

The Desert Speaks

Season 15 Program Descriptions

1501 – Goat Packing in the Red Desert

Natural historian and eccentric scientist John Mionczynski (also known as “Mr. Red Desert”) “invented” goat packing nearly 30 years ago in the high and cold Red Desert of Southwest Wyoming. He guides host David Yetman on a journey through the “heart” of the desert – the Honeycomb Buttes, which boast extremely colorful honeycomb rock formations. Along the way, they get to know their four-legged companions and experience the adventures involved in goat packing, including searching for wild cilantro, onion and garlic in the desert and using an excretion from ants as salad dressing.

Before Viewing

1. How might traveling with a pack of goats enhance a desert expedition?
2. List the different ways a desert could be explored (i.e. goat packing).

After Viewing

1. Why are the Honeycomb Buttes in the Red Desert so colorful?
2. What plants are edible in this desert?
3. Why are goats an environmentally preferred method of travel in the desert? (Think about their effect on the desert landscape.)

1502 – Wyoming’s Red Desert

Host David Yetman hops into a 50-year-old BMW motorcycle sidecar to explore Wyoming’s mysterious Red Desert, one of the least known and most threatened deserts in North America. Also called the “Great American Desert,” this eight-million-acre area has vast and varying landscapes including the largest active sand dune system in North America and the Great Divide Basin - the only place in the United States where the Continental Divide splits before rejoining. It is also steeped in history and fable, with ties to the Oregon Trail and the gold rush, as well as its share of ghost towns. Though it is high and cold, the Red Desert is home to the largest desert elk herd in the nation, the largest migratory game herd in the continental U.S. and over 350 wildlife species. Other highlights include a look at wild mustangs, petroglyphs and aspen groves. But all of these wonders exist under the constant threat of future oil and gas development.

Before Viewing

1. What creatures would flourish in this desert? Why?
2. What kinds of different landscapes would you expect to find in the desert region?
3. What environmental threats might impact a desert?

After Viewing

1. What were some of the qualities “Mr. Red Desert” found appealing about Wyoming’s Red Desert?
2. List the biggest threats to the Red Desert.
3. What are some of the types of animals that are thriving in this region?

1503 – Heart of a Pueblo

Plazas are the heart and soul of bustling Mexican cities and sleepy desert pueblos alike. Renowned architect Bob Vint travels with host David Yetman to explore a range of plazas, from pre-Hispanic to modern, and examine their unifying characteristics. The program includes a sampling of cities with some of the most beautiful and influential plazas, from the first pre-Hispanic plazas in Chichén Itzá to one of the world’s largest plazas in Mexico City. Then it’s on to the small town of Pátzcuaro to discover how courtyards are to the home as plazas are to the town. The program also uncovers how plazas were valued and used by people in the New World thousands of years before Spanish contact.

Before Viewing

1. What is a plaza?
2. Where might you find plazas?

After Viewing

1. What is origin of the plaza?
2. How do plazas and courtyards relate to each other?
3. Why are plazas important to Mexican culture?

1504 – Gateway to the Galapagos

The Desert Speaks begins its journey to the Galapagos Islands with a visit to Ecuador, which is to the islands as the United States is to Hawaii. After visiting a market on the mainland and a village with a monument to the equator, it’s off to

the islands of Bartolome and Genovese to explore their volcanic origins and get an up-close and personal look at the native wildlife. Some of the featured animals include several species of Boobies, waved Albatross, marine iguanas, Galapagos Hawks and the Magnificent frigate birds. A special treat for desert dwellers is the island version of the Prickly Pear Cactus, only this version has soft, "pettable" spines.

Before Viewing

1. Which islands that belong to Ecuador were made famous by Charles Darwin? Why?
2. What are the best ways to travel to an island?

After Viewing

1. What is the significance of Ecuador's name?
2. What types of animals might you find on some of the different islands?
3. Describe different habits and behaviors of the birds on the Galapagos Islands.

1505 – Treasures of the Galapagos

The second of three episodes in the Galapagos Islands finds host David Yetman hunting large cacti on a desert island. Along the way, he discovers flamingos in the middle of a huge lava lake, ghost crabs (so named for their quick disappearing act) and a variety of plant species endemic to certain islands. Yetman also explores the nesting grounds of sea turtles and finds a unique post office on the island of Floreana where pirates and whalers have used the same wooden container for centuries to leave or take mail depending on its destination. The program also examines the strategies different animal species must employ to cooperate in such close proximity on the islands and how the plant and animal life is impacted by the surrounding climatic forces.

Before Viewing

1. How might plants and animals end up on a desert island?
2. In the 1800s, how do you think sea travelers communicated with people in distant places?

After Viewing

1. How do flamingos feed?
2. How did ghost crabs get their names?
3. How do you think the large species of cacti ended up on the Galapagos Islands?

1506 – Ancient Secrets of the Galapagos

The third and final episode in the Galapagos Islands features some of the "newer" islands, which are "only" a few hundred thousand years old. There are plenty of interesting creatures in the waters around these islands, like marine iguanas – the only known iguanas that swim in salt water and can stay underwater for more than an hour – and the Flightless Cormorant – a bird that uses its stubby wings to swim rather than fly.

On Isabela Island, the crew visits Darwin's Lake – a saltwater lake – to study flower color and pollination and spends some time in Zodiac boats finding penguins endemic to the islands.

Before Viewing

1. Name two types of land dwelling animals that spend most of their time at sea.
2. What kind of animals might be found on a volcanic island?

After Viewing

1. What role did volcanoes play in forming the Galapagos Islands?
2. What features or adaptations do the marine iguanas have that has aided in their survival?
3. Why is the Flightless Cormorant flightless?

1507 – Life Along the Rio Sonora

The Rio Sonora in northwest Mexico begins at a spring just south of the U.S. border and cuts through the Sonoran Desert on its way to the Gulf of California near Kino Bay. Life in the Rio Sonora Valley has survived on the river's modest flows for centuries. The Opata Indians were the most recent of the native peoples and were living along its banks when the Spaniards arrived. Although they have long since disappeared, their lyrical names for many of the towns remain. The rough terrain and uncertain water supply have helped the area maintain its rural roots. Local delicacies, spicy chilies, historic missions, and a relaxed way of life all await a trip through the valley of the Rio Sonora.

Before Viewing

1. What kinds of life would you expect to find along a desert river?
2. How would a desert river differ from one found in the forest?

After Viewing

1. List the different crops found along the Rio Sonora and describe how they are made into food.
2. What common characteristics or traits do towns along the Rio Sonora have?
3. What are "topes"?

1508 – Bats Among Us

Montezuma Castle, a five-story 20-room cliff dwelling, served as a "high-rise apartment building" for prehistoric Sinagua Indians over 600 years ago. Now it serves the same purpose to a colony of bats. Concern over the possible harm that these latter-day residents may be doing has led to some very interesting hands-on research to study the impact of bat habitats on cultural landmarks. The program also visits Tonto National Monument, where the scale of the ruins makes capturing bats a test of wills and ingenuity, and Chiricahua National Monument to see how one of Arizona's natural gems is the perfect location for collecting data on tree-roosting bats. This episode finds bats in hand, in roosts and in the air to learn how bat population density affects humans.

Before Viewing

1. Where do bats live?
2. Why do you think bats are important to the environment?
3. Why might some people be afraid of bats?

After Viewing

1. What is your favorite type of bat and why?
2. Name some of the differences between the various species of bats.
3. Where would you live if you were a bat?

1509 - Grand Canyon, The Human Touch

Host David Yetman joins his brother, geologist Dick Yetman, for an exploration of the traces of humans along the Colorado River and Grand Canyon region. They observe sacred salt mines from the boat, visit the intersection of the Little Colorado River with the main river and even enjoy an impromptu canyon concert. The brothers learn the history of rapids – how they got their names, the scales of intensity and spend time with scientists studying the effects of the Glen Canyon Dam on the flora and fauna of the Grand Canyon.

Before Viewing

1. How might the Grand Canyon and the surrounding areas been used by the Native Americans?
2. How has humankind changed the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon?
3. What would a trip on the Colorado River be like?

After Viewing

1. How did the rapids in the Grand Canyon get their name?
2. Name some of the geological features or layers of the Grand Canyon.
3. How important has the Grand Canyon been for the Native Americans? Why?

1510 – Grand Canyon, Floating Through Time

The Yetman brothers continue their trip of exploration through the Grand Canyon, this time focusing on the geology of the canyon and the desert vegetation found along the river. They go plunging through Lava Falls, one of the last big rapids on the Colorado River and watch adults of all ages turn into sprightly kids again while jumping from the edge of a waterfall into a pool below. Two great mysteries about the Grand Canyon are explored in this episode. First, there is a geological period of time that is unaccounted for in the history of the canyon. What happened during this time and why is there no evidence of it? Second, what happened to everything that was in the Grand Canyon? Did it get washed out into the Sea of Cortez?

Before Viewing

1. What differences would there be between a river trip taken in the 1860s as opposed to today?
2. How old do you think the oldest rock in the Grand Canyon is?

After Viewing

1. What is the great unconformity?
2. What are two great mysteries of the Grand Canyon?

1511 – Pilgrimage to a Party

Many Mexicans consider San Francisco a "true" saint – one who delivers the "miracles" and "promises" that thousands of faithful make with him every year. But he demands that they live up to their end of the vow, which for most involves a pilgrimage. The Desert Speaks follows the faithful as they travel by foot and on horseback (some more than fifty miles) to the church in Magdalena de Kino, Sonora to pay homage to San Francisco in the hope that he may transform their lives. The Fiesta de San Francisco also transforms this sleepy town as tens of thousands of the faithful, semi-faithful and out-and-out revelers descend on it for the biggest party in Northwest Mexico.

Before Viewing

1. What is a pilgrimage?
2. Why would people go on a pilgrimage?
3. Can you name any modern day pilgrimages?

After Viewing

1. How do traditional native beliefs intermingle with Catholic beliefs at the Fiesta de San Francisco?
2. What are some of the different ways pilgrims fulfilled their promise to San Francisco?
3. What are the different methods of travel for the pilgrims?

1512 – Wines of the Desert

The stereotypical images of Mexico's Baja California include sun-drenched beaches, bizarre spiny plants, and remote dusty pueblos. But Baja is full of surprises. Known for its tequila and cerveza, the country's burgeoning wine industry may someday give these traditional beverages stiff competition as it starts to draw international recognition. Host David Yetman is joined by Bill Beezley, acting head of The University of Arizona Latin American Studies department and historian, for a tour of the region's vineyards. They search for the origins of this growing interest in wine-making, from the very large growers and producers to wine co-ops, where anyone can join in the fun.

Before Viewing

1. How is wine made?
2. Do you think the desert is a good place to grow grapes?

After Viewing

1. What makes Baja a good place to grow grapes? What makes it difficult?
2. Describe the process for making wine.
3. How do co-ops, large growers, and small growers differ in making wine? How has it affected their society?

1513 – Boom AND Bust in a Desert Town

The small town of Quartzsite, Arizona, located just 20 miles east of the Colorado River, has been a rock hound's paradise since the 1960s. These days, this former stagecoach town is also a mecca to well over a million visitors each year, most of whom converge on it in a wave of RV's during the months of January and February. Thousands of vendors of rocks, gems, minerals, fossils and everything else imaginable create one of the world's largest open-air flea markets. The Desert Speaks crew visits the town in the dead of summer and again in the bustling winter months to meet the unique characters of this community and learn the history behind this enigmatic place.

Before Viewing

1. What is a snow bird?
2. Why would a desert town go through a boom and bust cycle?

After Viewing

1. How was Quartzsite founded? How did it get its name?
2. Describe a typical summer month in Quartzsite. Describe a typical winter month in Quartzsite.
3. When would you want to visit Quartzsite? What would you want to see?