

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

Interesting Places You've Never Been To!

The "Grand Tour" - Part III or Ely Beckons Us to Return!

by The Intrepid Explorer

Sure enough, the sun came up in the morning. It looked like a fine day, though it was a bit cloudy again. So early in the morning, too. Maybe a shorter hike would be in order just in case it decided to rain on us once more. Not that we weren't prepared for rain, but it's not really much fun hiking down the side of a mountain in the rain.

First thing to do is go find the trail and look at a map and maybe talk to the camp site volunteer and get some information and maybe a recommendation on how to proceed. It's a nice day, so we'll walk on down to the entrance to the camp and see if we missed any better camp sites on our way in the previous evening.

It's a pleasant walk. The sun is out, there's a babbling brook along side the road part way down. A good view of the mountains from here without any rain falling on us, and enough light to see by. There's a big map at the entrance and we have our little map with some descriptions of what everything is. We think we can see where the glacier is, and it isn't that far. We'll head that direction and see how it goes. We talk to the camp volunteer. You can't really see the glacier from here, but you can see the path up to it. We have a good idea of where it is we are going to go.

We walk back to camp to get our gear. Cameras, ponchos, something for lunch. We'll drive back down to the start of the trail. Well, that's the plan. The car won't start. Not a good beginning to this day, which has only just started. The engine cranks and cranks, but nothing happens. Plenty of gas as we had filled up in Ely, and that's not even 100 miles. We open the hood and stare at the lifeless engine and peer underneath and everything else we can think of.

OK. Back down to the camp volunteer to see what options are open to us. Not many. It's a holiday weekend. The nearest town is Baker, Nevada, but apparently there isn't anything there, at least today. The nearest help is in Ely. The nearest telephone is down the mountain at the visitor center. A long walk to call for help. Before we raise the white flag our volunteer grabs her little volt meter and we had back to the car to have another look at it. Maybe the battery is low or something. We check the battery voltage. It's fine. How about the fuses? Well, why didn't we think of that? No. They're fine too. Three people standing there, scratching their heads. Time to raise the flag!

We go back down to the volunteers trailer. She has a radio.

She calls in to the desk at the visitor center and gets them to call the tow truck in Ely. One outfit is closed for the weekend. The other is busy, but he'll be coming out. It could be a couple of hours before he can make it. We go back to our camp and start taking things down and packing up. Then we grab our cameras and go for a hike back down the road towards the visitor center. It is still fairly nice, but it is getting cloudier, fairly rapidly. We keep our eyes peeled for a tow truck.

From the road it's possible to see some things we couldn't see from the campground, mainly because the trees have been cleared for the road and we can see the mountain clearly. Our camp site volunteer said she'd hiked to the top of Wheeler Peak. Now we could see the ridge line that was the route up there. It didn't look particularly difficult. Just a long hike up a ridge at 10,000 feet on what appeared to be piles of broken rock. The route up to the glacier was still somewhat hidden, but it would have been only a bit less strenuous and somewhat shorter. It would have been a nice hike, but would we have made it?

We wouldn't find out. Along came the big yellow tow truck. We flagged him down and got a ride back to camp. After a couple passes we managed to get him to our poor vehicle, pointed the right way. We gave it one more try at starting it. Still nothing. So, he backed up, grabbed it, and off we went, back to Ely.

By this time it had again started to rain. Some of it was rain. Some of it was snow, or slush or something less than liquid. Nice day for a hike! Good thing his windshield wipers were working well. Part way down he calls back to Ely on his cell phone to let them know he's coming. The connection is marginal, but he finally manages to get through. Further down, where the reception is somewhat better he calls a few places in town that do repair work. Not good. Everyone is closed for the weekend, and for the holiday. One place is open, but only until 5 PM. It's a two hour drive back, and it's getting well past 2 PM. We should make it, we hope!

Ah, the life of a tow truck driver out in the wilds of rural Nevada. You'd think it would be a pretty dull job. Most of the time, I suppose it is. But on the ride back we got the highlights of a decade of driving a tow truck around. Maybe we are easily entertained. Or maybe the stories were just good. Like the one about the truckload of expensive wine that overturned. Some kid was driving the truck and didn't quite make the turn and

over it went. Wine flowing everywhere. Broken glass like you wouldn't imagine. But not all the bottles were broken. And guess what? Since the labels on the bottles were stained from the broken ones around them, they were written off as destroyed. So, those who helped clean up got a little reward!

A truck load of milkshake mix for some fast food chain went over one very cold wintery day. That was probably even more of a mess than the wine as it wouldn't quite freeze solid, but it wasn't exactly a liquid either. Mostly it was just a big sticky mess. Some lucky people got to go out and clean it up. Or the truck load of pigs. Out in the hot summer sun. Prisoners from the local hoosegow got "volunteered" for that one. Chasing pigs around all afternoon. One little piggy managed to escape, but it wasn't very happy as it got a very bad sunburn. The owner had sent a truck down to pick up the living cargo after the accident, but by the time the last piggy was captured, it was a couple of days later. The owner was called, but it wasn't worth a trip to get the pig, so the one who found it got a nice supply of pork, or a rather large pet.

There were some unhappy tales too. A carload of kids on their way somewhere. Lost control of the car and rolled it. The ones without seat belts didn't survive, of course. The mother of one of them comes all the way out to Ely from somewhere far away, and wants to see where her son died. Many weeks after the accident, it's hard to remember exactly where it happened. But an effort is made to get her to the exact spot. As we drive down the highway in the rain back to Ely, our driver points it out to us.

Other nasty accidents too. People are killed, some are not. No explanation as to why some live and some die. Some walk away from accidents that you'd never expect anyone to survive. Others die in relatively minor accidents. And then there are some tales of events that have happened in Ely or the area. Forest fires and runaway freight cars on an old abandoned rail line at one of the mines. Again, maybe we were easily entertained, but I'd rather think there were some really interesting stories in there, maybe enough to fill a small book. Life can be every bit as interesting and exciting out in the hinterland as in the big city. Those of us who live out here know that. Those who move out here find that out!

We reach our destination. A rather small little garage, just down the hill from what appears to be a cemetery. Only two bays, with cars stacked up outside. Sharing the parking lot is a car wash. It's been raining, so business has probably been slow. They're still open! Hooray! We've gotten there in time. But that's only part of the problem. We explain the situation. A couple of the guys at the garage get some tools and a can of starting fluid and break into the intake of the engine. Turn the key, spritz some fluid in, and, VOILA! As expected, the problem is in the fuel system, most likely the fuel pump. After a couple of quick phone calls around town, we get the news. The dealer has a fuel pump, but charges handsomely for it. The other place can get one, but it's a holiday weekend, so who knows when it might arrive. The dealer gets the business.

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The Grand Tour....

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The owner of the garage assumes we're up there to go camping and fishing and such, and offers to rent us a truck for a couple of days, as that is the length of time it will take to get that new fuel pump in. No, we don't really want to go anywhere. We could go back to Great Basin National Park, but the thought isn't even on our radar screens. Where are we going to stay? We're in luck. The owner also happens to have an interest in a little motel just a block or two up the street. Nothing fancy, but nice enough for a couple of people who have had a rather busy day.



Where is a good place

for dinner? Again, there's a place down the street a block or two the other direction. Hmm. Well, there's something to be said for being in the city, particularly if you're going to be hoofing it.

We get unpacked and sort of settled in and then it's off to dinner. A couple of places were mentioned. One is a bit further up the street, but we opt for the one back in the direction of the garage. Maybe we just want to go by and see our poor vehicle and make sure it's being taken care of, too.

The restaurant is pretty fair sized. The decor is pretty much standard fare. So is the menu. But we find some interesting items on there, and order. The prices are very good. The food turns out to be even better. And the lady who looks after us is fast and friendly and we have an enjoyable dinner. Life has its ups and



downs. We seem to have bottomed out for this day and things are on the way up again.



On the way over we passed by a building with a fenced yard, and inside the fence was one of those Nevada Historical Markers. On the way back the sign is right there on the side. It's the White Pine Public Museum. Well, what luck! Now we know what we are going to do tomorrow. Sure sounds a lot more interesting than sitting around a motel watching cable TV stations from Utah.

We sleep "late." Let's go to our favorite restaurant for breakfast. Back down the street, past the museum. Someone else is waiting on us this time. Equally as fast and friendly. Once again the food is excellent and we have an enjoyable meal. We wander back to the museum to see what might be inside.

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Looks can be deceiving. It's not a very big building, but it's full. A big doll collection and some of the larger pieces of antique furniture are in the first room we enter. It's quite a mixture of things, and from all different eras. Some items go back to the later 1800's, most others are more like the turn of the century or maybe the early 1900's.

couple of stuffed mountain lions, and a huge eagle. There's a switchboard and a large bottle collection, with all the bottles carefully labeled. A barbed wire collection hangs on the wall. In back is a smaller room. There is a pretty fair rock and mineral collection and various mining artifacts.

Outside there is even more. An old log cabin, complete with furnishings. Buggies, mining carts, old street lamps. A section of railroad track with some cars on it. One must have been in a smelting plant. Even the old railroad depot is



This was, and still is, ranching and mining country, and there have been a lot of ranches and mines over the past century.

There is a small room next to this one. It has some odds and ends of things for sale. Books and souvenirs. And then another large room beyond. This one is even more fascinating. There are a

there. Behind that is still more. A really old log cabin, probably from some ranch. Various vehicles and farming equipment. This is "downtown" Ely. It seems like acres of artifacts, but it's not that much.

On the side of the museum itself is a large mural (see photo, above). On the side of the car wash is another. We learn that there are several murals scattered about town, commissioned by the town itself, depicting scenes from its past. The one on the car wash shows a shepherd and his sheep. This is Basque country. They came here way back towards the middle of the 19th century. Much of central and northern Nevada owes its existence to people like the Basques, and the Irish and Welsh miners on the Comstock. Glitter and gaming is a relatively new development.

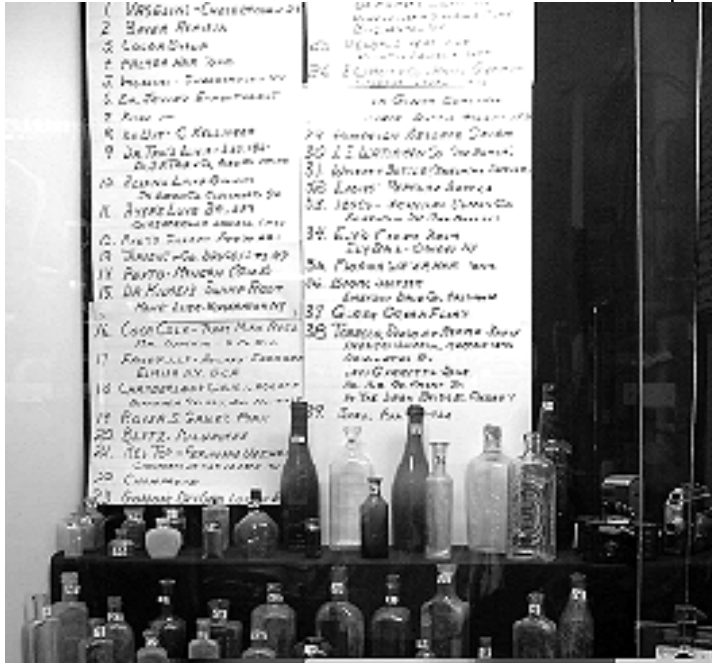
After a brief rest back at our motel it's time for dinner, so we go to our favorite restaurant again. Everything is still great. As



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it's early, we walk back and head down the street to find a store. Ice cream for dessert, and even some microwave popcorn. Back at the motel we've got a movie channel on the cable TV system so we make some popcorn and watch an Australian (Mel Gibson) defeats those dastardly British during the Revolutionary War.

In the morning we go back to the garage to see what news there is of our vehicle. It's finished! We rush back, pack our stuff, get some gas and we're back on the road again, more or less on schedule. We didn't get to hike Great Basin National Park, and the car repair was not exactly cheap, but the stay in Ely was very enjoyable. What looked to be a minor disaster turned into a very interesting visit. And there's more to come!

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The Hidden Oasis

by Charlene Dean and Maria Simatos

Tucked away in an obscure canyon lies the hidden oasis known as China Ranch Date Farm. The farm, in existence since the late 1800's, was started by a disgruntled borax field worker.... a Chinese field worker.... thus the name, China Ranch.

The "China" man found the microclimate in the canyon to be perfect for growing fresh produce and raising farm animals. So began his business of providing these things to the local mine workers until suddenly and mysteriously in the early 1900's, the "China" man just disappeared. No one knows what

happened to him exactly, there are no records. A man called

ued to refer to it as China Ranch and the name remains today. The property has been a number of things over the years. It has been leased for cattle farming, been an alfalfa farm and also a dude ranch. No one realized the potential of the date trees already in existence on the farm until Vonola Modine's nephew, Brian Brown, took an interest in them as an income producing possibility. In 1983, after finishing school, he began cultivating the fruit and caring for the trees. The business grew, and opened to the public in 1995 with a gift shop and bakery.

Today there are 800 trees planted on the property and 25% of those trees are in full production. In a good year, 200 to 300 pounds of dates are harvested from each tree. From March to August the trees go through the pollination process and are wrapped in cloth to prevent the birds from stealing the fruits. September through December is harvest time when the dates are washed, sorted and packaged for marketing.



happened to him exactly, there are no records. A man called Dave Morrison entered the history around 1912. As the story goes, Mr. Morrison simply filed a deed proclaiming the property the Morrison Ranch, and so it was, but the locals contin-

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Do visit, and browse through the gift shop where you can see, smell and sample the date nut bread being made right there on the premises. Purchase one of the large 5-inch cookies and savor the combined flavors of dates, cinnamon, and brown sugar. Yummy! Date shakes with additions like walnuts, chocolate, and cinnamon are a delight to the taste buds on a hot summer afternoon. Jellies, gift baskets, starter cacti kits and of course dates are available year-round.

Photographers will enjoy the scenery as well as hikers. Six hiking trails are available for exploring. They vary in length from 200 yards to 4 miles round trip. Breathtaking views,

abandoned mines, and nature undisturbed are just a few of the treasures awaiting you.

Guided nature walks on Saturday and Sunday mornings require reservations and are available from October through April.



Motels, camping and hot mineral springs are available in nearby Tecopa and Shoshone.



Directions: From Pahrump take Highway 372 north (turns into 178 in California) to Shoshone. Left on Hwy 127 towards Tecopa. Take a left on Old Spanish Trail to a right on Furnace Creek Road. Make a right on China Ranch Road and follow to the gift shop. Signs are clearly visible and easy to follow.

Hours: Open 9-5 daily
Closed Christmas Day
China Ranch Date Farm
P. O. Box 61
Shoshone, CA 92384
(760) 852-4415
Brian and Bonnie Brown
Owners/Operators
www.chinaranch.com

USGS Studies Natural Ground-Water Losses in Desert Areas

by Robert A. Boyd

The Amargosa Valley lies within the Death Valley regional ground-water flow system, one of the largest ground-water flow systems in the southwestern United States. This ground-water flow system covers an area of over 15,800 square miles in southern Nevada and southeastern California. Ground-water pumped from this flow system supplies the water used by residents and businesses and to irrigate crops. Relative large volumes of ground water are naturally lost from the Death Valley ground-water flow system in localized areas where geologic conditions force ground water to flow upward towards the surface at areas near springs, seeps, and playa lakes. Water discharged at many of these localized areas supports phreatophytic vegetation and provides critical habitat for numerous wildlife species. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is a federal government agency tasked with appraising and evaluating the nation's water resources. During the past several years, scientists from this agency have been studying ground-water losses from the Death Valley regional ground-water flow system in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Energy, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, State of Nevada, and County of Inyo, California. These studies have included an assessment of ground-water losses on a regional scale within the entire Death Valley regional ground-water flow system and detailed investigations of areas such as Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, Oasis Valley near Beatty, and Death Valley National Park.

Natural ground-water losses in these desert areas occur by evapotranspiration. Evapotranspiration is a process describing water consumed by vegetation, evaporated from open water surfaces such as ponds, and vaporized from moist soil to the atmosphere. USGS scientists estimate the volume of ground-water discharged by evapotranspiration by applying techniques that use satellite imagery and meteorologic data. Satellite-imagery data are used to identify areas with significant evapotranspiration and delineate these areas into similar units based on differences in vegetation and soil types. Meteorologic instruments are installed at sites within each similar unit to collect data (including air temperature, barometric pressure, solar radiation, wind speed, soil moisture, soil temperature, and precipitation) needed to compute representative annual evapotranspiration rates. The volume of water lost by evapotranspiration is determined by multiplying the area of each unit by the corresponding annual evapotranspiration rate.

Previous estimates of ground-water losses in many areas of the Death Valley regional ground-water flow system were made as part of a series of early reconnaissance investigations conducted in the 1960s and 1970s. Methods and techniques often differed among studies in these early reconnaissance investigations, and the uncertainty associated with many of the estimated ground-water losses was relatively high. The recent USGS studies generally indicate that estimated ground-water losses are greater than previously reported for discharge areas in the northern part of the flow system (such as Oasis Valley and Sarcobatus Flats) and less for areas in the southern part of the flow system (such as Franklin Lake, Shoshone area, and Tecopa/California Valley area). The recent USGS studies provide more accurate estimates of ground-water losses from the Death Valley regional ground-water flow system using consistent and comparable methods and techniques for each area. These recent USGS studies will provide better information to help water-resource managers determine how much ground-water can be pumped from the flow system while still protecting sensitive areas that provide habitat for wildlife and to scientists evaluating the direction and rate of ground-water flow away from areas on the Department of Energy's Nevada Test Site facility.

Reports documenting the results of the USGS studies of water losses from the Death Valley regional ground-water flow system and information about other USGS activities in the area can be viewed online at <http://nevada.usgs.gov>. These reports and information can also be obtained by calling the USGS Las Vegas office at 702-897-4000 or writing the USGS Las Vegas office at 6770 S. Paradise Rd., Las Vegas, NV 89119.

