

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WILDLIFE DIVISION
328 HILGARD HALL, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

SPECIAL REPORT
ON THE SIXTH ENROLLMENT PERIOD PROGRAM PROPOSED FOR
DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL MONUMENT

Submitted September 10, 1935

E. Lowell Sumner, Jr.
Regional Wildlife Technician

E. Lowell Sumner, Jr.

SPECIAL REPORT ON THE SIXTH ENROLLMENT PERIOD PROGRAM
PROPOSED FOR DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL MONUMENT

This is one of the regions which it will not be physically possible to visit between August 31, when the project list was received by me while on another field investigation, and September 9, which is the latest date on which reports can be sent in from the Berkeley office.

If it is so desired, I can make an inspection of certain questionable projects listed below about September 25, at which time I plan to visit Death Valley in connection with the proposed bighorn study.

CAMP NM-1

Park Project No. A-7, ECW-7 No. 144, Water Development. The type of construction contemplated is not known, and blue print plans showing this would be desirable. Simplicity and unobtrusiveness should be the keynote, and the project seems to call for some supervision to insure this type of development.

Park Project No. A-8, ECW-7 No. 146, Wells. Seems to call for the same sort of supervision.

Park Project No. A-13, ECW-7 No. 202, Road Improvement. The project includes improvement of the road into Hanaupah Canyon in which is located a spring of importance to bighorn as reported by Borell. However, in view of the fact that the locality is already occupied by at least one prospector and family, and also the fact that the road already exists, I should be in favor of approving this project in order to conserve our fire for other projects which threaten to be much more detrimental to wildlife. I refer especially to the developments proposed for Titus Canyon, discussed below.

Park Project No. A-24, ECW-7 No. 1025, Cleanup in Mesquite Grove. From the location indicated on the map as the seat of this project I infer that the work does not include cleanup of artificial debris arising from the recently abandoned practice of cutting mesquite for fuel, as carried on in the mesquite forest at Furnace Creek; perhaps the project comprises the undesirable "culture" of mesquite referred to in a letter from George M. Wright to Superintendent White dated September 3. In view of this uncertainty, further investigation seems desirable.

Park Project No. A-22, ECW-7 No. 711, Camp Ground Improvements. The areas mentioned badly need improvement and extension; project recommended for approval.

The remaining projects for this camp, listed by their Park Project numbers only, seem not to require specific comment, and are recommended for approval: Nos. A-1 to A-6, A-9 to A-12, A-14 to A-21, A-23.

CAMP NM-2

Park Project No. B-8, ECW-7 No. 144, Water Development. As in Project A-7 of Camp NM-1, more detailed plans, and possibly some supervision seem called for.

Park Project No. B-9, ECW-7 No. 146, Well Development. Seems to call for the same sort of supervision.

Park Project No. B-11, ECW-7 No. 202, Road Improvement. The location of this project is not designated on the map accompanying the project list and I do not have access to the master plans for reference at present. I suggest that approval be given for the work provided that no work in Titus Canyon is contemplated--and very probably none is.

Park Project No. B-16, ECW-7 No. 206, Trails. The same remarks apply to this project as to No. B-11 above.

Park Project No. B-22, ECW-7 No. 1025, Cleanup in Mesquite Groves. As in the case of Camp NM-1, Park Project No. A-24, further investigation seems desirable.

Park Project No. B-19, ECW-7 No. 711, Camp Ground Improvements. These are greatly needed in order to prevent the present disfigurement and misuse of the campsites.

The remaining projects for this camp, listed by their Park Project numbers only, seem not to require specific comment, and are recommended for approval: Nos. B-2 to B-7, B-10, B-12 to B-15, B-17, B-18, B-20, B-21.

CAMP NM-3

Park Project Nos. D-3 and D-4, ECW-7 Nos. 143 and 144, Pipe Line and Reservoir. Water for the checking station and for travelers is necessary at Daylight Pass, and Daylight Spring is the only source; accordingly, the projects merit approval. Since the proposed checking station will probably be located several hundred yards from the spring, the latter could still be used by most forms of wildlife if provision were made for a small overflow for that purpose. If objection were made to wildlife use on account of the relatively small size of the spring, a poultry type float valve could be installed which would provide enough water for wildlife without taking more than about one gallon per day from the proposed reservoir.

5

Park Project No. D-4, ECW-7 No. 144, Water Development. As in Project A-7 of Camp NM-1, more detailed plans and possibly some supervision seem called for.

Park Project No. D-6, ECW-7 No. 202, Construction Chloride Cliff Road. I have not had opportunity to visit the Chloride Cliff region and can offer no first hand information at present, so that I am not prepared to offer any objection to the project. The proposed route does not pass close to any known spring and so would not appear to endanger the status of the bighorn. I suggest we may well conserve our energy for curbing less desirable projects, such as the development proposed for Titus Canyon, as outlined below.

Park Project No. D-7, ECW-7 No. 202, Roads to Scenic Canyons. According to the data shown on the map included with the project list, this project merits approval insofar as it does not include any work in Titus Canyon.

Park Project No. D-8, ECW-7 No. 202, Titus Canyon Road Improvement. This is the very region which, in my monthly report for the period from April 15 to May 14 (page 18), I emphatically stated should be protected from exploitation, although at the time I had no inkling that a program of "improvement" would soon be advocated. This question seems important enough to warrant quoting from the earlier report, with several up to date emendations and additions:

"RECOMMENDATIONS.

"4. That the public be discouraged from entering Titus Canyon or using the road which enters it. Traversing this canyon or using the road represents a side trip and is not in any way essential to crossing the Grapevine Mountains because the wide, gently ascending Grapevine Canyon and Boundary Canyon roads serve this purpose. The Titus Canyon Road, on the other hand, is a mere wheel track in the sandy wash which forms the floor of the exceedingly narrow, winding, perpendicular-walled canyon. So steep is the grade and so deep the sand that cars are actually unable to travel up this canyon, so that signs have been posted warning motorists that it is a one-way route; indeed, for several miles there would be no room for two cars to pass. Nevertheless, certain individuals insist upon trying to make the ascent in spite of the warning signs. The attempts are invariably unsuccessful and frequently result in the cars becoming stuck, which can possibly lead to a serious situation, in view of the fact that Titus Canyon is nearly ten miles from the nearest traveled road, which is itself a rather infrequently traveled one.

Even if the Titus Canyon road should be oiled or otherwise improved, there is grave danger of motorists being trapped in the bottom of the gorge by flood waters released by the not infrequent mountain thunderstorms. This would result in damage to the car even though the occupants might be able to climb to safety. The gravity of the danger is illustrated by the following excerpt from TIME (Sept. 9, 1935, Vol. 26, No. 11, page 33):

'Into Death Valley from Red Mountain, Calif. chugged the automobile of Prospector John Backert, bound with his family of three for the Backert claim at Leach Springs, 60 miles away. Suddenly, one of the desert's rare cloudbursts swept down upon them, made a river of the road, forced the car to turn up a hillside, where it broke an axle. Well aware of their danger, Prospector Backert and Daughter Ernestine, 22, left Mrs. Rackert, 51, and Daughter Agnes, 12, in the car, started to hike the 40 miles back to town, got there 48 hours later. Organizing a rescue party, they sped back to their car, found only a penciled note. Mother and daughter, unable after two days and nights to endure the heat any longer, had wandered off into the trackless sands in search of water.

'For 48 hours the lost pair stumbled over the barren Valley floor, their feet blistered, their lips cracked, their tongues swollen. Often crossing their own footprints, they realized they were circling hopelessly. At last, completely exhausted, they lay down beside a dry mudhole to await their fate. There last week a searching airplane pilot finally spied little Agnes feebly waving a blanket.'

In Titus Canyon, however, there would be no possibility of saving the car, and some places not even a chance for a man to climb the walls.

From the point of view of wildlife, Titus Canyon should remain unvisited and undisturbed, because of the presence of the important Klare Spring at the very edge of the road. As indicated above, this spring appears to be an important water source for mountain sheep, and this importance has greatly increased in recent weeks due to the continued usurpation of the few remaining areas available to bighorn by the unceasing influx of prospectors. An additional reason for protecting the area from exploitation is that the canyon harbors six specimens of the curious relict plant Maurandia petrophila Coville. This plant has been found nowhere else in Death Valley or in any other part of the world, and the six known specimens are within reach of the casual passerby or botanical collector. Possibly I am needlessly anticipating, for I have heard of no special plans for developing the canyon, but even now there is some local traffic through it, and in our present era the extent to which the virus of "development" may spread cannot be foretold."

The ECW project as described really consists of two separate undertakings. One of these is "The justly celebrated and highly scenic Titus Canyon approach road [which] was constructed in 1926 at a cost of \$100,000 (and).....has been entirely neglected ever since." Actually, I believe that any impartial observer would agree that the approach road is not particularly scenic as roads go in Death Valley; it is the portion of the road which traverses Titus Canyon itself which properly deserves the title of being "justly celebrated and highly scenic." The \$100,000 was spent by a mining

company which subsequently abandoned the region, and this accounts for the present disuse of the approach road; I don't recall that anyone lives there at all now, and although hesitating to dispute the point with Mr. Goodwin, it certainly is news to me that the road is "in heavy use" unless this is meant to include occasional exploring parties of Government geologists and botanists. I would also call attention to the fact that some 15 miles of the approach road outside the monument boundary, from near Bullfrog to near McDonald Spring, traverse a quite monotonous and unscenic plateau. This section would probably never receive very good maintainance, either.

The second of the two undertakings outlined by this project has to do with the "improvement" of the road through Titus Canyon itself. This has never been used heavily by anyone, and as already mentioned, amounts to no more than a wheel track in the sand and a dangerous one at that--a point upon which I think anyone would agree upon seeing photos of the place (these I can take on my projected trip down there, if desired).

The development of Death Valley is taking place at a rate which I believe has never been paralleled by any national park or monument, and unless we act quickly, there will soon be no outstanding areas left which can be set aside as research reserves--even in such a vast country.

The Titus Canyon area, with its vital bighorn watering ground at Klare Spring whose flowing stream affords a varied ecological background for wild-life studies, its six known specimens of the newly discovered relict plant Maurandia petrophila, and its newly discovered fossil bed, is preeminently the logical area for protection as a research reserve. Death Valley is a "brand new baby" among our national parks and monuments; can't we profit by mistakes made in bringing up the other children? Must we develop every place where it is possible to make a four-wheeled vehicle go? With all the other places to go in this enormous new area, it would seem that this one might be spared.

If it is desired, I can make a special study of the Titus Canyon area for the purpose of laying out boundaries for a possible research reserve there.

Park Project No. D-15, ECW-7 No. 1015, Geological Research. This project seems to warrant approval. As mentioned on page 12 of my monthly report referred to above, this bed lies in the same canyon ("Titanother Canyon") as Tule Spring which is another very important and so far undisturbed sheep watering area adjacent to the head of Titus Canyon.

The remaining projects for this camp, listed by their Park Project numbers only, seem not to require specific comment, and are recommended for approval: Nos. D-1 to D-2, D-9 to D-14.