

A Visitor's Guide to El Camino del Diablo

With a Road Log of Junctions, Miles, and GPS Coordinates

Corrected to 17 November 2017

Friends of the Sonoran Desert
in Cooperation with
US Fish and Wildlife Service,
Barry M. Goldwater Range – West,
Barry M. Goldwater Range – East,
US Border Patrol,
International Sonoran Desert Alliance
& Cabeza Prieta Natural History Association
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"In all, four hundred persons are said to have perished of thirst between Altar and Yuma in eight years, and this scarcely seems an exaggeration, for the writer counted sixty-five graves in a single-day's ride of a little over thirty miles. So fearful was the death toll, that...travel along this route soon ceased, and at the time of this survey [in 1895] the road had not been traveled...in sixteen years. Locally it is known as 'El Camino del Diablo' (the road of the devil) and few names are more appropriate."

David D. Gaillard, US Corps of Engineers, 1896

A Visitors Guide for El Camino del Diablo

El Camino del Diablo – the Devil's Highway – links our past to our present to our future. It connects a region's history, its ecology, its enduring places and its diverse people. In simplest terms it runs from Sonoyta, Sonora, to Yuma, Arizona, but it is far more than a road.

Before history was written in words, the road – actually more of a route – was a network of Native American foot trails going to water, fields, villages, hunting grounds, and sacred places. American Indians, primarily Tohono and Hia-ced O'odham, guided the first European explorers, padres, and soldiers across the vast and perilous desert. Padre Eusebio Kino made some of the region's first maps, applying long-used Indian names and newly minted Spanish labels to villages, mountains, and rivers. Famous among those early travelers were Kino, Jacob Sedelmayr, and Juan Bautista de Anza.

Beginning in the late 1840s streams of prospectors, lured by gold fever, traversed the region seeking their fortunes in California. In 1854, the US purchased a vast tract of land south of the Gila River from Mexico (the Gadsden Purchase), and waves of surveyors, scientists, and adventurers came to see what the “new” land was all about. The original Camino was a foot trail. Horses came in the late 17th century and wagons or oxcarts followed in the late 18th century. A motorcar first crossed the route in 1915.

Today you can drive much of the route, or walk if you prefer. In stretches, the current roadway is the same as then; in others, it parallels the old trail, or at least what was first mapped as the Camino in 1920 by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Although the drive can be made in a day, you may wish to allow 3 to 4 days for the trip and prefer the company of a second vehicle. October through April may be the most comfortable and photogenic months to visit. During summer months, the heat will limit activities by even well-acclimated visitors. Enjoy your trip! ¡Bien viaje!

Be a safe traveler:

You **must** obtain a permit and register for this trip. At the same time you can learn current road and travel conditions, as well as where the flowers are blooming. Tell friends or family your plans and when you will return. Even small mishaps – a wrong turn, a dead battery, a spilled canteen, a sprained ankle, a broken spring, a missed rendezvous, a lost key – may cascade into dire consequences.

Take sufficient water, fuel, food, and shelter for warmth or shade. There are no services between Ajo/Why/Lukeville and Yuma. A person requires two gallons of drinking water per day in warm weather. Places labeled as a desert waterhole or “wildlife water” should NEVER be relied upon for water. Hundreds of people have died here thinking they could find water – do not let this happen to you.

The weather and road are unpredictable: flashfloods, mud, soft sand, jagged rocks, crippling heat, windstorms, and washouts top the list. Vehicles may fail. Stay with your vehicle if it breaks down or gets stuck. Agents, rangers, and wardens will find you. If stranded, find shade, raise your car’s hood, use mirrors and the car’s horn to attract help. No one is stronger than the sun – people can die of thirst and heat within hours, especially children or the elderly. So can pets. By sitting calmly in shade and drinking ample water, you will survive even the hottest day.

Obey all signs, rules, and regulations. They protect you and your public lands. In essence the Camino is a one-lane road with two-way traffic. Drive prudently. The speed limit is 25 mph and posted. In many places sensible drivers will proceed at a slower pace due to tire-puncturing rocks and stobs, spring-busting chuckholes, and deep sands or mud holes that swallow tires and axles. The route requires special caution with its many blind curves and hills – an unseen ATV or giant 6x6 water truck may be speeding toward you. Medical help is many

hours away. Caution is the best policy on this road. After all, you're here to enjoy the scenery safely.

Smuggling and illegal immigration may be encountered in this area. Avoid suspicious groups. Very, very few visitors have had any problems at all, but a potential for trouble exists.

Emergency numbers: 9-1-1.

Border Patrol: 1-877-872-7435

Interagency Dispatch: 1-800-637-9152

Operation Game Thief (Arizona Game and Fish Dept.): 1-800-352-0700

Cell phone service is spotty, unreliable, or nonexistent between Ajo and Yuma.

Using this traveler's road log and guide:

This road log gives mileages (000.0), GPS coordinates (NAD 1983), and key junctions.

"As you go..." gives information between waypoints.

Begin from either the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge visitor center in Ajo or the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument visitor center north of Lukeville.

Reset your trip odometer.

The trip ends at Yuma, Wellton, or Tacna, and the route in this guidebook is divided into legs:

- Prelude and Map
- Introduction
- Leg 1a: Ajo to junction of Darby Well Road and Highway 85
- Leg 1b: Organ Pipe to junction of Darby Well Road and Highway 85.
- Leg 2a: Darby Well Road to Tule Well
- Leg 4: Tule Well to Tacna
- Leg 2b: El Camino del Diablo, Tule Well to Tinajas Altas
- Leg 3a: Tinajas Altas to Goldwater Range northern boundary
- Goldwater Range northern boundary to Yuma and Interstate 8
- Goldwater Range northern boundary to Wellton and Interstate 8
- Leg 3b: Tinajas Altas to Fortuna and Interstate 8
- Alternate route From Leg 3b to Interstate 8
- Epilogue