



The Blake Williams Biological Research Station

Member of the Organization of Biological Field Stations (OBFS)

The Chihuahuan Desert Preservation Association recently celebrated the completion of its field station, named the Blake Williams Biological Research Station to honor the memory of Blake Williams. Leslie Townsend, his wife, has provided us with a thoughtful bio:

(Bennie) Blake Williams was born in Brownsville, TX in 1949. He bought his first cactus with his allowance as a young child, a purchase that led to a lifelong love of cacti. It was through this passion that he met Martin Terry, the inspiration behind the Cactus Conservation Institute, and Keeper Trout, both of whom shared a love of cacti and a concern for populations in Texas that are at risk.

Many species of cacti throughout North America and elsewhere are endangered through a combination of factors – clearcutting of land, climate change, poaching by collectors, and, for one species in particular, use as a religious sacrament.

*Together, Blake, Martin and Keeper Trout formed a non-profit, Cactus Conservation Institute, to protect such threatened species of cacti. Among the cacti that they focused on were the *Astrophytum asterias* (star cactus), *Echinocereus fitchii*, and *Lophophora williamsii*, commonly known as peyote and sacred to many indigenous peoples. Among other accomplishments, CCI conducted longitudinal studies to ensure proper harvesting of peyote for optimal regrowth. Together with The Nature Conservancy, Texas Parks & Wildlife, and an anonymous conservation entity, CCI procured approximately 500 acres of land for conservation of cacti as well as many other species of flora and fauna.*

Shafter and the location of the Blake Williams Research Center represented a sacred space for Blake. Blake studied philosophy throughout his life and from a young age practiced Buddhism in the Mahayana lineage. The desert at Shafter was a perfect reflection of the asceticism that he practiced, and offered a landscape reflecting timelessness, tranquility and beauty. His ashes are now scattered at Shafter.