

## Coso Hot Springs

Coso Hot Springs have been known to man for many years. First to the Indians and later they shared the springs with the miners, stage lines and cattlemen. The springs were in continuous use by man until the establishment of the United States Naval Ordnance Test Station at China Lake in 1943 (Today in 1971 it is called the Naval Weapons Center). At that time it was closed to the public. A person wishing to see the springs may go to the main gate of the naval base and request a pass. There are a few rules to be followed but they are for your protection and safety. The trip is well worth the effort put forth.

In 1914 Coso Hot Springs had a small store and tents to rent. Mail was also delivered by the Coso Hot Springs stage. This also was a station for freighting lines and other weary travelers. Water and steam bubbled and spewed from the fissures in the earth, forming hot pools of mud and water. It was at the mud pools where people dug small basins, then dipped water from the center to form their own private mud baths. They would crawl into these puddles to soak, finding relief from various types of pain or maybe just to relax. It was not wise to soak too long or a person would become so weakened they would need help to stand up.

Some would erect small pup tent covers over their mud hole to protect themselves from the hot sun, wind or cold depending on the time of year. Miners coming down from the hills built themselves a shelter from scrub brush, making it the same way the Indians made their wicki-up homes. Here the miners would remain only a few days bathing, doing their washing and gathering new supplies before returning to the hills in search of the once in a life time ore strike. Cattle drovers also used this area for a resting place while driving their cattle from one place to the other, looking for fresh grass for grazing, or perhaps taking the animals to market.

In 1921 the land was in the hands of a promoter who advertised the springs as the "Greatest Natural Radio Hot Springs in America", guaranteeing that its 250 springs would benefit stomach diseases, rheumatism and kidney trouble. He built concrete bath houses, with mud bath concrete tubs, and dressing rooms. Sleeping and eating quarters were also available to the customers. I do not know if the springs did all the promoter advertised, but I have been told about many it has helped, whether completely from the mud baths or partly psychological.

Mr. Raymond Gill, a long time resident of our area, worked at the springs in 1931 until 1933. He told me of many who were helped. One man was "Pap" Wright from Bishop. Pap had been troubled with rheumatism for quite some time, and with the use of crutches was able to get around. He was told by a dentist if he would have all his teeth pulled he would improve. After going through the discomfort of having all his teeth taken out he did not seem to get any better.

Pap began to make regular visits to the springs for mud baths. It was Ray's duty to help him in and out of the tubs. Ray began to see an improvement in Pap, so he took away one of his crutches telling Pap he would have to get along with only one. Pap not being too sure about it tried and was successful. For the next while Pap made sure his remaining crutch did not get out of his sight. Ray began to see more and more improvement so waited for the first opportunity to remove the remaining crutch and replace it with a cane. This really gave Pap quite a few moments of worry, but his courage soon came and he tried the cane and found himself a little wobbly but able to walk. The day finally arrived when Ray took his cane away, insisting Pap would have to walk all by himself to where the cane had been placed. Ray would not give in an inch, so with no other choice he walked to his cane realizing he did not need it. Thanks to Ray's forcefulness, this large burly man was able to walk in the city without the help of anything except his own strength. One day when Pap was walking down the street he met the dentist who had insisted he have his teeth pulled. The dentist was walking on crutches, and looking at Pap he said, "my God man what happened to you"? Pap just looked at him and said, "just have your teeth pulled. Just have your teeth pulled"

Two women hearing that to take the mud baths would restore their youth and help improve their looks, came to the springs for help. They did not understand English too well or speak it any better. Both were quite heavy set women. Before they entered the baths they were told not to stay in the tubs too long or they would become too weak to get themselves out. They must have felt they wanted to get their money's worth or else felt they needed as much help as they could get to improve their looks. They stayed in the tubs so long they had to call for help to get out. Now this proved to be quite a chore for the fellows who came to help. The ladies weight, modesty, and being all covered with the slippery mud took all the strength the men had, especially after the ladies fainted.

Of course when all was accomplished, the fellows had a good laugh and thought that would be the last they would ever see of the ladies. To everyone's surprise they did return only to repeat the same performance. The third time they returned they were told if they remained too long they would just have to help themselves. This time they required no help. Ray never did tell me just how much beauty and youth was restored to the ladies, but they must have been pleased with the results as they became steady customers. For a time "Volcanic Water" was bottled and distributed by the Owl Drug Company of Los Angeles.