

November 28, 1952

Memorandum

To: The Director 884-01
From: Superintendent, Joshua Tree
Subject: Desert Campground Operation

Mr. Vint's request for a statement as to our methods of handling campgrounds and the general philosophy behind them has been received.

Many years ago I was assigned to conduct the German Ambassador and a group of German officials on a tour of a national park. We drove through a campground which was teeming with campers some very old, many still in their teens; some were in tents, some had only a blanket; some had stoves and utensils, some heated a can of food over a pine needle fire, ate the contents with a stick and then made tea in the can. After observing the many camper activities one of the German officials said, "This resourcefulness, this initiative, this training in 'getting by' only with that which happens to be at hand -- this is what makes America one of the greatest nations on earth."

Every time I hear an official say 'let's install this, it will please the campers and make life easier for them' I think of the above incident. If you provide a child or an adult with the bare necessities of life they are reasonably well satisfied but give them a luxury and they will expect more and more. If all the comforts of home are provided free of charge many of the benefits and pleasures of camping are lost and the area becomes filled with squatters leaving only the least desirable sites for the legitimate short term campers.

The above philosophy will not receive widespread acclaim-- many will counter that the parks and monuments are for the use of the people and that we rely upon these multitudes for public support. I believe we would receive more support if long term camping were eliminated in order to permit more people to enjoy the parks and monuments. (My definition of a long term camper is a person who stays longer than is necessary to leisurely 'see and do' the exhibits of nature which are most conveniently visited from that campground.)

Many complaints are from short term campers because they can't find a suitable place to camp and from long term campers who find fault with the campground facilities because long and frequent use is no longer unique or enjoyable. Our most 'satisfied customer' is the short term camper who had a comfortable campsite -- they always want to come back to see more. The long term camper too often remembers only 'those inadequate facilities which I was compelled to use all summer -- but only in the parks could I get even these facilities free of charge'.

In Joshua Tree there are six campgrounds. These were first established in late 1950 in the interest of protection of the monument. Water is available in Cottonwood Spring campground only and we hope to eliminate this as a campground because it would serve a much greater use as a scenic or nature area.

Water is much less a problem than one would imagine. As a rule desert campers bring a supply of water -- it is almost as automatic as bringing food. In fact many more desert travelers carry water than food. If a person writes to inquire about camping he is always advised to bring water -- the nearest supply is 10 to 20 miles from the campgrounds. Because of the salubrious climate of the monument, and because of the large number of retired and semi-retired campers and trailerites who would flock to any area where free abundant facilities were provided, it might be inadvisable to provide water in the campgrounds.

Firewood creates more of a problem because it is more inconvenient to transport long distances and because the campers are certain that there will be a tree somewhere nearby. The first year that campgrounds were established some of the adjacent trees and brush were cut for firewood. However our efforts to prevent these depredations are now showing results. Now there is hardly a time when a camper, who was not advised to bring wood, cannot go to some of the fireplaces and find at least a small amount brought in and left by previous campers. At every opportunity we advise prospective campers that they must provide their own cooking fuel.

In the interest of conservation much thought should be given to the type of fireplaces -- if they are provided. This applies whether the fuel is brought in by campers or is chopped from a local botanical specimen. All fuel in the desert is usually dry and burns with little smoke. Therefore, the fireplace can be near the table to save time in cooking. Elevating the fireplace about two feet above ground permits faster preparation of the meal. Desert fuel, whether local or foreign, is generally small so that the grill, which should be thin in order to

heat quickly, should not be too far above the bottom of the firebox. The fireplace should be built small, shallow and with controlled draft to prevent too rapid combustion of the fuel.

Picnickers may eat their lunches anywhere they desire. In the interest of resisting regimentation we hope to be able to grant them this privilege for many years to come. Of course this requires study of the proper placement of refuse receptacles, and some additional cleanup by the patrolmen. Picnickers who desire to build fires are required to use the campground fireplaces. In this area, for the present at least, we prefer not to set aside a picnic area which prohibits campers and a campground which prohibits picnickers.

We are reluctant to make any development which would require regimentation or regulatory measures. If a certain development is essential an attempt is made to plan the development so that regulatory measures will be kept to a minimum. For example if a campground is located in an area surrounded by high rocks it is not necessary to put up and enforce signs "Do Not Camp Beyond This Point", and without running water in the campgrounds it is not necessary to enforce a 30-day camping period. Enforcement of regulations antagonize visitors and require manpower of which there always is a shortage. At least in some instances a proper plan might preclude many problems of administration.

It is less difficult to judge the public acceptance of any area which provides only the bare necessities of camping particularly when there is no entertainment of any kind -- just nature. In our area for the 1951 travel year the mechanical traffic counters indicated 90,560 visitors to the monument. During the 1952 travel there were 129,917 visitors. Use of camping and picnicking facilities increased proportionately. It is gratifying to see so many people who still are willing to 'rough it' just for the attractions which nature alone provides.

/s/ FRANK R. Givens
Superintendent

cc: Regional Director, Region Four

C
O
P
Y