



California State Parks
Since 1864

California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact (760) 393-3810 711, TTY relay service



Our Mission

To provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



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Salton Sea State Recreation Area Historical Architectural Tour

Welcome to the Salton Sea State Recreation Area Historical Architectural Tour. Your tour will start near the Visitor Center at Varner Harbor.



Salton Sea State Recreation Area Historical Architectural Tour



Pre-Tour Information

The Historical Architectural Tour has six stops and guides you to three areas of the park. It starts at Varner Harbor, then travels to the park entrance station, moving onto Mecca Beach, and finally returning to the Visitor Center Area.



Pre-Tour Information

This driving/walking tour will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes and have opportunities to walk around at each stop.



You may also walk from Varner Harbor to Mecca Beach instead of driving by taking the Ironwood Nature Trail which starts at New Camp.

The Architect and California State Parks



Photo Courtesy
of California State
Parks

The architecture in the park, designed by architect Robert F. Uhte, contains a unique blend of standardized and non-standardized Parks buildings, embodying distinctive characteristics of various types and periods of American architecture.

The preservation of architectural features in this park are examples of how California State Parks protects California's history to be passed on to future generations.

Salton Sea State Recreation Area Historical Architectural Tour - *Introduction*



Architecture reflects the character of places, times, cultures, and history. When you entered the park did you notice the entrance sign? Think about how the entrance sign, constructed in 1955, reflects the characteristics of the Salton Sea State Recreation Area.

Salton Sea State Recreation Area Historical Architectural Tour

Think about how you have changed throughout the years. Has the music you listen to changed? When you were younger did you prefer rock, metal, or punk. What about now? Do you listen to more jazz or classical? What do these changes reflect about you?

What do the changes in architecture reflect about American culture, history, and global roles throughout time?

Salton Sea State Recreation Area Historical Architectural Tour



Think about the changes that happened from 1950 to 1965 and how events of that time may have been reflected in the architecture.

- 1950 -The start of the Korean War
- 1955 – Disneyland opens
- 1957 – Russia launches Sputnik into space
- 1961- First American travels into space

Photo courtesy of
NASA

Stop 1

Varner Harbor

In the 1950's, the Salton Sea was becoming a sports fishing and boating "paradise" and had many restrictive private yacht clubs and marinas, such as the North Shore Yacht Club. The Salton Sea State Recreation Area's Varner Harbor provided low-cost access to the Salton Sea and maritime recreational activities.

Credit
—
Salton
Sea
SRA
boat
launch



Stop 1

Varner Harbor

This ease of access to the water provided by California State Parks contributed to the “Democratization of the Salton Sea” providing recreational opportunities to all people of California.

Credit –
Salton Sea
SRA
boat
launch;
visitors;
car; boats;
crane



Stop 1

Varner Harbor

The architectural design of the original harbor and boat ramp at the Salton Sea State Recreation Area was a reflection of a change in American culture as people wanted to spend more time recreating outdoors. The current upgraded boat ramp continues to provide access to the Salton Sea.



Stop 1

Varner Harbor

As you entered the park, on the historic entrance road, you saw a couple of examples of a very popular post WW II architectural style. What type of architectural style was it and why was it so popular?

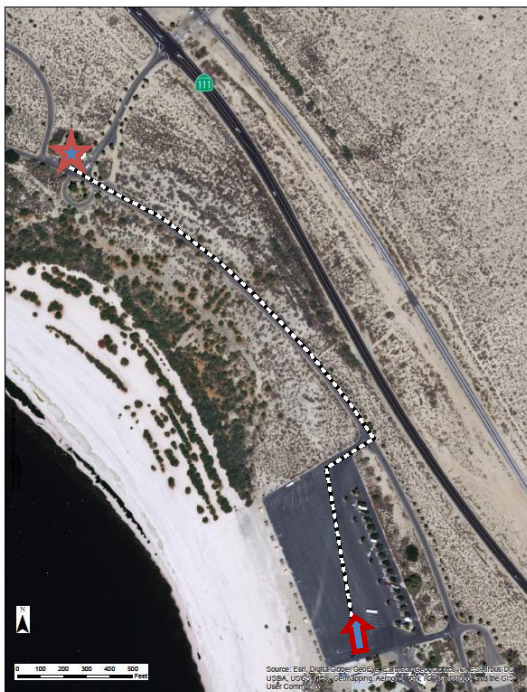


Travel to Stop 2

From Varner Harbor, travel back to the entrance station. There will be limited parking by the Ranger Station.

Stop 2

Ranger Station



Stop 2

Ranger Station

The architecture of the Entrance Ranger Station is a Modern Western Ranch style which became popular after World War II, when returning service men were able to take advantage of the GI Bill.



Stop 2

Ranger Station



Modern Western Ranch style architecture is marked by low, hipped roofs (sloped in four directions), such as on the kiosk, or gabled roofs (sloped in two directions), such as on the ranger station.

Stop 2

Ranger Station



The Modern Western Ranch architecture also had large picture windows facing the street and wrapped corner windows.

Stop 2

Ranger Station

One reason Modern Western Ranch architecture was popular was due to its' low cost to build. This made it affordable for returning servicemen and for California State Parks.



Stop 2

Ranger Station

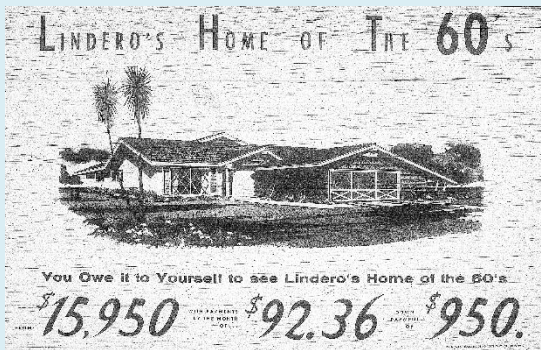


Photo courtesy of The Tribune (San Luis Obispo).

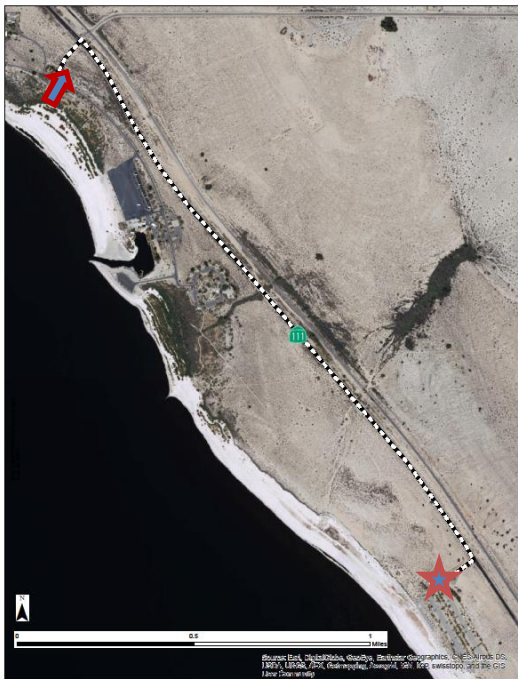
This affordability changed the American culture to a homeowner culture with a more than 10% increase in homeowner-ship after World War II.

Travel to Stop 3

Drive approximately 1 ½ miles south (turn right on Highway 111) to Mecca Beach. There will be limited parking on the right just past the entrance station. Your tour continues there.

As you go to the next stop, consider how the buildings and their surroundings relate to each other.

Travel to Stop 3



Salton Sea State Recreation Area Historical Architectural Tour

Welcome to Mecca Beach



Stop 3

Mecca Beach Kiosk

You have driven down a historic entrance road and are now at Stop 3. The Mecca Beach Entrance Station.



Stop 3

Mecca Beach Kiosk

The historic entrance station, with its low hanging flat roof illustrates Robert F. Uhte's philosophy that park buildings should blend unobtrusively within the park's natural or historic landscape.



Travel to Stop 4

As you go to the next stop, think about what other architectural features might an architect design for a campground and how important might these be to the campers' experience?

Travel to Stop 4

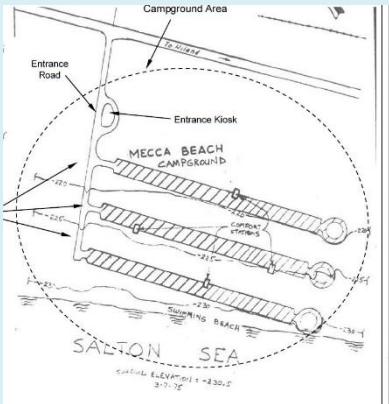
Continue straight ahead to the end and park in the day-use area.



Stop 4

Mecca Beach Campground

As an architect for California State Parks, Robert Uhte designed more than the buildings, he also designed the campground layouts.



Stop 4

Mecca Beach Campground

Take the opportunity to explore the campground, which provides easy access to the sea.



Photo courtesy Salton Sea State Recreation Area,
California State Parks

Stop 4

Mecca Beach Campground

Built in the early 1960's, the Mecca Beach Campground provided a place for post World War II era recreation. RVs were becoming more popular and campground architecture needed to reflect that change in American Culture.



Photo courtesy Salton Sea State Recreation Area,
California State Parks

Stop 4

Mecca Beach Campground

Camping has changed since the 1960's and continues to change. If you were to design the campground of ***tomorrow***, what would it look like?

Stop 4

Mecca Beach Campground

Through the years, there have been several upgrades to meet the changing needs of campers and American culture. As you explore the campground, see if you can spot some of those changes.



Stop 4

Mecca Beach Campground

What did upgrades did you see?

Did you see the solar the solar water heaters?

How about the upgraded electrical for campers?

While some upgrades may be easy to see, others may be harder to see. All the upgrades reflect a change in culture, from a growing conservation ethic to meeting the need for higher electrical current for RV's.

Stop 4

Mecca Beach Campground

As you explore the campground, think about how the architecture of the campground can make entering and exiting the campground with a RV or trailer easier.

Follow the campground road south to the end.



Stop 4

Mecca Beach Campground

At the end of the campground are the circulation roads (cul-de-sacs), providing an easy way for campers with trailers or large RVs to turn around.



Stop 4

Mecca Beach Campground

What other architectural features have you noticed in the campground?

Stop 5

Comfort Station

Have you seen any of the four comfort stations? Notice anything unique about the architecture?



Stop 5

Comfort Station

Did you notice the rows of large screened windows?

How about the color?

While the screens provide ventilation, the original white paint was durable and washable. It was often specified for use in government buildings, and seen as modern and simplistic, reflecting the elements of a more modern style of architecture.

Stop 5

Comfort Station

Take a look at the roof. Notice the design. We begin to see the incorporation of the International style of architecture with the Butterfly Roof. These roofs are more aerodynamic and sustain less damage from winds.

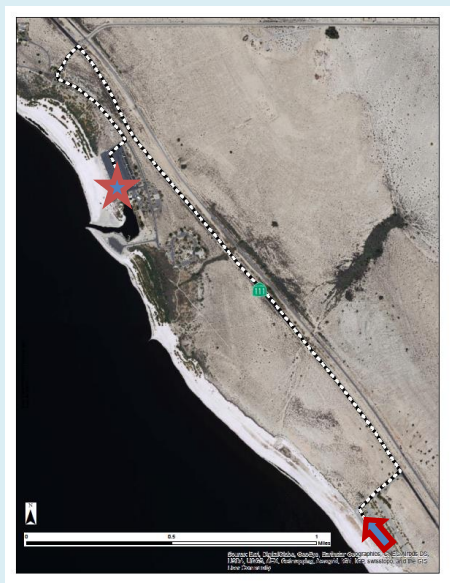


Travel to Stop 6

As you return to the Visitor Center, think about what events and changes were occurring in the 1960's and how architectural design may have been a reflection of those events and changes.

Salton Sea State Recreation Area Historical Architectural Tour

Travel back to Visitor Center to
continue the tour.



Stop 6

Visitor Center

In the 1950's and 1960's the United States set a national objective of a human trip to the Moon. Achieving this objective secured the United States position as a global leader.

Astronaut Edwin Aldrin poses for photograph beside deployed U.S. flag.

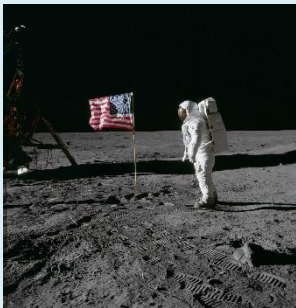


Photo courtesy of NASA

Stop 6

Visitor Center

The Visitor Center was a break from the ranch-style architecture we have seen earlier on the tour. By the late 1950's and early 1960's, California State Parks allowed Uhte some latitude in his designs.



Stop 6

Visitor Center

Uhte began designing buildings using a regional style of International Style of architecture. Adopting the use of glass, steel and concrete, the International Style created a more modern look, reflecting the United States modern role as a global leader.



Stop 6

Visitor Center

Remember the butterfly roof of the comfort stations? The Visitor Center uses a similar style, a series of inverted gables to create a series of four low reversed chevrons or “boomerangs”.



Stop 6

Visitor Center

Does the roof resemble anything?



Stop 6

Visitor Center

From a distance, the roof is meant to resemble a set of waves in motion. Another example of blending the architecture with the environment.



Stop 6

Visitor Center

The sleek modern look of the International style of architecture reflected America's new role as a global leader in the atomic age and space exploration.



Salton Sea State Recreation Area Historical Architectural Tour

Just as changes in musical taste may reflect different stages in our lives, the architecture at the Salton Sea State Recreation Area is a reflection of the changing eras in American time, history and culture.

Salton Sea State Recreation Area Historical Architectural Tour



From the Modern Western
Ranch style that reflected
the need for affordability for
both California State Parks
and returning GI's...

Salton Sea State Recreation Area Historical Architectural Tour



to the International Style of architecture, reflecting America's new role as a global leader through space exploration and setting a goal of a manned trip to the moon.

Salton Sea State Recreation Area Historical Architectural Tour

We hope that when you see a building, you will look beyond the structure and begin to see what the building reflects in America's history, culture and time.



Photo Credit:
NASA



Salton Sea State Recreation Area Historical Architectural Tour

Photo Credits

- Dennis Stephen
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- NASA
- California State Parks
- The Tribune (San Luis
Obispo)

Maps

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