

# Hot water bubbling out of ground may or may not hold healing power

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MERCEY HOT SPRINGS — By law, operators of Mercey Hot Springs resort cannot claim the natural mineral water bubbling out of the ground at 119 degrees has special healing powers.

But the customers can, and they provide enthusiastic testimonial.

Many come to the hot springs each week from throughout Central California looking for relief for aches and illnesses which doctors have not been able to cure or control with conventional treatment.

Joan Clifton, operator of the rustic resort complex on 140 acres on Little Panoche Road about 38 miles southwest of Los Banos, said most of her customers suffer from arthritis, bursitis and rheumatism. She said they come almost religiously to bathe in the hot mineral water which they claim have healing powers.

Some of her customers have been coming to the springs for more than 30 years.

"They drink it, they bathe in it, they take it home with them," she said.

Although Mrs. Clifton is prevented by law from advertising healing powers, she believes the water is therapeutic.

"I cannot claim the water cures, but it does," she said.

People who come here say this is the best mineral water around.

Mrs. Ethel Dosier of Fresno has been coming to the springs each week for two or three days for the past six years. A retired practical nurse, she credits the springs with keeping her alive and limiting her intake of pain-killing drugs. She said she suffers from osteomyelitis and a variety of other illnesses.

"The springs are my life," she said. "Otherwise, I would have been down a long time ago."

She said she came to the springs in desperation as she was on the verge of "death's door." Her initial 21-day visit, which is a recommended healing cycle, convinced her the springs are healers, she said.

Since coming to the springs, she said she shed a back brace. She still sees her doctor for regular checkups and takes medication for a heart ailment. She credits the springs for giving her better health.

"I've seen too many beautiful things here, this is a heaven all of its own," she said.

While at the springs, Dosier takes a daily 15-minute bath in an old-fashioned individual tub in a bath house. Afterward, she sweats for another 30 minutes in a blanket.

She then spends an hour in a cooling room so her body temperature can return to normal. When she leaves the springs she takes bottled water home with her.

An elderly man who has been coming to the springs for 35 years could hardly walk from his hotel room to the bath house because of advanced arthritis, he said. Mrs. Clifton said he now can walk and comes to the springs every other week for four days at a time.

Mrs. Clifton recommends just one bath a day because of the water inasmuch as it takes a lot from the body.

People have coming to the springs in search of better health since the resort was opened at the turn of the century. Initially, the baths were taken outdoors in horse troughs which lined the yard.

People with open sores were relegated to the last trough to prevent contamination.

The water was bottled and sold by an eastern pharmacy company which distributed the water nationally in drug stores. They claimed the water had miraculous healing powers and could cure a variety of ailments.

It was sold for \$1.25 a quarter or \$5 for a gallon. Mrs. Clifton sells bottled water at the springs for 50 cents a gallon now.

The springs were discovered about 125 years ago by an Indian. He reported his find to the Mercier Brothers, French-Basque shepherders, who promptly

claimed the water for their sheep.

Mrs. Clifton said the water proved unsatisfactory for the livestock because it could abort the lambs. The shepherders sold the springs in 1900 when a hotel and bathhouse was built.

The resort includes hotel rooms, small cabins and a recreation vehicle park.