



Volume 62
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TELESCOPE

The Official Newsletter of the Death Valley Natural History Association

Winter 2017

FROM THE DIRECTOR

By David Blacker, Executive Director

Spring is finally coming to Death Valley National Park. With spring comes the eternal question; will there be wildflowers, and if so, when? So here is the prediction from DVNHA's humble Executive Director. Yes, we will have flowers! In fact, some have already been spotted in the Furnace Creek Wash. We did not have as much rain as last year, and it was also later in the season, so we anticipate the peak to fall about mid-March. Keep an eye on the Facebook page for the most up-to-date info.

DVNHA is working closely with the National Park Service to begin giving tours of the grounds at Scotty's Castle. This would allow visitors a first-hand look at the ongoing recovery efforts at the site without impeding the work being performed. Scotty's Castle is still anticipated to officially reopen and resume normal house tour operations by the National Park Service in 2019. So stay tuned for more information.

Gretchen Voeks the curator at Scotty's has also stopped by to let us know that there is a new unfunded curatorial project at Scotty's Castle. Besides finishing the work on the Organ and Historic Upper Music Room curtains, we now hope to raise money for reproductions of the leather curtains that used to adorn the Great Hall. Leather certainly is delicate. Sadly, the brittle condition of the original curtains after many, many years here in the dry environment means they cannot be rehung when the rest of

the collection is returned to the Castle. This brings the level of unfunded projects at Scotty's Castle to almost \$100,000.

Please consider making a donation to assist us in this effort. Many of you have already contributed, Thank you. We wouldn't continue to ask if there were another way. It could take years to get money for these preservation and conservation efforts if we had to rely on other sources. Without your continued support, Scotty's is going to be missing some very important pieces upon reopening.

The Death Valley R.O.C.K.S. (Recreation Outdoors Campaign for Kids through Study) is going strong with 19 trips from 12 different schools scheduled for this season. The education staff (Brandi, Sara, and Cindy) are doing an incredible job! And our friends at the Death Valley Conservancy have committed to a donation of \$5,000 for R.O.C.K.S. this season—so, a big thanks goes out to Henry and Preston at the DVC.

We'd like to send out another special thank you to Sean O'Quinn and his wife Carrie Lancos who with the help of Sean's company matching program have committed to donating \$10,000 to the Wilderness Fund this year! They make this donation in honor of the role Death Valley played in their

DVNHA
has provided
\$4,000,000
[FOUR MILLION DOLLARS]
in overall aid
to Death Valley National Park
since 1954
and **\$100,000**
[ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS]
to Ash Meadows
National Wildlife Refuge
since 2008!
Thank you for your support!

relationship. Unwed five years ago, Sean and Carrie took their first vacation together. As soon as they stopped at Zabriskie Point they knew Death Valley was a special place and have returned at least once a year since—each time finding new places to explore and making new memories. It's members like this that make it possible to continue the incredible work that is being done all over Death Valley National Park!

I'm going to go outside and enjoy the beautiful weather right now. We hope to see many of you this spring. Until then, take care.

David

Scotty's Castle Curatorial Update

By Gretchen Voeks, Museum Curator Scotty's Castle,
Death Valley Natnial Park

2016 was a very busy year for the National Park Service (NPS) Scotty's Castle museum curation team. The October, 2015 flood impacted almost everything we do at the Castle.

Shortly after the flood the NPS Museum Emergency Rescue Team (MERT) was brought in to advise and assist park museum staff with museum collection safety and preservation issues following this disaster. Because of leaks in the ceiling of the archives storage area, MERT and park museum staff immediately removed most of the Castle archives to the Cow Creek Museum Storage Facility. Large archival drawings and blueprints were moved to the NPS Western Archeological and Conservation Center in Tucson because space was not available in the park. Less sensitive objects stored in the archives were moved into the Castle temporarily.

MERT also recommended removal of the entire Scotty's Castle museum collection to a museum quality storage facility while flood recovery and re-habilitation efforts to historic site and infrastructure are underway. Due to the flood, the site lacks adequate electricity, water, and sewer which are necessary for the operation of our HVAC and other infrastructure systems. The flood also scoured the site of landscape vegetation which resulted in an increase in abrasive dust intrusion, and, an impressive increase in rodent activity, threatening the preservation of the collections. Plans for repairs to buildings and the site requires access by numerous contractors creating a safety and security issue for the collections. So, after much discussion at the park, regional and national levels, the museum collection was moved to a secure, environmentally controlled museum storage facility. This work performed by contractors and park staff came to total completion late December, 2016.

Scotty's Castle museum collections will be inaccessible to visitors and researchers until the site re-opens for tours in 2019. However, the Scotty's Castle archives remain at the Cow Creek Museum Storage Facility to enable researchers to continue their work. In the interim, park museum staff are working on object-related preservation projects to improve the long-term preservation of this important collection.

Your generous post flood donations in response to the Centennial Challenge and the "Adopt a Room" program are very much appreciated! These contributions funded the conservation treatment of all of the silver objects on exhibit in the Dining Room, and the conservation treatment and stabilization of the velvet curtains in the Upper Music Room. The silver treatments are underway and will result in a very careful light polishing of the surfaces, removal of old silver polish, and application of a protective film that promises no

need for further polishing for 15-30 years! This is important because removal of silver tarnish results in removal of silver from the surface of the object. So, the longer we can protect the surface from tarnishing the less silver is lost over time.

The Upper Music Room curtains were in very poor condition due to decades of use (we no longer pull the curtains), the dry environment (our relative humidity averages 20%), sunlight and water damage at the lower edges (the doors have been sealed for many years but damage remains). While fading cannot be reversed, the curtains can be cleaned and stabilized. Tears will be repaired and strengthened, and evidence of water damage obscured. Conservation treatment of these beautiful curtains will begin this March.

In addition to the silver and curtain conservation projects, DVNHA donation funding will also allow the park to contract-out important repairs and upgrades to the theater organ that could not be accomplished during visitor tours. Several organ instruments are no longer operable and will be repaired. A bank of pipes will be moved to allow safer access during annual maintenance, parts of the organ console will be repaired, and the midi-system which allows us to play the organ during tours will be upgraded to a state-of-the-art digital system. All of this work is possible because of your donations and we are very grateful!

While the Castle is closed the park curation team continues to facilitate conservation projects to improve the condition of museum objects. Conservation projects we are currently working on or plan to work on include are:

- Reproduction of the leather curtains in the Great Hall which are deteriorated beyond the ability of conservators to repair them
- Reproduction of the linen curtains in the Solarium which have suffered from light and low humidity and are so fragile they are beginning to fall apart
- Conservation of the firearms collection
- Re-wiring many of the candelabrum and other electric lamps used for lighting during tours
- Replacing insecure hinges and backings for framed historic prints and photographs in the Main House and Annex

All of these projects are difficult to achieve during normal park operations with visitor tours, so the park is taking advantage of the Castle closure to complete as much work as possible.

**Thank you for your support of
Scotty's Castle!**



**DEATH VALLEY
NATURAL HISTORY
ASSOCIATION**

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TELESCOPE

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WHO WE ARE:

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Bookstore

Serena Revere
Ash Meadows Visitor Services

NEWSLETTER DESIGN
KimberMoore Design

Scotty's Castle Dining Room

Before



After

Scotty's Castle Upper Music Room

Before



After

Side-by-side before and after photos reveal the empty expanse now found in every single room at Scotty's Castle. Once beautifully adorned walls, shelves and floors lay barren, a sight not seen since the rooms of the each addition were first built and decorated. Bessie's precious furniture, textiles, wall hangings, books, baskets, pottery and all other collection items have been moved to professional curatorial storage. The items will not be brought back for public exhibit until Scotty's Castle is fully repaired and utilities fully operational. Photo Credits: NPS.

Member Highlight

We want to hear from you!

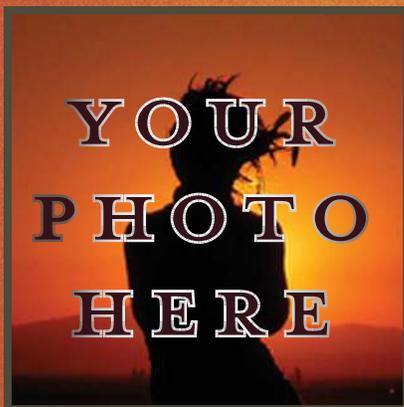
**Would you like to share your story
in upcoming issues?**

E-mail: memberships@dvaha.org

Subject Line: "Member Highlight"

Please include:

- 1-Photo of yourself in Death Valley or Ash Meadows
- 1-Quote about your love for the Death Valley area
- Year of your first visit
- Why you became a member





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2016 IN REVIEW—You helped DVNHA provide \$318,014 in aid to our partners: Death Valley National Park and Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge during the period of October 1, 2015 - September 31, 2016. This support provided visitors with free printed publications, support for NPS Centennial events, initial flood response relief, the first phase of restoration work on the Welte-Mignon Organ at Scotty's Castle, wilderness restoration, transportation grants to help get kids here to experience the outdoors, and the production of several interpretive videos. We funded five internships, provided 7,312 hours of educational programming, 1270 hours of wilderness restoration and 7,312 hours of visitor service assistance to 320,250 visitors combined. It was a busy year!

Aid to Death Valley National Park: \$296,556

- \$196,865 - Staff time in Death Valley
- \$31,669 - Scotty's Castle Historic Preservation
- \$16,889 - DVNP Video Project
- \$15,989 - Payroll taxes on donated staff time
- \$8,037 - Death Valley R.O.C.K.S. Transportation
- \$5,000 - Death Valley Dunes Video Grant Expense
- \$5,000 - Racetrack Playa Wayside Exhibit Grant Expense
- \$4,980 - Centennial BioBlitz
- \$4,058 - Wilderness Restoration
- \$3,885 - Free publications
- \$2,239 - Miscellaneous aid
- \$1,112 - Scotty's Castle Flood Relief
- \$730 - Donations of inventory
- \$103 - Celestial Centennial- MarsFest

Aid to Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge: \$21,458

- \$18,651 - Staff time in Ash Meadows
- \$1,931 - Miscellaneous aid
- \$876 - Volunteer Stipends



DVNHA's financial information is published and available for public viewing online. To view please visit: <http://www.guidestar.org/profile/95-2083126>