

TRAVEL

From empty slides to deserted swimming pools, I wandered around an abandoned water park in the middle of a California desert

By [Monica Humphries](#)



Monica Humphries/Business Insider



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I stopped in the Mojave Desert and wandered around a 251-acre abandoned water park.

The former park's history was a roller coaster of success and failure, changing hands three times.

Today, the water's dried up. What remains are empty pools and decaying buildings.

A scattering of palm trees in a sandy desert was my first clue that I was close to Rock-A-Hoola Waterpark.

Once I spotted colorful billboards, I was positive I had arrived.

Just off the service road running parallel to California's Mojave Freeway in Newberry Springs are the remains of an old water park.

The water park's history is reminiscent of a water slide with years of ups, downs, and sharp turns. It originally opened in the 1960s as Dolores Waterpark. Later, it operated under the names Discovery Waterpark and, most famously, Rock-A-Hoola Waterpark. Then, in 2004, it closed for good.

Today, the water has dried up, swimmers have disappeared, and most of what remains are empty cement pools and buildings decaying in the desert sun.

Driving through California's Mojave Desert in the fall of 2023, I didn't spot much beyond billboards, rest stops, and sand. Then, I saw palm trees and colorful buildings.

Palm trees were scattered throughout the abandoned park. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

I had arrived at my destination: an abandoned water park. I drove up and was shocked to find no fences or gates turning away visitors.

Scattered buildings and empty pools are all that remain. Monica
Humphries/Business Insider

I pulled into a sandy lot, drove past signs I imagined once welcomed visitors, and made my way to a parking area.

An old billboard formerly advertised the water park. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

For the next hour, I explored the 251 acres of ruins.

Abandoned buildings are covered in art. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

The place felt like a mirage. I spotted desert landscapes in every direction, with the park providing pops of color amid beige-toned scenery.

Slides on the property. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

At the front of the property was what remains of the water park's entrance.

The former entrance to the water park. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

Here, I could make out the word "waterpark."

The signage for the now abandoned water park. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

Bob Byers, a local businessman, built the property. It was originally a private resort, which he named Lake Dolores Waterpark after his wife.

A building at the abandoned water park. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

Source: Business Insider

In 1962, he opened it to the public. It was home to a lazy river, zip line, man-made lakes with water slides, and bumper boats.

The entrance to the water park. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

"We have an old-fashioned swimming hole," Byers told the Las Vegas Review-Journal in 1989. "You have to have a little country in you to enjoy this."

An abandoned slide at the water park in California. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

Source: Las Vegas Review-Journal

In the 1980s, Byers shut it down. The water park couldn't compete with other nearby attractions.

Some buildings now sit in ruins. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

In 1998, the park went through a major renovation. Money was poured into the attraction and transformed into a 1950s-themed oasis called Rock-A-Hoola Waterpark.

Stairs lead up to more ruins where water slides once existed. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

While rock-n-roll music once played across the property and 1950s references filled the park, only hints of the old theme remain today.

Empty pools fill the park. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

Rock-A-Hoola didn't last long. In 1999, an employee used a water slide after hours and became a paraplegic. The settlement cost the park \$4.4 million, the Review-Journal reported.

The park went through multiple names before it was abandoned. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

The park went bankrupt in 2000. In 2002, it tried its hand at success for a third time, reopening as Discovery Waterpark. By 2004, it had closed for good.

Electrical boxes now sit empty. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

While swimmers no longer go to Rock-A-Hoola, skateboarders, graffiti artists, photographers, and urban explorers do.

Graffiti coats every building on the property. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

I crossed the entrance gates, where I spotted the remains of an old water fountain.

The structure of a former water fountain. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

Dotting the perimeter of the space were the skeletons of buildings. One was likely home to tube rentals, another to snacks, and perhaps a third for souvenirs.

The buildings that remain are all empty. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

Practically every inch of the former water park was covered in graffiti, and rusted cans were scattered on sandy floors.

An empty spray paint can sit on the abandoned property. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

I pictured the slides that would have curved down the remaining steel frames.

Frames once supported a large water slide. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

I pictured people swimming in the vast cement ditches that are now better suited to skateboarders.

Skateboard tracks filled empty pools. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

I spotted the canal where the lazy river once flowed. According to Lost America, it was added during the 1998 renovation and was the largest in the world at the time.

A view of the empty lazy river at the water park. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

Source: Lost America

Toward the back of the property was a large hill with a handful of slides that would have sent swimmers down to the bottom.

On the property was a hilly area with a handful of water-slide remains. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

Since the park closed in 2004, rumors of a revival have existed. But plans to bring it back haven't come to fruition. In 2020, a private firm had plans to turn it into a "roadside playground," Business Insider previously reported.

Buildings now sit in ruins at the former Rock-A-Hoola water park. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

In 2021, the property was listed for sale for \$11 million.

The water slides' old frameworks are all that remain at the abandoned site. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

Source: Business Insider

The San Bernardino County Board of Commissioners approved plans to transform the property into a new park with a 22-acre lake, water park, and RV park, the Review-Journal said.

A view of Rock-A-Hoola's empty pools. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

It's unclear if the plans to revitalize the water park are still happening. The project's developers did not respond to a request for comment from BI on the project.

A view of the water park with mountains in the distance. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

As I explored the property in the desert heat, I saw no signs of improvement or progress.

A water slide covered in graffiti at the abandoned water park. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

So, instead of envisioning the future, I pictured myself at the park during Rock-A-Hoola's glory days.

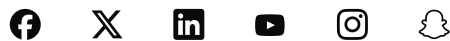
The walls of the former pools are now coated in graffiti. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

I imagined zooming down the Greased Lightning water slide and chilling in the lazy river.

The abandoned lazy river. Monica Humphries/Business Insider

And I was glad I stumbled upon a place I never expected to see in the desert.

Business Insider's reporter at the entrance to the abandoned water park. Monica Humphries/Business Insider



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