

## Agua Caliente Tribal History

The Cahuillas and most other tribes of the area belong to the Shoshonean division of the Uto-Aztecan linguistic family. Tribes in this group range from the Aztecs of Mexico to the Hopi, Papago and Pima of Arizona, the Ute of Colorado and tribes of the Morongo Reservation area, including the Serrano, Cupeno and Gabrieleno.

The Cahuillas of the area were fortunate in being spared the barbarities of the early Spanish and Mexican periods because of their isolation from the active centers of colonization and travel. However, the relative peace, which the Cahuillas knew as a way of life, was broken during the 1860's when smallpox, measles, changes in diet, and general harassment by the white population caused many deaths among the tribes of the pass area. Extensive intermarriage has occurred between the Cahuillas and the Serrano, the Chemehuevi and other tribes, who now share the Morongo Reservation.

The Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians is composed of several small groups living in the area at the time the Agua Caliente Reservation was established. Recently, archaeological research has proven that Indians occupied the Tahquitz alluvial fan about 350 to 500 years ago. Distinct areas of living quarters and food preparation are apparent. This, and the area surrounding the nearby hot springs, was the home of the Kawasic Band. The Painakic Band lived in Andreas and Murray Canyons; the Wanikik clan lived in Snowcreek and Whitewater Canyon. Palm Canyon was occupied by still another clan, but either through disease, intermarriage or other unknown reason, its identity has been lost.

The first contact with "civilization" is unknown, but the first recorded history of the area is contained in



### Historical Dates

on the  
Agua Caliente Indian  
Reservation

#### 1300-1500 A.D.

Lake Cahuilla dries up and ancestors move to present canyon area.

#### 1876

President Grant establishes first reservation - \$14 and part of \$22 only (880 acres).

#### 1877

President Hayes extends reservation to include all even-numbered sections in 3 townships (30,720 acres).

#### 1887

General Allotment Act authorizes but does not require allotments to be made.

#### 1891

Mission Indian Relief Act gives further authorization for allotments to heads of families (up to 20 acres of farm land and 160 to 640 acres of grazing land).

#### 1917

Congress directs Secretary of the Interior to make allotments.

#### 1927

Wadsworth submits new allotment schedule for 24 members who wanted allotments, and gives certificates of allotment to those 24 members, stamped "Not valid unless approved by Secretary." Wadsworth tells these 24 members that allotments will be approved shortly. Some members begin building.

#### 1938

First lawsuit filed to compel Secretary to make allotments - unsuccessful.

Brevet Captain Jose Romero's diary written by his diarist and



assistant, Commander Lieutenant Jose Maria Estudillo. In 1822, the Mexican government instituted a series of inquiries seeking an overland route from Sonora to California. Lt. Estudillo noted the day before the expedition's arrival in Palm Springs, December 28, 1823, that there would be no water or pasture for their horses until Agua Caliente was reached. This implies that he knew of the hot springs' existence beforehand, and it was not a discovery of this expedition. San Gabriel baptismal records note that some of the Indians from the Whitewater Canyon were baptized as early as 1809.

In 1824 Estudillo wrote that the expedition returned to the spot known as "Los Vernitos" (Little Springs), and the soldiers were impressed at the sight of corn, pumpkins, melons, and other summer crops being grown by the Cahuillas in mid-winter.

The Cahuilla Indian name for the Palm Springs area was "Se-Khi" (boiling water), but the Spanish named it Agua Caliente (hot water). Later came the name of "Palm Springs", official name on U.S. Government maps.

The ceremonial life of the Cahuilla was a rich and varied one. Elaborate ceremonies marked every important milestone of the individuals life and embellished the life of the group. The people were industrious and creative, and their reputation was one of independence, integrity and peace.

Villages were occupied all year, with one or more people leaving when necessary to hunt, gather plants, visit or trade. The most extensive absences from the villages were associated with harvesting or collecting basic food staples. At those times, one-half to two-thirds of a village moved to a collecting area and camped for one to several weeks.

Crops in the Agua Caliente area were

#### 1940

Supreme Court refuses to hear first lawsuit because papers filed 1 day late. Lee Arenas starts second lawsuit.

#### 1944

Supreme Court holds that Secretary must make allotments in second lawsuit.

#### 1944

Secretary disapproves 1927 allotment schedule due to objection to allotment.

#### late 1940's

First allotments made according to 1927 schedule (unequal in value). Third lawsuit filed to require equalization.

#### 1959

Congress passes the Equalization Act

#### 1977

Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians and the City of Palm Springs enter into the first Land Use Contract recorded in the country ever.

#### 1989

The Agua Caliente Development Authority is formed - an economic development subsidiary of the Tribe.

The Tribe also forms a committee for cultural preservation, which is now the Agua Caliente Cultural Museum.

#### 1995

The Spa Casino opens for business in what was formerly the ballroom of the Spa Hotel.

#### 1998

Proposition 5 is passed by the voters of California to legalize Indian Gaming on reservations in the state.



irrigated by water from nearby streams. Remnants of these rock-lined irrigation ditches from Tahquitz, Andreas and Chino Creeks are still visible in areas untouched by developments. Old letters on file in the Bureau of Indian Affairs office, written in the mid-1880's, tell of elderly Indians' remembrance of their parents working on these ditches when they were very young.

Women of the band were responsible for gathering all of the plants that were used for food. Some of the basic food plants were acorns, mesquite beans, seeds of all kinds, wild fruit, agave, and yucca. The women were also responsible for making baskets and pottery. Men were responsible for hunting the wild game needed for food, clothing, and various other uses. They commonly used bow and arrows, nets, and throwing sticks to capture game such as deer, quail, small mammals and reptiles.

Mesquite beans, pinion nuts, acorns and the dates of the native palms, ground into meal and prepared as a cake or mush, were a large part of their diet. After gathering, these were stored in baskets and earthen granaries for later use. Many grinding stones can be seen in the Canyon areas where food preparation took place. Their main sources of meat were rabbits, ground squirrels, deer, mountain sheep and quail. They used the agave cactus not only for food, but the fiber was used in making nets, slings, sandals, and other items. It was also their needle and thread. They utilized the flowers, fruits, seeds and roots of practically all of the native trees and plants as food, medicine or building and making homemaking materials.

Cahuilla dwellings were usually of extended-family size. The early ones were circular, brush shelters built over a scooped-out hollow and built up with boulders. Later dwellings, influenced by the Mexican jacal, were rectangular and had walls plastered with mud or adobe and were covered by a thatched roof.

Trails connected villages with other

villages and hunting and gathering areas. The Cahuillas had an extensive trade system with neighboring tribes. Food, shells, animal and mineral products were traded with the tribes of the surrounding areas.

Cahuilla villages typically had 100 to 200 inhabitants. Several villages together composed a larger political and territorial unit called a tribelet or sib. Each sib was divided into lineages, which consisted of both nuclear and extended families. Cahuilla society was divided into two groups or moieties known as the Wildcat and the Coyote moiety and vice versa.



Centuries ago, the Cahuilla Indians, ancestors of the Agua Caliente Indians, lived in comparative isolation. In those days, game was plentiful where the rocky canyons opened onto the desert floor; and the abundant hot springs, which gave the tribe its name, served as a focal point of all activities.

On May 15, 1876, Section 14 and a portion of Section 22 (Tahquitz Canyon) were set aside by Executive order of President U.S. Grant as the Agua Caliente Reservation. On September 29, 1877, and per departmental order of February 2, 1907, all even-numbered sections and all unsurveyed portions of Township 4 South, Ranges 4 and 5 East, an Township 5 South, Range 4 East, San Bernardino Meridian, were added to the Reservation, except Sections 16 and 36, and excepting also any tract, the title to which had passed out of the U. S. Government. The Government had given the odd-numbered sections to the railroad in the early 1870's. In addition, the government re-acquired Section 35, Township 4 South, Range 4 East and Southeast 1/4 Section 3 and North 1/2 Section 11, Township 5 South, Range 4

East, which were then added to the Reservation by Executive order, for a total of approximately 31,500 acres.

On January 12, 1891, Congress passed the Mission Indian Relief Act, authorizing allotments from the acreage comprising the Reservation at Palm Springs, California. However, more than fifty years passed before the allotment selections were approved by the Secretary of the Interior. During this time, Palm Springs, as a quiet resort town grew in size and in importance as a Southern California attraction. Even as early as the 1930's, Palm Springs was described as a recreational oasis.

The Equalization Act of September 21, 1959 (Public Law 339) finalized the individual Indian allotments and set aside certain lands for Tribal use and cemeteries. Palm, Andreas, Murray and Tahquitz Canyons are Tribal lands. Tahquitz Canyon may be seen by obtaining a special permit. Palm, Andreas and Murray Canyons are open to the public from early September through May 30 for a small entrance fee. They are still preserved in their natural state, as nearly as possible, with certain areas having been cleared for picnicking and parking, and trails built for hiking. Also, there are a number of equestrian trails.

Palm Canyon has been pictured in newspapers and magazine articles all over the world and is one of the most outstanding beauty spots in Palm Springs. This fifteen-mile length of canyon wilderness is breathtaking, for there is a combination of chaotic, rocky gorges and minor canyons, which are rough, barren and desert-like. An easy foot trail leads down into the canyon. The movie industry has frequently relied upon this canyon to provide them with great natural settings.

Among the hundreds of miles of bridle paths near Palm Springs is the one which leads through Andreas Canyon, a favorite with desert riders. Throughout this scenic ride are groves of stately, skirted Washingtonia filifera palm trees and



unusual rock formations. Here the cliffs form sheer towering walls. Along the stream in the flat granite rocks, one can find grinding mills used long ago in making Indian meal. Indian relics have been found in the caves near the parking area.

Tahquitz Falls, in Tahquitz Canyon, pours across sheer granite in a spectacular sixty-foot drop. Some will remember it was this waterfall which was used in the original movie "Lost Horizon".

Wild ponies have been sighted in all canyon areas. It is said that they are probably descendants of horses belonging to the early ranchers with ranches in the mountains.

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A Development of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians

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