

Arboretum Progress

Robert T. McKittrick

Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum

Although many readers of "Desert Plants" are well acquainted with the Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum, perhaps the greater number are not. A very abbreviated history of the Arboretum was presented in the first issue. Some further insight into the Arboretum's activities and character can be gleaned from the account of special events presented in the second issue. A number of "Desert Plants" subscription applications are accompanied by requests for more detailed information on activities and services provided by the Arboretum today. These requests prompt me to devote most of this issue's contribution to an edited version of the "Information Release" that we furnish upon request.

The Arboretum is located in the Arizona Upland Division of the Sonoran Desert, 60 miles east of Phoenix, 100 miles north of Tucson and 25 miles southwest of Globe. The entrance is on U.S. Highway 60, 3 miles west of Superior and 12 miles east of Florence Junction. All highways leading to the Arboretum provide the traveler with close-up views of the unique and beautiful Sonoran desert flora as well as the beauty of the desert mountains and the associated bajadas. Take U.S. Highway 60 all the way from Phoenix or Globe. From Tucson, drive north on U.S. 80-89 (Oracle Rd. and Pinal Pioneer Parkway) to Florence Junction and east on U.S. 60. An equally attractive, alternate route from Tucson is via U.S. 80-89 to Oracle Junction, State Route 77 to Winkleman, State Route 177 to Superior, and west on U.S. 60.

About one-quarter of a mile into the botanic gardens are three parking lots, each, only a short walk away from the visitor center, rest rooms and a picnic ground provided for the comfort and enjoyment of the visitors.

The botanical gardens are the focal point of the Arboretum program and its chief attraction. They are a living museum of desert plants native to the immediate area and to the other American deserts and of plants from desert lands throughout the world. The Arboretum has an outstanding collection of cacti and the other succulents and a notable collection of eucalyptus trees.

The Gardens are viewed from a network of Arboretum trails formed by the one and one quarter mile long Main Loop Trail and its many laterals (Figure 1). In addition, the High Trail originates at the picnic grounds and joins the Main Loop Trail about one half mile up Queen Creek Canyon. The High Trail leads the visitor through some unique native stands of plants and provides fine overlooks of the gardens below. It crosses Queen Creek on

"stepping stones" which along with its narrow winding course high above the creek bed requires the hiker to be more agile than any of the other Arboretum trails.

Most visitors take self conducted tours of the Arboretum aided by one of our two guide books. One is keyed to specific numbered sites along the trail through the cactus garden from the Visitor Center to Ayer Lake (Figure 1). The other presents broader concepts related to various areas and groups of plants.

Organized groups and classes with defined interests may request special educational lectures and tours. All such services are on an *appointment only* basis and are usually booked weeks or months in advance. Appointments may be made by contacting the person below.

Dr. Carol D. Crosswhite
P.O. Box AB
Superior, Arizona 85273
Telephone: 689-2832

Organized groups and classes are asked not to come without an appointment, since the facilities (including restrooms, parking lots, trails, etc.) can accommodate only the number of groups and classes that are ordinarily scheduled. Adult supervisors and an orientation session are required of classes below college or university level.

The picnic ground is shaded by large sycamore, tamarisk and eucalyptus trees. The William T. Smith Building (main administration building) houses the Visitor Center and public restrooms. The Visitor Center features exhibits of Arboretum plant and animal life, Arizona Indian culture and the Magma Railroad (built in 1914-15 to supply the Magma Mine and Smelter and to carry the copper to market). These exhibits are mingled with books, live plants, mineral specimens and other display quality items that may be purchased by the visitor.

At present the Arboretum is closed only on the national holidays of New Year's Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. On all other days of the year the public is encouraged to visit the Arboretum at any time between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. It is anticipated that as the Arboretum becomes more fully integrated into the Arizona State Park System, these hours and holidays will change. Those changes will extend the public visiting hours.

There is an admission charge of 50¢ for each adult, with children under 17 admitted free when they are under adult supervision.

In addition to its public service efforts which do demand the great majority of staff time and operating funds, the Arboretum does maintain a scientific program. This includes both teaching and research. Special study of the plants, animals or desert environment at the Arboretum can be made through advance appointment. Scientists and college students training to become scientists are housed on the grounds in guest houses accommodating 25 persons. A laboratory with basic research equipment, glassware and supplies is available for most field-oriented studies. Scientific collections of pinned insects, fluid-preserved and stuffed animals and herbarium specimens are available for study. A library, photographic darkroom, support greenhouses and growing beds are available for a variety of research uses. A large natural area on the slope of Picket Post Mountain is reserved for scientific study. On site research by the staff or with staff members as cooperators includes a search for natural plant growth regulators inherent in desert plants; trials of desert plants as ground covers; propagation of endangered desert plant species, and the establishment of a research plant collection of desert legumes.

The Arboretum administers land totaling 1075 acres. Of this, a 725-acre tract (the north slope of Picket Post Mountain) belongs to the Federal Government. It has been used by the Arboretum as a restricted-access study area and nature preserve under a Special Use Permit from the Forest Service since it was fenced in 1929. Deeded land owned by the Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum, Inc. totals 350 acres along Queen Creek. This land includes the 35-acre tract of botanical gardens open to the public. A final tract of 20 acres south of U.S. Highway 60 and east of Picket Post House is owned by the University of Arizona.

Two references in the above information that deserve further mention are the High Trail and the William T. Smith Building.

The High Trail is a foot path that was constructed in the early history of the gardens along the south side of Queen Creek away from most of the cultivated areas. Because much of it was carved out of the steep side of the canyon wall, it was subject to severe erosion from the run off of heavy rain showers. The trail was closed several years ago when it became too hazardous from lack of maintenance. The renovation of the trail and its continued maintenance was chosen as a project for the Arizona State Park sponsored Young Adult Conservation Corps work crew. The project was completed with the in-

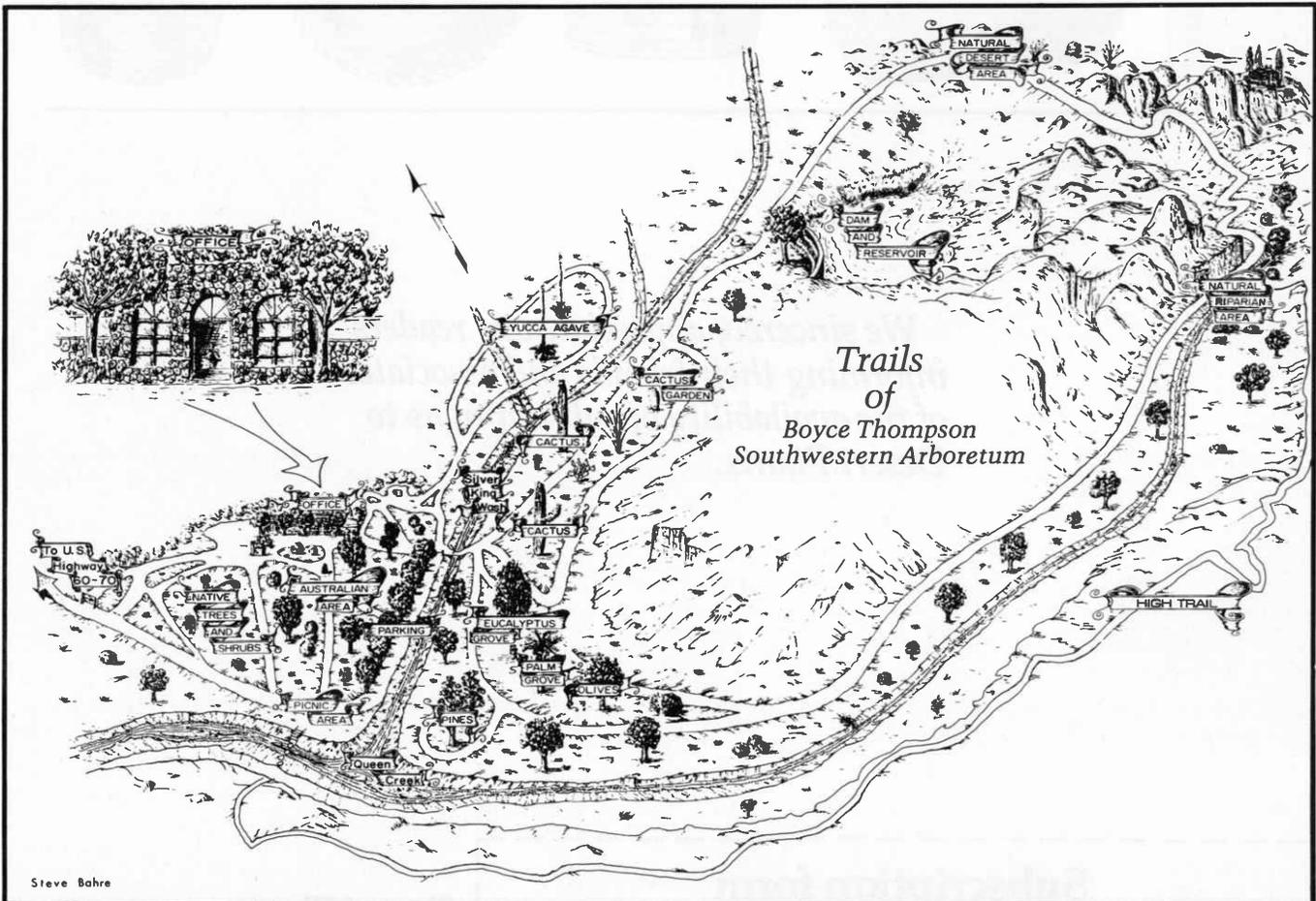


Figure 1. Map showing trails and general features of the Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum.

stallation of concrete "stepping stones" to bridge Queen Creek at both terminals. The trail was opened to the public February 1.

Mr. William T. Smith is a past treasurer of Newmont Mining Company who has also been Chairman of the Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum Board for more years than the eleven I have spent at the Arboretum. Mr. Smith is also the current Chairman of the Arboretum Advisory Committee. In recognition of his many years of service to

the Arboretum and the contributions made through his "unflagging enthusiasm" and "dogged determination" during those years, the Arboretum Board has named the main administration building the William T. Smith Building. A plaque so designating has been cast and will be hung in the main hallway of the building. You will read more about Mr. Smith in an upcoming article introducing, individually, all the members of the Arboretum Advisory Committee.