



The Ranger Review

Montezuma Castle, Montezuma Well, & Tuzigoot National Monuments

Montezuma Well: Through the Looking Glass

By Resource Assistant Leah Duran

Gaze into the blue-green pool of Montezuma Well and you'll see reflections of ancient cliff dwellings embedded in its limestone ridges. Passing muskrats and ducks send ripples through the image of these 800-year-old structures, blurring their brown outlines. The tranquil waters of this natural sinkhole act as a mirror of history, a looking glass that reflects centuries of human impact on this desert oasis.

The creation story of the Yavapai-Apache Native Americans traces their origin to the emergence of a corn stalk growing up out of the Well. The Yavapai-Apache recognize the life-giving importance of water in an arid environment, as did others throughout the Well's history.

As early as 600 A.D., Hohokam farmers from the Phoenix area formed the first permanent settlements here. Around 1125 A.D., Sinagua from northern Arizona integrated into life at the Well, building cliff houses and a two-mile irrigation canal. Dip your toes into the cool water that was once used to nourish crops of corn, beans, squash and cotton.

After the Sinagua left around 1400 A.D., the Well saw



Montezuma Well and Back House behind the irrigation canal. Photos by Leah Duran & Laura Albert

many owners. In 1883, Samuel Shull claimed squatter's rights and built a shack. Shull later traded the property to Abraham Lincoln Smith for \$40, a horse and a pair of chaps. William Beriman Back, a rancher from Missouri, acquired the Well from Smith in 1888 for two horses.

Back made a home at the Well for his wife, Margie Ann Dickinson, and their seven children. He instituted several far-reaching changes, taking advantage of the resources left by former inhabitants. For the foundation of his house, Back used rocks from an old Sinagua cave. The same cave later housed a blacksmith shop and pigpen. Back thought the Well might make a good fishing hole, so around 1910, he stocked the water – which contains too much carbon dioxide for fish to survive – with blue gill and catfish.

"We never caught one or saw one since," said Back's son,

also named William, in a 1947 interview. The elder Back also planted grapevines, which still twine around mesquites lining the prehistoric canal. Back further created a new ditch to irrigate the present-day picnic grounds.

Early tourists included guests from nearby ranches and soldiers from Fort Verde, who picnicked beneath the shade of cottonwoods and sycamores. For 25 cents, visitors could take a rowboat tour on the Well. They could also sample ditch water – which contains high amounts of arsenic – from an enamel cup that Back kept at the outlet.

Back's children sold pieces of painted pottery and arrowheads, along with "petrified horseshoes" – old horseshoes they left in the canal until dissolved limestone formed a hard coating over the metal. They also sold "old shoes, turtle shells, bottles, sticks, etc.," Young Bill said. "In a year, an article would lime up about half an inch."

What on Earth is THAT?!

By Ranger Laura Albert

I am a transplant to the desert ecosystem here in Arizona. I will admit, the only things that I knew prior to coming here were that it's hot, dry, and there are way more venomous creatures living here than I have been exposed to in my lifetime. But since then, I have learned more about the critters living here and enjoy their presence, yet give them their space. I decided to be brave one evening and sit out on my back porch to talk with a friend on the phone. It was dark, cool, and there was a light breeze making it a pleasant experience. That was until I moved my headlamp in the direction of something large moving towards me.

To say that I was startled was an understatement! I leapt up onto the chair as this insect- it looked like a cricket on steroids with jaws- came running at a quick pace towards me! I yelled, "Holy crap!" into the phone which in turn got a response from my friend wondering what was going on. It ran under the chair and captured some other insect and proceeded to shred it to bite sized pieces while I cowered on top of the chair hoping that it wouldn't find any way to climb up to me. Needless to say, I was affected by this experience and wanted to find out what this crazy

looking insect was and if I should be afraid of it!

After months of searching for this insect, I stumbled upon it one day quite by accident. This "cricket on steroids" was actually not a cricket at! It is a Sun Spider



Sun Spider searching out prey at night. Photo courtesy of Judy Hedding.

(other names it goes by are Wind Spider or Wind Scorpion). They are in the Arachnida family like spiders and scorpions, but they are perfectly ok with eating their cousins. There are a 120 species that can be found in the United States, most of which are found here in the southwest. They are usually nocturnal and, as I observed, very fast

because they actively hunt their prey. Sun Spiders are not venomous, but those big jaws- there are four of them- can produce a painful bite if you handle them. Those jaws are used to crush their prey and they eat everything from insects, spiders, scorpions, small lizards, and even birds and rodents! They have two eyes, but their eye sight is very poor. Instead, they hunt by feeling the vibrations above and below ground. They will even dig down to unearth their prey. They have 8 legs, but two are long and in front, are covered in hairs, and used as feelers to hunt.

So, I have a healthier respect for these Sun Spiders and I let them live to keep other creatures away that could do more harm. Even though they occasionally find their way into my kitchen.

They Are Just Like Us

By: Resource Assistant Sarahanne Blake

How do you envision a prehistoric Native American community? Maybe you picture women grinding corn, men hunting for food, or a medicine man healing the sick. But do you picture bickering siblings? Laughing friends? A stressed out mom?

Something gets lost in translation when talking about people in history. We forget that they were actually people. People with feelings, friends, and family members; people with lives of their own. Emotionally, socially, and culturally, nothing has changed since the Sinagua were here, only the resources at hand. Sure, not all of us grind our own food or sew our own clothes, but we still do laundry and cook food. We still gather together with our neighbors for things such as religious ceremonies, town fairs, or birthday parties, and we still trade for goods, except that what we use for trading is money. The foundation for society is the same everywhere during every time period: We all need food, shelter, love, and a sense of community.

Sometimes it's tough to imagine having something in common with people you've never seen or who may not even be alive anymore. But



Tuzigoot National Monument ruins rising up against the landscape.

think about people in other countries, you know they exist; we read stories, hear news broadcasts, we know someone who knows someone who's been there. We know those people are real and that they have emotions just like us and problems just like us. Or how about people that have passed on? When they were here, we know they had lives and families and hopes, too. They felt everything we still feel today. We know about their trials and tribulations, about their dreams and successes. Just because they're deceased doesn't mean everything they did and everything they were is lost.

To combine the two, think about people from other countries who have passed away. The Sinagua lived here during the entirety

of the Middle Ages in Europe. Do we know that people felt and loved and hated during that time in history? Yes. That time period brought us amazing architecture, leaps in science, new forms of artwork, and The Crusades. Medieval Europeans were passionate and dedicated, were the Native Americans from this site any different?

It's human to have emotions and thoughts and dreams, even people who lived almost 1,000 years ago can relate to that.



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Park Happenings & Funny Pages By Ranger Laura Albert

The Ranger Review is designed to give you more information about what to see and do while visiting our sites. We hope that you enjoy seeing our parks from a Ranger's point of view!

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