



In Search of Eldorado

Link to the Eldorado Song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VczD1olutQ8>



Day 12
Tuesday,
January 14th

China Date Ranch
To
Mojave National
Preserve
Weather
30's to 60's and sunny

Hello to Family & Friends

Those gravel roads in Death Valley sure were tough on the RV. LOL

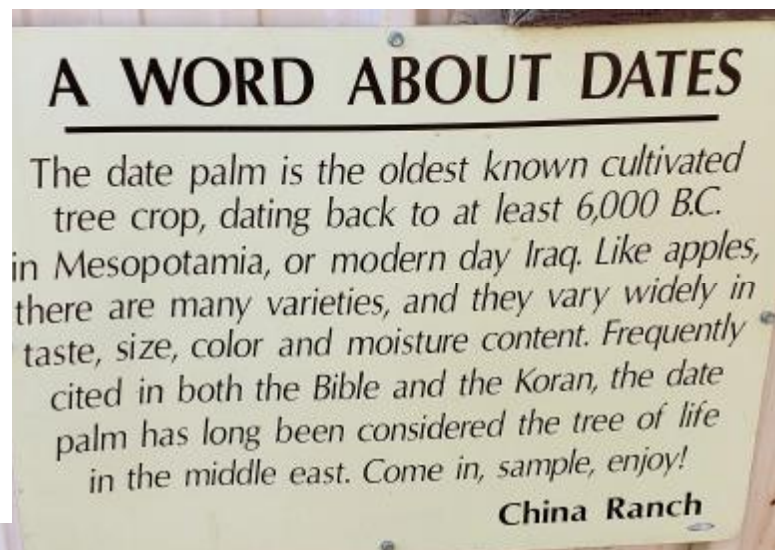
China Ranch was on my list but as a maybe since it was kind of off the beaten path. But it was a safe overnight parked on their gravel parking lot. The coyotes didn't keep me awake. I slept in long pants, t-shirt, insulated socks and a hooded sweatshirt under a sheet, two blankets and two bedrolls. As my mom would have said "snug as a bug in a rug." Good thing, the inside temp was 38 degrees when I hopped out of bed. I was not cold at all.

I did a short hike in the morning and wandered around until they opened at 9:00 and I could thank them for their hospitality.

Even though I ran the RV engine several times before bed and after I woke up to warm the house up, I had plenty of gas left. But my first stop is still Baker, California. I need food, milk, gas, air and maybe to dump the holding tank.

Just a couple warnings: today is a day of ups and downs; and there are a lot of plaque pictures.

But first, a little tour of the China Date Ranch.



In Search of Eldorado

By Edgar Allan Poe

Gaily bedight,
A gallant knight,
In sunshine and in shadow,
Had journeyed long,
Singing a song,
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old—
This knight so bold—
And o'er his heart a shadow—
Fell as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength
Failed him at length,
He met a pilgrim shadow—
'Shadow,' said he,
'Where can it be—
This land of Eldorado?'

'Over the Mountains
Of the Moon,
Down the Valley of the Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,'
The shade replied,—
'If you seek for Eldorado!'



First Fronds

When young clone trees begin to emerge from the sides of the parent trees, their first leaves, or fronds, are frequently squeezed and deformed into these interesting looking shapes and patterns.

They can be used in floral arrangements, wall hangings, or abstract art creations. Or, they can be used to beat your children or pets. Hell, we don't care what you use them for as long as you pay for them first! Be careful when selecting them, they are prickly and will bite. _____ each.



KIT CARSON SLEPT HERE

Honest! In the spring of 1844 Carson was the lead scout for John Fremont and a party of U.S. Soldiers returning from California traveling east along the Old Spanish Trail to Santa Fe. The group spent the night, watering and grazing their horses along willow creek. In his journal Fremont notes that this was the best grazing since entering the Mojave Desert, and that the date shakes were excellent.

(OK, we made that last part up.) **China Ranch**



Speaking of the Old Spanish Trail, I will be following it for a few miles before turning south.

On to Baker, California. What a town. I searched for a grocery store and the only one I could find is the Baker Market. I quote from a review on Yelp 'Baker Market is a store full of absolute crap. It costs more than at most places. The food selection is terrible. Mostly Junk...' and it continues from there. I walked in with my reusable grocery bag, walked around looking for produce and/or meat. Never saw anyone in the store but myself, and walked out.

Most everybody knows I am a big 1% milk drinker. Since I am from Wisconsin, the dairy state, that seems appropriate. Whenever I travel I usually have a hard time finding milk, cheese, etc., or at least the selection is one tenth of that at home. Here in

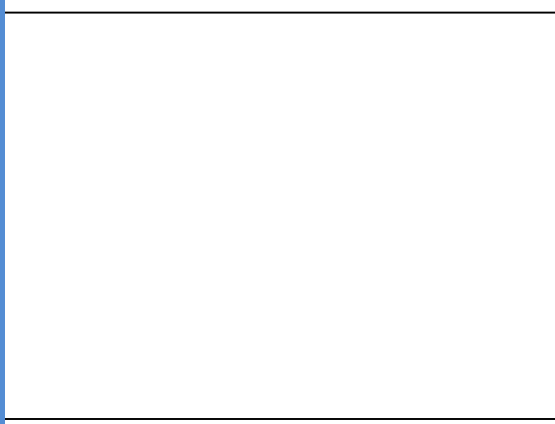


California, the new dairy capital of the US, you'd think they would have a great selection and no problem finding what I want. One grocery store and five gas stations later I finally found half gallons of 2% milk. No meat or veggies in town.



Alien Fresh Jerky. Quite the place. I asked the girl at the counter where they go grocery shopping around here. Her response was "Las Vegas." You have got to be kidding me. Vegas is 94 miles away. Can you imagine having to drive 188 miles to the grocery store and back?

Yup, that's the building



This must be the summer stand out back.

The Alien Fresh Jerky Store

Entrepreneur and Business Man Luis Ramallo with his family first envisioned Alien Fresh Jerky in the year 2000. On May 5th, 2002, the store was established in the community of Baker in California, approximately 100 miles due south west of Las Vegas, Nevada. Originally intended as a stop for jerky, drinks, and an assortment of snacks and goodies, the store has become a landmark stop on I-15 for travelers going to Las Vegas and Los Angeles.

Today, more than 300,000 people visit Alien Fresh Jerky annually, and that number is still growing!

Alien Fresh Jerky Store



Pool Bar Office



Corporate Headquarters

As the first corporate building to be built in Baker, this will house the business operations offices as well as an ample conference room, break area, plenty of office space, and be a part of the property theme by having a unique, out-of-this-world appearance, very futuristic. The roof will display several alien hovercrafts that will from time to time display smoke and sound, and at night, will also include an awesome light display!

The Future of Alien Fresh Jerky Baker, CA

Mothership Hotel



The Mothership Hotel

Located in the heart of Baker, California, The Mothership Hotel is set to be a one-of-a-kind experience. Featuring 32 uniquely themed rooms, each is an experience on its own. And for those curious to see how a space ship works, the Mothership tour is sure to expand the imagination!

Make sure you read the sign below

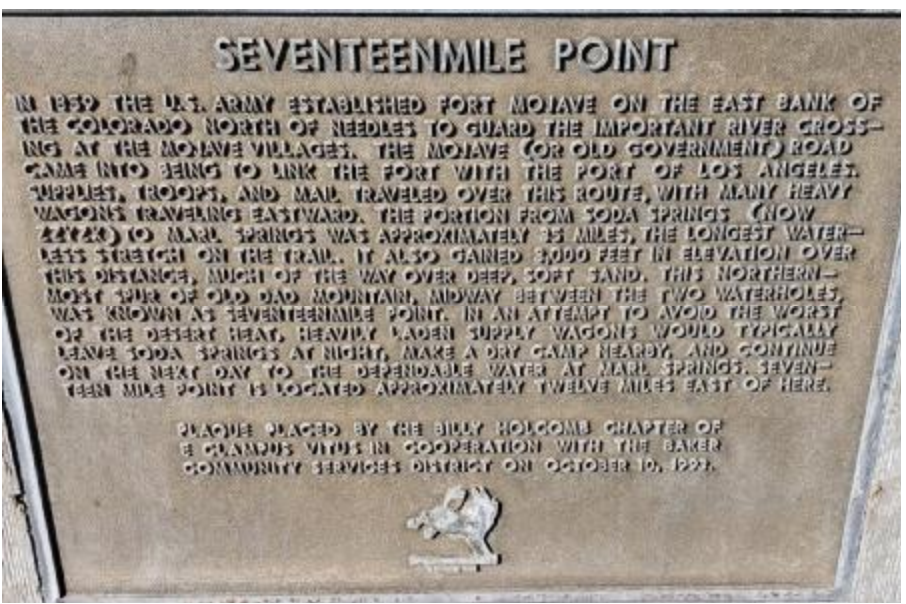
**NO TRESPASSING
CONSTRUCTION
SITE FOR
UFO HOTEL
YOU WILL BE
ABDUCTED**





The selection top right is my favorite. This guy definitely has a weird sense of humor.

Back to food. Since there isn't much in the pantry, and I was near what could be described as civilization, I ate at.....SHOCKER....Arby's for lunch. I have the date muffins and bread for breakfast, peanut butter and crackers for lunch and cheese and crackers for dinner. I also have Alien Fresh Jerky (only one bag for \$12) and beef sticks for snacking on. That will have to sustain me for 2-3 days at least.

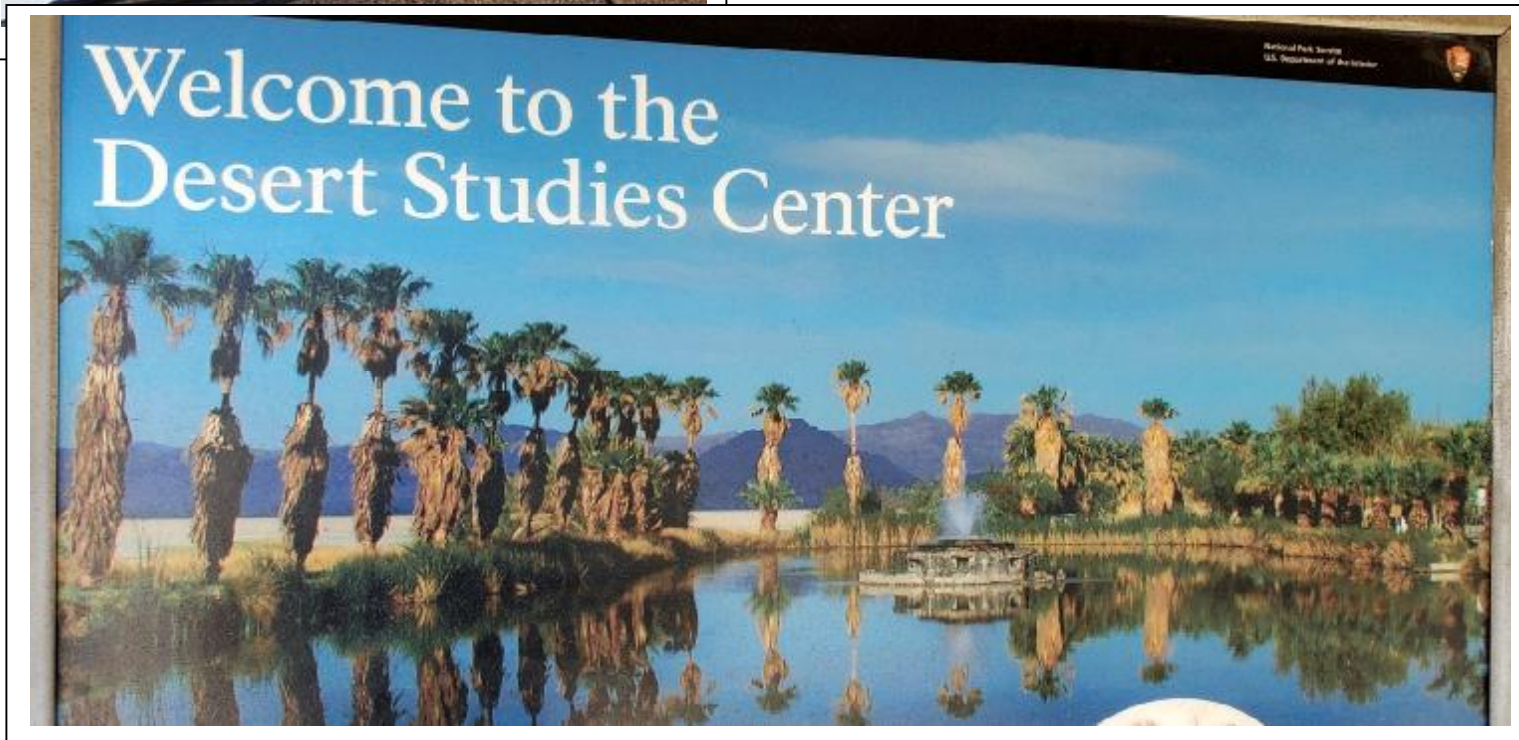




Pronounced zis-icks. Now known as Soda Springs. I don't have internet so I can only go by memory of Roadside America, that the person who named it wanted to be sure it was the last city on any list.



I don't think this fella was having any luck extracting food from that plastic bag. I know how he feels.

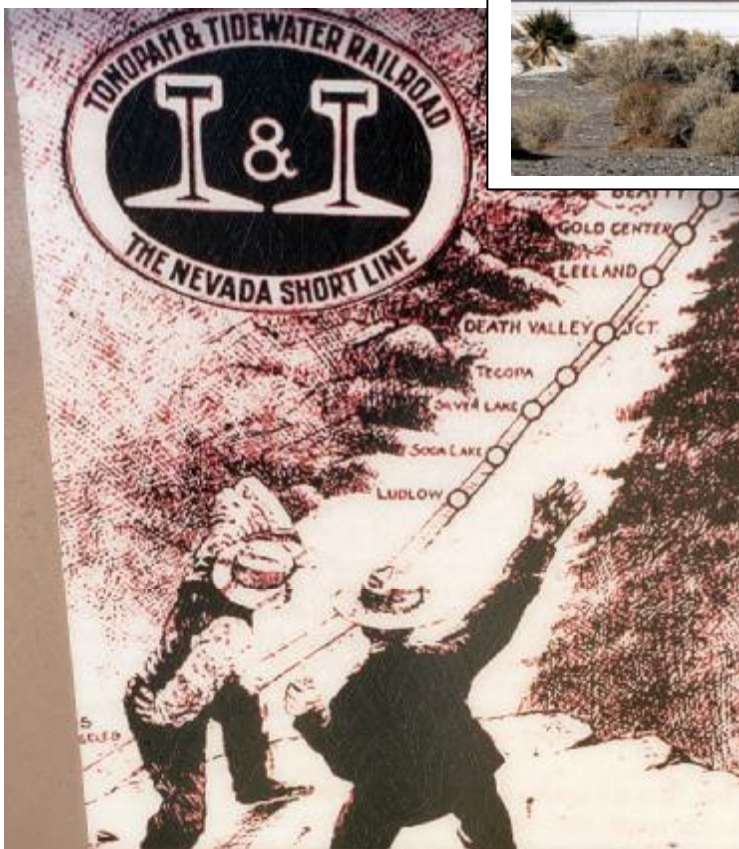


Scientists and students from around the world visit this California State University field station on the edge of Soda Dry Lake to learn about the Mojave Desert. Weekend extended education courses are open to the public.

Explore Zzyzx

Many of the roads, buildings, ponds, and plantings date from the Curtis Springer era, when a radio preacher from Los Angeles developed a religious health resort here. A nature trail circles the pond and includes exhibits about the area.

The grade for the railroad



T & T Railroad

Although abandoned in 1940, you can still see the grade for the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad stretching across Soda Dry Lake. The T&T line was developed in 1907 by Francis "Borax" Smith to carry ore, cargo, and passengers between desert mining districts and the main railway connection at Ludlow.



The Soda Works

The remnants of rectangular evaporating ponds still visible on the dry lake bed were part of a soda extraction facility operating between 1907 and 1912. Compounds such as soda used in laundry products, baking soda, and caustic soda were extracted from lake brine and shipped on the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad.

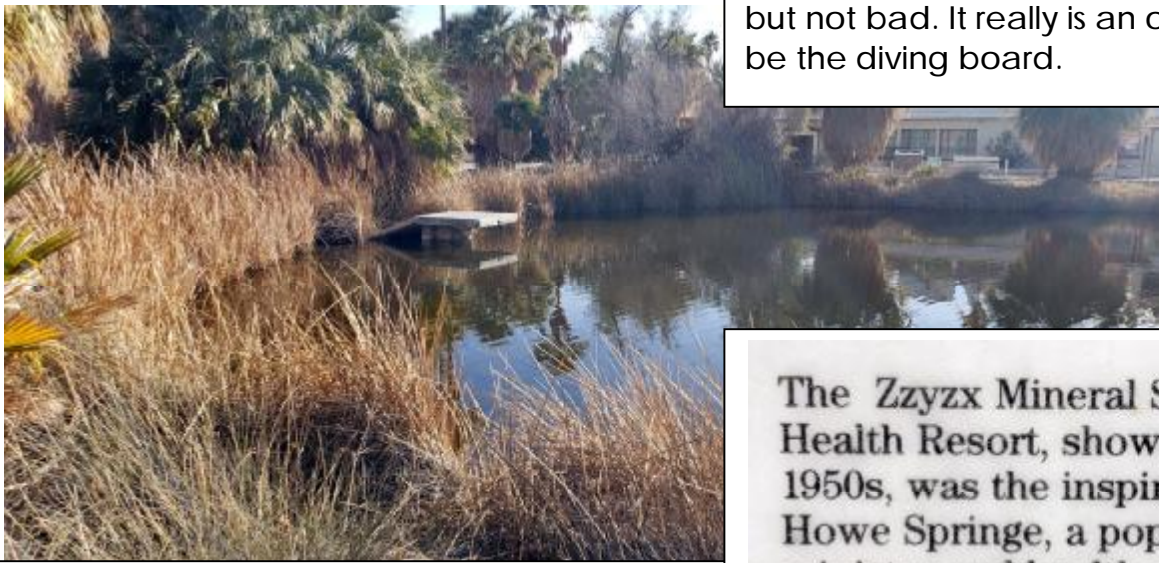


I guess the preacher went a little nuts on building here in Zzyzx. He thought the place would become another Hot Springs, Arkansas. Left and below are unpaved and unfinished boulevards





Not quite as nice as the same picture above, but not bad. It really is an oasis. Below must be the diving board.



The Zzyzx Mineral Springs and Health Resort, shown here in the 1950s, was the inspiration of Curtis Howe Springe, a popular radio minister and health promoter.



Mohave Indians guided the first settlers to Soda Springs.
Photograph courtesy Mojave River Valley Museum

Wagon trains stopped at the oasis on their way to San Bernardino, California.

Remnants of the Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad (1905-1940) are still visible at Soda Springs.



A Traveler's Rest

The waters here at Soda Springs have sustained people of many cultures for thousands of years. Nomadic Chemehuevi people and the agrarian Mohave Indians visited these springs during hunting, gathering, and trading trips through the area. Their travels created an Indian trade route across the desert.

In 1776, Father Francisco Garcés, guided by Mohave Indian traders, was the first European to enter this area. By the 1860s, the Indian footpath became a wagon road for freight and passenger service between San Bernardino, California, and Prescott, Arizona. Several colorful accounts of travel on the "Mojave Road" fill the historical record, with mixed reviews of the palatability of the water at Soda Springs.

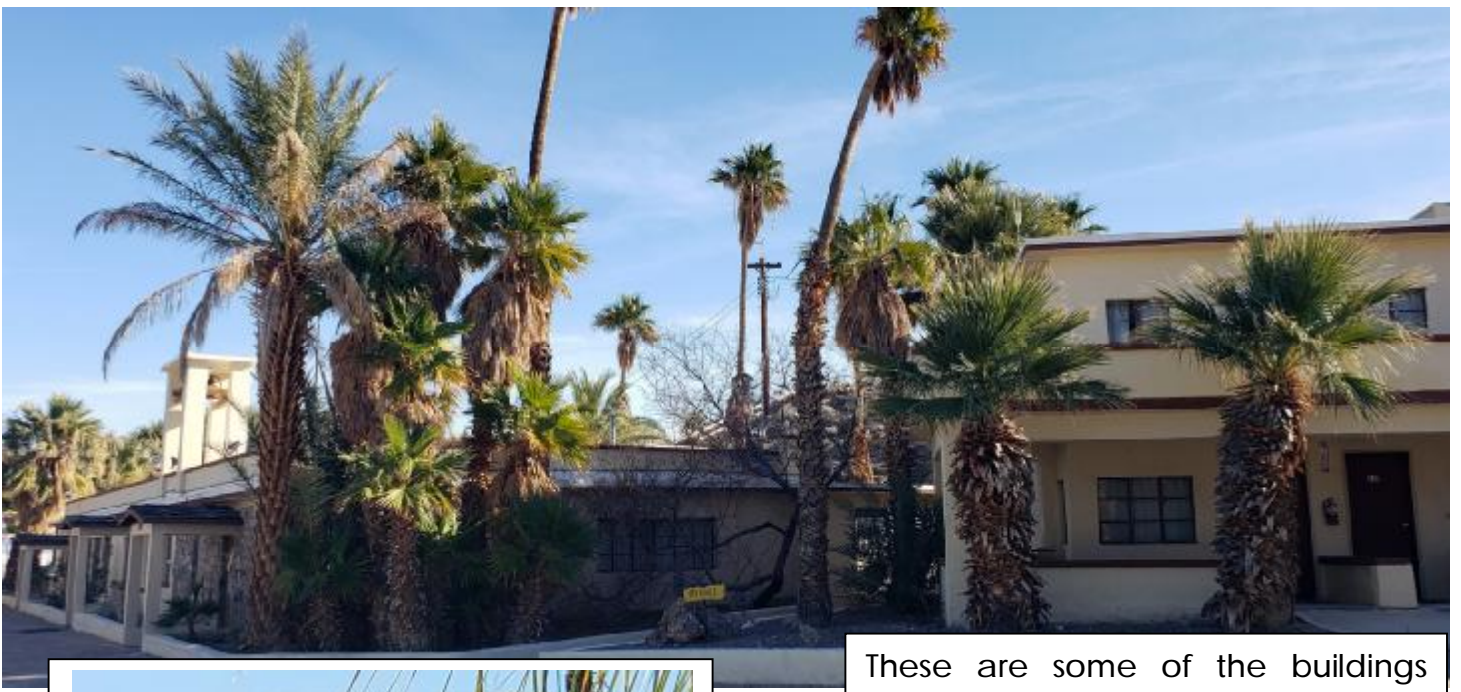
**Mojave
National Preserve**

**National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior**

Soda Springs grew to include the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad, an evaporative salt works, and a small religious colony by the early 1900s. The Zzyzx Mineral Springs and Health Resort opened in the mid-1940s, and remained in operation until 1974. Today the former resort houses California State University's Desert Studies Center.



The dry lake bed



These are some of the buildings used for classrooms



Kind of says it all for California, don't you think?





Mojave National Preserve

Depot Days: Past and Present

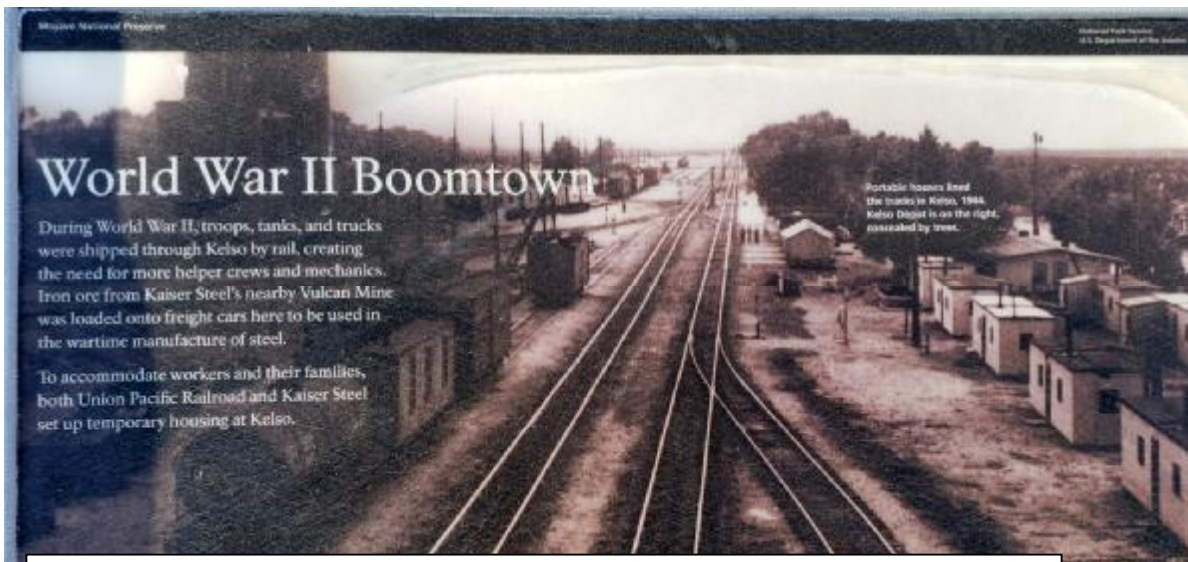
Built in 1924, the Kelso Depot housed a train station, ticket and telegraph office, restaurant, reading room, and dormitory rooms for railroad employees. It was often called the Kelso Club House, a Union Pacific Railroad term for employee boarding and recreational facilities.

As railroad technology improved and fewer personnel were needed, the Depot became obsolete. It was closed in 1985, and Union Pacific planned to raze the building. Concerned citizens intervened and the building was saved. It was renovated and reopened as a National Park Service Visitor Center in October, 2005.

**Kelso Depot Visitor Center is Closed on
Tuesdays and Wednesdays**

**Hours of Operation:
10 am to 5 am
Thursday through Monday**

Can you believe it? I arrived at 4 p.m. Too bad it's Tuesday. They don't even have any brochures or maps in a box on the porch you can take with you. The only map I have is a picture of the map in a display case which doesn't show any of the hiking trails or off road campsites. The only way I can find that information is online and guess what? No cell phone or internet access. I did get a connection while I was leaning against the visitor center wall, but there is no description of the hiking trails or where they're located. Even the 'download PDF of campsites' does not tell you where they are. Well, they had some nice plaques nearby.



Kelso Jail

From the mid-1940s to 1985, this two-cell strap-steel jail was used to confine drunks and other unruly individuals for a night or two. The jail's original location was west of the Kelso Depot on the far side of Kelbaker Road; the jail's cement pad foundation can still be found there.

The jail was removed from Kelso in 1985, the same year that Union Pacific closed the Kelso Depot. It ended up in the backyard of Ron and Kay Mahoney in Barstow, California. Two decades later, Kay Mahoney donated it to the National Park Service when the Kelso Depot reopened as a visitor center in 2005.



I have a list of 15 things to visit or hike here in Mojave. I can't believe the visitor center is not open every day. The BLM office in Needles is about 2 hours away. Just looking at Google maps I see several road closures of roads I was planning to take just south of Mojave. Time to re-route and re-think and re-plan.



As I drove back northeast looking for a campsite for the night I kept seeing the orange glow in my side mirror. I wanted to give my search until 5:00, then head back to a railroad gravel pit I passed earlier. At the stroke of 5 I found a dirt road leading off of the dirt road that I was on. I walked it for about 100 yards and found a campsite. It even has a fire ring. No firewood for me though. So I pulled on in amongst the Joshua trees and settled down for the night.



As I said at the start, a day of ups and downs.

I think I will head towards Needles. The route takes me past the Hole-in-the-Wall Visitor Center, which I think is only open on weekends, but maybe they have maps available. While in Needles I can jump across the Colorado River to Arizona and fill up on cheaper gas. Then I will head back here armed with the knowledge, and maps, I need to have a good time. Needles will hopefully have a grocery store too.

I see one of my items is already a goner. The Mitchell Caverns State Park, contained completely within the Mojave National Preserve, only has tours on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Reservations are required and must be made by phone on Mondays only. Easy come, easy go. It is only a state park, so it can't be that great, right?

Another oddity here is Castle Mountains National Monument. It also is contained completely within the Preserve and there appear to be no roads into it. I was hoping to get close and hike in. This baffles me. Set aside an area of land for preservation. Make it a National Monument. This means it must really be something to see. Then don't give anyone access to the site. Our government at work.

I forgot one of the really bad downs. I was getting ready to leave Zzyzx and wanted to fill up my water bottle. I keep gallons of water from the Brita pitcher at home in a storage compartment accessible only from the outside. But I can't find the key ring. It has a bright yellow stretchy band with keys for all the exterior storage compartments, the RV house door, the bike lock, the bike battery lock, the bike rack hitch and something else. I did not want all those keys on the same ring with the ignition key and have to haul them around all over the place. The routine is when I need them, I put the stretchy band around my wrist. It comes off to open or lock whatever I need then goes back on the wrist. When I get back in the RV there is this jangle of keys hanging from my wrist and I take them off and put them above the visor next to the binoculars. I searched the RV from stem to stern, twice. I stood and worked backwards over the past two days when I last used the keys. Now, it's possible that I hit a bump and they fell down as has happened in the past. But if that occurs, they fall in my lap. Last time I used them was to fill water bottles at Sidewinder Canyon in Death Valley. Without those keys I can't access the gallons of water; I can't add water to the tank; I can't empty the holding tanks; I can't get the bike off the rack; I can't get to water hoses or sewer pipes; no tools, tables, grill, etc. I am ready to call the China Ranch and ask them to check the parking lot. I am ready to beg a ranger in Death Valley to check the parking lot of the gravel pit for Sidewinder Canyon. I sit in the driver's seat and grab the phone. Then I spy a bit of yellow through a slot in the area above the visor. I remove the binoculars and reach all the way in, and there they are. I think with the bumpy roads the binoculars had been tossed up and down and the keys slowly slid under them. I was already calculating how much it would cost me to have a locksmith make new keys from the locks.

A bullet dodged.

Until next time.....