

Out of the Desert

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In the late winter/early spring of 1994, Mel Milton, a developer from the state of Washington and long time retriever field trialer, decided to purchase a piece of property in the desert community of Niland, California. Little did he know that years later many other retriever field trialers would soon become his neighbors, making the Imperial Valley in California more than just a rich agricultural farm area.



Mel Milton and Go Margo at the Southern Arizona
Retriever Club Trial March 13-15, 2009

Mel and his wife Joan loved the winter warmth in the Arizona/California area, and for 20+ years, they would travel south to the Parker, California area to spend winters training their labs. Unfortunately, the grounds in Parker became overgrown and crowded, so Mel moved training headquarters over to The Finney Ramer Wildlife Preserve and trained there for about 5 more years. It was then he decided he would like to purchase a place of his own so he could develop technical water ponds and nice training fields to help enhance the dogs' abilities. He hired a realtor to look for property

he could purchase and when the realtor found places that were available, Mel would fly down from Washington to view the possibilities.

Finally in 1994, 80 acres became available. Mel purchased the land and began his life long dream. The property was a defunct tomato farm on the outskirts of Niland. As he built his place up, other field trialers would come and train with him, and they, too, began to look for property they could buy to develop. Land was reasonable, and water shares from the local water company were available.

In 2000, Arnie and Linda Erwin, Chris Allaire, Bill and Lorna Kolstad, Bruce Mullis and Mary Mazolla purchased 40 acres from an old fish hatchery and began to develop their own dog training grounds. The area, like Mel's, known as "Mag 7" has ponds and fields created for field trialing retrievers.

Shortly after that (in about 2003), a group of Canadians, known as the "Aye" team purchased another 80 acres of property. Members of the "Aye" team are Jim Harvie, Mickie Rawlins, and Joe Augysten.

In 2005, Jack Vollstedt and Mark Perrizo purchased an additional 80 acres of property, and now the area of Niland has become an outstanding field trialing destination for several area clubs to hold their field trials. Jack uses much of his property to grow alfalfa along with training for his dogs.

Patti Kiernan of Justin Time Retrievers began to do winter training on Mel's property. Soon her business began to prosper and her clientele began to grow. She just recently worked out the logistics with Mel and purchased his 80 acres for her winter training program. During the Southern Arizona Retriever Club's trial in March 2009, a tailgate celebration was held in honor of Patti and Mel closing the land transaction. Great food, lots of fun, and a champagne toast were enjoyed by all who attended.

The Southern Arizona Retriever Club, San Diego Field Trial Club, and the California South Coast Retriever Club all hold trials in the Niland, California area, for a total of 5, and sometimes 6 retriever field trials yearly. The trials bring in a considerable economic surge to the local towns of Calipatria, Niland, Brawley and El Centro. With temperatures in the 70's and 80's December through March, the Niland area offers a nice climate to train and trial in when the rest of the country still has snow and cold.



“Aye Team” property



Stick pond on “Mag 7” property



Mel Milton's Property



Jack Vollstedt's property