

AGUA CALIENTE PARK

Agua Caliente Park is a relatively new park operated by the Pima County Natural Resources Parks and Recreation Department and is located off of Roger Road northeast of Tucson and in the shadow of the Catalina and Rincon Mountains. The land comprising the park was acquired by the county in 1984 after Roy P. Drachman, a local businessman, donated over \$200,000 to the county to be used toward the purchase of the property. The park was opened to the public on 19 January 1985 and named the Roy P. Drachman Agua Caliente Park in honor of the man who had pushed for its establishment.

The natural feature that defined this oasis in the desert was the perennial Agua Caliente Spring and the associated three pond areas that were fed by the spring. The spring area originally consisted of two springs, a hot spring and a cold spring with a combined flow of up to 500 gallons per minute that provided an adequate water supply for the three pond areas.

Unfortunately, in misguided attempt to modify nature, the springs were blasted to create a single spring in the mid-1930s. This created a single spring with a constant temperature of 72 degrees but also drastically reduced the water flow to between 150 and 300 gallons per minute. The spring was blasted again in the early 1960s (possibly in an attempt to increase the water flow) by the Myriad Research and Development Corporation who had planned to build 300 homes surrounding the ponds. The result was to further reduce the water flow from the spring to a maximum of around 100 to 125 gallons per minute. The long term draught that Arizona has been experiencing has also had a major impact on the flow from the spring At times it has been barely a trickle with the result that ponds 2 & 3 dried up and the water level in pond 1 was reduced. A well was dug to provide supplemental water to help remedy the situation.



Figure1. Pond 1 in August 2016



Figure 2. Pond 2 Restoration– 08/2016



Figure 3. Pond 2 - March 2019

AGUA CALIENTE PARK

Figure 1 shows Pond 1 in August 2016./ A pond restoration plan was initiated in 2014 and is currently (2019) in progress. The restoration effort commenced with Pond 2. The pond was drained and the area cleaned and lined to reduce water loss through seepage back into the aquifer. Figure 2 shows the restoration effort involving Pond 2 during August 2016. After the restoration of Pond 2 was completed, water was gradually added as it became available. Figure 3 shows the condition of Pond 2 in March 2019. The restoration effort for pond 1 was scheduled to commence early in the spring of 2019 but was delayed because of the abnormally heavy spring rains and the temporary increase in the flow of the spring that precluded the emptying of the pond. As of May 2019, the restoration of Pond 1 is scheduled to commence in either June or July. Once the water in Pond 1 is drained into Pond 2, the park will be closed until the restoration and lining of Pond 1 is complete.

Although the area has recently been established as a public park, it has been a magnet for people for thousands of years because of its status as a lush oasis in a harsh desert. Artifacts have been found within the park that indicate that hunter/gathers had used the area as long as 5,000 years ago. The area was also the site of a Hohokam village around 1200 A.D. The Gadsden Treaty of 1853 transferred control of the area from Mexico to the United States and it didn't take long for the Americans to begin to make use of the Agua Caliente Springs. The U. S. Army periodically used the spring as an encampment area for about 20 years after the Gadsden Purchase. Then in 1873, Peter B. Bain filed a claim to the 160 acres surrounding the spring in accordance with the Homestead Act of 1862. Subsequently, the property surrounding the spring went through a succession of owners. James Fuller purchased the property in 1875, established an orchard and cattle ranching operation and then opened up a Hot Springs Resort on the property. Over the next eighty or so years, several different people including Willard White, Gibson Hazard and the Filiatrault family operated the property as a ranch until 1959 when it was bought by the Myriad Research and Development Corporation with the intent of creating a housing development surrounding the ponds. This never happened and the property was eventually purchased by Pima County in 1984 and opened as a park. There were three buildings on the property when it was



Figure 4. Ranch House & Visitor Center



Figure 5. Rose Cottage (Education Center)

AGUA CALIENTE PARK

purchased by the county (the Ranch House, a cottage and the bunkhouse). Restoration of the Ranch House and the Rose Cottage was completed in 2004. The Ranch House is used as a Visitor Center with a portion of it as a caretaker residence and the Rose Cottage is used as an Education Center. Figures 4 & 5 are photographs of the Ranch House and Rose Cottage. Additional photos of the Ranch House are depicted in Figures 6 through 9..



Figure 6. Ranch House Living Room



Figure 7. Ranch House Dining Area



Figure 8. Ranch House Kitchen Area



Figure 9. Ranch House Display Area

Summarized by T. Johnson from the PimaCounty web site, the Friends of Agua Caliente web site and Agua Caliente Park pamphlets. Photographs by T. Johnson