

Dear Loyal Readers, One and All, Wherever you may be:

I have been in Yuma, Arizona for the past week. Rather than sending day by day diary pages, I am sending one dispatch with sights I have seen this week.

Monday we traveled to Bard, California. What's a Bard you ask? Bard is a community way down in the very southeastern corner of California. Bard is known for farming AND date groves. Every year when I come down here a mandatory stop at Imperial Date Gardens is a must! Date shakes are the big draw for most people. Of course,



while there, I had to purchase the 11 pound box of Medjool dates. While there, I bought a book on everything you ever wanted to know about dates. So - - Loyal Readers, here is part of your education for today.

****Dates are VERY labor intensive! Each process must be done manually.**

****Men (I guess they are all men) who work in date trees are called Palmeros. They are chosen for their fearlessness of heights, good balance, and common sense.**

****Date trees are dioecious - male or female.**

****One male tree furnishes pollen for 49 females.**

****All date seeds typically produce trees different from the parent tree. Therefore "vegetative" propagation is necessary.**

****Offshoots are taken from the base of a parent tree. All medjool dates come from a very few offshoots made back in the early 1927. The history of that episode is another story.**

****Artificial pollination is required.**

****Thinning of date clusters is done manually.**

****Clusters of dates must be trained to hang down.**

****Strands of dates are separated to prevent fruits from rubbing against each other.**



Date offshoot



When I was here the flowers were just beginning to show.



****Cloth bags are put on, first to protect the ripening fruit from inclement weather. Later, when the dates are ripe, the bags serve as a harvesting assist tool. Photographs show up to 2 dozen bags high up in each tree.**

****Medjool date palms begin to bear fruit in 3 to 5 years and reach full bearing age between 10 and 15 years.**

****Averaging 17 to 22 fruit arms, a mature tree yield can top 200 pounds.**

****Medjool trees are generally harvested three different times depending on weather conditions.**



**Human hands actually touch very few fruits during harvesting keeping the fruit as thoroughly clean as possible.
 **The packing house is another story where fruits are washed and dried.



An older grove with new trees in between older ones.



The Bard area not only has date groves but lots of field crops as well.

On another day I was on a photographic expedition to capture images of some crops grown in the area. The photos here show the Yuma area, although photos of Imperial Valley, California would look much the same.



This time of year winter and spring crops such as sudan grass, soft wheat, lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, and green onions abound. As the weather warms other crops such as melons, corn, cotton, and beans can be found.

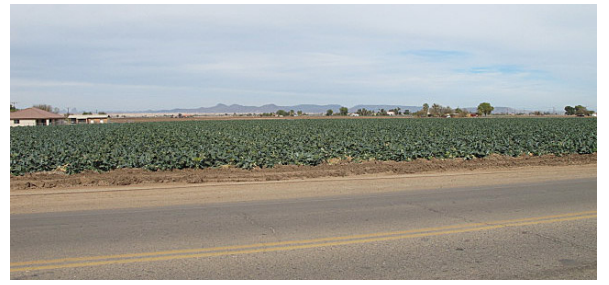


Leaf lettuce



Cauliflower





Lettuce in technicolor



Broccoli



We came upon this field of something and are at a loss of what it is.





One day a trip to Algodones, Mexico was in order, along with hoards of other “Americanos”. They stream across the border by foot and vehicle. What are they all doing over there? Most are visiting doctors and dentists, others are buying medicines and alcohol. I can’t begin to tell you all of what goes on. Here, let me save a few thousand words and show some pictures.



The U.S./Mexico border



The crowds streaming through on foot



Notice the big Mexican building in the background. That’s been there for several years. They never finish so taxes can’t be applied.



Our first sight through the border crossing



Main Street, Algodones



We concluded our business at Baja Farmacia and my impulse buying filter was securely engaged again so we immediately headed back for the border crossing.



Before we entered the farmacia, my impulse buying filter had dropped to zero. I found a garden ornament that I thought I might want. I visited one place and saw two ornaments. One was priced at \$25, the other was \$20. Of course, the one I wanted was \$25. I told the guy I would give him \$20. He said, no \$25. I said OK, I'll go across the street. So I did.

Same thing there. Only this time the guy said I'll take \$20. Sold! I can't believe I did something like that!



Lost Americanos?



Lots of "stuff"



More "stuff"



Exiting Mexico into the U.S. It was only a short line (about a dozen cars) and took us about 20 minutes to get back into the U.S. Several years ago the line was at least a mile long and took 3 hours! The Border Patrol is in NO hurry!





On our way back to Yuma we stopped by what is left of the mighty Colorado River, just as it enters Mexico.

Adjacent to the river is the All American Canal which carries water to all parts of the Imperial Valley and Yuma areas. Some water is allowed to flow into Mexico by treaty. Of course, we know how the U.S. honors some treaties. Remember our Native Americans?



Traffic leaving the border



On our way back to Yuma we stopped by to view what's left of an old "plank road". This road was built because wagon wheels would get stuck in the sand.



In the same area we found the remains of an old adobe building.



A visit to Yuma would not be complete without a visit to Yuma Territorial Prison State Park. This is the same Yuma Prison fabled in some western films of the day. Today, not too much is left of the facility. However, it does provide a glimpse of a past time. Following is a description of the prison. If you are not interested, just skip past this portion.

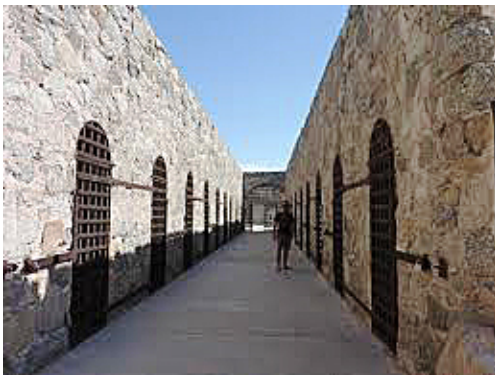


On July 1, 1876, the first seven inmates entered the Territorial Prison at Yuma and were locked into the new cells they had build themselves. At Yuma Territorial Prison State Historic Park a person can walk through the actual strap iron cells and solitary chamber of Arizona's first prison. Now a museum, the building houses photographs and colorful exhibits of those who once "involuntarily" stayed there.

Despite an infamous reputation, written evidence indicates that the prison was humanely administered, as a model institution for its time. The only punishments were the dark cells for inmates who broke prison regulations, and the ball and chain for those who tried to escape.



Typical cell with sleeping areas



A total of 3,069 prisoners, including 29 women, lived within these walls during the prison's 33 years of operation. Their crimes ranged from murder to polygamy, with grand larceny being the most common. A majority served only portions of their sentences due to the ease with which paroles and pardons were obtained. One hundred eleven persons died while serving their sentences, most from tuberculosis, which was common throughout the territory. Of the many prisoners who attempted

escape, twenty-six were successful, but only two were from within the prison confines. No executions took place at the prison because capital punishment was administered by the county government.

During their free time, prisoners hand-crafted many items. Those items were sold at public bazaars held at the prison on Sundays after church services. Schooling was available for convicts, and many learned to read and write in prison.

By 1907, the prison was severely overcrowded, and there was no room on Prison Hill for expansion. A new facility in Florence, Arizona was built, and the last prisoner left Yuma on September 15, 1909.





The Yuma Union High School occupied the buildings from 1910 to 1914. Empty cells provided free lodging for hobos who rode the freights in the 1920s, and sheltered many homeless families during the Depression. Townspeople considered the complex a source for free building materials. This, plus fires, weathering, and railroad construction, destroyed the prison walls and all buildings except the cells, main gate and guard tower; but these provide a glimpse of convict life a century ago.



Oh hooray! There is a DQ in Yuma! A necessary stop for a Choco Love Cherry Blizzard was in order!



The weather has been very pleasant this week. A couple of days with high clouds made the above sunset photo possible.



Wild flowers did not make an appearance yet. I found these blooms out in a desert field. The plants were only 2 inches high. You should have seen me down on all fours trying to get these shots.

That was my week. Along with the sightseeing, I had a good visit with my Aunt Caroline. Tomorrow I am on my way to Anthem where I will leave The Peanut for 7 nights while I visit with more relatives in Sun City. You probably won't hear from me for several day. Thanks for coming along with me this week. Bye for now - - Earl