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[Book Catalog](#) An excerpt from The Explorer's Guide to Death Valley:

Foreword

In the summer of 1983 I accepted the superintendency of Death Valley National Monument. During my previous twenty-four years with the National Park Service I had worked in some pretty spectacular national parks--Glacier, Grand Canyon, Everglades, and Canyonlands to name a few. I did not know Death Valley at all, and like many who have not visited the area I naturally expected the area to be hot, dry, flat, sandy, and perhaps boring. I was challenged, however, with the assignments of removing the alien burros that were competing with the native bighorn sheep for forage and water, and of dealing with the mining companies still active within the monument--an anomaly in a park. With my preconceived ideas, I was in for a surprise!

I found Death Valley to be intensely complex (geologically as well as administratively), beautiful (sometimes bold and brash and other times and places very subtle), full of life (if you know where to look, and as you would expect a desert after the spring rains), and with a rich history of man (from the first Native Americans to the early explorers to visitors). With such a large and magnificent area compared with many of the earlier parks I had worked in, I wondered why Death Valley was not a full national park rather than "just" a national monument. Surely park status must have been someone's dream. Briefly, I wondered, what is the story behind it?

In 1890 Stephen Tyng Mather, who worked with the *New York Sun* newspaper, suggested to his co-reporter John Spears that Spears might want to go to California to do a story on a vast and beautiful desert--Death Valley--where Steve's father, Joe, was working for Pacific Coast Borax. John did visit the area, and his book *Illustrated Sketches of Death Valley*, published in 1891, became immensely popular and brought the Death Valley beauty and lore to the American public.

In January 1927 the Pacific Coast Borax invited Mather, by then the director of the National Park Service, and his assistant Horace Albright to Death Valley to see the company's new Furnace Creek Inn, scheduled to open the next month. Also on the agenda was a discussion of the possibility of making Death Valley a national park. All concurred that it was the right thing to do and that the area deserved national park status, but they also felt the political timing was wrong and the area was still open to mining. Death Valley would have to wait.

Horace Albright soon became director of the National Park Service, and he still hoped Death Valley would become a national park. In the final days before leaving office, he got outgoing President Herbert Hoover, who was his good friend, to sign the proclamation establishing Death Valley National Monument on February 11, 1933. It was a start, but for Horace and all of us who have worked in Death Valley and grown to love it, the dream continued. Over the decades there were occasional efforts to elevate the area to a full national park. The Mining in the Parks Act of 1976, which closed Death Valley to mineral entry, removed one of the serious obstacles to its attaining national park status.

The California Desert Protection Act was introduced before Congress in 1986. After eight years of debate, the bill came to a happy conclusion on October 31, 1994, when President Bill Clinton signed the bill that established Death Valley National Park. The long dream of many was fulfilled. Death Valley, the nation's fifty-third national park, was increased in size to almost 3.4 million acres, making it the largest national park area outside of Alaska.

Scott Bryan and Petty Tucker-Bryan had a dream, too. Both were very familiar with Death Valley from having lived, worked, and spent years exploring and studying the area. Their dream was to put out a guide to this magnificent national park. This book is their result. I think you will enjoy reading it as you plan your trip to Death Valley. I know you will find it useful as you explore the park. Enjoy, good reading, and have a good time exploring my favorite national park.

-- Edwin L. Rothfuss
Superintendent, Death Valley National Park
August 1983-November 1994
