



Trona Pinnacles: Towering Relics of the Ancient Past

By Michelle White

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I was in for a surprise when I arrived at the destination my friends had chosen for a weekend camping trip. Previous desert trips had exposed me to the playas and stark saltbrush landscapes of the Mojave, but there in the far northeastern corner of Kern County, the Trona Pinnacles were an intricate marvel to behold. Composed of more than 500 tufa (calcium carbonate) pinnacles rising from the bed of the Searles Dry Lake basin, this National Natural Landmark is a geologic wonder, unique among desert settings.



Entering the Pinnacles by car and following the dirt paths that wound around these giant rocky outcroppings, I felt for a moment as though I had been transported into a vivid new video-game background. Or as if Stonehenge had unhinged and scattered its pillars, assembling with some long lost cousins to form an expansive phenomenon in the warm California desert. Regardless of the associations it evokes, the Trona Pinnacles appear marvelously imposing in the silent desert, especially when the daylight wanes and the stars emerge. Highly visible from the desert perspective, removed as it is from the city haze, stars and a full moon are enough light for ground-dwelling objects to cast shadows. They also make for a lovely and dramatic night sky.



Unique desert flora.

Upon locating a sufficiently smooth site to pitch a tent, I noticed another unique attribute of the Pinnacles - the variety of wildlife. Many deserts are presumed to be harsh, barren landscapes, although all deserts generally contain more life than they appear to, and parts of the Mojave have remarkable biodiversity. Besides the incredible geologic formations, the Trona Pinnacles boast an array of wildflowers, caterpillars, insects, and lizards, providing for a particularly abundant desert.



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calendar

Tuesday May 20th

7:30 PM | Tartuffe: South Coast Repertory

The tufa spires, some as high as 140 feet, were formed underwater 10,000 to 100,000 years ago when Searles Lake formed a link in an interconnected chain of Pleistocene lakes stretching from Mono Lake to Death Valley. The source of the tufa deposits were ancient mineral-laden springs along a fault zone on the lake bed. The elaborate relics of the past are visually incongruous today: a long line of sharp points amidst the otherwise flat dry lake bed, surrounded by badlands and mountain ranges.



In 1968, the Pinnacles, now managed by the Bureau of Land Management, were designated by the Department of the Interior as a National Natural Landmark to protect one of the nation's best and most distinctive examples of tufa formation. Located at approximately 2,000 feet above sea level in the Western Mojave Desert, the Pinnacles are best explored in fall, winter, or spring, as summer temperatures often exceed 115°F. It is recommended to bring plenty of water, and to avoid the sand washes unless you have 4-wheel drive. Primitive camping is available.



From Los Angeles, take I-5N to CA-14N to CA-178 into the town of Ridgecrest. The trip from L.A. is just under three hours. The Trona Pinnacles are located approximately 20.0 miles east of Ridgecrest. Access to the site is from a BLM dirt road (RM143) that leaves SR 178, about 7.7 miles east of the intersection of SR 178 and the Trona-Red Mountain Road. The 5.0-mile long dirt road from SR 178 to the Pinnacles is usually accessible to 2-wheel drive vehicles; however, the road may be closed during the winter months after a heavy rain.

For more information, check out <http://www.ca.blm.gov/ridgecrest/trona.html>.

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9:00 PM | Victory Lap Variety Show !

Wednesday May 21st

12:00 PM | Free LOST Exhibit at The Paley Center for Media in Beverly Hills, For a Limited Time Only!

7:30 PM | Tartuffe: South Coast Repertory Season Finale

8:00 PM | Surely Lorraine's Anime Wong at Malo's Silver Lake Sessions

Thursday May 22nd

12:00 PM | Free LOST Exhibit at The Paley Center for Media in Beverly Hills, For a Limited Time Only!

7:30 PM | Hovorostovsky @ LA Opera

8:00 PM | Tartuffe: South Coast Repertory Season Finale


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