

National monument death valley, california essay

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Death Valley, located in the western states of Nevada and California, is one of the nation's many national monuments. Spanning more than 3 million acres of space between the Mojave Desert and the Great Basin, Death Valley contains a number of sand dunes, canyons, mountains and more, contributing to an immensely varied desert environment that is one of the nation's great treasures (Rothman and Miller, 2013). The area itself is also a national park in addition to being a national monument, and is the largest national park in the mainland United States; it is also an International Biosphere Reserve. Death Valley's history, environment, and intrinsic geographic value are just some of the reasons it remains an indelible part of the American landscape.

Death Valley has been around as early as 7000 BC, as evidenced by the existence of groups of Native Americans who have inhabited the area at various points since that time (Rothman and Miller, 2013). During the colonization of the New World by the Europeans, Death Valley received its name: many people going out west in the Gold Rush to find their fortune in California found themselves stuck there; while just one group member perished there, it was treacherous enough to earn the moniker anyway. In the later 19th century, gold and silver mines cropped up in Death Valley to take advantage of these climes; however, borax was the only real sustainable ore to come out of those attempts (Rothman and Miller, 2013). In the 1920s, tourism in this area increased, as areas within Death Valley started to get resorts built within them. Eventually, Death Valley was given national monument status in 1933 by President Herbert Hoover; it wasn't until 1994 that President Bill Clinton granted Death Valley National Park

status as well (NPS, 2014).

The climate of Death Valley is extremely hot and arid; it has been called the driest and warmest area in North America, since there is very little surface water to provide relief for the high temperatures and sand. It is so hot in Death Valley that, when recording the hottest temperatures in the country, meteorologists simply choose to ignore Death Valley since it will always be the hottest place. The highest temperature recorded worldwide happened in Death Valley on July 10, 1913, at 134 degrees Fahrenheit (NPS, 2014).

Conversely, nights and winters in Death Valley are extremely cold, with average temperatures reaching a low of 39 degrees Fahrenheit. These extremes in temperature lend Death Valley its difficult living conditions, as well as its mystique and appeal.

Death Valley is a wide-reaching area with many different fascinating points of interest to choose from. One of the most fascinating areas is Zabriskie Point, a beautiful range of erosional ridges that run throughout the Amargosa Range section of Death Valley. The point itself is made of sediments that came from Furnace Creek Lake, and left there after drying up 5 million years ago. This site has been the inspiration for many different artists and filmmakers, from Michaelangelo Antonioni (who made a film set there called Zabriskie Point in 1970) to the filmmakers of the 1950s science-fiction movie Robinson Crusoe on Mars (Rothman and Miller, 2013)..

Badwater Basin is also another fantastic point of interest in Death Valley, a salt flat that lies under the Black Mountains. This site is the lowest point in North America, being less than 300 feet from sea level. It is also made entirely of nearly 100% pure table salt. The salt formations lead to

geographical formations and saucers of salt that are brilliant to behold - the shapes occur because of the evaporation of water in the salt pan, leading to expansion of salt crystals that form these disks. The Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes are another notable landmark, being a widely-spanning crest of sand dunes that stretches for miles around - these were used in the Star Wars films and many others to depict tremendously brilliant deserts (Rothman and Miller, 2013).

Being a desert environment, not much life grows in Death Valley, though there are some zones where vegetation can be found. Desert Holly, Creosote Bush, sage, mesquite and more are some of the desert-friendly flora that can be located within Death Valley. As far as fauna goes, the vast majority of life in Death Valley are smaller mammals, like coyotes, bobcats, cougars and the like. Bighorn sheep are also found in comparatively large quantities in the valley. There are also more than 300 species of birds, and three dozen species of reptiles that can be found in Death Valley, leading to a surprisingly fertile and habitable area of land (NPS, 2014).

In conclusion, Death Valley is an incredible, wide-reaching and expansive national monument in North America. Its millennia of history, rich wildlife, and stunning geological formations have earned it a status as a protected space, while its treacherous and hostile environment have lent it a rather romantic reputation as a dangerous place to survive. Humans have always had a difficult time living and thriving in this area, which is perhaps what flatters our own sense of curiosity about it. Because of these attributes and more, Death Valley remains a fascinating landmark in the canvas of America.

Works Cited

National Park Service. "Death Valley Site Index." NPS. gov. 2014.

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