



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Joshua Tree National Park

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Joshua Tree National Park News Release

Park Offers Living History Tours at Keys Ranch

Visitors to Joshua Tree National Park can now step back in time when they take a tour of Keys Ranch with a costumed guide. To help bring history alive, park rangers at Joshua Tree now offer a special costumed tour of Keys Ranch on **Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays at 1 p.m.** Differing from the standard ranger-led tour, the new living history tours are presented in a first person presentation that gives tour participants a more complete picture of the life and times of the Keys Family—residents of a remote desert homestead at the end of the Great Depression.

The year was 1940. Europe and Asia were at war. Japan had invaded China. France and England fought to fend off the relentless German Blitzkrieg. A popular American President prepared to run for an unprecedented third term in office. Celebrating a perceived end to the Great Depression, New York City began hosting the two-year World's Fair in 1939. Robots, monorails and televisions introduced visitors to a seemingly bright future. How did these events affect the remote Mojave Desert? Was the Depression truly over for the family of William and Frances Keys and other desert dwellers? How did they make it through those difficult years?

For adventuresome visitors, the new interpretive tour of the Keys "Desert Queen" Ranch attempts to answer some of these questions. Using "Living History" techniques, a costumed guide engages ranch visitors with stories, historical facts, questions, and memories. A uniformed ranger introduces the tour and makes the transition to 1940 where visitors are encouraged to participate by asking questions about work, family, diet, school, medical care, and other aspects of pioneer life. Eventually, the costumed guide returns to the present so "the rest of the story" can be told. At that point, questions can be answered about post-1940 events and artifacts as well.

Reservations are suggested for all Keys Ranch tours as tours are limited to 25 people. Visitors without reservations or advance-purchase tickets are welcome if space is available. Either the living history or regular Ranger-guided tours offer participants a rare visit into the past where frontier values and rugged desert living will be explored. **Call 760-367-5555 for tour reservations**, or visit Oasis or Joshua Tree Visitor Centers to purchase tickets. Guided tours of Keys Ranch cost **\$5.00** per adult and **\$2.50** for Senior and Access Card holders as well as for children ages 6-12.

At Keys "Desert Queen" Ranch, you'll walk in the footsteps of desert pioneers and become part of a growing number of visitors who have experienced history and learned that not all of Joshua Tree's treasures were found within its rocks.

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