

# THE MIRACLE WATERS

The Hot Mineral Water of The Coachella Valley  
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The Indians in this part of California are known as the Cahuilla. One band of this tribe has lived in the Palm Springs area for centuries. Most historians agree on the fact that the first Europeans to make extended contact with them were members of the Romero expedition in 1823-24. Romero was a Brevet Captain from Sonora who was sent into the Coachella Valley by the new Mexican government to find a route through the desert to Tucson. Romero's part stopped at *Sexhi*, which is what the Indians called Palm Springs, and after inquiring if there was any gold in the area, were told, "No gold, señor, but we have water." Sticking his toe in the water, the Captain probably exclaimed, "Agua caliente, agua caliente!"--in Spanish, hot water. They named the place Agua Caliente, and from that time on the Indians there have been known as the Agua Caliente Band of the Cahuilla Indians.

In his *Stories and Legends of the Palm Springs Indians*, published in 1943, Francisco Patencio, an elder of the tribe, says that the first Indians to settle near Palm Springs were afraid to live near the water, fearing they were "alive." According to Patencio, a huge blue frog lived in the spring, as well as a snake and other spirits. These spirit beings would cry like human infants when something bad was about to happen. "They knew," the Indians said. So these hot mineral springs held magical qualities for them. Before the Indians entered the water to bathe, they made offerings of food and prayers to assure their safety.

In 1887, Dr. Wellwood Murray built the first hotel in Palm Springs, and he paid the Indians \$100 a year to lease the springs for his visitors. He built a bathhouse with dressing rooms directly over the springs.

The original bathhouse was tom down in 1916, when the Indians put up their own structure which had two rooms, one large enough to cover a pool and allow four people to stand together in the hot curative waters.

These springs are located at the present site of the Spa Hotel, on Indian Avenue in downtown Palm Springs. Although they are covered and can only be seen through a viewing tube at the front of the building, the same healing water is still being used, pumped up into 2 large outdoor pools, one pool maintained at 106°F (41°C), which is how it comes out of the earth. The hotel is a large moderm complex, with 230 rooms, and a warm and friendly atmosphere. Indoors, treatments include facials, massages, and a number of individual whirlpool baths which use the healing hot waters. Great care is taken so that a visitor can make full use of these magical waters.

Bob Landry, Director of Sales, also informed me that the Cahuillas recently purchased the hotel (they have always owned the property) which they plan to refurbish and maintain. Undoubtedly, they will make great efforts to assuage the spirits who live in the waters.

Ten minutes to the north of Palm Springs lies the small spa community of Desert Hot Springs. With a population of around 14,000 residents, the town caters to visitors from all over the world who come each year to make use of the abundance of natural hot mineral water. Technically, there are no springs, or water above the surface. Most of the more than 45 motels and hotels have their own wells which pump the healing waters up at temperatures ranging from 85° to 200°F (29° to 93°C). Ideally, the swimming pools are kept at 90°F (32°C) and the Jacuzzis at 104°F (40°C). This water, which comes from snow run-off on Mt. San Gorgonio, travels by way of an underground river, until years later, it arrives beneath the surface of the desert, where it is dammed up and heated by a series of earthquake fault zones which impede the downhill flow of the water.

Dr. Broue, an Australian chemist and metallurgist, spent many years traveling the world analyzing curative waters. He has said of the waters in Desert Hot Springs: "From the analysis of these waters, I have not found the like of them in any country I have explored. It is pronounced curative agency, as is the air. It could be bottled and shipped everywhere."

An analysis of the water shows the sulfur content to be high; but in a crystalline form, so there is no odor. Following is a partial breakdown of the content of the hot water.

## Natural Hot Water (ppm)

Silica	21.5
Iron Oxide	Trace
Calcium	45.1
Aluminum Oxide	Trace
Magnesium	5.1
Sodium	268.6
Sulfate	493.6
Chloride	120.5
Bicarbonate	129.0
Fluoride	5.3
Hydrogen-Ion (pH)	8.3
Conductivity	388

Desert Hot Springs is also blessed with its own pure municipal drinking water, which is found in another large "bathtub", as the hydrologists are fond of calling them, just to the south of the hot water area. This water is also pure snow run-off, which the Mission Springs Water District delivers to the homes in the area just as nature as given it to us. This system is one of the few in the state where the water is untreated, as constant monitoring shows no traces of any harmful bacteria. The analysis of this water places it on an equal footing with commercial mineral water like Evian--and it comes out of my tap.

Desert Hot Springs has been a city since 1941, when the man who must be given credit for developing the hot water, L. W. Coffee, constructed a large bathhouse on Palm Drive and Eighth Street. Although there are stories of Indians digging wells in the area during the last century, the first documented use of the water came in 1913, when the pioneer Cabot Yerxa hand dug a 30-foot (9 m) well and found water that was too hot to stand in; later, after digging another well, he found cold water. In the desert, this phenomenon could only be viewed as a miracle, so he named his holdings Miracle Hill. Currently his Old Indian Pueblo and Museum (now a certified historical monument) is a stopping place for thousands of visitors who came to find out about the miracle waters and learn about the man who discovered them.

Why do these waters have a curative effect on the human body? Dr. Robert Bingham, who heads the Desert Hot Springs Arthritis and Medical Clinic, and has been treating arthritis patients since his days working with Sister Kenny and polio victims, says there are at least three reasons.

"One, is the desert climate... you'll notice that you don't see a lot of dust, you don't see pollens, you don't see pesticides and herbicides... the air is clearer and the air is purer; then, we have a favorable altitude. We're about 900 feet (275 m) high here."

Then, "... when you go in the pool at 102° to 104°F (38.9° to 40.0°C), you immediately increase the flow of blood through your body... about two or three times what the ordinary flow of blood would be. Now, if you put a person in the pool, and they exercise at the same time they're in the pool... they're getting two or three times as much blood, more oxygen, more white blood cells, reparative cells, to repair the inflammation and damage that the arthritis does to the bones and joints. "

Dr. Bingham recommends getting in and out of the hot water three times in succession, soaking 5 to 10 minutes each time, cooling off between dips, to be repeated three times daily. His treatments also include a natural low-fat diet, as well as vitamin supplements.

And what about the minerals? Not much work has been done in this area; but, besides being absorbed through the skin, most experts agree that breathing the fumes is also beneficial to our systems.

The work of Dr. Bingham and those like him have kept alive Mr. Coffee's vision of Desert Hot Springs as a healing center. "I realize that Nature has created much for mankind in Desert Hot Springs; but that with scientific advice, much more can be accomplished for the sake of humanity."

Coffee died in 1957. His bathhouse no longer exists, a great historic loss for the town. When Coffee rebuilt his bathhouse in 1947, following a devastating fire, he installed into the brick walls a bronze plaque, as if to insure longevity for the building. The plaque is gone, but his words remain:

*THIS BATH HOUSE  
ERECTED 1947  
BY  
L. W. COFFEE  
LILLIAN T. COFFEE*

*Who developed these  
God given curative hot  
Mineral waters, so long  
Hidden beneath the  
Sands of the desert,  
Waiting for the time to  
Arrive when suffering  
Humanity could enjoy,  
Nature's benefits.  
The Wealth of Health*

#### **EDITOR'S NOTE:**

The Geo-Heat Center gratefully acknowledges John Hunt for writing this article for the Bulletin.

John Hunt is a resident of Desert Hot Springs, and he is a writer and lecturer who is working on a book about the area called "The Waters of Comfort", due to be finished this year. For additional information, please call Mr. Hunt at (619) 251-9994 in Desert Hot Springs or at his office in Los Angeles (213) 460-6013.