

FIELD OBSERVATION REPORT

By Mary Wilson

November 6, 2019



November 11, 2019

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Plants

Freezing weather has taken its toll on a lot of plants that were either killed or they are struggling for survival such as the common sunflower, tumbleweed, ragweed, vinegarweed, and camphorweed. Coyote melon leaves are dying but the yellow gourds are in good shape. Some plants are still surviving such as California buckwheat with their brown clusters, horseweed, and turkey mullein still have their gray leaves. Right on schedule are the yellow flowers of the rubber rabbitbrush. Long stem buckwheat flowers have gone from the white to purple and stems are still gray. Now we have to start the rain season so we can have next years wildflower growth.

The sculptured blue antelope by Ancheta and Martin are gone.

Winterfat—*Krascheninnikovia lanata*



Winterfat occurs in dry valley bottoms, on flat mesas, and on hillsides at elevations between 2,400 and 9,300 feet. It is drought resistant and intolerant of flooding, excess water, or acidic soils. Seed production, especially in desert regions, is dependent on precipitation.

Winterfat is a low-growing, long-lived (up to 130 years old) subshrub with a woody base and numerous annual branchlets, growing 1 to 3 feet tall. The stems and gray foliage are covered in woolly white hairs which age to a reddish color. The flowers have small bracts and develop tiny white fruits. The silky hairs on the fruits allow for wind dispersal. It flowers April to September and reproduces from seed and sprouting. Sprouting of the buds near the plants base occurs when the plant is browsed or damaged.

The common name, Winterfat, refers to this plant's usage as an important winter forage plant for wildlife and livestock. Winterfat is considered a very good browse for wildlife and is extensively utilized by rodents, rabbits, antelope, deer, elk, and bighorn sheep.

The Zuni people used the root that they would grind and use to treat burns. Blackfoot Indians soaked the leaves in warm water to make a hair wash. Other Indians used the plant to treat a wide variety of ailments such as treating fevers.

MILT STARK AND ARTHUR B. RIPLEY DESERT WOODLAND STATE PARK

A project that was very important to Milt Stark was the Arthur B. Ripley Desert Woodland State Park. This area is a prime example of a virgin forest of Joshua and Juniper Trees. This is how the western part of the Mojave Desert must have appeared to early explorers as they came through the area. Mr. Ripley willed the land for this park property to the state. He died in 1988 and it wasn't until 1990 that the State of California finally accepted the 556+ acres of this prime desert woodland. Milt has been involved with this project from its very beginning. He arranged for the Sierra Club members to clean up the place and in five workdays they had filled up six very large dumpsters with trash. Fencing was put around the park, display boards were put in and several hundred Joshua trees were planted. A question came up about the name of the park and having Ripley as part of the name. Milt attended a meeting in Valencia and the motion was carried to call the park, Arthur B. Ripley Desert Woodland State Park.

In 1996 the first entrance sign was put in, and the gate was installed. Milt helped put in the first self guide nature trail, "Ripley Nature Trail" and he wrote the first trail guide.

Milt was President of the Poppy Reserve Mojave Desert Interpretive Association (PRMDIA) from 1999 to 2010 and he worked with State Parks to have Ripley projects completed. In 2005 Milt received approval to put in a new hiking trail, the "Rare Juniper Trail". One again the Sierra Club and volunteers helped put in the trail. The plants were removed from the trail area and transplanted to the old dirt road to the east of the ramada area. The trail was completed in 2010 and Milt wrote the brochure for this trail. He also had made the signs at the junction of the Nature Trail and the Rare Juniper Trail.



In 2007 the old poster display boards were replaced with state-of-the-art interpretive panels.

Milt contacted Boy Scouts and Eagle Scouts to build a ramada and it was completed in one day on May 15, 2010. Milt added the cross sections of the cut Juniper trunks on the back of the ramada.

Also in 2010 Milt directed his attention to the study of the local Juniper trees. There had never been a definitive botanical study of the California juniper. There was little information on these trees and he enlisted me to help do the research on 20 of these trees.

Right off it was observed that there was no official description for California Junipers in the area surrounding Ripley, Quartz Hill and Lancaster. Botanists did not list any subspecies for the California juniper. We believed we had proof that there are many subspecies for this tree. After our years of research (2010—2016) consulting with biologists and botanists, Milt wrote a description on *J. californica* Carr. California Juniper that is just for the Junipers at Ripley and the surrounding area.

A few items we researched showed the rings on cut junipers indicate that they were between 100 and 200 years old. They are extremely drought resistant. They are also disease resistant and other juniper trees in higher elevations were susceptible to mistletoe, but none had been found at Ripley. The male and female trees will change sex in about 2 to 3% of the trees. We also put together a plant list for Ripley.

There are literally pages and pages of notes and forms with regard to the Juniper tree. They include the height, width, how many limbs grow from the tree at ground level and counting the rings on them to see how old they were (limbs are younger than the main trunk), the branchlets growth, when the male trees grew the cones and released the pollen, when the female trees produced the receptors for the pollen and then grew the berries.



There was difficulty in seeing the original entrance sign from the road so a new double sided entrance sign was installed in 2012.

Milt requested and got approval to have two benches put in at Ripley. He died on November 6, 2016 and did not get to see them, but they were installed 2018 and a plaque in his memory was installed on the bench by Post #1 on the Rare Juniper Trail.



There were a few items that Milt requested that were not completed at his death but hopefully they can be finished in the future. The Juniper stump by Post #4 on the Rare Juniper trail to be sanded and coated with a substance so people could count the rings of the tree to see if they could tell it's age when it died. Putting in a parking area, a entrance that wheelchairs and walkers can go through, and a paved trail at least to the ramada area. These would have to have ADA approval and have been discussed with State Park personnel. He had wanted a Rededication Ceremony and would have invited people who helped so much to make this park a reality.

One of the nicest tributes one could pay Milt would be to walk the trails at Ripley and enjoy the solitude and natural beauty. It is like stepping back in time and seeing what the valley looked like a hundred or more so years ago. The park has a free day-use entry and is located off Lancaster Road, between 205th and 210th Street West. Just park off the paved road onto the dirt area by the fencing and go through the gate. There is a trail that will lead you to the ramada, display boards and brochures for the two trails.

THANKFUL FOR TODAY'S THANKSGIVING

By Mary Wilson



It is that time of year when menus are started for that gathering of family and friends for Thanksgiving. The menu might include: appetizers, turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy, corn, green beans, candied yams, cranberry sauce, bread, and pumpkin pie.

The first Thanksgiving or Harvest Festival was probably held sometime between September and November of 1621. Of the 102 passengers on the Mayflower that landed at Plymouth (Massachusetts) by the time of the feast were only 53 pilgrims that were alive and only four women had survived. The pilgrims had encountered the Indians of the area and with their help had survived the first winter. The pilgrims were so thankful they decided to have three days of celebration of thanksgiving and 80 to 90 of the Indians were also part of the feast.

Edward Winslow was elected governor of Plymouth and also wrote many articles. His account of the harvest states: *“Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together, after we had gathered the fruits of our labor. (The Indians) had their greatest king Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer...”*

So for their Thanksgiving they killed fowl (which could have been wild turkey, goose or duck), and the Indians killed five deer. Now the fowl had to have the feathers plucked (a wild turkey can have approximately 5,500 feathers), be gutted and trussed. The deer had to be skinned, with that hide being saved for later use, gutted and cut up. They were close to water so they may have had fish and shellfish. Next a lot of firewood had to be collected or cut and a fire pits made with a spit for the hours of cooking the meat. Some of the meat was boiled.

Other items may have been chestnuts, walnuts and beechnuts from the forests. There was flint corn (multicolored Indian corn). Indian corn was different from the sweet yellow corn that we eat today. It had various colors – reds, blacks, yellows and whites – on the same ear, and was not eaten fresh from the cob. Instead, Indian corn was dried and then pounded into flour and cornmeal for cooking and baking. Indian corn was part of almost every meal in the Plymouth Colony. The Indians also grew green beans, pumpkin or squashes. The Pilgrims had brought seeds for turnips, carrots, onions, garlic and pumpkins. So if any of these items were in season they may have been part of the meal.

There were no potatoes, white or sweet, as they had not infiltrated to North America from South America yet. There would be no cranberry sauce as there was very little sugar – it had to be imported and was expensive. No pumpkin pie with a crust as there was no flour (they had to plant wheat first), milk or butter (they had not brought any cattle with them on the Mayflower), however they did have pumpkin and they boiled or baked it and mashed it. This also meant there was no bread for stuffing. They did have the corn meal that could be made into a type of cornbread.

Two very different cultures (English and American Indian) and two different languages for three days, but they were thankful for a good harvest in their new homeland and surviving the winter. I am very thankful for my family and friends but also for the farmers, all the people who make the items that fill the grocery store shelves, the modern conveniences in my kitchen and if all fails go to a restaurant for my Thanksgiving!

