

*Sometimes a road trip opportunity comes out of the middle of nowhere, and it also takes you to the middle of nowhere.*

# We'll cross that bridge when we get to it...Yuma's BRIDGE TO NOWHERE

Story and photos by Tyson Hugie

**O**n a Tuesday at the office in Scottsdale, my coworker Greg sent me an email entitled, "Seen this?" with a screen capture of what is known as the Bridge to Nowhere. Of course, I dropped all work-related activities and headed straight for Google. My colleagues at the office know me well. What I soon uncovered was the history of a very little-known 800-foot-long suspension bridge about 8 miles north of the desert community of Yuma, Arizona.

I took to the streets bright and early on Sunday morning in my Acura and headed westward. Yuma sits along Interstate 8, and it's only 7 miles north of the Mexican border. The sun shines for about 90 percent of days in Yuma, making it the sunniest place on earth (specifically, the city receives 4,015 hours of sunshine per year). The city's population booms in the wintertime when snowbirds from the Midwest roll in with their fifth wheel travel trailers and spend a few months in its perfect climate.

At Fortuna Road, Exit 12, I rolled off the main highway and headed north toward US 95. Following some directions I'd printed from Roadside America, I knew exactly where I'd be seeing the bridge. Sure enough, its two tallest spires beckoned from afar, as I hit the brakes in the ILX and made a left-hand turn onto a gravel road that truly did look like it was in the middle of nowhere. Just a half mile or so up the dirt road, I'd driven as far as I'd be able to. Multiple warning signs urged me to not take any further steps toward the bridge. BRIDGE CLOSED; NO TRESPASSING; and UNSTABLE were some of the notifications I received. Still, I felt like I needed to get a closer look, so I parked the car and started hiking.

The bridge was built in 1929 in the name of Henry Harrison McPhaul, a notable resident of Yuma. Just a little fewer than 40 years later, in 1968, it was deemed unfit for modern traffic needs—not difficult to understand, given its narrow width. A larger bridge



was built upstream, along with a dam that rerouted the river.

Today, the McPhaul Bridge is nothing but a roadside relic. It doesn't go anywhere or serve any purpose at all, except for inquisitive road trippers like me.

The actual deck of the bridge is completely shut off with a fence and padlock, so I did not walk along the top of it. I did, however, hike down underneath the platform. Thick wooded brush was difficult to navigate, and I was wearing shorts, so the sticks would frequently jab at my legs and scratch them. I had to tread carefully down there. The view of the underside of the bridge was worth it. What was once a riverbed is now most-

KEEP RIGHT >>



**TYSON HUGIE** loves Acura, loves road trips and loves writing to bring those passions together. His *Drive to Five* website takes readers along in his over-500,000-mile Acura Legend coupe and his late model Acura ILX as they discover offbeat destinations and enjoy the scenery along the way. Travel along at [drivetofive.wordpress.com](http://drivetofive.wordpress.com).



ly dry, since the flow of water had been diverted in 1968.

Not even a mile up the road, another quick stop was to be made. A white, hand-painted sign along Highway 95 said, "Pause; Rest; Worship." Another dirt road presented itself to my left, so I veered north toward the tiniest church building I've ever set foot in. The "Tiny Church," as it has indeed been named, dates back to 1995 and was built by a farmer on his property. I spent at least 20 minutes at the church and saw nobody else around. The front door was unlocked, so I let myself in. There are six tiny pews in the 8-foot by 11-foot interior. The front row had bottled waters and some pudding on it, maybe in case any worshipers needed sustenance? Sitting on top of the pulpit was a Holy Bible and a guest book, which I signed.

My return trip to the Phoenix area was smooth sailing, as Interstate 8 on a Sunday morning is very quiet and there are remarkably few 18-wheelers along that stretch of road. I did make just one more visit before calling it a day.

Dozens of times I'd driven past Exit 67 for Avenue 64E to Dateland, but it wasn't until this Sunday that I let my curiosity get the best of me, and I pulled off I-8 for a closer look. I'd known that Dateland was famous for its date shakes, but not much else. I was greeted by a modern service station and adjoining Quizno's sandwich shop. For \$4.50, I indulged in a date shake. The flavor reminded me just remotely of a jamocha flavored shake from Arby's. The consistency was really thick, and the chunks—well, they were a bit much. It was so chunky, in fact, that my straw kept getting plugged.

Dates, I've learned, are a fruit that grows on a certain type of palm tree called a Phoenix *Dactylifera*, which can grow up to 75 feet in height. Dateland, Arizona started out as a stop along the railroad line in the 1920s. Its irrigation pool doubled as a swimming pool at that time.

Today, Dateland's source of industry primarily comes from its convenience as a pit stop for motorists cruising between Yuma and Phoenix along the interstate corridor. If you ever get the chance to swing by on your way to San Diego, I'd recommend it—just enjoy your date shake with a spoon instead of a straw. ■

