



Papago Saguaro National Monument

Introduction

Saguaro National Monument (made a National Park in 1994) wasn't the first Park Service unit dedicated to the conservation of the Sonoran Desert. Long before Saguaro National Monument was created by Presidential proclamation on March 1, 1933, the effort to conserve a portion of pristine Sonoran Desert culminated in the creation of the first Sonoran desert monument in 1914: Papago Saguaro National Monument.¹

Papago Saguaro National Monument

During the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, Phoenix, was undergoing rousing economic growth. In response to this economic growth a style of conservation, one that celebrated economic developments while also valuing the desert's natural beauty was gaining popularity. Increased contact with nature as a space for leisure, and continued development, led to calls for the protection of natural and cultural sites in the southwest.

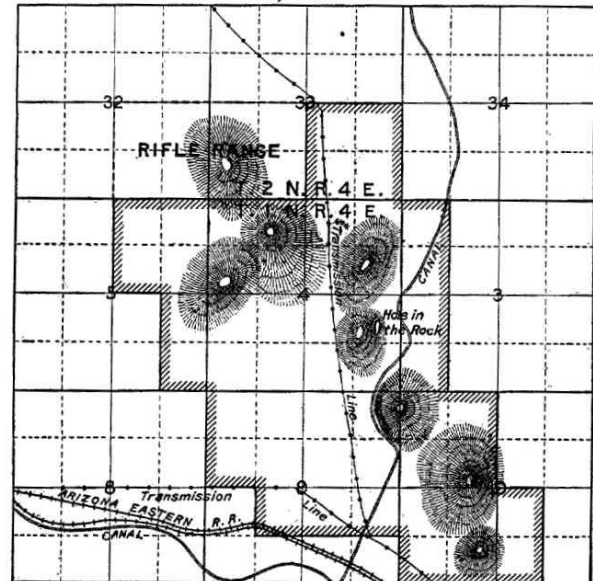
In the early part of the 20th Century local activists as well as Park Service conservationists recognized a need to preserve a part of the natural environment of the Sonoran Desert with its distinctive landscape, and exceptional plants including the Giant Saguaro cactus (*Carnegiea gigantea*), the tallest and most massive of the "Arizona" cacti. The Park Service was looking for a place of remarkable beauty, scientific potential and a local population center to utilize the park.

In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson, acting at the behest of Arizona Congressman Carl Hayden, Phoenix boosters, and a range of other interested parties proclaimed the Papago Saguaro National Monument on the outskirts of Tempe and Phoenix in Maricopa County including a popular local natural feature, Hole-in-the-Rock (Proclamation No. 1262, 38 Stat. 1991 [January 31, 1914]). The Antiquities Act allowed Presidential proclamation of a monument if it protected cultural, historic, or scientific features.

Phoenix residents would come to view the Papago Saguaro National Monument as a park along the lines of New York's Central Park and the social value of the park overrode the natural features of the park or any scenic, historic, or scientific values the NPS might highlight.² In 1926, the Phoenix General Manager requested Washington Boulevard be extended to the Apache Trail. The boulevard (making

PAPAGO SAGUARO NATIONAL MONUMENT ARIZONA

Embracing the SE¼ of Sec. 33, T. 2 N. R. 4 E. W¼ of W¼ Sec. 3, All Sec. 4 NE¼ and E¼ of SE¼ Sec. 5, W¼ and W¼ SE¼ Sec. 10, N¼ NE¼ and NE¼ of SW¼ Sec. 9, T. 1, N. R. 4 E. all East of Gila and Salt River Meridian Containing 2,050.43 Acres



Boundary of Monument
 DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
 GENERAL LAND OFFICE
 Clay Tallman, Commissioner

Figure 1. Map of Papago Saguaro National Monument. Map from 1915, National Park Service Annual Report

access to the monument easier) along with the developmental approach represented by the City Manager meant that the Monument's days were numbered. The city was re-imagining Papago Saguaro even as it engulfed it.³

By the mid-1920s the NPS was beginning to question Papago Saguaro Monument's viability in the face of declining local support. It was under threat, and although it did have many splendid cacti, its location was originally determined more by local use—Hole-in-the-Rock—rather than its merit as a distinctly rich desert environment. Further, NPS Director Steven Mather was busy setting parameters on the National Park system since existing parks and monuments were woefully underfunded. Seeking a way out of accepting every public location as a park, Mather and Horace Albright had pushed forward a National Conference on Parks to encourage states to make and manage their own parks.

The turning point arrived in response to Arizona Governor George Hunt's backing of an Arizona Department of Fish and Game request for a fish hatchery within the monument. Secretary of Interior Franklin K. Lane's office reflected on earlier encroachments—shooting range, road easement, efforts to make picnic areas—and then argued: “this area was established as a national monument for scientific reasons, and...any further reduction in area would affect its value as a national monument.” The Interior memo went on: “In view of these persistent requests for use of land within the monument for State and city purposes, I would be glad to approve legislation whereby the entire monument be abolished as such and turned over to the State or the City of Phoenix, as may seem best, for either a State or a city Park”.⁴

By 1930 monument lands were back under state control. Today Papago Park is a municipal park of the cities of Phoenix and Tempe. Developed as a city park, Papago Saguaro has fulfilled local expectations. The 1496 acre park includes the Desert Botanical Garden, a large zoo, picnic areas, baseball and softball fields, several small lakes, hiking trails, bicycle paths, a fire museum, Rolling Hills Golf Course, and Hunt's Tomb, the pyramidal tomb of Arizona's first governor, George W. P. Hunt.

During World War II, the park housed a POW camp and contained as many as 3,100 prisoners from 1942 to 1944. It was also the site of the largest mass escape from any United States prison camp in World War II. The Great Papago Escape occurred on December 23, 1944 when 25 prisoners, including German U-boat commander Jürgen Wattenberg, escaped the camp using a 178-foot tunnel and made their way to the Arizona desert.⁷

Saguaro National Monument

The loss of Papago Saguaro, while somewhat regrettable, offered opportunities to refocus on a new location. In December 1930, Superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park, M. R. Tillotson wrote to NPS Director Horace Albright noting, “for some time I have been greatly interested in the establishment somewhere in southern Arizona of a national monument, the feature of which would be typical desert flora and especially the Giant Sahuaro”.⁵

He went on:

While in Tucson recently Mr. Hoffman Birney casually mentioned to me an area on which there was an especially fine sahuaro forest and I therefore took occasion to visit the site of which he spoke. I found this to be at the foot of the west slope of the Rincon Mountains, some 17 miles east of Tucson. This is undoubtedly the finest sahuaro forest I have seen with my limited knowledge of that country. It amounts in extent to some two or three thousand acres, lying in a slight basin or depression.

The Sahuaro (sic) there is exceptional, not only because it grows especially large and with the characteristic varying shapes, but principally because of the fact that here the growth is heavier than in any individual area I happen to know of. This particular forest is readily accessible over a good road by way of Wrightstown, from Tucson, and is only about 17 miles distant. If it were set aside as a national monument for the preservation of this characteristic growth especially it should, therefore, attract many visitors.⁶

Tillotson's interest was nothing new. Locals had sought to interest the NPS in the site years before, but Papago Saguaro had blocked these earlier efforts. In 1930, as the NPS searched for a new monument, there was already an established coalition of local conservationists and scientists who desired the protection of what was known locally as the Tanque Verde Cactus Forest or Giant Cactus Forest. However, establishing the new monument east of Tucson was not a forgone conclusion. But local activists and state representatives were determined. The state of Arizona, and in particular, the University of Arizona acted first and created the University Cactus Forest to protect a large stand of Saguaros along the west flank of the Rincon Mountains.

But local activists continued to pressure Washington, and on March 1, 1933, President Hoover designated the area once known as the Tanque Verde Cactus Forest as Saguaro National Monument.

¹ Marcus Burtner, 2011; *Crowning the Queen of the Sonoran Desert: Tucson and Saguaro National Park. An Administrative History*. MS on file at Saguaro National Park. p.20

² IBID., 29

³ IBID., 31

⁴ IBID., 32

⁵ IBID., 33

⁶ IBID., 34

⁷ John Hammond Moore, 2006; *The Faustball Tunnel; German POWs in America and Their Great Escape*. US Naval Institute Press

For more information contact:

Ronald Beckwith ph: (520) 733-5160
Archeologist email: ronald_beckwith@nps.gov
Saguaro National Park
3693 S. Old Spanish Trail
Tucson, AZ 85730