



Mike Rowe gets dirty at Oasis Camel Dairy

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Ever consider being a camel farmer? On a visit to Ramona, Mike Rowe of television's Dirty Jobs fame got to try milking these towering beasts, and a filming of the popular Discovery Channel series landed the crew at Ramona's Oasis Camel Dairy.

Gil and Nancy Riegler, owners and caretakers of these benevolent animals, have spent the past 20 years developing and operating the first camel dairy in the United States.

The Rieglers have a mutual interest in exotic pets. Gil trained exotic animals to become therapeutic pets "back in the nineties," and Nancy trained exotic birds for the San Diego Zoo and Wild Animal Park. The couple moved to Ramona and began with eight camels, originally taking exotic creatures to several venues across the country.

From nativity scenes and company business parties to camel races and talk shows, Ramona's camels have been providing unique services and entertainment that are becoming increasingly popular each year. They are regulars at the annual San Diego County Fair and recently were on Larry King Live with Rowe.

"When you tell people we milk camels, they have the idea that it's dirty and gross, but they are such clean animals," said Nancy.

The public will be able to see for themselves on the Dirty Jobs episode on Oct. 27. Producer and star of the show Mike Rowe will get down and dirty with the camels--. Just how dirty has yet to be seen.

With the newest addition to the herd in September, the 34-acre dairy is home to 22 camels, with three babies on the way, and numerous other animals. In the beginning, the couple raised the camels—and other animals and exotic birds—to be taken to fairs and shows along the West Coast. After reading about the benefits of camel milk on the Internet, the Rieglers decided to add a camel dairy to the growing repertoire of animal productions.

Milking camels "took a long time," to get used to, admitted Gil. Because camels need their baby present to lactate, the milking occurs only after breeding. According to the Rieglers, camels only produce milk for about 90 seconds for each feeding. The average produced is six to seven liters during each milking.

As groups gather at the dairy, young and old alike are treated to grunts of curiosity from the gentle giants. Far from being the spitting desert dwellers of television fame, the camels are loving and sensitive animals, the Rieglers agree.

"Camels are incredibly affectionate," said Nancy.

Public and private tours are offered at the dairy. Groups are invited for an hour at a time. The animals are milked and petted, and discussions are held to teach about their behavior.

While the Rieglers currently don't sell milk to the public, they do sell soap made with 25 percent camel's milk. They sell the soaps on the Internet, at fairs and during tours.

Oasis Camel Dairy is at 26757 Highway 78 in Ramona on the way to Santa Ysabel. The next public "Meet the camels" tours will be on Nov. 8 and 22 at 1 p.m. Reservations may be made but are not usually necessary. (Keep in mind, however, these next dates follow the airing of the camels on Dirty Jobs!)

For tour cost and more information, visit www.cameldairy.com or call 760-787-0983.

The Dirty Jobs episode at the camel dairy is scheduled to air on Tuesday, Oct. 27, at 9 p.m. on the Discovery Channel.