

WILD RIVER

The Colorado River was a river then, which could be a rampaging giant, a spawner of killer and destructive floods in the spring that, like a chameleon, turned into a placid trickle of water in the hot, dry months of summer.

The rivers' characteristics are described clearly in Justice Black's opinion in *Arizona vs. California* (1963):

The Colorado River itself rises in the mountains of Colorado and flows generally in a southwesterly direction for about 1,300 miles through Colorado, Utah and Arizona and along the Arizona-Nevada and Arizona-California boundaries, after which it passes into Mexico and empties into the Mexican waters of the Gulf of California. On its way to the sea it receives tributary waters from Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, and Arizona. The river and its tributaries flow in a natural basin almost surrounded by large mountain ranges and drain 242,000 square miles, an area about 900 miles long from north to south and 300 to 500 miles wide from east to west – practically one-twelfth the area of the continental United States excluding Alaska. Much of this basin is so arid that it is, as it always has been, largely dependent upon managed use of the water of the Colorado River System to make it productive and inhabitable. Arizona, page 552.

In the desert, even a small stream is king because there is no competition for the job. So it is that the Colorado River is the most important source of surface water for the thirsty deserts of California and the Southwest.

When the first Europeans discovered the Colorado, they found it to be totally unpredictable, and often a raging barrier. It was impossible to cross at flood stage, but they could practically walk across it during dry periods.

To the pioneers, the river had few redeeming attributes. So encumbered with silt, it was dismissed as "too thick to drink and too thin to plow." It was not considered a navigable stream. For a time, shallow-draft streamers operated on the river between the Gulf and Fort Mojave (now Needles). Captains never knew from one day to the next if they would be stranded on a sand bar or sheltering from a raging flood. All the boats were eventually wrecked. It was dangerous and unprofitable, and no good could be seen in the river.

Geologist John Wesley Powell, the first man to traverse the Grand Canyon by water, reported the river would never be of beneficial use.

Settlers soon began to come in, mutual water companies were organized, and before the 3rd of April 1902, four hundred miles of irrigation ditches had been dug, and water was available for 100,000 acres or more of irrigable land.

Meanwhile, the future of the Valley was seriously imperiled by unfavorable reports concerning its soil. In the early part of 1902, the Bureau of Soils of the US Agricultural Department published the results of a survey of the irrigable lands in the

The Railroad in the Salton Sink
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During the latter half of the nineteenth century, government reconnaissance parties explored every natural gateway in the mountains surrounding coastal Southern California. Of all these natural gateways, San Gorgonio Pass, by reason of its broad approaches and open country, was the least costly of the three to build through - in terms of capital expenditure.

The Southern Pacific Railroad Company of California, chartered during April 1866, was originally projected to construct a line south from San Francisco via Los Angeles to the Colorado River, where it was to connect with a railroad from the East. It was on February 13, 1875, that contracts were let for the extension of Southern Pacific's Los Angeles Division from Spadra southeast to San Gorgonio Pass. Throughout the early summer of 1875, a large force of men was engaged in grading the railroad through San Timoteo Canyon and over San Gorgonio Pass. On August 21st, the Gazette noted that work had been temporarily suspended in the face of temperatures registering 120 degrees in the shade - if any could be found. Reports circulated that a number of Chinese, employed in grading in the Cabezon Valley, had perished from the intense heat. On January 28, 1876, regular train service was extended to Whitewater. On May 29, 1876, the 70-mile section from Colton to Indian Wells was completed and opened for traffic in late July. Here the construction work came to a halt until early 1877, partly because of summer heat and also, due to the uncertainty of Federal aid to the Texas & Pacific Railroad. During the fall of 1876, large quantities of ties and rails accumulated at Indian Wells, and consequently, once it was decided to continue the railroad east, it was done rapidly. In the meantime, Indian Wells had been renamed Indio at the request of the federal government. Durmid was reached on March 8, 1877, Pilot Knob on April 29th, and on May 23, 1877, the tracks were laid to the west bank of the Colorado River at Yuma. The rapid construction through this section was as much the result of the topography encountered, as it was the skill and tenacity of the railroad builders. From a summit of 2,592 feet at San Gorgonio, the rails made a steady descent into the Colorado Desert. At a point just west of Indio, the grade slipped below sea level and for 61 miles it traversed a vast sub-sea level depression known as the Salton Basin. The lowest point reached by rail in the continental United States, -266.5 feet, was achieved eleven miles east of Walters, and it was not until Flowing Well was reached that the railroad was again above the level of the sea. The line was mostly tangent. Curves were few, and grading light. "From Dos Palmas to a point between Frink's Spring, there is no brush - nothing but complete waste and utter desolation." wrote F.E. Shearer, in 1884, for the Pacific Tourist. He went on to report that "the climate...is not one in which a sane person would select to spend the summer."

The soil below Coachella Valley, all the way to the Mexican border and beyond, was found to be very rich, but water was in short supply. It was noted, however, that the Colorado River, where it entered the delta region below Yuma, was at an elevation of 25 to 200 feet higher than the arid land situated immediately to the west. Ultimately, on May 14, 1901, irrigation water was turned on at the Pilot Knob head gate. Promotion and colonization of the area began immediately. Because the

The passage of the Homestead Act by Congress in 1862 was the culmination of more than 70 years of controversy over the disposition of public lands. From the inception of the United States there was a clamor for ever-increasing liberalism in the disposition of these lands. From 1830 onward, groups called for free distribution of such lands. This became a demand of the Free-Soil party, which saw such distribution as a means of stopping the spread of slavery into the territories, and it was subsequently adopted by the Republican party in its 1860 platform. The Southern states had been the most vociferous opponents of the policy, and their secession cleared the way for its adoption.

The Act, which became law on Jan. 1, 1863, allowed anyone to file for a quarter-section of free land (160 acres). The land was yours at the end of five years if you had built a house on it, dug a well, broken (plowed) 10 acres, fenced a specified amount, and actually lived there. Additionally, one could claim a quarter-section of land by "timber culture" (commonly called a "tree claim"). This required that you plant and successfully cultivate 10 acres of timber.

Salton Basin Timeline

1500	Lake Cahuilla dries up for last time. Estimates range from 1300 to 1500. Agua Caliente Indians move into canyons.
1540	Colorado River Delta explored by Melchoir Diaz.
1600	Spanish start to explore Salton Basin. Continues into the 1800's.
1604	Spanish Governor of 'New' Mexico, Don Juan de Ornate, explores and names the Rio Colorado.
1616	Pearl hunting and trading expedition up the Gulf of California and into the Colorado River Delta led by Captain Juan Delturbe.
1701	Father Eusebio Francisco Kino crossed Colorado River into Salton Basin.
1774	Juan Batisto de Anza led expedition through Salton Basin, 'El Camino Del Diablo', to establish overland route to San Gabriel Mission. Said to have found wreck of the lost Pearl ship.
1782	Don Pedro Foges made first trip from Colorado River to San Diego.
1815	Report of San Gabriel Mission Indians mining salt. Expeditions start from Los Angeles to obtain salt.
1822	Mexico gains independence from Spain.
1825	Trappers, Kit Carson, Jedediah Smith, William Wolfskill, and others are recorded to have gone through the Salton Basin.
1828	Record of flood.
1846	Lt. W.H. Emory dispatched with troops from Ft. Leavenworth to protect Americans from harassment by 'Californians'. Exhausted after crossing Salton Basin, they were overrun by Mexicans and Spaniards at San Pasqual.
1846	US enters war with Mexico.
1848	US wins California from Mexico in Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. US/Mexico border established.
1849	Dr. Oliver Wozencraft observed Native Americans growing crops around springs; corn, barley, and vegetables.
1849	Dr. Oliver Wozencraft records flood in basin.
1849	Gold discovered in Northern California. Gold Rush begins and traffic through the Salton Basin begins.
1850	California admitted to Union as the 31st state.
1850	J.R. Bartlett surveys US/Mexico border.
1852	Record of flood.
1853	Lt. K.S. Williamson (US Topographic Engineers) lead expedition with William Blake (Geologist) surveyed Salton Basin for railroad routes. Blake claims that the basin could be productive if it could be irrigated.
1855	Williamson/Blake party experiences severe earthquake (probably 6.0 mag, in L.A.) and violent mud volcano activity in the south.
1858	Butterfield Stage route through Salton Basin, passenger fare was \$100, St. Louis to San Francisco took 25 days.
1859	Record of flood.
1859	Dr. Oliver Wozencraft receives support from State government for developing the basin, works toward federal support.
1861	Outbreak of the Civil War diverts federal attention and support.
1862	Massive flooding.
1867	Record of flood.
1876	First Indian Reservations designated by President Grant. Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Reservation established with a 640 acre grant.
1876	First survey for an "All American" canal by Lt. Eric Bergland.

Historical Landmarks within the Salton Sea Watershed.

Riverside Co.

NO. 985 DESERT TRAINING CENTER, CALIFORNIA-ARIZONA MANEUVER AREA (ESTAB MAJOR GENERAL GEORGE S. PATTON, JR.) - CAMP GRANITE - Camp Granite was established Spring of 1942. See previous entry for full description.

Location: 45 mi E of Indio on I-10, N on Hwy 177 approx 25 mi, rt on Hwy 62 for 5.4 mi

NO. 985 DESERT TRAINING CENTER, CALIFORNIA-ARIZONA MANEUVER AREA (ESTAB MAJOR GENERAL GEORGE S. PATTON, JR.) - CAMP YOUNG - The D.T.C. was established by George S. Patton, Jr., in response to a need to train American combat troops for battle in North Africa during The camp, which began operation in 1942, covered 18,000 square miles. It was the largest military training center to exist. Over one million men were trained at the eleven sub-camps (seven in California).

Location: General Patton Memorial Museum, Chiriaco Summit, from Interstate 10 exit N at Chiriaco Summit, Indio

NO. 985 DESERT TRAINING CENTER, CALIFORNIA-ARIZONA MANEUVER AREA (ESTAB MAJOR GENERAL GEORGE S. PATTON, JR.) - CAMP PILOT KNOB - Camp Pilot Knob was a Training Center, established by General George S. Patton, Jr., to prepare American troops for battle during World War II. It was the largest military training ground ever to exist. At the peak of activity here at Pilot Knob, June-December 1944, the 1st Infantry Division, and the 36th and 44th Reconnaissance Squadrons of the 11th (Mechanized) Cavalry trained for the liberation of Europe, 1944-45.

Location: On Sidewinder Rd, 200 yards N of I-8, Town of Felicity

Imperial Co.

NO. 1008 YUHA WELL - Known as Santa Rosa de Las Lajas (Flat Rocks), this site was used on March 1846 by the Anza Exploring Expedition, opening the land route from Sonora, Mexico, to Alta California. On December 11, 1846, divisions of Anza's colonizing expedition used this first good watering spot beyond the Colorado River on the route from Sonora to San Francisco.

Location: Eastbound Sunbeam Roadside Rest Area, between Drew and Forrester Rds (P.M. R31.3), on I-8

NO. 194 MOUNTAIN SPRINGS STATION - In 1862-70, about a mile north of here Peter Larkin and John Larkin built a stone house as a store from which ox teams pulled wagons up a 30% grade. The San Diego and Fort Yuma Railroad used the site as a toll road station until 1876. The crumbling house was replaced in 1917 by another still visible today. Changes, beginning in 1878 and culminating in today's highway, have left the older stone house ruins intact.

Location: Site is 200 ft W of westbound lane, I-8 (P.M. 2.3), just N of Mountain Springs Rd, 2.3 mi E of Mountain Springs. Plaque is located adjacent to Desert View Tower, approximately 100 yards distant from Tower landmark plaque.

NO. 808 CAMP SALVATION - Here, on September 23, 1849, Lieut. Cave J. Coats, Escort Commandant of the Boundary Commission, established Camp Salvation. From September till the first of December 1849, it was a center for distressed emigrants attempting to reach the gold fields over the Southern Emigrant Trail.

Location: Rockwood Plaza, Sixth St E at Heber Ave, Calexico

NO. 944 SITE OF FORT ROMUALDO PACHECO - In 1774, Spain opened an overland route from San Diego to San Francisco but it was closed by Yuma Indians in 1781. In 1822, Mexico attempted to reopen this route. Lt. Romualdo de San Juan and his soldiers built an adobe fort at this site in 1825-26, the only Mexican fort in Alta California. On April 26, 1826, Yuma Indians attacked the fort, killing three soldiers and wounding three others. Pacheco abandoned the fort, re-

Reclamation Act 1902

This act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to develop irrigation and hydropower projects in 17 Western States. Provides that ". . . the right to the use of water acquired under the provision of this act shall be appurtenant to the land irrigated and beneficial use shall be the basis, the measure, and the limit of the right."