

It Happened Around Here

By Dennis H. Stovall

To see and to enjoy the greatest variety, and likewise the most lavish display, of desert wildflowers you must get off the main traveled highways, and follow seldom-used trails. These lead you into the Mohave's isolated gardens of wildest beauty. The Girl and I and old Tip have just returned from a pilgrimage to some of these. We were invited to spend a weekend at the Joshua Ranch – far out in the arid country beyond Muroc Dry Lake. Here are mountains and buttes and valleys that are still to be named. Unmarked roads and trails lead and criss-cross in all directions. Neighbors are far apart, as miles count, yet they are real neighbors because they know and help one another.

Loves Beauty

The owner of the Joshua is a busy and successful Los Angeles manufacturer. The “ranch” is his “first love,” after his wife and six daughters. But the daughters are married and for the past twelve years he has not missed going out to his desert haven as regularly as Friday night or Saturday morning arrives. On most of his weekend journeys his wife accompanies him, for she, too, loves their Mohave home – where peace and quiet and healing sunshine constantly abide.



But they want others to share the joys and blessings of their desert place. So there is never a weekend that they do not have from half a dozen to twenty or more guests. Comfortably equipped, white-painted cabins, under the friendly old Joshua trees, provide quarters for the visitors. It isn't a “guest ranch” in the usual meaning of the term. You couldn't “hire” accommodations on the Joshua. The owner and host finds keenest delight in having those men and women come to his place who need and can appreciate the desert. I would violate a confidence if I gave his name or made known the exact location of his 640-acre paradise.

Vivid Garden

Just now that part of the Mohave is one immense wild flower field. Daisies paint the valley floor, as well as the hill slopes a golden saffron. We drove miles and miles around and across the vividly-colored gardens, getting out of the car and wading knee-deep among the big flower beds. The clear air was heavily scented with perfume – fragrance from the primrose and encelias. Among the yellow daisies were long-stemmed, cream-white coreopsis, desert candlesticks, lupines, Indian rhubarb, squaw cabbage, “crazy Dutchmen,” and many others.

The Mohave wild flowers are at their best after the annuals of the Salton Basin and the poppy fields of the Bakersfield region wither and turn golden. They continue blooming till late in May, nights may be nippy, but the balmy sunlit days make you wish you might live perpetually in that far-flung paradise.

All Good Friends

When we got back to the ranch we found eight cars had arrived, bringing thirty visitors – young people mainly, relatives and friends, children and grandchildren of the genial host. It’s that way almost every Sunday we learned. There are no booze parties on the Joshua, but all who go there have a good time.

When the weekend company departs, just two old men remain. One is the aged father of the owner whom everybody calls “Dad.” He is as spry and alert as any of the youngsters, though well along in the eighties. His cabin quarters are his pride, and he has everything, he declares, to “make a man happy.” Plenty of work, too, for he is the caretaker.

His companions, during the between-time periods is “Uncle Em,” also in the eighties, and one of the very few remaining Twenty-mule-team “long string” freight drivers of the old borax days in Death Valley. He, too, has his own neat and well-kept cabin, does his own housework and cooking and couldn’t be taken off the desert “unless you hog-tied and dragged him off.”

Man to be Envied

“It’s the only place for a human being to live – and really get the most out of existence,” Uncle Em avers. He was lolling in his easy chair under the old Joshua tree, his gaze held on the range at the valley’s western boarder. The sunset glow painted the buttes and the desert in brilliant coloring. The old mule-skinner may have been dreaming – but I almost envied him.

