

The Astounding Mystery of the Sailing Stones

In Death Valley National Park, huge rocks are moving around like they are on a racetrack without anything, or anyone moving them. The first person to see these curious rocks in motion was Joseph Crook. It was very rare for him to see one, because they only move every two or three years! Some geologists found out what happened, and they wanted to figure out how. At first they had decided it was because of strong gusts of wind, but they realized the rocks were too large for that. It left them wondering, how were they moving?

Later on, Joseph caught Jim McAllister and Allen Agnew's attention with the moving stones. In 1948, they wrote the first report about the sailing stones. They also studied that the same thing happens in Little Bonnie Claire Playa in Nye County, Nevada too!

In 1952, Louis G. Kirk, a National Park Service Ranger, recorded the course the stones generally take. He wanted to see if the stones really moved, and recorded it. He didn't want to find a scientific explanation. Most people who saw the recording thought they moved at least partially because of wind and muddy areas, but a few stones weigh as much as a person, and researchers think that is too heavy for wind and mud to push them along. George M. Stanley figured layers of ice surrounding the stones help catch the wind, or maybe the ice alone causes the rocks to move.

On May 1972, Bob Sharp and Dwight Carey started to monitor the stones. Soon, 30 stones with new tracks were named, and tracked. They also tried out the ice hypotheses by getting a few of the stones, and watching them. They realized if ice had anything to do with the rocks moving, then the ice around it would have to be small. During the experiment, the stone, named Karen, mysteriously

vanished. There were no fire tracks or footprints were found near where that stone was.

In 1995, Professor John Reid led a few students from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and Hampshire College in a study of the sailing stones. They found almost identical paths made by the stones in the late 1980's. Physicist Bacon, and the people he was working with, perceived that wind that blows in Death Valley can be stronger because the area is flat; therefore, the stones that are even a bit higher than the others get the entirety of the strong wind, which can reach up to speeds of 90 miles per hour. People think this is partially the reason why the stones move almost as fast as a person running.

In 2009, people put out cameras that were pointed at what was happening to the stones, which they think lasted around 10 seconds. In 2011, a study showed that the belief that ice carries the rocks, which was more likely, because the ice lifts the stone off the ground, which makes there be less friction.

A year before, Richard and James Norris put stones with GPS devices and time lapse cameras in Death Valley, and waited for them to move. They proved the earlier hypothesis about wind is wrong. They found that the stones move whenever the ice under the stones start melting, and there only needs to be a light wind for them to move. Mystery solved.