

Death Valley

Yes, there's Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, the Everglades, and lost of other national parks, as well..... but I've got Death Valley here in California, and there's no other place quite like it in North America. In fact, only the Dead Sea region, on the border of Jordan and Israel, can compare to it.

Located in Southern California, next to the Nevada border, Death Valley is a deep and arid basin, walled in the west by the Panamint Range and in the east by the Amargosa Range. Less than 2.03 in. of rain a year falls in this forbidding land, which, in the summer, has some of the highest temperatures in the world. The small Amargosa River and Furnace Creek die in the sands. There are alkali flats, colored and grotesque rock formations, salt flats, sand dunes, and briny pools. Badwater, at 282 ft. below sea level, is the lowest point in North America. The Panamint Indians (an offshoot of the Shoshone), a hunting and gathering society, are the only group ever to be self-subsisting in the area.

The name *Death Valley* was given by gold seekers who, in 1849, mistakenly undertook to cross the region on their way to the gold fields. The valley, itself, yielded some gold in the next decade, but more wealth was to be taken out of the area by the valley's famous mule-team wagons, which hauled vast loads of borax.

As inhospitable as it is, still Death Valley is host to an array of small animals, and its peculiar plants blooming in the Spring gives it a surprising beauty that attracts many tourists every year. The valley was much publicized by Walter Scott, called Death Valley Scotty, whose ostentatious home, *Scotty's Castle* is a famous showplace there.

Death valley was originally established as a National Monument in 1933, covering some 1,879,088.28 acres. Last year, however, President Clinton signed into law the California Desert Protection Act, which expanded the Death Valley and Joshua Tree national monuments and elevated them to national park status. Sponsored by U.S. Senator Diane Feinstein, the act directly affects the future of California's 7.5 million desert acres. Aside from the two national parks, the Act also created a 1.2 million acre East Mojave National Preserve.

During the Winter, and especially during the Spring, Death Valley holds wonders that any visitor will appreciate. There are small herds of wild burros, flowering cactus, pristine sand dunes, and lots of places to explore. Although, some attractions are better viewed at a distance....Some years ago, I took my family camping at Death Valley during Easter vacation (*You can tell in was awhile ago since we were still calling it 'Easter Vacation.'* Now, *we're politically correct and call it 'Spring Break.'*) Anyhow, while visiting Scotty's Castle, my oldest son became personally acquainted with a cactus. The rangers at the first aid station were very nice!



trailer park. It was overrated by Fred Harvey in the past, although I'm not certain of its current status.

Thirty-strikes are rarer critters, but representative samples are shown here.

I have a total of 22 Death Valley covers in my National Parks collection, but I'm sure that Ed Brassard or other National Park collectors probably have more.

