

Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park Newsletter

Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park • PMB 288, 8711 E. Pinnacle Peak Road • Scottsdale AZ 85255 • www.pinnaclepeakpark.com

TARANTULAS

By Challie Facemire

It's your worst nightmare come to life, the stuff horror movies are made of: you round a bend in the trail and right in the middle of the path is a huge hairy spider. Well, maybe not that huge, but it still looks threatening, right? The truth is, despite the bad rap they get in movies, tarantulas are incredibly docile and you can do a lot more harm to them than they can do to you.

In Arizona there are many different types of tarantulas, but the most common one is the Arizona Blond Tarantula. These spiders can grow up to three inches in body length and have four inch long legs. They are invertebrates, so they rely on their exoskeleton for muscular support. They shed this exoskeleton at least yearly; the young can shed it several times a year, and adults may shed it more than once a year if they have lost legs or any of their hair (actually called urticating hairs).

The urticating hairs serve as a tarantula's main defense. These are not truly hair but fine bristles with a barb that makes them difficult to remove.

When a spider stands on its hind legs and waves its front legs at you it's not just trying to be big and scary, it is actually flicking these hairs as a defense. These hairs are irritating but they are only really dangerous if they are deeply inhaled.

There is a common misconception that a tarantula will bite a human at the slightest provocation. This is untrue; the previously mentioned urticating hairs are its main defense. It takes extreme provocation for them to bite a person or anything it doesn't plan on eating. Even if one does bite, it hurts less than a bee sting and will not cause harm unless the bite becomes infected or if you are allergic.

A tarantula's venom, while not harmful to humans, does serious damage to its prey. Tarantulas cannot eat their food, so their

venom is designed to liquefy prey, which they then drink. Tarantulas generally hunt insects and sometimes small lizards. They also eat scorpions (which can and do hurt people at the slightest provocation), so they are actually beneficial creatures to have around.

Tarantulas have many predators. They are eaten by coyotes, foxes, hawks, and other birds. They are also eaten by the larvae of the tarantula hawk, a type of parasitic wasp. This was paralyzes tarantulas and injects them with its eggs. When the larvae hatch, they consume the still-living tarantula. People are also a threat to tarantulas, but not for the same reason. These creatures are incredibly fragile. Their exoskeleton is not armor and it cannot resist impact if they are stepped on or dropped. If it is severely damaged or cracked, the tarantula will die.



Photos by Ben Greene



This year's Friends of Pinnacle Peak Calendar is now Available!
Please go to www.pinnaclepeakpark.com to order your copy today!



MATT LUCKY

By Yvonne Massman , Photo by Laura Lucky



Photo by Laura Lucky

You may have noticed a different look to this issue of the newsletter . . . and observant you are! Matt Lucky, who has been the editor since the first issue in 2006, has retired from his VOLUNTEER editor position (which meant no income whatsoever for all of his hours and hours of dedication). For the last seven years these gorgeous newsletters have been his creation.

Matt began as one of our first volunteers to the park shortly after the park opened; he has been involved with the bi-yearly Adopt-a-Road clean up, served on the board of the Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park, provided community outreach promoting the park, and produced the amazing YouTube video fly-over that highlighted the park and surrounding areas. Guests at the Four Seasons never lose their way on the 7/8 of a mile trail leading from the resort to the park because Matt keeps the resort in full supply of laminated maps, free for the taking!

While we have been “Lucky” to have him campaigning for us for all of these years, his thriving real estate career has won out and he is retiring from his post at the park!

You will be missed, Matt! Thank you!

Pencil-Joint Cholla Or The Christmas Cactus

Text and Photos By Yvonne Massman

The *Opuntia leptocaulis* is appropriately named the “Christmas Cholla” as it is a brilliant green plant with bright red fruit. The fruit ripens in late fall through early winter, and stays on the plant until almost summer. Then the fruit dries and loses its brilliant and showy red color. This plant flowers from May until June, and the flowers have a tendency to open up late in the day. You have to look hard to catch a bloom because the small pale yellow to pale green blossoms can very easily be overlooked.

A few of the plant’s unique characteristics consist of stems that are approximately 1/8 of an inch thick and a two inch spines extending out from each joint on these branches. Make sure you watch out while hiking: another characteristic of this plant is that it loves to hide out amongst other native plants and shrubs. One such plant is the Triangle-Leaf Bursage (*Ambrosia deltoidea*) also known as the Triangle Leaf. The Bursage vegetation can provide nice cover for that two inch spine, which might be discovered a little too late.

The main perk of this plant is that the fruit is edible! The fruit has a mild flavor. One chef described it as similar to the taste of strawberries, and another said it was watermelon-flavored. Be aware that preparing the fruit for consumption could take some time. It is recommended that they are plucked off (a little twist helps to release the fruit) of the branches with either hemostats or tongs, and then each piece of fruit should be quickly run over the top of a flame to burn off the cinnamon colored glochids (fine spines). Please remember though, there is no fruit or plant harvesting allowed within the park or the preserve boundaries.

The Christmas Cholla has a variety of other common names; including Darning Needle Cactus, Holycross Cholla, Tesajo, Rat-Tail Cactus, Slender-Stem Cactus, and Pencil-Joint Cholla. It is commonly mistaken for the Pencil Cactus, *Opuntia arbuscula*. The similar looking *Opuntia* is somewhat rare around the state. Its fruit is a more subdued greenish-red and is far less juicy than its family member, the Christmas Cholla. Arizona is a host to 28 different species of *Opuntia*.

To see this beauty, you don’t have to hike too far up the trail at Pinnacle Peak. The prolific bright red fruit that speckles the thin branches will definitely make this identification an easy one!



Rock climbing has been a tradition on Pinnacle Peak. The Kachinas, the first organized rock climbing club in Arizona who accomplished such climbs as all four peaks in one day and pioneering most of the basic routes on the Head of Camelback, planned for the first ascent of Pinnacle Peak to take place on December 14, 1947. After this meeting two of the climbers decided to pull a fast one on their cohorts and beat them to the punch.

On the morning of December 13, Ed George and Bill McMorris drove up to the South side of Pinnacle Peak. The route they took became the classic climb "South Crack 5.3" (to see the climb, see page 120 and 121 in Weekend Rock Arizona). Bill's account of the climb is as follows:

"Pinnacle Peak was the first climb I had ever led, and I was so nervous Ed had to give me a boost to get me started up the left hand crack. I then climbed about 15 feet and wedged myself happily into the safety of the chimney where I made feeble efforts to get around the chockstone. To dislodge me from the safety of the chimney, Ed came up and gave me a shoulder to step on so I could reach over the chockstone and pull myself up. Neither of us was belayed during this operation. We were foolish and lucky.

From a safe stance above the chockstone, I belayed Ed and watched, somewhat gratified, when he didn't find it entirely easy to get over the chockstone. He then belayed me as I led up a wide, gently sloping chimney for about 50 ft. and then a steeper section that ended under a second much larger chockstone.

I got in a piton near the chockstone for protection, rested a bit and got past the chockstone without much trouble. Ed followed easily and belayed me while I scrambled up a short face climb to the summit.

For about two minutes I felt quite elated at having made my first lead on what appeared to be a first ascent, but then I realized the summit was split by a chasm about 5 or 6 feet wide that looked to be 100 feet deep. The summit across the gap was much smaller in area, but clearly a couple of feet higher than the one we had reached. I belayed Ed while he jumped across the gap. He landed on a substantial foothold in the opposite face, lunged forward, grabbed the top of the narrow summit and clambered up." (Taken from a report written by Bob Owens, 2004)

Bill didn't make the same jump, a decision that ate at him for years until he later did finish it. The two left a cairn and a note from a "second grade girl" along with a picture for the other climbers to find the next day.

On Sunday, December 14, the Kachinas arrived at the base of the climb. Bill and Ed were with them, and staying quiet about the shenanigans they had pulled the day before. When they came to the summit the leader found the cairn and note. The boys still kept quiet about what they had done, and looked down with the rest of the group. Later on, the truth came out since they had been seen jumping the chasm without ropes by a

friend of their father.

Today there are around 75 climbs on and around Pinnacle Peak. There are climbers up there nearly every day of the week. People travel from all over to climb South Crack as it has become a classic climb in Arizona. If you keep an eye out you can generally catch site of them all over the mountain.

A NOTE TO CLIMBERS AND INTERESTED PARTIES:

If you are a climber please keep in mind that the climbing areas close when the park closes. So please remember to be on the main trail headed out before the staff does their final sweep. They can't leave until you leave, and they would really hate to see you receive a citation.

If you don't have climbing gear you are not allowed in the climbing areas. This is a dangerous sport that requires technical gear and training.



Photo by James Kieffner, Climber Sal Fritz

First Ascent: A Brief History of Climbing At Pinnacle Peak

By Challie Facemire

Scheduled Activities at the Park from January 25 - March 22

- Jan. 25th – Liberty Wildlife from 9am to noon.
- Jan. 25th – Solar Viewing and educational program 8am to 10am.
- Jan. 31st - Astronomy Talk, 6:30pm, registration required starting 7 days prior to event. All participants must be 8 years or older. Sign up at the trail head or call [480-312-0990](tel:480-312-0990).
- Feb. 8th - Solar Viewing and educational program 8am to 10am.
- Feb. 8th – Southwest Wildlife from 10am to noon.
- Feb. 14th – Full Moon hike, 6:30pm, registration required starting 7 days prior to event. Sign up at the trail head or call [480-312-0990](tel:480-312-0990).
- Feb. 21st - Astronomy Talk, 6:45pm, registration required starting 7 days prior to event. All participants must be 8 years or older. Sign up at the trail head or call [480-312-0990](tel:480-312-0990).
- Feb. 22nd - Liberty Wildlife from 9am to noon.
- Mar. 8th - Solar Viewing and educational program 8am to 10am.
- Mar. 8th - Southwest Wildlife from 10am to noon.
- Mar. 16th - Full Moon hike, 6:45pm, registration required starting 7 days prior to event. Sign up at the trail head or call [480-312-0990](tel:480-312-0990).
- Mar. 22nd - Solar Viewing and educational program 8am to 10am.
- Mar. 22nd - Astronomy Talk, 7:15pm, registration required starting 7 days prior to event. All participants must be 8 years or older. Sign up at the trail head or call [480-312-0990](tel:480-312-0990).

**Coming in early April:
The Second Annual Pancake Breakfast!**

Great Western Cookout 3/1/2014 4PM-8PM

Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park will be supporting our volunteer program at the Great Western Cookout at MacDonald's Ranch on March 1, 2014. We will be there in our booth, along with a dozen other organizations, talking about our commitment to supporting the local environment and its denizens.

There will be train rides, a petting zoo, panning for gold, games, music, and plenty of other entertainment, which will be followed by a delicious cookout dinner. The Cowboy Buffet includes a 6 oz mouth-watering sirloin steak grilled over mesquite charcoal, tender chicken, and all the fixings.

At sunset the bonfires will be lit, and live country music will fill the desert air. S'mores will be available for kids to roast while a silent auction and raffle are being conducted.

Advanced reservations and ticket prices: Adult \$50, Child \$42 (children from 3 to 12 years old, children under 3 are free). Stage-coach rides: Adult \$10, Child \$8. Adult beverages (Beer and wine): \$5.

For tickets and information contact www.gppaaz.org, www.scenicdrive.org, (480)361-6498.

MacDonald's Ranch is located at 26540 N Scottsdale Road, in North Scottsdale.

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Send feedback and input to:
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