

The desert drew me in with a dreamy seductive unfolding. After hiking all day, I sat in a desert garden at twilight when tan and gray mountains turned pink, it was the night they invented Desert Rapture, and I threw a handful of precious stones into the midnight sky and watched as they turned to comets and etched fiery trails across the starry void. The millennial night was filled with blissful, revealing, panoramas, and at dawn I awoke in a snuggerly feeling a balming, opulent effect, and the wonderment of it all. The Desert.

In the daze-making air of the desert, the West is magnified and things happen that are not in the realm of ordinary reality.



Mescalito by Steve Morath <http://www.stephenmorathart.com/>

Desert Rats

This desert tour is dedicated to my father, Paul Benson Parker who was a Desert Rat in the Great Southwest. I have long thought if I hiked far enough into the un-trailed desert southwest, if I hiked deep enough, long enough, hard enough, that I would eventually find the Desert Rat spirit of my long-departed father sitting in the shade of a rock overhang waiting for me... and I did. More about that later, for now let's set the stage for this long awaited encounter by taking a closer look at Desert Rats and prospectors.

A professional prospector might have a degree in geology and work for a multi-national extraction corporation. A recreational prospector might belong to a club or an organization like the Gold Prospectors Association of America. When members go to a club-owned claim there is no prospecting involved, they are working an existing claim, gold has been found there that's why the club staked a claim on, or bought, the property. Some prospector associations are like social gatherings where members can take their grandchildren for a nice, safe, weekend outing. Most of these club members don't find enough gold to pay their yearly membership dues.

Desert Rats don't usually have degrees in geology or join clubs. Now (2014) that gold is valued at over \$1300 an ounce, and an ounce of gold will sometimes fit in a thimble, everybody and their brother are out prospecting. Today people are panning, sluicing, dry washing, metal detecting and digging for gold in Russia, India, Australia, South Africa, Canada, Mexico, Bolivia, America, and...

From the 1830's to the 1930's gold was about \$20.00 an ounce, and men of a certain character spent their lives prospecting for it. Today Desert Rats would be

out there if gold were \$5.00 an ounce. They aren't in it just for the money; they treasure everything the desert has to offer. Desert Rats are the sun-hammered iconic role models of prospecting, they're into the desert as a lifestyle because they love it. Desert Rats belong to a brotherhood of men that includes some prospectors, treasure hunters, rock hounds, explorers, relic hunters and adventure seekers. Desert Rats know where wild burros can be found, and where abandoned mines are scattered across mountainsides. They know where to find turquoise, gold and silver, Indian relics, and hidden oases. They may have an old waybill to a lost treasure and just need one more grubstake to find it. They live in Desert Time where eons, eras, and epochs can be seen and felt and walked through.

Harry Oliver was a Desert Rat.

<http://www.thecoachellavalleyartscene.com/2012/06/15/desert-rat-scrap-book/>

Desert Rats are unique individuals. Some are hermits practicing hermatude, reclusive, self-reliant, living in a world of their own design, uninterested in and unaffected by the vagaries of contemporary society. They know that forces beyond their control are corrupting society so they go their own way nurturing their inner Desert Rat, and you probably won't see them if they see you first. Others are raconteurs ready to entertain with tales of lost treasure and abandoned mines.

A prospector once told me how he would spend the daylight hours looking, actively searching, studying the ground, using his sense of vision, eyes sweeping back and forth, constantly looking for gold. One night in a dream he saw a gold nugget gleaming in a shallow stream and picked it up, then he started to wake up

so he held the nugget tight against his chest. When he was fully awake he looked down and saw that he was still holding the nugget.

In the 1800's prospectors often joined together for protection from the hostiles because Indians killed hundreds of prospectors in the American West. At times known mineral deposits were not worked for years while prospectors waited for the local Indians to be subdued. The gold and silver in the Cerbat Mountains near Kingman, Arizona is just one example. When Indians were not a problem prospectors often preferred to go it alone.

He was a prospector for gold, a hunter of solitude, a lover of the drear, rock-ribbed infinitude, because he wanted to be alone to remember.

From *Desert Gold* by Zane Grey