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Grapevine News

COLORADO RIVER HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM

The Mojave Valley Camel Experiment

Brought to you by our Archivist—Pat Herzig

Camels may seem out of place in the North American deserts, yet their history in places like the Mojave Valley is a fascinating story of innovation, exploration, and adaptation. These hardy animals, more commonly associated with the Middle Eastern and North African deserts, were introduced to the American Southwest in the mid-19th century as part of a unique military experiment. Their time in the Mojave Valley and other desert regions highlights both the ambitions and challenges of the American expansion across the continent.

The idea of using camels as transport in the American Southwest originated with Jefferson Davis, then U.S. Secretary of War and later President of the Confederacy. In 1855, Davis proposed using camels to carry supplies across the arid landscapes of the western territories, where traditional pack animals like mules and horses struggled with the intense heat, scarce water sources, and rugged terrain. With congressional approval, the U.S. Army imported around 70 camels from the Middle East, along with several handlers experienced in camel care and training. These camels were soon tested in desert environments, including parts of the Mojave Valley, where the vast stretches of dry, challenging terrain were similar to the camels' native environments.

The camels performed admirably in many respects. They could carry loads of up to 600 pounds—double that of mules—and required less water, making them ideal for desert travel. Their toughness and endurance impressed military officials, and they quickly proved that they could navigate harsh landscapes with greater ease than horses or mules. Despite these advantages, the project faced several logistical and cultural challenges.

As part of their testing, the camels traveled through the Mojave Valley and the broader Mojave Desert, which extends into present-day California, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona. This landscape, with its scorching temperatures, rocky terrain, and limited water, was perfect for assessing the camels' capabilities. In the Mojave Valley, camels were deployed to transport supplies between military outposts and survey possible

Continued on pg2

Continued from pg1
routes for stagecoaches and railroads.

The camels quickly adapted to the valley's desert conditions, easily traversing the dry riverbeds, cactus-filled plains, and rocky outcrops. However, they also faced obstacles that tested the limits of the camel experiment. The roughness of the Mojave Valley's terrain led to friction with other pack animals and startled local wildlife. In addition, their presence alarmed settlers, prospectors, and Native American tribes, who were unfamiliar with these animals and often found them intimidating.

Despite the camels' success in navigating the Mojave Valley, the experiment ultimately failed to gain lasting support. Camels frightened horses and mules, causing logistical issues at military posts and disrupting established transport routines. Their handlers, mostly Middle Eastern, struggled with language barriers and found it difficult to integrate into military life. Additionally, the Civil War's outbreak in 1861 shifted national priorities, diverting funds and attention away from the Camel Corps.

After the Camel Corps was disbanded, many of the camels were auctioned off or simply released into the wild. Some made their way into remote parts of the Mojave Valley, where they roamed freely. Occasionally, these feral camels would be sighted by travelers and settlers, becoming the subject of local lore. These "ghost camels" reportedly survived for decades in the harsh desert landscape, their unique adaptations allowing them to endure where other animals could not.

The Camel Corps left a lasting impression on the history and folklore of the Mojave Valley. Though short-lived, the experiment demonstrated the resilience and adaptability of camels and contributed to a unique chapter in American history. Local legends about ghost camels persisted well into the 20th century, with some residents reporting sightings of camels as late as the early 1900s. These stories have added to the mystique of the American Southwest, where the unlikely image of camels wandering the desert became part of the region's cultural heritage.

While camels did not permanently establish themselves in the Mojave Valley or become a mainstay of desert transportation in the United States, their presence is a testament to the ingenuity and experimental spirit of that era. Today, the story of the Camel Corps serves as a reminder of the challenges and creativity involved in American expansion, as well as the lengths people went to in exploring and adapting to new environment. Camels in the Mojave Valley represent an extraordinary footnote in the story of America's westward expansion.

NOTE: The information from this article was obtained through CHAT GBT.

PRESIDENTS CORNER

Hi , well here it is, November and Fall is finally here. Our annual election was on the 12th, and I would like to welcome our newest board member Ray Wesch. Ray is our Educational Programs coordinator and a knowledgeable docent at the museum on Thursdays.

On November 20th from 5:30 to 7:00 we will be hosting an event with Luis Vega as our speaker. Bring your ATV and trailblazer questions to get them answered. Luis will also be autographing books and possibly they might be in the raffle. Please come and enjoy, we will have refreshments

If you have anything you would like to donate, contact the archival committee to check and see if it's a good fit for the museum. Please call the museum. The number is 928-754-3399, or you can call me at 928-219-2582.

Lots of work on our Educational Garden from Laurie Thompson and Naomi Jack. They have put in lots of work cleaning up and making the garden look beautiful. Thank you!

Maintaining our yards and our buildings takes a lot of time and it's so nice to see the great jobs the volunteers do. Without our volunteers, we couldn't exist. Many thank yous to all of you for your very wonderful help.

Our museum hours are now Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00 am to 4:00 pm, with the last admission at 3:00. So if there are no visitors as of 3:00, we will close.

If you have any questions concerning the museum, please call me at 928-219-2582 or call the museum at 928-754-3399.

Sincerely
Karole Finkelstein
President

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

The Colorado River Historical Society Museum is seeking volunteers. If you enjoy history and want to learn more about the area, the society needs you. This is a chance to meet area visitors from all over the world and form friendships with a wonderful group of volunteers. Many of our volunteers are part-time residents and retirees. Hours are flexible and duties are as easy or challenging as you would like.

Examples of the types of volunteer we need:

Docent	Handyman
Gardener	Data Entry
Teachers	Marketing

Fundraising & Event Coordinators

COLLECTIONS CORNER

Collections News:

Each CRHS newsletter allows the Collections Committee to provide news and updates about one of the four collections: the Archives, the Artifact collection, the Educational Garden, and the Library. This month, we want to share some news about the Archive and Library collections.

Library news: Did you know that the CRHS Library not only contains books but maps, periodicals, newspapers, compact discs, (CDs), digital video discs, (DVDs,) and video tapes, (VHS), as well? The collection also includes several rare and out-of-print books considered part of the Special Collections. We continue to catalog the collection using an online Library Management System called LibraryThing. LibraryThing collaborates specifically with individuals, small libraries, and organizations to make their library catalog available online. Our goal is to have the Museum's Library catalog available on the CRHSM's website which will allow you to search the collection.

Archive news: Recently, the Bullhead City School District donated several Mohave County Parcel Plat maps to the Museum. To properly conserve and process these maps, we first have to make sure they are thoroughly cleaned and bug-free before we begin to catalog and add them to the archive collection. In the future, we hope to make this collection available for viewing by Museum members and researchers alike.

The Collections Committee is excited about the progress happening in our departments. The newly built storage room certainly helped provide much-needed space to place shelving units and file cabinets that house the many items in the collections. We are now better equipped to organize, store, and care for the collections entrusted to our care.

As our work and efforts continue in the collections, make sure you look for future CRHS newsletters with updates and information about the progress we are making and other exciting news we have to share with you!

Irene Holiman

Librarian

SEEKING COLLECTION DONATIONS

We are always looking for any artifact that is pertinent to our Tri-state area. This includes, but is not limited to, photographs, family histories, mining equipment, Davis Dam, Native Americans, steamboats, ranching, fossils, explorers, highways, historical maps, churches, service clubs and businesses.

- We cannot accept an artifact with stipulations on it such as it must be displayed in a particular way or time period.
- We do not accept loans.

Give us a call at the museum if you have an artifact or historical item you would like us to consider.

AROUND THE HOUSE

We just wanted to give you an update on progress in the Educational Gardens at the museum. We have been monitoring a few of our plants that suffered from the extended summer heat this year. Although our plants are mostly native to the Mojave Desert and have had ample water, they just may not have been able to survive the long stretch of nighttime temperatures that stayed above 90 degrees. Plants, like people, have their needs and besides the common things like water and nutrition, cool down periods are just as important to their survival (it also doesn't help the water they get from our watering system is over 100 degrees). The plants most affected were the newly planted ones from last fall. This contrasts with the two pigmy palms (non-native) that did make it through this year. This is due to their adaptation to this area for the past eight or so years. Although they are not native, they have adapted over time to the more extreme environment (we did baby them a bit, but with all we could do, we couldn't change the extreme heat).

We are in the process of training some of our smaller trees that have looked more like shrubs than trees into more tree-like form. Specifically in this article, we want to focus on our Desert Ironwood (*olneya tesota)* trees. These are very interesting and challenging trees. They are very important to our local desert habitat but, like many of the native plants we have around the area, they have many thorns. Here is an excerpt from an article we published last August about the Ironwood. *"Found in desert washes and on low hills, often in gravelly to silty soil, below 3,000 feet, Desert ironwood is also a habitat-modifying keystone species, that is, a species that exhibits strong influences on the distribution and abundance of associated species. It is important as a nurse plant for many younger plants, providing shade and protection as they grow, as well as providing habitat for animals that make nests in the trees, as well as below the trees. Possessing one of the hardest and heaviest woods in the region, desert ironwood grows slowly but steadily, and some trees are estimated to be about 800 years old! It is remarkably resistant to rotting, perhaps because its heartwood is rich in toxic chemicals that make it essentially non-biodegradable—a dead ironwood tree trunk will persist as long as 1600 years! Usually a multi-trunked tree, sometimes single-trunked, plants can grow as large as 50 feet tall, but normally much shorter, especially in Arizona. More commonly in our area they get up to about 30 feet tall and wide. They bloom in April - May. Native bees are the primary pollinators of ironwood."*

Master Gardener Associate—Laurie Thompson
Master Gardener— Naomi Jack

Here is a "before" and "after" pruning picture of one of our Ironwoods.

Come see our Ironwoods in the museums "Educational Gardens".

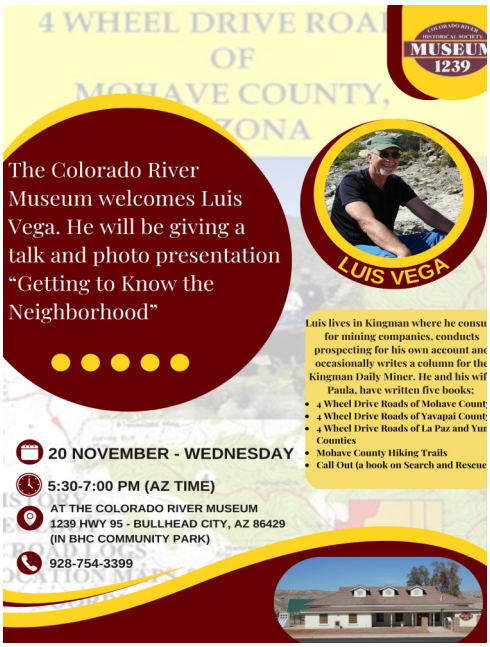
EVENTS CALENDAR

All events are at the museum unless otherwise stated

Guest Speaker—Luis Vega:

Join us for a fun and informative evening about 4 wheeling and hiking in the area.

Nov20th 2024 - Wednesday 5:30 pm-7pm(AZ time)



4th Annual Patron Event "*New Year at Your Museum*":

January 21th 2025 - Tuesday 5pm-7:00pm(AZ time)

WORD PUZZLE

Mojave Camel Experiment

H	P	R	D	H	R	H	X	E	O	O	S	M	Z	S
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I	A	Q	D	E	T	S	E	T	D	I	B	C	S	A
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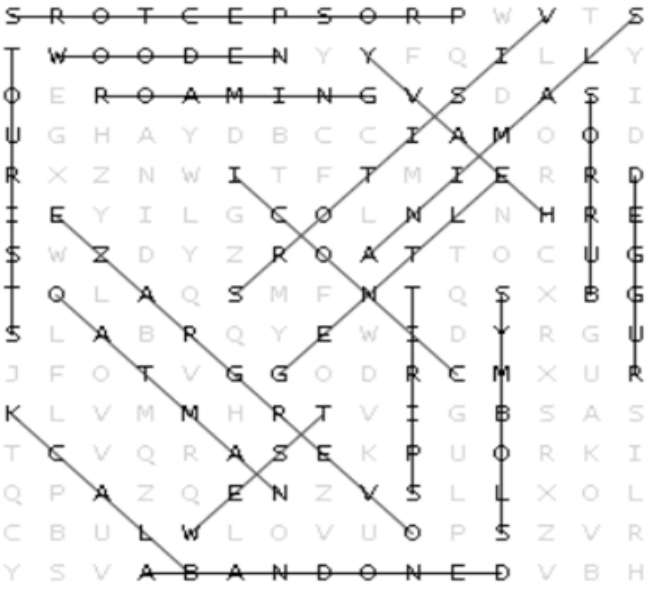
C	G	N	P	S	Q	K	E	M	Q	S	H	E	T	G
S	E	S	R	O	H	R	O	F	Y	A	Z	Y	N	C
P	P	U	D	B	S	V	W	D	H	F	J	S	H	T

ADMIRABLY
CAMELS
CHALLENGING
DESERTS
ENVIRONMENTS
EXPERIMENT
FASCINATING
HANDLERS
HARDY
HARSH
HISTORY
HORSES
MILITARY
REGIONS
TERRAIN
TESTED
WATER

October 2024 Crossword Puzzle answers: Burros of Oatman



C O L O R A D O R I V E R
H I S T O R I C A L S O C I E T Y
M U S E U M

1239 Highway 95
Bullhead City, AZ 86429

PO Box 1599
Bullhead City, AZ 86430

Phone: 928-754-3399
Email: CRHSmuseum@outlook.com
Web: coloradoriverhistoricalsociety.org/
Hours of Operations:
Tuesday—Saturday 10:00am - 4:00pm
(last admittance 3:00pm)

Mission Statement

The mission of The Colorado River Historical Society shall be to operate a museum to promote interest and knowledge concerning the history of the Lower Colorado River area, most specifically the Tri-state area.

Grapevine News Editor - Laurie Thompson

MEMBERSHIPS

A Note From our Membership Chairman:

Have you been by to see our Educational Gardens yet? Our volunteers have done a phenomenal job creating a beautiful space highlighting local floral and fauna, a Cactus Hill, a Prehistoric display, mining displays, a wonderful mural wall and much more! Your donations made this space available! If you haven't become a member of the Colorado River Historical Society yet, now is the time.

Of Note: We have made a small change to the Individual and Family membership levels from $15 to $20 for Individual and $25 to $30 for the Family level.

If you have questions about membership, or you're interested in becoming a member, please reach out to Ellen Brown at 928-542-1160 or see one of the docents when you visit the museum.

Membership Chair - Ellen Brown

GIFT SHOP NEWS

Our museum store now features, "Flavors of the Southwest". Amongst other delectable items, we are featuring Anasazi Beans. The "Anasazi" were Indians who lived in the four corners area of Arizona. To complete your southwestern meal, we offer a cheesy corn bread mix. Tempt your family and friends to cactus candies for dessert!