



Hi-Desert Star



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Giant Rock splits

Landers boulder now two

By Stacy Moore
Hi-Desert Star

LANDERS — Giant Rock, before Monday morning considered by many locals the largest free-standing boulder in the world, is now two boulders.

A slice of the rock fell off from the boulder at 8:20 a.m. Monday, exposing a gleaming white granite interior.

Camper Leslie Blunden of Palmdale was in her RV Monday morning when, at about 8:20 a.m., she heard what she described as a loud rumble.

Running outside, she saw that a section had fallen down from the face of the rock.

"When it hit the ground, it sent up a huge cloud of dust," said Blunden.

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As she was enveloped in the dust, the broken-off piece rolled toward her, hesitated, then settled back in place.

Blunden's husband, Larry, and fellow camper Gregg Law had walked beneath Giant Rock about half-a-minute before it split.

It may have been a small



earthquake centered in Loma Linda that broke the rock, said Linda Curtis of the United States Geological Survey.

According to Curtis, a 4.4-magnitude earthquake in Loma Linda occurred about two hours before the split.

An earthquake of that low a magnitude as far away as Loma Linda alone, however, could not have broken apart Giant Rock, she said.

The magnitude-7.1 Hector

Jerry Gonzales, left, and **Krista Lesa** stand atop Giant Rock's new piece a few hours after the split. Some campers had just walked by the rock when it split.

Mine Earthquake in Oct. 16, 1999, may have begun the splitting process in the rock, and subsequent aftershocks and the Loma Linda quake might have finished the job.

However, it's all speculation,

said Curtis.

"Anything's possible," she added.

Now that about one-eighth of Giant Rock is no longer intact, does Giant Rock's reputation as the largest free-standing boulder

in the world hold?

According to Curtis, Giant Rock had heavy competition for that reputation from Ayer's Rock, the monolith outside of Alice Springs, Australia.

The Yucca Valley Branch

Library reference desk reports that Ayer's Rock covers 3.33 square kilometers, or about 1.8 miles, of ground.

Before the split, Giant Rock, according to Joan Wilson's "The Heritage of Yucca Valley," covered

5,800 square feet, or a little more than one mile, of ground.

However, according to Curtis, Giant Rock was still ahead of its other competition for freestanding boulders, so it is still probably among the largest.

STACY MOORE / Hi-Desert Star

Coroner: 'Nothing obvious' caused JT couple's deaths

By **LeAnn Robinson**
Hi-Desert Star

JOSHUA TREE — Last week's deaths of Vernon Marlatt, 84, and Laura "Betty" Marlatt, 83, are becoming even more perplexing as an investigation continues.

According to Deputy Coroner Glen Miller in Yucca Valley, Dr. Steven Trenkle, a forensic pathologist with the coroner's office in San Bernardino, finished autopsies on the Marlattes Monday and still no cause of death has been found.

It appears that they both died of natural causes, according to Miller, but the official cause of death is pending until test results come back from toxicology and

microscopic tests.

The toxicology tests look for abnormalities in the blood, such as poisons, illegal drugs and overdoses of prescription medication, Miller explained. The microscopic tests are performed to look for disease that is not visible to the naked eye during an autopsy, he added.

Vernon Marlatt had heart disease, lung disease and kidney disease, any of which may be a cause of death, but, Miller explained, "We can't confirm that until we get the results back."

According to Miller, the pathologist said that with all of his problems, Vernon may not have had much longer to live.

Betty Marlatt, on the other hand, did not seem to have any medical problems other than a history of high blood pressure, said Miller.

A deputy coroner such as

Miller acts as a field investigator for the coroner's office. He is responsible for collecting information, securing residences, taking photos and passing information on to the coroner's office.

In doing so, Miller has found that the Marlattes share a birthday, one year apart, as well as a day of death.

Their driver's licenses' numbers are the same except for the last two digits and their Social Security numbers are the same except for the last four digits.

Miller said the similarities may indicate that the Marlattes have known each other for a long time, but it cannot be confirmed at this time. They do have a daughter who lives in Indiana.

"This is a mysterious case and I'm looking forward to having the cause of death, like everyone else, because there is nothing obvious," said Miller.

12 Marines involved in alleged hazing of private

MCAGCC — Twelve Marines have been investigated for an alleged hazing incident involving a private who was smashed against his locker, made to do pushups while a fellow Marine held a foot on his neck and had his shirt cut with a knife here, according to the Associated Press.

After an investigation was conducted into the alleged incident at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, 10 Marines were disciplined administratively and two were charged with dereliction in the performance of duty and assault, according to Capt. Patri-

cia Restrepo, public affairs officer at Camp Pendleton.

One Marine is also being charged with failure to obey a lawful general order or regulation.

The Marines allegedly improperly corrected the private and overstepped their bounds of authority. The incident was reported in December.

Ten Marines are being disciplined administratively for unprofessional conduct and for allowing the actions of the other

See **MARINES / A10**

'Names' give art for auction Saturday event to benefit college students

By **Michele Pinney**
Hi-Desert Star

JOSHUA TREE — The Copper Mountain College Alumni Art Auction, set to begin at 6 p.m. Saturday at the Helen Gray Education Center on White Feather Road here, will have 40 original works by Morongo Basin painters, sculptors, photographers and crafters available to the highest bidder.

According to Fine Arts Division Chair **Mike Murillo**, the event

has raised over \$10,000 for art students in its first two years.

"We brought in over \$4,000 the first year and more than \$6,000 last year," Murillo said. "I hope we can break the \$8,000 mark this year!"

Murillo said he has donations from about 25 local artists, including photographer **Phil Dunham**, also known

as "the shadow catcher," gourd painter **Lupe Molina**, metal sculptor **Simi Daba**, potter **Tony Soares** and stone sculptor **Mike Smiley**.

"David and Teresa Doolit-

hopeful buyers to state their offer.

Admission is free, Murillo said, but to participate in the auction, bidding rights must be purchased at a cost of \$5.

There is one special item to be auctioned that will not be on display at the event.

"We're going to auction off a dinner for six," Murillo said.

"Jim Pulliam and I are going to cook the meal and **Kindred (Murillo)** and **Jackie (Pulliam)** will be serving it!"

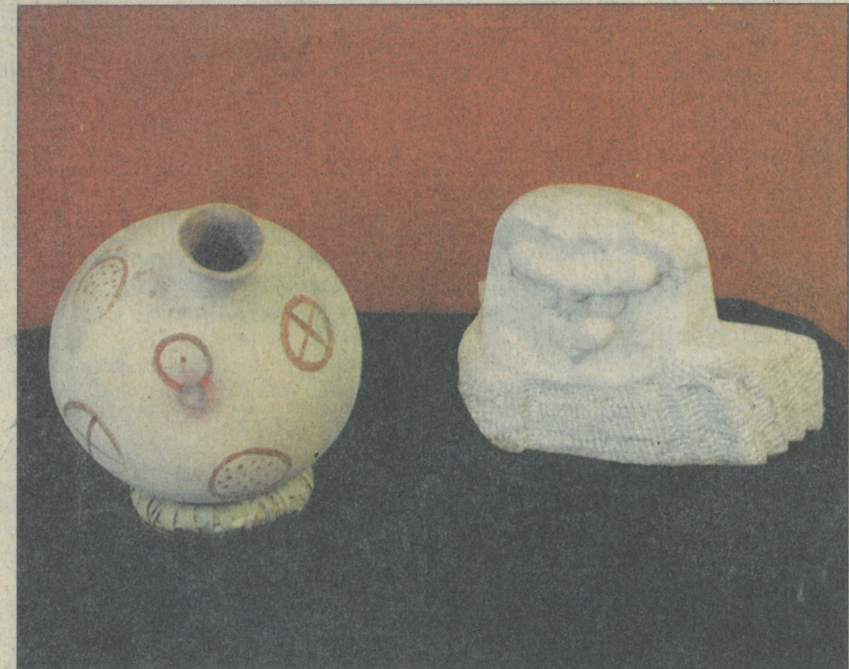
Murillo said he's a pretty good cook,

although he couldn't say whether Pulliam's talents are conducive to culinary adventures.

The dinner will be served at the Pulliams' home high in Pioneertown.

All proceeds of the auction will benefit Copper Mountain College students.

For more information, contact Murillo at 366-3791



MICHELE PINNEY / Hi-Desert Star

This Tony Soares pot and Mike Smiley alabaster sculpture will be auctioned off Saturday during the Copper Mountain College Alumni Art Auction.

tle, who are 'Condor,' will be playing their special kind of music at no charge to us," Murillo said. "And the Boys & Girls Club is doing the no-host bar again. We're also auctioning a piece of art that all the proceeds will go to them."

The first hour of the auction will be silent, Murillo said, with items displayed on tables and a bid sheet for

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