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Publishing the Southwest

JENNIFER JENKINS

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Publishing the Southwest

Two of the most distinctive natural features of the Southwest are mountains and water. Both are fiercely loved, and both are often exploited. Harold Bell Wright, sometime Tucson resident and the best-selling U.S. author of the 1920s, opened his novel *The Mine with the Iron Door* (1923) with a paean to the mountains and a caution about the water:

From every street and corner in Tucson we see the mountains. From our places of business, from our railway depots and hotels, from our University campus and halls, and from the windows and porches of our homes we look up to the mighty hills. But of all the peaks and ranges that keep their sentinel posts around this old pueblo there are none so bold in the outlines of their granite heights and rugged cañons, so exquisitely beautiful in their soft colors of red and blue and purple, or so luring in the call of their remote and hidden fastnesses, as the Santa Catalinas.

Every morning they are there—looking down upon our little city in the desert with a brooding, Godlike tolerance—remote yet very near.... Even in the darkness we see their shadowy might against the sky, and feel the still and solemn mystery of their enduring strength under the desert stars.

And because there was water here, and because there was gold here,...wild and adventurous life, through the passing centuries, made this place a camping ground and a battle field—a place of labor and crime, of victory and defeat; of splendid heroism, noble sacrifice, and dreadful fear...set amid the grandeur and the beauty of these vast deserts, lonely skies and wild and rugged mountains.

The essays in this issue of *Journal of the Southwest* bring to mind Wright's sage and prescient characterization of the region 100 years ago.

Together, the two pieces in this issue offer a macro and micro history of the region, each intertwined with portraits of the individuals who have shaped our understandings of the geology and hydrology of place. The University of Arizona plays a supporting role in both of these stories, led as they were by U of A faculty. George H. Davis provides the long view of the formation over millennia of the “metamorphic core complexes” that encircle our Tucson home. The essay is also an insider’s history of the identification of these distinctive structures by a group of ardent structural geologists associated with the University of Arizona in the last quarter of the 20th century. As David Yetman hints in his introduction, the two are inseparable. It is both the epic biography of a mountain chain and an autobiography of a structural geologist: a true bildungsroman. A printable Field Guide to these stone features follows the essay.

Julia Fonseca traces the evolution of groundwater pumping in Arizona and the role of the University of Arizona Agricultural Experiment Station, particularly irrigation engineer and U of A professor G. E. P. Smith, in wrangling emerging water policy across the 20th century. This essay adds another chapter to the saga of G. E. P. Smith, following on Fonseca’s essay about Smith’s role in promoting Arizona’s 1919 Water Code (which he wrote) and opposing the Colorado River Compact (see the summer 2024 issue of *Journal of the Southwest*). In this history we see the ways in which Arizona’s hydrologic and legal choices have shaped the current environment of water distribution, scarcity, politics, and profit—all predicted by G. E. P. Smith at one time or another. A recent headline in the *Arizona Daily Star* underscores Fonseca’s purpose in telling Smith’s story: “Arizona Will Again Get Less Water From Colorado River” (15 August 2025).

Arizona has always ridden cycles of boom and bust, some fueled by natural events and others by extractive economies. The essays in this issue speak to such periods of boom in plate tectonics millennia ago to pending bust in the immediate crisis of water extraction and drought.

With this issue, I take the editor's chair while Jeffrey Banister is away on a well-earned research sabbatical. As a second-generation *JSW* reader, I am proud to steward this remarkable publication that has guided and informed so many of us in learning about our mosaic and precious region.

—Jennifer L. Jenkins