

Welcome to Pakoon Springs! You don't often hear stories with the words 'alligator' and 'Arizona' together. At first it may seem like one of those old cowboy yarns told with a wink and a smile. Sometimes, however, those tales do have some teeth to them. One such story is that of Clem, an American alligator who, in 1987, made a most fateful trip from the swamps of the Deep South to the Mojave Desert of western Arizona.

Clem was scarcely a foot long when he was brought out west to a ranch situated on the banks of Pakoon Springs. He was a gift, brought from a friend, to Charles Simmons, the rancher who once owned the area around the springs. Though some expressed doubt about the ability of a swamp animal to survive the hot, dry summers and cold winter nights of the Mojave, Charles seemed to believe in Clem from the beginning and for nearly 20 years, Clem hid in his pond at Pakoon rarely venturing out.

Charles never considered Clem dangerous; he believed the gator was afraid of people every bit as much as people were afraid of Clem. However, with time, and a growing gator, there were bound to be a few close calls.

One night, as Charles was preparing for bed, he and his little dachshund heard noises outside the house. When Charles opened the door, the dog zipped out the door, made an abrupt stop, turned tail, and ran back into the house at lightning speed. The next morning Charles learned what had spooked the dog when he saw dozens of alligator tracks all around the house. On another occasion, a hired hand was working underneath an old pickup at the ranch. Out of nowhere, old Clem came waddling down the driveway and right past the poor frightened man, eyeing him all the way. Luckily nothing came of it.

Clem had some close calls of his own. In the late 1980's, severe wildfires struck the area around Pakoon and Clem found himself having to dodge the helicopter baskets that firefighters would use to scoop up water from the springs. A friend ribbed Charles about how Clem likely got scooped up and bailed out by the helicopters. After the fires died down, however, there was ol' Clem, still in his pond, to the secret relief of all.

In 2002, Charles sold his ranch to the BLM with the expressed mandate that no harm come to Clem. BLM managers knew, however, that they could not just leave him out there. So they set out to find the grumpy gator. It took several attempts, but a very skinny Clem was finally pulled from the water in July of 2005. He was relocated to the Phoenix Herpetological Society in Scottsdale, Arizona where he still lives today. Weighing only 130 pounds at his capture, Clem now tips the scales at more than 600 pounds with the potential to reach 800 by the end of his life. His temperament is about what you'd expect from an alligator that grew up on the Arizona Strip; he is as fierce and grumpy as any gator the southern swamps have to offer. The ponds he called home, meanwhile, have undergone extensive restoration to bring them back to a more natural form than they had been. Decades of ranch use produced heavy modifications to suit the needs of the people and livestock that lived here. Now, however, the hope is to get things back the way nature intended. This time without the gator.

While some of the fantastic stories told over the campfires on Parashant may stretch the fabric of truth a bit, don't be too quick to brush them off. After all, you wouldn't want to be the one that goes swimming in an alligator hole.

Don't open until you arrive

3. See Ya Later

Take a picture!

Alligator

N 36° 24' 53.3"

W 113° 57' 25.1"

Be on the lookout, strange critters have called this place home.

Turn off of County Rd. 111, there is a parking area available. Short walk required.

Difficulty: ♦♦ - -

#FindItAtParashant