

Fortynine Palms Oasis~Joshua Tree National Park

Destination	Distance	Time (as if it really mattered)
Fortynine Palms Oasis	3 miles round-trip	2 hours
This is moderately strenuous hike with a total elevation gain of 480 ft		
Access: Turn left (south) on Canyon Road off 29 Palms Hwy., 4 miles west of 29 Palms		
Best time: October through April; in summer start early, at dawn, or late, after 5 p.m.		

Text and Photos by Pat Flanagan

Fortynine Palms Oasis is a quiet moment in a rugged canyon that is the main drainage for the steep mountains behind the town of Twentynine Palms. During the summer monsoons, flood waters, with no place to go but down, scour the canyon. Prior to the construction of the flood control channel in 1969, the town was also scrubbed clean as the waters continued to their final resting place in a playa to the east. Mural #13 Flash Flood portrays the famous floods of the 1940s.



The trail begins from Pioneer Canyon to the west of 49 Palms Canyon. The old Indian trail over the hump provides a more gentle access and is not apt to be washed out during the rainy season.

The Indians used the Oasis for the reasons you do today—it is cool, green, and beautiful. They also harvested the dates (one of the few dependable sources of sugar available to them) and the pinyon nuts at slightly higher elevations. Today, as then, bighorn sheep clamber over the rocks, white-throated swifts ride the air currents, and all manner of reptiles hide in the rocky crevices. The Indians appreciated the canyon for the abundance of seasonal food it afforded them. Springs also have important spiritual significance as bridges between the upper and lower world.



According to an article in Desert Magazine (Dec. 1940) by Randall Henderson, the Oasis was also a favorite of Mrs. Bernice Tucker, a resident of Twentynine Palms, and her three children. This story begins in 1922 when Bernice, while resting in the cool of the palms, built a dream that included a small rock cottage by the spring for her and the children. She even thought of a dam to provide water to miners. The kids loved the place and agreed.

Bernice acquired the water rights to the Oasis and for the next 10 years she and her children, with the help of mules, brought in the cement and arranged the rocks to build the dam. They never built the house (she built three others on the land she was homesteading near the current Marine Base) nor did she open a bottling plant, although her sturdy dam has withstood the floods of time. She maintained the water rights to protect the canyon and only relinquished them when the area became part of Joshua Tree National Monument.



When you walk the trail think of the hundreds of times Bernice and the children, for the sheer love of the land and the experience, made the same trip.