Part IV. WINTER TO SPRING SITES

Section I – CAHUILLA WAYS

Introduction Followed by Site Directions/Descriptions

Sky and earth meld into one eternal plane on the cusp of dusk, sliding down the backside of the world. Rolling hills to the east barely break the continuity of sky and naked land. A watering trough in the foreground pigeonholes the planet as earth, the only point of reference in a sun field so vast.

This scene catches the breath of lone drivers who descend from Los Coyotes Reservation down to Highway 79 to search out the westerly trails and head

back to the concourse of cities that define the time barrier between Southern California as it was and is. Cahuilla country hearkens back to a time when resourcefulness had nothing to do with online apps and everything to do with truly knowing the land's bounties and where to trade what little the the shoots and shrubs of the wilderness lacked.

A tiny, crippled church in the hills marks the entrance of civilized worship, but its state of ill repair, along with the discarded material objects along the highway, signifies a rejection of the formalized material world in a desert insistent upon drawing its resources from within. On the road below, a Spanish

church built in the 19th century documents earlier attempts at imposed formality.

The Los Coyotes Reservation is one of seven Cahuilla bands in Southern California. Sites in this chapter lie on turf inhabited by three separate bands, the Anza, the Ramona and the Santa Rosa Cahuilla. The resourcefulness of the groups becomes apparent on a leisurely drive through Cahuilla country, where even dry desert plains sustained life with a more varied diet than most California Indians enjoyed. With starvation as a constant threat, the Cahuilla worked hard to secure and preserve food, making for quiet, peaceful villages with less leisure activity than their coastal counterparts enjoyed.

Although mesquite beans and acorns from various oaks served as staples, the women knew every secret for leaching, soaking, grinding, and cooking other plants that looked inedible. The Desert Cahuilla were one of few American tribes to dig ancient wells, or earth-ollas, complete with underground stair steps.

Self-reliance enabled each band to develop its own distinctive identity. Each clan maintains such individuality, in fact, that few ceremonies can be precisely described as common to all Cahuilla. Both "cult religions" and mainstream religion within Native American culture seem to reflect a more individualistic, less communal and shamanistic approach to worship among the Cahuilla people

than among northern tribes. Indeed, a sense of aloneness is easily captured in this region, which encompasses a diverse range of elevations from the San Bernadino Mountains to Borrego Springs to the Chocolate Mountains to the San Jacinto Plain to the eastern slopes of Palomar.

Seasonal extremes of temperature and dry winds across the region's four life zones affected potential food sources and shelter. Resourcefulness notwithstanding, visions of an easy life disappear in sandstorms and windstorms, in intense Valley heat and high-country snow.

Villages set in canyons or on alluvial fans historically protected indigenous people, and the

area surrounding each village was commonly owned by those who claimed its lineage, although the seasons demanded a fairly mobile lifestyle. Each clan appointed a chief through a patriarchal order.

Among the Cahuilla, plants took on significance as living beings with whom one could communicate and interact. Rocks, elemental forces, animals, birds and spirits played anthropomorphic roles in oral literature and cosmology but also communicated not only with a shaman, but with anyone who knew how to truly listen. The Creator designed plants to serve humanity, but not in a one-way relationship. A gatherer would thank the plant for its sacrifice, apologizing for inflicting harm but also recognizing

that plants, by nature, submit to their predetermined use or destiny. The human obligation to the plant included not exploiting it, which meant not gathering all the plants of one type in a gathering area, and always leaving a part of the plant behind for species propagation, as true environmental stewards would do. Certain rituals, such as the first-fruit ceremony at the beginning of each plant's gathering season, also made the user an active participant in the spiritual interaction with creation.

Contemplation of the many generations of such traditions uplifts even the quiet, careful wilderness walker to the level of fulfillment reserved for shamans in some of the more sedentary Amerindian cultures.

(For instance, in early Chumash culture, the shamans, who played a significant role in initiating seasonal changes, belonged to the antap, or elite class. In Cahuilla culture, class and governance relate to lineage, but do not dictate spiritual powers.) Belief in the importance of lineage thus colored the development of Cahuilla spiritual life in positive ways.

Cahuilla people, as other indigenous peoples, did not deign to claim domination over the land, although they carefully allocated gathering privileges. They considered ancestral homelands sacred. Nurturing these lands gave life meaning, as did the cycle of life that included initiation rites and respect for the supernatural powers of nature.

Each tribe had its own explanation for the forces of nature. Cahuilla earthquake lore credited the supernatural named Tahquitz with rolling over in his grave in periodic anxiety. It seems he abducted a beautiful girl from Agua Caliente and made her his wife, forcing her to share his nightly meal as he dined on the souls of men. He finally realized how unhappy she was and let her go, with the promise that she would die if she ever told her people where she had been. Her clan accepted her back with open arms but pleaded with her for some time until she confessed her fate and accepted the consequence of death. This, apparently, did not appease the quaking Tahquitz.

Oral legends may slip away, but a few remnants of Cahuilla spiritual life exist as patterns and anthropomorphs documented indelibly in rock art at sacred sites near some Cahuilla villages. For more details about the purpose and nature of rock art, refer to the Kumeyaay and the Chumash chapters.

Illustrations at La Puerta Real de San Carlos record the passing of a 1775 expedition of 240, led by Juan Bautista de Anza, en route to San Francisco. The Cahuilla accepted their guests calmly, but a shaman took note of this significant event. Since Shamans did not simply doodle but recorded only events with symbolic meaning, perhaps the painter suspected the changes that modernization would bring to the

ancient traditions and lifestyles of the various tribes and tribelets.

Independence notwithstanding, networks of trails connected villages, and the Cahuilla shared an active relationship with the Gabrielino/Tongva and Serrano, and to some degree, the Luiseno. The Colorado Desert separated them from their southern neighbors, the Ipai and Tipai (now Kumeyaay), except in the Anza area, while intermarriage, trade, ritual and war brought them together with northern tribes.

Originally, the Cocopa-Maricopa Trail bisected this geographic center of Southern California, and two other trails, the Santa Fe and Yuman, also

connected the tribe with its neighbors. Although the original routes have changed, the indigenous presence still lends a special peace where the faces of those working at pageants, working for the forest service, or walking along the city streets wear eyes folded under cocked brows to protect them from the

sun, eyes full of gentle wisdom inherited from indigenous peoples.

Hemet Maze Stone

1 mile - exploration beyond site possible

Directions: From the coastal cities, take Interstate 15 to Highway 74, and watch for the small historical marker 2 miles west of Hemet, in Reinhardt Canyon. Turn left and travel another three miles. Walk the last mile, to where the road dead ends, and look for the maze stone on the right. After viewing the stone, walk a short distance along the unmarked trails that offer elevated views of Hemet Valley, where several Indian civilizations historically thrived.

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A common theme in Indian sand paintings as well as petroglyphs, the swastika reiterates an image found in almost all the earth's great cultures. Tribal art always portrays it rotating clockwise, from east to west, replicating the natural movement of the sun from east to west. The late sand painter David Villasenor or pointed out that "in the late Nazi regime, this powerful symbol was taken, tipped on its side, and spun counter-clockwise, thus creating a complete antithesis of all that is natural, and substituting order with chaos." (11)

California peoples supplant this usage with an interpretation of the swastika center as the great center of life, the Great Spirit or the great mystery

from which all life emanates. Four bars reach out to the four points of the compass, with Father Sky and Mother Earth sitting at the extreme horizon. Man and woman come to the process of creation as equals, demonstrating how positive and negative polarities, when united and balanced, issue life, light and evolution. The bars can also represent four different types of sacred plant life, such as corn, beans squash or melon, and tobacco.

The Hemet Maze stone incorporates the swastika in an ornate maze inscribed so many years ago that its artist did not pass on its specific meaning. Yet one can guess at the significance of this sacred mural, which faces the sweeping valley west of Hemet,

toward Black Mountain and Red Mountain. Before federal law prohibited defacing such sacred landmarks, a plaque was mounted adjacent to the artwork, protected only by a wire fence. The boulders beyond make interesting meditation sites, where the sun sets on a sweeping landscape, the vision of serenity that may have inspired this ancient art.

South Fork Trail

2 miles round-trip Rouse Hill lookout; 5 mile round-trip to San Jacinto River

Directions: From Los Angeles, take any eastbound freeway to Interstate 15 south. Turn east on Highway 74. Continue through Hemet. Beyond Valle Vista and a section of divided highway, you'll see the Cranston ranger station. Drive 8 more miles and look for the trail marker near a large parking area on the right, as you move up the hill. Because of its southwestern exposure, the trail stays dry beyond the first snowfall, and shows well in spring, in the late day. Avoid a muddy day if you plan to descend to the river.

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Cahuilla means "the masters." Although the tribe assumes it referred to linguistic rather than political power, the origin remains obscure. Masters of language? Masters of an eco- spiritual lifestyle? Masters of human relations? Masters of abstract artistry? Masters of ingenuity in creating hunting tools such as the boomerang? If nothing else, those who walked the South Fork Trail to its end mastered a steep climb. Those who became lost in awe along the way mastered nature-inspired meditation.

Several bands of Cahuilla Indians inhabited the community of mountains between the San Bernardino range and the Anza Borrego Desert. They gathered in villages of about 100-200, which affiliated

with larger political groups where several villages shared common territory. Tribelets, called Sibs, had populations ranging from 300 to 2,000 people. Lineage determined gathering areas and village affiliation.

The Cahuilla language group consisted of two subgroups or moieties. Cahuilla law and custom did not prohibit intermarriage but actually *required* members of one group to marry members of the opposite group, to ensure social and economic alliances. The encouragement of intermarriage seems a bit progressive in early California (as early as 1500 A.D., in fact), considering later European

immigrants tended to react when their women married into other linguistic, lineal or ethnic groups.

Currently, at least 650 Cahuilla live on the Morongo, Agua Caliente, Los Coyotes, Santa Rosa, Cahuilla, Soboba, and Torres-Martinez reservations. The Soboba Cahuilla probably used the South Fork Trail the most.

In the sycamore cradle of the scenic highway at the base of the San Bernadino Forest, the road suddenly arcs to the left. This promising trailhead sits in the elbow of the arc. Afternoon light glazes the red shank of the manzanita, and Hemet fills the splendid backdrop, which gets even better as the trail takes

you quickly to the back side of the mountain, leaving the traffic noise behind.

The mountain transforms, with this one turn, from a range of boulders and beige and desert constitutionals to a menagerie of plants thriving in sandy white soil, the luxurious nubby blanket of green spilling into the rumpled lap of the ridges beyond. In their deep crevices, perpetual shade sprouts pine and spruce, which shoot up from the base on vertical ground.

Continue along the flat trail for views of the steep drop-off that lends wall-length views of Rouse Hill, whose sleeves thrust down like balloon tethers, as if some mighty upsurge exalted the peak while gravity

prevailed upon its tendons, preventing it from floating up entirely into the flawless sky.

Those with the will and the cleats can continue down the second mile of trail to the cold runoff waters of the south fork of the San Jacinto River. The climb out proves very vertical and strenuous. Those merely seeking quiet sanctuaries will find them along the first mile of trail without the climb.

Students of the metaphysical, as well as followers of Asian house-blessing customs, emphasize the importance of juxtaposition in the physical environment to create spiritual peace of mind. They seek out converging vortexes as well as simple energy flow in a room. I suddenly sensed this

perspective on the South Fork Trail. Something about the way the energy flowed around this mountain, bathing it with warm colors and archetypal vistas at every turn, gave me the high I had been seeking all day and had not found on every other trails. Every step seems a worthy meditation site.

The San Jacinto, Santa Rosa and Thomas Mountains reek with legends, but on the South Fork, an ancient silence calls vociferously to me. May it call to you as well.

Ramona Trail

7 miles round trip, moderate

Directions: From Los Angeles, take any eastbound freeway to Interstate 15 south. Take Highway 74 east. Drive from Hemet to Mountain Center, but veer right just before reaching it, at the junction of Highways 74 and 243. Drive eight more miles to the trailhead and park on the right side of the road. Walk across the gated cattle guard and follow the dirt road to the trailhead, which will appear on the left.

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An 1884 writer captured on paper the legend of Ramona, a girl of mixed Anglo and Indian heritage who fell in love with a full-blooded Cahuilla named

Alessandro. Forbidden to marry him, Ramona eloped with Alessandro, and their pursuers chased them across the Southern California countryside until the young husband finally lost his life in the chase. The wife's ranchero fell into the hands of Americans, doubling the tragedy of the story's ending with a reality experienced by many of the story's original listeners and their ancestors.

Given the Cahuilla attitude toward intermarriage described on the previous pages, the story of Ramona and Alessandro symbolizes a poignant loss of rights—not only the right to intercultural love, but the right to a value system and way of life that promote unity instead of enmity, peace instead of

polarity. Like other California tribes, the Cahuilla way suffered from American occupation of the land, but progeny still bear a strong relationship to the land. They sell merchandise to the local stores, and work and walk along the city streets. At this writing, the American lifestyle has not driven them from the land they love nor drained the vitality from their love for it. They still remember the places in the Thomas Mountains where Ramona and Alessandro walked, the places where they lived and died, and an annual pageant in the town of Ramona memorializes the legend.

When I caught up with a park ranger on an abandoned trail, it did not surprise me to see a

Cahuilla face. The well-designed Ramona Trail, on the southern slopes of the Thomas range, named for the legendary Indian girl, bears the same distinction as all the San Jacinto trails as a sacred place. Chief Francisco Patencio, a Palm Canyon Cahuilla, said "The trails of the Indians went everywhere. They led up all the canyons. They were hunting trails for the men and used by the women to gather the seeds, nuts, plums and acorns, so many things. They led from one tribe to the other. All the Indians did their part to keep the trails clear. These trails were sacred to the Indians." (14) The various bands of Cahuilla shared responsibility for trail maintenance out of honor for the sacred trails.

Begin your journey up a series of switchbacks ascending from a pastoral pine-clad valley up through manzanita and sage fields, where red shank drops its shredded bark peelings on the snow on an early winter day, alongside tracks of bobcat, coyote and fox.

Hiked off-season, the trail offers plenty of solitude. As views of Garner Valley and the Desert Divide open up, the valley bears the lightness of a silence so fragile that each flap of a crow's wing echoes through hollow air. Quartz glittering among the snow dust gives way to lichen-scalped granite boulders above. Jeffrey pines in the lower meadows give way to chaparral and then return again on the upper

slopes, where incense cedar perfumes the air and Coulter pines cast their gigantic progeny on the ground in the form of distinctive cones, and all shed tears of ice as the morning sun exerts its influence. At midday, the silent weeping reaches hysteria and ice bars thunder to the ground, hushed by wind, the only audible signs of change in a forest that sanctioned life unchanged for so many generations.

Two obvious spots emerge for rest and reflection, one three quarters of a mile in on the left, and one on top. The trail gives way to a road at Tool Box Springs. Pass the water spigot and follow the road another quarter mile up to the picnic area. (Two more miles of walking on this road will take you to the summit.)

When you see the picnic area coming up on the right, look due left for a boulder pile, where perched on top, you may spot Apache Peak and the multiple layers of the San Jacinto Range. Find peace here until the wind chases you down again to embrace the sweeping vistas on the return walk.

The prevailing view on the downward hike, Apache Peak and Spitler Peak, lounge on the landscape like two unshaven men. To see their stubble close-range, look for the turnoff to Hurkey Creek County Park, five miles north, and drive to the Spitler Peak Trail one and three-quarter miles past the park. You may want to save this adventure for another day, since the trek to Apache Peak spans 12 miles. For now, enjoy

Ramona's namesake trail and the freedom to walk it that the young Cahuilla maiden could not enjoy in the end.

Ryan Mountain

Indian Caves to Ryan Mountain Summit - 3 1/2 miles, round trip

Directions: From 1-10, exit north on Highway 62, halfway between Riverside and Indio. When you reach Twenty-Nine Palms, follow the signs to the Joshua Tree National Monument Visitor's Center. Drive eight more miles south on the main park road, veering right at Pinto Y junction and continuing another 8 1/2 miles to the Indian Cave Turnout.

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Silence reigns in the world's open spaces, where visual clutter also dissipates in a vast plain of sands, grasses, shrubbery or, in this case, Joshua trees.

Visceral senses bond and blend at the Joshua Tree National Monument.

Walking up the Ryan Mountain Trail under an unforgiving sun, we felt a sense of the slow pace of change. Geologists date this mountain at several million years old. It has lived through several reincarnations as part of the Little San Bernadino Range. Still, it remains intact.

As we neared the upper slopes, we felt engulfed by a vastness so infinite that it depersonalizes yet somehow connects. Some relationship between the inner core of the earth and the inner core of the human spirit left my son and I sitting silently on the

edge a slope, lost in separate thoughts yet sensing each other's thoughts without voicing them.

"Are you ready to go on?" he said, just before I opened my mouth to tell him I was ready. We spiraled the mountain, ending at a mere 5,470-foot peak, feeling somehow on top of the world. Circular vistas of flat palms of earth reflected back not a sound but the scolding wind and, eventually, the voices of three different tongues, for we reached the peak simultaneously with other parties of international hikers. None of us understood one another's words, but the mountain spoke to us all in universal imagery. If you reach the peak alone, you

too may hear the tongue of eerie chorus of geologic forms and trees singing back to you.

Four valleys, named Lost Horse, Queen, Hidden and Pleasant, lie at the foot of the mountain, all broad and all seemingly near because of the desert's open visibility. The progression and names of the valleys symbolized, to me, the four spiritual valleys identified in the mystic writings of Baha'u1llah--the valley of search, of knowledge, of love, and the valley of full awareness and self-effacement. The walk up the mountain seems a physical ritual calling the soul to an ascension of its own.

More recent rock formations, some as young as a million years old, decorate the four valleys

surrounding this ancient stone pedestal. We listened to the wind for a while, tried unsuccessfully to capture the panorama on film—some capacities no mere camera is endowed with—and walked back down the trail to look at the Indian Caves at the trailhead.

The latter task proves frustrating for many hikers, misled by the promise of deep caverns in the rock. The site received its name from a few sheltered enclaves where passersby once camped for shelter from the unbroken winds of the desert. With only subtle evidence of work sites for nomadic bands of Cahuilla and Serrano, the caves look somewhat less spectacular than some of the rock formations you

may have stopped to admire on the way to the trailhead.

If you explore the caves and the rugged carpet prolific with rocks and trees at the beginning of your trip, look for the trail that leads up the hill and merges with the campground trail. Turn right to ascend Ryan Mountain. Due to that primordial echo effect and the high number of tourists who camp nearby, morning hikes prove more reverential.

Still in Cahuilla country, the park also saw early visits from Serrano and Cupeno tribes. The Joshua tree, named by early Mormon immigrants for its heavenly-raised arms and bearded biblical look, already played a significant role in the lives of

indigenous people, who roasted the flowers and buds, ate the seeds and used the red roots to dye patterns into woven baskets.

Today, historic interest probably attracts less interest than the remoteness and unique aura of the Joshua tree forest.

Borrego Palm Canyon

To Palm Grove and waterfalls - 3 miles round trip

Directions: From Los Angeles, take any eastbound freeway to Interstate 15 south, then go east on Highway 79 until your reach Highway 78. From San Diego, take Interstate 8 to 1-15 north. From there, take Highway 76 to Highway 78. Traveling east, you will soon come to S-2. Turn north and follow it for six miles, taking the turnoff to Borrego Springs over an 18-mile mountain pass which snares a lot of snow- and rainclouds in winter. If winter conditions exist in the high country, come prepared with snow tires or chains. As you reach town, you'll come to a sign directing you to turn left to the campground and

visitor's center. Turn onto it and take the turnoff to the campground. Pay a day use fee and drive through the campground to the trailhead parking at its end, where you'll find a well-marked trailhead and drinking fountain.

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You undoubtedly took your first gasp driving down the mountain, as you came around the bend to see Anza Borrego unfold in a sheath of desert plain hemmed in by the alluvial fans of the Santa Rosa Mountains and the rocky deposits of the Vallecita Mountains, linked by the Borrego Badlands, with the distant shores of the Salton Sea splaying light onto the scene.

Now find the heart of this geologic wonderland, one of the 25 palm stands created when the earth shifted along a fault line in this once fertile jungle, blocking the groundwater, which then produced a mane of mesquite or palm trees. In winter and spring, this palm stand erupts out of a clean desert stream that gushes through the wash after a rainstorm, creating flash floods at times.

The Cahuilla knew the locations of all the oases and set up a village at this one, capturing the water in giant ollas and drawing life from the desert. Their resourcefulness, matched only by their resiliency, enabled them to find enough nutrition in a mouthful of chia to sustain them on a long day's walk. The final

flourish of winter leaves the desert moist enough to support a panoply of early March blossoms in Anza Borrego.

Hike this trail after the major rains and before the spring heat. A trail guide can best introduce you to the bounties of Anza Borrego. Among this garden of Cahuilla bounties, a rock garden rims the path. The rocks tell the story of the evolution of the plain, populated by humans long before its population of stones remained intact.

The Northern Diegueno, along with the Kumeyaay, shared Anza Borrego with the Cahuilla. They tell a creation story about the birth of two brothers who lived at the bottom of the sea. The

older one, interchangeably called Tuchaipa or Chaipa-Komat or Chakumat, arose from the sea first, telling his younger brother, Kokomat, to keep his eyes open while swimming. Kokomat, blinded by the salt water of the Salton Sea, salt water, accused his older brother of malice. A game of one-up-manship resulted from their argument. Tuchaipa gathered a piece of yellow clay and made mankind.

Kokomat tried to do the same, but his creations resembled misshapen webbed foot creatures. These creatures became birds. Frustrated by his failure, Kokomat returned to the earth beneath the sea. According to legend, earthquakes roar whenever he moves about in the underworld.

In reality, many of the quakes that molded this canyon occurred long after its first inhabitants arrived. The thrusting of the mountain ranges and the perpetually falling boulders have created a striking landscape quite different from the lush, flat terrain the first indigenous people knew.

Some of the exposed rock in the park gleams with a luster called desert varnish, created when water deposits microscopic amounts of manganese and iron. These layers, over thousands of years, build up in a dark coating, a patina that adds drama to a lively winter desert, especially when kissed by a misty rain.

A ground squirrel may cross your path, but the summer heat has forced foxes and other wildlife into an especially nocturnal lifestyle. Look carefully for bighorn sheep hiding up among the outcroppings, some as large as 200 pounds, with 20-pound horns.

The path crosses the creek and follows through the narrows of creek-side boulders. Just before the canyon, these boulder walls create a dead-end enclave, perfect for meditation. Find your sanctuary here, as more hurried explorers climb over the rocks, lean into the canyon and bushwhack in to the waterfall.

Once you do follow the route up the rocks, you'll come upon a forest of 700 fan palms, where the

Cahuilla enjoyed a wealthy harvest of pea-sized blue palm fruit. What they couldn't eat fresh in the summer, they dried for winter use. Chief Patencio remembers a day when the shamans burned the fan palms to rid them of insects. Since this practice ended, only the insects can harvest the fruit.

Picture the oasis the palm canyon represented to indigenous Cahuilla and find your own spiritual oasis on this late winter/early spring walk.

Cactus Springs

5 miles round-trip, from Trash Transfer to Horsethief Crossing

Directions: Choose the Cactus Springs trail sometime between the dirges of winter and the late spring heat, but not when moisture might precipitate avalanche or flash flood possibilities. From the I-10 Freeway between Banning and Indio, turn onto 111 South. Drive through the wind channel and into the 18-mile span of desert that starts with Palm Springs and ends at Palm Dessert. From Palm Desert, turn right onto State Route 74 and drive another 15 miles. Look for the Pinyon Flat Campground sign on the right and the Transfer Station sign on the left. (From

Hemet, this point appears 40 miles east on Highway 74.) Follow the Trash Transfer Road for less and ¼ mile, turning left onto the Elks Retreat dirt road. Park at the fork. A sign will direct you to Fire Road 7S01 and the Cactus Springs Trail a short distance beyond. (Or park outside the fenced transfer station and walk the rockier dirt road alongside the station to save wear and tear on your car.)

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"The white man says that only 10,000 Cahuilla were here when they came," a young Cahuilla girl told her father, who replied, "Oh no, that's not true. "There were many more than that." Katherine Siva Saubell, remembering this story, described the history of her

people as “from time immemorial,” or at least 2,000 years. This trail reads like a travel journal of their history.

The old Cahuilla route skirts a mountain of Sonoran Desert vegetation and leads to rewarding spring waters, in the wet season, but one of the most notable features appears in the first mile, in the form of beautiful stones embedded into the trail and strewn along the hillside. The quartz ranges from brilliant white to rose quartz, brick red rock and marbled variations of various gems. Mostly likely the source of the name Santa Rosas, the geology attracted miners, whose leftovers decorate the first leg of trail.

The Cahuilla may have collected the stones but based their wealth more on the staples the trail offers, such as agave, whose leaves supplied provisions for cradles, sandals, nutrition and sewing. Although women did most of the cooking, men cooked the agave through an elaborate process. Mohave yucca also proved important for its fiber and edible pods.

The Cactus Springs Trail dips and winds and braids through the tresses of lush vegetation at several points before dropping down to Horsethief Crossing. The architecture of the trail makes sense, as the Cahuilla used this path to ascend to the high country to gather pinyon nuts and to hunt deer in the

summer, taking advantage of its natural hunters' blinds. In August, they returned to roast the pinyons over hot coals and to live on the winter harvest from these desert gardens.

The observant hiker can appreciate such a treasury of resilient plant life preserved even more by conservation. The Cahuilla made medicinal eye packs from the bark of the scrub oak or "pawish." They extracted food, tea, and medicine from the red-skinned manzanita and whittled many tools from its stems. Most manzanita tracts, in fact, they passed on by lineage, to serve the needs of the family for many generations to come.

Cahuilla offered thanks to the Creator by placing the season's first gathering of any plant in the ceremonial house and offering prayers before collecting any more for human use. Without outside intervention for 100 years after Jean Batiste Anza's ride through Cahuilla country, the spiritual life of the people thrived. They lost much of their land, however, because the U.S. government never ratified the treaty signed in 1851 to restore it.

As you continue on the trail, perhaps marveling at the resourcefulness of the Cahuilla people to thrive on what the land offers, you will finally round a corner to face the rock canyon wall that echoes the wet laughter of Cactus Springs. You'll drop quickly into

the canyon and find this alder-lined oasis, where boulders provide seating for your own spiritual reverie, and clear waters offer a more visceral cleansing for hot feet.

After crossing several seeps where the spring feeds lush plant communities, you may notice how the dry banks invite the creek to cut a wide girth through the canyon to feed into pools and rapids. Most people turn back after lunch or at least a visual feast here, although backpacker may continue up to eight more miles before setting up camp.

To enrich your understanding of Cahuilla life, stop at the Cahuilla Tenawat Vista Point, two miles northwest on the main road, or continue on to the

cultural centers in Pam Springs and on the Morongo Reservation.

Pinyon Flats

1 mile round trip – mostly moderate; hiking boots recommended

Directions: From the I-10 freeway between Banning and Indio, take Highway 111 toward Palm Springs. Drive through 18 miles of city until reaching Palm Desert. Turn right on Highway 74. Drive up 15 miles to the Pinyon Flats Campground exit. Turn right. Park outside the entrance to the campground or pay the day use fee and park inside. Just beyond the sign and fence, turn right onto the unmarked Pinyon Flats Trail.

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The Pinyon Flats trail leads to a symbolic circle of mountains that replicates the continuous circle of life that inspired Cahuilla wisdom.

Moon Maiden hails as the first creation of the Cahuillan co-creators, Mokut and Temayawet. She named the flowers, plants and animals and taught the people to properly list them. The people learned not to eat sacred animals such as the eagle (aswet), owl (moot), bear (huuwet), and condor (wesaneawet).

This society recognized the value of feminine energy and wisdom enough to credit the Moon Maiden with teaching them how to live in harmony with nature and also to establish a progressive

marriage system. Each village took on the identity of the coyote (Isily) or the wildcat (Tukat). Members of each clan could only marry the opposite clan, to sustain the lugubrious relations between neighboring villages.

Cahuilla songs celebrated stories of the creation, the Moon Maiden, and the coming-of-age of the youth. Spiritual songs, circular homes and ceremonial houses and gatherings depict the human cycle of birth, growth and progression into the next world.

The western Cahuilla originally settled into 12 villages, connected by hunting and wintering trails straddling the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains. The Desert Cahuilla and Mountain

Cahuilla filled 20 more villages from San Bernadino to Borrego Springs. Trails in the Pinyon Flats area provided passage from the high country to the lowlands.

Fire regeneration and evidence of human interaction with the forest makes this adapted service route an interesting comment on nature's tenacity, as new life springs up in the crevices of human-made objects and in the shadow of ecological events. Some of the objects tell the story of survival over the centuries. After the Mission era, when many bands assimilated into urban populations, the Mountain Cahuilla cultivated the land and maintained a sense of craftsmanship to create objects used in their daily

lives. They asked for no government assistance other than the right to protect their homeland. Even when crop failure brought them close to starvation, they refused to beg, according to reports made to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1882.

Life-sustaining plants along the trail include manzanita, yucca and pinyon pine—mixed desert and mountain vegetation. In late winter and spring, fireweed and yellow monkey flowers decorate the rose quartz-studded path. Sanguine clouds rest against snowy peaks at dusk, the ideal time to walk this route.

The trail initially follows the fence that borders the campground. Soon it dips up and down and crosses

two dirt roads, following the San Bernadino National Forest boundary up a steep hill overlooking homes and fields to the northwest. It peaks on the hub of a wheel of higher peaks. Magnificent vistas circle a meditation site unlike like those in groomed parklands. The rough edges of human life, juxtaposed against nature's flawed perfections and pearly sunsets, offer a special kind of authenticity on this bronzed, windswept point.

Wherever you turn from her, you'll witness a circle of life that transcends weather, geologic time and the stories—told and untold—of human history.