

Forests come in all shapes and sizes. Typically, when we think of forests, we think of lush green undergrowth framed by towering trees. This area, however, can also be considered a forest of sorts. The undergrowth, however, is decidedly more prickly and poky. The towering trees aren't actually trees at all, they are types of yucca known as Joshua trees. These "trees" can reach impressive heights, the tallest known grew to be 80 feet tall, but most stay closer to the ground, only about 15-20 feet tall at maturity. Its anthropomorphic name is said to have come from Mormon pioneers who settled in the Mojave Desert. To them, the outstretched arms of the Joshua tree reminded them of the biblical story of Joshua supplicating the heavens. The name stuck and is now the accepted common name for *Yucca brevifolia*.

The Joshua tree's life cycle is heavily dependent on each year's rains. For this reason, it is difficult to determine the age of Joshua trees. Conditions must be just right, just enough rain at just the right time, for the Joshua trees to flower. Upon flowering, the trees enter into a symbiotic relationship with the local pronuba moth. A pregnant female moth flits between the creamy white flowers of the Joshua tree looking for one that is just right. Along the way, she gathers pollen from each flower and collects it into a ball. When she has found the one that is just right, she enters and lays her eggs deep in the petal cup. She then deposits her gathered pollen load onto the flower's stigma to fertilize the flower so it may begin maturing its seeds. The eggs and the seeds grow together until the pronuba larvae hatch and begin to feed on the bounty of ripening seeds. There are many more seeds, however, than the larvae can eat which allows the Joshua tree to propagate its next generation. The timeless dance of pollinators and flowering plants, like this one, occurs in ecosystems the world over and is responsible for much of the world as we know it.

Don't open until you arrive

2. Guardians of the Desert

Take a picture!

N 36° 32' 56.1"
W 114° 00' 52.1"

This is no Buckingham Palace, but the guards are just as serious.

Park along County Rd. 101. Requires short walk to fully appreciate.

Difficulty: ♦♦ - -

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