

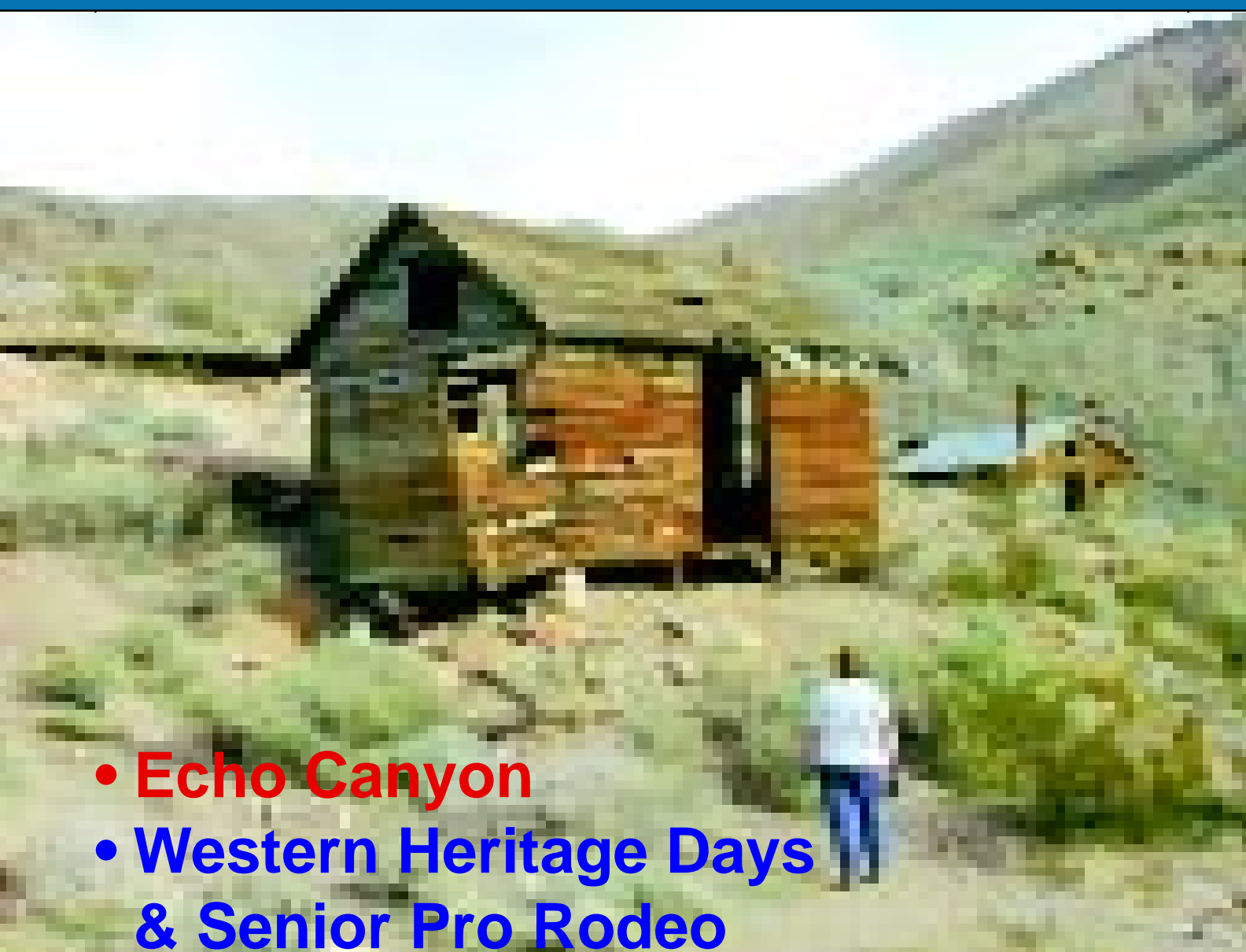
# THE **AMARGOSA NEWS**

**FREE!**

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- **Western Heritage Days & Senior Pro Rodeo**
- **Cooperative Extension Plans**
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***YOUR GUIDE TO THE  
DEATH VALLEY AREA***

# Interesting Places You've Never Been To!

## Echo Canyon

by *The Intrepid Explorer*

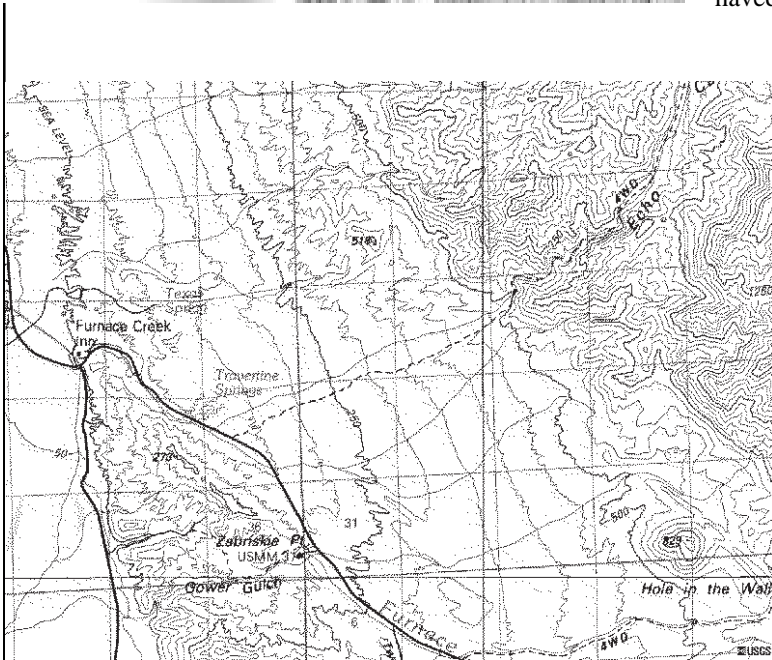
Echo Canyon is one of those places that you have actually heard about. Somewhere. Long ago. But you haven't actually been there. Maybe you heard that it was a Jeep trail. Or you saw the road and the sign as you drove by and decided for yourself that it was just a little bit too rough for you and your poor old vehicle. I know. That was what I thought too. Someday, when I get that HumVee, I'll give it a try.

I'm still waiting for the Hummer, but I didn't wait to go explore Echo Canyon. For those who are new to the area or just don't get around much, Echo Canyon is in Death Valley and is in the Funeral Mountains which separates Death Valley from Amargosa Valley. Compared to some of the other canyons in Death Valley, it isn't particularly long or hard to get to. If you're coming in from the south heading towards Furnace Creek, the road is past Zabriskie Point, but before you get to the little stand of palm trees. There is a sign, but it is not very prominent unless you are looking for it. It is a gravel road coming in at an acute angle, so it's hard to see from that direction. If you're pushing a baby carriage, I would hesitate to make the trip. Any 4WD vehicle will make it to the end with ease. Any pickup truck should as well. Probably most mid size or larger passenger cars could make it. There is a little loose gravel and a few bumps and dips so it might be an adventure for a really small car with tiny tires, but having gone up to Chloride City and driven down West Side Road in my little old Geo, I'd probably be crazy enough to try it. What you see at the beginning is just about the same as what you'll see at the end or anywhere in between.

Once you've found it, you're ready for some fun. The first 3.3 miles are quite easy as it's just a drive up a very well behaved alluvial fan. No big rocks or washouts to contend with.

Any car would get you there. Other than the mountains looming ahead of you, there isn't much to see unless it's a banner year for wildflowers. Just before entering the canyon you will find some Death Valley Sage growing on the right side in the rock. If you're lucky, it will be blooming. If not, better luck next year! After that point, the canyon itself begins. But before leaving the alluvial fan behind, make sure to turn around and enjoy the view. Telescope Peak is right there on the other side of Death Valley. You'll be able to turn around and see it or the mountains around it for a good part of your trip.

The mouth of the canyon is quite narrow. Very much like Titus Canyon, for those who are familiar with it. Even though this doesn't look to be a great year for wildflowers, they started popping up all around shortly after entering the canyon. I'm not a geologist



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## Echo Canyon

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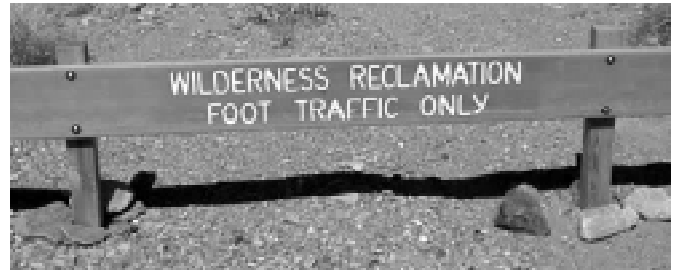
so I won't try to tell you what you'll be seeing, but every few hundred yards you get another great view. Red, white, brown and grey rocks. Some smooth, some jagged. With some blue sky and a few clouds, it's a beautiful sight. But don't forget to look down too! If it's spring you will probably see all sorts of wildflowers, and if you don't see any now, a little further up the canyon you might. Also, once you are in the Narrows, the road is a little more unpredictable. Not much, but there are a few bumps that nobody has bothered to remove, and there is a distinct possibility you'll find people camped along the way, and vehicles coming down the canyon. All kinds. Trucks, cars, motorcycles, even bicycles. So keep an eye out for fellow visitors who may not be paying enough attention.

About 1.6 miles after entering the canyon, you'll come to Eye of the Needle. It's a giant hole in the side of large piece of rock and looks very much like the hole in a large sewing needle. You won't be able to miss it as the road makes a big turn around it so you'll see it from both front and back. Another half mile and the narrow part of the canyon is behind you. Now you are surrounded by large rounded hills with a lot more sky above.

Another 2.6 miles or so and then the canyon really opens up and seems to more or less disappear. You'll see the road split, but the road to the left goes only a short distance and is blocked off. If you go that way, park, and get out and walk,



you'll find an old mine shaft that's been covered over with wire mesh. There are a few cans and things around to show that people were once there, but that's about all. If you continue to the right you'll begin to notice small diggings in the surrounding hills, now long abandoned.

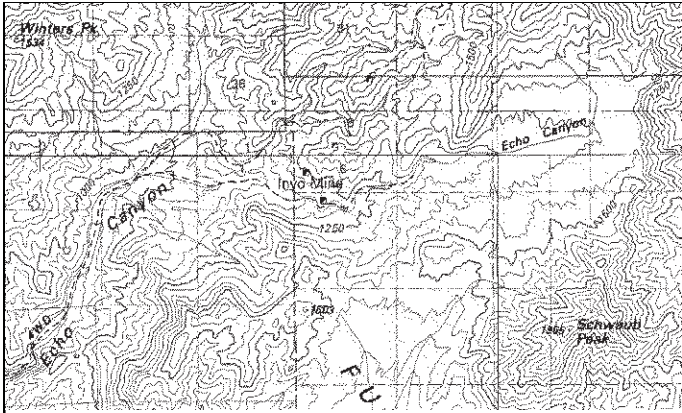


One more mile and you should come to another fork in the road. To the left the road climbs a bit past the remains of some old building. If you are VERY adventurous, this road leads north, and then east down to the ghost town of Lee, and from there down the mountain to Amargosa Valley. There is a large rock fall along the way which is probably easier to cross coming from the other direction, though the Park Ranger we met says there isn't much difference any more.



Being a single vehicle not equipped with winches and shovels and all, we went straight ahead. The first time I'd recommend that path as you will come across the remains of the Inyo Mine and the mill and houses the workers lived in just about a half mile further along. Stop to take a look, take some pictures, maybe even have a picnic lunch. The mill site is just a bit off the road so you can park and not block traffic. There are around a half dozen buildings still standing, and the remains of more. Much of the mill machinery is still there and you can see the mine up the hill a ways. It was late in the afternoon so I didn't climb up there to take a closer look.





The road continues for another 1.4 miles and ends abruptly at a very narrow gap in the rocks with a post in the middle. You'll have to hoof it from here, or turn around and go back. If you decide to do some hiking, you will find a rock fall not too much farther. If you look carefully, you will see some petroglyphs. As they have already been vandalized, I won't mention precisely where they are. You'll find them if you keep your eyes peeled.

We ventured some distance more along this path. About another hour of a leisurely hike. The "road" more or less follows along a dried stream bed. It's a gentle uphill walk on gravel

and is not at all strenuous. If you continue all the way to the end, I'm told, you will get to a point where you come to the edge of a steep cliff. It's about 3,000 feet down, with a magnificent view of the Amargosa Valley down below. The map says it's only about a 2.5 mile hike. We were only about half way there after an hour, or so it seemed. There were some low, gentle hills up ahead. Perhaps it wasn't quite that far to the edge over to the north. If that is your destination, then allow a good hour and a half for hiking there and the same to get back. That is the end of Echo Canyon.

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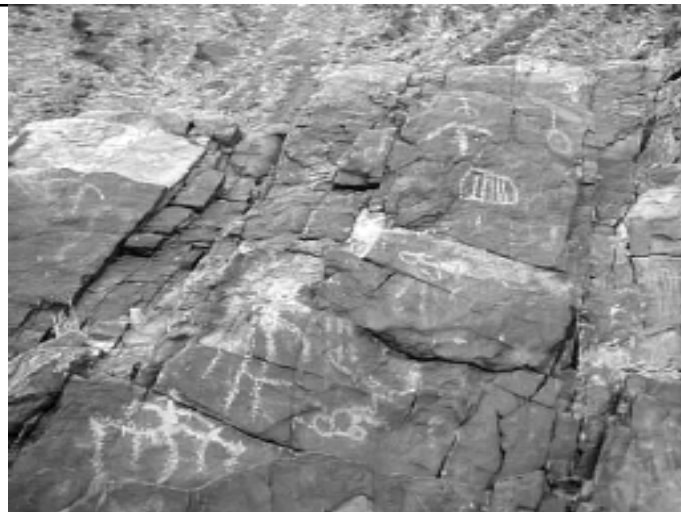
## Echo Canyon

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Some notes:

If you are a somewhat serious Death Valley explorer, or just don't want to miss what is out there, you should get one of the many guide books that are available. The one I've been using for the past several years is entitled "*The Explorer's Guide to Death Valley National Park*" by T. Scott Bryan and Betty Tucker-Bryan. It is an excellent book! First, it has exact miles to various points along each trip so you can keep track on your odometer and watch for points of interest or places to turn off the road. In addition, there are sections on history, plants and wildlife, minerals, ghost towns, railroads, and some general information about the facilities and sights of Death Valley National Park. I highly recommend it.

Though I am not the food critic here (maybe next issue?) I must suggest that you start your trip off right by having breakfast at the restaurant at Furnace Creek. The same goes for Stovepipe Wells if you are in that area. The food is great and it's an awfully nice way to start any trip. But be sure to bring your appetite or a few friends as you probably won't be able to eat everything that they give you. If you're at Furnace Creek, then you can go down to the Visitor's Center and get that tour guide or some maps or talk to the Park Rangers to see if my story is really believable! They are full of useful information about the area, so make use of them.



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