

Our community has a modern history over a century old and roots that reach back into ancient history. Visual and cultural icons along the Salt River are among the destinations that make our area unique. From Hole-in-the-Rock and Loma del Rio to the Desert Botanical Garden and the Eisendrath House, the Tempe of today is a unique creation from the continuous intertwining of many cultures. Grains ground at Hayden's Mill were grown by descendents of the ancient people who built the very water canal system on which the original Mill and now the entire community continue to depend. All of these features and so many more are part of Papago Park and the area surrounding it north and south of the river. The Park and its associated features covers nearly 2,000 acres of shared state and municipal parks preserve.

Papago Park is home to artifacts and petroglyphs by which Native Americans, including the Salt-River Pima Maricopa and Gila River Indian Communities, trace their roots back almost two thousand years. Glass and ceramic tools found near Hole-in-the-Rock are thought to have been used for chores like smoothing wooden ax handles. Ancient and sacred features at Hole-in-the-Rock link to petroglyphs and other evidence found on "A" Mountain and the Loma del Rio site north of Tempe Town Lake. Flora, fauna and rock formations in the area continue to attract local, regional and international visitors on foot, bicycle and horseback.

Despite its amazing features, the Park, the surrounding area and the amenities have seen significant deterioration over decades. Established as a National Monument in 1914, the Park was deemed unworthy of protected status, so in 1930 was decommissioned. Once this occurred, the Park began a slow descent into overuse and abuse. It is our responsibility to do better with the trust placed in our hands from generations before us and those that are yet to come. And we are.

Tempe has been working together with Phoenix, Scottsdale and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community as members of the Papago Park Executive Committee. We are beginning our efforts to rehabilitate and preserve Papago Park as a part of Arizona's Centennial Celebration in 2012. Centennial Project improvements could address many of the man-made and natural elements that have long suffered distress.

Phoenix already has made substantial efforts toward the restoration of Tovrea Castle on the west side of the Park, just as Tempe is working to preserve the Eisendrath House on the east edge of the Park. Improvements are needed on the stone and masonry amphitheatre near McDowell Road, built by the WPA in the early 1930s. And with private sector help, we plan to see a rebirth of the Hayden Flour Mill and Silos and further improvements to the historic elements of Tempe Beach Park, all located on the south edge of the Park.

The Papago Park Centennial Project gives all of us an opportunity to join together in preserving the elements of our region that connect us. The Park showcases the natural beauty that has drawn people to the Salt River Valley for thousands of years, and provides us with recreational amenities to enjoy the great quality of life unique to our region.

If you are interested in participating in the process of protecting, preserving and improving the Park, Tempe has formed the Ad Hoc Papago Park Committee. It will begin gathering input from

the Tempe community. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 10, 2009 at 4:00 pm. at the Tempe Library. For past minutes, click on www.tempe.gov/PublicBodies/Docs/CouncilAdHoc/.

Whether you live in Phoenix, Scottsdale, Tempe or the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, I invite you to attend meetings, communicate with your Council members, and serve in this great effort. We owe it to those who came before, and to those who will inherit our legacy, to save – in perpetuity – these public treasures that uniquely identify Tempe and the region.