

Earl's Diary - Tuesday, February 24, 2015

Greetings to all my loyal readers,

For the past six years, my travels to Arizona, have taken me through the I-15/I-40 corridor, in Barstow, California. Passing through this area always takes my memory back many (and I do mean MANY) years to 1954. On the hillside, to the north is the sign, which can be seen for many, many miles away, to advertise Calico Ghost Town.

Way back in 1954, when I was just a young lad, in Boy Scouts, we made an excursion to Calico Ghost Town, when it was REALLY a ghost town! Walter Knott had just purchased the property in 1951 and was in the process of restoring the buildings. Although my fading memory doesn't recall how the place looked, I'm sure it didn't like it does today.

This year I dedicated myself to revisiting the place after all these many years. Unfortunately, I don't have any photographs of that earlier visit. Today is a different story. Camera in hand, I trudged up the hill to wander through the town.

I wasn't really sure of what I would see. In reading some reviews, some indicated it was a great place to visit to experience the old west feel. Other reviews labeled it as a "tourist trap". Well, off I go to discover the *real* truth! You are welcome to come along with me.



The Peanut arrives in Calico



A Casita sneaked in while I was here. Some hardy souls were even in a tent.



The first thing I found was the campground which featured full hookups, restrooms and showers (\$1.00 for 5 minutes). Some sites were only water/electric. Other sites were dry sites. Naturally, The Peanut prefers full hookups! The town is only a few yards from the campground.



I arrived early enough today to be able to spend a couple hours exploring the town. My purpose today was to find out what I could see that wouldn't cost any money. My Impulse Buying Filter was securely in place!

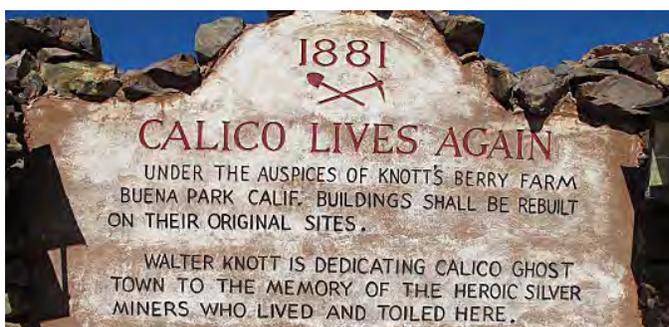


In 1881 four prospectors were leaving Grapevine Station (present day Barstow, California) for a mountain peak to the northeast. Describing the peak as "calico-colored", the peak, the mountain range to which it belonged, and the town that followed were all called Calico. The four prospectors discovered silver in the mountain, and opened the Silver King Mine, which was California's largest silver producer in the mid-1880s. A post office was established in early 1882, and the Calico Print, a weekly newspaper, started publishing. The town soon supported three hotels, five general stores, a meat market, bars, brothels, and three restaurants and boarding houses. The county established a school district and a voting precinct. The town also had a deputy sheriff and two constables, two lawyers and a justice of the peace, five commissioners, and two doctors. There was also a Wells Fargo office and a telephone and telegraph service. At its height of silver production during 1883 and 1885, Calico had over 500 mines and a population of 1,200 people.

By 1896, silver value had decreased to \$0.57 per troy ounce, and Calico's silver mines were no longer economically viable. The post office was discontinued in 1898, and the school closed not long after. By the turn of the century, Calico was all but a ghost town, and with the end of borax mining in the region in 1907 the town was completely abandoned. Many of the original buildings were moved to Barstow, Daggett and Yermo.



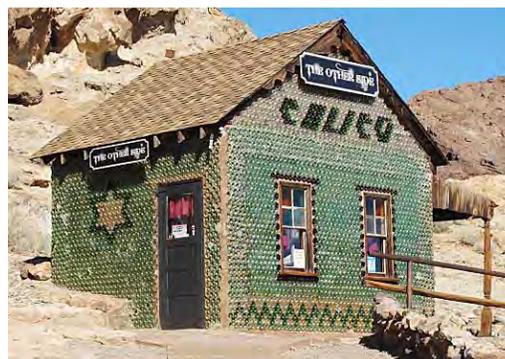
Calico has a suitably desert-like setting at the edge of arid hills on the north side of the wide expanses of Mojave Valley. The hillsides are quite devoid of any vegetation so the rocks are fully exposed, and the mineral content is evident from the deep red/purple colors of some of the outcrops. Part of the hills around town are formed of sharply folded and twisted strata, further evidence of past metamorphic activity.



One reviewer says, "If you LOVE history...especially Gold Rush...silver mines..California history..this is a GREAT place to visit."

Most of the restored and newly built buildings are made of wood with a simple, rustic architecture and a severely weathered appearance. Some structures still stand dating back to the town's operational years: Lil's Saloon; the town office; the former home of Lucy Lane, which is now the main museum but was originally the town's post office and courthouse; Smitty's Gallery; the general store; and Joe's Saloon. There is also a replica of the schoolhouse on the site of the original building. (The school house is a replica because the original one burned down.) The one-time homes of the town's Chinese citizens exist as ruins only; nothing remains of the former "family" residential area on a nearby bluff.

Here we are at the entrance. I'm sure it didn't look this way 61 years ago. Today I am planning on touring the town with my Impulse Buying Filter firmly in place. I just want to get a feel of an old west mining town.

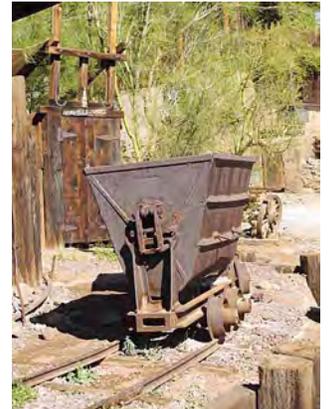


These are my own photographs. I could have found lots to import from the internet. However, I wanted this diary page to have my own emotional feel.

Walter Knott and his wife Cordelia, founders of Knott's Berry Farm in Buena Park were homesteaded at nearby Newberry Springs. When he was a young man, Walter Knott worked the mines in Calico, an experience that stayed with him all his life. Some 40 years later he went back (1951) -- and bought the town. Some of the buildings he moved to Buena Park, California, as an attraction to bring people in to his wife's chicken restaurant.



These buildings eventually became the center of one of the most famous tourist theme parks in the world, Knott's Berry Farm. The buildings he left behind in Calico, however, became just as important, to him and to the world. He restored the town and created a place where travelers can step back in time to experience the gold rush days, and learn how people lived during this exciting time.



Some of the miner's shacks



How would you like to wash with these?



A visit to the dentist

Calico population ups and downs:

- 1881 - 40
- 1882 - 300
- 1887 - 1,200
- 1888 - 500
- 1889 - 800
- 1890 - 80
- 1893 - 300
- 1951 - 10



How would you like to take a bath in this?



I love history, so it was pretty cool to imagine what the town must have been like back in the day.

Tomorrow I will revisit the town to see what I can spend money on. You are again invited to come along with me. Thanks for traveling with me today.

- - Earl

In 1966, Knott donated the town to San Bernardino County, and Calico became a County Regional Park.