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# Thirsting for water



## a desert place

Natural beauty  
through preservation

Presented by:  
CONSERVATION COMMITTEE of the  
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Last year during the hot season, I wrote an article for "A Desert Place" entitled "Thirst in the Desert."

I spoke about the 49-ers who tried to cross the Sonoran Desert during the torrid months, searching desperately for a level route to California's gold country.

And I told the tragic story of the early-day travelers on the road which became known as "El Camino del Diablo," the infamous Devil's Highway. These luckless wayfarers, journeying in one of the most waterless areas on the face of the earth, were confident they would find water at the famous waterhole called Tinajas Altas, located southwest of Yuma. And they were right, these intrepid men.

Tinajas Altas reputedly held water when all the other desert tanks were dry. The trouble lay in finding Tinajas Altas; there were no conspicuous landmarks and scores of would-be El Dorados died of thirst when they were literally within yards of abundant drinking water. A

line of wooden crosses marks the places where they perished.

But the most shocking part of the story is that when the packs of these thirst-stricken men were examined, many of them were found to contain plenty of unconsumed drinking water!

The men had been saving it instead of drinking it, victims of the myth that water in the desert is to be hoarded rather than used.

This fatal mistake suggests to me that now that the Arizona's scorching summer is upon us and many cityfolk will be wandering in the parching desert, it may be timely to renew the warning I gave in my last summer's article about thirst in the desert.

Assume that you are stranded in the desert with a limited supply of water. What is the right and what is the wrong way to manage your water supply?

The wrong way, it is now agreed by the experts, is to hoard it as the unfortunate dead of Tinajas Altas obviously did.

Carefully rationing your water

supply, consuming it drop by drop, limiting yourself to a cupful when you need at least a gallon a day for good health and alertness — this way likes the road to dusty death, in Macbeth's words.

There is a sound physiological basis for this conclusion. When the body is overheated, as from desert sunlight, the normal response is sweating, which cools the surface of the skin by evaporation.

Water lost through sweating must be replaced. If not, dehydration sets in, followed by eventual death.

As for how much water you should drink to keep going in the hot desert, the answer, according to the experts, is: **Drink the minimum amount necessary to quench your thirst.**

Otherwise, the loss of water through sweating will not be balanced, and physiological exhaustion will soon result.

Staying alive is one of the nicest things about living. If you are determined to explore the more remote parts of our beautiful Sonoran Desert, one way of staying alive is to discard the discredited traditional notion that you should hoard your water supply and consume it only drop by drop.

Instead, drink just enough to quench your thirst (more would be wasteful) and let the marvelous fluid do what it is supposed to do to your body tissues.