



Desert Riders stop in Morongo Valley on way to Joshua Tree circa 1938. PHOTOS BY PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY/SPECIAL TO THE DESERT SUN

Palm Springs horse trails legacy of Desert Riders

Group documented paths used by hikers, horsemen today

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Special to Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

Desert Riders, founded in 1930, began as a social organization, a club where likeminded people shared their love of horses and their love of the desert.

Riders would mount up and be out of

the "village" in just a few minutes, sometimes without any particular destination in mind. The more persistent and frequent adventurers would meet on the trail and plan group excursions. Those who would go out for early morning rides would sometimes take their breakfast with them on a pack horse and build a fire somewhere on the rocks. They would then enjoy breakfast to-

gether around the campfire.

On Nov. 24, 1931 members of the yet-to-be organized riding club came together with the purpose of making its existence formal. Discussion over the club's name was the first order of business. According to "The Desert Riders Their History," compiled by John D.

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Cliff Campbell, Ray Ryan and Frank Bogert at the Desert Riders 30th Anniversary circa 1960.



Desert Riders are seen circa 1935. PHOTOS BY PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY/SPECIAL TO THE DESERT SUN

Riders

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Hicks, members decided to appoint a committee to select a name. A prize of one year's free membership was offered to the person who came up with the winning name. Tony Burke earned the prize when he came up with the most natural selection possible: "The Desert Riders."

After selecting a name for the club, members worked out names for officers, which were reminiscent of the Old West. The president was the Roundup Boss; the vice president was the Straw Boss; the treasurer was the Buck Boss; the secretary, the Top Wrangler, and the Trails Boss looked after the trails. Each year elections were held and the new officers were sworn in.

An exclusive club within the club was formed that was limited to members who had "bit the dust." The "Caterpillars" as they were called, had to participate in a ritual where they would stand on the breakfast bench and elaborate on their spill, produce a witness and explain how it all happened.

Certain types of falls earned a certain number of points. Each fall was judged by how many parts of the body hit the ground at the same time. A one-point landing translated into one foot hitting the desert floor. A two-point landing represented two feet and a three-point landing was considered to be two feet and one hand. The point system went all the way up to five points (two feet, two hands and your backside) with special recognition if the rider fell on a cactus.

As time went on and the population of the city of Palm Springs grew so did development of open desert. Highways and roads began to crisscross the desert trails and houses and apartments began to fill up much of the empty acreage throughout the city.

The Desert Riders was only about 10 years old when they documented their favorite trails and published the Desert Riders Trail Map. This map marked



Pearl McCallum McManus and Frank Bogert on a Desert Riders ride circa 1931.

the trails that were used and described each one in detail. The funds that were raised from the sale of the maps helped to maintain the many trails that the club constructed. Some of these trails wind up the mountains that surround Palm Springs and provide a spectacular view of the desert below.

These trails today are used by horsemen and hikers alike.

In 1953, Desert Riders filed Articles of Incorporation and in the application they described their primary purpose as an effort, "to perpetuate the spirit of camaraderie and the love of horsemanship." The corporation was set up as strictly non-profit but they could collect dues, levy assessments and elect officers. By increasing the cost of memberships and recruiting new members to the club, money was raised to protect the riding trails.

The Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians allowed the Desert Riders to use Andreas Canyon, a favored spot for the club because of the running water, superb scenery and a palm-rimmed amphitheater which was ideal for meetings with ample space for horses, picnic tables and even parking.

The tribe did not oppose the marking of trails through their reservations.