

# RECONNOITERING IN THE EASTERN SIERRA NEVADA & GREAT BASIN BY 4-WHEEL-DRIVE

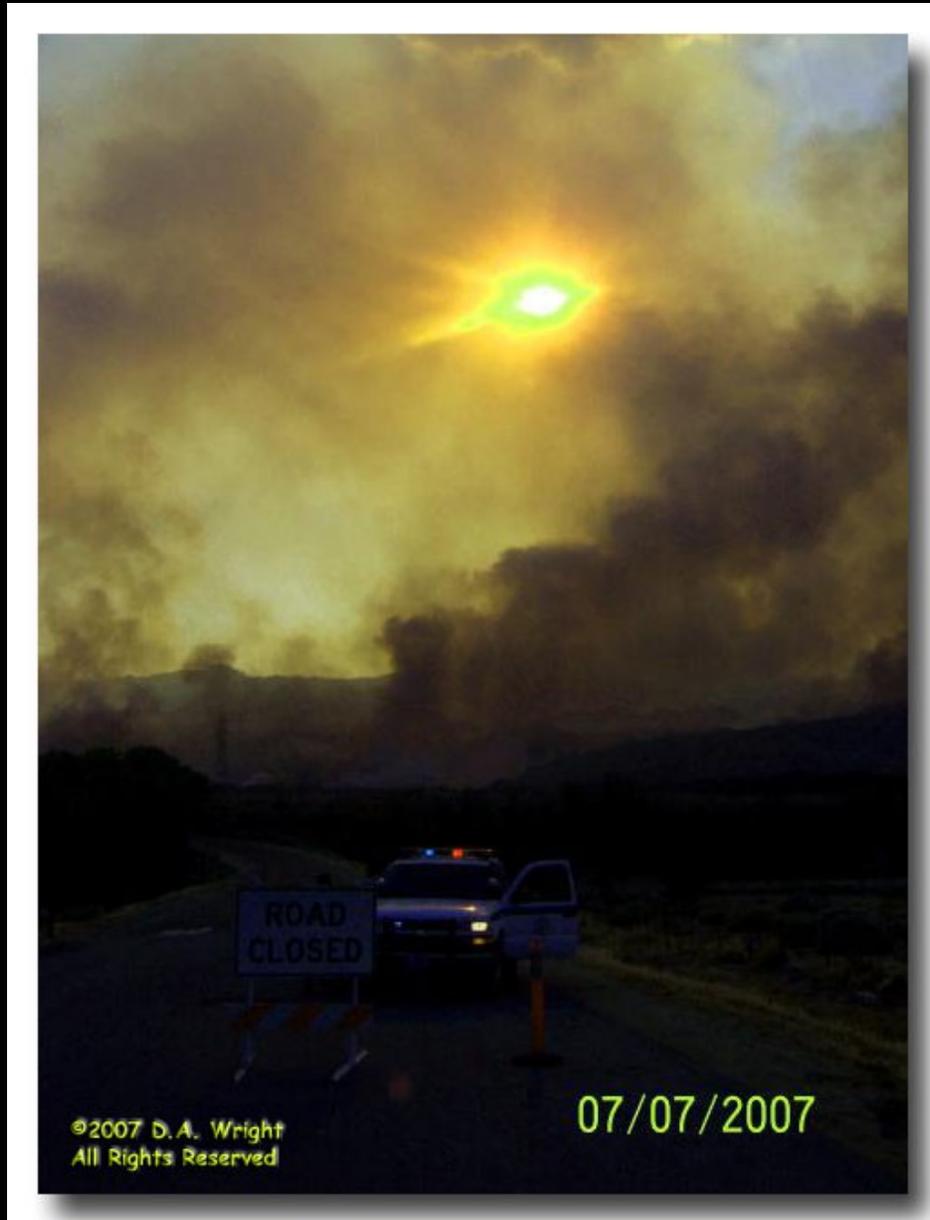
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RESN&GB4x4 Trips:

**A Long Hot Summer:**

**From the Frying Pan into the Fires - Escape From the  
Flames of July 2007**



A Forest Service law enforcement officer with Inyo National Forest at a road block in the road in front of my home. The view is westward in late afternoon and looking toward the Sierra Nevada

It's been a long, hot, dry summer. After a winter of drought, the Great Basin doesn't need dry lightning storms that bring fire and no rain.

But that's precisely what the winter of 2006-2007 and the summer of 2007 has brought to the Great Basin. Massive wild fires started early in the season and continue to the day of this writing in every state of the western US.

Blame it on drought, Global Warming, or the cycles of nature; it's simply been a long, hot, summer.

Summer started off with a vengeance. The meager snows that fell the previous winter – less than half of normal annual snowfall – in the Sierra Nevada and the White/Inyo Ranges, on the east side of the valley, melted off early; by early May the majority of the snow was gone from the slopes of the 13,000 and 14,000 foot peaks just west of my home. The only white patches up there to cool the soul on a hot summer day were those of the Palisade group of glaciers, a few of them can be seen from my home. By early June, daytime temperatures routinely climbed to well over 100° - not unheard of, but not an everyday occurrence around these parts either.

In early July, a wild fire touched my neck of the sagebrush, and nearly touched and torched my home as well. On Friday, July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007, a line of thunderheads smashed up against the Sierra Nevada range. Before long, lightning started striking at positive and negative ions wherever they happened to be. And they mostly hid in the dry sagebrush.

Ten small lightning fires simultaneously flared up in the Owens Valley – what eventually coalesced to become the

The small town of Independence, California (28 miles south of my home) was evacuated in its entirety and flames licked at the very edges of town. Several outlying ranches lost homes and outbuildings to the flames; the town's water reservoir burned and collapsed. A historic and scenic fish hatchery was threatened severely and nearly succumbed. The fire also jumped US395 and shut down that transportation artery for much of two days.

In my neck of the woods, on the western fringe of Big Pine, California, flames of the 7,000 acre northern portion of the Inyo Complex fire – what became known as the Sage Fire – started by a single lightning bolt well up in the heights of Big Pine Canyon, near Glacier Lodge; then burned up onto the northern flank of that canyon. Instead of going up the mountains as most fires tend to do, this one came down with the wind down into the valley. Flames surrounded a hydroelectric plant, homes and a school. They continued down to the valley floor and threatened to extinguish the life from Big Pine as well.

I had just come home from work as the fire started up about 3:00 PM on that Friday afternoon. I sat in my back yard under by my shade trees, having a beer and watching the first puffs of the smoke and flames. Then soon the evacuation process began of the campgrounds up Big Pine Canyon – a hundred or more RVs, pickup trucks with 5<sup>th</sup> wheel trailers, SUVs and other vehicles poured out of the canyon and past my home. This was soon followed by the initial attack by ground crews from the Inyo National Forest, Big Pine Volunteer Fire Department, California Division of Forestry, the City of Los Angeles Department of Water & Power and the Bureau of Land Management all heading up the canyon in search of big flames. Those flames were quite visible high up on the mountainside after dark.

Over the next few days, Big Pine's Mendenhall Park became a small tent and modular city as hundreds of fire fighters,

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1 Internet and Newspaper Sources for the Inyo Complex Fires:

Sierra Wave TV 33 (Bishop, California) – [July 6, 2007](#) and [July 9, 2007](#).

The *Inyo Register* (Bishop, California).

[Article 1](#)

[Article 2](#)

Click on number above to return to main text.

support crews and administration set up camp. Helicopters used to drop fire retardant and water, and for aerial reconnaissance took off and landed at all hours during the sunny part of each day from each of the two large baseball fields.

Saturday morning dawned smoky and deceptively calm. But it soon became obvious that something was amiss – Instead of awaking to find the fire line far up the mountainsides, the fire had crept downhill overnight toward the hydroelectric power plant and Bernasconi School at the bottom of the Sierra Nevada – less than three miles from my home. Although there wasn't much obvious fire activity in the morning, by early afternoon the day's heat had spurred on a raging fire that again continued hungrily consuming anything it could.

By midday, law enforcement officials from several agencies came down and set up a roadblock in the road in front of my home; earlier they had been parked about a mile up Glacier Lodge road at Sugarloaf Road leading to Bernasconi School. Flames were eating their way north to nearby Baker Creek Canyon; then turned east and spilled out of that canyon and then down the gentle slope at the base of the range toward my home as well as the western edge of Big Pine. Heavy groves of locust trees are found along Baker Creek and a marshy spring area to the south near the school, and soon the fire was licking up those locust trees and getting dreadfully close to home. Soon, Baker Creek Campground, it visible less than a quarter mile from my home, was evacuated.

Ash and embers drifted down like a gentle snowfall. I set up a couple of sprinklers on top of my roof and kept them wetting my property the remainder of the day; just in case one of those embers got some crazy notion to consume my home as well.

By middle afternoon, the fire front was less than a mile away. Law enforcement officials told my neighbors and I to prepare to evacuate. An evacuation center was set up at the town hall in Big Pine, albeit only three blocks further from the flames than was my home. My wife and I packed a few clothes, got the pets ready to go and grabbed our homeowners insurance papers and put them into both our car and truck. We called some friends in nearby Bishop and made arrangements to stay with them if necessary. And then we waited for the worst.

In the next hour, the animal shelter, near Baker Creek Campground, was emptied of its animals; which were taken to a Bishop veterinary hospital. A horse riding club, two blocks from my home, was also evacuated of people and horses. The flame front progressed eastward and northward. The neighborhood of Graham C., often mentioned on this website as a traveling companion on many of my trips and 4x4 pages, was also under evacuation watch. His home is less than two miles north of mine.

Saturday night and Sunday morning were sleepless for my wife and I. I stood vigil in the night standing or sitting in my

backyard, watching flames that appeared to be over 100 feet tall consume the locust groves and sagebrush just west of my home. Heavy smoke filled the air and ash and embers snowed down upon my property. Law enforcement vehicles idled out front with constant 2-way radio chatter. Heavy fire trucks and tanker trucks noisily drove to and from the fire front during the night.

By Sunday, crews started to get a handle on the flames; which slowly retreated and later in the day no longer posed an immediate threat to our home. A couple of days later the flames were for the most part vanquished, and the public was allowed back into the fire area. My wife and I took a drive around the area and saw for the first time just how close flames came to our home, the devastation and the heroic efforts made by fire suppression crews to save the school and Big Pine itself.

Whew! Close call. I certainly didn't want to relive that again! I think we're ready for a vacation!

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The fire behind my home shortly after it was ignited by a lightning strike midway up Big Pine Canyon.



The fire in the middle of its second day.



Inyo National Forest law enforcement officers block the road in front of my home, with the fire consuming sage and trees a short distance away.



The fire early in the morning, Sunday July 8<sup>th</sup>. Note the powerline tower silhouetted in front of those gigantic flames!



Devastation after the fire. Swirling clouds of ash blow on the afternoon breezes.



Baker Creek still burbles through the charred landscape. Just to the left and out of view of this shot, a log was still aflame a few feet from my legs.

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The sign reads "A Beautiful Forest is a Matchless Sight." Rather ironic in this setting.



Burned down power poles running up Big Pine Canyon. A portent of things to come in the next weeks ...

North to Winnemucca!

Dropping Down from Bear Creek Summit  
The Road to Jarbidge



Ah! The chance to vacation and relax in the cool heights at Jarbidge, Nevada; which includes idyllic and cool scenes such as this, this photograph taken near the town along the 47-mile dirt road in from Elko. Jarbidge is a rustic and historic town set along the Nevada-Idaho border northeast of Elko, Nevada and southwest of Twin Falls, Idaho.

Long before the hot summer hit, my wife and I had been making plans to spend a week in the cool heights of Jarbidge, Nevada; nestled deep in a chasm of the Jarbidge Mountains along the Nevada-Idaho border northeast of Elko (see my [Jarbidge, Nevada 4x4 trips page](#) for more information on roads, what to see and do; also see my [Trip 2001](#) pages for more Jarbidge info).

The tiny community of Jarbidge has become near and dear to my wife and I and we longed to return for a relaxing vacation.

Our plans also included sharing Jarbidge with my elderly parents; who live in the furnace hot deserts of far southern California. Jarbidge would be perfect for them – it would give my parents a break from the triple digits of their neighborhood, it would allow a slow enough pace so that they wouldn't be left exhausted due to their age.

Our dog, Arkeline (a blond cocker spaniel) also came along to enjoy the ride as well. He's compact and spent his time riding in the back floor between the legs of my wife and mother.

If I were driving my Toyota Tacoma to Jarbidge, I would have been planning and engaging in a lot of backcountry and trail exploring during that week; but since my parents were coming, it meant that this trip would be taken driving my 2006 Honda CR-V. It might have all wheel drive, but it certainly isn't built to be a rugged 4-wheeler. I often have used/knocked the CR-V as a yardstick for many of the 4x4 trails on this website – stating that a particular route would best not be traversed in a CR-V or Toyota RAV-4. This would be my first real dirt road trip with this car since I bought it new last year, and the shake-down cruise gave me some indication of what it is truly capable of instead of just speculating.

Since there are no phones or TV in our accommodations in Jarbidge (and only a few of such amenities in Jarbidge for that matter), that left lots of time to simply sit on the porch, stroll around town, visit with the locals at the Outdoor Inn or the small store, read, nap; and most of all, relax. Ah! Life before the Internet, computers, digital media, television, telephone, and moving at hyper-speed throughout my daily grind. That was indeed what I was looking forward to.

To help break up the long trip to the northeastern corner of Nevada, we planned to overnight in Winnemucca. My wife and I always enjoy coming to the town and do often; we also have friends who live there.

Unbeknownst to me, as my attention was focused on the fire that threatened my own home, the Winnemucca, Nevada area was also suffering from its own large fire on the very same days. Their fire also was ignited from a lightning strike that torched off the brush up on Sonoma Peak south of town and burned down through Water Canyon right down onto Winnemucca itself. Instead of a couple hundred people being evacuated as in the case of Independence, this fire forced the evacuation of much of the southern half of Winnemucca itself; as well as neighborhoods in the Grass Valley section a few miles southwest of town. A separate fire southwest of Winnemucca, near Imlay, also closed down Interstate 80, stopped the Union Pacific and Amtrak trains, and barbecued countless cows on the nearby ranges. Nevada was indeed being smacked about by natural phenomena this year.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Newspaper References for Winnemucca / Imlay Fires:

[\*Elko Daily Free Press\*](#), July 8, 2007

**“Fires force evacuation in Winnemucca, close I-80 west of Elko”**

[\*Elko Daily Free Press\*](#), July 9, 2007

**“Fires scorch rangeland: Evacuations, road closures as blazes burn 300 square miles”**

[\*Elko Daily Free Press\*](#), July 8, 2007

**“Winnemucca evacuees allowed to return home”**

[\*Las Vegas Review-Journal\*](#), July 8, 2007

**“Hundreds evacuated as fire burns to edge of Winnemucca”**

On Sunday, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007, even while hot spots still smoldered a short distance from my home; my wife, mother, father and myself packed our luggage into my Honda CR-V and set off for Winnemucca. Our itinerary was vague, relaxed and allowed for plenty of time for simply doing nothing at all but soak up the scenery or what struck our fancy at the time. Our only solid plans were to drive to Winnemucca on Sunday, July 15<sup>th</sup>; north and east to Jarbidge on Monday the 16<sup>th</sup>; and stay at Jarbidge Tuesday the 17<sup>th</sup> through Friday morning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. On Friday, the 20<sup>th</sup>, we planned to drive north and east out of Jarbidge to Rogerson, Idaho; then turn south along US93 and travel to Ely. On Saturday, the 21<sup>st</sup>, we planned to return to Big Pine via US6 and Tonopah.

We left my home in Big Pine about 8:00 AM on Sunday, July 15<sup>th</sup>. Due to the age and fragility of my parents, I decided to take the quickest and most direct route to Winnemucca – via US6 north out of Bishop; across NV360 to US95 near Mina; north on US95 through Hawthorne and Fallon to Interstate 80; then north and east along I-80 to Winnemucca. It is 334 miles this way from my home to our favorite motel in Winnemucca – Scott's Shady Court, generally taking about 5¾ hours to make the trip at legal and relaxed speeds. On past trips to Winnemucca, I've enjoyed traveling to Winnemucca via the scenic route through Gabbs, Ione, Austin and Battle Mountain, maximizing our dirt road byways along the way. Or on other occasions we've traveled east to Goldfield, north to Tonopah; up the Smoky Valley and west to Austin, then to Winnemucca via Battle Mountain. But on this trip, to minimize negative impact on my parents, dirt road driving in the CR-V would have to wait until we traveled the dirt road route to Jarbidge on this trip.

It was a warm trip up and thunderheads started building early as we left the Owens Valley, and continued to build and increase as we traveled north. We never hit any rain, but it threatened a few times to do so over nearby mountains. The monsoon moisture followed us northward as we left Bishop and traveled northward; arriving at Winnemucca about the same time as we did.

As we hit the railroad community of Inlay, we could see the effects of large rangeland wildfires – Humboldt Hill and the ghost town of Tungsten was blackened, as well as the rye grass lands on both sides of Interstate 80. Some details from the Inlay Fire:

- Called the Tugsten Fire. Started by lightning.

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[Nevada Appeal](#), July 19, 2007  
“200 acres burn”

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- As of the July 9<sup>th</sup> press date, had burned 58,000 acres and destroyed one outbuilding at the historic Tungsten Mine complex north of Interstate 80 (you can see some of the buildings in the distance on the face of the mountains).
- Fire had closed Interstate 80 in the days previously, and had halted Union Pacific and Amtrak train traffic.

After resting up a bit after arriving at Winnemucca – we arrived at about 3:20 PM after a relaxed drive up with several stops – we decided to take my parents on a tour of the town and surrounding countryside. Driving up Water Canyon Road, we saw first hand the effects of Winnemucca's fire; several expensive homes on the upper side of town were left standing, but yards were scorched, burned down wooden sheds revealed scorched and blacked lawn tractors, tools and the like.

Some details from the press about Winnemucca's fire:

- July 8, 2007 – Fire at 8,000 acres. Known as the Thompson Fire.
- July 9, 2007 – About 1,500 evacuees allowed to return to their homes in Winnemucca and nearby Grass Valley neighborhoods. About seven outbuildings were destroyed as flames burned into yards of about a dozen homes. An electrical substation was destroyed. A 10-mile long fireline bulldozed around Winnemucca in the past is credited to have saved the town. Livestock was also killed in Water Canyon.

Farther up the canyon, near the Bloody Shins trailhead, a campground was still intact due to their tables being made of concrete; the surrounding countryside more blackened than the inside of the metal fire rings near each table. Flowing black with ash and debris, Water Creek trickled down through the campground.

It appeared that the road might take us into lands untouched by fire, so we continued up into the canyon. We did get above the burned out landscape, but barely so. Tall aspens in the canyon were a delight, although some of them had stark contrasts – blackened charcoal upon bright white aspen bark on some trees which were burned along their lower trunks.

Turning around and heading back down toward town, the sun dropped below the clouds and created a gorgeous sunset.

Click on any image below for the full size version.



Our route on Day 1, Sunday July 15, 2007



For a change, my 2002 Toyota Tacoma TRD 4WD truck will be left behind, and our trip into the wilds of the Jarbidge area will be taken with the space and comfort of my 2006 Honda CR-V.



Northbound on US95 approaching Luning, Nevada. For fun and navigational purposes, I did take along my basic Garmin e-Trex GPS unit, which I had previously programmed with coordinates for points all along the path of our intended travels. Even though the e-Trex has no internal mapping, the programmed route can be followed; the GPS reading out real time distances and arrival times to each destination; also giving prompts for turns or arrival at each destination. At the bottom of the screen, numerous readout parameters can be used, I kept it in real time altitude mode. A 79¢ hardware store suction cup with a hook works perfectly in the CR-V to hold the GPS



My Honda CR-V on the shores of Walker Lake, Nevada.

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unit upright and in place, even over rough roads.



Northbound on US95, north of Fallon, Nevada and crossing the twin sinks of the Carson and Humboldt Rivers.



Looking south up Pavilion Street in Winnemucca, from Scott's Shady Court Motel. The view is toward the burned out Water Canyon area on the northern end of the Sonoma Range.



The burned out area along the lower reaches of Water Canyon Road, near Foothill Road. High priced homes are to my back across the street, as well as those in this view. Many of the homes in this view had outbuildings burned down, as well as destroyed landscaping.



Looking up Water Canyon, which culminates at the summit of 9,395' high Sonoma Peak. Most of the lower canyon has been scorchted.



My CR-V in a grove of tall and straight aspens. This grove was untouched, as it is only yards out of the fire zone.



The CR-V in a mixed grove of aspens and other trees was touched by fire. But flames only made a modest attempt to consume this grove and only patches of blacked earth and bark are found through this idyllic spot.

Click on any image below for the full size version.



On the way back down Water Canyon, the clouds parted for a wonderful sunset.

## Winnemucca to Jarbidge - Part 1: Fire From the Sky!



Storm Clouds north of Elko on NV225 unleashing fire and rain. The fire part of the equation is what would eventually ruin our plans for relaxed and idyllic days at Jarbidge ...

Monday, July 16<sup>th</sup> was the day to head to Jarbidge. I was looking forward to seeing and experiencing the area again; and anxious to see how well the Honda would take the 47 miles of dirt roads into town.

The day started off cloudy. It was obvious that the area was under a monsoonal cloud mass that would culminate in thunderstorms later in the day.

That part had me worried primarily was the effect that heavy rains would have on the dirt road over the twin 8,500 foot high summits Coon Creek and Bear Creek in the Jarbidge Mountains. That road tends to turn a bit snotty and slimy in the wet. The Honda's 4x4 system should be able to aid in traction, but the tires are the OEM street variety that the car came with when I had purchased it new. Narrow tread sipes don't have much bite in gooey mud.

We left our rooms at Scott's Shady Court early, 7:30 AM. Breakfast was relished at the restaurant of the nearby Red Lion Casino; we had their \$3.<sup>99</sup> special of ham & eggs, served up with hash browns and toast.

After breakfast, we went over to WalMart to pick up last minute incidentals for the trip. Batteries for the GPS, rechargeable batteries for the digital camera; a few doggie treats and toys for Akeline, and food items for Jarbidge. We had

planned to enjoy one meal daily at the Outdoor Inn, but create simple and easy dishes from a can and electric skillet in our rooms at Jarbidge.

Exiting WalMart, it was obviously raining pretty hard up on the Sonoma Range when we came out of the store. Thunder could be heard, even though it was before 10:00 in the morning.

We left Winnemucca, heading east on Interstate 80. As soon as we cleared the outskirts of town, heavy rain pounded the Honda. But as soon as it started raining, sunshine reined once again and there were few threatening clouds to be seen to the east. But that would change soon enough.

Elko was a quick stop to gas up for the long roads ahead. I wasn't sure if at the time that gas was still available at Jarbidge – in past years the Sinclair gas station was closed to the public and it only reopened last year – so wanted to make sure I had enough gas to make it back to civilization before the CR-V would need pushing in case the situation reversed itself since my last visit.

As soon as we left town northward on NV225, heavy clouds unleashed their potential for changing the landscape – heavy rain and lightning used my dark blue Honda for target practice. Blasts created by lightning attempting to scorch sagebrush within yards of our Honda burst into the relatively silent cabin that the car normally possesses. Amid the plopping raindrops, another sound started to ring in our ears – the popping of Mormon crickets. Several medium sized infestations of the pesky, large and wingless cricket blackened the pavement along NV225 as we progressed northward. They pop like bubble wrap when you drive over them. Seems to be a bit late in the year by my observation, but I'm no expert on that particular insect. All I do know is that the crickets are much larger than your garden variety cricket, a two-tone green body and head, no wings. They don't create relaxing and musical chirping melodies by rubbing their wings at high frequencies as do their more common cousins, but they do emit a variety of high pitched and highly audible squeaks. They are also hugely voracious, eating everything in their path. They annually rampage portions of the Great Basin each spring and early summer, dining on the sagebrush and everything else they are capable of consuming (seemingly everything but steel); usually denuding the landscape. Running down the road across their paths is not in vain, as they are also cannibalistic – survivors greedily devour the casualties left behind by passing cars and trucks.

Arriving at the turnoff to Jarbidge on NV225, we stopped to stretch and let Arkeline water sagebrush. Heavy thunder and superb displays of lightning in the Independence Range to the west was a treat to watch. I gathered some wonderful lightning shots with my videocamera. On one particular capture, what appeared to be two large strikes, watched in slow motion on video reveals a half dozen thick bolts and spidery arterial smaller ones.

But the lightning that wowed us at this time would eventually spell ruination to hundreds of thousands of acres along the

Nevada and Idaho border and cut my vacation short. We just didn't know it then. But we would soon find out.

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Map of Day 2 of our travels: Winnemucca to Jarbidge, July 16, 2007.



Our rooms at the unique and rustic Scott's Shady Court in Winnemucca (AAA approved). My wife and I stayed in Santa Ynez, my parents next door in Santa Susana.



A stop at the recently remodeled WalMart in Winnemucca - now a Super WalMart.



Westbound from Winnemucca on Interstate 80.



A Union Pacific locomotive moves around cars on a siding near Carlin.



Driving through the tunnel east of Carlin. I seriously doubt my Garmin was getting much



The Union Pacific mainline near western Elko.

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of a fix on satellites overhead as we traveled deep beneath the earth!



Dinner Station, north of Elko, was picturesque as usual. Many vehicles were parked around the buildings on both sides of the road, yet we saw no one on this trip. Thunder showers enhanced the beauty of the region on our stop.



At the junction of the road to Jarbidge with Nevada 225, looking west into the Independence Mountain Range. Many strikes of lightning were seen and videotaped during our stop. This pull out has a historical significance to me and my buddy Graham C., as documented in my [Trip 2001 webpage](#).

## Winnemucca to Jarbidge - Part 2: CR-V'ing 47 Miles of Dirt Roads to Jarbidge!



The Outdoor Inn, Jarbidge, Nevada. It is interesting to compare photos of three of my recent 4x4 vehicles - my 1996 Chevrolet S-10 4x4 pickup; my 2002 Toyota Tacoma TRD 4x4 pickup; and now my 2006 Honda CR-V - parked in front of this building over the past six years.

The drive eastward along the Elko County dirt road to Charleston Reservoir was taken at 20 miles per hour or less. Light to moderate washboard rattled the interior of the Honda. My Garmin e-Trex was telling me that I would not reach my destination for hours, but I didn't care. I did not want to rattle the nerves of my parents nor my wife nor I. We weren't in any hurry anyway.

Eastward we traveled. The monsoon thunderheads parted and soon it was obvious that my worries about the road over Coon Creek and Bear Creek Summits was in vain – bright sunshine and purple clouds lit up the afternoon skies and landscape, creating Technicolor landscapes.

It was good to be back in Jarbidge country. This is what I was looking forward to the past few months. Solitude, cool temperatures, relaxation.

Shortly after passing by the Prunty Ranch and the ghost town of Charleston, another infestation of Mormon crickets darkened the roadway and sagebrush along both sides of the road. We passed through several squalls of them all the way to Coon Creek Summit.

The sun shone most of the climb up Coon Creek Summit. What I call “skunk cabbage” dominated the air with its pungent

tobacco-like odor. Sheep grazing along the lower slopes of Seventy-Six Creek meandered in the sagebrush and aspens along the road, while their lambs cutely hopped, skipped and jumped about. A few marmots scurried out of the way of our slow moving Honda. I was rather amazed at the relatively low altitudes we saw marmots – in my corner of the Great Basin you don't usually see them below 10,000 feet.

Topping Bear Creek Summit, a fore-gleam into the future was seen as heavy smoke ascending to the heavens dominated the view west and north. It was obvious that the thunderstorms that we passed through created a range fire somewhere near Mountain City or along the northern reaches of the Bruneau River.

Dropping into the canyon of the Jarbidge River, I wished for another gear lower on the Honda's 5-speed automatic transmission, or a low range; as 1<sup>st</sup> gear was just too high, requiring repeated pressure on the brake pedal to keep downhill speeds in check. Fortunately, even though my particular sample is equipped in basic fashion with no options what-so-ever, the 2006 Honda CR-V is equipped with standard 4-wheel disk brakes. No brake fade made itself obvious on the steep drop from 8,500 to 6,500 feet from Bear Creek Summit to the bottom of the Jarbidge River canyon bottom. But I'm sure those disk rotors were pretty hot by the time I reached the canyon bottom ... No bad odors emanated from the rotors, however, even though the Honda was well packed with four people, a dog and luggage for all.

Before long, we were entering Jarbidge; arriving in town about 4:00 PM. Only Jarbidge is on Mountain Standard Time as opposed to our watches set to Pacific Standard Time. It was good to be back again, even if it was now 5:00 o'clock. A stop at the Outdoor Inn fetched us our keys to The Barn Hotel at the northern end of town (the same people who own the Outdoor Inn also own the small motel next door to the Inn, the Red Dog Saloon across the street and The Barn). Rooms there are spare, but comfortable; still going for \$35 nightly with a \$10 one time charge for Arkleline as it was last year. Common bathrooms are at the end of the hall. My parents received the keys to the room that my wife and I enjoyed last year; my wife and I got a room down the hall.

All of us set up our particular room, unpacking for our stay at The Barn. The 2006 Honda CR-V is equipped with a folding table that also serves as a cover to the full size spare tire well in the floor of the rear of the vehicle (even though the full size spare tire is mounted on the rear door), which proved to be quite practical in the room of my wife and I to stash things on, and for use in the common “living room” area of The Barn.

Last year, my wife and I enjoyed The Barn to ourselves for the most part. This year, however, workers for the mining company doing exploratory work and those working for the U.S. Forest Service doing road rebuilding north into Idaho used up the majority of the other seven rooms the make up The Barn Hotel. But all of the workers were respectful and quiet; leaving for work early in the morning before we awoke for the day; they'd return late in the evening and quickly go out to the adjoining RV park with a 12-pack of beer in hand to watch sports on satellite TV at some travel trailer belonging

to their particular buddy (pretty much each trailer had a dish set up on a tripod out front). In effect, we had the place to ourselves.

Since Jarbidge is fairly far north in the grand scheme of things in this Northern Hemisphere, nighttime falls late. At 10:00 o'clock Mountain Standard Time, it is merely dusk, affording plenty of light to move about without flashlights. After our arrival and unpacking the Honda, we all moved about enjoying the afternoon and evening air and dense forests that grow on the floor of the canyon of the Jarbidge River. My father – 81 years old – cannot walk too far without exhaustion. But he enjoyed sitting on the back porch and short walks about The Barn with my mother.

After retiring for the night, I occupied myself with downloading my digital camera into my computer and enhancing them with Adobe Photoshop® while my wife slept. Shutting off the light to go to bed about midnight Mountain Standard Time, I became aware of flashing light coming through the curtains of our room, which pointed south. Opening the curtains, I became aware that the flashing light was natural – a thunderstorm was heading in our direction.

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On the road to Jarbidge: the road east to Charleston Reservoir.



On the road to Jarbidge: the road east to Charleston Reservoir.



On the road to Jarbidge: near the Prunty Ranch.



On the road to Jarbidge: Charleston ghost town on the Prunty Ranch.



On the road to Jarbidge: Mormon cricket infestation along lower Seventy-Six Creek.



On the road to Jarbidge: Sheep grazing along the grade to Coon Creek Summit.



Along the road to Jarbidge: Climbing into the Jarbidge Range bound for Coon Creek Summit.



On the road to Jarbidge: Climbing into the Jarbidge Range. The GPS is telling me that Coon Creek Summit is a bit more than three miles away, in a straight line. The road is



On the road to Jarbidge: The CR-V has conquered 8,400' Coon Creek Summit.

Click on any image below for the full size version.

anything but straight, but not overly curvy either.



On the road to Jarbidge: Smoke from the new Rowland fire, which was ignited by lightning earlier that day. This fire would eventually grow to ruin our plans for a relaxed week in Jarbidge.



Entering Jarbidge.



The Barn Hotel, located on Jarbidge's northern side. Quiet, inexpensive, simple, comfortable.



The Barn after dark. The flash on my camera would soon be joined by much brighter flashing from the heavens ...



Panorama of the southern end of the Jarbidge Mountains. Coon Creek Summit is just right of center, above the light colored streaks.

Jarbidge Part 1: Full Day of Doin' Nothin' At All!

Rex Mill  
Jarbidge, NV



Ruins of this old mill for the Rex Mine sits on a small shelf above the Jarbidge River south of Jarbidge. View is southward into the country at the junction of the Jarbidge River and Fox Creek.

Just after midnight, the morning of Tuesday, July 17<sup>th</sup>, the heavens unleashed a torrent of rain, lightning and thunder. I got up and pointed my video camera out the window and caught several occurrences of the sky and surrounding landscape lighting up brighter than daylight. About 1:30, all went quiet again and I spent the rest of the night in comfortable sleep. Before drifting off to sleep, it was my hope that the heavy rain at Jarbidge also wetted and extinguished the fire areas nearby.

I slept in until 7:45 Mountain Standard Time (although my watch and body was telling me it was still 6:45 AM). My wife had brought along our old coffee percolator and she set it up in the common room of The Barn, which is a small room by the back door set up like a living room. Soon the aroma of fresh coffee started entering our room and my senses. Mmmm ... fresh, hot coffee in Jarbidge!

With a steaming cup of coffee in hand, I went outside in my bare feet and walked around the muddy and puddled parking area of The Barn and the main road. It was cool, breezy and so pleasant. No inkling on this morning that the Rowland Fire portion of what was to become the Murphy Fire Complex was to head this way all too soon.

Our plans were to have at least one meal at the Outdoor Inn daily. This morning we chose breakfast. Pricing at the Outdoor Inn is simple and very reasonably priced considering where all food items must be brought in from – Twin Falls, Idaho or Elko, Nevada. Their food prices undercut some of the finer casinos in Nevada's largest cities. I noted that prices were the same as last year. My 2-egg, sausage, hashbrown and toast breakfast was an even \$6.<sup>00</sup>. The breads are homemade and so are the jams and jellies. Ample food and tasty!

While eating breakfast, the power went out. Of course, conversation with the few patrons and employees of the Outdoor Inn turned to the situation – how long was the longest that Jarbidge has been without power? Twenty-five hours was the last recollection. The matron of the Inn started making telephone calls. She could not get an outside line out of town, but in-town calling was unimpeded. No one seemed to have an answer. I brought up the fire burning over toward the Bruneau River, and that surprised some and seemed to make a lot of sense to others – the power line to Jarbidge comes in via Idaho, then turns and runs west over to Mountain City. Only a couple of the patrons in the Inn were even aware that there was a fire burning west of town. Talk then centered on how many power poles were destroyed by fire or if the current was cut off for the safety of fire crews. As we left, the employees set themselves to the task of getting the backup generator running.

The itinerary for this particular day was loose and we simply walked about town. My father cannot walk far, so he'd plop down on a friendly porch or two and strike up a conversation with the inhabitants while my wife, mother and I continued to walk about.

My wife picked up some jewelry that struck her fancy in Jarbidge's small gift shop, across the street from the Outdoor Inn, and which was staffed by a Arizona woman who had close friends living in my neck of the woods and she knew my backyard pretty well (the woman who owns the shop and ran it last year, also owns the Sinclair gas station and is also Jarbidge's postmistress). At the gift shop, I picked up a T-shirt with the insignia of the Jarbidge Volunteer Fire Department, proceeds going directly to the town's protection against the flames. With events that would soon occur, I think my money was well spent. The woman also queried me about the Mormon crickets when she found that we entered Jarbidge from the south. It had been decades since the last major infestation of them in town with ill effects, and townsfolk tend to take preventive measures to ensure it won't happen again.

The Sinclair gasoline station was still open, much to my relief. Just in case we explored more than we anticipated with the CR-V, we'd be able to gas up and have a full tank before leaving Jarbidge. Gasoline prices were very reasonable - \$3.<sup>28</sup> for diesel, \$3.<sup>34</sup> for unleaded regular; or about 20¢ higher than Elko and Winnemucca prices.

My wife had forgotten to pick up some powdered coffee creamer in Winnemucca, but Jarbidge's little store had a box of 50 packets of Coffee Mate and the store's owner charged us only a \$1.<sup>50</sup> for the entire box.

The store's owner has the keys to the Jarbidge Jail, so he opened it up for our inspection. The jail held the perpetrator of the last stagecoach holdup in the United States in 1916, the crime solved with the first use of finger and palm prints as forensic science in solving the crime and convicting the thief/murderer.

For lunch, my wife and mother decided to make some tuna sandwiches. We didn't bring our ice chest, so my wife sent me over to the Outdoor Inn to ask for a cup of mayonnaise. When I walked in the building, I noticed that the ceiling fans and lights were on. I inquired if they were still running on generator power, they laughed and said as they were watching me circling around to park in front of the building is the instant that the power came back on.

After lunch it was siesta time. Sleep was good and sound in our comfortable room with a pleasant breeze blowing in. When I awoke, clouds had coalesced enough for some refreshing sprinkles, but nothing like those encountered the day previously. A few distant rumbles of thunder were heard.

My wife, mother and I decided to check out the Tsawhawbitts Bed & Breakfast next door. A couple of 1958 Ramblers were parked out front, one for sale. Dad always loved Nash's and Ramblers and there was always one parked in the driveway as I was growing up and he still had a 1964 Classic when I left home when I got married in the mid-1970s.

The evening was spent watching DVD's of the old Carol Burnett and Jack Benny television shows on my laptop computer. When I retired at 9:00 PM to go and download my digital camera to my laptop, Mom & Dad sat on the back porch until after dark enjoying the night sounds and breezes.

Click on any image below for the full size version.



Mmmm ... morning coffee at The Barn in Jarbidge! This is the life!



Breakfast time at the Outdoor Inn.



My breakfast, which cost \$6.<sup>00</sup>.



My father and mother at the Jarbidge Community Hall, which is the old Commercial Club, an original business building from Jarbidge's earliest days.



Street life in Jarbidge is simple ... drive around in your old Jeep or ATV, stop and chat with your neighbors about the latest news from the outside world.



Very reasonable gas prices are found in Jarbidge. The station was out of business the first time I visited in 2001, but it reopened in 2006 and remains open as of this writing.

Click on any image below for the full size version.



This old 1929 Dodge Touring car was a former Elko County Sheriff's vehicle. The car is restored and is driven around town on a regular basis. See my [Trip 2001](#) page for more photos and experiences with this car.



My dad inspects the meager furnishings of the Jarbidge Jail.



Mom & Dad enjoy an evening walk along the lonely main street of Jarbidge.



Bob Hope and Elke Sommer on my laptop computer; The Jack Benny Show from the mid-1960s on DVD.

## Jarbidge Part 2: Something's Gone Wrong!

When I awoke at Wednesday morning at 7:30 AM Mountain Standard Time of our second full day in Jarbidge, I had no idea yet that it was to be also our last day there. The smoke we saw topping Bear Creek Summit on Monday was setting the stage to ruin our day as well as the rest of our week.

This morning Mom decided she would make breakfast at The Barn for all of us – heaping bowls of electric skillet oatmeal.

After breakfast, we decided to take an auto tour around Jarbidge. First stop was the cemetery, with Dad repeatedly quipping to us not to leave him there. The cemetery is found north of town on a shelf on the west side of the river across from the ranger station. The cemetery is rustic in a scenic sense, dominated by tall grass with nearly hidden grave stones, a few wood and metal fences around plots. Most of the earliest graves are toward the back of the cemetery, the most recent along the north and eastern fence-lines. In recent years, the Smithsonian studied the site and compiled a list of graves and known information about those buried there. The list is mounted on the cemetery's information board at the gate.

After visiting the cemetery, we head south from Jarbidge. Continuing south after the main road turns west to climb Bear Creek Summit, we head up toward the Pine Creek Campground, then turned onto the road running up the mountainside to the Rex Mine. I wanted my folks to see the scenic old mill building that sits a few hundred feet above the bottom of the canyon. The road up to the mill building has eroded somewhat since my last visit, I did managed to flip up and snag a large rock under the Honda; which simply rolled along the underside of the fuel tank skid cage and rear trailing arms and out the back.

After visiting the millsite, we turned up toward Bear Creek Summit. When we came over two days previously, we skipped the beautiful viewpoint just off the main road. On the way up toward Bear Creek Summit, we began to notice small groups of Mormon crickets. I made a mental note to let the lady at the gift shop know that they've come closer to town now.

I climbed the short but steep hill and topped out on the grand overlook. A big column of fire smoke greeted our eyes immediately, this time it was much closer to the Jarbidge River. While my mother, father and wife poked around near the CR-V at the viewpoint, I walked a quarter mile up a dirt two-track that traveled northward, topping multiple 8,500-8,700 foot summits along the rim of the Jarbidge River Canyon, then settling down onto the sagebrush steppe country of the Diamond A Ranch. I was hoping to get some better views of the canyon, but after topping the first summit, I saw only more summits, each a little higher than the one I was on. On the way up, I saw several individual Mormon crickets.

While standing atop the first small summit on the ridge above and north of Bear Creek Summit, I also noticed smoke from another fire farther east and that one appeared to be close to Murphy Hot Springs, just inside Idaho on the road out north and east to Rogerson, Idaho, on US93. This was to be our intended road to exit Jarbidge come Friday morning.

Click on any image below for the full size version.



Our limited movement in and around Jarbidge, July 16-18, 2007.



The CR-V at the Jarbidge Cemetery. View south up the canyon of the Jarbidge River.



View southeast from the Jarbidge Cemetery.



Jarbidge Cemetery, viewing northwest.



The CR-V is parked on the switchbacking road to the Rex Mine, and is parked next to the [millsite](#) for that mine. The road in the



My mother and father at Bear Creek Summit view point. View is south to Coon Creek Summit.



The fire, now burning closer to Jarbidge, as viewed from Bear Creek Summit.

Click on any image below for the full size version.

distance is the county road dropping into the canyon from Bear Creek Summit. The view is northwest.



A panorama taken from the viewpoint on Bear Creek Summit. At the left edge is looking just east of due south, the right edge is looking northwest to the fire.

## Jarbidge Part 3: Fire in the Backyard!



Packing non-essentials  
In case of evacuation of Jarbidge  
(no electricity)  
The Barn, Jarbidge, NV

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The fire is close! Evacuation possible! Dad, Mom and my wife and I pack our non-essentials and put them in the CR-V just in case we get the order to leave Jarbidge!

After we enjoyed the cool forests of Bear Creek Summit, we returned to Jarbidge. Coming back down into the canyon, we could clearly see the eastern fire that appeared to be near Murphy Hot Springs. We wondered if the road to Rogerson was now open and if it would be an option for exiting Jarbidge country when we planned on leaving the day after the next.

Stopping first in the gift shop, I let the woman know that we spotted Mormon crickets on the northern side of Bear Creek Summit. I also inquired if the road north was open. She said that she heard that it was closed due to the fires scattered all over the Idaho steppe country north of Murphy Hot Springs, which was jumping the road at various points.

After visiting the gift shop again, we went over to the Outdoor Inn. This time we decided to have lunch.

At the Outdoor Inn, I inquire about road closures. Being that there was no communications with the outside world via the telephones, they were not aware of any closures.

We decided to have a late lunch/early dinner. One of the menu items is a pork chop dinner, which sells for \$8.<sup>50</sup> with one pork chop, or \$11.<sup>00</sup> with two chops. Dinner entrées come with a cup of homemade soup, a side salad, potato, vegetable

and homemade bread. Dad, Mom and my wife decided to have the single pork chop dinners. I wasn't that hungry and a simple cheeseburger with fries and a side salad sounded good, which was \$6.<sup>25</sup> for the burger and fries, another \$2.<sup>50</sup> for the dinner salad. We all had lemonade, which added only \$1.<sup>00</sup> to our tabs.

The pork chops that came with everyone's dinner was very thick and juicy. All the other items that came with dinner was very good and praised by all. My cheeseburger was fine, although the fries were a bit mediocre. The salads were good, although the lettuce was getting a bit old. Not surprising in the fact that fresh lettuce is hard to get into Jarbidge! Overall, we were happy with our meals and were all full and ready for a siesta.

We returned to The Barn and selected our rooms and beds for an afternoon nap. We laid down about 3:00 PM. About 4:00 PM I awoke hot and sweaty. I looked up and saw that the ceiling fan was not running, indicating that the power was out again. Mom & Dad were already up because they got too hot in their room and were outside on the back porch.

I wanted a cold beer and could hear the generator running at the Jarbidge Store. Mom and my wife wanted an ice cream bar. So we all walked over to the store. When we arrived, a town meeting was in full swing. There were about a dozen town residents in the store and all were discussing the fires and what to do. Unknown to us, there was talk of another fire south down near the Prunty Ranch, which could threaten the road to Elko. The store owner came outside to unlock an outside freezer for the ice cream for my mother and wife. He was very apologetic about the half melted ice cream, which took a beating from the double whammy power outages the last two days. He refused to take any money for the ice cream bars. The inside drink coolers, however, were hooked up to the generator and the beer was cold. I was a quarter short of change, the owner waved my debt due to the fact that his cash register wasn't running due to the power outage and not being plugged into the generator. We listened to the townsfolk talking about the fires and making carpool arrangements for trips to Twin Falls and Elko for doctor visits and shopping. One thing we did learn about the electrical situation, however, was that upwards of 40 power poles were burned and that power could be out indefinitely – until the fires were out and the power company could get back in and rebuild the lines.

My mother, wife and I returned to The Barn. We sat in the livingroom with Dad and talked about what we might do – what is there to do in the dark that night? I had brought along my power pack/battery jumper, but didn't bring my 120 volt inverter; which would have been handy for recharging my laptop computer battery, digital camera and videocamera batteries. It would have helped pass the evening by watching DVDs on my laptop computer without running down the computer's battery. Fortunately, Jarbidge being on Mountain Standard Time and being as far north as it is, darkness doesn't really come fully until after 10:00 PM, at which point is past our usual bedtime anyway. We decided to stick it out and enjoy the evening without modern gadgets and concentrate on just relaxing and enjoying one another's company in the pleasant and breezy evening.

About 5:30 PM, a portent of what was to come and what would ultimately change our plans wafted in on the breeze – Jarbidge Canyon started to fill visibly with thick smoke from the fires. Soon, ash was also coming in on the breeze.

About 6:00 PM, the crews from the mining company doing exploration work came in. I inquired of several of them of the fire and power situation. They've all heard conflicting stories on whether the road north was open. They all could see the fires well from their high vantage points east of town at the various mines. Soon afterward, the Forest Service crews working on the road to Idaho also came in. I saw the foreman and knew that he had a Forest Service radio and would likely have the most accurate news. He told me that the road to Rogerson was closed except to local traffic. He also confirmed the fire south of the Jarbidge Range and suggested the best way to leave Jarbidge – if that was our intent – was through Rogerson.

About 7:00 PM, I was getting antsy. Smoke now filled the canyon so thickly that visibility was less than a mile. Ash was falling steadily like a light snowfall. Déjà vu from my own experience at home with wildfire only a week and a half previously. We decided to run over to the Outdoor Inn to see if we could get any further news and decide what would be the best course of action – stay put or get out of town.

A block before the Outdoor Inn, trucks and cars were congregated in front of a home. People were nervously watching the smoke and doing a lot of excited talking. One of the men had a fire radio. He informed me that fire crews were requesting that Jarbidge Volunteer Fire Department send over a crew and a truck to the Diamond A Ranch, as wildfire crews were fighting to protect that ranch from the fire and that the ranch and others nearby had been evacuated. The Diamond A Ranch is 7¼ miles northwest of Jarbidge. I inquired as to the method used if Jarbidge is evacuated. He told me that townfolk and the Elko County Deputy Sheriff will go down the street and alert residents and visitors that they need to leave and which way to go.

At the Outdoor Inn, many of the townspeople were inside having drinks and talking of the situation; trying to make the best of it. The power was out, it was semi-dark in the bar and restaurant as oil lamps were burning everywhere. The bartender was quite busy serving up drinks to the road and mine crews. The waitress was trying to man the phone as townfolk phoned in for the latest news or she was dialing others to catch any whiff of information she could. Ironically, there was much discussion as to who was going to open the Inn for breakfast in the morning – dependent, of course, if there was an Inn to open if the flames didn't come racing into the canyon overnight.

We hadn't yet paid for our rooms at The Barn, so we decided just in case we had to leave that night that we'd talk to the staff about it. Since the power was out, they couldn't run our credit cards, but they did have their numbers down. The woman pulled out an old card imprinter – used to be the standard way of running credit cards in years past but now are

largely useless – and took an imprint of our cards in case we had to leave later that night.

When I walked out of the Outdoor Inn, I noticed a couple of people at a home across the street loading up some belongings into their pickup truck.

We returned to The Barn. People were outside watching the thickening smoke and ash-fall. A woman living next to The Barn (and who worked at the Outdoor Inn) started packing up some of her things into her truck, getting ready to leave. We decided that before it got dark that might be the best course of action to take – after dark and in full evacuation mode it would be very difficult to pack up our bags and pack the Honda due to the fact that only my father had a flashlight – a Mini-Maglite at that.

As I was putting unnecessary filled luggage into the Honda, I noticed the Jarbidge Fire Department tanker truck and a crew of fire fighters heading north. A spotter plane circled made an appearance every other minute or so as it circled over Jarbidge and the nearby fire.

About 9:00 PM, the woman from the gift shop came racing up on an ATV and told us and several other people standing nearby that Jarbidge was under a voluntary evacuation notice. Murphy Hot Springs was under a mandatory evacuation notice.

My folks and I talked it over and decided it might be best to simply leave right then and there, instead of waiting and worrying if we were going to get ourselves into a bad situation if we hang on. With the power out, smoke in the air, Jarbidge wasn't such a great place to be at the moment.

I had asked the woman if the road to Rogerson was open or not. She said reports were conflicting over both roads north and south, but figured that if Murphy Hot Springs was being evacuated, they were heading north. If we went north and suddenly hit a wave of vehicles coming south, then we'd know that Murphy Hot Springs residents were sent southward.

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Town's people parked along the main road, discussing the situation and mulling over the options.



Smoke can be seen obscuring the canyon from this view north from the Outdoor Inn.



A view west up Bear Creek across from the Outdoor Inn. The red building is the Jarbidge Volunteer Fire Department.

## Jarbidge Part 4: Escape From Jarbidge!

Evacuation from Jarbidge  
Driving down canyon to Rogerson, Idaho



Heading down the canyon of the Jarbidge River into Idaho and Rogerson.

Our escape route first went south to the Outdoor Inn to return our keys to our rooms at The Barn and to let them know we were leaving. Then we head north down the canyon of the Jarbidge River hopefully to safety at US93 at Rogerson, 65 miles northeast.

It was nearly 9:30 PM now and it was solidly dusk. Smoke and ash made driving in the increasing darkness worse. I vowed to myself silently not to panic and drive at sane speeds, as the road is dirt, after all; and with construction going on who knew what we were going to encounter. Going off into the river in the middle of the night with flames roaring down on us didn't seem like a good prospect. And with fire being close, who knew how panicky wildlife or range cattle was going to factor into the equation.

Where would we stay tonight? Twin Falls, Idaho or Jackpot, Nevada? I've only driven through Twin Falls two decades ago in the middle of the night – driving into town on the Interstate and quickly turning south on US93 to head into Nevada – so had no idea of how big the town is (it looks rather small on the map, but most folks say around 30,000 people) and how easy it would be to get a motel room for us and the dog at midnight or later. Jackpot, being a casino town on the Nevada-Idaho border, would be wide open all night, but fires were raging close to that town as well. Didn't want to get checked in only to go through all this evacuation crap again after we fell asleep – which would likely be well after midnight at this rate.

My gas gauge was pointing between a half tank and three-quarters. I wished I had taken the time to gas up earlier when the power was on, although I had heard that the Sinclair gas pumps were running on a backup generator. But at 9:30 PM it just didn't seem to be the time to try to get gas. I knew there was another Sinclair at Rogerson, but my main worry was driving far north only to get into trouble and having to run south. Would I have enough gas to make it to Elko?

We took off north down the canyon of the Jarbidge River. I was rather disappointed it all came to this. I wanted my parents to see the giant monoliths that line the canyon that gave birth to the Native American lore of Tsawhawbitts, the giant man eating monster that they thought these humanoid looking stone figures to be. Tsawhawbitts is pronounced "Jah-Ha-Bitch", thus being linguistically mangled by Caucasians who flooded in here during the early 1900's mining boom as "Jarbidge." But Tsawhawbitts and his family were only dark figures against the darkening sky as we drove through and we only got quick glimpses of them through the trees along the road. Along with Tsawhawbitts, Caterpillar, Peterbuilt and John Deere also made their presence known – bulldozers, loaders, graders, dump trucks and other road construction equipment were parked at various points along the way.

Though I concentrated on my driving and kept rather quiet, it was obvious that my parents were quite nervous. I tried my best to help keep them calm. We were not in any danger yet, but the factor of the unknown immediately ahead worried us. I fiddled with the car's radio in hopes of getting a strong radio station with any news on the fire situation. The only thing we could get with any signal strength and clarity was a country-western station from far away Boise. All music, commercials and no news.

As we drove north, a set of headlights in my rearview mirrors indicated that another vehicle was also leaving Jarbidge. I kept my speed at 20-30 miles per hour, the following vehicle stayed well back and matched my speed.

Just inside Idaho, a road leaves the main road and heads southwest back into Nevada and the Diamond A Ranch. As I rounded a corner just before coming to that road, flashing strobe lights blinded us momentarily. A U.S. Forest Service truck was parked across the road and the ranger flagged us down to tell us that two semi trucks carrying bulldozers were coming up the road and would need a wide path to make the sharp turn. The sharp turn was followed immediately by a narrow wooden bridge, then a steep grade up out of the river canyon; which would be difficult for the heavily burdened semi-trucks to negotiate.

By then the vehicle following us – a Chevrolet pickup – had caught up and was parked behind us. Soon, two semi-trucks with low-boy flatbed trailers and carrying large bulldozers were pulling up slowly. The first one made the turn easily, but in the dark and by the light of my headlights it sure looked like that bulldozer was going to tip over onto our Honda! The second truck struggled to make the turn and stalled a couple times. I put the Honda in reverse in hopes that the high

mounted lights and backup lights on the car would warn the Chevy behind me of my intention to make more room. The Chevy immediately reversed about 50 feet and we gave the struggling semi all the room he could use. He made it on his third attempt.

Continuing northward, we were traveling in the direction of the Forks of the Jarbidge River, where the main river and the East Fork of the Jarbidge River meet. As we drove northward toward the forks, it became apparent that the northern horizon was glowing red.

At the Forks of the Jarbidge, the road turns east and in two miles hits Murphy Hot Springs, a small community of houses and mobile homes strung along a narrow strip between the road and the river. No lights were seen shining from inside the homes, but many lights of vehicles and flashlights were busy moving about the town.

At Murphy Hot Springs, the main road starts to climb out of the river canyon and reaches the plateau; where the road immediately becomes paved. The pavement, still narrow and unmarked, meant that speeds could rise a bit. There are no shoulders along the road, few reflectors and directional signs; and waist high sagebrush grows to the pavement's edge. Just after hitting the pavement, my mother made an exclamation and we all turned our heads to the west – a tall wall of flame was glaringly bright at a distance of what appeared to be about a mile.

I stopped, dropped the window and took a long exposure of the flame front. It was the only photograph of the fire that I took. However, I did have the video camera in my hand or propped up on the dashboard and had it recording often. At the worst part of the drive, though, I hastily shut the camera off and tossed it to the floor. I needed to keep my eyes on the road and my hands on the wheel. Our very survival was at stake.

A few miles further and a set of flashing strobe lights of an emergency vehicle was coming at us. A sheriff car went right on by, so I took that as a signal that the road ahead was clear. We had second thoughts about that shortly ...

The road to Rogerson meanders over hill, dale and draw. Few warning signs or reflectors are found along the road. The road makes sudden turns and drops into draws then back out again; if you're not careful, you can easily run off the road if you're not paying attention to your speed and direction through here. Driving through at 10:30 PM in the darkness it was worse – heavy, fog-like smoke, blowing ash; all of it glowing internally from flames within, made the drive as if we were driving through Hell itself.

At a point about 10 miles north of Murphy Hot Springs, we began to encounter flames getting closer and closer to the roadway. To our right, a fairly high mountain was totally ablaze, lit up like a tall Manhattan skyscraper. To our left, a wall of fire was making its way toward the road itself. The road suddenly made a turn and dropped into a gulch – a ranch house

was lit up in the lights of pickup trucks, emergency vehicles and flames. We could see men scurrying about trying to chase down horses and get them into a horse trailer.

Coming up out of that draw, it became obvious we were passing through an area that had already burned. Soon we encountered a crew of fire fighters taking a needed break, standing around their trucks eating and drinking coffee. I inquired of them if the road was open. They said that they really didn't know; but if we got ourselves into trouble ahead, to come back to where they were and stay put for our safety. Soon, very soon, we would be tested as to whether we needed to heed their advise.

A few miles further and the road dropped into a gulch and meandered around in it. To the right was a hillside fully engulfed in flames within 50-yards of the car. To our right it appeared that the road was bending right into the flames. As I approached them, I had to make a quick decision – should I gas it and go for it? Or should I chicken out and go back?

I hit the gas. My mother let out a stifled scream. My dad, sitting in the front seat, yelled at me to quit videotaping and get to driving (although at that point I had already turned off the videotape recorder and dropped it to the floor). The sagebrush on each side of the narrow, 1½-lane width strip of pavement was ablaze; flames were six to ten feet high and within feet of each side of the Honda. I could feel the heat through the window glass against my cheeks. Touching the window was like touching the glass on a hot summer day. I accelerated through the fire's path, it being about 100-yards long. Glancing into my rearview mirror I could see the flames and smoke curl in a downward circle in the car's jet-wash as we passed through. And soon I was out of it and into safety once again. But only for a short time.

We came up out of the draw and it appeared that everywhere our eyes looked there were flames – as if our entire field of view was on fire. In the next few miles, we several times had to dash through the flames along both edges of the pavement. Where flames were not within feet of the Honda, they were within yards. Again and again I was forced to hit the gas and make a run through the flaming gauntlet as if on some wild amusement park ride. Only this was not amusing, it was life or death.

Over hill and dale were flames or charred landscape. But as we continued eastward, we eventually realized that the fires were no longer on each side, but becoming gradually more to our rear. We had escaped from the flames! By the time we hit the small reservoir on House Creek, the glow in the sky was behind us. It was pitch black dead ahead. Though the smoke was heavy and fog like in many places, we were much relieved and hoped that we would no longer be seeing glowing smoke that would indicate danger ahead.

In minutes, the road dropped and crossed the top of the narrow dam holding back Salmon Creek Reservoir. I knew that Rogerson and safety lay only a few minutes ahead. It was still pitch black, yet smoky from the fires behind us. But at

Rogerson, a decision must be made.

We hit the tiny community of Rogerson on US93 – a few homes and a brightly lit up Sinclair gas station. It was nearly 11:30 PM Mountain Standard Time. I was mentally, emotionally and physically exhausted. Which way should I go? Twin Falls or Jackpot? Or just keep driving through the night? Though tempting, gas prices at Rogerson were only \$3.05 per gallon, we elected to turn south to Jackpot. Jackpot is small, but not tiny and has at least three large casinos. We figured that would be our best spot to overnight and get something to eat in the morning. We turned south the 18 miles to Jackpot from Rogerson.

We arrived in town about 11:50 PM. Jackpot, being on the border of Nevada and Idaho, is on Mountain Standard Time also. Town was smoky and I knew that fires were within a dozen miles of town, but we couldn't see any glow close enough to appear threatening. We chuckled to ourselves that gas was 10¢ per-gallon cheaper back at Rogerson than in Jackpot. We passed up Barton's 93 Club and Cactus Pete's Casinos and found the Covered Wagon Motel on the southern end of town. It looked fine to us, and we pulled in. The office was closed, but a sign indicated that we see the night clerk at a window on the side of the building. A polite yet humorous man greeted us and told us that indeed there were available rooms for the price of \$25. Oh, we have a dog? Well that will be another \$10. Sounded like the bargain of the month to us!

We took a few bags into our room. It was midnight when we closed the door. I was drained, exhausted and hyper at the same time. I downloaded my photos to my laptop while my wife found CNN on the TV and looked to see if there was anything about our situation – not really expecting to find anything. Instead, all news focused on a steam pipe explosion in Manhattan, which had killed one person and caused considerable damage. When my wife first locked onto the news station after channel surfing around and the ruinous scene greeted my eyes, my blood ran cold as I thought “Oh No! Not another terrorist attack!” (my wife was nearly a casualty in the 9/11 attacks on NYC). That just above did me in. What a way for this day to end.

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The path of our flaming exit from Jarbidge!



The semi pulling a bulldozer bound for the fire zone west of Jarbidge.



Continuing down the canyon toward the Forks of the Jarbidge River.



The only photograph I took the time and effort to make of the fire, near Murphy Hot Springs. I had more important things on my mind - survival - and the worst was yet to come!

Jackpot to Ely: More Fire and Charred Great Basin



Hotel Nevada, Ely, Nevada. Far from fire and a really neat place to stay!

**M**y wife was up early, before 5:00 AM. She made coffee and took the pot over to my parents room next door. I stayed in bed, dozing until until 8:00 AM.

I showered and put on some clean clothes and had my coffee and watched the news. All the network morning shows were on, but the local Boise station did break in with very brief news on the fire that hit Jarbidge. They said that Jarbidge and Murphy Hot Springs were “evacuated.” Did that mean that Jarbidge was officially cleared out after we left, or was our voluntary exit the extent of the evacuation? It wasn't until later that I found out that Jarbidge was indeed fully evacuated just a few hours after we left.

The night clerk had recommended the restaurant at Barton's Club 93 as a good place for breakfast, so after we packed up the Honda, we head south. But first, we gassed up. Ironically, gas had gone up 5¢ per gallon overnight.

Our night host's recommendation for breakfast was excellent. I paid just \$5.<sup>00</sup> for a tasty and filling 2-egg breakfast with

sausage, hashbrowns and choice of toast. My wife, mother and father had similar meals.

We pulled out of Jackpot and a sign on the south end of town indicated that our watches were right once again – Pacific Daylight Standard Time was back in force after we passed some invisible line. Makes me wonder if I lay down across the time zone if my head and feet are one hour apart ... at least that's the way I felt this morning – after the surrealistic and exhausting events the night before – even after drinking at least three pots of coffee.

It was quite smoky in Jackpot, but the visibility improved as we traveled southward toward Wells. We crossed huge burned areas burned the previous week in the vicinity of H.D. Summit. Smoke from the fires near Jarbidge was visible and smoke from a big fire between Wells and Elko wafted our direction; making half the East Humboldt Range clear and the other half nearly hidden.

At Wells, we stopped to allow Mom and Dad to sample old downtown Wells, along 7<sup>th</sup> Street and the railroad tracks. Each building has a plaque affixed to it, outlining the building's history and a historical photo of it. My wife walked the dog, I stretched and drank coffee, hoping for a run-by of a Union Pacific train to videotape. None came.

Southbound on US93 just south of Wells, my GPS was reading that Ely was 193 miles in a straight line away, though highway signs added 25 miles to that figure. The drive south through the Clover Valley dropped us south of the smoke from the Starr Valley fire (west of Wells) and the bright snowfields still capped portions of the range. This was also my first time traveling this section of US93 – in the past years I've always traveled via US93 Alternate over to Wendover, Nevada/Utah as I was either coming from or going to eastern Wyoming and western South Dakota in those short years in the mid-1980s that I lived in the Black Hills country. This would also be my first visit to Ely since 1993.

It was a long but scenic drive south on US93. Everyone dozed off as I drove south, the sound of smooth jazz on the Honda's CD player added to the ambience and my personal enjoyment of the picture window view out the windshield. As I got down to the vicinity of the old Nevada Northern Railroad village of Currie, I began to notice new smoke on the eastern sky.

Getting into the northern portion of Steptoe Valley, a glance south gave away the source of that smoke – a peak in the Cherry Creek Mountains (part of the Egan Range) was wearing a belt of smoke around its midsection. As we drove closer, we stopped at a rest area across the highway from the old community of Schellbourne. Just to the south of west, 10,134 foot high Telegraph Hill was on fire. This was sure getting old ... it seemed that everywhere I've gone, everything I've touched turns to flame in the past month! But at least Ely was far to the south, out of danger.<sup>3</sup>

Approaching McGill, I could not help notice how bare the town looked without its old gigantic, hundreds of feet tall smoke stack left over from the Anaconda and Kennecott Copper days – the stack was imploded and toppled in the mid-1990s and was featured on the media. But McGill still seemed to be a lively town, even though there is largely no industry here any longer. Tracks of the McGill Branch of the Nevada Northern were still in place, but rusted and sagebrush covered, the highway crossing paved over and signal arms removed; indicating that trains haven't needed to run this branch in many a year.

Approaching Ely, the Nevada Northern mainline crossing still was in place; an old, graffiti covered hopper car parked next to the highway on the mainline trackage. The Highline Branch, further up the hillside and which once served the uppermost portion of McGill's huge old copper mill complex, seemed to be intact.

We had originally planned to stay at the Four Sevens Motel in Ely, as my wife found it in the AAA Tourbook as being of reasonable price. Pulling up to the motel, we found that they had just filled their last room. Along the way south from Wells, we had seen several signs advertising the Hotel Nevada, an Ely historical landmark a couple blocks away in Ely's old downtown; the clerk at the Four Sevens made arrangements for us to take a suite there.

The Hotel Nevada was quite unique and entertaining. Our suite was on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor – two bedrooms, one bathroom and a sort of sitting area/sink/refrigerator/microwave oven in the middle between the bedrooms. The hallway was adorned in farm implements and branding irons; the downstairs area a sort of motorcycle/local wild game room affair with glassed exhibits of stuffed wild animals; along with Harley Davidson, Indian and customized Honda motorcycles scattered about the casino, parked atop rows of slot machines.

My mother, wife, dog and I took a walk for several blocks along Ely's main drag. It was quite busy, with dirty 4x4 pickup trucks, semi-trucks, and local traffic. There was a “Hollywood Walk of Fame” type walk in front of the Hotel Nevada – bronze stars embedded in the sidewalk held the names of celebrities that had stayed at the hotel. Murals on many buildings depicted Ely's heritage and railroad history.

We decided upon the late lunch/early dinner special at the Hotel Nevada. The dish was some sort of South American

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Information on the Telegraph Hill fire near Schellbourne Rest Area; as well as the US93 Complex of fires between Wells and Jackpot in which we traveled through.

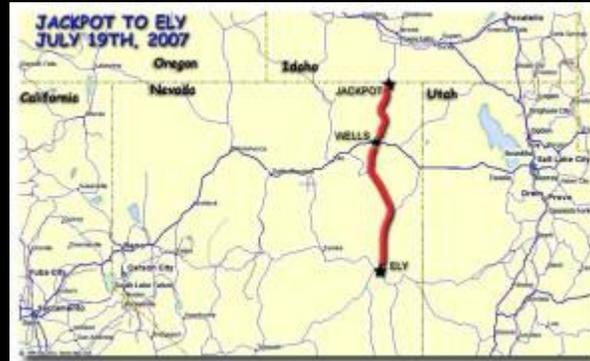
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barbecued beef with a light rosemary sauce, vegetable, potato and bread. Very tasty and a good price – we had beat the clock between lunch special and dinner special by one minute. The only difference that I could see was that the price would have gone up a couple of bucks.

After dinner, my dad and I partook of the 99¢ margaritas of the hotel bar and watched the various sports games on the multiple big screen television screens. I asked for and received an extra shot of tequila – for a modest fee more – on my drinks.

After watching TV for a while in the room, I decided to take Arkeline for a walk to the park a couple of blocks up the street. It was dusk and it seemed as if the sidewalks and highway were shut down – very little traffic was found and I was able to walk around and cross streets and Ely's main drag without having to wait for traffic to clear. Ely was suddenly quiet and serene. The [Hotel Nevada](#) was brightly and colorfully lit against the dusky western sky – a half moon overhead was the crowning jewel.

Click on any image below for the full size version.



Map of our travels July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007 - Jackpot to Ely.



The Covered Wagon Motel, Jackpot, Nevada.



Barton's Club 93 Casino, Jackpot, Nevada.  
It was recommended that we eat breakfast here. We were not dissappointed.



The drive south on US93 north of Wells, Nevada. Spots of snow can still be seen on the East Humboldt Range. Smoke from the Starr Valley fire can also be seen.



Passing through a charred area that burned a week or so previous to our passing through. Near the H.D. Summit area north of Wells, Nevada.



Looking southward at the East Humboldt Range, along US93 north of Wells, Nevada.



My wife walks Arkeline while Dad is to the left photographing some of old downtown Wells, along 7<sup>th</sup> Street and the railroad tracks.

Click on any image below for the full size version.



A few miles south of Wells, Nevada along US93 and looking north. Dense smoke can be seen billowing up from the big fires near Jackpot and those farther north in southern Idaho.



Scenic Clover Valley, south of Wells, Nevada; along the eastern base of the East Humboldt Range.



US93 looking northwest to the East Humboldt Range, at the southern end of Clover Valley.



This row: Telegraph Hill, in the Egan Range north of Ely, on fire. Various scenes down along US93, the last photo from the rest area at Schellbourne Rest Area.



Traveling southbound down US93 toward Ely. The former smelter community of McGill in the distance. The last time I traveled through here, about 1993, the huge smelter stack still dominated the town. The stack could be seen for tens of miles. A few



The former Nevada Northern Railroad branch line into McGill. Now out of use, it was one of two lines that ran into McGill - this one that ran into the lower level of the



The Hotel Nevada, where we overnighted on the third floor.

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years later, the stack of hundreds of feet high was brought down.

giant smelter that used to dominate the town, and the Highline Branch, which ran to the upper level.



The Hotel Nevada looking east down Autlman Street.

Last Day - Ely to Big Pine



The long road home - US6 in Railroad Valley between Ely and Tonopah.

I awoke at 6:30 AM in the Hotel Nevada, about the same time everyone else did. One bathroom, four people, time consuming, especially when you gotta go ...

Breakfast time. Hotel Nevada special? Steak & Eggs, \$4.<sup>99</sup>. Never had steak and eggs before in my life, so I thought I'd give it a try. Figured at that price, I'd get a puny piece of tough, low price and low quality steak. But boy, was I wrong! A sirloin steak – thick, juicy and 6-8 ounces in size – served with eggs, hashbrowns and choice of toast or biscuits and gravy. We all got the steak & egg special. My wife surprised me by ordering it with biscuits and gravy. It was a meal that could have fed both of us. Very tasty also.

After steak & eggs, we checked out of our room and head east a bit. I wanted to see if there was any activity around the yards of the Nevada Northern Railroad. A short train lead by a diesel locomotive was idling next to the depot, awaiting orders to roll west to the old copper pits at Ruth and Kimberly. Otherwise there was little activity anywhere to be seen. No one else wanted to even get out of the car, so I grabbed a few quick shots and we head southeast out US6 bound for home.

The long road southwest along US6 is scenic and interesting for about 50 miles, then turns from high country with thick forests of juniper and piñon to drab desert valleys filled with scrub with mountains seen far off in the distance. It would remain that way the remainder of the way to the California border. This country is deep in the rain shadow of the Sierra Nevada and other high intervening mountain ranges that lie parallel across this section of the state and gets very little

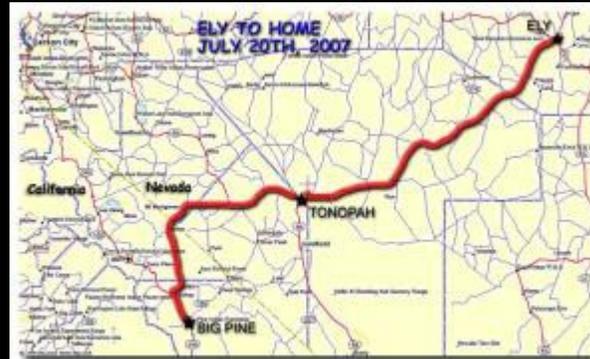
rainfall. Even Las Vegas – deep in the Mojave Desert – gets more annual precipitation than these valleys.

The trip from Ely to Bishop, California took less than five hours at legal speeds; with only a gas stop in Tonopah. By the time we made it to Bishop, the steak & eggs wore off, so we stopped for a lunch at McDonald's, before traveling the remaining 15 miles home. It was hot when we got home, about 95°.

What a trip – chased by fire, lots of driving, not much time for true relaxation like I had envisioned for the months preceding this vacation. Mom and Dad by then were tired and homesick. So they hurriedly threw their bags into their car, used the bathroom, and sped off for their home 300 miles and six hours away.

Thus came to an end our tour of the wildfires of the American West! What a “hell” of a ride!

Click on any image below for the full size version.



The route from Ely to Home on July 20<sup>th</sup>.



The Ely Depot of the Nevada Northern Railroad.



The yards at the Ely Depot of the Nevada Northern Railroad, viewing east toward the Schell Creek Range.



A train made up and ready for passengers for the day's run to the copper mining areas west of Ely.



The first 50 miles or so southeast of Ely on US6 has some scenic vistas, such as this one taken northwest toward the White Pine Range.



Shortly afterwards, though, the highway drops into increasingly arid valleys as it heads southwest toward Tonopah. This shot was taken at Currant, looking southwest across the broad Railroad Valley.



Crossing Big Sand Springs Valley.

Click on any image below for the full size version.



Tonopah, Nevada.



Entering California near Benton and about 50 miles to home.

## Epilogue

The fire at near Jarbidge and Murphy Hot Springs continued to burn for several more days. Jarbidge remained evacuated. Several times in the days after I returned home, I attempted to call the Outdoor Inn in Jarbidge to see if I could find out if the town survived. In the afternoon of Wednesday, July 25<sup>th</sup>, I finally succeeded in getting someone on the phone. At the time I was told that fires were still in the area, but Jarbidge was reopened to residents only.

Some details of the fire from the press <sup>4</sup> :

- Started July 16<sup>th</sup> by lightning.

4 Newspaper References for the Jarbidge / Murphy Hot Springs Fires:

[Elko Daily Free Press](#), July 18-25; 28 and 30, 2007.

[The Wood River Journal](#) (Hailey, Idaho), July 26, 2007  
"Jarbidge fire evacuees find refuge in Twin Falls"

[AOL News](#), July 17, 2007

[BLM Press Release of Jarbidge Evacuation](#), July 19, 2007.

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- July 18<sup>th</sup> – Voluntary evacuation order for Jarbidge, mandatory for Diamond A Ranch and Murphy Hot Springs. Later in the night a full evacuation order was given to Jarbidge.
- July 19<sup>th</sup> – Jarbidge evacuated as what is now called the Rowland Fire pushed south into the foothills of the Jarbidge Mountains. Fire is at 286 square miles in size. All roads into Jarbidge closed. Bulldozers bladed a fire break around the town. Bureau of Land Management fire crews currently holding the biggest fires at Murphy Hot Springs.
- July 20<sup>th</sup> – The Rowland Fire has consumed 160-180 power poles of the Idaho Power Company, scattered between Thousand Springs, Idaho and Jarbidge; and from Jarbidge to Mountain City.
- July 21<sup>st</sup> – Entire Jarbidge Mountain area, including the town itself, under mandatory closure. No one allowed in. The Rowland Fire now said to be at 125,000 acres.
- July 22<sup>nd</sup> – The Rowland Fire is considered part of the Murphy Complex of fires burning along the Nevada-Idaho border. The fires have charred 866 square miles. The Mountain Home Air Force practice range north of Murphy Hot Springs is threatened.
- July 23<sup>rd</sup> – Murphy Complex now up to 562,278 acres. Now at 20% containment. Evacuation order for Jarbidge, Diamond A Ranch and Murphy Hot Springs still in effect. Power still out for entire region. Heavy air attack focusing on Jarbidge. Officials have closed off all lands between Mountain City and Jarbidge, including the Bruneau River area.
- July 24<sup>th</sup> – Flames have spread south from Idaho into Nevada in a line from Mountain City, to Jarbidge and Jackpot. Hundreds of power poles have been destroyed. Power has been out for nearly a week. Jarbidge was spared by flames by a scant mile. Residents of Murphy Hot Springs allowed to return to their homes today. Power pole destruction count at 200 poles. Power still out. FEMA has approved funds for fighting the Murphy Complex Fire. The fire has threatened more than 200 homes, 20 businesses and an undermined number of outbuildings. 1,300 citizens are still without power. The Scott Creek Fire near Jackpot is added to the Murphy Complex, now at 879 square miles. A portion of the Rowland Fire, the western part of the Murphy Complex, threatened the Prunty Ranch south of Jarbidge at the Charleston ghost town pictured above. Later in day, some residents have returned to Jarbidge despite evacuation order still in effect. Electricity has been

restored to Jarbidge.

- July 25<sup>th</sup> – Evacuation order officially lifted for Jarbidge, after six days that the town was emptied. Elko County Sheriff said that it took 1.5 hours to evacuate Jarbidge. Fires near Jarbidge could still threaten town. Road into Jarbidge from Rogerson still officially closed. Fire still burning in Jarbidge Ridge and Copper Mountain areas. Prunty Ranch at Charleston still threatened.
- July 28<sup>th</sup> – Murphy Complex now at 659,993 acres and is 80% contained. Some public lands will be reopened to the public the following day, but the entire Jarbidge area remains closed. More than 1,200 people have fought the fire and costs have mounted to more than \$6.6 million.
- July 30<sup>th</sup> – Murphy Complex at 1,020 square miles but now 98% contained. All areas of the complex in Nevada are fully contained. Costs to combat fire now over \$9 million. Areas of Jarbidge within forest service boundary is now open, although the Jarbidge Wilderness area is still closed.

**Note:**

Our escape from Jarbidge was well documented on Super 8mm videotape, including leading up to the worst passage through the fires. If and when I get the video transferred over from VHS to DVD, I'll add to this page new photo stills taken from the video, and possibly some short video segments.