



# In Search of Eldorado



Day 27  
Thursday  
January 31st  
Quartzite  
To  
Near Yuma

Weather  
*Great today. 70's and sunny*

## Hello to Family & Friends

What a day!

I checked out of my campground around 11:15 a.m. after I helped the RV take a dump, filled the water and washed the floor. My plan is to take as many of the dirt & gravel roads into the Kofa Wildlife Refuge as possible and do some hiking along each one. Then find a good spot in the Refuge for overnight.

Since my GPS was set for Palm Canyon I missed Cattail Rd. Palm Canyon was then 7 miles of dirt & gravel to the trailhead parking area. This is the first real hiking I have done on this trip and I was looking forward to it.

About 4 miles prior to the trailhead is a little shelter with the info plaques below.



## Eldorado

By Edgar Allen 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!'

## Mining...

Gold and silver mines were established in the mountainous areas of the Refuge, and lead and copper mines in the foothills and outwash plains. Since the middle of the 19th Century, mining interests have been active in these lands, including some claims that are still open today.

Hmmm....I was under the impression the Yuma Proving Ground was a test area for vehicles. Maps said Chrysler and GM both have proving grounds near Yuma. I hope I don't step on any mines, military or gold. Although a gold mine might not be too bad.

## ...and the Military

The US Army has been here since Fort Yuma was established at the Colorado River crossing in 1850. During World War II, an area near the Colorado River at Laguna Dam was used for testing equipment and munitions, and designated the Yuma Test Branch. General George Patton found the desert ideal for training troops for the North African campaigns.

After the War, the Army continued testing here, renaming the area Yuma Proving Ground. YPG surrounds the Refuge on three sides, in a U shape. In times of war, Refuge lands can be reincorporated into the Proving Ground.

The remains of both mining and military activities make Kofa an area to explore cautiously.



Nice view

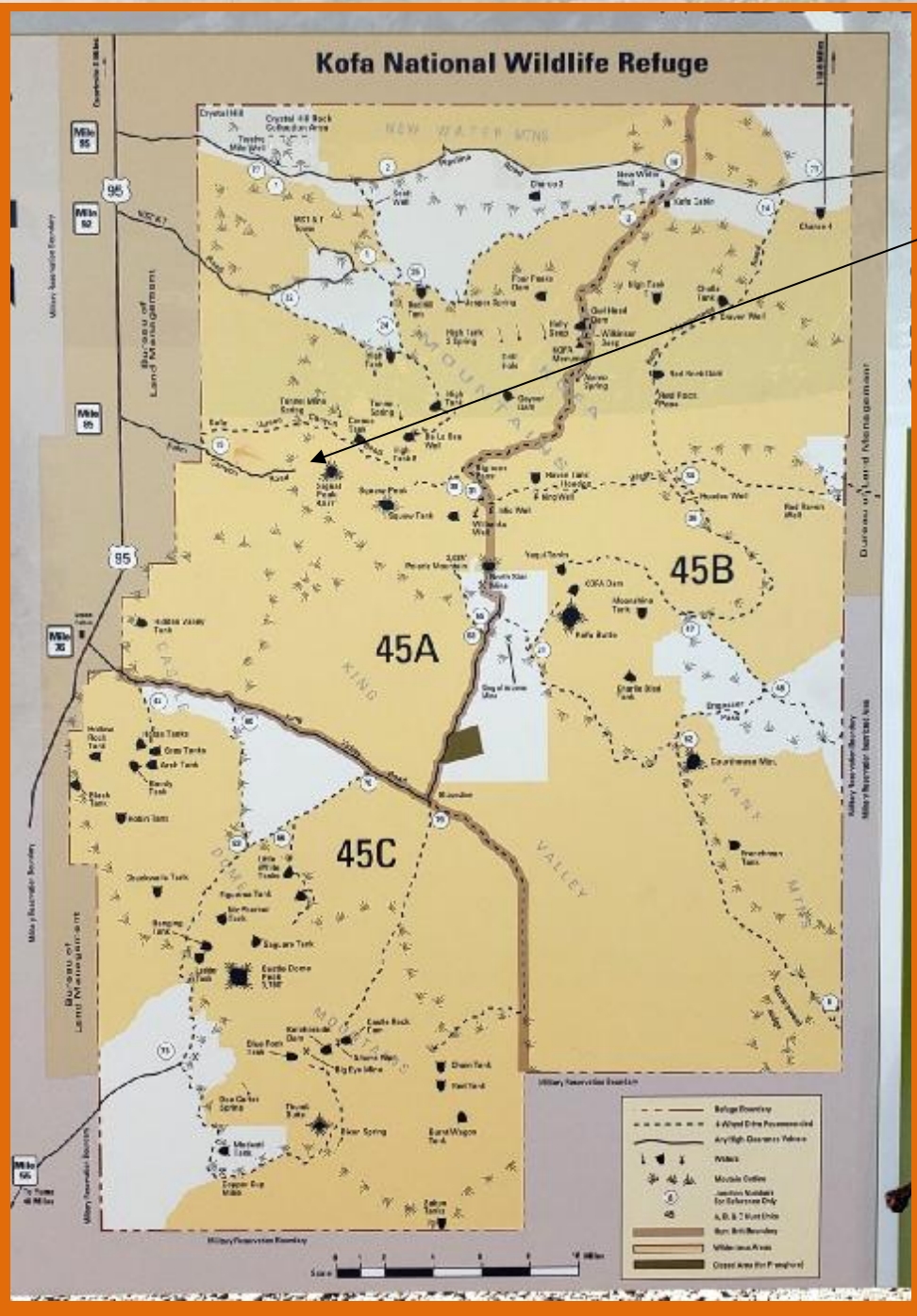


# A Legacy of Debris and Danger

It is dangerous to ignore the hazards that remain in Kofa, the legacies of industries gone bust, and necessary military testing. Some potentially devastating debris remains here—unexpected in a refuge but present nonetheless.

Numerous abandoned mines throughout the Refuge have left vertical shafts, drift tunnels, and open pits that can be harmful to the inexperienced visitor. Do not enter them or explore them at close range—be safe and stay clear.

Past military exercises and equipment testing on Refuge property have left unexploded ammunition, weapons, or other ordnance behind. Encounters are not frequent, but if you come across a shell or something suspicious, **do not** pick it up, handle it, or explore it in any way. Make note of where you saw it and follow the 3Rs of explosives safety shown at right.



Follow the arrow to my destination



You can just see the road in the center of the photo, curving its way into the valley.



This one is kind of funny. It's a panoramic shot from the trailhead. Notice how long the pickup truck is? He was moving in to park as I took the photo.

# DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP

**D**esert bighorn sheep once inhabited much of the Sonoran Desert in the United States and Mexico. By the late 1930s, excessive hunting along with grazing competition from cattle eliminated the sheep from much of their historic range. Kofa National Wildlife Refuge was established on January 25, 1939 by Executive Order 8039. The conservation of desert bighorn sheep was the driving factor in the creation of the refuge.

No animal is better known for its territorial battles than the bighorn sheep. The majestic rams charge each other banging their massive horns to defend or attempt to capture the breeding rights to bands of ewes. The sound of clashing horns is most likely to be heard ringing in the mountains in the late summer, the primary breeding season.



Historic range of the Desert Bighorn Sheep.

These stocky, but agile mammals feed on a variety of brush, grasses and leafy annual plants. Bighorn lambs are born throughout the year with the peak of the lambing season occurring from December to March. New lambs weigh 7.5 lbs. and can follow their mother anywhere within 2 or 7 days after birth. Both male and female sheep begin growing some curly coats in life. Males will grow to 100-200 lbs. Adult females average 103 to 140 lbs.

These magnificent animals survive in strongholds like Kofa National Wildlife Refuge where controlled hunting and increased water supplies promote their increase. Gradually the sheep are being moved in small bands back to their former ranges throughout the mountains of the southwest.



I would like to see a bighorn sheep again

# PALM CANYON

Millions of years ago the southwestern United States resembled a broad plain with scattered marshes and streams, studded with mountain ranges and erupting volcanoes. Some violent eruptions left huge, collapsed pits (calderas) where mountains once stood. Scientists suggest that two immense calderas formed in this area covering the surrounding marshes with hundreds of feet of ash, rocks, cinders and lava. Then, about 25,000,000 years ago, after a long quiet period, more earthquakes and eruptions shook the ground. The previously-formed rock layers cracked, split open, tilted and lifted. The Kofa Mountains probably formed during this period of violent change.

Palm Canyon, the deep gash in the rhyolite block before you, is the product of thousands of years of erosion. Erosive forces continue to deepen and widen the canyon.

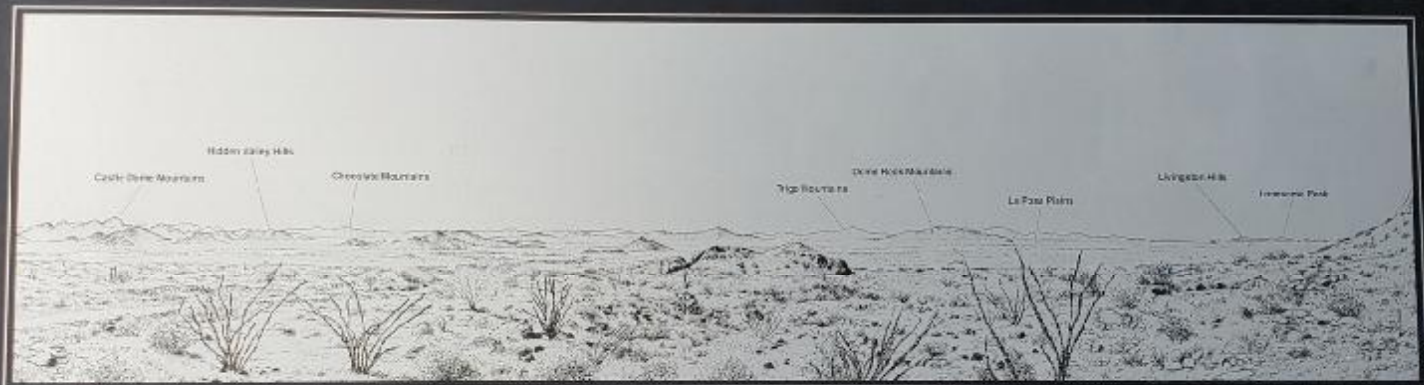


For a closer look at Palm Canyon and the palm trees growing here, walk the half-mile trail to the canyon's mid-section. The Palm Canyon Trail begins near the top of the parking area. Be sure to pick up a trail guide.



The two plaques above and the one below were at the trailhead.

# THE SONORAN DESERT



The Sonoran Desert, one of four desert regions in North America, covers well over 119,000 square miles. Before you, the La Posa Plains stretches 20 miles westward to the Dome Rock mountains, and extend northward over 100 miles. This region is a virtual oven, where rainfall rarely exceeds 6 inches annually and the intense sun often sends temperatures spiraling to 120°F or more.



Yet the Sonoran Desert teems with plants and wildlife. Around this observation point a variety of small trees, brush, grasses and annual plants grow in scattered clumps. From this point, fingers of brush-lined washes stretch across the plain. Indeed, to motorists driving on U.S. 95, the landscape appears covered with plant life.

While most desert wildlife avoid the hot sun, an occasional ground squirrel, a few lizards and several kinds of birds may be spotted throughout the day. After dark, the desert comes alive as the majority of wildlife move about.





Palm Canyon

I consider myself to be somewhat of a decent follower of trails. If you think logically you can determine the next turn in the path; following cairns I mastered pretty well in Canyonlands and Arches National Parks. But this trail? The first ½ mile was not too bad, simple rocks outlining the trail. As I moved further up the canyon the trail seemed to split and go every which way. I climbed up pretty far before I saw a cairn. I would stop every once in the while and look up at the cliffs for Bighorn Sheep. I ended up following the wash up the mountain. I had read that this was easier than the path. As I scrambled over boulders I could imagine that any Bighorn Sheep that were watching were having a good laugh. There were some parts where I looked back down the way I had just climbed up and said to myself “just how the heck am I going to get back down that way?”

Soon, Paul Simon’s song SLIP SLIDIN’ AWAY began running through my head.





I was near the end of the canyon when I stopped to take the photo above. The end of the road is the parking lot. You cannot even tell there are vehicles there.

In the photo to the left I was trying to show the path I followed to get here. Path? What path. I created my own path. Unfortunately, I was not the only idiot because I passed other footprints along the way.

I finally stopped and looked up at the sheer walls of the end of the canyon. No place left to go. Maybe I missed the path as it turned into another side valley? So I made my way across to the next wash. Nothing there either. Forget this. It might be dark by the time I make my way back down to the RV so I better get started.

A short time later I misjudged the distance from my foot to the rock below as I was backing down a boulder. I was stretching with my right foot and that darn rock was just a little further away than I thought it was.

Oops, down I went.

I landed hard, mostly on my left side. I could almost hear the Bighorn Sheep laughing at this stupid human. Lucky one of them didn't fall off the cliffs in a fit. Mostly scrapes and scratches. No broken bones, and I must have landed on a rock with my left thigh. Ouch.

Well, no one was going to come and get me. I took another look down that boulder filled wash and started down.

If you're squeamish at all over blood and cuts and scrapes, skip the next page and go to the end.



Left hand



Left arm



Left leg



I fell two more times on the way down, but nothing like the first time. The second time I fell into a bush and, of course, this is the desert and every bush has thorns. I have not removed my t-shirt yet and taken a look at the back and shoulders, probably full of tiny holes and tears. The third time I just sat backwards onto a boulder. I would have been in dire straits without my hiking poles.

As I neared the end of the trail I could see a couple below me. Once I caught up we stopped and chatted for a bit. Seems the trail is a loop and I missed a sign pointing the other direction to the actual palms in the canyon. Ok, so I'm not Daniel Boone. She actually showed me pictures of the palms. Talk about rubbing salt in my wounds.

I drove to a more level spot and washed the damaged areas as well as I could and took some aspirin. I was wondering if I had busted my little finger or the side of my hand as there was quite a bit of pain.

I decided to drive straight to Yuma. Maybe there was a walk-in clinic I could visit and at least get it professionally cleaned up. But on the drive the pain started waning. I actually felt pretty good. Then I stopped at a gas station to buy some triple anti-biotic and I realized how sore my thigh really is. But since I was feeling ok I found the free BLM Land campsite below and set up camp.



Looks like I am all alone, right? So wrong. I was lucky to find an empty spot. There must have been 75-100 campers here. The website states a 25' maximum. There are some 40'ers here; big 5<sup>th</sup> wheels; tents. It's crazy.

Thus ends another day. Like I said in the beginning, 'what a day!' About the last 30 minutes or so as I write this my left wrist has started to hurt. I think it is just because of the way I have to hold it to type, but hope it is nothing worse. I already broke this wrist once before. A couple more pain pills and a good nights sleep will help considerably.

I know what you're thinking, I should have stuck to the bike and left the hiking to the other idiots. I planned to do both on this adventure, and today really was an adventure.

If I can ride the bike tomorrow without too much pain, I will take the RV into Yuma and bike around to the sights I want to see.

Wow, I hear rain coming down on the roof. Good, the RV could use a wash.

Until tomorrow.....