



In Search of Eldorado

Link to the Eldorado Song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VczD1olutQ8>



Day 18
Monday,
January 20th

Back to
Joshua Tree
National Park

Weather
50's to 60's and cloudy

Hello to Family & Friends

I left the Fantasy Springs Casino in Indio this morning, with the need to get some more food, since I might be In Joshua Tree for a few days. Then I found gas for \$3.57 as compared to \$3.85 at all the other stations. So even though it was only 7.8 gallons, I filled up.

Don't mind the GPS cord in the photo above. I saw no reason to really stop, especially with two other cars already pulled over, so I just snapped this one as I drove by.

Below is an old friend of Morgan's and mine from Big Bend National Park, the Ocotillo Cactus. We saw a lot of them down there.



In Search of Eldorado

By Edgar Allan Poe

Gaily bedight,
A gallant knight,
In sunshine and in shadow,
Had journeyed long,
Singing a song,
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old—
This knight so bold—
And o'er his heart a shadow—
Fell as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength
Failed him at length,
He met a pilgrim shadow—
'Shadow,' said he,
'Where can it be—
This land of Eldorado?'

'Over the Mountains
Of the Moon,
Down the Valley of the Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,'
The shade replied,—
'If you seek for Eldorado!'

There are a lot of plaques in Joshua Tree, but a lot of good scenery also. First hike was a The ¼ mile Bajada Nature Trail



BAJADA TRAIL

A bajada, or slope at a mountain's base is formed of eroded sand and gravel. More moisture is trapped and available to plants in a coarse, well drained soil. Plant growth begins earlier in the warmer soil of this south facing bajada, which allows a greater variety of plants to grow here than on the bajada across the valley.



BRITTLEBUSH

Brittlebush (*Encelia farinosa*) is a good indicator of water conditions. The leaves are large and green during the wetter times. When temperatures climb and soil moisture drops, the leaves become gray and brittle. Dense white hairs on the leaves help reflect sunlight. Brittlebush provides a winter food source for bighorn sheep.



CREOSOTE

The creosote (*Larrea tridentata*) is the most common plant of the hot, dry deserts. Many animals live in and around the creosote, despite repellent oil and resins that discourage browsing. Look for insects, lizards, and the round brown galls of midge larvae. Rodent burrows among the roots aerate the soil, which helps water drainage.



Colorado Desert

The Colorado Desert, a sub-region of the vast Sonoran Desert, is a sand and rock desert of broad plains interrupted by mountains of igneous rocks. The plants you see here are representative of the Colorado Desert; the Colorado and the Mojave are the two desert ecosystems found in Joshua Tree National Park.

The Colorado is a low desert, hotter and dryer than the nearby Mojave. Colorado Desert vegetation is more diverse than the Mojave's, but large cacti typical of the Sonoran Desert are noticeably missing. Creosote bush and bursage dominate the desert flats; mesquite, palo verde, smoke tree, desert willow, and ironwood occupy broad sandy washes; ocotillo, brittlebush, and various cacti secure the rocky slopes.

La Palma de la Mano de Dios—the hollow of God's hand—is the endearing Spanish name given to this desert region prior to explorer William P. Blake's 1853 naming of the desert after the Colorado River.

When I drove through here last Thursday, I noticed a lot of pull-offs that said 'EXHIBIT', and there would be a plaque with info about something or other. I bypassed them all, telling myself I would stop at every one on my way back through. It was ok for awhile, then, even I got a little tired of pulling over.

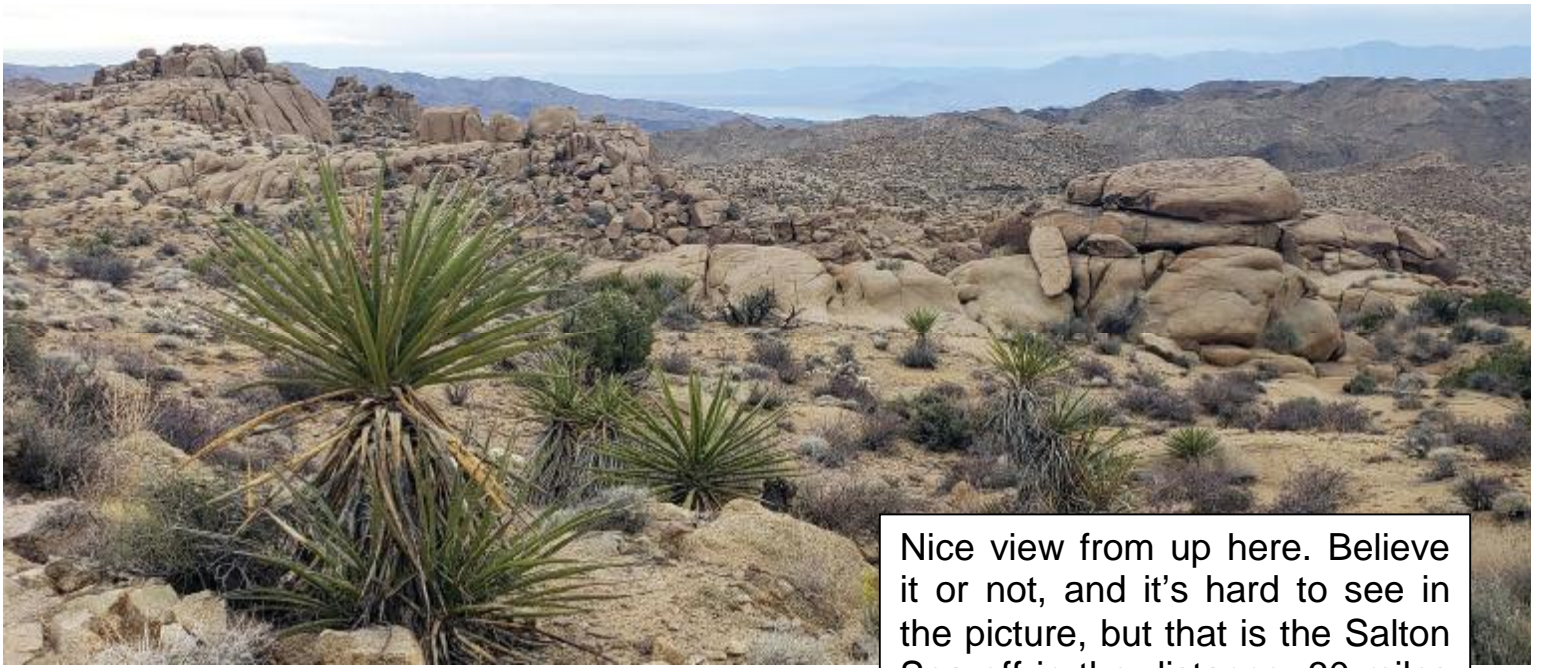


In MY conventional way (which is doing things UNconventionally), when I saw the parking lot for the Cottonwood Springs Hike was full and there were another 20 cars parked on the shoulders of the road, I joined them but started the Mastodon Mine Hike clockwise instead of counterclockwise which visited the spring first then continued on to Mastodon Mine. I'm glad I did. Everyone was coming from the other direction. It also turned out that I hit all the steps on the way down instead of the way up. When I passed a young lady and informed her of this fact, she said "Oh, I wish you wouldn't have told me that." Maybe I'm just a mean old man.



The first cloudy day since I've been out here.

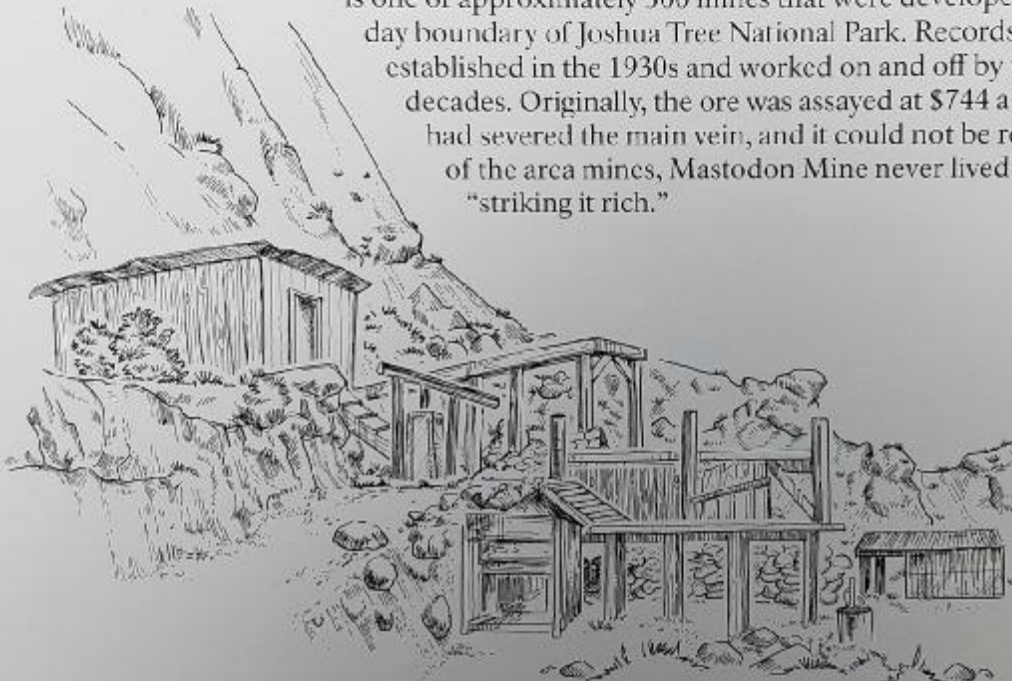




Nice view from up here. Believe it or not, and it's hard to see in the picture, but that is the Salton Sea off in the distance. 30 miles away and 3626 feet lower in elevation.

MASTODON MINE

Mining in the desert was a challenging proposition due in large part to the heat, scarce water, and lack of wood for building supplies. However, many hardy souls took on the challenge. Mastodon Mine is one of approximately 300 mines that were developed within the present-day boundary of Joshua Tree National Park. Records indicate the mine was established in the 1930s and worked on and off by the Hulsey family for decades. Originally, the ore was assayed at \$744 a ton. However, faulting had severed the main vein, and it could not be relocated. Like many of the area mines, Mastodon Mine never lived up to the dream of "striking it rich."



Compare the drawing above with the picture below of what's left. Still very similar except for the top left building, just the debris remains.





The mineshaft is not open. I stuck my camera through the protective grating.



Joshua Tree National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Mine Closed

Due to unsafe conditions, mines in the park are closed. Entering mines may result in death or bodily injury. Violators will be fined.

Mines are also home to many bat species.



Why does that matter?
Bats are integral to our ecosystems, but they are at risk. Nearly 7 million bats have died from white-nose syndrome, a fungus that can be transmitted by humans. Bats may abandon their homes if humans enter.

Stay out, stay alive, and keep our bats healthy.

Phone: 800-451-2261 or 951-346-2261



Kinda looks like a burrow for some animal, doesn't it?

Cottonwood Spring



Those palm trees are 50 feet tall. You can't actually see the spring, access is denied. Probably a good thing because, most likely, people would start tossing coins into it.

BEDROCK MORTARS

About 15 feet to the south lie two pieces of granite bedrock. Both rocks contain deep mortar holes created over time as Cahuilla Indians pounded mesquite and other seeds into flour. Take a look at the holes; imagine the time it took to make the holes so deep. Generations of Cahuilla woman spent weeks here each year ensuring that their family and community had food to last them through the year.



Indians, cowboys, miners, teamsters, and other desert travelers found Cottonwood Spring a refreshing place. The Indians camped here for centuries, as stone mortars and artifacts found on the site attest. With greater water needs, miners made the greatest change to the land. They built an arrastra (a drag-stone mill for crushing ore), constructed roads for hauling ore and supplies, and piped water to nearby mines. From 1870 to 1910 their presence dominated. Take the short walk to the palms or consider hiking farther to discover other clues to mining and homesteading near Cottonwood Spring.

This is Smoke Tree Wash. Not sure how all these washes get named. Just up the road is Fried Liver Wash. An internet search reveals only questions and surmises such as, Look where we are, must be Fried Liver for dinner tonight. OR, someone shot a big horn sheep and fried its liver for a snack.

A Desert Wash

Seen from above, the wash is a river of sand in the midst of a gray-brown desert flat. When heavy downpours strike the desert, you don't want to be standing here. The rainwater rushes downslope into a network of rocky canyons that quickly dump their loads into the flat channel of the wash. A rampaging tide of whitecapped, muddy water roars through the wash, sweeping with it every poorly anchored thing in its path. Almost as quickly as it came, the water subsides and soaks deeply into the sandy sediment of the wash.

It is this subsurface moisture that sustains the trees and shrubs that grow here. Plants like smoke tree, desert willow, ironwood, and palo verde drink long and slowly from the wash's stored groundwater. The underground water enables the plants to thrive here. Wildlife congregates in these sandy strips, taking advantage of the abundant food, shade, and shelter.

soaks
n.

The smoke tree depends on flash floods to germinate its seeds. The seed's outer coating must be scratched and scraped by the grinding action of floods before it can grow.

Breeding birds like phalaropes prefer nesting in desert washes because of the abundance of food and protective shade offered here.





I guess there must have been a recent flash flood

Old Dale and Black Eagle Mine Roads

The Old Dale Road (to your left) leads to the Dale Mining District, outside the park. The Black Eagle Mine Road (to your right) dead-ends at a barricade just outside the park, beyond which is one of the most extensive mining operations in the area.

The extensive mining operation where the Black Eagle Mine Road ends is the Eagle Mountain town where security kicked me out.

The chase for gold here began in the early 1880s. Wagons and trucks bumped along these roads carrying supplies and ore. The mining town of Dale—more a mining camp, because it moved with successive ore vein discoveries—supported 1,000 people in its heyday. Miners and their families lived amid the whirl and roar of mining

machinery running day and night. Miners dealt with isolation and scarcity of water; you might too, if you choose to venture far along these backcountry roads. Travelers should be prepared, cautious, and self-sufficient—help may be a long time coming if you break down or run short of water.



On the Joshua Tree map is mentioned 'The Transition Zone – In this ecological melting pot, two great deserts, the Mojave and Colorado blend together in a vibrant landscape featuring plants and animals representative of both.' As I'm driving north I can see the contrasting colors off in the distance and take this for the dividing line between deserts. There will be more on this later.

Joshua Tree National Park

Turkey Flats

Turkey Flats is really not so flat. It is in fact a loose extension of Pinto Mountain, composed of rock, gravel, and sand—called alluvium—that washed from the slopes and canyons, spreading gradually at the base of the mountain and over the basin.

On my itinerary it says 'Turkey Flats – Sand Dunes' As the ranger was looking at my list and marking them on the map, he said "Sand dunes? I didn't know we had any sand dunes." It must be the rock, gravel and sand mentioned to the left. I skipped the hike once I found out it was 14 miles round trip.

Choice Spots

Local folklore holds that in the 1920s an enterprising poultry farmer believed a turkey farm would work nicely here—thus the name Turkey Flats. Lack of water and distance from markets, however, proved

Hmmmm...seems I forgot to take a picture of the rest of the story. Either that or something gobbled it up. Heh Heh. Sorry.



This is the biggest Ocotillo I have ever seen. It must be 20 feet tall.

Cholla Cactus Garden
If the plant bears any helpful or even innocent part in the scheme of things on this planet, I should be glad to hear of it.
J. Smeaton Chase, *California Desert Trails*, 1919



Ok, I was truly amazed here. The pic above is a 180 degree panoramic from east to west looking north. Teddy Bear Cholla as far as the eye can see.

It's a ¼ mile path through the garden and the Cacti are everywhere. I could find no explanation as to why this area is so special for the Cholla.



A look at the internal structure of a cacti. Below is looking south.



Silver Bell Mine

On the slopes to the south you can see the remains of the Silver Bell Mine, with its tipples still standing. These ore bins held and fed rock to a stamp battery that crushed the ore into a sandy-watery pulp and pushed it onto an amalgamation table where the precious metals were extracted. Though the mine operated some 40 years, ownership and details about the mine's riches are sketchy. Nevertheless, it was a versatile mine: gold in the 1930s, lead in the 1940s, and copper in the 1950s.

The plaque says 'on the slopes to the south'. I could not see any tipples on any of the slopes around me, but I could see the ore bins on the next page.

Prospectors began staking claims in this desert region around 1865. Gold fever gave rise to mine names like Fore Aces, Big Bozo Claim, Lucky Turkey #2, and Hard Digging. Mining reached its peak here by 1917 and tapered off by the 1960s.

THE MINE

can see the remains of tipples still standing. ore bin to a stamp battery that crushed the ore into a sandy-watery pulp and pushed it onto an amalgamation table where the precious metals were extracted. Though the mine operated some 40 years, ownership and details about the mine's riches are sketchy. Nevertheless, it was a versatile mine: gold in the 1930s, lead in the 1940s, and copper in the 1950s.

shafts and adits are unstable and may be filled with harmful gas. Use great caution around mine workings and leave them undisturbed. Collecting rocks and other items is prohibited.

Prospectors began staking claims in this desert region around 1865. Gold fever gave rise to mine names like Fore Aces, Big Bozo Claim, Lucky Turkey #2, and Hard Digging. Mining reached its peak here by 1917 and tapered off by the 1960s.

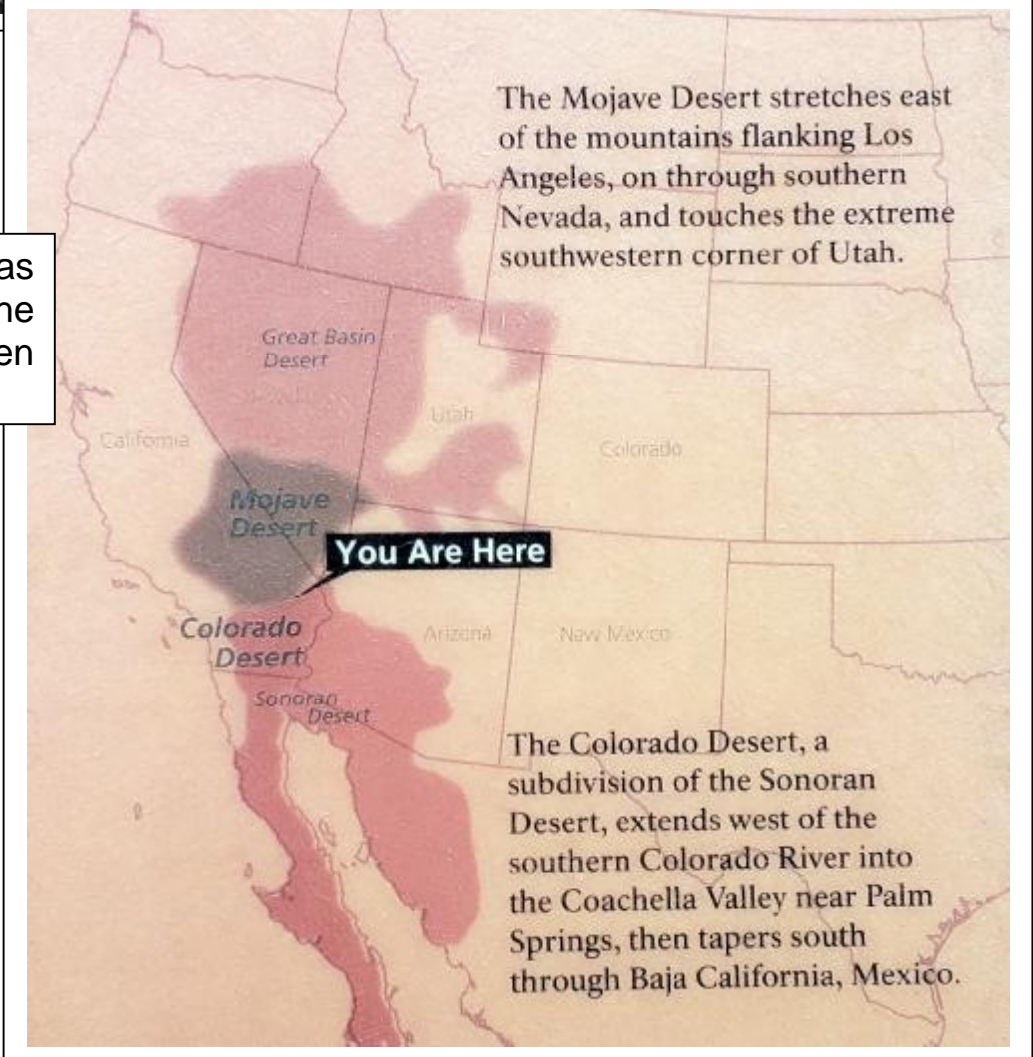
Ore was hoisted from the Silver Bell Mine by the skip and dumped onto the grizzly, which sorted ore into the tipples. A 1958 report showed the Silver Bell Mine is having low gold and silver values but high copper values—worth about \$9.0 a ton.





Where Two Deserts Meet
The faster the eye is moving the fewer things it will see.
Barry Lopez, *California Desert: A Worldly Wilderness*, 1997

Read on to see how I was earlier mistaken about the transition line between deserts



There is no real boundary line between the two deserts, just a gradual change in elevation, with representative plants of one desert or the other beginning to dominate. The desert lines blur here, but travel on, you'll recognize the shift. You'll be in the higher, cooler Mojave Desert, marked by the

presence of yuccas—especially Joshua trees. Or you'll be in the lower, hotter Colorado Desert, dominated by flats of creosote bush and interrupted by scatterings of ocotillos, ironwood, palo verde, chuparosa, and smoke trees.



I can certainly tell the difference, can you? Much greener, more prolific and larger plants. The temperature has dropped also. It was chilly today with the thick cloud cover.



**Arch Rock
Nature Trail**

DIKES

Down at your feet you will notice a blocky line of light colored rock extending for quite a distance. This feature is called a dike, and it juts out from the surrounding rock because it is more resistant to erosion.

Dikes form in fractures of the main body of rock while it is still deep beneath the surface of the Earth. Hot liquid rock or magma gets pushed into the cracks in the surrounding rock where it then solidifies. Precious minerals are associated with some types of dike formations.



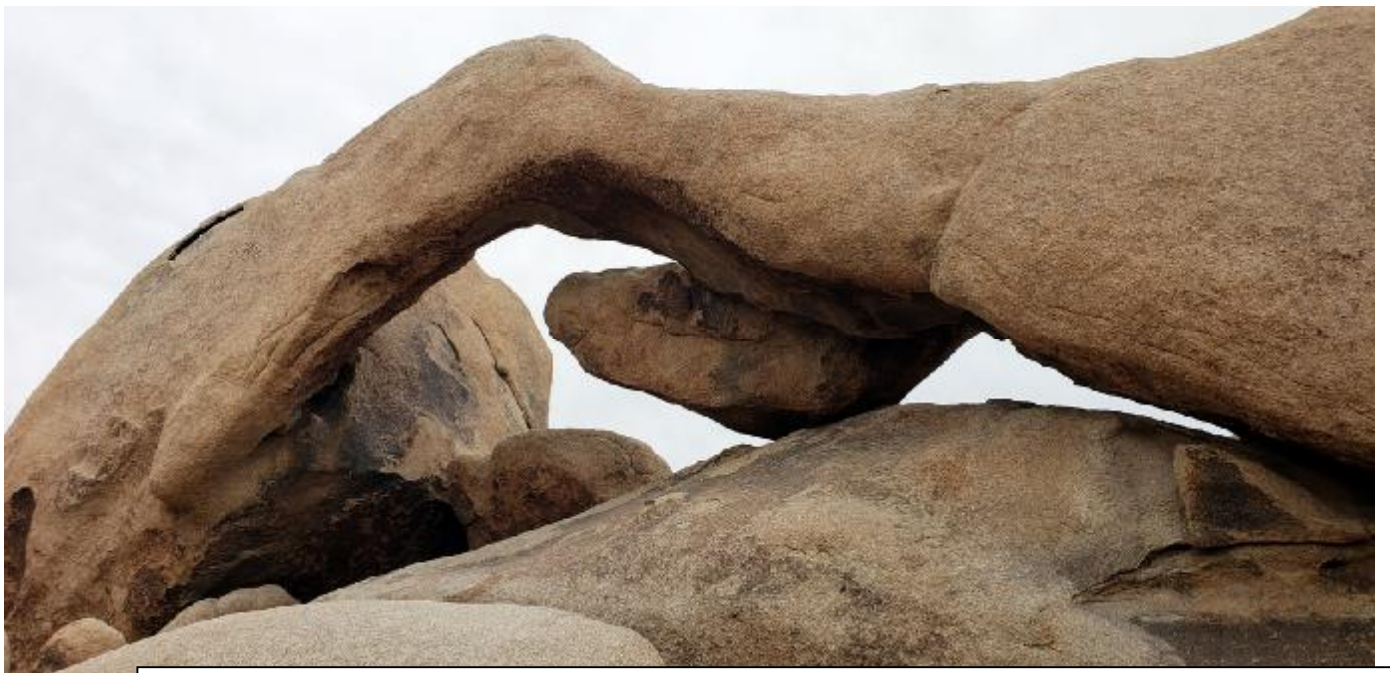
This is another great place to hike. You can climb in and out and up and down amongst these boulders and never really get lost. I spent 10 minutes trying to find an alternate route away from the arch without any success. I finally had to go back the same way I got there.





THE ARCH

Geological processes have created this beautiful arch over time. But we must realize that in a geological framework, its existence is only for a moment and it is not a final product. Erosion or wearing away will continue. Water will dissolve minerals on the surface and will seep into tiny cracks causing them to expand and contract with temperature extremes. Bits and pieces of the rock will fall away, exposing new pieces to the elements. Wind will help wear it away, as will other agents in this environment. Then, one day, this arch will tumble, only to be replaced with other unique shapes and forms.





Nice view.

I'm not sure, am I frugal? Or just cheap? As I drove north through the park I kept an eye on mileage so I could judge if it would be cost effective to drive back out of the park and camp free on the BLM land there instead of paying for a campground in the park. I have been on the road 18 nights and have only paid for camping twice, in Death Valley. So my average cost of lodging per night right now is two bucks. It will go up in San Diego and Los Angeles. But it turned out I was closer to the north exit, only ten miles from the Tortoise Rock Casino in Twentynine Palms. Fifteen dollars for a campsite or \$5 in gas to drive back and forth? I think the decision was easy. Plus, I am lower in elevation with warmer temps which means using less LP to run the furnace. Last time I filled that up, in Baker, it cost me almost thirty for 5.4 gallons, more expensive than diesel.

So here I sit at the casino.

I am looking forward to the next couple days. I will be heading back into Joshua Tree, but instead of going south I will turn and head west then north again. There are twelve hikes along the stretch of road through that side of the park. I have eight of them on my list and have not driven that direction yet. I will most likely stay in a campground tomorrow, darn, fifteen bucks.

Since I finished off the Christmas cookies, I think I'll wander into the casino and see what they have for dessert.

Until next time.....