

FREE!

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YUCCA

YUCCA
MOUNTAIN

X BLACK CONE

X RED CONE

X LITTLE CONES

X STEVE'S PASS

HWY. 95

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

Interesting Places You've Never Been To!

Crater Flat

by The Intrepid Explorer

Old and new residents alike are all familiar with the fact that we are surrounded by mountains on nearly all sides. This area is part of what is called the Basin and Range. Mountain ranges with valleys, or sometimes closed basins are the typical topography of this part of the country. Mountains are just sheets of rock that have been compressed and shoved skyward. This is a very slow process that typically takes millions of years.

However, there are also volcanoes in our area! No, Mount Charleston is NOT going to blow it's top like Mount St. Helens did some years back. Nor is lava going to be oozing out of the

top and down the sides like the volcanoes in Hawaii that you've probably seen from time to time when they decide to get themselves a bit of TV air time. No, there are no active volcanoes in this part of the Mojave, but the dead remnants of volcanic activity of the past. In some cases, the past wasn't that awfully long ago, geologically speaking.

And you don't have to go very far to see them.

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Timber Mountain Caldera

Timber Mountain

Yucca Mountain

Crater Flat

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They can be found at the north end of the Amargosa Valley, right off of Highway 95. The first, and by far the largest, is the Timber Mountain Caldera. It is so big, that the only way to really see it is from the air or on a map. The caldera is roughly 20 miles in diameter! Needless to say, this remnant of a long gone volcanic explosion would have been quite a sight when it was created. Had you been far enough away to survive the event, that is. Caldera are created when a mountain literally blows its top and leaves behind a large circular crater. One that did so and filled with water is the famous Crater Lake. There are many others out here in the West, but this is the closest one. Rock from that gigantic explosion can be found all over the area, even in Death Valley. If you are in the Amargosa Valley and look north at Yucca Mountain, then the tall mountain in the background to the north of it is Timber Mountain itself. As you can see from the map, it is approximately in the center of the caldera named after it. If you've ever gone on the Yucca Mountain tour and gone to the top of Yucca Mountain itself, then you'd have gotten a pretty fair look at the caldera. Unless you have access to the Nevada Test Site/Yucca Mountain Project, that is as close as you can get to seeing it. But there are other volcanoes in the area that you can see "up close and personal", and I'll show you how to get there.

To begin your very own tour of local volcanoes, all you have to do is get on Highway 95 and head west towards Lathrop Wells and Amargosa Valley. After you pass the Highway 373 turnoff to your left, continue on about six miles, and look to your right. You should be looking at a very large red cinder cone. There is a gravel road that heads straight towards it. What you are looking at is the mining operations being carried out by the Cind-R-Lite Company of Las Vegas. The cinders that are mined are made into lightweight cinder blocks. Originally they were hauled all the way to Las Vegas for processing, but now they are processed on site. At the current rate, they will only last another 750 to 1500 years.

As you continue heading "north" on Highway 95 (it's actually close to due west at this point) and travel another couple of miles, you'll see a paved road running off to your left. If the street sign is up, it will say Valley View. The sign on the highway might alert you to the fact that this road will get you to the farming area in Amargosa Valley. If you look somewhat to the west of the road, you'll notice some rather large sand dunes several miles away. That is Big Dune. I won't cover Big Dune in this article, but perhaps in the future, and now you know where it is and how to get to it.

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Crater Flat

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Going another seven or eight miles west you'll come to a gravel road that intersects the highway. To the left, it heads towards the Funeral Mountains, and if you took that direction, you'd eventually wind up at Indian Pass, which one will assume is the way that the Native tribes of this area got into and out of Death Valley. Again, I won't go into the details in this article, but it's something an adventurous person might want to try some day.

On the right, one will see a long mountain that stretches off to the northwest. And a gap in this mountain. This is Steve's Pass. This is your turn off, so don't miss it! There are actually about three different roads from Highway 95 that all head to that same gap, so if you miss the first, there are a couple more opportunities before you have to turn around and try again. At this point there isn't too much to see of your destination, but be patient. Once you go a couple of miles and get to the top of the pass and start heading down, you will be entering Crater Flat.

The cinder cones of Crater Flat are 1.2 million years old. As you follow the road north you will pass a couple of small cones to your right. These are Little Cones. Further along, and to your right is a very large red cone, named, Red Cone. And to the north of that is an even bigger black cone, Black Cone. After you pass Red Cone, you will see a road that runs off to the right, towards the cone. Take this turn. If you continue, you will eventually find yourself in Beatty, though it's a long bumpy road to get there. Shortly you'll get very close to Red Cone and you'll see another road off to the right, heading directly for it. Take this turn and in no time you'll be at the base of the cinder cone. If you have a Jeep or other 4WD

vehicle, or think your truck is pretty hot, you can follow the road that winds its way up the cone itself. Otherwise, the safe thing to do is park at the bottom and hike up to the top. It isn't very far, and the views are quite good. Off to the east is Yucca Mountain. It isn't much to see, as it is just a low lying ridge. Timber Mountain is to the northeast. On a clear day you can probably see Telescope Peak over in Death Valley.

If you wander around a bit you'll probably find a road that runs towards Black Cone. The road starts off pretty good, but gets worse the farther you go. If you have a sturdy vehicle, then you can probably get out to the base of Black Cone and do some more mountain climbing. If not, then drive around and explore Crater Flat, or maybe head back down 95 and explore Big Dune.

For more information on Nevada's volcanic origins, go to the Internet to: http://vulcan.wr.usgs.gov/Volcanoes/Nevada/description_nevada_volcanics.html

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