

Another Beautiful Day at Lake Mead

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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"I have no idea why people find smashing their drink bottles so much fun. It's very dangerous for the people playing in the water." said Terry Prucha. He chose to spend his weekend not lying on the beach and bathing in the sun, but to go to the Lake Mead National Recreation Area to do something more meaningful -- to clean the beach. Tzu Chi volunteer Prucha wrote down his feelings and wishes to protect the environment.

Lake Mead is the largest reservoir in the United States. It is located on the Colorado River about 30 miles (48 km) southeast of Las Vegas, Nevada. It was formed by the Hoover Dam and extends 112 miles (180 km) behind the dam, holding approximately 26,134,000 acre feet (32.236 km³) of water. Because of the high summer temperatures in the Las Vegas area, the lake is a very popular recreation spot; it offers boating, fishing, swimming, water skiing, sunbathing, camping, and picnicking.

About eight million people a year visit the Lake Mead National Recreation Area. With so many visitors, it is impossible for the small number of park employees to keep the area clean. To help with this monumental task, the National Park Service at Lake Mead started the "Adopt a Cove" program. This is a program through which a group can adopt a cove at the lake for a year and agrees to conduct at least three scheduled clean-ups during that year. For us Tzu Chi members at the Las Vegas Service Center, it was a perfect way to get involved in the work of environmental protection in our local community.



In August, 2011, we adopted a cove named "Government Wash". It is a large area with many visitors and always has a great deal of rubbish. We had already been to the area three times; Saturday, May 19 was our fourth visit. It is a great way to get together for fresh air and exercise while doing a much needed community service.

It was 6:00 a.m. when 15 of us met at the Las Vegas Service Center's parking lot to share our cars in driving to our adopted cove, "Government Wash". It was very early; but, as it was our fourth visit, we knew the temperature would be in the high 90s of Fahrenheit and the sun almost unbearable in just a few short hours. At 6:00 a.m. it was still cool from the night air and the perfect time to get started. After ensuring that we had plenty of cold drinks and enough gloves and tools for everyone to pick up the rubbish, we were off to the lake.

We arrived a little before 7:00 and knew right away that our cove needed us. The weather was warming up; more and more people were using the lake. With more people, unfortunately, there is more rubbish. At first, when I glanced around at all the garbage, I became discouraged. It is

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such a beautiful area -- why do people have to be so uncaring and spoiling the landscape with their unsightly garbage? After setting up a large umbrella as a shady rest spot and making sure everyone had gloves, a pick-up tool and a garbage bag, it was time to get started.

As is our custom, we all walked down to the water's edge to start. Even though it was early, there were already families playing in the cool water. There was a lot of abandoned picnic waste, paper plates, napkins, plastic silverware, and, as usual, beer bottles. The bottles should be easy to pick up but most are smashed on the hard ground; this makes it very difficult and time-consuming to pick up all the small pieces. I have no idea why people find smashing their bottles so much fun; it is very dangerous for the people playing in the water. Most tourists have no shoes; it is very easy to receive serious cuts walking back to their car or picnic area, especially the children. This makes it all the more important for us to clean the area.



One of the park rangers stopped by while we were picking up garbage to see how we were doing; it was the first time we had such a visit. He told us that he had been watching us work for a while and wanted to come over to thank us for helping to keep the recreational area clean. It was a great opportunity for us to introduce ourselves and tell him about Tzu Chi; he seemed genuinely interested. We assured him that we were all very grateful to be given the opportunity to do something so meaningful for our Las Vegas community and that we would be coming back again. It was very nice of him to stop by.

We worked in our cove for about three hours without a break. By then, the sun was beating down and the temperature had risen quickly. In those three hours, the 15 of us – unbelievably -- collected 48 bags full of garbage. It is sad how little respect people have for their environment. As we took a last look, there was no doubt that the cove looked much better as we loaded the bags into the cars for the trip to the large dumpsters. It was hot, hard work, but well worth it.

Many thanks to all the Tzu Chi members, family, and friends who participated in helping to keep our Lake Mead adopted cove beautiful. Without all of you, it would be an impossible task. Be sure to get plenty of rest; we will be going again in July..... see you then!

By Terry Prucha