



On July 9th we competed in the first annual Ace in the Hole BBQ Shootout in Holbrook, Arizona. It was a great first year event and we enjoyed our stay in Holbrook. According to the Phoenix Examiner, Navajo County was known for its railroad, lumber, farm and ranch businesses as well as trade with the Indians. It also attracted cowboys and criminals chased out of Texas and other areas of the country. Holbrook became a typical Wild West town with brothels, saloons, and gambling houses. It was once said Holbrook was "too tough for women and churches".

My first encounter with Holbrook, AZ was in 1972. We were moving from Dallas, TX to Portland,

OR. Our van, towing a Uhaul trailer, broke down at a rest stop on I-40 east of the Petrified Forest National Park. I hitchhiked to the visitor's center at the park and called a tow truck from Holbrook. It was a Saturday and we checked into a motel while our van was towed to the shop. The next day was a Sunday so we didn't expect to see much action repairing our van and prepared ourselves for a weekend stuck in a motel in Holbrook. To our surprise, the mechanic came into the shop on Sunday, tore down the engine and found the problem was with the timing chain. The owner of the local auto parts store came in on a Sunday and sold the mechanic the parts he needed. By late Sunday we were once again on our way. Being at a disadvantage in such a situation, you would expect to be gouged and ripped off at every turn, but that wasn't the case. The amount we were charged for the towing, repairs and parts were quite reasonable.

We were treated respectfully, and taken well care of by the citizens of Holbrook in 1972, and again this year at the BBQ competition. The contest was well organized and it seemed that someone from the city was constantly stopping by to see if we needed anything. The BBQ contest is part of Holbrook's Old West Days where the town gets together to celebrate its rich, and sometimes violent old west history. With a population of only 5,000, it seemed the entire town turned out for the festivities with numerous vendors on the 1898 courthouse lawn, a talent contest, a dance contest, and a re-enactment troupe re-enacting some of the town's more violent shootouts complete with muzzle loading rifles and shotguns. After the turn-ins, and while waiting for the awards ceremony, we toured the courthouse, which was built in 1898, and is now a county history museum. The courthouse even claims to be haunted by George Smiley, a murderer and the only person ever hanged in Navajo County, and a prostitute named Mary who died while imprisoned in one of the jail cells.

We finished 15th in chicken, 9th in pork, 4th in brisket, 2nd in ribs and 5th overall. Congratulations to Slap Yo Daddy BBQ for Grand Champion and Big Poppa's Smokers for taking Reserve.

The town is committed to bringing the event back next year. If you want a small town, Americana experience, visit Holbrook.

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