

GUIDE TO THE
ANTELOPE VALLEY CALIFORNIA POPPY RESERVE STATE NATURAL RESERVE
PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

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Park History

Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve State Natural Reserve contains roughly 1,781 acres of natural resources. Located in northwestern Los Angeles County, the park lies along the western edge of the Mojave Desert in Antelope Valley between the Tehachapi Mountains to the north and Liebre Mountain to the south; it is roughly 15 miles west of the city of Lancaster. The park is accessible by car via Lancaster Road.

The area containing the present-day park was occupied by the Kitanemuk tribe, a Shoshone band, for 2,000 to 3,000 years before Europeans arrived. The Kitanemuk people formed small settlements and used the area for hunting antelope, as a work site, and as a travel route. The Spanish first encountered and traveled through the area in the late eighteenth century. Under Mexican rule, the valley was used for seasonal sheep grazing and as an antelope hunting preserve. With the completion of the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1876, American farmers and developers began entering—and altering—the desert region. Antelope Valley farmers thrived for a period, growing wheat and grazing cattle before a 10-year drought and economic depression plagued the area in 1895. Although many farmers lost their properties and left the valley, those that stayed were soon rewarded. In 1906, Elias and Eric Munz established Munz Ranch in the current park's location just in time for the construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power used Munz Ranch as its headquarters. Aqueduct construction, crop diversification, the introduction of electricity, and the construction of a paved state freeway after the turn of the twentieth century all helped Antelope Valley's economic recovery.

In 1970, the Lancaster Women's Club formed the Wildflower Preservation Committee and sought to establish a natural preserve for California poppies. The California State Parks Foundation received its first donated parcel in 1974. California State Parks—having purchased acreage from Munz Ranch in addition to the granted land—acquired and dedicated the property two years later. Classified a “state reserve” in 1976, the park was reclassified a “state natural reserve” in 2004 via legislation.

California State Parks, coordinating with the Poppy Reserve Mojave Desert Interpretive Association, maintain a vast expanse of annual and perennial wildflowers at Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve State Natural Reserve. Between March and May, visitors are treated to vivid blooms painting the hilly landscape (**Figure 1**). Open to the public during wildflower season, the Jane S. Pinheiro Interpretive Center offers informative videos and displays. The park also offers eight miles of trails and guided tours during bloom season. Camping is prohibited as the park is day-use only.



Figure 1. California poppies in bloom, ca. 1985. Catalog # 090-S20819.

Scope and Content

The Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve State Natural Reserve Photographic Collection spans the years 1960-2015 with the bulk of the collection covering the years 1978-1986. There is a total of 196 cataloged images, including 99 photographic prints, scans, and negatives, 92 35mm slides, and 5 born-digital images. Photographs originated primarily from California State Parks staff.

The collection mainly documents blooming wildflowers and other features of the landscape. Imagery includes several ground and landscape views of California poppy fields, the Tehachapi Mountains, grasslands, roads, a reservoir, and numerous non-poppy wildflower varieties, such as lupine, sage, prince's plume, owl's clover, coreopsis, filaree, and goldfield patches.

The collection also documents the Jane S. Pinheiro Interpretive Center. Imagery includes the building's 1981 construction, numerous landscape and aerial views of its exterior, and several shots of the interior that feature exhibit panels, paintings, plaques, and the information desk.

The Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve State Natural Reserve Photographic Collection primarily focuses on the park unit's premier resource: its wildflowers. Less known within the park and unrepresented by the collection are the cultural and historical resources contained there. The collection would definitely benefit from the inclusion of images depicting Kitanemuk archaeological evidence, like workshop sites, house rings, quarry sites, and surface artifact scatter as well as images featuring the remains of the Los Angeles Aqueduct construction project, an undertaking which left the concrete foundations of a quarry rock crusher on the property.

Related Collections

Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve State Natural Reserve Collection, California State Parks Archives.

Antelope Valley, Lancaster, Kern County Scrapbook, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County: Seaver Center for Western History Research.

Catalog Subject Search Terms

Aerial view
California Poppy/Poppies
Coreopsis
Filaree
Goldfield
Grass(land)
Jane S. Pinheiro Interpretive Center
Landscape view
Lupine
Owl's clover
Prince's plume
Rattlesnake Hill
Reservoir
Road(s)
Sage
Tehachapi Mountains
Wildflower(s)