

Pinal **NUGGET**

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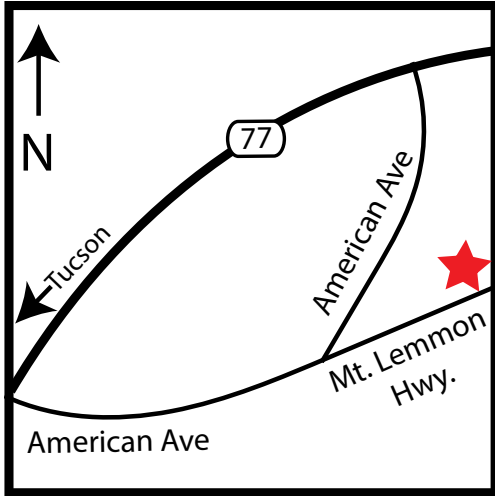
FREE

**BIG
HORN
SHEEP**
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Photo by John Byerly

High Desert
Adventures,
pages 6-9

A community publication of Copperarea.com



New Manager at the Oracle State Park

John Hernandez
Pinal Nugget

Vince Micallef has been named the new manager of Oracle State Park. Vince has over 30 years experience in the field of parks and recreation.

Vince grew up in Lakeport, Michigan. He attended Central Michigan University earning a Master's Degree in Parks & Recreation. He went

to work for the Department of National Resources for state parks in Michigan and later worked for Walt Disney

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NUGGET

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NEW MANAGER

Vince Micallef has been named the manager at the Oracle State Park.



WELCOME

Sign at the entrance to Oracle State Park. Photo by John Byerly

Manager

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World in Florida.

Vince has been in Arizona for 20 years. He has worked as the Parks & Recreation Director for the City of Avondale, Outreach Manager and West Valley Regional Coordinator for Maricopa County, Community Services/Recreation Director and Interim Town Manager for the city of Youngtown, and the Library Director in Sun City West. He is an advocate for Arizona Parks & Recreation and a member of the National Recreation and Park Association.

Oracle State Park has 4,000 acres which Vince will be managing. Vince has a real interest in trails, conservation and wildlife which attracted him to Oracle State Park. "I like what's going on with state parks. I am excited about what they are trying to do to become self-sustaining," he said. A big part of that plan will be finding revenue sources.

Vince believes that Oracle State Park has a "very strong foundation" to build on. He cited the Environmental Education Program, Dark Skies and the Arizona Trail as important parts of the foundation.

"Oracle State Park is the only state park that the Arizona Trail runs through," he said. "All our hiking trails link up with the Arizona Trail."

He would like to see more events such as the "Oracle Rumble" race which was

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Manager

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successful, bringing hundreds of people to the park. By partnering with the Arizona Trail Association, he hopes to bring more events to the park and more hikers, equestrians and cyclists.

Oracle State Park was the first state park to establish Dark Skies and at one time was one of only 20 Dark Skies parks in the world. Vince will be working with them to increase the number of Dark Skies programs and events. Opening up primitive camping areas in the park will allow astronomers and guests to stay overnight to observe the skies.

Camping sites will be open to the public and there is the possibility of renovating some of the old cottages in the park for rentals. Vince

would like to open the park for more events such as family reunions and special occasions. The park and the Kannally ranch area are already open for weddings. They are great venues for club and group meetings.

Vince would like to see more areas in the park provide more resources to wildlife. He talked about some waterholes being added using existing windmills to pump well water and creating a butterfly garden. The park will need some renovations and upgrades to see all of this happen. It will take funding and volunteers to make it a success.

“We are very fortunate to have the Friends of Oracle State Park and other volunteer groups working

with us,” Vince said. “It takes every group that we have to make it work.”

He added, “We have some great volunteers that work on projects such as maintenance, installing donated park benches and gardeners and landscapers that create areas that attract birds and insects.”

Oracle State Park is looking into the possibility of networking with other agencies and businesses to be an anchor for attracting tourism to the Oracle area.

“The park is trying to be the best neighbor they can be,”

said Vince. The park invites feedback from the community and public and any ideas they may have on how the park can be improved. “I hope with my being here to be able to take on the challenge and expand all the positive things that have happened here to make the park self-sustaining for future generations,” he added.

The park is open daily from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information about Oracle State Park or becoming a volunteer visit azstateparks.com/oracle. Like them on Facebook.



HIKE

A sign at the Oracle State Park announces the start of the Nature Trail Loop. Photo by Sirena Dufault.



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June events at the Oracle State Park



⬆ STARGAZING

Volunteers set up telescopes for night sky viewing at Star Parties at the Oracle State Park. Photo by Michael Weasner.

Weekends: Touring the Kannally Ranch House

Self-guided tours of the historic Kannally Ranch House: Visit the newly revamped and expanded park office/gift-shop and take a self-guided tour through the multi-level Kannally family home. The Mediterranean-Revival Style ranch house built 1929-1933, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Guided Tour of the historic Kannally Ranch House begins at 11 a.m. every Saturday and Sunday for the drop-in public. 45-minute duration. Alternate times and days may be added by reservation.

Wednesday, June 21, 6 a.m.: Morning Bird and Nature Walk

Celebrate the summer solstice with an early morning ranger-led walk from 6-8 a.m., to identify birds, plants in bloom and fruiting, and other signs of wildlife. Bring binoculars if you have them! Please call for a reservation; free with park admission. Park gates will open early to meet at the Kannally Ranch House at 6 a.m. 520-896-2425

Saturday, June 24, 6-10 p.m.: Live Music and Star Party

Bring your own picnic and enjoy cooler Oracle temps and scenic sunset views from the patio of the historic Kannally Ranch House. Local country music icon, Hadj Banjovi, will perform an Americana mix of tunes from 6-8 p.m. on the upper patio of the Kannally Ranch House. Stick around after dark for a star party with telescopes, until 10 p.m. No reservation needed; free with park admission.

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Finding an adventure in Oracle, AZ

Finding your next great outdoor adventure is as simple as driving to the high desert of Oracle, AZ. The area offers everything from hiking, biking and camping to exploring a cave. Oracle is located northeast of Tucson off Hwy. 77 and is an easy daytrip from Phoenix or Globe.



GREEN CAVERN LAKE →

Peppersauce Cave was made known to the public in 1948 and has been featured in several publications, including National Geographic in 1951. It is a wet cave and has water pretty much all year round. These lakes connect to an underground aquifer and the water can sometimes rise to partially flood the cave.

← CAVE LADDER

Peppersauce is visited by over 23,000 people every year. To gain access to the main lake you have to climb down this ladder, one of the more exciting spots in the cave. For those who hunger for a little more excitement, near the "big room" the cave continues down much farther but you have to go through what is called the "rabbit hole", a narrow slit in the rock which you have to go through head first, and get partially submerged in water.



PEPPERSAUCE CAMPGROUND

Up Mt. Lemmon Hwy. from Oracle and just before you reach Peppersauce Cave is the Peppersauce campground. It is a nice, relaxing, green campground to get away for a few days.

Photos by John Byerly



ROAD SIGN

Heading north out of Oracle is Mt. Lemmon Rd. This road leads to Oracle State Park, the Triangle Y Ranch, the Arizona Zipline Adventure, Peppersauce Camp and Caves, and to Mt. Lemmon itself. It is a great road to take a 4x4 or offroading vehicle to Mt. Lemmon or ride some of the back roads.

Finding an adventure in Oracle, AZ



⬆️ LUMINOUS FLOWER

A Desert Marigold catches some of the days last rays of light from the setting sun.

⬅️ BIKING

In addition to hiking and equestrian use, the Oracle State Park features some great mountain biking trails. Zachary Macdonald, who also works for the Arizona Trail Association, spends many hours cruising these trails on his mountain bike. In addition to enjoying the ride, he can also cover much more ground to scout which areas and trails could use a little T.L.C.



⬆️ WELCOME SIGN

Oracle State Park is a 4,000 acre nature preserve which boasts over 15 miles of trails for hiker, mountain biker and equestrian use. It is also distinguished as an International Dark Sky Park, meaning it is an exceptional location for viewing the night sky. It is open 7 days a week from 9 a.m.- 5 p.m.

WINDMILL ➡️

An historic windmill sits as one of the main landmarks of the Oracle State Park. It's a 4-mile round trip hike to this feature.





TRAIL MARKER (↑)

A section of the National Scenic Arizona Trail, at 800 miles traverses the entire state, crosses through Oracle State Park.



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As long as I am out exploring Arizona and seeing bighorn sheep - life is good.

Bighorn Sheep in Arizona

Jerry and I roll our four wheel drive vehicles across the rough and rocky road known as Telegraph Pass in the Picket Post Mountains when suddenly a bighorn ram crosses the road. He is a magnificent beast, a thick muscular body with a large pair of horns which curve all the way around his head and past his ears.

**Gary Every
Pinal Nugget**

The ram is far too quick for me to take a photograph and disappears in the desert scrub. Moments later the ram reappears atop a hill and stares at our vehicles as we roll slowly past. This time I get my photograph.

Jerry says, "I think that is the biggest bighorn sheep I have ever seen – even bigger than the one we saw at Canyon Lake."

I have been fortunate to see bighorn

sheep many places, many different times but the one place I have never seen bighorn is in the Santa Catalina Mountains. They lived in the Pusch Ridge area when I was a growing boy and as a young man I spent many afternoons getting torn up by acacia bushes searching for the elusive beasts. The sightings of bighorn in the Catalinas became rarer until they were determined to have

disappeared entirely from the region by the 1990s. In recent years, there have been extensive and expensive sheep reintroduction efforts in these mountains. The problem is this part of the mountain has not seen a large wildfire in many years and the thick underbrush makes the bighorn easy prey for ambush. Every time they release new bighorn onto Pusch Ridge they quickly succumb to predators.

Personally, I am okay with feeding the mountain lions but the sheep will not survive until they burn off the underbrush.

My first encounter with a bighorn was while hiking up the Bright Angel Trail of the Grand Canyon. It was a pair of female ewes, (probably mother and daughter) who hopped along the trail, waiting nervously to see if I would follow. I had no choice – they were on the trail. When they got bored of me they scampered off a cliff where I never could have followed. Every time I have backpacked Aravaipa Canyon I have seen bighorn scampering atop the canyon walls. Sometimes you do not have to wander deep into the wilderness to discover bighorn sheep. I have seen bighorn sheep while driving the highway from Kingman to Hoover Dam when spotting a small herd of bighorn just off the side of the highway. Jerry pulled into the Morenci library parking lot one day and was greeted by a herd of six bighorn sheep.

One place where I used to regularly see bighorn was the Silverbell Mine in the Silverbell Mountains. Water would puddle on the flat terraces of the open pit mine and the sheep often paused there to drink. Just after the creation of the Ironwood Tree National Monument, which includes the Silverbell Mountains on the northern perimeter a goat herder brought in a herd of goats which were infected with a contagious eye disease. Three years ago, Jerry and I went hiking in the Silverbell range and near the top of a rocky crag, in a place where animals were bedding there was the unmistakable smell of sheep urine. At least the smell was unmistakable if you have ever spent time in the 4-H section of a county fair.

I had the privilege of participating in Cabeza Prieta bighorn sheep surveys for two years in a row. Located on the Arizona Mexico border, the Cabeza Prieta Wildlife Refuge and Bombing Range is one of the largest wildlife

refuges in the country and it is also one of the hottest, driest deserts in the world. The bighorn sheep surveys used to take place in the middle of July, during the hottest part of the summer. The Cabeza Prieta is roughly the size of Connecticut and yet there are only seven watering holes in the entire place. Bighorn sheep are well adapted to the desert and do not have to drink often. It was reasoned that when the temperature was well into the hundred and teens the sheep will have to drink more often. Each of the watering holes has a blind where observers are supposed to wait and count the sheep or anything else which comes to drink. Mostly observers sit and wait, marveling at how incredibly hot it is. I do remember the thrill, when after four brutally hot days, a mother and her young son, worked their way down the rocky crag to drink, so wary and cautious, so athletic. The young ram turned his head and for

Continued on page 12



FAMILY

A herd of bighorn sheep on Picket Post Mountain near Superior.



MAGNIFICENT

Author Gary Every encountered this beautiful bighorn sheep on Picket Post Mountain near Superior.



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Bighorn Sheep

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just a moment his head and curving horns cast a perfect silhouette shadow upon the granite boulder. It was a breathtaking moment which I will never forget.

While researching the traditions of bighorn sheep in the region I stumbled upon some amazing histories. When Spanish conquistador Juan Bautiste de Anza was roaming through the Estrella Mountains outside Phoenix in the 1770's he came upon Pima villages that forsook the growing of corn and based their economy upon hunting sheep. Every village placed stacks of bighorn sheep skulls at the four corners to protect the village from storms, wind, rain and lightning. It was said that a good shaman could bring a rainstorm armed only with a bighorn sheep skull and some saguaro fruit wine.

The last shaman said to have this power was an O'odham sorcerer named Jose Juan who was interviewed by the Norwegian anthropologist Lumholz in 1908. Jose Juan was reported have been well over one hundred years old at the time. This did not stop Jose Juan from being interviewed by the geographer Ives in 1939. Julian Hayden interviewed the son, Jose Juan, during a bighorn hunting expedition. Jose Juan ritually burned the bones in the fire. The O'odham are the only tribe in North America that ritually burns the bones of game animals. This is a practice that goes back to the mammoth hunters. It has always amazed me that here in Arizona, in one of the

driest deserts in the world, people are keeping alive a tradition which goes back to the Ice Age.

My favorite way to see bighorn sheep is while kayaking Canyon Lake. The normally shy sheep do not seem very intimidated by the kayaks. The best time to kayak Canyon Lake is during December and January when motorboat traffic (and their accompanying rough waves) are at their lightest. One time when Jerry and I were kayaking Canyon Lake we had three bighorn sightings in one day. The first was a small herd of sixteen. The second sighting was a pair of sharp silhouettes high atop the canyon walls. The third time we floated upon a huge ram. He was big stout, and muscular. The ram was not intimidated by us at all. As we slowly floated towards him, taking photographs the whole time, instead of running away, he snorted and stamped his feet. There is no doubt in my mind, that had we been on land he would have charged us. I even wondered what I would do if he charged us, leapt into the water and began swimming towards us. He snorted and stomped with no intention of leaving. It was obvious he expected us to leave. He was one macho hombre.

When I get back home from the Picket Post Mountains, I compare my photos of the Telegraph Pass Bighorn with the one from Canyon Lake and in the end it does not matter which ram is bigger. As long as I am out exploring Arizona and seeing bighorn sheep – life is good.



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