

## **Backgrounder**

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### **History of Death Valley National Park**

Death Valley was only established as a national park in 1994, but it has been a thriving land for centuries.

During the last 10,000 years, four Native American cultures have lived in the area. The Nevares Spring People were the first known group, arriving 9,000 years ago. Around 5,000 years ago the Mesquite Flat People took their place in the area. Two thousand years ago, around the time the area became a desert, they were replaced by the Saratoga Spring People, a culture more advanced at hunting, gathering, and handcrafts. Around 1,000 years ago, the Timbisha, a nomadic group of people, moved into the area.

People of European descent first populated the area during the California Gold Rush starting in the 1840s. In December 1849, the Bennet-Arcane Party, a group of European travelers making up 100 wagons, got lost on the Old Spanish Trail and stumbled into Death Valley. They eventually just barely made it out alive, and as they left one woman turned and said, “Goodbye, Death Valley,” giving the area its name.

Death Valley grew in population due to mining profits. Borax was first found in 1881 by Rosie and Aaron Winters near The Ranch at Death Valley. Eagle Borax Works was founded in 1882, becoming the area’s first commercial borax operation, followed by Harmony Borax Works in 1883. The products of these borax works were brought out of Death Valley by “twenty-mule teams” on 30-day round trips, granting a canyon the name Twenty-mule Team Canyon. The Death Valley Railroad was built in 1914 to serve mining operations. Death Valley became the world’s number one source of borax by the late 1920s. In the early 1900s, an accidental gold discovery in the area started a short and small gold rush.

Tourism in the area began in the 1920s, as people began to see springs and the Furnace Creek Inn and resort. Death Valley Scotty, a con man, and Albert Mussey Johnson, helped Death Valley gain fame through the building of Scotty’s Castle in Death Valley. The myths that developed around the large estate brought in tourists from all over.

In 1933, President Herbert Hoover proclaimed a national monument in and around Death Valley. In the early 1940s, the Civilian Conservation Corps built barracks, roads, telephone lines, and buildings in the area. In 1976, Congress closed Death Valley to the filing of new mining claims, allowing mining to remain on a limited basis with strict environmental standards.

In 1984, Death Valley National Monument was designated a biosphere reserve. In 1994 the monument was expanded by 1.3 million acres and the California Desert Protection Act named Death Valley a national park.

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