



Our Journey to Saline Warm Springs

By Marc Welter and Sonya Robinson



I first heard of Saline Valley 12 years ago in 1992. At that time Sonya and I were living in Ventura County, over a day's drive away in the other direction, close to the ocean. Previously I had lived in all climes, from Montana to Texas to Florida and California, and I had purposefully rejected any thought of visiting a desert region.

“Not for me!” I said. “What could there possibly be in the middle of a desert for me to see or do... especially Death Valley?”



However, some of my naturist buddies invited me (coerced more like it) into coming with them on my first overnight campout to Saline. I reluctantly came along and soon realized how wrong my assumptions had been. I was completely surprised if not overwhelmed by the beauty of the place, and exposed myself to a whole new world of discovery.



The Valley itself offers a wide variety of side trips you can take, including hikes to a basin full of natural crystal formations, sand dunes, old homesteads and abandoned mines. Nearby is “Scotty’s Castle”, a famous Death Valley tourist attraction, and a dry lakebed with its famous “moving rocks” (as seen on National Geographic.) Bring your hiking boots (many of these beautiful areas are 4-5 miles from camp) and/or a “dune buggy” for local travel. Just make sure the “buggy” is licensed as the ranger will give you a citation if there are no plates. Gee, did I forget to mention the hot tubs? There are two campgrounds to enjoy. The first one you will see, called the “Lower Springs,” is where the “local residents” hang out. It has improvements such as a lawn area, goldfish pond, picnic tables, a library, a large fire ring, three “hot tubs” and a source spring. This lower camp is usually more populated than the Upper camp, so usually we travel the extra half mile and have our pick of campsites at the Upper Springs. Hopefully you have arrived in early afternoon so there is time





to establish your camp and have a late lunch/early dinner before hitting the hot tubs for the first time.

Be aware: Coyotes (called “tricksters” by the locals) and wild burros often come into camp so be careful not to leave out any food or water because if they find it, they will forage through your camp while you are away! If you weren’t relaxed before, you will be shortly after settling into the warm natural waters of the tubs. The Lower tubs are obviously the social centers of the campgrounds and attracts philosophers and storytellers (some factual, some pretty far-fetched) and they often talk among themselves from dusk to dawn. They go by such colorful names as “Lizard”, “Five Mile”, “Sheepdip”, etc and these colorful personalities will catch you up on local news, recommend local places to visit and give directions, and often solve the world’s problems all in a single night! It is also a great spot for stargazing, so if you have binoculars or a telescope be sure to bring it with you.

The Upper Springs have two large concrete tubs connected by piping and valves to the source spring, thus the temperature can be regulated. Please don’t use the source spring for anything except picture-taking! There is also a hot water shower nearby and a sink to wash dishes.

The toilets are 3-sided one-holers – that’s right, no door! No, it wasn’t because the architect ran out of wood, rather he/she realized the view of the multi-colored mountain ranges and desert floor was worth contemplation, and where better to contemplate! Just to be sure, hang a hat or towel or something visible on the hook outside to advise others coming up the trail that the facility is occupied. Now that you have learned the layout of the campground and the informal rules, you are ready to just sit back and enjoy the rest of your visit. Sometimes the “Jet Jockies” from Nellis Air Force Base may give you a low-level flyby. And I mean “low-level” – you can see their faces in the cockpit! Just wave back, this is a local and harmless custom, but it is loud!

Hopefully you will have a memorable experience on your visit and become a desert enthusiast as I did over twelve years ago. I brought Sonya with me

on my second trip there two years later and she too was pleasantly surprised after being a “beach person” all her life. We both have made several trips there since, and we are planning another for this April, so we will have even more to talk about soon. If you go, we hope you will become as enchanted with Saline Springs as we are. I hope to meet all of you out there one day. And don’t forget your tire chains!

Enjoy,
“Bare Bates” Marc

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