

Mountain Empire Note No. 3

DESERT VIEW TOWER



In the early days of travel along the corridor now used by Interstate 8, when the stage coach journey from San Diego to Yuma required a full month of arduous struggle, the lip of the mountain barrier where the Desert View Tower now stands was a site of inspiration to weary travelers. To those headed for the coast, it marked the end of desert discomfort and the beginning of ever-increasing enjoyment as they approached the Pacific shore.

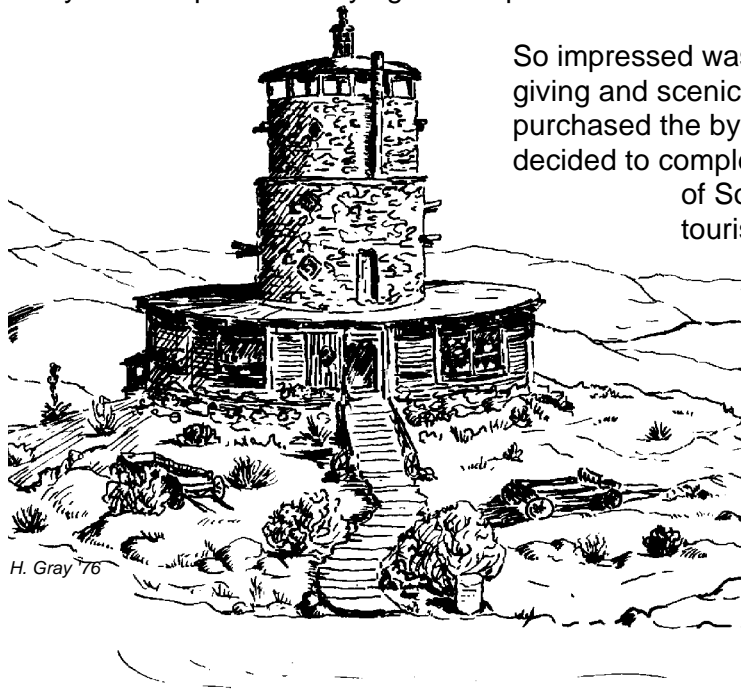
To the eastern-bound, it provided a vast colorful vista of rugged grandeur, in which the hazards of sandy wastes were mercifully hidden. They saw only a deceptive mirage, predominated by the soft lilac tones of desert and deep violet tints that were distant mountain shadows.

Many gifted persons seeking serenity found it at the Tower and stayed to call it home. All benefitted by the altitude, fresh air, stimulating sunshine and springs of pure, cold water found nearby.

In the early 20's Bert L Vaughn, who owned the resort at Jacumba, conceived the idea of creating a tower built of native materials. He envisioned a look-out that would survey the inspiring jumble of mountain and desert. It was to be a monument to the pioneers. Construction was begun, but the Tower was never completed.

During the Great Depression, itinerant artist W.T. Ratcliffe visited the area. He noted the resemblance of the many huge granite boulders to actual and mythological creatures. This inspired him to spend the next two years with mallet and chisel creating the wierd creatures that now inhabit this area which may be seen by visitors via a marked trail.

Dennis A. Newman, a veteran flyer of World War II, came to this spot for rehabilitation, after five years of operational flying in Europe and the Middle East.



So impressed was Mr. Newman with the health-giving and scenic values of the area, that he purchased the by-then-abandoned Tower. He decided to complete the structure and develop one of Southern California's most unusual tourist locations.

Thus began the *Boulder Park Project*, involving three years of building and reconstruction. In 1950, the Tower was opened to the public.

As it continued to develop down to the present time, over a quarter of a million people have visited it.

The Tower, with its four-foot-thick walls, has been converted into an interesting museum. Many period exhibits of old guns, swords, lamps, war trophies, wagon models, antiques, Indian and pioneer relics are found in and around the Tower. A pair of binoculars is mounted on the hurricane deck at the Tower to provide a closer view of features in the surrounding country. A host of desert chipmunks are usually on hand to amuse the traveler.

Access is via the In-Ko-Pah off ramp of Interstate 8 from either direction. Desert View Tower will celebrate 50 years of Operation in May of 2000. It has drawn visitors from all parts of the world. There is a gift shop on the ground floor of the structure.

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Suggested Reading

THE HISTORICAL GUIDE TO THE BACK COUNTRY, Mountain Empire Historical Society, Campo, 1993