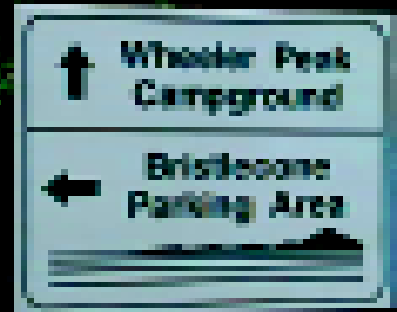


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***YOUR GUIDE TO THE
DEATH VALLEY AREA***

Interesting Places You've Never Been To!

The "Grand Tour" - Part II or To Infinity (Currant) and Beyond!

by *The Intrepid Explorer*

When last seen, the Intrepid Explorer was wandering around Railroad Valley, watching those cute little pumps suck petroleum out of the ground. It seemed an unlikely place to see such activities. Railroad Valley is much like any other valley. Flat on the bottom and surrounded by mountains, though they were many miles away. It is a large valley. But here and there, scattered all over the place were those little pumps, bobbin' up and down, tirelessly. There were tanker trucks coming in and out, and what might have been some sort of processing plant, though it didn't look like any refinery I've seen, so maybe it just pumped the stuff into the trucks and sent them on their merry way. There was a distinct odor of petroleum here. I didn't really notice it before stopping, or further up the road, so it's probably just that plant. The map says there is a large wildlife refuge there, and it looked like there may have been some marshes or something many miles to the south. But an interesting sight in Nevada.

Continuing on towards the northeast, the valley eventually comes to an end. Just before it does you reach Currant. There wasn't much there on the highway to be seen. The billboard that you see in the above photo, and a few buildings. Maybe there is more hidden away. There is a road running off to the northwest that leads to Duckwater, and Currant is right up against some hills, so there may have been more of it elsewhere.



After leaving Currant the terrain definitely begins to change. The road climbs up to Currant Summit, and on the other side you've pretty much left the desert behind. There are trees all around. Not mighty oaks, but the sort of scrub you find up at Mountain Springs or Blue Diamond if you're driving from Pahrump to Las Vegas. Junipers and such. Not quite forests, but not the creosote bush flats of this area. The road climbs and meanders for a good many miles. Eventually, far off to the north is *something*. At first it was hard to tell what it was. A bare patch, devoid of any trees. It seemed to be manmade. Looking at the map, there was a dot in

that area labeled Ruth. Ruth was a very substantial copper mine. I think it dates back over a century. It had its own railroad to haul the ore. Typical of mining towns, it's seen its share of boom and bust cycles. I think it's in the bust mode now, but I'm not sure. We got to talk to one of the locals in Ely, and it sounds like mining is still a major economic activity in the area, so perhaps Ruth hasn't quite passed away yet.

While on the subject of old mining towns and such, I think I should mention something to those who are new to Nevada or maybe aren't familiar with the program. In the accompanying picture you will see a "Nevada Historical Marker". Many are blue, though I'm sure the one by Mercury is silver, so maybe the newer ones are the blue ones.

Anyway, they look like giant outlines of the state of Nevada with some text. Rather than trying to explain what it's all about myself, I'll just "borrow" the description on their Web site.

Nevada Historical Marker Program

The Historic Marker Program was initiated by the Nevada State Legislature in 1967 to bring the State's heritage to the public's attention with on-site markers. There are now 253 historical markers in Nevada commemorating sites and buildings such as Las Vegas Mormon fort, Stokes Castle in Austin, the Pony Express Station in Elko, and the first airplane flight in Nevada at Carson City. The Historic Marker Program is a cooperative effort involving the Depart-



ment of Museums, Library and Arts, State Historic Preservation Office, which administers the Program, the Northern Nevada Correctional Center which constructs the markers, the State Historical Society which reviews proposed marker texts, and the Nevada Department of Transportation which installs the markers. The previous material was found at http://www.state.nv.us/cnr/ndwp/markers/hist_map.htm and was created by the Nevada Division of Water Planning, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Ely or Bust

After viewing Ruth from afar, you come around a bend, and down below, nestled in the surrounding hills, is Ely. Something of a welcome sight after

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The Grand Tour...

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driving for several hours. The first real town since leaving Tonopah. We didn't stay long. Refuel the car, stretch the legs, and get back on the road. It was mid afternoon, there was still a long way to go before arriving at the intended destination, and it just isn't that much fun trying to find a campsite in the dark, and then getting set up and making dinner. So that's all there was of Ely. **That** day.

From Ely the road heads southeast through a long, low valley. To the east were some reasonably high mountains, to the west some "hills". I use that term loosely. Out here, if it isn't several thousand feet above local ground level, then it's a hill. The term "mountain" I tend to reserve for those really big chunks of rock. I think the area was known as the



end. Our trip in the Schell Valley ended. Not because we ran out of valley, for there was much more of it yet before us, but because our destination was the Great Basin National Park, which lay to the east. And that's the direction we headed. Again, the terrain made a dramatic change. We were climbing again. Same scrub on both sides of the road in some very colorful rock. Through Connors Pass, and back down into another valley. More mountains to the east, but this time they were the mountains we were heading to. We were getting close, but was that Wheeler Peak? It wasn't much more than a *hill!*

The map said we were close, and Wheeler Peak is 13,063 feet, which I'll grudgingly consider a mountain, but *where was it?* We were close, but not there. We continued along, almost in an

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Schell Valley. Coming from the desert, it looked awfully green. There was a road heading into the real mountains where there was camping and fishing. On the western side of the road there was a large marsh and some water. Beyond that was a rest stop that had a number of informational signs explaining how at the right time of year this was a good location to see elk. We didn't see any, but they probably heard we were coming!

Well, this is the Basin and Range part of the country, which means that we have a lot of hills and valleys. Even some mountains. And, as they say, all good things must



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arc centered on Wheeler Peak, never getting closer, but not receding either. Eventually we wound up on the other side and finally headed up into the mountains. Along the way, not too far out of Baker, we began to pass an art gallery. What? It's an outdoor art gallery. Someone in town has a sense of humor, and someone has some artistic ability. For several miles, the fence posts are "decorated". Some are ghosts, some are cowboys. All manner of things. Those who have been in the Pahrump area for a number of years may remember Sheriff Pete, a finely attired Joshua tree on Highway 160 several miles south of town. Well, here we're talking dozens of Sheriff Petes, and each one is different. Sometimes you do a double take to be



sure you just saw what you think you saw. There's an old junk car with a skeleton in the driver's seat, for example. Maybe Salvador Dali began his career here?

At long last...the entrance to Great Basin National Park. It isn't dark yet, though the sunlight is fading fast. We stop at the ranger station to see a map and get some idea of what's available. The place is almost deserted, but it's almost closing time so that's not so strange. We get maps. The top campground is open and has plenty of camp sites. The drive up is slow as the road does a lot of twisting and turning. We're going up to around 9,000 feet after all. On a clear day you can see forever, but even on a foggy day you can see Utah from up on this road! The view, even though it is hazy and getting dark is quite spectacular. Worthwhile of some pictures. But that can wait until tomorrow. After all, it's not going anywhere.

A little bit too early. Some of the aspens are beginning to turn color. A few more weeks yet. The vegetation makes dramatic changes as we climb. It's almost treeless down below in Baker, but there's a huge forest up here. And even some deer! They stop and pose so we can take their picture, then they trot off into the forest and the gathering gloom. Even though it was a sunny day when we

left, and it was clear most of the way, there have been clouds looming to the east. We've finally reached them. It's completely overcast up on the mountain, and definitely cooler, and, hmmm, why that sounds like thunder, and it isn't all that far away.

It's getting dark, it looks and sounds like it could rain at any moment, so we quickly cruise around looking for a good camp site. Plenty to choose from. It may be Labor Day weekend, but it's only Thursday. We got a jump on the crowds and have clearly beaten them up here. We find one that looks

good, pull in and start unpack. The thunder is getting louder, it's darker still, and rain seems rather imminent now, not just a possibility. We no sooner get a small tent up and get some boxes inside of it when it starts to rain. No roaring campfire tonight! No Coleman stove and hot meal. Grab the flashlights, grab some of the food and jump into our vehicle and eat sandwiches while listening to rain beating on the roof.

It could be worse.

After all, it is now quite dark out, so we probably wouldn't have done too much hiking or sightseeing. We've got a laptop computer and at least one of us can download some digital pictures taken earlier in the day. It isn't me! As it's still August it isn't particularly cold, though having just come from Amargosa Valley earlier in the day, the change in climate is rather noticeable. Thunderstorms over the mountains are quite common in the summer, and that's just one of the things one has to expect, even if they didn't exactly plan on dealing with it. Tomorrow we'll see about hiking up to the glacier and maybe seeing some of the Bristlecone Pines that are on the way. A little rain won't dampen our spirits!

To
Be
Continued

