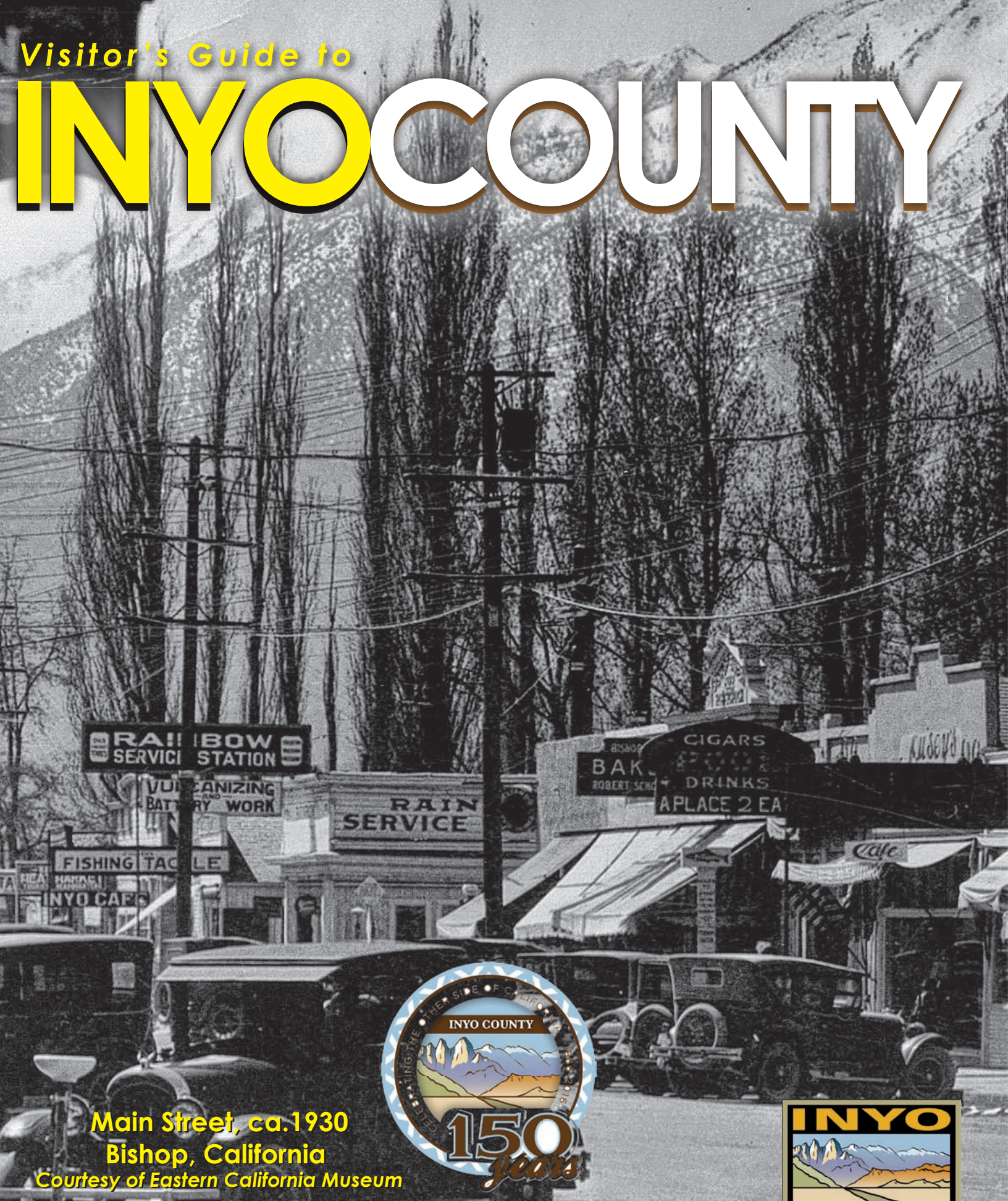


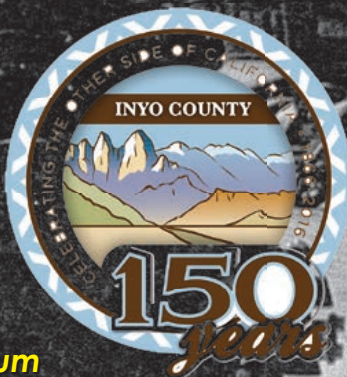
Visitor's Guide to

# INYO COUNTY



Main Street, ca.1930  
Bishop, California

Courtesy of Eastern California Museum



## SESQUICENTENNIAL ISSUE

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# INYO COUNTY



SESQUICENTENNIAL  
ISSUE

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*The Other Side of California*  
DEATH VALLEY AND THE EASTERN SIERRA

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# Inyo County Celebrates Its Sesquicentennial

B&W Photographs courtesy of Eastern California Museum

Color Photographs and story by David Woodruff



*Inyo County 150 year celebration at the courthouse in Independence March 22, 2016.*

It's not very often a county has the opportunity to celebrate a 150 year anniversary. On March 22, 2016, on the courthouse steps in Independence, several hundred people gathered to do just that. Inyo County is 150 years young in 2016.

The California state legislature carved out Inyo County from existing Tulare and Mono counties (with more area added a few years later from Kern and Mono counties). Legislation to create the new county was actually first passed in 1864, with the name of the county to be Coso and the county

seat to be Bend City.

Communication and transportation problems kept the legislation from moving forward and a bill to create the county had to be reintroduced in the 1886 legislature. This time, the county's name was to be Inyo with the county seat at Independence. The bill passed, the citizens elected their county officials and Inyo County came into "official" existence.

The original northern boundary was just north of Big Pine. In 1870, the citizens of Bishop, the largest town in the area, petitioned the state to move

the county line so they could be in Inyo County instead of Mono, with the reason stated that the trip to the county seat of Bridgeport was long and difficult, especially in the winter.

Inyo County has seen an active 150 years. From the 20-Mule Teams of Borax in Death Valley, to the tungsten mines of Pine Creek, mining has played an important role in the development of Inyo. The first white settlers were ranchers, raising cattle for the residents of nearby mining camps on the lush grasses of the Owens Valley. Today, cattle are still Inyo's largest agricultural

commodity.

But without doubt, the arrival of the city of Los Angeles and the subsequent export of Inyo's water to the thirsty and growing metropolis to the south beginning in 1913 has had earth shaking impact on the people and the land of Inyo for now over 100 years.

The morning of March 22, 2016 dawned brightly over Independence as county workers and community volunteers worked feverishly to put the last minute details in place for the



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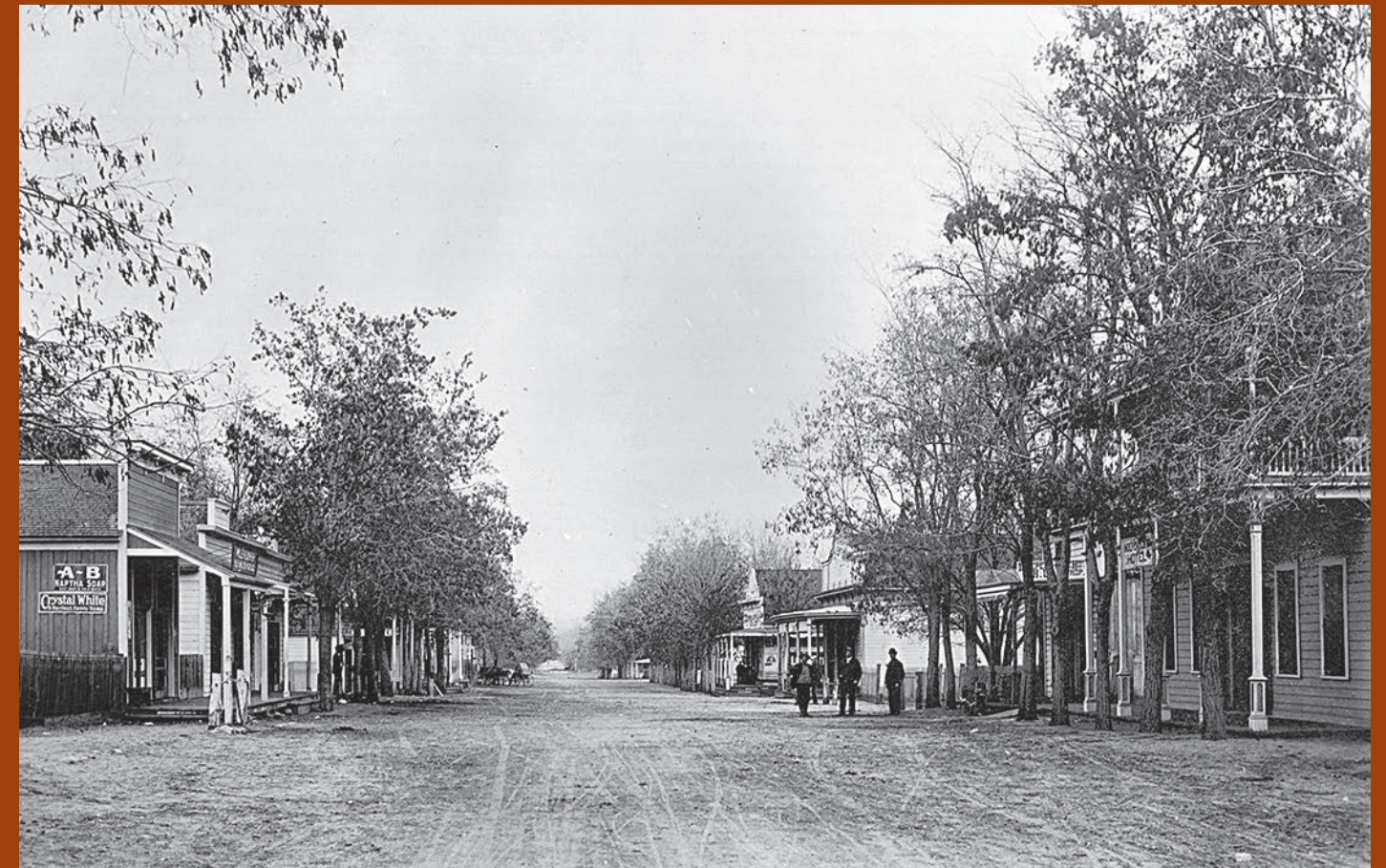
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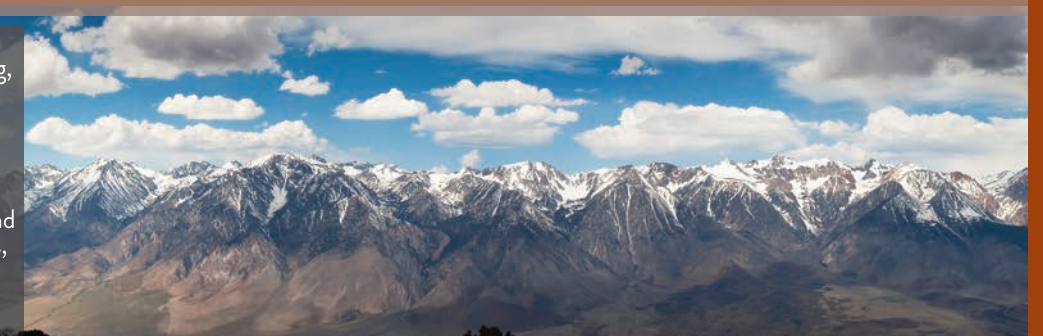


*Early Independence, ca. 1900.*

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highly anticipated celebration to be held later that day on the courthouse steps. The Inyo Board of Supervisors, dignitaries, invited guests, pioneer families and keynote speakers would all be part of the gala event.

The setting could not have been more perfect with the stately courthouse gracing the scene to the east while the majestic Sierra Nevada formed a picture perfect backdrop to the west. The Model A car club from Bishop drove their classics down from Bishop and were joined by



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Top, West Line Street, Bishop, ca.1920.  
Middle, Inyo County Courthouse dedication, 1923.  
Bottom, Inyo Sesquicentennial Celebration, 2016.



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other classic cars, all of which lined Highway 395. Community members from Independence dressed in their finest period dress adding to the classic look of the celebration.

The Inyo County Sheriff Color Guard smartly presented the California and United States flags with Inyo's first county administrator and rancher John K. Smith leading the crowd of several hundred in the pledge of allegiance. After a welcome from County Supervisor and Board Chairman Jeff Griffiths, the character of Inyo County's first newspaperman, historian and legend Willie Chalfant presented the first keynote address reminding the attendees how the strength of their community has seen them through challenging times in the past and will bear them well now and into the future. Dignitaries and guests from Death Valley to Bishop made stirring speeches highlighting the greatness of Inyo's people and their history.

Proclamations honoring Inyo and its sesquicentennial were offered by officials from Mono, Inyo and Kern



"Chicken" Smith making a delivery

counties, along with officials from the state of California and US House of Representatives. Being unsure if Inyo County ever fulfilled their financial obligation to pay Mono County for the Bishop area when it withdrew from Mono in 1870, the Inyo Board of Supervisors presented Mono County with a "check" for \$12,000.

Former Inyo County Water Director Greg James recounted the history to the people of Inyo's many challenges in dealing with water issues and how it has survived them. James said, "Thus, it can be seen that even facing great challenges, the citizens and officials of Inyo County have the opportunity to follow the example of the many



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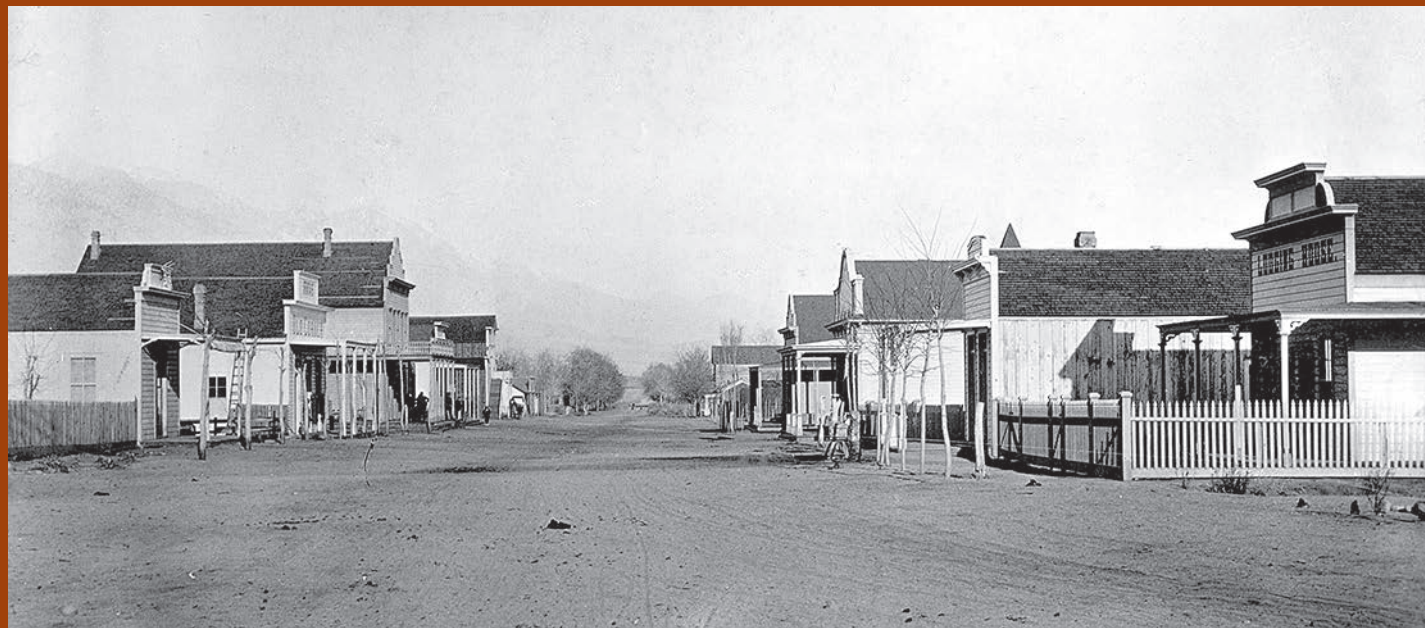
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# The Owens River River of Many Uses

by David Woodruff



Top, Independence, ca. 1900.  
Bottom, Inyo Sesquicentennial Celebration 2016.

citizens and officials who have worked tirelessly over the past 100 years to protect and enhance the valley's environment, economy and way of life in this Land of Little Rain.

The Courthouse Celebration ended with 5th generation member of Inyo pioneer family, Rob Pearce urging the crowd to never forget their heritage and how important it is in shaping who we are today.

Once the events finished up at the courthouse, the group progressed across the street to the Independence Legion Hall where a pie social rivaling the "best of them" was held. Over

75 pies baked by Culinarians from throughout Inyo County satiated the appetite of the attendees.

And if the assemblage of revelers hadn't already been thoroughly satisfied, a special commemorative keepsake published by the Inyo 150 Sesquicentennial Committee, Heritage and Humble Pie was given to all who attended this grandest of days. The 115 page book was a collection of the recipes used to prepare the tasty pies interspersed with short stories of Inyo's history.

Most of those that attended the celebration of Inyo County's

Sesquicentennial on March 22, 2016 agree it was a perfect day and one that will be long remembered. The good news for those that missed it, Inyo's 150th celebration will continue throughout the remainder of 2016. Civic and community organizations will be hosting history presentations, field trips, history walks and dozens of other events as continual reminder of the importance of 2016 in Inyo's history. You can go to <http://www.theothersideofcalifornia.com/inyo-150-calendar-of-events/> to see a complete list of upcoming Inyo 150 events. ■

The Owens River is the lifeblood of the City of Los Angeles. It was the diversion of its water to the great metropolis through the LA Aqueduct, which allowed that city to grow from just 100,000 in 1900 to 1.2 million just 30 years later.

Previous to the diversions, the Owens River served the area's first inhabitants, native Paiutes and Shoshones, quite well. They built small diversion dams to irrigate crops to supplement their food stores.

The arrival of white settlers put an

end to the Native American way of life. Ranchers quickly diverted Owens River water for their own use, to grow hay for their cattle. Farmers moved in and took the best land for themselves. Increasing numbers of white settlers made it nearly impossible for the Paiute and Shoshone to maintain their way of life.

At its peak, farmers and ranchers in the Owens Valley had almost 80,000 acres of land under cultivation. When Los Angeles officials arrived in 1905 to begin construction of their aqueduct, it

was the water rights of these farmers and ranchers that the City quickly pursued. Many sold out. Others held on but eventually caved in to the financial and social pressures put on them by the City. Today, less than 15,000 acres of land in Inyo County are under cultivation.

Once diversions started in 1913, the loss of water and the effect it had on Inyo was profound. About 5 miles south of Lone Pine sat the 108 square mile Owens Lake. This desert lake supported a huge population of waterfowl and other wildlife. By 1926, just 13 years after the Owens River was diverted into the LA Aqueduct, Owens Lake was dry.

The Owens River begins on the icy slopes of the Eastern Sierra just south of June Mountain Ski Area. Small creeks combine in Glass Creek Meadows to form Glass Creek, the furthest natural reach of this over-utilized watercourse.

Glass Creek soon joins Deadman Creek and flows easterly under US Highway 395 just before the climb to Deadman Pass. These two creeks are joined by smaller tributaries and springs and together they soon flow into the northern reaches of the broad expanse of Long Valley where it becomes well known to fishermen and women as the "Upper Owens".

For 26 miles, the Owens River winds its way through this picturesque setting toward 50-plus square mile Crowley Lake, the largest storage reservoir on the Owens. Fly-fishing is the sport here with brilliant rainbows, brown trout, and cutthroat testing the skills of anglers.

From Crowley Lake, the Owens River drops steeply through the voluminous Owens River Gorge. The Gorge was formed when the Owens River cut through the Bishop Tuff: a layer of welded ash formed from volcanic activity erupting in Long Valley thousands of years ago. This erosion exposed the tuff layers, including rare columnar rhyolite



Pleasant Valley Reservoir...where the Owens river enters Inyo County.

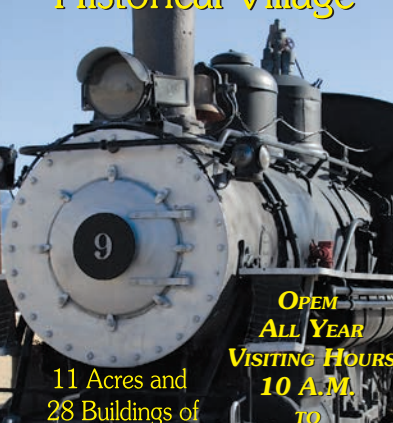




Owens River looking south from Mazourka Canyon Road, east of Independence.

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Top, Owens River looking south from Hwy 6.  
Bottom, Owens River just south of the Pleasant Valley Dam.

formations.

Though most of the flow of the Owens River here passes through huge pipes as it drops quickly towards the Owens Valley through three electrical generating powerhouses, enough water is allowed to flow through the Gorge's natural stream course to support a healthy brown trout population.


The steep vertical walls of the Gorge attract climbers from throughout the world and foot trails wind throughout the Gorge providing numerous hiking opportunities, especially during the cooler months.

As the Owens River enters the flats of the Owens Valley, its speed slows as it makes its way peacefully through the bottom-lands. At one time, several irrigation ditches fed off the river enabling ranchers and farmers to enjoy an agrarian lifestyle. Today, a small amount of water from the Owens River still finds its way to the rancher's fields, but mostly, it flows south to slake the thirst of a sprawling metropolis.

About 10 miles south of Big Pine, at a location called Aberdeen, the River is diverted into a ditch, and from here, flows 233 miles to Los Angeles through a series

of siphons, canals, pipes and reservoirs, entirely by gravity. It was and still is considered a marvel of engineering.


In 2006, after years of negotiations and litigation, the City of Los Angeles agreed to allow water to flow on a permanent basis down the 63 miles of the Owens River dry riverbed below the Aberdeen diversion, all the way to Owens Lake. This part of the river had been dry ever since 1913, except in exceptionally wet years. Today, riparian growth and wildlife has returned to this section of the river as nature tries hard to re-establish and restore this watery desert gem.



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Owens River flowing into north end of Owens Lake, southeast of Lone Pine.

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Dry Owens Lake itself is seeing a resurgence in its own environmental health. The dry lake was once considered one of the single largest contributors to air pollution, fouling the air with its dust when the winds blew. Since 2001, the city of Los Angeles has been working under a court order to reduce the dust, and today, 90% of the former dry lake-bed is under effective dust control.

Shallow pools of water have been spread over much of the lake, providing a resurgence in visits by waterfowl. The City recently opened its Owens Lake Trails project. Three different access points provide 4 miles of hiking trails, taking in the scenery and providing wildlife-viewing opportunities.

The Owens River has had a long history of serving humankind, and continues to go through many changes as it works hard to please everyone. Perhaps the Owens can be best summed up in a Mark Twain quote, "A river is like a book, but not a book to be read once and thrown aside, for it has a new story to tell every day." ■

# The Owens Lake Bird Festival

*by Michael Prather*

Once again thousands of migrating shorebirds and waterfowl are migrating through Owens Lake during spring and fall. A California wildlife heritage that was lost has returned – good news for a change. Flying marathon distances from as far away as South America and the Arctic, the awe of seeing these birds is overwhelming. They pause at Owens Lake for rest and to put on fat because the next leg of their journey north or south will be hundreds, if not thousands of miles away. They will fly it non-stop.

Flocks of thousands of American avocets and sand pipers can be

the annual Owens Lake Bird Festival put on by Friends of the Inyo ([www.friendsoftheinyo.org](http://www.friendsoftheinyo.org)) each April. During the festival guided tours led by experts take participants out onto Owens Lake to see the wonder of migration and the amazing numbers of birds. With binoculars, spotting scopes and field guides the natural history stories of the bird species are shared. Where are they coming from and where are they going? What are they eating? Additional tours include geology, local history, Sierra Nevada canyons and dunes. For a look at the full program from 2016 go to the Friends of the Inyo website. The April 21-23, 2017 program will be up as soon as it is finalized.



American avocets

seen feeding on the lake-bed or wheeling through the sky. Birds of prey can sometimes be seen flashing among the flocks looking for a meal. Audubon designated Owens Lake an Important Bird Area in 2001 owing to the large number of migrating birds and significant number of snowy plovers, a Species of Special Concern in California. Set in the southern Owens Valley at 3,600 feet near Lone Pine, Owens Lake is framed by the 14,000 foot High Sierra crest to the west and the 11,000 foot Inyo Mountains to the east. This is a world class landscape – the Inter Mountain West.

Now visitors may tour the lake on their own or better yet by attending

the annual Owens Lake Bird Festival put on by Friends of the Inyo ([www.friendsoftheinyo.org](http://www.friendsoftheinyo.org)) each April. During the festival guided tours led by experts take participants out onto Owens Lake to see the wonder of migration and the amazing numbers of birds. With binoculars, spotting scopes and field guides the natural history stories of the bird species are shared. Where are they coming from and where are they going? What are they eating? Additional tours include geology, local history, Sierra Nevada canyons and dunes. For a look at the full program from 2016 go to the Friends of the Inyo website. The April 21-23, 2017 program will be up as soon as it is finalized.

Department of Water and Power. Each has an information kiosk and walking and driving routes.

1.) Boulder Creek Route – From the Whitney Portal Road junction with Hwy 395 drive 4.5 miles south of Lone Pine to Boulder Creek RV Park on the left side of the highway. Turn in and drive 3.1 miles east on the unpaved road to a right turn south. Follow the signs. You will come to ponds and bird foraging areas with good roads around them for viewing.

2.) Dirty Socks Route – In Olancha (22 miles south of Lone Pine) turn east off of Hwy 395 onto Hwy 190. Drive 4.5 miles east to the Dirty Socks haul road on the left. Follow the signs. You will



Phalaropes

Ornithologist Joseph Grinnell visited Owens Lake several times early in the last century. In his field notebook for September 24, 1917 he recorded, "Great numbers of water birds are in sight along the shore – Avocets, Phalaropes and Ducks. Large flocks of shorebirds in flight over the water in the distance, wheeling about show en masse', now silvery now dark, against the gray-blue of the water. There must literally be thousands of birds within sight of this spot. En route around the south end of Owens Lake to Olancha saw water birds almost continuously."

### Birding at Owens Lake

The best dates for viewing the migrating shorebirds and waterfowl at Owens Lake are mid-March to mid-May and mid-August to early November. Highest numbers of shorebirds are seen in the second half of April and August. High numbers of waterfowl (ducks) occur in October.

For enjoying the history and beauty of this wonderful valley and landscape, any time of year is fine, although it is recommended that visitors not drive out onto the lake after rain or snow.

Three public access locations have been developed by the Los Angeles

pass expanses of dust control work managed by Los Angeles to end the regional hazardous dust problem at Owens Lake. The dust was caused by the drying up of the lake to quench the thirst of Los Angeles starting in 1913 with cutting off the Owens River which fed the lake.

3.) Plaza Route – Drive 3.1 miles south of the Whitney Portal Road junction with Hwy 395 to Hwy 136. Turn left onto Hwy 136 and drive 10.3 miles east. Turn right on the unpaved road and follow the signs. You will see the stunning landscape architectural project built as part of the public access for wildlife viewing. Inspired by the wing curve of the snowy plover the shade structure casts the shadows of flying birds onto the plaza. Trails lead out to viewing areas with interpretive panels discussing the natural history of migrating birds, Owens lake history and geology. ■



# Beauty of The Bishop Murals

Photographs and story by David Woodruff

The city of Bishop is well known for the natural beauty that surrounds it. Majestic mountains, cascading creeks, lush green fields and picturesque rock formations all make for a setting of world-class stature. With the surrounding scenery this spectacular, one might easily overlook the beauty that can be found inside the town itself. Along the walls of buildings throughout the town, one can find beautiful artwork that challenges the eyes to stay focused on the more urban scene instead.



Top, Will Rogers, kids and ice cream at Dwayne's Pharmacy on West Line Street.  
Bottom, Father Crowley at north side of Body & Soul, 197 North Main Street.



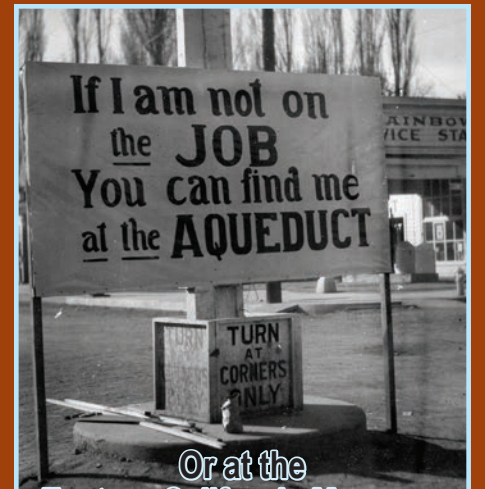
Kittie Lee Inn, south side of Whiskey Creek, 524 N. Main Street.

At fifteen different sites in Bishop, one can find the town's history and heritage artfully displayed in a spectacular outdoor art gallery of picturesque murals. Founded in 1997 by Barbel and David Williams, Dan Wells and John Knowlton, the Bishop Mural Society has produced some of the most beautiful large scale works of

art to be found anywhere.

Intent on showcasing the fascinating history of the Owens Valley, the murals depict scenes ranging from railroading to medicine and from mining to religion.

The Society's first mural "Trompe L'oeil Mural," was completed in 1997 by Bob Unkrich, Barbel Williams, John



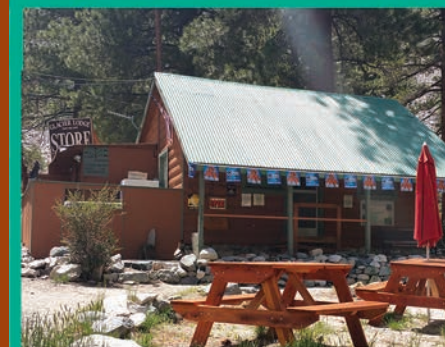
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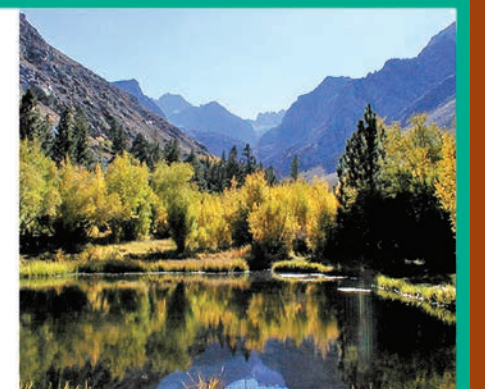
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Knowlton and David Williams. This mural was painted to match the windows, awnings and siding of the adjacent building, which now houses a real estate broker. Mural Society founder David Williams is pictured as in real life.

Today, Bishop is well known for having some of the Eastern Sierra's best bakeries. The town's history for producing delicious baked goods dates back over a hundred years. In 1998, Janet Essley completed "Bishop Bakery 1922", which showcases a scene of Basque shepherders passing with their flocks in front of the patisserie.

One of the more unique murals in Bishop is the "Young at Heart" by John Pugh. Inscribed with words as a land title, it cleverly presents a layered sample of Bishop heritage, a "sedimentary survey" if you will. The top layer is of bullets, spurs, horseshoes, railroad spikes, rusted water valves, and old keys, a sampling of Bishop's more recent history. Next are Bristlecone pine roots, followed by Paiute arrowheads and beads, followed by fossilized Mammoth tusks and Saber-tooth skulls. Bringing up the bottom layer are fossils of ancient roots, prehistoric leaves and Trilobites. On the lighter side, a dog named Hunter helps to "ground" this piece as he looks out from the top layer and "sniffs the air for a bone, but picks up the scent of an eon."

On the west side of Dwayne's Family Pharmacy, Phillip Slagter has created a lighthearted scene showing

Will Rogers enjoying an ice cream with some of the town's children. And flanking the roof-line of the same building are four separate nine-foot panels depicting the "History of Medicine".

At 400 W. Line Street, is one of the Society's more controversial works, "Drain" by John Pugh. An agricultural Shangri La appears as a mural within a mural. This vision of the valley's past is not meant to portray a specific vantage point yet rather allow the viewer an ambient experience of the ecology of the Owens Valley before the LA Department of Water & Power diversions began. A protruding drainpipe symbolizes the diversion of water down the LA aqueduct, and all the things that went with it.

Murals are not always done in paint. "Celebrating the Sierra" by Patricia Holton, Betty Cameron, Susanne Olson, Margaret Phelps, Sara Steck, Coleen Randolph, Earl Gann, Carolyn Lynch & Carol Conner-Turner, is a natural history mural of ceramic tiles and mosaic. The 237 individual tiles have been handcrafted, stamped and decorated by over 110 members of the local community. The mural is dedicated to the committed volunteers of Inyo County Search and Rescue. The mural can be seen on the east wall of the Bishop Library.

These are just some of the beautiful murals that you can see on a visit to Bishop. Most of Bishop murals are within easy walking distance to the downtown corridor. The Bishop Mural Society has put together an informative website, where you can find information about the murals and a self-guiding map. Maps are also available at the Bishop Chamber of Commerce and other locations throughout Bishop. The Bishop Murals are maintained thanks to the generosity and support of the people that enjoy them. The Bishop Mural Society invites you to become a member. You don't have to be an artist to belong. For more information on how you can support the Bishop Murals call (760) 872-2428, or go to <http://www.bishopmurals.com>.

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# The Old Spanish Trail Winds Its Way Into Inyo County's History

Photographs and Story by Susan Sorrells



*Remains of Historic Rock House on Old Spanish Trail.*

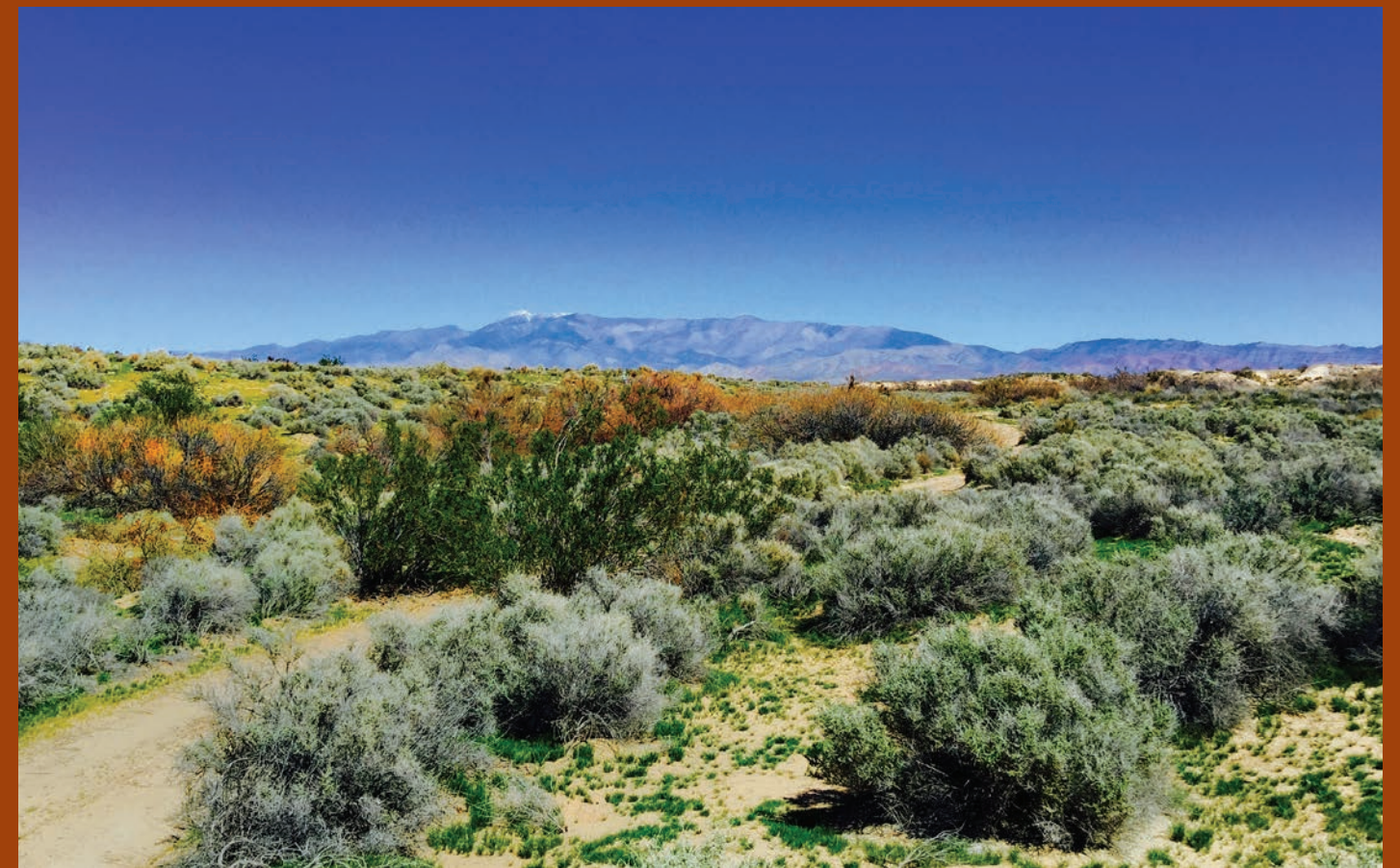
This year Inyo County proudly celebrates its Sesquicentennial. Inyo County was formed on March 22, 1866, only 16 years after California became the 35th state in the union. Neither of these events would have occurred so quickly however, despite the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 that ceded much of Mexico's northern territories to the United States, without another event that occurred only nine days before the treaty was signed. This event was the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in Coloma, California. At that time in United States history there had to be at least 60,000

inhabitants in a territory before it could become a state, and in 1848, at the time of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, there were only 7,500 residents in what later became California.

The discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill and the ensuing gold rush dramatically changed these statistics. Between 1848 and 1855 it is estimated that over 300,000 prospectors who became known as the forty-niners migrated to California in search of their fortunes. Many of these forty-niners followed a trail that had been established in the late 1700s from Santa Fe, New Mexico to Los Angeles, California when

California was still a Spanish colony. This trail is called the Old Spanish Trail and much of it, from the Nevada border to San Bernardino County, traverses Southeast Inyo County.

Leroy and Ann Hafen, two of the leading scholars on the Old Spanish Trail described it as being "the longest, crookedest, most arduous pack mule route in the history of America." Although the trail had been used as a combination of known trails for over a 100 years to travel from New Mexico to California the trail became a much more established route when the merchant Antonio Armijo from Santa Fe, New Mexico began using the



*Old Spanish Trail with a view of Spring Mountain Range.*

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Canyon leading to the Spring called "The Rock that Weeps."

route on a regular basis around 1829. His excursions were so successful that the route began to be used by other traders and commerce on the trail flourished. The parties often consisted of pack trains of 20 to 200 members and twice as many mules. These activities continued and the trail expanded as different variations of the main route emerged as more was learned about the terrain and also as a result of the changing social and environmental conditions.

By 1848 however the nature of the trail changed dramatically because of the gold rush to California and because of the development of the Mormon community in Salt Lake City, Utah and along the Old Spanish Trail. The traffic on the trail continued to increase when San Bernardino became a Mormon settlement in 1851.

Because of the extensive use of the trail between 1828 and the late 1850s the mule traces and the wagon ruts still can be seen on the land. Emigrant Pass, which is now traveled on as an Inyo County road, parallels the original tracks. And the springs, such as the Rock that Weeps, Stump Springs and Resting Springs, which were crucial for the survival of the people and the animals along the trail, still exist, it is as if the contemporary traveler is transported back in time. The Old Spanish Trail has been considered so important by our national government that it has been declared a part of the National Park Service System, joining the Death Valley National Park and Manzanar. ■

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# This Is My Inyo

By Julianne Black

This is the 2016 winner of the Inyo County writing contest hosted by the Lone Pine Chamber of Commerce.

There are too few magical places on the planet. Places that time seems to have forgotten altogether, letting them carry on without major visible change or corporeal erosion. Deep pockets of beauty and culture where the sun seems to slide slower than normal across a sky too blue to comprehend. Where the landscape has such variety that every direction becomes its own "scenic overlook." This is life at 3700 feet. This is Inyo County, home to, incredibly, both the lowest point and highest peak in the United States.

Many people have Inyo stories. My mother-in-law tells a crazy tale (all too frequently) about how my husband's head and left shoulder were born in the car along 395 on the way to a Bishop hospital. Other people have a less-emotional imprint, simply seeing it as a dot on the map. A clean and quick refuel stop on the way up to mountains or down to the beach. But my own Inyo stories are of deep love and appreciation. Of growth and family togetherness. Of being unplugged and part of the natural world around us. Let me tell you about my Inyo.

With a goofy Great Dane and a precocious toddler, having room to run, endless unusual geography to explore, and plenty of "backup plan" options makes the Inyo area our favorite stomping ground. My personal stories (and sometimes social media posts for the grandparents) are dotted and splashed with mini camping excursions and family adventures. Perfect little capsules in time, like seeing who can spot the crazy lizard rock in the Alabama Hills first. Or going up to Whitney Portal for a veggie burger at the cool little snack and gear shop surrounded by waterfalls, streams and pools too cold most days for little piggies – not that we



Diaz Lake water color painting by Sharon Pauer

don't try. This is my Inyo.

For those who do their research, the Inyo area is like a Super-Sized botanical garden – but without the entrance fee, over-priced snack bar and gaudy gift shop. From snow-capped peaks to sun-

bleached back roads, this area offers infinite discoveries for families during a day trip or long holiday weekend. And, if you hit it right, watch the terrain bloom into the most fantastic panoramic canvas of wildflowers in the brightest



hues nature has to offer. It certainly also works in our favor that my daughter is a big fan of “bumpy rides” (going off-roading) and there is simply nowhere better to take a nice long drive in a direction you’ve never gone before for a picnic dinner among the Joshua trees at sunset. This is my Inyo.

Besides the natural beauty, Inyo is something of a mosquito in history’s amber. Our family loves to wander around the western towns – human and ghost alike, as if walking through a dusty page in John Wayne’s scrap

book. You can almost hear the horses, and truly expect to see them around every corner kicking at the dirt roads and snorting their greetings. The true timelessness of the mountain backdrop lined with the frontier-style architecture of iconic downtown Lone Pine can transport the daydreamer easily and completely out of the modern day, making it well known in the movie industry for doing exactly that.

You can certainly blow through Inyo on your way to somewhere else, and heaven knows, I did it dozens of times

when I was living in Southern California. Back then, Inyo was nothing more than a sleepy stretch of drive-throughs and an inconvenient speed trap along the impossibly lengthy and monotonous drive to Mammoth for us. It wasn’t until my husband got a job at China Lake and our little family moved up to the high desert that I understood what was really here. What appeared at first to be something of a drop of in the middle of nowhere became the greatest gift. Now my daughter grows up with a sense of pride in her natural environment. An interest in conservation. A respect for wildlife.

This diverse and wonderful patch of country became our backyard playground. I’ll never look back. Some days we don’t plan at all. We just pack a lunch, pile everyone in the Jeep and pick a direction. If it gets hot, we head up. If it gets cold, we head down. Easy-peasy. And thankfully all in a doable driving distance for a restless moose-sized canine and impatient four year old clad in her favorite hiking boots and a tutu. This is my Inyo. ■

# My Life As An Outdoorsman A Comedy in Several Acts

By Chris Langley



South Lake located in the Bishop Creek Recreational Area.

Dartmouth [College] carefully cultivated the image of the rugged outdoors man who was also smart and sophisticated.... The Dartmouth Man was strong, brave, smart, eloquent, self-reliant, free of female constraints, yet ...he was skilled in the outdoors. He could move among all classes by virtue of a complete and well-rounded education that relied on wilderness as well as books. He was John Tallmadge “Deerslayer with a Degree” in Eco-Man: New Perspectives on Masculinity and Nature.

The storm is upon us, moving quickly, ineluctably down the Sierra Crest. We are at the summit of Mt. Langley. It was Memorial Day weekend, when the weather still hasn’t quite made up its mind about whether it’s winter or summer. The clouds are dark, boiling and lightning flashes within them even though it was the middle of the day. My companion who has cajoled me into reaching the summit of Mt. Langley yelled for me to follow. Later he would assure me I was too dumb to realize how dangerous the situation was.

He had convinced me to climb it to sign the book at the top for my great great grandfather for whom legend (my father) claims the mountain was named.

The scramble off the crest is onerous, more a tumble than an elegant retreat. My beard feels alive with electricity, the resonant thunder shakes our bones, and the smell I am informed later is the smell of ozone, somewhat bitter and metallic, created by the proximity of the lightning strikes. We survived.

I grew up on the East Coast and did a lot of camping with my brother and parents. I was also a somewhat timid Boy Scout, but was trained in the scout way. When I chose Dartmouth, over Yale and Harvard, I knew I was

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selecting a more rural, outdoors-oriented school. We had the Freshman Hiking trip as our orientation in the still all-male college and the College owned a significant part of New Hampshire.

In the Peace Corp in Iran I rode a camel for hours, slept in the camp of Baluchi and Kurdish traders, and climbed the active volcano of Taftan. Life was rough yet I fell in love with the desert. When I landed in Lone Pine, I didn't know at the time I would spend the rest of my life here.

Most of my outdoor life has been wonderful but also marked by slips, tumbles, ineptness and humorous conundrums. Friends and I did a lot of hiking to go fishing in the High Sierra. Many days were uneventful and beautiful but here are some others.

I always told my climbing friends, who called themselves Fugowee Men that the Nazis would have to be threatening to pull my fingernails out before I would belay. Down at Fossil Falls the day arrived. One friend was clowning around using a German accent at the bottom, while the other was above on the edge of the cliff, ropes in hand. I only remember fearing for my life, finding enough strength to scramble like an insect, although in retrospect the only lasting memory was the experience of being hauled up by my crotch.

Scratching the experience off my bucket list, several years later there I was showing my class that I wasn't "afraid" to go back to the ropes. It was part of our week -long Outdoor School



Lake Sabrina located in the Bishop Creek Recreational Area.

experience at Bernasconi Center out of Big Pine. I still compare it to my wife's claim that the only reason we have two sons is she somehow forgot the experience of labor for the first one. Likewise now I remember why I said I would never climb again. This time I mean it.

It had been raining off and on and three of us went up to Boy Scout Lake in the shadow of Mt. Whitney to fish no matter what. Soon one of the would-be fishermen was behaving irrationally and beginning to do somewhat dangerous things. He had gotten wetter than us and we soon corralled him in the protection of a large boulder, started a fire and fed him warm food. Luckily, it was a good fix for hypothermia, which had come on so quickly. I was much respectful of getting wet up in the mountains.

On a trip to Meysan Lake I suddenly felt deathly ill. I had made the trip several times but now I knew what altitude sickness felt like. It was mostly over in 20 minutes, but I had no

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Ancient Bristlecone Pine Tree on White Mountain.

interest in drinking the pint of scotch I had hauled up with me. So I gave it to my friend, the tax collector, for his pleasure. He arrived at my house about a week later with a gallon of scotch. When I said "But it was only a pint," he replied magnanimously, "A pint up there is worth a gallon down here." Who said tax collectors are not generous.

On another fishing trip we were hiking up Cottonwood Canyon in quest of the illusive Golden Trout. Crossing a rushing creek, I slipped on a rock with my full pack on and went into a pool of cold rushing water. I couldn't get up and the water was rushing over my head. I feared the humiliation of drowning in a foot of water, but finally freed myself as my friends rushed back to help. The only problem was I had also broken my glasses. The rest of the trip was good if blurry, indistinct fun.

There are lots more stories to tell and most people are not as disaster-prone in the outdoors as I am. Inyo County is the greatest place to hone your outdoor skills. Look at me. I am still alive with no scars or broken bones to show for my adventures in the Sierra Nevada that are at my doorstep. ■

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