

Earl's Diary - Friday - January 31, 2014

Hello to all my Loyal Readers, wherever you may be.

I was awakened by the pitter patter of rain on the roof of The Peanut. I don't think it rained hard or very long. It was just enough to hold down the dust. This morning, as I looked out the window, blue sky was showing. Last night I was sure glad I piled on the extra blankets! There appears to be more snow on the nearby mountains.



Today is going to be a sightseeing day. You are invited to come along with me as I tour Manzanar Relocation Camp, just up the road from Lone Pine. I spent all afternoon looking at exhibits in the visitor center and then touring the grounds. This will be your history lesson for today.



Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941, led the United States into World War II and radically changed the lives of 120,000 men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry living in the United States. In February 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 authorizing the Secretary of War to establish Military Areas and to remove from those areas anyone who might threaten the war effort. Without due process, the government gave everyone of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast only days to decide what to do with their houses, farms, businesses, and other possessions.

Ten war relocation centers were built in remote deserts, plains, and swamps of seven states; Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming. Manzanar, located in the Owens Valley of California between the Sierra Nevada of the west and the Inyo mountains on the east, was typical in many ways of the 10 camps.

About two-thirds of all Japanese Americans interned at Manzanar were American citizens. by birth.



My first stop upon entering was the Visitor Center. The site was established to preserve the stories of the internment of nearly 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II and to serve as a reminder to this and future generations of the fragility of American civil liberties. The center tells excellent stories through exhibits and photographs.



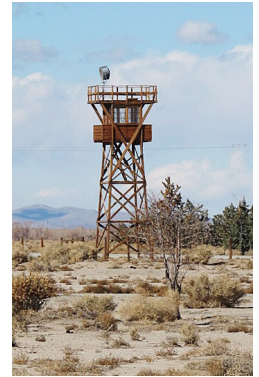




An entire wall with names of all who were interned at Manzanar



The 500-acre housing section was surrounded by barbed wire and eight guard towers with searchlights and patrolled by military police. By September 1942 more than 10,000 Japanese Americans were crowded into 504 barracks organized into 36 blocks. There was little or no privacy in the barracks -- and not much outside. The 200 to 400 people living in each block, consisting of 14 barracks each divided into four rooms, shared men's and women's toilets and showers, a laundry room, and a mess hall. Any combination of eight individuals was allotted a 20 by 25 foot room. An oil stove, a single hanging light bulb, cots, blankets, and mattresses filled with straw were the only furnishing furnished.



Following the stop at the visitor center, I took a 3.2 mile loop road around to the various sites. The National Park Service has reconstructed two of the barracks and one mess hall from Block 14.







What was life like? Coming from Los Angeles and other communities in California and Washington, Manzanar's internees were unaccustomed to the harsh desert environment. Summer temperatures soared as high as 110 degrees. In winter, temperatures frequently plunged below freezing. Throughout the year strong winds swept through the valley, often blanketing the camp with dust and sand.

Internees established churches, temples, and boys and girls clubs. They developed sports, music, dance, and other recreational programs; built gardens and ponds; and published a newspaper, the *Manzanar Free Press*.

Most internees worked in the camp. They dug irrigation canals and ditches, tended acres of fruits and vegetables, and raised chickens, hogs, and cattle. They made clothes and furniture for themselves. They served as mess hall workers, doctors, nurses, police officers, firefighters, and teachers.

My tour of the grounds continued along a well graveled road. Most of the camp is bare - except for the desert plants which have reclaimed the area.



Remains of the orchard



All photographs by Earl





When Manzanar War Relocation Center closed in 1945, most of the buildings were sold as scrap lumber or moved to private property throughout the Owens Valley. Besides the original sentry posts and auditorium, most of what remains consists of foundations, concrete slabs, and garden features. The National Park Service adaptively restored the auditorium as an interpretive center with exhibits and a film. Two barracks, a mess hall, a guard tower, and some rock gardens are in the process of being restored.



Cemetery--very few internees are buried here



Original cement slabs



Water pipes still visible



Original ponds and gardens are being excavated and restored by Park Service



Well, dear readers, this has been a most interesting and educational day. Oh oh! Here comes my editorial. This episode in our country's history has to rank up there near the top of embarrassing moments. Our treatment of Native Americans is also near the top. Let's not forget turning Owens Valley into a desert by Los Angeles. We have another one coming up - Our Governor Brown wants to dig large tunnels under the Central Valley Delta. The purpose is to ship water to Southern California again! Imagine that! Now they want to make a desert out of Northern California! Nuf said!

I got home just in time to heat my dinner and work on this diary page. I hear the wind blowing through the trees. Every once-in-awhile a blast runs into The Peanut. No worries, however. The Peanut has stood up to blasts before.

Tomorrow I have more sightseeing to do. Thanks for coming along with me today. Bye for now. - - Earl