

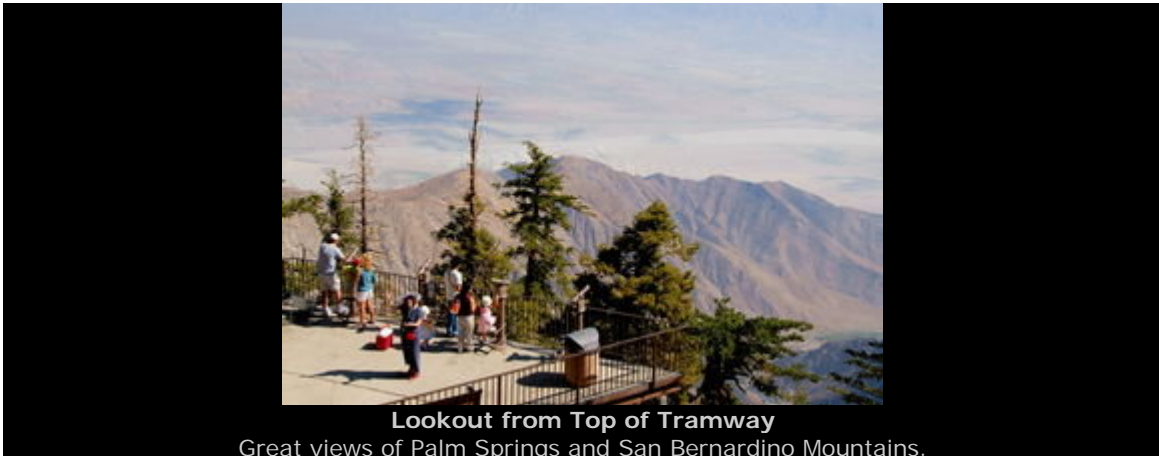
Palm Springs Heat, Tram & Wind Farms

This Labor Day weekend (September 1-3, 2007) was a sweltering surprise as temperatures climbed to 115F each day. And it never cooled off. Perhaps the biggest surprise came when going out in the morning only to get slapped with a thrust of hot 95-degree air. However by the end of the weekend I felt a lot more comfortable with it. Mentally it helped me to think of the heat as the inverse of mid-winter back home in Minnesota.

It will take a long time for my hand to forget a scorching from opening a metal door knob that had been resting in the sun. And the metal railing to help enter the swimming pool was too hot to be of any use.

To be fair, I would point out that Palm Springs, which is only an hour and a half drive from Los Angeles, does not usually get such extreme heat. It was an unusual weekend with an estimated 25 deaths related to the heat in the LA area and 100,000 households lost power. Tragically an elderly couple died because they could not afford to turn on their AC.

Aerial Tram



The highlight of our visit was the trip by the Aerial Tramway from Palm Springs to Mount San Jacinto State Park. This short 10 minute ride whisks you from 2,600 feet to 8,500 feet, saying goodbye to hot desert and hello to a 35-degree drop in temperature. The Tram holds 80 people who stand on a circular, revolving platform. In the 10-minute ride the passengers make 2 complete circles in what they claim to be the world's largest rotating tram.

At the top of the Tram you will find two restaurants, but the best part are the walking trails among tall Sugar Pines and giant boulders. I found the fragrance of the pines to be relaxing as we kept a lookout for wildlife and birds. The large stellar jays dominated the bird population. We hoped to see a road runner but they rarely leave the desert below.

The top the vistas are marvelous with a panorama that includes the city of Palm Springs, the San Bernardino Mountains, and parts of the Banning wind farms.

Wind Farms

What can you farm in the desert without irrigation? If you are just west of Palm Springs, the answer is wind. In the San Geronimo Pass



Dead Sugar Pines

Walking in the Mount San Jacinto State Park we encountered these dead sugar pines that looked like a running animal.

along Interstate 10 about 15 miles west of Palm Springs stand thousands and thousands of wind machines.

Together they supply more electrical power than the city of Palm Springs can use. Windmills are planted at this site because the narrow passageway between the San Bernardino and the San Jacinto mountains creates the fastest wind speed in Southern California.

The wind machines, most of which are made in Denmark, cannot make money in less the wind speed is over 13 mph most of the time. A lot of people think these wind machines are an eye sore, but I think they have an elegant appearance. Most notably they are the cleanest, and fast becoming the most efficient, source of energy.



City of Palm Springs

The desert city as seen from the lookout at the top of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway.



Wind Machines Up Close

These tall windmills stand as tall as a 15 story building. Notice how tiny the little house looks in the lower left.



San Geronio Wind Farms

The fields of this farm of wind machines climbs up the side of the mountain and fill up the horizon.



Wind Farming

Thousands of huge machines are packed into a small corridor to catch the heavy winds.