

WELLSPRING NEWS



Summer 2022

Published by the Friends of Agua Caliente, Inc. (FOAC)

Tucson, Arizona

From the President

Dear Friends of Agua Caliente Park,

It's been a busy year so far. In March we were finally able to celebrate the County's work to regrade and line the bottom of the main pond with a lovely dedication ceremony that included a ribbon cutting for the new bridge. Pete Filiatrault, emeritus FOAC board member who lived in the Ranch House as a teenager, was there to help cut the ribbon. Sandy Sarah, a founding FOAC Board Member gave remarks as did many officials from the County. The Tanque Verde High School Jazz Band entertained us before and after the ceremony. We were delighted to learn that the clay lining has decreased water loss through the bottom of the pond and cut both energy and water use by about 70%. It's been satisfying to see the return of friends, families, and wildlife to this beautiful oasis in the desert.

The Ranch House is now open and staffed by volunteers on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 10-2. The Gallery has rotating exhibits from local and young artists. Two lovely vintage quilts now grace the Ranch House. They were donated by Rita Broadbent, who is a quilt enthusiast and thought they belonged there. One is an early 1900s Grandmother's Flower Garden quilt with exquisite handwork. The other is a 1970s era Double Wedding Ring quilt.

With your help, FOAC has purchased a refrigerated bottle refill station that is installed near the restrooms. We can now refill our water bottles with cold water! FOAC is also purchasing a water fountain station that has a pet drinking fountain to replace the current water fountain. We funded two animal benches that were recently installed on the new Nature and Birding trail: a horned lizard, and a turtle. They are really cute! We'd love for you to find them and tag us on Facebook with your picture. The board hopes these additions will enhance your experience at the Park.

The County is working hard to landscape around Pond 2. The soil is quite salty so amending the soil and finding plants that will thrive there has been challenging. You may have noticed all the plant test plots as the county continues to determine what will work to enrich the visual landscape and provide good habitat for the animals that call the Park home.

Pam Rossetter
FOAC President

Nature Corner: Tortoise

Have you seen a Sonoran Desert Tortoise on a morning desert walk or an evening stroll? Those are the times of day it is coolest for them in summer. They emerge from their burrow and begin to mate in March.

They live in the Sonoran Desert in Sonora, Mexico, western Arizona to the Mohave Desert, southern California, Utah, and southern Nevada.

Desert Tortoises have elephant-like, short, broad, club-shaped, hind feet and flat front feet for digging. The upper shell is brown to gray and marked in round circles. The male's undershell is concave to accommodate the rounded shell of the female during copulation. The female's undershell is flat. Tortoises measure up to 14" in length.

Tortoises eat spring plants, seeds, fruits from Prickly Pear cactus and Saguaro cactus, grasses and insects. They drink rainwater.

They are toothless, but can give a very hard bite. The large tongue helps push food back in the mouth. They have no visible ears.

Desert Tortoises live in shallow boulder piles and under rocky overhangs. Sometimes they share lodges with Gila Monsters, Rattlesnakes and Pack Rats. They live within a few miles of where they hatched. Their lifespan is 35 to 40 years.

They are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Don't take one home with you! AZ Game and Fish adopts out tortoises that cannot be released to the wild. Here's a link to the site.

<https://www.azgfd.com/wildlife/nongamemanagement/tortoise/captivecare/>

Judy Gray
FOAC Board Member & Naturalist

Membership

Join Friends of Agua Caliente! Thank you to all of our loyal supporters. If you have not yet renewed, please consider supporting FOAC. We will be mailing out our 2023 requests in October. Our ability to support the Park with funding and items they cannot normally purchase is tremendous and we owe it all to you.

As of July 1, 2022, we have 310 supporters for the 2021-2022 year and through your generosity, we have raised \$23,475. This includes 253 renewals (72% renewal rate) and 57 new supporters. FOAC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation and donations are tax deductible.

Membership is \$15 for an Individual, \$25 for a Family, \$50 for Organizations and Donations of any amount are appreciated. Please send name, address, and email along with a check to Friends of Agua Caliente, Inc., PO Box 32005, Tucson, AZ 85751-2005. You can also securely support FOAC with PayPal or Credit Card from our website.

Your dedication to the Park and FOAC is greatly appreciated.

Jim Knoll, Membership

Board of Directors

Pam Rossetter, President
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Peggy Denny

Judy Gray

Jerry Martin

Sylvia Olberding

Joyce Roughton

Sandy Sarah (Co-Founder)

Board email addresses are:
FirstLast@FriendsOfAguaCaliente.
Org

Nature Programs

In-person Nature Programs sponsored by Pima County NRPR have resumed. Cost is \$5.00 and online registration is required. Programs at Agua Caliente Park in July and August include:

- ◆ 'Slow Birding', Wednesdays, July 6 and August 3
- ◆ An Evening of Herpetofauna, Thursdays, July 7 and August 4
- ◆ Lizards of Agua Caliente Park, Fridays, July 8 and August 12
- ◆ Birding Agua Caliente Park, Wednesdays, July 20 and August 17
- ◆ Fledgling Birders: Birding for all Ages and Abilities, Saturdays, July 23 and August 20
- ◆ Dragons and Damsels Of Agua Caliente Park, Thursday, August 18
- ◆ Bat Walk at Agua Caliente, Thursday, August 25
- ◆ Nature Journaling for Everyone, Tuesday, August 30

Information: www.pima.gov/nrpr, eeducation@pima.gov or 520-724-5375

In the Beginning - October 1993

The following presentation was given by Sandy Sarah, Co-Founder of the Friends of Agua Caliente, on March 16th, 2022 at the Pond 1 Dedication Ceremony.

And the bulldozers were coming to Agua Caliente Park! This bit of information was supplied to me by my neighbor, Mary Karrels, who wanted another neighbor, Linda Wood, and me to meet with Jorga Riggenbach and former ranch resident, Pete Filliatrault, at Agua Caliente Park.

The proposed topic? What could a group of citizens do to stop the bulldozers from removing all the historic buildings in Agua Caliente Park so the county could build a new, modern visitors center.

As soon as we came forward wanting to save the

historic buildings, a 10 foot tall chain link fence went up around the Ranch House and the

entrance to the bridge was heavily blocked. The interior of the pink Rose Cottage had already been partially gutted because the Parks Department did not anticipate any dissent with their plans.

It turned out that we could, and did do a lot. It took at least six months before we were ready to make our presentation to the Board of Supervisors.

Pima County was concerned because Rock Squirrels had done significant damage to the foundation of the Ranch House and there was asbestos in the ceiling of the Ranch House. Because New Mexico was suffering from cases of hantavirus and there had been a case found way over in Avra Valley, there was a concern that it might be found at the Park.

Pete's parents purchased Agua Caliente Ranch in 1951 and made it their home until they sold it in 1959. Linda's identical twin sister, Ann Rodriguez, was the Pima County Recorder and thanks to Linda's knowledge of county government, we were able to set a plan in motion that ultimately brings us to this official opening of a new bridge to the island at Agua Caliente Park.

We had many meetings with various county officials, starting with Dan Felix, then Pima County Parks Director. We met with Paul Marsh, District 4 Supervisor and Ed Moore, and others, as well as Linda Mayro, Pima County Cultural Resources Director. Other county supervisors were also a positive influence on our work. We also worked with the Pima County Parks Commission in our

quest to preserve the historic buildings in the park.

We created the 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation



Rose Cottage 2010

Photo courtesy of Susan Knoll

with the assistance of various county personnel. Pete was an accountant.

Linda Mayro introduced us to Robie Pardee, a parks employee, and Jim Ayres, of the Tucson - Pima County Historical Commission. Both Robie and Jim have since passed away, but they, along with Linda, deserve a big hand for helping us to get where we are today.

I can still remember when Linda and I called the Pima County Health Department after being told by the Chairman of the Parks Commission that hantavirus was at the park and the buildings really needed to be torn down. The response from the health department, "There is No hantavirus at Agua Caliente Park".

Please see **History**, Page 4

History (cont.)

Our presentation to the Pima County Board of Supervisors would take place the next day. This was some time in the spring of 1994. The Chairman of the Board opened with a question about hanta-virus. “It’s not there”, we responded. We gave our presentation to the Board and thankfully, they voted to save the buildings in the park.

During the call to the audience at the end of the meeting (and after we left) someone from the neighborhood complained about the cement water tower on the acre of land and the east end of the Park, saying that it was in bad shape. The water tower was used to supply water from the spring to the Ranch House and had been a surveyor’s landmark for many years. The Board voted to remove it and it was removed with some difficulty since it was in much better shape than represented by the neighbor. The Board also voted to remove the service building that was in bad shape.

If my memory serves me correctly, the Bunkhouse was the first building restored, followed by the Ranch House and the pink Rose Cottage. The Audubon Society had a small gift shop in the Ranch House after the renovation. But the County dragged their feet at replacing the island to the bridge.



Bunk House 2011 Photo courtesy of Susan Knoll

Around the turn of the century (2000), a PC Flood Control Employee found a potential grant from the US Army Corps of Engineers to “Repair a damaged habitat”. The proposal would build a bullfrog wall around pond one and turn the NW corner of the Park into a “cienega” (the Spanish word for swamp or marsh) because it was assumed that one might have existed in that area

more than 100 years ago. We held public meetings, the County held public meetings, but in the end, the proposal would have required running a water line from 49ers County Club to the Park because the spring in the Park was no longer producing enough water to support the plan. Public sentiment was strong against the idea, and the plan was dropped.



Ranch House 2006 Photo courtesy of Susan Knoll

One of our most important projects after the renovation of the buildings were complete was making sure the property was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It took about 10 years to accomplish that!

Next on the county’s project list was to restore ponds one and two with liners that would conserve water. As a part of that project, the bridge to the island was finally to be restored. And now, nearly 30 years after our founding, the bridge to the island has been replaced and we recently celebrated that event.

That’s how the Friends of Agua Caliente started!



Buffelgrass Is a Threat to Saguaros and Maybe Your Home

You've probably heard of buffelgrass. It's considered a noxious invasive species in the Sonoran Desert because it grows readily and harms the ecosystem. This grass was introduced to our desert in the 1930s for erosion control and livestock grazing. While it is perfect for the savannahs of Africa, here it takes up the natural open space, crowding out native species like saguaros and their nurse trees (mesquites and palo verdes).

Buffelgrass will not only physically crowd out native species, but is also fire-adapted and burns much hotter and faster than our native grasses. The rate of spread for a buffelgrass-fueled fire is 10 times faster than predicted for a fire fueled by usual desert fuels. Buffelgrass-fueled fires kill saguaros

and native trees and shrubs, leaving a rich regrowth of buffelgrass and dead native plants. The grass is not good forage for some of our most beloved native animals. For example, desert tortoises will lose weight and their body condition deteriorates when buffelgrass cover reaches just 20% because they struggle to find food, which for tortoises, consists of native plants.

This bunchgrass has become established on the east side of town and endangers our beautiful saguaro ecosystem as well as our homes. In August 2019, lightning ignited a patch of buffelgrass on the slopes of the Catalinas north of Snyder Road. Twenty-two firefighters worked to bring this fire, known as the Mercer Fire, under control, but only

after it burned through 25 acres.

Last February and March I joined a buffelgrass pull along Snyder Road, east of Catalina Highway sponsored by the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum. There was a LOT of it along the northside of the



Freed Saguaro - Before & After



Photo courtesy of Pam Rossetter

road. A crew of about 12 people spent three mornings pulling out the grass. While we did some great work, there is more to do. Buffelgrass seeds will probably sprout with the summer monsoons. Control requires patience, determination, and about three years of effort to rid an area of the seedstock. We freed many saguaros and it was immensely rewarding.

You can help control this invasive species in our area. Learn to ID it, pull it when you find it, map it, and

participate in a pulling event. Below are some resources to get more information, report buffelgrass patches, sign up for buffelgrass pulls, and learn what else you can do to help Save Our Saguaros.

[Learn about buffelgrass](#)

[Video - Welcome to the buffelgrass patch](#)

[Sign up for a pull or register a site](#)

Pam Rossetter, FOAC President

Friends of Agua Caliente, Inc.

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Social Media

Visit our Facebook page and share your photos of Agua Caliente Park along with your stories about your Park visit with us via Facebook Messenger. You can also send an e-mail to tinabaker@FriendsOfAguaCaliente.org and we will share your photos to our Facebook page.

To find us on Facebook, search “Friends of Agua Caliente Tucson” within Facebook or scan this QR code.



Our YouTube Channel can be accessed from our website or search “Friends of Agua Caliente” from within YouTube. The website can be accessed at <https://friendsofaguacaliente.org/>

Electronic Newsletter

Sending the newsletter electronically saves *FOAC* postage and you receive it in color. If you did not receive an electronic version and would like to be placed on the electronic distribution, please send an email to:

info@FriendsOfAguaCaliente.Org

We do not release our database to anyone.