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

Interesting Places You've Never Been To!

Chloride Cliff/Chloride City

by The Intrepid Explorer

This time we're back in Death Valley again. In case you haven't figure it out, this is my favorite destination. It's no coincidence that there also happens to be a *lot* of things to see and do in Death Valley. Just might be why they made it into a National Park!

Also, there are two ways to get to our destination. If you are adventurous, you can go in one way and come out the other, which is what I did this trip. But I better give you some details so you can decide which is best for you.

If you don't have a high clearance vehicle, then the best way in is from Highway 95. If you read a previous article about Crater Flat, you follow the same route up Highway 95, going past the turn off to Crater Flat. You continue on past Carrara and then turn left, heading southwest, when you get to the road that leads to the old cement plant, frequently assumed to be Carrara, that heads to the right up into the mountains. See the pictures to be sure you are go-



too many diversions along the way. If you go in the Spring, then there will be lots of plants and flowers, but the rest of the year it will be pretty bleak. At one point you should see a road running off to the north. This should be about 4 miles from Hwy. 95. If you know your geography, then you might realize that the road is heading straight for Rhyolite. If you visit Rhyolite, you can see the other end of this road, and it is straight as an arrow, so it's hard to miss *if* you are looking right at it. Otherwise, from an angle, it blends into the cre-



ing the right way.

The first point of interest is an Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) communications facility. It's a very strange and prominent building, as you can see. It's also a good place to get out and take a look around, and if don't see it within a few miles of travel, you are most certainly on the wrong road as it can be seen for miles from Highway 95. If you are on the correct road, then keep on going. There aren't



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sote bushes and is almost invisible. So, keep a sharp eye out if you want to see it.

Otherwise, there's not much else along the way to see, or to let you know where you are. There aren't any significant roads that intersect either, so it's pretty hard to get lost. You just keep heading toward the Funeral Mountains to the southwest. Eventually the flat terrain starts to disappear as you begin climbing the slope of the mountains. At that point you should see the 4x4 sign. The road also gets more rutted. I drove this far and much further in a little Geo Metro



some years ago, so almost any vehicle can make it. Just pay attention and watch out for large rocks or deep ruts!

The road will start to climb and is no longer straight. It winds this way and that through some low hills. When in the clear you should have increasingly good views of the mountains on the other side of the valley. Eventually you come to the only bad spot on the road, where it has been cut out of the side of the mountain. If you are unsure of how much clearance your vehicle has, *this* is the time to get out and check! It's a long walk home, and I don't think AAA will come get you if you misjudge and get stuck. Sooner or later someone will come by and might be able to push or pull you off the rock, but it could be a long wait. I parked my little Geo there and walked as I had not seen a single vehicle the whole way. This last trip we saw several cars and ATV's up there, so maybe that's not such a good idea. It's not very wide here either, so don't plan on turning around if you decide you can't make it. Scout it out first and then go on ahead or back down a bit to a safer parking spot. I'm not trying to scare anyone. It's not much of an obstacle to anyone in a regular old pickup truck or SUV, but if you're driving your old Cadillac pulling a boat trailer, then maybe you might reconsider going beyond this point!

Once you get beyond that point and can safely take a look around, well, you might just want to stop and take a really good look. The best views are yet to come, but you'll get an inkling of what they will be like. You'll be able to see the Panamints, the Cottonwoods, the Grapevines, and the Sierras, if it's a clear day, and probably a whole lot of other mountains that I couldn't even identify because there were so many. You might want to bring your binoculars and a map or two and see how many you can see. But as I said, the

best views are further on ahead, so don't spend too much time here.

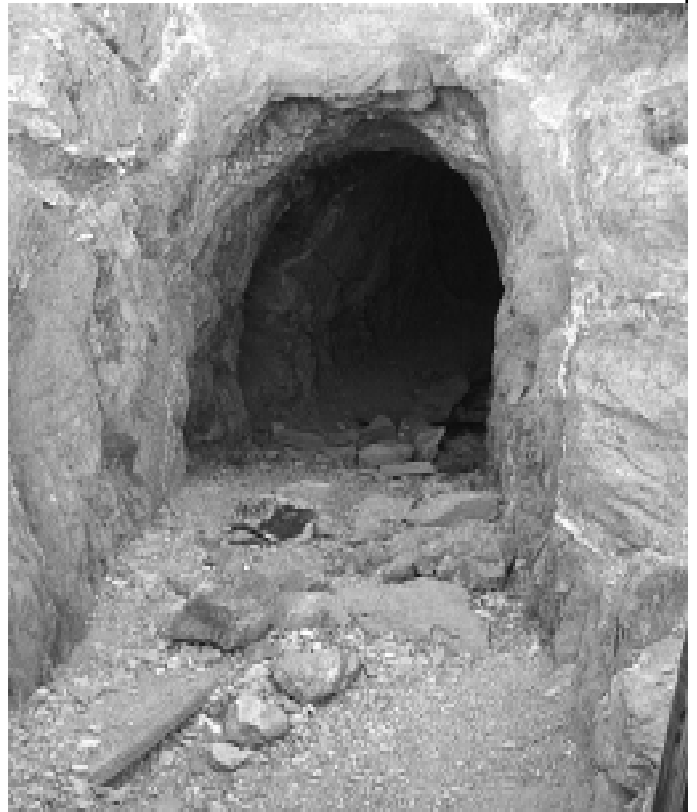
The road continues winding but heads down into a small valley of sorts. This is Chloride City. It was a silver mining camp. Originally, silver was found back in the 1870's. After a while things died down and it was largely deserted. But then after the turn of the century there was a new gold rush in the area, and Chloride City was "rediscovered". Someone even tried to mine mercury, but wasn't very suc-



cessful. The water tank they built to run the mercury processing is the largest and most obvious thing still standing.

If you've gotten this far, you should notice that there are roads running all over the place. You're pretty much on your own here. I've included some pictures of things you will find, but there's much more than what you see in this article. There are numerous shacks of various sorts, including wood, metal, and stone. Shafts are to be found everywhere. The Park Service warns visitors not to go into old abandoned mines. Do so at your own risk. I doubt any are really dangerous as I didn't see any screens or anything to prevent entry, but you never know. A friend gave me some advice on these matters. If you are determined to go into an old mine shaft, then leave your wallet at the entrance. Oh no. It's not to prevent you from losing it if you should stumble





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and fall in the dark. It's to notify your next of kin and pay for your funeral! So, be warned.

There are a few points of interest while you are at Chloride City. First is the grave of James McKay. I have no idea of who he was or when or even where he died, much less the cause of his demise. But there is a marker and what sure looks like a grave sitting there for all to see. Nearby is a shack and a mine shaft. If you know who he was, please let me know. That is certainly not the only grave in Death Valley that is a mystery. More than a few have come out in search of riches and adventure and got more than they bargained for and are now buried here. Some graves are at least marked in some way, and others are not.

Another point of interest is The Dugouts. It consists of three "houses" in a row that were dug out of the surrounding rock. One has pretty much collapsed. The other two are in somewhat better shape. This is pretty common in mining camps. Those who didn't anticipate staying long, because they would be strike it rich in no time and move on, dug a bit of a hole in the ground and tossed a tent over it. Those who knew better put up some low rock walls. The really industrious dug into the rock. Or maybe those were mine shafts that didn't pan out. Who can say? Only the rich and famous actually made buildings out of wood or brick. After water, wood is the next most precious thing in the desert. Brick isn't too far behind as it has to be hauled in from somewhere else. Sand and gravel are to be found just about anywhere, so if you have a little cement then you can make concrete. Not fancy concrete, but something that will serve to bolt down milling machines and things of that nature. When you're wandering around these old digs, or ghost towns anywhere, it's worth remembering that few of them had electricity or running water and nearly everything had to be hauled in by wagon or truck over roads that were far worse than what you had to drive on to get up there. Life can be difficult enough in the desert today. Imagine how much more interesting it was a century ago!

Ok. One last stop. Please allow sufficient time. You might even go here first and then explore Chloride City afterwards as we did. It is Chloride Cliff. I won't try to explain how to get there. A good topographic map is the best way. You can get these at many Park Service Ranger Stations, and various other places. Or, you can find them on the Web. Two excellent sites for maps are:

<http://terraserver.homeadvisor.msn.com>

and

<http://ww.topozone.com>

If you have a good sense of direction, you may find it on your own. Follow the main road towards the west and up and eventually you'll come to a flat area with a very steep cliff

on the side facing Death Valley. The view from there is second only to that from Telescope Peak, and comparable to Dante's View or Aguerberry Point. Besides all the mountains mentioned earlier, Corkscrew Peak and Grapevine Peak are very easy to spot from here. You also have a great view of the sand dunes and places like Marble and Cottonwood Canyons, which can't be seen from those other spots. Now I'm sure some of you have probably been to Keene Wonder Mine. Actually, if you're down in Death Valley and take the gravel road to "Keene Wonder Mine", what you really see is the remains of the mill that processed the ore. You can see a tramway that runs up the mountain and disappears. At the end of that tramway is the mine itself. If you are adventurous and in good shape, you can climb up there. Or, you can look down on it from above at Chloride Cliff. The end of the tramway is barely visible. The mine is further up the slope and can be clearly seen if you look below you. Numerous trails and roads can also be seen just about everywhere. If you pick the right one you can climb down to the Keene Wonder Mine. Or you can just sit there, take pictures, and have a nice picnic lunch.

Now, for that alternate route to Chloride City and Chloride Cliff. You may not have seen it as you were coming in, but you can see it easily as you head back. Once you get down near to where the hills started to appear, you'll see a road that runs off to the left going north. It's about 2 miles from Chloride Cliff. That road will take you to Daylight Pass and will get you pretty close to Keene Spring. It starts off rather nicely. I had heard it wasn't a very good road and so I was somewhat surprised at first. Later on, in a few spots, the road gets very narrow, or is deeply rutted, or has some sharp turns in it. Again, leave the Cadillac at home. But a pickup truck or SUV should have no problems unless it's wet or at night. The road is about 5 miles. The first mile or two is easy, as is the last mile or two. Once you've reached the pass, you can turn right and head to Beatty, or go left and head down into Death Valley. By then it should be dinner time, and either destination will offer you some great places to stop and relax a bit before heading off to further new adventures.

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Telescope Peak and the floor of Death Valley as seen from Chloride Cliff



The Sierras, Mt. Whitney, and Marble Canyon as seen from Chloride Cliff