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HISTORY CENTER

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

LA LOMA ADOBE/ RESERVOIR CANYON TRAIL



A self-guided walking tour on the Reservoir Canyon Trail

INTRODUCTION

The History Center of San Luis Obispo County features the La Loma de la Nopalera Adobe (La Loma Adobe) and its setting within the Reservoir Canyon Natural Reserve—land that has been occupied for as long as 15,000 years by native peoples. Hikers can fully access the beautiful Reservoir Canyon Trail from either of two trailheads (*), planning their hikes with care (plenty of water and sunscreen) for the difficult 4.5 mile terrain. There is limited parking at each trailhead, and remember, if you pack it in, pack it out.

Enjoy your hike!



SITE 1
LA LOMA DE LA NOPALERA ADOBE
1590 LIZZIE STREET, SLO



The La Loma Adobe today.

“La Loma de la Nopalera Adobe” (La Loma Adobe) anchors the southern gateway to the 800-acre Reservoir Canyon Natural Reserve. At present, this little-known structure is awaiting restoration to its former status, with only the exterior available for viewing. A prime example of an early California adobe, the La Loma Adobe is significant for its “Monterey style” design and rare two-story configuration. Its ties to the early settlement of San Luis Obispo and its association with a prominent “Californio” family adds enrichment to the story of San Luis Obispo.

The Mission Period—A Useful Vista

La Loma de la Nopalera means “the hill of prickly pear cactus.” Indigenous people of Mexico and the Southwest utilize the Nopales prickly pear cactus for a variety of culinary dishes. Visitors can’t miss the abundant crop of this cactus here, and Site 2 has an even more remarkable display.

The core structure of the building may have been constructed as early as 1782 and if so, the Adobe pre-dates even San Luis Obispo Mission itself. La Loma Adobe is certainly one of the oldest surviving structures in San Luis Obispo, if not *the* oldest!

The La Loma Adobe’s location was most likely selected because of the elevated views toward the Mission and the surrounding valley. Originally one story and only a single room, it may have served primarily as a vista where a sharp-eyed lookout could keep an eye on the Mission’s herd of livestock grazing the surrounding potrero (unfenced pastures). A lookout here could also warn nearby Mission authorities of any unauthorized herds whose owners attempted to diverge from the El Camino Real in front of the Mission and avoid payment of the dinero demanded for crossing the potrero.

Early California—A Questionable Claim

In 1843, Don Francisco Esteban Quintana, a native of New Mexico, claimed the site of La Loma Adobe and occupied it. Quintana believed that he’d purchased an earlier land grant by Governor Alvarado with a full league (about 4,400 acres) surrounding the adobe. He brought a substantial herd of cattle from New Mexico, proceeded to purchase other properties in the sleepy pueblo, and was soon a wealthy landowner and merchant. Within two years, Governor Pio Pico appointed Quintana as one of several alcaldes (supervisors) of San Luis Obispo—just in time for the outset of war between Mexico and the US.



Don Francisco Esteban Quintana.



La Loma Adobe with presumed Muñoz family members circa 1870.

Mexican authority in San Luis Obispo ended dramatically on December 14, 1846 when John C. Frémont and his California Battalion stormed into town after a grueling night ride down Cuesta Grade. For the next few days, records of Frémont's campaign suggest use of the La Loma Adobe as quarters for some of his 430-man force, wherein they gathered prisoners and intelligence to move South over the Santa Ynez Range. Within a few weeks, Frémont had captured the Presidio of Santa Barbara, and negotiated surrender of the remaining Californio forces at Campo de Cahuenga in Los Angeles. Thus, Alta California transitioned to US sovereignty a full year before the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which officially ended the War.

In 1853, the now-former alcalde Quintana filed a claim with the U.S. Land Grant Commission to establish clear title to his "Rancho La Viña" estate with its prominent Adobe. Unfortunately for Quintana, his claim was denied when he could not produce records of the deed from Mexican officials. He soon worked to exchange his defective title for the Rancho Potrero de San Luis Obispo, which was about five miles Northeast (currently Cal Poly). The legitimate owner of the Rancho Potrero was Doña María Concepción Boronda Delissegues, known as "Chona."

The Legacy of Chona and Jose Maria Muñoz

Chona was born in 1820 into the prominent Boronda

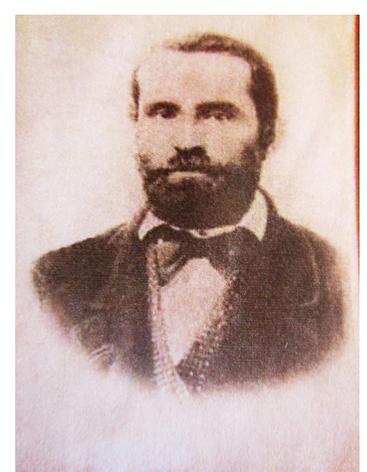


Doña María Concepción Boronda Delissegues, de Muñoz ("Chona")

family of Monterey County. The family was descended from Spanish soldiers who had accompanied Junipero Serra, guarding the missions and presidios of the Franciscan friars in Alta California. In 1837, 17-year old Chona married French mariner Olivier Delissegues who had survived a shipwreck in Monterey Bay by swimming ashore. He settled there, and soon met and married Chona at Mission

San Juan Bautista. In 1842, she received the land grant for the Rancho Potrero, encompassing 3,500 acres (much of modern-day San Luis Obispo, Cal Poly, and the Chorro Valley). The couple moved to her Rancho Potrero property, but sadly, Delissegues died at sea in 1849 just before the birth of their fifth child, Justina (named for her father's ship). Jose Muñoz did well as an attorney—so well, in fact that in 1857 he would be elected County Judge, and in 1863 as Sheriff, earning a \$1,000 annual salary (allocated by the County).

Nonetheless, Muñoz was troubled by the fact that their title to the "La Vina" rancho was at best clouded. In 1865, he lost his position as Sheriff in a three-man contest. After running and losing in 1867 and again in 1869, he took action to file a Homestead Act patent claim for a 160-acre portion of the La Vina Rancho to protect his family.



Jose Maria Muñoz

By 1870, Muñoz still not hearing whether his patent claim would be approved, learned of his father's death in Mazatlán. He left for Mexico to settle his father's estate, and was considering moving his large family to Mexico to avoid financial ruin in the event that the Land Office denied his patent claim. The patent was finally issued, but it is highly unlikely that Muñoz (still in Mazatlán) had learned of it. A few weeks later he boarded a steamship, the SS Continental, bound for San Francisco and tragically, the ship foundered off Cabo San Lucas. Muñoz went down with the ship (along with seven other passengers), never knowing that he had secured his family's future by clearing title to the La Loma Adobe.

After the death of her second husband, Chona would never remarry, but continued to live at the Adobe for another 16 years. Five of her nine children would be married at the site. In 1876, two of her sons, Alexander

and Albert Delissegues, subdivided a tract that included the Adobe into 5- and 20-acre parcels and platted both “Johnson Street” as well as “Muñoz Street” which would become part of the Southern Pacific Railroad right-of-way in 1894. The “Dellissegues Tract” also platted “Lizzie Street,” named for one of Chona’s grandchildren, who had died at a very young age.

In 1886, Chona sold the La Loma Adobe and moved to Nipomo, where two daughters, Justina Delissegues and Manuela Muñoz, had each married a son of the esteemed owners of Rancho Nipomo, William Goodwin Dana and his wife Josefa Carillo Dana.

The La Loma Adobe was ultimately acquired by the Bowden family, who in 1953 abandoned the adobe for a more modern home on the hillside above (since demolished). In 2006, the Bowden family subdivided the Bowden Ranch, and a prestigious neighborhood now occupies the site.

Proceed up Lizzie Street to the trailhead on the right side near the top, and take a short walk up to Site 2, the natural springs and perennial stream above the Adobe, and water works serving the Bowden Ranch neighborhood.

Intrepid hikers can proceed over the ridge 4½ miles to Site 5, the Reservoir Canyon Dam – that’s the northern trailhead of the RCNR, accessible from Reservoir Canyon Road off Highway 101. Abundant hiking opportunities are available there, and it is easier to reach Sites 3 and 4 on the ridge that lies between the trailheads.



Trail head to right of bike rack and red water pipes.

SITE 2 TRAILHEAD BOWDEN RANCH WATERWORKS



As you ascend on the foot trail above the Bowden Ranch neighborhood on Lizzie Street, the natural landscape begins to dominate both sides of the trail. A small footbridge leads over the creek and the trail rises along a knoll that support a veritable forest of Prickly Pear cactus; when in bloom, these native cacti produce an abundance of edible Nopal fruiting lobes called “tuna” in Spanish. This might also have been the cactus outcropping that reportedly fed some of John Fremont’s troops in December, 1846 on their California campaign.

Bowden Ranch Waterworks

The trail crosses the stream twice more before climbing steeply up the ridge. At the third crossing, note the dark green water tank and modern plumbing along the stream. These facilities were installed with the Bowden Ranch development, and the resulting spring water is utilized to supplement available municipal water in use by the homeowners in the Bowden Ranch neighborhood.



Riparian stream corridor above La Loma Adobe with modern storage tank.

At the third crossing, a close inspection of the stream course just downstream from the trail will reveal a historic diversion structure of masonry, supplemented with more recent concrete improvements. This healthy perennial stream continues to pour over the artificial impoundment here from a natural spring further upstream.

If time and energy permit, continue on the trail above Site 2 to the top of the ridge. The trail ascends very steeply above this point, however, and is not recommended for

those with open-toed footwear or an unwillingness to clamber over rocky inclines. There is a reason that this trail from Lizzie Street is often labelled on guide maps as the “Firefighters Trail”: It has been used on a regular basis to train wildland fire fighting techniques by the City of San Luis Obispo Fire Department. An easier trail to Site 3 is available from the northern trailhead at Reservoir Canyon (**Site 5**).

Once on the top of the ridge, head north on the wide unpaved access road to Site 3.

SITE 3 ABANDONED RADIO TOWER (MURRAY RIDGE/“HIGH SCHOOL HILL”)

The ridge between Reservoir Canyon (to the north) and San Luis Obispo (to the South) is variously called “High School Hill” or, at its highest point, Murray Hill—named for Walter Murray, an immigrant from England who founded the SLO Tribune in 1869 and was also elected to the State Assembly.

The unpaved access road at the top of the ridge is occasionally used by official maintenance vehicles, but it is primarily an active hiking trail, with incredible 360° panoramic views.

The tall steel tower on the Northwestern spur of this ridge is shrouded in mystery. In the Conservation Plan for this area (adopted by the City in 2013), the tower is described as:

“...an old air traffic beacon still stands at the Northernmost point of the trail on the ridge—a physical reminder of the World War II era...”

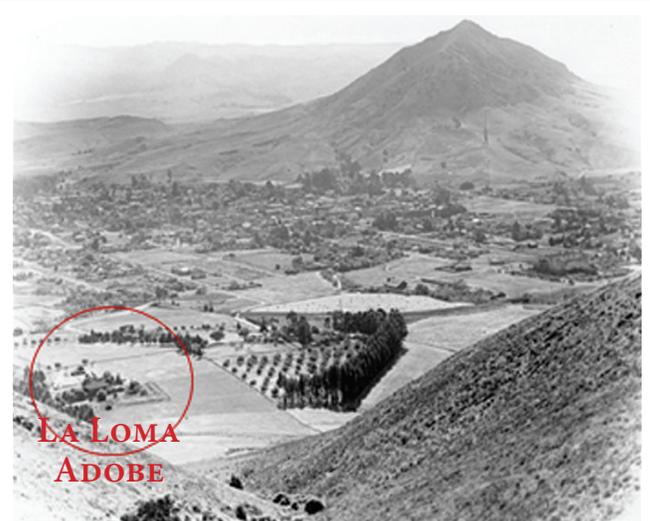
According to the Conservation Plan for this area adopted by the City in 2013, the tower is explained in this manner: “...an old air traffic beacon still stands at the north-

ernmost point of the trail on the ridge—a physical reminder of the World War II era.”

An “Aircraft Warning Service Tower” is indeed reported to have been erected in San Luis Obispo during World War II, but it seems as though that particular description may be regarding a 3-story wooden tower that was situated in Mitchell Park in downtown SLO. An exhaustive search by the History Center and City staff found almost nothing about this ridgetop tower to prove specific evidence regarding its original purpose.



Abandoned Radio Tower.



View from Trail above La Loma Adobe/Lizzie Street and San Luis Obispo ca 1910

There IS evidence that it had at least two lives: A tower may have been originally constructed at this site for purposes of monitoring or warning of military aircraft—friendly or “enemy” during the Second World War. The tower may have demolished in stages in later years, but the site has been repurposed in more recent decades.

Besides the tower, a concrete pad at this site is present a few feet to the north. This pad appears to have been poured in

two stages. Inspection of aerial photographs prove that sometime between 1937 and 1949, unknown parties erected the tower and a small building on the southern part of the pad. A 1952 map published by the US Geological Survey has the site shown as an abandoned radio tower.



1952 USGS map noting “Radio Tower (Abn’ d).”



Aerial photo of abandoned tower site, 2021, Google Earth.



Concrete pad.

A 1965 aerial photo shows that a tower was erected sometime between 1949 and 1965—possibly a second tower? Comparing a 1987 air photo with that from 1965 shows that the building and pad were expanded toward the northwest sometime after 1965, but review of the 1987 air photo shows that the building had been demolished—but the tower remains.

Another theory has held that the tower may have had some purpose during the Cold War (1945-1991) in connection with missile launches at Vandenberg, or in monitoring Soviet satellite activity. Researchers associated with Vandenberg SFB have not yet been able to establish this connection.

Was the present tower erected as a radio broadcast antenna in the late 60s? According to local radio engineers, it does not appear to be suitable for that use: It’s a poor location for AM signals (high on a hill), and the tower legs are grounded so wouldn’t work. FM wasn’t around prior to 1965, and the first FM was KVEC-FM which was located on Cuesta Peak. The angle iron structure was very typical though the late 50’s. The existing KVEC tower is of the same type of materials.

One theory is that the tower site was possibly repurposed in the early 1960s for a UHF antenna for that band of television broadcasting, based on the unique configuration of an oval-shaped hole in the platform. To date, only one local resident has offered a clue: An electrical contracting firm by the name of “Cline’s Electric” provided the wiring for the lighting on the tower sometime in the 1960s.

The History Center welcomes community input to help us tell the story and establish the significance of this site to our 20th century history of aviation, communication, or the military.

Regardless of what story needs to be told, the mysterious “High School Hill tower” is a highly visible landmark with an elusive but possibly significant history. For those hikers who can scale the heights and visit the base of the tower on either the Firefighters Trail from Lizzie Street, or from Reservoir Canyon, the breathtaking views from there are well worth the effort.

From this site, it is possible to take a shorter trail that descends directly to Site 5, the Reservoir Canyon Dam and trailhead. Alternatively, however, you may return to the south and walk to the fork where the longer, easterly part of the “Reservoir Canyon Loop Trail” will extend to the left to Site 4, “Goat Man’s Meadow.”

SITE 4

“GOAT MAN’S MEADOW” RESERVOIR CANYON HILL

(THE GHOST OF FRANCIS “FRANK” HASTINGS)

Hikers who take the trail between Sites 3 and 5 will encounter prominent “Private property” warning signs situated between the bottom of the canyon and the top of the ridge. The City’s published maps of the Reservoir Canyon Trail contain a notice: “This portion of the trail is on an easement. Please respect private property and do not disturb any features.” This Guide also strongly urges hikers on this part of the trail heed this advice and do not stray more than a few feet from the trail to observe this unique site, which we call “Goat Man’s Meadow.” Those who stray onto the private property are trespassing—but worse, they may find themselves shadowed by the ghost of the “Goat Man.”

Just who was the “Goat Man?” What do we know about the man who accumulated the various pieces of weathered scrap metal, automobile parts, and debris that is scattered about the hillside here at Site 4, clear evidence of a not-so-ancient human occupation?

The man’s name was Francis “Frank” Hastings; from about 1925 until his death in 1968, he had occupied a makeshift cabin here, earning a reputation as a reclusive hermit and rarely leaving the property. According to the reports obtained by History Center volunteer Michael Burrell, Frank Hastings had been known to warn off intruders with a few pot-shots from a firearm.

Hastings had joined the US Army during the First World War, serving stateside as a cook in San Diego and holding the rank of Private First Class. Shortly after the war, he met and married Ida Voland “Vola” Pusey, in Maryland. Their first son, John B. Hastings was born there on August 15th, 1925, but at about that time, Frank returned to California and joined his father, Edward John Hastings, who had built a small cabin on a 308-acre homestead claim in upper Reservoir Canyon.

At that time, the entire length of the Canyon was accessible by a wide road in roughly the location of the current trail, and a small bridge and steep access road permitted the Hastings family to drive all the way to this site.

Edward’s wife Josephine—Frank’s mother—resided separately in Northern California. At about the same time that Frank arrived to join his father, Edward left the Canyon and retreated back to Northern California to join his wife and a sister. Frank was alone at the small cabin – until, that is, “Vola” arrived.

According to those who knew the couple, Vola was a very smart, pretty, and rather private woman. She first walked into Reservoir Canyon in 1926, and asked a neighbor about where her husband was living. That neighbor took her up to where the steep trail started.

After Vola joined him, a second son was born, Frank Desmond Hastings, on November 1, 1926. Frank worked as a mechanic and auto parts salesman, and even owned a 1926 Willys Overland 4-wheel drive vehicle to get some distance closer to the cabin from the Canyon road. By the 1940 Census, however, Frank’s occupation was listed as “farmer;” he had chosen simply to raise goats in the upper Canyon. That

activity appears to coincide with a deterioration in Hastings’ relationship with his neighbors, and with the world. Accounts from neighbors suggest that the family was stressed by their isolation and impoverished lifestyle. Observers had filed



Francis “Frank” Hastings Cabin by Chuck Greenall

complaints of child neglect or abuse with the school district. At some point in the 1930s, the two boys were relocated to the homes of their grandparents and an aunt in Northern California.

Vola continued to reside on the property with Frank, and in 1953 Edward deeded a 40-acre portion of his acreage to his grandson, Frank D. Hastings, the younger son of Frank M.—the land surrounding the “Goat Man’s Meadow” intersected by the trail here at Site 4. By that time, however, the property was embroiled in disputes with neighboring property owners over water and access issues, disputes that raged on for years. A well-publicized trial in 1955-56 forced the

Hastings family to give up their goat herds to settle a lawsuit, and instead Frank turned to raising only rabbits.

In 1963, Vola died of unknown causes, which led to even greater difficulties for the “Goat Man.” Before her death, Vola had walked into town every other month to buy groceries at Ted Greenall’s Market on upper Monterey Street, spending virtually all of Frank’s meager pension of \$73/month. After Vola’s passing, Charles Greenall personally drove a 1936 Dodge Coupe to deliver the groceries up to the gate where Hastings’ trail led to his cabin site.

On his last delivery to Frank Hastings late in the summer of 1968, he complained to Greenall that he was not feeling well. A newspaper article of September 7, 1968 relates the story of how two boys came across his body, which the County coroner found to have been decomposing for two weeks. The cabin and rabbit pens gradually fell into the meadow, though some parts of the ancient Willys Overlander are reported to still be there in “Goat Man’s Meadow.” The spirit of the Goat Man rests there with them.

SITE 5 RESERVOIR CANYON TRAIL AND TRAILHEAD

Site 5 is steeped in history: Once known as Fillmore Canyon, the area took its name from a surface-water reservoir constructed in the early twentieth century. Water merchants had identified Fillmore Canyon as early as 1871 as a source of reliable water of good quality. By 1874, J.P. Andrews had organized the private San Luis Obispo Water Company and purchased about 200 acres of land in the canyon. Descendants of the Andrews family still own property in the Canyon, and the 1894 J.P. Andrews Bank building still anchors the corner of Monterey and Osos Street across the street from the SLO County Courthouse.

The San Luis Obispo Water Company eventually constructed two reservoirs, a 20-million gallon storage reservoir behind the dam at Site 5 and a smaller 2-million gallon dis-

tribution reservoir downstream in a site behind the home belonging to Walter Murray, now the site of the Apple Farm Inn. A 9-mile network of cast-iron pipe, 7" at its largest diameter, carried the water in a 150' vertical drop to a system of 22 fire hydrants and 250 customers.

In 1899, the City of San Luis Obispo purchased the water company in its entirety for the sum of \$50,000—a considerable discount from the original asking price of \$125,000—and the City then became the water purveyor for the community. For the first 40 years of the 20th century, the water collection system grew to include several diversion structures on San Luis Obispo Creek and its tributaries, including Hansen Creek and Gularte Creek, as well as the dam on Reservoir Canyon Creek.

In 1941, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers constructed Salinas Reservoir near Santa Margarita, drilled a 1-mile tunnel through Cuesta Grade, and connected that water source to Camp San Luis Obispo, a major training facility during the Second World War. After the war, Camp San Luis was dismantled and the Corps declared the water surplus. In 1952, the City secured rights to the Salinas Reservoir, a more reliable water supply with a 7 million gallons per day capacity. The Reservoir Canyon/SLO Creek supplies became uneconomical to operate and were abandoned. Today, all that remains of the local water supply system are remnants of a diversion dam on San Luis Obispo Creek (partially demolished to improve fish passage), a few sections of pipeline, some remains of small concrete diversion dams in the tributary creeks, and the dam face at the mouth of Reservoir Canyon.

The reservoir continued to serve as a recreation area, however, and the opening of trout season brought scores of anglers to its shore. Camping and picnic sites were maintained for many years by the Kiwanis Club, but in 1985, ma-



Seasonal waterfall and tunnel used to discharge water from the reservoir



The Reservoir on opening day of fishing season, ca 1950s

major changes came to the Canyon. The Las Pilitas Fire that year destroyed much of the vegetation in the canyon, filling in the then-abandoned reservoir in the process.

Also in that year, four Cal Poly students were arrested and charged with a homicide when their random target shooting took the life of Mariano “Apache” Rey on private property in the upper canyon. Rey had been camping on the property with permission from the owner. The students were ultimately acquitted of the charges, but the destruction associated with widespread target shooting soon prompted the City to ban firearms use on the public land in this area.

Since that time, the ecosystem has made a remarkable comeback with very little assistance from humans. It is the primary goal of the City to conserve and protect the natural habitats in this area, respecting the resilience of the fauna and flora that inhabit this Canyon.

When one knows where to look, subtle evidence can still be found of the water diversion projects first begun in 1874: The steep, linear embankment that rises squarely above the parking lot is the original earthen dam that formed the reservoir. The dam was anchored into exposed bedrock at its

south end, easily accessible on a side trail that leads along the length of the dam. Here, a lovely 15-foot seasonal waterfall makes a dramatic backdrop to a popular picnic site among oaks and bay laurel trees. To the right of the waterfall, a tunnel was bored directly through the bedrock and served as a penstock for the reservoir, managed by a turnstyle that would open a weir in the face of the dam when needed.

Aside from its human history, Reservoir Canyon is a place of exceptional beauty and abundant biodiversity: Trails that line both sides of the canyon upstream of the dam lead along a rich riparian ecosystem, and as they ascend from the canyon, the trails reveal spectacular views from the ridge that rises above the canyon overlooking the City of San Luis Obispo and its surroundings.



Along the trail.

Explore the Canyon by means of the well-designed trails and, if the opportunity is available, climb over the 4.6 mile trail from **Site 5** to the top of the ridge and back down to **Sites 1 and 2**, the Bowden Ranch and La Loma Adobe on Lizzie Street.

SITE 1 SAVING THE LA LOMA ADOBE AND PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

What fate lies ahead for the La Loma Adobe and its site within the growing community of San Luis Obispo? The organization “Friends of La Loma Adobe” are working diligently to stabilize, preserve, and protect the adobe structure and its surroundings. The Friends are also commissioning

studies to enhance the interpretation of the history of the site and verify or refute some of the lore surrounding its occupants and the notable visitors that came through its doors, especially in that critical time of transition between Mexican and American governance.

Following the preparation of a *Historic Structures Report* required for designation on the National Register of Historic Places, the Friends hope to work with the community to restore and furnish the home for an appropriate “adaptive re-use.”

Meanwhile, considerable effort is now underway to reintroduce historically documented Mission and Rancho era plants in the landscape surrounding the site, augmented with California native plant species—and the results are stunningly visible in the beautiful grounds surrounding the building.

Visit the Friends of La Loma Adobe website

lalomaadobe.org

for more information.



La Loma de la Nopalera means “The Hill of Prickly Pear Cactus.” Indigenous people of Mexico and the Southwest use these cacti, with beaver tail-like paddles, for a variety of culinary dishes. These “prickly pears” are also known as tuna, sabra and nopal (from the Nahuatl word nōpalli for the pads).

What is prickly pear “fruit?” Called prickly pears, these neon “fruits” provide delicious juice that tastes like a cross between strawberry, cucumber, raspberry and watermelon.

Feeling adventurous?

Shop at your grocery store for this delicious “fruit” and try some fun Summer recipes, like:

- *Prickly Pear Margarita
- *Nopalitos con Huevos
- *Licuado de Nopal (Cactus Smoothie)
- *Prickly Pear Lemonade
- *Nopales Salad
- *Cactus Fries with Prickly Pear Sauce
- *Nopal Soup
- *Prickly Pear Jelly



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