



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Death Valley National
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Death Valley News Release

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Early Death Valley Artist's Work on Display at Death Valley National Park

Death Valley National Park invites the public to view a special showing of Robert F. Williams paintings at the Furnace Creek Visitor Center. On an extended loan from the Binnewies Family (Fred Binnewies was a former Superintendent of Death Valley National Park), is a small collection of paintings created by artist Robert F. Williams in the 1950s. The Furnace Creek Visitor Center is located in the heart of Death Valley along California Highway 190. The visitor center is open year round from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. But who was Robert F. Williams?

On a year-long trip across the country in 1938, the Williams family discovered the beauty of national parks. Artist Robert F. Williams, his wife Margaret, and their youngest son Frank (also an artist) began their journey from their home in Queens, New York towing a travel trailer to Shenandoah National Park. The forested park was such a wonderful subject to paint, they continued to Great Smokey Mountains NP, and then headed out west to visit Yosemite, Crater Lake, Mount Rainier, Yellowstone, Grand Teton, and Glacier National Parks. Along the way they stopped at the new Death Valley National Monument which Robert found the greatest challenge to paint in his long career.

Returning home, Robert displayed his national park paintings in a local gallery, where they came to the attention of National Park Service officials preparing exhibits for the Federal Building at the 1939-1940 New York World's Fair. His paintings became the only one-man art show at that famous fair.

In 1955, Robert permanently donated 31 paintings of 10 different national parks to the National Park Service, many of which are still on display in park visitor centers throughout the country. Other paintings by Williams are hanging in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

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But his association with the National Park Service did not end there. Determined to capture the incomparable desert landscapes of Death Valley on canvas, Robert returned to Death Valley with his wife in 1955. They lived in one of the CCC-built cabins at Wildrose (see painting) for three years and became close friends with Park Superintendent Fred Binnewies.

As the National Park Service approaches its centennial year in 2016, it must be remembered that a long, rich relationship exists between artists and our Public Lands. Artist Thomas Moran accompanied the Hayden Expedition as they explored the Yellowstone Territory in 1870. The resulting paintings inspired the public and congress to lobby and ultimately create the world's first national park. Many artists, like Robert F. Williams, have since been inspired and have captured that inspiration for many more to enjoy. And to this day artists create works of art that continue to heighten the public's awareness of the importance of preserving our public lands.

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