



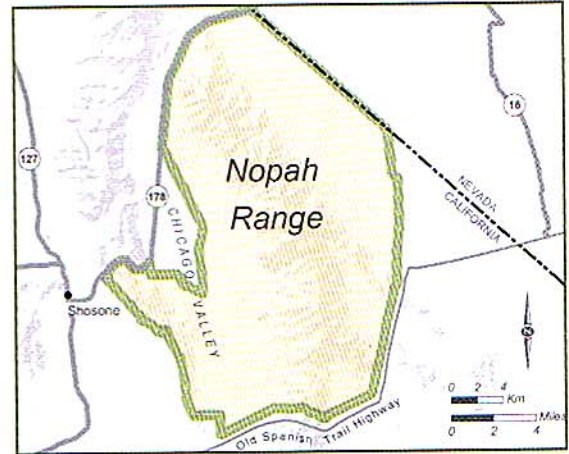
Nopah Range: Up Close and Personal

To CYNTHIA KIENITZ, the Nopah Range Wilderness is the dividing line between the life she lives and the life she left. Six years ago, she found herself driving west from Las Vegas where she was entrenched in the rat race. Turning off Highway 160 onto Old Spanish Trail Highway she soon found herself on the narrow road that courses through Immigrant Pass. On a hairpin turn just before the crest, a new world opened up before her, one so compelling that she could appreciate it, even if just through her windshield.

'You could see layer upon layer of mountain ranges. You've just been in the hippest town in the world, the entertainment capital of the world, and at that very point you leave it all behind for another world. What a relief. I'm home.'

Soon, she opened the Ranch House Inn at the China Ranch Date Farm near Tecopa, 'so I could be here.'

Here is the Mojave Desert, and to Cynthia Kienitz the Nopahs are the essence of this compelling desert environment. 'There's a sound unique to the Nopahs and the Mojave Desert,' she believes. It has something to do with the lack of vegetation and the unfettered breezes. 'A certain feel on your skin. So arid. So quiet. Just pristine, clear air.'



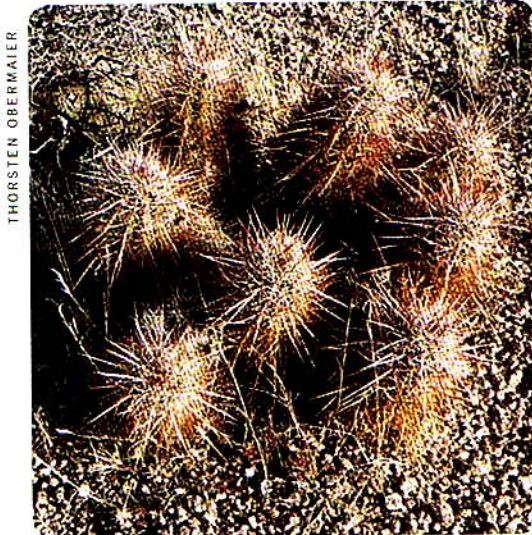
But the desert nights here are the 'most profound and most beautiful I have ever experienced.' The complete absence of light, noise and air pollution make the stars crisp and absurdly abundant. If she's driving, often she just has to stop the car, get out and feel 'it', that 'ancient feeling of timelessness.'

Time is etched on the surface of the Nopahs. Through these mountains a segment of the Old Spanish Trail can still be found in the wagon tracks of frontier traders and Mormon settlers. 'Nothing has changed in that area in 150 years, so you can still walk in their steps and see what it was like for them,' she says. Soon, as part of the Old Spanish Trail Association, she plans to learn more about the Native Americans who used their thousands of years of experience in the desert to teach early American settlers where to find the springs and passes.

Kienitz is fascinated by the stark and absorbing geology of the Nopahs, but she admits that like most people she tends not to think of them as a place to hike in. But she's going to change that. The desert has made her hungry to know it better, to seek out its 'secret places, the springs and little wonders that always surprise you.'

The Nopah Range Wilderness is emblematic of what encounters with wildness can do to change and enrich a life. 'That's where I composed my life. That's where I saw a desert tortoise struggle for life and I learned how to live mine,' she recalls. 'I'm one of those people who live on the edge of wilderness. I wake up to it in the morning. I go to bed to it at night. It's been essential to my life. I can't live anywhere else. I can't go back.'

To contact Cynthia, or for more information about the Ranch House Inn, visit www.ranchhouseinn.com or call (760)852-4360.



THORSTEN OBERMAIER

Hedgehog Cactus