



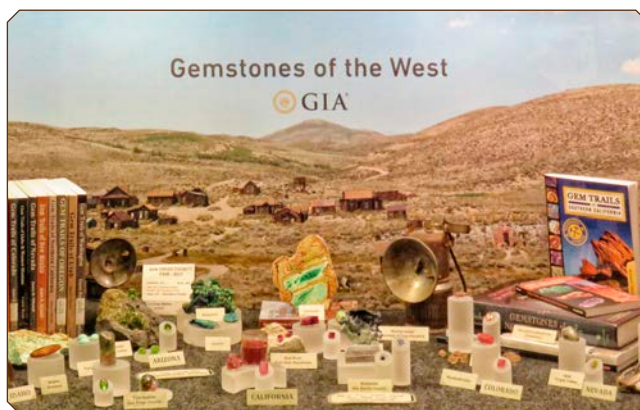
Roundup for gem minerals of the West

by Lisbet Thoresen,
Public Lands Representative for SDMG
and PLAC – South Chair, CFMS

THE MOJAVE DESERT has many collecting areas beloved to Rockhounds that are now within the footprint of the **Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM)**. Since the 1990s, repeated legislative efforts to protect the area from commercial exploitation failed, so finally **Senator Dianne Feinstein** asked **President Obama** to designate it as a national monument, which he did on February 12, 2016.

The public has a limited awareness of the beautiful and varied gem minerals found in the California desert or the deep affinity hobby collectors feel for this oasis of collectible gem minerals.

Other Stakeholders love the desert too, while still others see economic potential in it. Consequently, the Mojave Desert has been a battleground of competing values for as long as anyone can remember. Now, however, the conflict has narrowed and focused on **Mojave Trails**, specifically. It may be downsized significantly to accommodate commercial interests, which is being hotly contested in a renewed battle that may go on for some time.

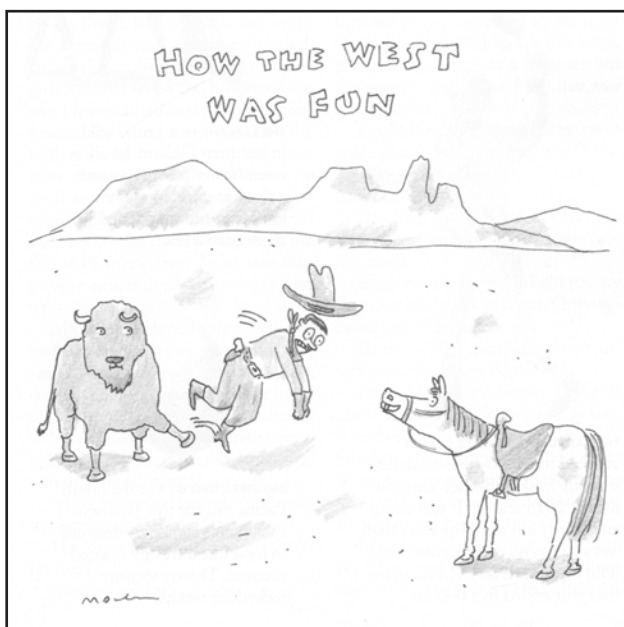


GIA's Caroline Nelms exhibit on "Gemstones of the West" juxtaposed selected gem trails field guides with gem mineral specimens from localities in the western United States. Her exhibit won the Coordinator's Award in the educational category. Photo: L. Thoresen.

Where does that leave Rockhounds?

Between a rock and a hard place?

If **Mojave Trails** is downsized to make way for commercial development and the building of utility-scale projects, hobby collecting almost certainly will be drastically curtailed. Fences will go up, and Rockhounds, as well as other recreational users, will be shut out.



Michael Maslin, The New Yorker Collection/The Cartoon Bank. Reproduced by permission.

Conversely, areas that remain in the monument will be under management, and historically, public lands with protective designations are managed according to very restrictive guidelines. To alleviate the burden of cost and human resources, closure of secondary roads and unmapped trails has been the rule rather than the exception. So, unless the management plan for **Mojave Trails**, which has yet to be drafted, explicitly accommodates hobby collecting and keeps roads and trails open, Rockhounds could lose access to collecting areas.

California **BLM** and **BLM's Desert District Advisory Council (DAC)** is keenly aware that the Mojave Desert is hallowed ground for Rockhounds, so they appreciate the expectations invested in explicit

accommodations being written into the management plan for **Mojave Trails** – whether it remains intact or is downsized. Rockhounds could enhance their own prospects of getting more of what they want in the management plan, if they are willing to cultivate comity and mutual support with other Stakeholders and if they are willing to invest more energy into elevating public awareness about what's at stake.

In a perverse way, perhaps, the timing could not be better for this particular public lands crisis – the national monuments review ordered by **President Trump** on April 26th has propelled what might be an otherwise obscure topic to high visibility with the public. And the public responded to the review by overwhelmingly supporting the preservation and designation of more national monuments (see the previous article). **DOI** never received more comment letters on any other issue previously – ever.

So, is there any reason the public cannot or will not support hobby collecting on lands with protective designations, if they understand better what responsible hobby collecting values are and where access is threatened? Some groups like **The Sierra Club** may never yield any concessions, but what about other groups, and what about **John Q. Public**?

The **2017 San Diego County Fair** provided both an ideal venue and the ideal theme – “**Where the West is Fun**” – to address the issue. It provided

“Rockhounding in the California Desert District has been a family activity and hobby for generations of Californians. The BLM is committed to focusing on rockhounding, and other recreational activities, in the development of the management plan for Mojave Trails National Monument. Input from the rockhounding community will be essential in helping us identify appropriate management actions that balance access with resource protection.”

**– Kyle Sullivan,
MTNM manager, BLM**

opportunity (as it does every year) to reach a lot of people and show them extraordinarily beautiful gem minerals, but this year, gems and minerals found in western localities were showcased – 21 of the 22 land-based national monuments under review, including **Mojave Trails**, are located in western states. In collaboration with lifelong Rockhounds **Bill Depue**, **Vivian** and **Danny Watts**, and **John Pickett**, this author (LT) made an educational exhibit showcasing “**Agates and Jaspers from Mojave Trails National Monument.**” We invited **BLM** staff and several conservation groups to visit the **Gems, Minerals & Jewelry Dept.** at the Del Mar Fairgrounds where they could see firsthand why we love gems and minerals and collecting.

Frazier Haney, **Conservation Director of Mojave Desert Land Trust**, brought his family from Joshua Tree, and **Sheara Cohen**, **California Desert Public Lands Representative for The Wilderness Society**, travelled from Oakland to see the show. They were bowled over – they spent three hours, asking questions – lots of questions – and there was lots of ooh-ing and aah-ing over the specimens, the lapidary, the jewelry. We won over **Frazier's** 21/2 year-old daughter **Lily**, too. She made a bee-line for the sandbox to sift for a polished gem treasure. A future Rockhound? Hope so.



Frazier Haney and Sheara Cohen lean in for a closer look at an exhibit of petrified wood at the 2017 San Diego County Fair.



Lisbet Thoresen and Frazier Haney inspect the exhibit featuring Agates and Jaspers self-collected and carved by Bill Depue, Vivian and Danny Watts, and John Pickett.



Jamie Haney looks on as daughter Lily selects a polished gem treasure from the sandbox.



Agates & Jaspers from Mojave Trails National Monument



Preserving Rockhound Habitat on Public Lands

The Desert Renewable Conservation Plan (DRECP) is the most ambitious land use amendment in California history. It is a programmatic "guideline" for administering 22.5 million acres of public and private lands in California's deserts (through 2040).

The Record of Decision for Phase I of the DRECP was signed on September 16, 2016. Its focus is on conservation and recreational values of 10.6 million acres within DRECP's scope. The ROD paves the way to streamlining the permitting process for as many renewable energy projects as quickly as possible in the Mojave Desert.

National Monument designations and other protective designations may be the only way to protect public lands from being bulldozed for utility scale projects under sweeping planning efforts like DRECP. Accommodations for conservation values, recreational uses, and other special interests can be included in the management plans for national monuments, but they require input from the public and Stakeholders. The process requires transparency to work.

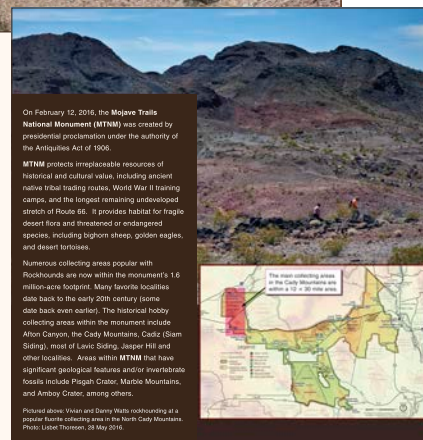
Pictured above: Joe Surver at the Top Notch Claim in the North Cady Mountains. He and partner Bill Depue staked the claim before the Mojave Trails National Monument was designated. Photo: Lisbet Thoresen, 28 May 2016.



Bill Depue (age 91) and Jonathan Davis (age 8) are lifelong Rockhounds; although, Bill has been doing it a little longer – he has been going out to the desert nearly every weekend since he was 15 years old. Jonathan got an early start – Bill took him out on his first rock collecting expedition when he was 17 months old. Asked what he looks for, Bill says, "I look for beauty."

Agates and Jaspers, with all their varied colors and patterns, are endlessly awe-inspiring, and the act of personal discovery – finding an exceptional specimen – is a thrilling experience. No less edifying is studying, sharing, and displaying minerals, and for many Rockhounds there is nothing more gratifying than carving lapidary objects from self-collected specimens.

The "rough" and "cut" Agates and Jaspers on display here originated from just a few of the many historic collecting areas within the Mojave Trails National Monument, primarily the Cady Mountains and part of Lavis Siding.



On February 12, 2016, the Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM) was created by presidential proclamation under the authority of the Antiquities Act of 1906.

MTNM protects irreplaceable resources of historical and cultural value, including ancient Native American trade routes, World War II training camps, and the longest remaining undeveloped stretch of Route 66. It provides habitat for fragile desert flora and threatened or endangered species, including bighorn sheep, golden eagles, and desert tortoises.

Numerous collecting areas popular with Rockhounds are now within the monument's 1.6 million-acre footprint. Many favorite localities date back to the early 20th century (some date back even earlier). The historical hobby collecting areas within the monument include Alton Canyon, the Cady Mountains, Cactus (Sloan Siding), most of Lavis Siding, Jasper Hill and other localities. Areas within MTNM that have significant geological features and/or overabundant fossils include Pagan Crater, Marine Mountains, and Ambury Crater, among others.

Pictured above: Vivian and Danny Watts rockhounding at a popular fossil collecting area in the North Cady Mountains. Photo: Lisbet Thoresen, 28 May 2016.

