

DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL MONUMENT

R E S U M E

FOR

THE YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 1933

Dear Mr. Director:

CREATION OF THE MONUMENT

Death Valley National Monument was established by proclamation of President Herbert C. Hoover on February 11, 1933. It was one of the last acts of President Hoover; and as a Californian, it must have given the President satisfaction to reserve for public use this splendid area of desert and mountain scenery in his own state.

On March 16, 1933, the undersigned was named by Director Horace M. Albright as the first superintendent of the Monument. I had already made two visits to the area and had covered the principal roads and points of interest.

Although Death Valley has been so recently taken into the national monument fold its scenic and climatic attractions have been known to Americans since 1849, and probably earlier than that to the Spanish explorers. But only in the past five years has the Death Valley region been opened as a resort. The Stovepipe Wells Hotel was built by H. W. Eichbaum in 18⁹26-27; and shortly afterwards the Furnace Creek Inn and Furnace Creek Ranch accommodations were constructed by the Pacific Coast Borax Company.

Despite generally poor roads the attractions of the Death Valley region are such that a conservative estimate of the travel

for the season of 1932-33, between October 15 and May 15, is 5000 cars with 9000 visitors.

AREA AND BOUNDARIES

The present area of the monument is 1,610,000 acres. It was possible for the National Park Service to give only perfunctory study to the boundaries of the proposed monument before the issue of the Presidential decree establishing it. On further investigation it appears that certain areas which are physically part of Death Valley proper and its northern extension were omitted from the monument. Several thousand acres to the north of the present northern boundary as far as Sand Spring and Last Chance Spring; and south of the southern boundary to include the Amargosa River and Saratoga Springs should be taken into the monument. Other minor changes of boundary lines should be made to conform with physical conditions, topography and scenic attractions.

SCENIC AND HISTORICAL ATTRACTIONS

The Death Valley Monument is one of the greatest scenic spectacles in America. When developed it will probably rank with the Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and the Sequoias of California. It has the color, depth and spaciousness of the Grand Canyon, with a variety and charm of its own.

Death Valley was literally given a bad name; but there is a fascination in badness - of the Death Valley type. It is a Valley of Life as well as of Death; as many health-seekers have found.

The romantic history of the early explorations of Death Valley, particularly the epics of the Manly and Jayhawkers parties in 1849, contribute much to the interest; as do the many mines which are driven into the painted mountains.

Death Valley is commonly supposed to be a sunken valley several hundred feet below sea-level. It is more than that and takes in an area of desolation fully 130 miles north and south and from 20 to 70 miles east and west. This area contains mountains of many colors, gorgeous canyons by the score, Telescope Peak 11,045 feet above sea-level with fine forests, many springs and even running streams of water which quickly sink underground.

The views from the rim of Death Valley 5000 to 7000 feet above the sink, such as those at Chloride Cliffs, Dantes View and Augreberry Point are equal to the famous views at Grand Canyon or Yosemite.

Death Valley contains everything to make a first class national park except streams and lakes for fishing. The lack of these is offset by an almost perfect winter climate.

Admirable and succinct descriptions of Death Valley are found in the books of W. A. Chalfant, "The Story of Inyo" and "Death Valley, the Facts".

CLIMATE

The climate of Death Valley has been much maligned. It is not so different from that of many other desert areas of California

where there are large communities and agricultural development, such as the southern San Joaquin Valley at Bakersfield and the Imperial Valley. It is a little hotter and drier than the other desert areas that have been reclaimed. Even the intense heat of summer which reaches a maximum of about 135 in the shade, is not continuous and there are periods in midsummer when Death Valley may be visited with pleasure and comfort. Occasional sand storms and cloudbursts are dangerous to visitors unless proper precautions are taken.

The winter climate is the same that has made Palm Springs and other places the Egypt of America. In fact the extreme dryness of Death Valley gives the climate remarkable curative effects.

I think it safe to say that the time will come when Death Valley will be a tourist attraction even in summer; for resorts may be placed thousands of feet up in the surrounding mountains, and good roads would make it possible to motor into and out of the inferno in a few minutes. The novelty of motoring below sea-level in mid-summer in a temperature of from 120 to 135 in the shade would attract many people if no risks to life or health were involved.

TRAVEL

At the end of April, 1933, Assistant Superintendent D. J. Tobin, Sequoia National Park, made an inspection trip to Death Valley and installed signs and voluntary travel registers at the three main entrances: Furnace Creek Inn, ^ERichbaum Toll Road and Scotty's Castle. This was at the end of the winter season. The summer travel shown by these registers from May 1 to September 30, 1933

was 320 cars and 970 visitors. The vast bulk of travel of course enters Death Valley during the winter, chiefly between November 1 and May 1 of each year. Careful check has been made with the hotel companies and others, and based on registrations, toll-road payments, gas station visitors, etc, a conservative estimate of the travel during the winter of 1932-33 is 3000 cars and 9000 visitors. Of this about 14% was out of state cars.

With the early completion of Boulder Dam and its system of tributary and connecting roads travel to Death Valley will vastly increase. Death Valley is the main route and short cut to central and northern Californian points from Boulder Dam. Also it is only three hours by present poor roads off the main transcontinental route (91) from Salt Lake City to Los Angeles. With good roads it will be more easily reached and visited from a transcontinental highway than is Grand Canyon. It is certain that travel will rapidly increase. Apart from road improvements much publicity is being given Death Valley by reason of the creation of the monument and by the operating companies.

WORK OF THE PAST YEAR

Several visits to Death Valley were made by the undersigned and other officers from Sequoia National Park. Signs and registers for travel were erected at the principal entrances. Many conferences were held with Superintendent H. P. Gower of the Pacific Coast Borax Company and with other old-timers in the region including the famous Death Valley Scotty. Superintendent Gower, who stays at Death

Valley and Death Valley Junction, all through the year has heretofore taken care of the region more than anyone else, because the Pacific Coast Borax Company with its large interests and holdings, has been equipped to assist in keeping up the roads and in helping out distressed travelers. The Stovepipe Wells Hotel Company has also given such assistance in its area.

During a visit in August park men with the superintendent put up signs that had been blown down, improved watering holes, surveyed and marked boundaries.

IMMEDIATE WORK AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDED

While great care must be exercised not to develop too hastily in Death Valley and above all to guard against such development as may spoil the atmosphere and charm of the region, yet the rapid increase of tourist travel in the past five years and the prospective greater increase, make it necessary to take steps to protect and serve the public and protect the natural scenery, flora and fauna. The chief needs are:

(a) Personnel as a beginning of: a custodian, permanent appointment; a temporary ranger, 7 months appointment; a foreman, 7 months appointment. Funds to employ about six laborers during winter months. The protection and restoration of desert flora and fauna is of prime importance and permanent personnel is needed.

(b) Protection and development of the many wells and springs, nearly all of which are now fouled by packrats and small mammals and by horses or burros as well as by human beings. Camping places must be

provided with sanitary conveniences. There is today only one public campground in the Valley and that in very poor condition compared with national park standards.

(c) Maintenance and improvement of the present desert roads pending a thorough survey of the road possibilities and a general plan for development of the monument.

(d) Improvement of roads and trails to existing side canyons and viewpoints on the rim. Development of additional short roads and trails to interesting points.

(e) Equipment: Ford or other light pickup truck; 1 1/2 ton freight and utility truck; 1 1/2 ton dump truck; tractor, grader and road maintenance equipment, with miscellaneous tools, tentage, mess, and other minor equipment.

The sum of \$19,000 is available from Public Works Program for construction of ranger quarters and information building, campground and other development, and work under this program is expected to begin early in October.

Chief Landscape Architect T. G. Wint is visiting the monument in September, 1933, and will place a landscape architect there to assist the superintendent in planning.

In concluding this first annual report on the Death Valley National Monument it is only fitting that reference should be made to those who have virtually had charge of the area until the federal government assumed the responsibility. The officers and employees of the Pacific Coast Borax Company, Furnace Creek Inn and Stovepipe

Wells Hotel have all been most courteous and helpful. W. A. Chalfant, H. P. Gower, Miss Kathryn Ronan, Walter Scott, Mrs. H. W. Eichbaum, O. A. Egbert, Supervisors Brown and Naylor and many others who have lived and worked in the Death Valley region have given and volunteered advice and assistance. There is something big and colorful about Death Valley and its surroundings; and the bigness of it all is reflected in the hospitable and helpful attitude of those who have made it part of their lives. In the initial development we cannot do better than confer frequently with the oldtimers.

John R. White
Superintendent.