



Volume 62

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TELESCOPE

The Official Newsletter of the Death Valley Natural History Association

Spring 2017

Board Chair—Sixteen Years in the Making

By Tim Kendziorski
Chair, DVNHA

Death Valley has a way of reaching out and grabbing hold of you in the most wonderful way. My first experience here was one I will never forget. I was invited to spend a weekend in the valley with a seasoned enthusiast and a few of her friends. The plan was to spend the weekend exploring the northern end of the park. We turned off at Scotty's Junction and, with Brendon Perry's "Eye of the Hunter" playing, made our way toward Mesquite Springs Campground. It had been raining most of the way from Reno, where we started, but as soon as we made our turn, the skies cleared and a sense of wonderment took over me. We passed Scotty's Castle and I was taken with how beautiful it looked basked in the delicate nighttime light.

We arrived at Mesquite at 2:00 in the morning and slept among the damp grounds. I awoke to my first daylight views of the area. It was simply beautiful and....cold! So cold, that we decided to head on down to the south end of the valley where it was warmer. In the haste of packing up, a grommet popped off one of the tent pole ground anchors. "This is not a problem," I thought, but it will be a reminder to get a better tent.

Down in Texas Springs, weather was quite favorable and we spent two wonderful afternoons exploring. I am still amazed at the stark and rugged beauty of the valley and also really impressed at how hearty my companion is in this environment! No road is too scary to traverse. She knows this like the back of her hand. In her, I put my complete trust. We took a walk in the hills around the camp.

Later that evening, the weather started to turn—the wind picked up. Exhausted, we hit the sack early. Despite having some protection from a hill, our little tent was taking quite a beating. I awoke several times to things flapping around. Tent poles on the windward side, were bending under the strain and pushing on my arms and face as I tried to sleep. I went outside to pound our little stakes back into the hard, rocky ground. That broken grommet would no longer hold the pole or anchor assigned to it. I remember waking up to see my companion sitting up with her arms outstretched like an apparition in the dark. "What are you doing?" I asked. "The tent is coming down," she said. And with that, we quickly got out and placed the heaviest things we could find inside the tent to hold it down.

We somehow prevented the tent from completely blowing away and put away the most precious item, my companion's 12" truss-mount telescope, cleared out the front seats of the car to finally settle in as best we could. The wind buffeted the car, but we were secure, warm, and dry with a small blanket between us. Exhausted from the excitement, my companion said, "I'm worried you aren't having a good time. "I am," I assured her. "We're making memories!" And, with that we finally fell asleep.

Sixteen years later, my companion is my wife and we have been Death Valley enthusiasts ever since. I should confess that during that trip I planned on asking her to be my wife—walking through the campground I knew she would be the one.



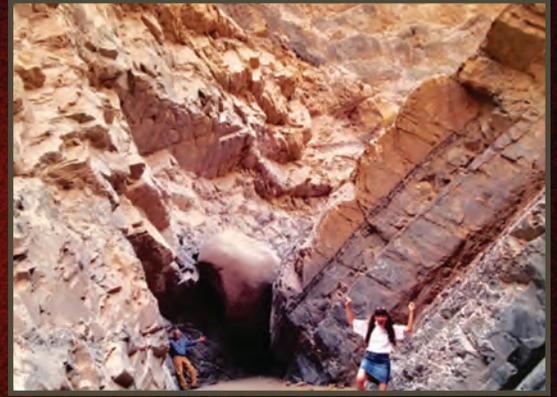
Tim and Kimber checking out the newly installed interpretive signs at Dantes View during their April 2017 visit.

It's been a long and wondrous road from that trip to now being the Chair of DVNHA. A journey I would not have imagined myself taking under any other circumstances. Years ago, I saw that DVNHA needed a website. I volunteered my services, free of charge, and put together the beginnings of what I envisioned would work. A few weeks later, Dave Blacker called to ask if I would be interested in being on the Board of Directors. I suggested that the person he really wanted was my wife, Kimber Moore, as she was the ultimate Death Valley fan—and had way more than me to offer the association. From that point forward, both Kimber and I have been contributors to the mission of the DVNHA.

The story continues as we have many more years to contribute to the hottest, driest, and lowest place on earth—Death Valley!

Member Highlight

Meet the Wallicks. They travel all the way from Michigan to experience our extremes and have found a "lifetime of adventure!" in Death Valley since their first visit in 2004. Avid supporters of DVNHA's programs to assist Ash Meadows and Scotty's Castle, they decided to officially join as members to support our general operations this year.



Ray and Victoria at Chockstone in Marble Canyon. They look like they're having a blast, don't they?

Thank you for sharing with us, and for your continued support.

The Resilient Devils Hole Pupfish

By Kevin Wilson, Ph.D., Aquatic Ecologist
National Park Service, Death Valley National Park

On a stormy night in June 2016, the Devils Hole ecosystem and its resident pupfish were in for a surprise. Lightening flashed throughout the Amargosa Valley. Research staff worked into the night to observe newly hatched and young Devils Hole pupfish; these less than two month old fish are mainly active at night because the adult pupfish will eat them if they are detected during the daylight hours. At approximately 11 p.m., the weather changed into an instant deluge of rain. Staff scrambled to secure their equipment. In just five minutes a torrent of water was flowing over the rocks and into Devils Hole. The staff made a hasty 4x4 retreat on roads that had turned into rivers.



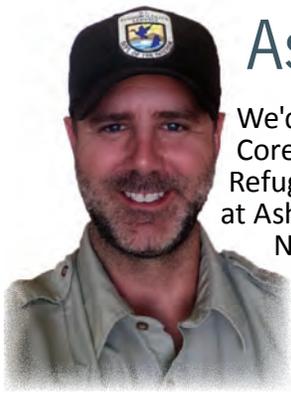
Agency staff checking the depth of the shallow shelf after removal and transport of material from the shallow shelf to a lower shelf within Devils Hole.

Photo Credit: Olin Feuerbacher, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Returning the next morning, it was evident that tremendous flooding had occurred within Devils Hole. A check of the weather station revealed that a little over one inch of rain fell within the first 20 minutes, and over two inches total during the 90 minute storm. Though this type of disturbance may have positive impacts by bringing nutrients into the ecosystem, rocks and sediment also came down onto the "shallow-shelf" leaving a portion of the shelf above water, reducing critical habitat for the fish. This was a problem.

Death Valley National Park worked closely with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Nevada Department of Wildlife to determine the best path forward. After careful consideration of several options, it was decided that the material above water would be carefully placed into 5-gallon buckets and transported down by SCUBA divers to a shelf 15 feet below the shallow shelf. By keeping the material in the hole instead of removing it, valuable nutrients would be retained in the ecosystem. Sixteen 5-gallon buckets of material were moved in total.

It would be two and a half months of waiting. The team monitored the fish closely until the scheduled Fall count of the pupfish to see how the flood and the transport of material affected the Devils Hole pupfish population. With relief, the official Fall count was 144 observable pupfish, the highest count in over a decade. It's important to keep in mind that the flood does not directly explain the high count; however, it seems that the flood did not have negative long-term impacts. Thus, the pupfish continues to be amazingly resilient in times of uncertainty.



Ash Meadows—in Good Hands

We'd like to introduce Corey Lee, the new Refuge Manager at Ash Meadows

National Wildlife Refuge (AMNWR). Corey is a trained fisheries biologist with a keen focus on habitat restoration.

Corey Lee, Refuge Manager,
U.S Fish and Wildlife Service,
Ash Meadows NWR.

He has worked with an array of different agencies in many states across the country, including: Florida, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Nebraska. His work has involved everything from coastal areas, marshes, big rivers, small streams, and both small and large reservoirs. Prior to accepting the position as Refuge Manager, Corey was the manager for the Ash Meadows Fish Conservation Facility (AMFCF) which has a captive population of Devils Hole pupfish. His job at the AMFCF involved working directly with Death Valley National Park staff for Devils Hole as well as working with AMNWR on fish surveys and habitat restoration projects.

Corey's passion for the outdoors originates from his childhood growing up in the Ozarks where he spent time hiking up and down the forested hills of Missouri, embracing his surroundings.

Whether it is fishing, camping, or just a day hike, getting outside is what matters most to him.

"I think you need to stay in touch and appreciate the world around us. Ash Meadows is such a unique place that allows you to see how nature can adapt to change. My job is to make sure all of these resources are here for future generations to enjoy. I am so blessed to be able to work at Ash Meadows!"

If you can't find him at the Visitor Center, he will likely be found out on the refuge exploring the wonders of Ash Meadows.



Above: Corey conducting surveys in the refuge tank at the AMFCF.

Left: Kings Pool at Point of Rocks located in Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge.

Photos courtesy of Corey Lee, USFWS.



DEATH VALLEY
NATURAL HISTORY
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est. 1954

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FROM THE DIRECTOR By David Blacker, Executive Director

Full Circle The year was 1972, my mother pulled into the neighborhood where my grandparents lived. We pulled cardboard boxes out of the back seat and began going door-to-door selling candy to raise money for Easter Seals. I was five years old, and this was my baptism into the world of non-profit fundraising. Since then, I have done walk-a-thons, wrapped gifts at the mall during Christmas, and tossed candy at parades. So 45 years later, I found myself speaking at the Oregon State Convention of Epsilon Sigma Alpha (ESA), a worldwide women's group that my mother has been involved with since 1972. I spoke to eighty-five dedicated ladies who have spent years supporting groups like Easter Seals and St. Jude's Children Hospital, not to mention local groups in their areas. After my talk on supporting public lands, one of the attendees commented that she was glad to see that ESA got me off to a good start in the non-profit world, and I would have to agree.



*Top portion of image:
David Blacker, Circa 1973.
Bottom: David speaks at the
Oregon ESA Convention
in April 2017. Photo courtesy of
ESA's Sandi Diess.*

Some quick Park updates for everyone:

Work has begun at the Furnace Creek Inn and Ranch on their big renovation. Food service options are now limited to a breakfast, lunch, and dinner buffet. Work will begin in earnest in July.

We will be setting up an online registration for any Scotty's Castle Flood Recovery Tours we may be able to provide this fall. Members get advance notice of these events, if I have your e-mail address. So be sure to officially join or renew your membership when due so you don't miss out on this opportunity!

Until next time, stay cool!

David