

RECREATION IN THE CALIFORNIA DESERT



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## Descriptive Summary

**Title**

Recreation in the California Desert

**Date**

1977

**Creator**

Paul F. Clark and Eric J. Redd

**Extent**

Four (4) oral histories

**Collateral:**

A report for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) *History of Recreation in the California Desert* (1978)

**Repository**

Center for Oral and Public History  
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**Project Abstract**

In an effort to supplement their report to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Paul Clark and Eric Redd conducted these four interviews concerning the California Desert. These serve as an appendix to the final report, presented in 1978, entitled *History of Recreation in the California Desert*. Each interview presents a unique side to varying aspects of recreation in the desert, whether it's hiking, rock collecting, RVing, or motorcycle racing. Interviewees also comment on military use, as well as future land planning in the desert. Interviewees provide accounts of their early exploration and observations of the area in the 1930s and 1940s as well as the growing recreational interests in the desert. Furthermore, they advocate their cause to be considered as part of future conservation and land planning efforts.

**OH 1583**

NARRATOR: TOCHER, CRAIG

INTERVIEWER: Paul F. Clark and Eric J. Redd

DATE: October 11, 1977

PROJECT: Recreation in the California Desert

TRANSCRIPT: Verbatim (32 pp); Edited (41 pp); Final (20 pp)

AUDIO FORMAT: Missing

**ABSTRACT:**

An interview with Craig Tocher, an employee with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The purpose of this interview was to gain perspective on the history of recreation within the California desert and why future preservation of the desert remains important. Excerpts of this interview, as well as others, were used in an extensive report entitled *History of Recreation in the California Desert*, authored by the above-mentioned interviewers, and presented to the Bureau of Land Management in 1978. Topics include Tocher's professional background in the National Park Service, working in landscape architecture and master planning; Tocher joining the Bureau of Land Management and his early investigations on recreation in the desert; his involvement in a report called *The California Desert*, which argued for a desert study, which would lead to protection of the desert as a National Park; the formation of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in the early sixties; methods in which he had to garner support for desert; the environmental resources in the desert; the effects of recreational off-road vehicles; development of planning guidelines in the dessert, including budgeting; forming an official staff to execute the management plan; garnering public support; creating recreational maps of the California desert for travelers; issuing land permits for special events and races; development of camp grounds, restrooms, and signage; Tocher's personal observations of people using the desert as recreation; using the California Desert Plan as a prototype for other BLM possibilities across the country; and finally, the drawbacks from management of desert recreation.

**OH 1584**

NARRATOR: McSHAN, MAGGIE

INTERVIEWER: Eric J. Redd

DATE: November 1, 1977

PROJECT: Recreation in the California Desert

TRANSCRIPT: Edited, (27 pp); Final (15 pp)

AUDIO FORMAT: Missing

ABSTRACT:

An interview with Maggie McShan. The purpose of this interview was to gain perspective on the history of recreation within the California desert and why future preservation of the desert remains important. Excerpts of this interview, as well as others, were used in an extensive report entitled *History of Recreation in the California Desert*, co-authored by the above-mentioned interviewer, and presented to the Bureau of Land Management in 1978. Topics include McShan's early years of rockhounding in the California desert, looking for unique rocks and petrified wood, during the 1930s and 1940s; starting a rock store and museum with her husband; starting the Needles Gem and Mineral Club in the 1950s, as well as the Needles Blue Agate Club; interaction with other rock clubs; early rockhounders of the California desert, who shared McShan's hobby; favorite areas where McShan enjoyed rockhounding; McShan's multiple and various observations of desert recreation; encounters in the desert with General Patton's troops during WWII; trash and debris left over from the Desert Strike (troop training); her feelings on competitive off-road racing in the desert; exploitation of desert flora; and finally, different interest groups of the desert, including the recreationists, conservationists, and the Bureau of Land Management;

**OH 1585a**

NARRATOR: BEAR, ROBERT

INTERVIEWER: Paul Clark

DATE: November 3, 1977

PROJECT: Recreation in the California Desert

TRANSCRIPT: Edited (29 pp); Final (18 pp)

AUDIO FORMAT: Missing

ABSTRACT:

An interview with Robert Bear, resident of Beaumont, California. The purpose of this interview was to gain perspective on the history of recreation within the California desert and why future preservation of the desert remains important. Excerpts of this interview, as well as others, were used in an extensive report entitled *History of Recreation in the California Desert*, co-authored by the above-mentioned interviewer, and presented to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in 1978. Topics include Bear's early history exploring the California desert and becoming a confirmed "desert lover;" his forays into the desert, hiking with the Sierra Club; early tourist stops in the desert, such as Scotty's Castle; his personal hiking and climbing group of the Sierra Club, called the Desert Peak Section (out of Los Angeles), which sponsored trips for enthusiasts;

satisfaction in climbing difficult peaks like Picacho del Diablo in Baja, CA; posting metal registers (designed by Kasper Kuspersion) at the peaks he climbed; popular California desert peaks for climbers; his opinion on the military's presence in the California desert; popular peaks in Arizona, Nevada, and Utah; the San Geronio chapter of the Sierra Club and how it differs from the Angeles chapter; Bear's role as the conservation chairman in both chapters; the history of Sierra Club's role in conservation of the desert; desert land tracts; and finally, his evaluation of the BLM and its cooperation concerning the California desert, and his advice for future handlings.

## **OH 1586**

**NARRATOR:** ADAMS, BILL

**INTERVIEWER:** Paul F. Clark and Eric J. Redd

**DATE:** December 3, 1977

**PROJECT:** Recreation in the California Desert

**TRANSCRIPT:** Verbatim; Edited; Final (27 pp)

**AUDIO FORMAT:** Missing

### **ABSTRACT:**

An interview with Bill Adams. The purpose of this interview was to gain perspective on the history of recreation within the California desert and why future preservation of the desert remains important. Excerpts of this interview, as well as others, were used in an extensive report entitled *History of Recreation in the California Desert*, co-authored by the above-mentioned interviewer, and presented to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in 1978. Topics include Adams' early interest in motorcycle riding and his gradual interest in desert racing; organized motorcycle endurance races of the mid-1940s; the introduction of British and Japanese motorcycles, which competed with Harley Davidson and Indian brands; being part of the Compton Rough Riders motorcycle club; popular Los Angeles riding areas and the housing encroachment, which pushed riders to the desert; popular postwar motorcycle races and endurance events; negative attention that motorcycle events garnered from environmental advocates; the Cactus Derby event; introduction of the knobby motorcycle tire, for the purpose of off-road use; the demographics of motorcycle riders presently; the start of the counter movement against motorcycling in the desert, early 1960s; his current motorcycle club, the Chaparrals; popular motorcycle endurance races and events of the 1960s and 1970s; his role in the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA) and his particular division, District 37; the Hook and Ladder endurance race, sponsored by the Pasadena Fire Department; early starts of endurance races in the 1970s and promoters such as Ron Burpo and Stu Peters; Mickey Thompson and the SCORE racing event; and finally, states his case about motorcycling in the desert.