

California Deserts Road Trip (D23A)

A year ago I planned a trip out to Palm Springs and Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in the southeastern California deserts. But when I delayed the trip a bit, I ended up adding a visit to see the California poppy bloom out past Palmdale, and cut most of my Anza-Borrego plans. I wanted to head back out to that area to see more of Anza-Borrego as well as to pick up a couple things from last year's list for the Palm Springs area that I didn't have time for. I kept this as a shorter trip as I was out there just last year as well as to schedule around a couple rain storms forecast to hit the area, although one ended up disrupting some plans anyway.

This time I headed towards Anza-Borrego first, targeting El Centro for my first night so that I'd be well-positioned to enter the large state park from the south first thing the next morning. I only made a couple repeat photo stops along the drive to El Centro.



The remains of a pre-Columbian Native American trail that connected the Salton Sea area to the Colorado River.



The highway I took cut through the heart of the Algodones Dunes, home of the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area. The dune field is believed to have been created when the Colorado River used to flow into the Salton Sink area, creating a large inland lake. Prevailing winds carried lakeshore sand to the east, depositing it here.

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park is the largest state park in California, and preserves a number of features found in the Colorado Desert, including historical sites, archaeological sites associated primarily with the Ancient Kumeyaay people, fossil sites (both sea bed and post-Dinosaur Age animals), and interesting geology. This was my seventh visit to the park, and I still managed to make a number of stops at places I hadn't been to before as I entered from the south and worked my way north to the town of Borrego Springs. Borrego Springs is outside of the park, but it is completely surrounded by it.



Mortero Wash



I bet you didn't expect to see the Grand Canyon in southeastern California. When the Colorado River carved its way down through the Colorado Plateau region as it created the Grand Canyon, it carried a lot of sediment downstream. The sediments were deposited in the Gulf of California or in the Salton Sink area, depending on the flow of the Colorado River at the time. A little to the east of here, the San Andreas Fault runs towards the southeast, passing through Coachella Valley (the Palm Springs area) and the Salton Sink towards the Gulf of California. Land to the west of the fault has slowly been pushed northward over millions of years. As a result, both seabed and sediments from the Grand Canyon that the Colorado River deposited atop that seabed can be found in what is now Anza-Borrego. That also explains why seabed fossils can be found here. This view of the Carrizo Badlands shows the effects of more recent erosion on those Grand Canyon-originated sediments.



Looking west from the Carrizo Badlands Overlook



The road leading to Carrizo Gorge



The California palm is the only palm native to the American West. It used to grow naturally in several areas of the southwest when the climate was cooler and wetter. But as the dry desert climate took over the region, the palm's natural distribution was reduced to a number of isolated small groves, about twenty of which can be found in Anza-Borrego. The Mountain Springs Loop hiking trail connects a handful of these groves, which are found along washes. The washes provide a reasonable amount of groundwater – a mature California palm needs about 200 gallons of water/day.



Some barrel cacti were beginning to bloom.



As were the brittlebush, one of my favorite desert shrubs.



After a rather comprehensive visit to the park in 2016, I hadn't planned to return in 2017. But winter weather conditions were such that the park experienced a wildflower "superbloom". I thought that with this winter's wetter than normal conditions that Anza-Borrego might experience another superbloom this year. No such luck. But spring wildflowers were still abundant, especially the purple sand verbena, as seen here at the June Wash area.



At Vallecito County Park, which is surrounded by the state park, stands this old stagecoach station. It served both the Butterfield Overland and San Antonio-San Diego Mail routes.



I returned to Blair Valley, where I planned to retake a couple hikes that I took back in 2011. The Pictograph Trail leads to a pictograph rock art site. I remembered it as an easy hike, but I had forgotten that it starts with a bit of scrambling through these rocks. A bit too much scrambling for my now medical-booted feet.

The Mortero Trail is another easy trail there that leads to some morteros (seed grinding spots). Since my last visit, it has become much better signed, so I was able to see features that I hadn't seen before.



If it weren't for the ash deposits, this ancient agave roasting pit might be overlooked.



These pit and groove carvings are found in a number of places in the southwest, but their purpose is unknown. They're too small for seed grinding purposes. And in this case, being carved into the side of the boulder would have made them useless for that purpose anyway.



Some type of seed grinding took place on the indentations atop this rock.



This rock features four morteros for seed grinding as well as a number of pit and groove carvings.



So where did the Ancient Kumeyaay get their seeds and other plant-based food? You're looking at what amounted to a Kumeyaay grocery store. Who needs Stouffers, Betty Crocker and Keebler's when you've got all this to choose from?



The Mortero Trail now continues some distance past the last of the morteros to this pictograph. Although the meaning of this pictograph has been lost to the ages, the Kumeyaay often used black at masculine sites and red at feminine sites. E.g., a site with a number of red pictographs might have been used for ceremonies related to a girl's coming of age.

By the time I set off on my trip, the weather forecast had changed enough that I suspected that I might lose all of the next day to rain. Turns out that there was a break in the weather, and the sun came out for a while in the afternoon. But there had been enough rain that anything off pavement would have been a mess. So, instead I headed out on a wildlife spotting drive.



Desert bighorn sheep (left) and African elephants (right)



When hiking out in the desert around Borrego Springs, you should keep an eye out for scorpions (left) and dinosaurs (right).

The “wildlife” here are the Galleta Meadows Sky Art sculptures, dozens of sculptures surrounding Borrego Springs that were inspired by history, local fauna, now-extinct animals whose fossils have been found in the region, and sometimes a bit of whimsy.



My favorite – and pretty much everyone else’s – is this giant sand serpent.



People who drive wimpy cars park them in parking lots. This is how you park a Jeep.



This tennis ball sits outside Borrego Springs tennis club. I wonder what size rackets they use?



I capped off my visit to the park by checking out some more wildflower blooms. On the left is one of the photos I took on this visit. Certainly a respectable bloom once I zoomed the camera to get a closer look. On the right is a photo from the 2017 superbloom at about the same location. Of course, my hotel probably would have cost me twice as much if a superbloom were underway this year.

On to Palm Springs.

By a bit of a roundabout route along the east side of the Salton Sea. According to Google Maps, the fading town of Bombay Beach had a number of quirky sights somewhat reminiscent of last year's stop in nearby Slab City. Alas, some were no longer there. E.g., Clyde had been painted over in the *Bonnie and Clyde* mural. And road repaving work through the whole town kept me away from other highlights.



Bombay Beach TVs. So much on TV and still nothing worth watching.



The Bombay Bathroom Club. I hear they have a membership app. Wipe right if you want to join, wipe left if you don't (Tinder dating app members reading this will get it.)



I bet you're thinking, "I wish I thought to put a large egg on top of my house!"



I had hoped to see the *Temple to the Scientific Method*, but the road pavers were working on that block of road while I was in town.



On my drive into Palm Springs, I stopped at the Palm Springs Art Museum's Faye Sarkowsky Sculpture Garden to look around. This sculpture, *Laura*, was my favorite. In large lava flows, when the lava hardens into basalt, it can create (often) six-sided columns. Here the artist carved these faces into a couple basalt columns. No paint used – just polishing the basalt gives it that look.



One planned site from last year's visit was the Living Desert Zoo and Garden, recognized as one of the top zoos in the country for how it creates habitats for its animals.



Two giraffes and an ostrich



A cheetah



The Arabian oryx has two horns, but from the right angle, the horns line up so well that it can appear as if they only have one horn. It is believed that the unicorn myth is based on the Arabian oryx.



A yellow-footed wallaby. Note that its joey (baby) is hitching a ride in its pouch.



Because the park doesn't allow smoking, visitors in need of a nicotine fix tend to linger near this exhibit, a pack of camels.



This Cape Porcupine (left) and American Badger (right) are among the highlights of the park's petting zoo.

I also checked out the Museum of Ancient Wonders. It had casts of numerous fossils arranged in a timeline from some of the earliest forms of life up through early man. I found it only mildly interesting, though, as I have seen variations of this in other places only with actual fossils.



Humanoid skull casts from the Middle and Late Pliocene epoch, from about 2.5 to 5.3 million years ago. As I work on the family genealogy, I collect photos like these in case I discover some ancestors among them. But I'll have to file these for now, as I'm still working my way through our Holocene epoch ancestors.

Because the Palm Springs Art Museum Architecture and Design Center was open late, I decided to check it out as I walked from my hotel to downtown Palm Springs to find a restaurant for dinner. Last year's exhibit there focused on modern chairs, and wasn't particularly interesting to me. But this year, they had an exhibit on American building wood framing. Wood framing was both cheap and very flexible, allowing architects to design buildings with a lot more creativity while still keeping costs in line.

The exhibit featured scale models based on original framing plans for a number of types of buildings.



Framing model for the Jim Kaney round barn built in 1905



THE HILLSBORO
No. 3088—Almost 400 sq. ft. and 8 ft. 6 in. high. Foundation on concrete. 2 1/2 in. thick. 10 ft. 6 in. wide.

THE EXTERIOR WALLS are planned to be finished with old English or tavenor face brick, in colors ranging from light reds and browns.

FLOOR PLAN. From the front corner, the plan through an awkwardly designed screen door from door of clear white pine, with conventional straight iron hinges and hardware.

The hall contains a wainscoted entrance to the second floor, which has wainscoting from ceiling, hallway, and a small porch, opening from the hall leading into the living room. At the left you will find a passage through to the kitchen, coffee table and side entrance and doorway.

In the center of the living room you will find an English design fireplace with built-in seat and benchcase at the left. The double door, placed each between the living room and dining room is a small screened porch.

IN THE KITCHEN you will find a very compact arrangement, great range, hood, refrigerator, built-in dining board and lavatory place for other equipment.

The successful designing of a garage is a part of the main building is essential.

In every house builder but it seldom works out as successfully as in this plan. Come in to see the plans, make connections, and find the actual route the work bench and storage.

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

SECOND FLOOR PLAN

Page 12. SEARS, ROEBUCK & CO.

Framing model for the 1936 Sears Hillsboro house kit. And, yes, you used to be able to order house kits from the Sears catalog.



I only made one photo stop on the drive back to Las Vegas, here at a pair of World War II Desert Training Center: California-Arizona Maneuver Area sites: Camp Coxcomb and Palen Pass. More than a dozen military camps were established in the deserts of southeastern California and southwestern Arizona during World War II to train U.S. soldiers for fighting in North Africa. Little remains of these camps today except for historical markers and scarring on the desert floor where camp roads used to be laid out. Palen Pass, pictured, is where the troops who were trained at the various camps were put to the test in live ammo “war games” before being shipped off to the North African theater.

On both the drive out and drive home, I took US 95 between Las Vegas and Needles, California. There was a significant change while I was gone. President Biden announced the creation of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument, which now covers the southernmost part of Nevada and straddles US 95. I’ve been to sites now in the new national monument before, including my stop at Keyhole Canyon on my way home from last year’s California Deserts trip to see some rock art.

This new national monument connects a number of southeast California’s National Park System units and national monuments to some in Nevada, Arizona and Utah, creating a continuous block of protected lands that now stretches from the Palm Springs area to Moab, Utah.

It looks like I’ve got some more exploring to do.