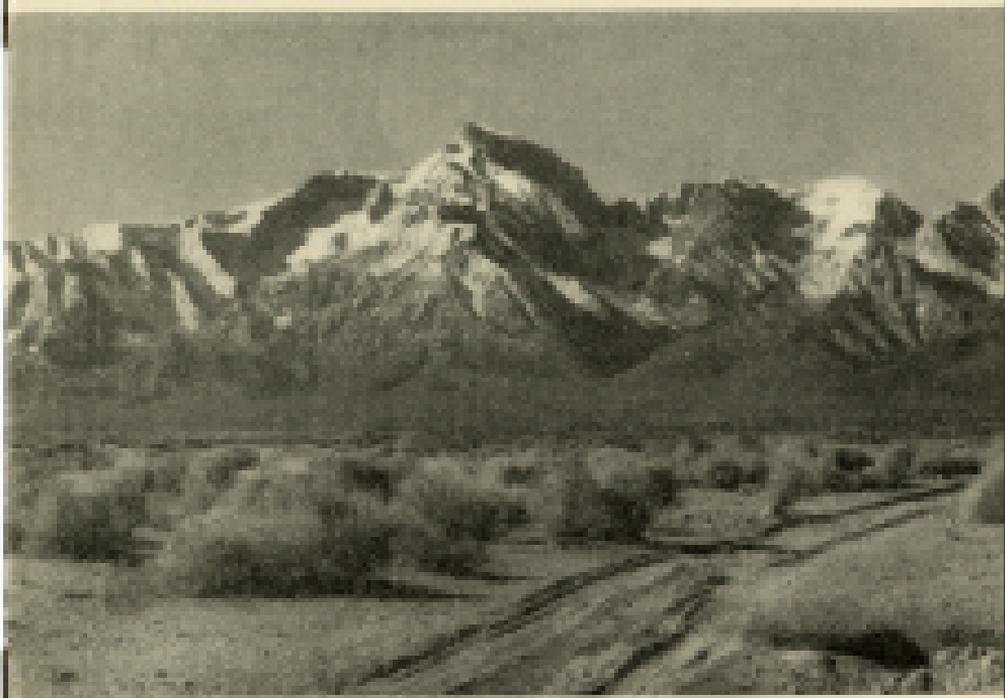


OWENS VALLEY... ... CALIFORNIA



PARCHER GUIDES 15c
INTERESTING - INFORMATIVE - ACCURATE

Cover picture shows Mt. Williamson
near Independence, Calif. Photo by
Fraser's, Pomona, Calif.

Copyright, 1942
FRANK M. FANCHER
240 Franklin St.
Boston, U.S.A.



PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS, INC., 1942

Owens Valley . . .

by

FRANK M. FANCHER

OWENS VALLEY! Ever since the days of '49 the name has meant adventure. The pioneers toiling across the desert wastes heard the name associated with water and game and green grass for their weary animals. Spanish miners heard of it as a place where great riches in silver could be found. And modern tourists think of it as the gateway to wonderful recreation areas in the High Sierras to the west and in the Death Valley and Panamint deserts to the east. Owens Valley itself has much to interest and charm the traveler and it is the purpose of this guide to help him enjoy the Valley as he travels through it.

Beginning at Long Beach, California, and ending at Providence, Rhode Island, U.S. Highway No. 5 winds across the continent. A small segment of this great highway, about 133 miles, is through the Owens Valley of Inyo County, the second largest county in California. Leaving the oil fields of Long Beach the road winds through metropolitan Los Angeles, San Fernando Valley, up Mint Canyon through its chaparral covered hills to a low summit, and then drops down the other side where queer looking Joshua trees line the highway like sentinels. Ninety nine miles north of Los Angeles is Mojave which may be said to be the beginning of the desert. Just east of Mojave is the famous March Army Air Base.

The author sincerely thanks W. A. (Bob) Crosby, Manager of the District office of the Automobile Club of Southern California, for his cooperation in the writing of this Guide.

INYOERN

Forty-four miles north of Mojave may be seen the Mescal Ordnance Testing Station east of the highway at Inyofern. The Navy has set aside many square miles of this desert country for rocket testing and other experiments. A panorama of the entire project may be seen from the highway at Homestead.

LITTLE LAKE

Twenty miles north of Inyofern is Little Lake, the first roadside stopping place in Inyo County. Little Lake is named for a small lake, close to the highway, fed by underground springs. This place is located where the terrain forms a natural gateway flanked on one side by low hills and on the other by great masses of lava which appear to have dammed up a river at some time in the dim past. Through this gateway came the party of Captain Joseph Walker in 1841 followed by the settlers urging their weary animals over the sandy trail. Here too, in later times, came many men "outside the law," who, fleeing from the Owens Valley country to the comparative safety of the coastal cities, found this gateway shut by shrewd deputy sheriffs from the county east of Independence, who have made this bottleneck a convenient trap to catch the criminally inclined.

Just north of the Little Lake store and west of the highway on the lava bluffs at the south end of the lake can be seen a fine collection of Indian petroglyphs or rock carvings. This ancient picture gallery, with spirited animals, scenes of the hunt, supposed maps of the desert water holes, perhaps symbolic figures of sun or moon and other unreadable picture writings, was carved by an unknown people in prehistoric times.

Three miles north of Little Lake and a short distance off the highway to the east can be seen a dark red volcanic cinder cone which looks like a huge chocolate drop in the distance. The Owens Valley Indians have a legend that

the color came from the blood of a giant who was killed at this place.

COSO HOT SPRINGS

Off the highway eleven miles to the east of this cinder cone is Coso Hot Springs which is a series of hot, bubbling springs widely known for their beneficial medicinal properties. The springs are of many colors, one of red soda water, another of blue gray mud, still another of brilliant yellow, all bubbling up from vents in the earth within a few feet of each other. Prior to the war many people came here for relief from rheumatism and like diseases but at the present time the springs have been taken over by the Navy and handed to the public. In ancient times the springs were used by Indians of the desert country who came from long distances to seek help from the friendly spirits they believed lived in the waters.

LOS ANGELES AQUEDUCT

Paralleling the highway, beginning at San Fernando, is the Los Angeles aqueduct which carries water from the Owens Valley 200 miles away. Twenty miles north of Little Lake, at the base of the mountains to the east can be seen a large reservoir. However, one of a series of reservoirs which impound water for the aqueduct. The highway crosses the aqueduct just beyond Halfway and again north of Lone Pine.

OLANCHA

Ten miles north of Halfway is Olancha, a beautiful oasis at the south end of Owens Lake. Olancha is the take-off point for the fishing and hunting district of Monoche in the Sierra, and several park trails are located nearby. A good road to Death Valley turns off here to the right.

OWENS LAKE

Owens Lake can be seen to the east of Olancha and the highway follows the lake shore for about twenty miles north from that point. This lake is a land-locked alkaline body of water fed by the Owens River. It was deep

enough to warrant the use of commercial steamboats in the days before the water of the Owens River was diverted into the aqueduct by the City of L.A. Today the lake is practically dry but its bed produces great quantities of soda ash and other chemicals. Soda plants are now operating on its shore and two of them may be seen from the highway.

LONE PINE

Twenty-three miles north of Olancho is Lone Pine, a farming, progressive town, the principal trading center for southern Inyo. Lone Pine was founded in 1861 principally to supply the mines which were operating in that vicinity. After the mines played out to some extent, ranching and stock raising became its main support. At the present time it is a tourist center and the starting point for trips to Mt. Whitney, Cottonwood Lake, and many other noteworthy places in the High Sierra.

MT. WHITNEY

Due west of Lone Pine and seen best from the center of town is Mt. Whitney, 14,498 feet in elevation, the highest mountain in continental U.S. Mt. Whitney is surrounded by 7 peaks all over 14,000 feet in elevation.

ALABAMA HILLS

At the foot of the Sierra and west of Lone Pine are the Alabama Hills so named by Southern sympathizers during the Civil War. These hills are worn by erosion into many queer shapes and are reputed to be one of the oldest formations in the U.S. They are the locale for many moving pictures, particularly Westerns and pictures of India.

KEELER

Sixteen miles east of Lone Pine on State Highway 190 (the Death Valley Road) is the little town of Keeler. Perched on the crest of the Inyo Range 800 ft. above the town is the fabulous old Carré Garcia mine. Adventurous Spanish miners of the seventies with Indian labor took

millions in gold, silver and lead down the precipitous cliffs on burro backs. The bullion bars from the smelter at Keeler were hauled by wagon train to the coast. Later a train, whose rails are still to be seen, was built to lower the ore to the valley floor, and a steamboat called the "Bessie Brady" hauled the bullion across Owens Lake, bringing back on the return trip loads of cobs, from the oversail standing on the west shore, a few miles north of the town of Cortoppe.

Directly east of Keeler over the Inyo Range is a valley of soft, Saline Valley. In a deep depression a vast expanse, dazzling white as snow, proves to be almost 100% pure salt. In 1912 an aerial tram was built, this great deposit was shoveled into baskets and transported across the mountains for your breakfast. Today the tram is a ruin and Saline Valley goes back to the Indians, with only an occasional prospector to break its solitude and curse its terrible roads.

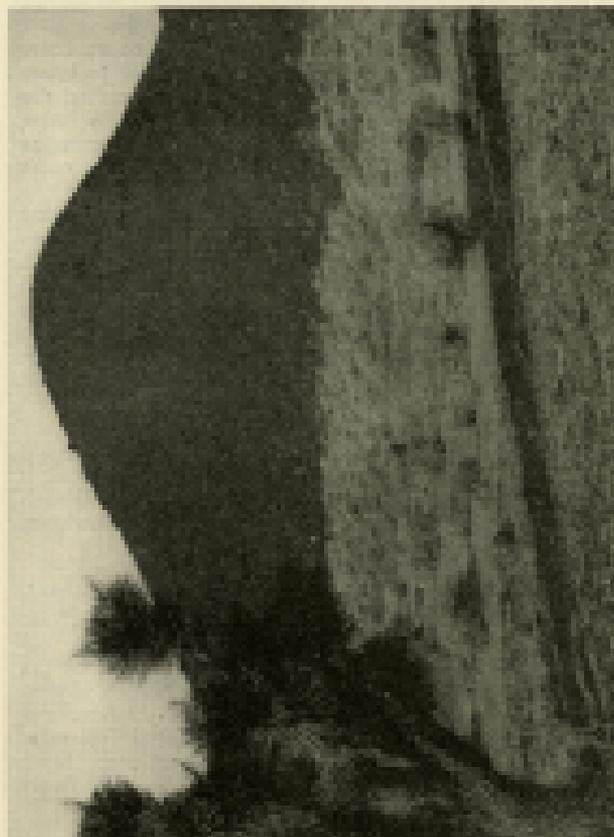
DARWIN

Twenty-four miles southeast of Keeler is Darwin, an old mining town, now producing large quantities of lead. It was founded in 1875 and named for Dr. Darwin French who explored that region in 1860. The name has also been given to Darwin Wash and Darwin Falls.

PANAMINT AND DEATH VALLEY

State Highway 190 which goes east from Lone Pine through Keeler and close to Darwin also goes on into Panamint and Death Valley. Panamint Valley lying between the Inyo and Panamint ranges is crossed by the highway 50 miles east of Keeler. Panamint Valley is famous for its mines and old mining camps such as Panamint City and Bolliker. Twenty-one miles east of Panamint Valley the highway crosses Towrie's Pass into Death Valley, visited by tens of thousands of people every winter.*

* See the Parker Guide on Panamint Valley.



Gloria's Blood-Creder Cone

Photo by Fredricka Brown, Calif.

SIERRA NEVADA

Beginning at Lone Pine and for 80 miles north, U.S. Highway 8 parallels the awe inspiring Sierra Nevada whose serrated crest rears up almost perpendicularly 7,000 to 10,000 feet from the floor of the Owens River Valley. In these mountains reside a thousand lakes most of which are stocked with trout, luring droves of fishermen during the summer months. Down the precipitous slopes run many small streams, fed by the snows which may be seen in the higher elevations the year around. All of these streams are stocked with trout and provide good fishing during the season.

MANZANAR

Ten miles north of Lone Pine and directly on the highway is the town of Manzanar. This area was a great apple producer until the irrigation water was diverted into the Los Angeles Aqueduct. During World War II the U.S. Army constructed a camp at this point to house Japanese who were evicted from the West Coast. The camp was built in the spring of 1942 and at one time contained 10,000 Japanese-Americans. After the war these people were returned to their homes and by January, 1947, most of the buildings had been torn down.

INDEPENDENCE

Six miles north of Manzanar is Independence, the county seat of Inyo County. The Eastern Sierra Museum is located here in the Court House on the east side of the main street. Prehistoric weapons, primitive cooking utensils, artifacts of a culture before the dawn of history, and exhibits of pioneer days in Inyo are here displayed. Independence was named for Fort Independence which was established three miles north of the present town by a company of Union soldiers on July 4, 1862. From 1865 to 1877 troops were continuously stationed at the fort. The present town was settled in 1861 and was known as

Pytown's up to 1888 when the name of the town was adopted.

MT. WILLIAMSON

West of the highway between Mammoth and Independence can be seen one of the most spectacular of the many high peaks along the crest of the Sierra Nevada. This is Mt. Williamson with an elevation of 14,394 feet above sea level.

KEANSARGE

Fifteen miles west of Independence over a winding mountain road is Keansarge or Onion Valley, elevation about 5,000 feet. Near the road as it winds up the mountain is the old mining settlement of Keansarge. When the Southerners gave the name "Alabama" to the hills near Lone Pine, the Union sympathizers adopted the name "Keansarge" after the Union battleship which defeated the privateer Alabama.

Along the Sierra, north and south of Independence are Sheephead, Keansarge, Sawmill and Tobacco passes, over which horses may be ridden to the many trout filled lakes and streams. Pack and saddle horses are available during the summer months.

FISH HATCHERIES

The spot that makes any fisherman's mouth water and gives him "red" itchy fingers is the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery operated by the California Division of Fish and Game. It is located off the Highway to the west about two and a half miles north of Independence. This hatchery supplies millions of trout fingerlings which are planted in the neighboring lakes and streams. Visitors are welcome. Six miles north of the hatchery and about one mile to the east are the Black Rock rearing ponds where small fish are taken from the Mt. Whitney Hatchery and raised to catchable size in the warm water before planting. Hundreds of thousands of fish may be seen in these ponds.

WINNEDUMAH

Once, a long time ago, the Owens Valley Indians were at war with Indians who lived on the west side of the Sierra. Outnumbered by their foes, the Owens Valley Indians were being forced back over the Inyo range to the east. At last they had all retreated over the mountains except their two chiefs, Winnedumah and Tinnesacha. When their enemies saw that the Owens Valley Indians had all fled to safety except the two chiefs, their head man who was standing on the crest of the Sierra Nevada pulled up a pine tree and fixing it to his bow, fired it across Owens Valley killing Chief Tinnesacha who, on his fall, turned to a long shaft of stone lying on the ridge. Chief Winnedumah was still standing on the crest of the Inyo Range and his enemies did not have time to pull up another pine tree to shoot him, so their headsman shouted, "Winnedumah! Stay where you are!" and the chief turned to an upright shaft of stone some 80 feet high and 50 feet in diameter at the base. This natural stone shaft can be seen from the highway at Independence on the crest of the Inyo Range east of the town and is called Winnedumah Monument.

BLACK ROCK COUNTRY

About fifteen miles north of Independence the highway starts through the Black Rock Country, so called because of the great masses of black lava which cover the area. This lava poured from cones which can be seen along the base of the mountains on both sides of the Valley. As the hot lava spilled from the earth's crust and ran out across the valley floor it cooled and hardened into many grotesque and fantastic forms. The Indians made use of the natural cover furnished by the upthrust lava when fighting with the early white settlers. The highway runs out of the Black Rock Country when it crosses the Forestry Hills and near this point is the intake for the L.A. aqueduct where the water is directed from the Owens River.

CHARLEY'S BUTTE

Just before crossing the Poverty Hills on the east side of the highway there is a black lava butte with a story. In pioneer days a two-family group of travellers with women and a child in the party was attacked by a band of Indians as they topped the hills. Fleeing for their lives, they made a break for the river and a negro, Charley Tyler, stayed behind at this lava pile to cover the retreat. They reached safety at Fort Independence, but Charley gave his life, and the butte bears his name. "Charley's Butte".

Fourteen miles north of Independence and just east of the Poverty Hills is Tennessee Reservoir named for Chief Tennessee. This is a part of the L.A. expedient water storage system.

PREHISTORIC INDIAN VILLAGE

Not far from the Tennessee Reservoir and just south of the Fish Springs store on a small hill you can find the remains of a pre-historic Indian village. The Indians who lived in this village built houses of brush, and around the bottoms of these dome-shaped homes they piled stones to make the buildings more secure. The brush houses have been gone for a long time but the circles of stones can still be seen, as can the holes in the rock made by the women where they ground native seeds for food for the tribe.

FISH SPRINGS GIANT

Not far from the Fish Springs store the highway crosses the stream which flows from Fish Springs. Near where the highway crosses this stream there is a cave formed by the lava flow, and the Indians say that in ancient times a giant lived in this cave who would eat up any Indian that he caught. The Indians finally appealed to the Patahwnees or very strong water babies who lived in the springs, to help them. One of the Patahwnees climbed out on the bank where the giant could see it and when the

giant came to eat it up the Patahwnees came out of the water and pulled the giant into the spring and drowned him. You should never say anything cross or mean when you are going over a stream of water, as the water babies will not like it if you do.

VOLCANOS

A sinister cone of black lava dominates the west foreground between Fish Springs and Big Pine. It is a dormant volcano, called Black Mt. and as geologists count time, is not very old. At the top of the cone can be found several series of cones going down into the mountain. A light breeze of warm moist air is always coming out of these cones. Don't try to reach the top of the volcano unless you are wearing heavy boots, for the sharp lava rock will cut an ordinary pair of shoes to pieces.

BIG PINE

Big Pine, 29 miles north of Independence, was settled in 1855 through land grants by people who used the waters of Big Pine Creek for irrigation. A road has been built up Big Pine Canyon for 11 miles to a beautiful spot where a lodge is located and where horses may be prepared for a 3-hour trip to Polaris Glacier, the southernmost glacier in the U.S. Back of this glacier are the Polarisides, crevasses which are three peaks over 14,000 feet in elevation. Nine beautiful lakes are in this basin, all of which are stocked with trout. A great deal of mining activity goes on around Big Pine and it is the northern outlet for Solano Valley. Considerable talc is hauled from the mountains to the east and north of Big Pine, as well as silver, lead and gold.

At Big Pine the Owens Valley is comparatively narrow, but approaching Bishop sixteen miles away, it spreads out to a width of 15 miles. From Big Pine a road runs east over Westgard Pass to Nevada point. North of this pass the name of the Inyo Range changes to the "White Mountains."

KEOUGH HOT SPRINGS

Between Big Pine and Bishop is Keough Hot Springs. These springs located at the base of the Sierra supply a constant flow of boiling hot mineral water for a public plunge and private health giving baths. Because the water is so hot it must be mixed with cold water before it can be used, and nature has very conveniently provided a cold spring near the hot ones so that the right temperature can be secured. Although valued by the Indians for generations, the therapeutic properties of the hot springs were not generally recognized until the opening of the secret by Phil Keough in 1913.

BISHOP

Bishop, an incorporated town, was founded in 1861 by Samuel Bishop who drove a herd of 500 cattle from the San Joaquin Valley and with his family located a ranch near the present site of the town. Bishop was principally a farming and stock raising town until the advent of the City of L.A. and the loss of the water on which the ranches depended. It is now one of the principal tourist centers of Eastern California.*

BISHOP CREEK

The main tourist attraction near Bishop is Bishop Creek, its canyon, and the lakes and streams which comprise its headwaters. Bishop Creek, a dashing mountain stream, derives its source from the perpetual snow and ice fields along the crest of the High Sierra southwest of Bishop. This creek makes a drop of over 7,000 feet in less than thirty miles but passes long enough in its race down the mountain slopes to form around seventy lakes.

A good paved mountain road goes up the Bishop Creek Canyon. This road, with a maximum 12% grade, makes it possible for tourists to easily drive into the back country of the Sierra. Fourteen miles from Bishop the road

up the canyon divides, one road following the South Fork of Bishop Creek to South Lake 22 miles from Bishop, and the other following the North Fork to Lake Sabrina, 18 miles from Bishop, and to North Lake, 19 miles from Bishop.

Dams have been built of the curleto of Sabrina and South Lakes and the water thus impounded is used by the California Electric Power Co. to operate five hydro-electric power plants. These power plants can be seen from the Bishop Creek road and the power generated at these plants is sent by transmission lines to Southern California and as far away as Mexico. The steel towers of this line can be seen from the highway all the way from Inyoharn to Bishop.

During the summer months thousands of fishermen, hunters and mountain enthusiasts take advantage of the recreational possibilities of this area. Good camp sites have been provided by the Inyo National Forest and there are a number of well equipped summer resorts for those who do not wish to camp out. Boats are available for rent on the larger lakes, and horses and guide service are provided for those who wish to take either short or long trips into the back country away from the automobile roads.

PUMICE

Bishop has also become the center of the pumice industry. Pumice, a very light volcanic ash, is mixed with cement and made into a very good building block, which is becoming widely used. This curious rock is so light that it floats on water.

TUNGSTEN

Some of the largest tungsten mines in the world are high up in the Sierra at the head of Pine Creek Canyon, elevation around 11,000 ft., and are reached by a good road leaving the highway 11 miles northwest of Bishop.

* See the Parker Guide on Bishop, California.

OWENS RIVER

Three or four miles north of Bishop is the Owens River which enters the meadow country after its torturous journey through the Owens River Gorge. This is a fine trout stream and thousands of fishermen yearly attempt to fill their creels by tempting the fish with various kinds of lures.

U. S. HIGHWAYS 395 AND 6

One hundred and twenty-four miles south of Bishop, U.S. 395 (the Three Flags Highway) joins U.S. 6 and one mile north of Bishop these two great highways reach a parting of their ways. U.S. 6 turns to the right toward Tonopah and Salt Lake and U.S. 395 turns to the left toward Reno. At a point about 16 miles north of Bishop U.S. 395 leaves the Owens Valley and enters the wonderland of Mono.*

LT. RICHARD OWENS

If Lt. Richard Owens, trusted fellow officer of Gen. Fremont, who thus honored his friend in naming this valley "Owens," could tether his horse by one of these dashing mountain streams and pull out a few flashing rainbows for his frying pan, he would be proud of "Owens" Valley and happy that so much of its primeval grandeur and uplifting beauty had survived the pressure of civilization, to be a place of inspiration and relaxation for his descendants.

* See the *Parcher Guide on Mammoth Lakes*.

Other *Parcher Guides* on interesting places in the West can be purchased at Park Offices, Book Stores, Tourist Resorts or from Frank M. Parcher, 505 Franklin St., Boise, Idaho, for fifteen cents.