

PhotoFile

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Featuring Photography and Articles by John R. DeLapp

ANZA—BORREGO DESERT STATE PARK

California's Largest State Park

In This Issue...

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park



While living in Escondido, California in 1984-85, my wife and I were introduced to Anza-Borrego Desert State Park by her cousins who also lived in Escondido and regularly recreated in the park during the winter months. Although I only visited it once or twice during that time, I found it an enjoyable place with

many opportunities for hiking, making photographs, and watching its variety of birds and other wildlife. Years later, after our son moved to San Diego following college, I began using the trips to visit him as opportunities to revisit the park, expand my appreciation for it, and to add more photos to my collection.

Since I live in Alaska and am accustomed to a cold climate, I have avoided trips in the summer, but have visited the park in fall, winter, and spring. Due to the oppressive summer heat, public visitation drops off significantly in the summer. My trips to the park in winter and the shoulder seasons has allowed me to make a variety of images, provided new experiences, and furthered my understanding of the desert environment.

My photo collection includes images from twelve separate trips beginning in 2005 when I started making regular visits to San Diego. Some trips have been solo trips, while others I have been accompanied by photographer friends, or my wife, Tina. The photographs included in this magazine were taken from my image collection produced from all those trips.

One of my favorite photo subjects in the park has been the Peninsular desert bighorn sheep that can sometimes be seen in, or near, the Palm Canyon campground. These animals are federally protected and live only in the desert mountains of San Diego and Riverside counties as well as the mountains in Baja Mexico where they are also protected.

While I am not an expert on the park with intimate knowledge of all its features and assets, I have grown to love it and hope that the images shown here, made over the past fourteen years, have captured some of the park's beauty and its appeal as a protected desert environment.

John R. DeLapp

FRONT COVER: This blazing sunrise was a gift to all who witnessed it at the Palm Canyon Campground.

BACK COVER: A large Peninsular Desert Bighorn ram takes a moment to contemplate photographer Ike Waits in the Palm Canyon watershed.

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FEATURING PHOTOGRAPHY AND ARTICLES

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Other publications by John R. DeLapp that are available for preview or download from www.magcloud.com include:

PhotoFile #1: *Chinitna Bay Bear Camp*, Oct. 2012

PhotoFile #2: *Redpoll Rally*, March 2013

PhotoFile #3: *Denali*, July 2013

PhotoFile #4: *Road Trip*, July 2014

PhotoFile #5: *Havana*, May 2015

PhotoFile #6: *Bear Boat*, September 2015

PhotoFile #7: *A Season to Remember*, April 2016

PhotoFile #8: *St. Paul Island*, September 2016



Two Peninsular desert bighorn sheep keep watch over a flowering mountain inside in the park.

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park is California's largest park and is located about a two hour drive through the mountains east of San Diego. The community of Borrego Springs, its small plane airport, golf courses, RV parks, and other adjacent private lands are surrounded by this park.

The park encompasses some 1,000 square miles and stretches from nearly the Mexican border to Riverside County in the north. It is unique in many respects and is characterized by its badland deserts in the east and rugged canyons and mountains which rise to more than 5,000 feet in the west.

Most park facilities and some 500 miles of primitive 4WD roads

are located in the low desert areas on east side of the mountains. The climate in the low lands is dry and very hot, being only slightly cooler in the summer than places like Death Valley. Record highs of over 100 degrees have been recorded in eight different months, although temperatures in the winter are usually very pleasant.

In 1933, California recognized the uniqueness of the area and approved its creation and management as a protected park. The park was named after the early explorer Juan Bautista de Anza and the word "borrego" which is Spanish for sheep.

The tiny town of Borrego Springs serves as the hub for park activities where basic services of

fuel, food, and lodging are available. The park visitor's center is located just west of town at the base the mountains along with the Palm Canyon Campground which is the largest campground in the park. It has 47 sites with full hookups and 73 dry sites.

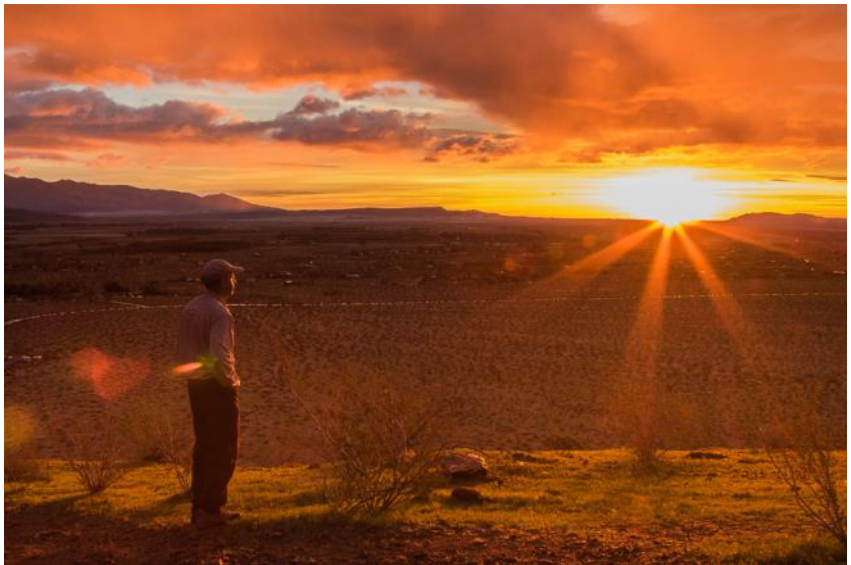
In addition to state support, the park receives funding, volunteers, and many events provided by the Anza-Borrego Foundation, a non-profit corporation with headquarters in Borrego Springs.

One asset of the park which is often overlooked is its designation as an International Dark-Sky Park. The park is committed to protecting this feature and is educating the public on its value as a natural resource.

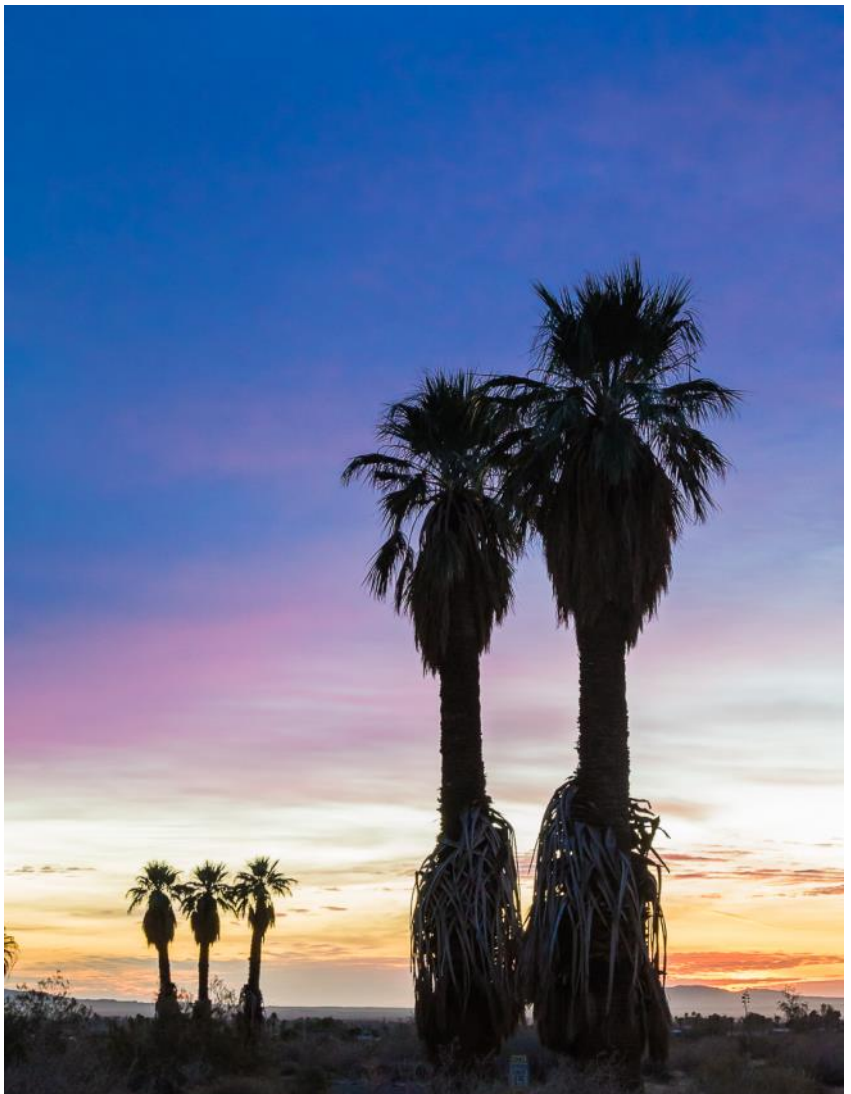


Desert meets desert mountains...

A rainbow is created by early morning sun shining on light shower which is falling on Palm Canyon and adjacent mountains. The upper portion of the Palm Canyon campground is visible on the plain in the lower right.



Watching the sunrise from Panoramic Overlook Trail.



Another sunrise as seen from the Palm Canyon Campground.





Blooms from winter rains...

The average annual rainfall in the park measured at the visitor's center is only about five inches. But when rains arrive in sufficient quantity and at the right time, the vegetative response can be spectacular.

Far Left: Brittle bush blooming in Palm Canyon with the morning sun lighting up the mountains.

Top Left: Cholla cactus with a single yellow flower.

Middle Left: Pink flowers of a Prickly-pear cactus.

Bottom Left: Yellow blooms of a Barrel cactus.





Peninsular Desert Bighorn Sheep...

The Peninsular desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*), also known as Nelson's bighorn sheep, are a subspecies of the Desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) and have been listed as an endangered species by the federal government since 1973. These sheep are only found in the lower elevations (400 to 4,000 feet in the mountains of Southern California as well as in Baja California (Mexico). Their habitat consists of desert canyons, washes, and eastern slopes of desert mountains stretching from Palm Springs southward into Mexico. This includes a large portion of the mountains in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

The population in the U.S. was only 280 animals in 1996 but has grown following years of conservation and habitat protection. An aerial census done in 2016 estimated the population

had grown to 780 animals. The sheep are also protected in Mexico where the population is estimated to be about 2,500 animals. The sheep are vulnerable to predation (mountain lions, coyotes, bobcats, and eagles), but disease (from domestic animals), habitat loss (from humans and livestock), climate changes, and poisonings from eating domestic plants, may be more serious threats.

Rams can weigh as much as 300 pounds and develop massive, curved horns, while the ewes have short horns with little curvature. Sheep live in herds which vary greatly in size and may be as large as 100 animals. Sheep in the park rely on the springs that exist in Palm and Coyote Canyons as well as other water which is made available in times of drought by the park.



A small herd of rams stand in the middle of the Palm Canyon trail which takes hikers to the palm grove oasis..



More Peninsular Desert Bighorn Sheep...

Since these sheep are protected, they are quite tolerant of people, but not dogs, which are not allowed on trails.

The herd to the left is a mix of mature rams, ewes, and a few lambs. Rams are often seen in herds consisting of only mature rams. It is not unusual to see them sparring with each other, testing their strength, and apparently establishing a pecking order within the herd. Fortunately, they don't see any need to challenge people.





Birds and other critters seen in the Park...

Left: This Cactus Wren, which is my favorite bird in the park, often makes very distinctive calls in early morning, presumably claiming his(?) territory. They build amazing nests in the midst of cholla cactus.

Below: The Black-tailed jackrabbit shares habitat with cottontail rabbits.

Bottom: A Bewick's Wren perches in a chuparosa bush which is one of the hummingbirds' favorite. In fact, "chuparosa" means hummingbird in Spanish.

Bottom Left: A Rock Wren is sometimes heard but hard to see as it forages in rocky areas.





A Say's Phoebe takes flight off a post.



Male Phainopepla



A hummingbird launches off a perch.



Male Costa's Hummingbird flashes his colors.



Loggerhead Shrike holding a lizard.



Northern Mockingbird.

More birds and critters...

Right: This western diamondback rattler was coiled in the frog pond near the Palm Canyon trailhead. He eventually moved slowly away into brush and rocks when a group of people gathered to view the snake. Western diamondbacks are the largest rattlesnake in the West and have a reputation for not backing down when encountered. Although their venom is not as toxic as the Mojave rattler, they are very dangerous due to the length of their fangs and volume of venom that can be injected.

Below: A Great Egret is a bird that is not often encountered in the park.



Black-throated Sparrow at the frog pond.



American Kestrel, the smallest falcon.

Camping, Family, & Friends...

Not long after the park was established, work began on the Palm Canyon Campground with the construction of a number of ramadas and toilet facilities made using local rock. The ramadas included a fireplace at one end along with two concrete picnic tables and a slat roof to provide some shade. The toilets were constructed without doors or roofs, allowing users nice views of the sky and surrounding mountains (see below).

Subsequent flash floods destroyed a number of these early rock structures but several remain in use and are a unique, popular, and an enjoyable feature of the campground.

One of the most enjoyable parts of visiting the park is sharing experiences with family, friends and fellow campers as seen in accompanying photographs.



John DeLapp, Ike Waits, and Scott DeLapp enjoy their morning coffee at one of the remaining rock structures, 2014.





Ike Waits, Lynn Wegener, and John DeLapp keep warm on a winter evening next to the fireplace, 2008.



Alaskans and expat-Alaskans enjoy a dinner at Palm Canyon Campground, 2019.



The Pauley-DeLapps, visiting from Connecticut, pose for a picture near the palm oasis, 2017.



More fun in the sun ...

Upper Left: Early one morning, John climbed the Overlook for the sunrise and a nice view of the lower portion Palm Canyon Campground. Recent rains had sprouted many patches of green grass on the usually brown landscape.

Above: Bob and Deb Glassmaker get ready to leave the campground for a ride. (Feb., 2019)

Left: A young lady takes a picture of her boy friend (not in the picture) who is lounging in a small pool of water at the palm oasis on a hot spring day.

Lower Left: Lynn Wegener walks down the 6-mile long California Riding and Hiking Trail that drops more than 2,000 feet from Culp Valley to its end at Hellhole Canyon in the valley below. The hike follows a ridge crest that provides amazing views of the mountains and valley below.

Below: This group of young ladies were walking to an arresting drum beat that was provided by the lady in purple as they returned from the palm oasis.





Norah and Julia take a break for a snack after hiking Palm Canyon trail to the palm oasis. (Dec., 2017)



Tina and John pose in one of the rock ramadas for what became their 2018 Christmas photo. (Nov., 2018)



Palm Canyon ...

Left: Visitors on the Palm Canyon Nature Trail stop and watch desert sheep on the nearby mountainside.

Left Below: Trees at the Palm Oasis in Palm Canyon, which is about a 1.5 mile hike from the campground. During wet periods, the spring which feeds these palm trees produces enough water to create a bubbling creek all the way down to the campground. During dry periods, the creek may dry up completely and all that remains are some small pools at the base of the palms.

Right: A long time-exposure shows star trails in the night sky. One of the remaining old rock ramadas is shown in the foreground.

Right Below: Tina checks out the self-guided tour of desert plants outside the visitor's center. The visitor's center was completed in 1979, is partially sunken, and finished with local rocks to resemble as much as possible the natural the desert environment.





An unusual collection of natural rocks called the Pumpkin Patch.



The Badlands as seen from Font's Point.



Typical road in the Badlands.

The Badlands...

East of Borrego Springs is the low desert portion of the park referred to as the Borrego Badlands. A series of 4WD roads takes visitors to various attraction in this vast area of dry washes, canyons, and various formations, most of which has little or no vegetation. Visitors are always advised to check on road conditions before heading off the main roads into this maize of sandy roads.

The combination of wind and water erosion create unusual formations and objects, such as the rocks at the Pumpkin Patch. These natural rocks are called "concretions" and are believed to be formed over time when damp sand, driven by high winds, cements particles together forming various shapes. In this case, "pumpkins".



The three desert "rats" explore the Badlands.



A view from Font's Point with the Borrego Spring's airport visible in the background.



Lynn checks for mail at the "mailbox" at 17 Palms Oasis. Over the years, visitors leave various messages there.



17 Palms Oasis. Palm trees are a sure sign of water and here we found only damp ground.

Night on the desert...

Because it's dark is no reason to put the camera away. The skies in the Borrego Springs area are not totally free of light pollution, but still very good for astrophotography. Below, is an example of a Milky Way image made from the campground. Other examples of night photography include a technique using "light

painting" to make interesting images of one or more of the metal animal sculptures that are scattered all around Borrego Springs on private lands. Or, it can be fun experimenting with glow sticks after dark to see what types of images can be produced, as shown in the examples on the adjacent page.





This fighting horses sculpture by artist Ricardo Breceda, is one of more than one hundred metal sculptures by the artist that are located on private land (Galleta Meadows) in the Borrego Springs area. All are accessible to the public.



An example of light painting using glow sticks and long camera exposure.



Flaps down on final approach, as Scott DeLapp pilots a rented plane to the Borrego Valley Airport.



Scott taxis his plane to a parking space at the Borrego Valley Airport.

For Pilots...

Borrego Springs is served by the Borrego Valley Airport (L08) located east of town. The single strip is a 5,000 x 75-foot paved runway that is open to the public. At various times of the year, acrobatic air shows are conducted from this airport.



John DeLapp works at his Anza-Borrego desert "office".



Evening calls for a relaxing fire at the Palm Canyon campground.

