



FRIENDS OF THE MOJAVE ROAD

REPORT – NAMRC 2015

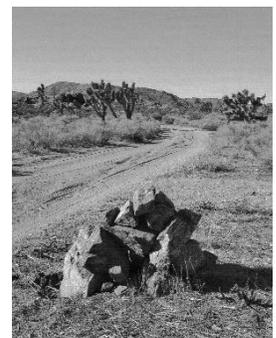
John N. Marnell



The Mojave Road is a four-wheel-drive recreation trail stretching from the banks of the Colorado River westward across the Mojave Desert nearly to Barstow; the Mojave Road as it is currently used, traverses a distance of nearly 140 miles. The history of the general route of the “Road” dates from when Mojave Indians living along the Colorado River traded with Native Americans along the coast – trading foodstuffs for sea shells. In 1776 Fr. Francisco Garcés was the first non-Indian to travel the route as he was led from the Colorado River across the desert to the San Gabriel Mission. In the late 1850s through the 1880s, regular use of the route began with the U.S. Army, and shortly after that the users included prospectors, traders, and the U.S. mail – all helping to define the route of the Mojave Road.

Dennis G. Casebier, beginning in about 1962, became familiar with the history of the road and soon decided that its value was to educate others about the Road and to make it a viable trans-desert corridor. After walking the route he came to the realization it would be better used as a four-wheel-drive road. In 1980 and '81 Casebier founded the Friends of the Mojave Road, published a guide book, and in November of 1983 the Mojave Road began its journey as a recreational as well as educational resource of the Mojave Desert. The *Guide* contains detailed maps and mile-by-mile road logs describing the history and environment of the Mojave Desert as it is seen from the route. The *Mojave Road Guide* is now in its fourth edition, with a new edition on the horizon. Over 20,000 copies are in the hands of 4x4 enthusiasts. The support organization, The Friends of the Mojave Road flourishes today as the nonprofit Mojave Desert Heritage and Cultural Association, headquartered at Goffs, California. www.mdhca.org

The Mojave Road was laid out utilizing as much of the original road as possible, balancing private property interests, government regulations, accuracy of the route and other considerations. It was always the aim not to erect signs to aid the user. [BLM has recently placed a number of signs for a few miles west of the Colorado River]. Rather it was decided early on to utilize the natural material at hand – rocks – to mark the route. So rock piles, referred to as cairns, were placed at major intersections, always on the right side of the trail to show the way. Even today, rocks for these markers are used, reused, stacked and restacked by volunteers or simply by those traveling the Road.



The Mojave Road winds its way through federal jurisdictions of the BLM and Mojave National Preserve. Regulations have been instituted related to the number of vehicles allowed to travel together, campsite rules, firewood gathering and so forth – rules we have learned to live within.

A few years ago a new superintendent arrived at the Mojave National Preserve. Some stories were spread that the route of the Mojave Road was now designated by a nearly continual track of beer cans, toilet paper, and vehicle tracks destroying flora in many areas. The superintendent wanted a firsthand view. I was fortunate to lead a small caravan of BLM, NPS, and other Friends of the Mojave Road through the Mojave National Preserve. No such debris, trash, or toilet paper tied to bushes could be found, thus substantiating the long held belief that education promotes good behavior. The Mojave Desert Heritage and Cultural Association has now developed an agreement with the NPS to monitor the Road conditions and trail worthiness. Additionally, monsoonal type rainfall occurs throughout this part of the desert on occasion and because of a good relationship with groups such as the California Four Wheel Drive Association we have been able to maintain a safe and sustainable route of travel through difficult areas. Cooperation with governing agencies, at least for the time, will assure public access to this national treasure that is ten feet wide and one-hundred forty miles long!