bill to extend the mining laws of the United States to Joshua Tree National Monument. Shortly after the establishment of the administrative office at Joshua Tree, the Superintendent contacted many of these organizations and as a result several of them reversed their action whereupon Congressman Sheppard apparently reversed his stand and his bill was not reported out of Committee. Concerted action along this line has again arisen. The Mining Association of the Southwest, working under the guise of assisting in national defense, is again attempting to organize miners and interested groups to agitate for the introduction of a Congressional bill to open the Monument for mining for strategic defense minerals. Various plans have been advocated, the latest being to have the Monument opened for prospecting and mining for a period of ten years. This agitation is in a formative stage at the

time of writing of this report and no action has been taken by this office as yet other than to keep the Washington and Regional offices informed of developments.

No detailed report can be made on the status of fiscal affairs of the Monument since all accounts are maintained by the Region Four office. In general, the appropriation will be entirely expended.

Superintendent.