

How I Spent My Summer Vacation

by *steven kapellas*

news editor

What can you say about a place where hundreds of nuclear bombs have been exploded?

The Nevada Test Site has been in existence for almost 40 years. More than 600 tests have been conducted, 112 in the atmosphere, the rest underground.

When we approached the entrance to the Test Site I noticed two things. The first was a small object in the middle of the road. It turned out to be a security guard.

He was a cold-hearted looking man who came on the bus to look us all over.

He walked all the way to the back of the bus, even opening the restroom to make sure no-one was inside.

I know now he was just making sure we had our identification badges on,

but I had the feeling it was more than that.

So much of an effort is made to make sure things are secure at the test site.

I couldn't help noticing how easy it is to get inside. The fences surrounding the site are barely three feet high. Someone could hop the fence, climb a small mountain and "presto!" you are on the Nevada Test Site.

The next thing we did was pick up our tour guide, Frances Guinn.

One strange thing about her: She wore these bright yellow sun glasses.

That may not be funny to you, but I wondered if she was wearing some sort of special radiation glasses to protect her from the test site.

Our first stop was the medical building. There we met the chief physician. He told us he wasn't a "typical DOE employee," but he sounded just

like a DOE press release when it came to the dangers of radiation.

The doctor claimed there was no link between nuclear testing and cancer.

"Let me see the evidence," he said, but not once did he provide evidence of his own to support his claims.

Despite having to listen to the doctor's propaganda, the hospital visit was interesting. A fully equipped surgical room, X-Ray lab and hospital beds convince a visitor the DOE is serious about the quality of medical care at the test site.

My favorite part of the hospital visit was the decontamination room. I'm not sure if it was some sort of sign, but there was an autopsy table in a room that is supposed to remove radiation from your body.

Our next stop was a visit

to a dump — oh, I mean a low level nuclear repository.

We drove right into it. I would imagine we were no more than 200 feet away from radiated material.

Some of the material inside the dump was in canisters while some was in wooden crates.

I also thought it was funny how the tour guide from the repository said it wasn't necessary for people working there to wear protective clothing. But then why did I see two workers wearing special clothing?

And to make things even more strange, the worker who was touching the equipment was not wearing gloves while the one who was writing on a clipboard had gloves on.

Our next stop was the Control Point. Here, senior test site officials coordinate all aspects of a test. Visiting the Control Center

gave me the sense of reality — tests are really conducted out here.

By far my favorite memory of the control center was when I had to go to the restroom. Francis "escorted" me and waited outside. I was so nervous I almost forgot to wash my hands.

The last time someone walked me to the restroom, I was in kindergarten.

Our next stop was 1,400 feet underground — yes 1,400 feet underground. This was the Spent Fuel storing area.

From 1980-1983, tests were conducted beneath the earth's surface to determine the effects of storing spent reactor fuel in granite formations.

It was extremely exciting to be 1,400 feet below the surface. The only problem was getting down there. We had to ride in this open, steel

cage of an elevator. It took about three minutes to get to the bottom, the whole time looking only at wooden boards.

Once underground, I soon realized this wasn't your normal mine shaft. This mine shaft had had a nuclear bomb exploded inside it.

A couple of things piqued my interest once inside. The first was the temperature. I had always thought being underground would be cold, but it wasn't. The temperature was around 75 degrees.

The second thing I noticed was how close I was to a past nuclear explosion.

I was only a thousand feet away from ground zero. That was scary.

I did find a little humor down under. The doctor had talked about how test site workers are tested for radiation and ear damage.

See "Nuke" page 15

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