

## Mitchell Caverns Open Again - President Message November 2017

On October 24, 2017, PRMDIA had the privilege of attending the reopening ceremony for the only state park that was closed following the crisis of 2012, Providence Mountains State Recreation Area, home of Mitchell Caverns. Many factors led to the closure. The most pressing challenges were multiple infrastructure issues at the aging park, first opened in 1934 as a private resort under the visionary guidance of Ida and Jack Mitchell. Their resort was purchased by the State of California and opened as a state park in 1972. Thanks to the dogged determination of the Tehachapi District of California State Parks, led by Superintendent Russ Dingman, as of Nov 3, this special place is now open once again. PRMDIA Board Member, John Marnell and his wife Barbara Marnell, have long led the charge to support the park when it was open and persevered as supporters during the time it was closed, insuring that the closure was not permanent.

Thank you to John Marnell for writing the following report about the reopening ceremony:

### **EAST MOJAVE TREASURE RETURNED TO THE PEOPLE**

**JOHN MARNELL - NOV. 4, 2017**

PRMDIA was in attendance during a special celebration on October 24<sup>th</sup> when Providence Mountains State Recreation Area, and Mitchell Caverns were reopened after being closed almost seven years. It was a nice opportunity for our members to meet and talk with guests and the historic East Mojave Mitchell family.

Nearly one-million dollars was spent to bring this jewel of a state park back to the people who love the desert and appreciate the uniqueness it has to offer. Infrastructure issues and deferred maintenance problems were frequently encountered, and resolved piece by piece. PRMDIA's role was significant in that we provided budgetary support for visitor related materials and educational items through the Committee to Reopen Mitchell Caverns. Additional funding by PRMDIA supported the ceremonial blessing detailed below, as well as for food provided for the one hundred in attendance. A number of PRMDIA members and others supported this effort by spending two additional days on-site in preparation and purchase of food and supplies. Among those to be recognized, especially was Margaret Rhyne for her countless hours of dedicated service to this effort. Committee to Reopen Mitchell Caverns members who also worked tirelessly to facilitate this event include John Marnell, Janet Winters, Gretchen Winfrey, Kate Allen and Lynn DuPratt. Barbara Marnell, Phil Rhyne, Ray Winters and Nathan Krumm were also instrumental in the success of PRMDIA's efforts at the Reopening.

The celebration began with an invitation for all to be a part of sharing the respect for this place held sacred by the Chemehuevi. The blessing was given by Sr. Cultural Director Matthew Leivas, assisted by Hope Hinman, Chemehuevi tribe. The caverns had been a seasonal home for these Native Americans for years and was also a place of solitude for the Shaman.

State Parks Director Lisa Mangat then proudly detailed the hard work and tireless effort put forth by so many people in the rebuilding effort. PRMDIA was also recognized in comments during the Introduction.

All five living grandchildren of Jack and Ida Mitchell were in attendance along with many other Mitchell family descendants on a perfect day in the desert. The Mitchell grandchildren then approached the podium, hand in hand - the beginning of a moving tribute showing the love the family has for this

magical corner of the desert where Jack and Ida Mitchell settled in 1934. The celebration then moved to the start of the trail to the caverns, where Lisa Mangat and the Mitchell family together cut a sparkling blue ribbon opening the pathway to the “Eyes of the Mountain.”

Each of the Mitchell family as well as the other dignitaries received a complimentary copy of the 2003 publication *Keepers of the Caves* – (a reprint of the original *Jack Mitchell Caveman*) courtesy of the Mojave Desert Heritage & Cultural Association.