

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

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Exploration Trips

The Greenwater Region of Eastern Death Valley National Park

Furnace ghost town site, Kunze (original Greenwater) ghost town site, Ramsey (new Greenwater) ghost town site, Gold Valley, Gold Valley ghost town site, Willow Spring, Willow Creek ghost town site.

Note: Hyperlinks within the text will open a new browser window with offsite photos by myself and others. My transcribed voice notes made on microcassette recorder during the trip can be linked to at the end of each page.

Introduction and Day 1: November 22, 2002

Since purchasing the Toyota Tacoma in June, 2002, and the Snug Top camper shell in October of the same year, I hadn't really taken the chance to give them a proper shake down cruise out in the field. Also, permanently placed in my windshield is an annual pass for Death Valley National Park, which would expire in a few months and I had only used it once. And lastly, I needed to do some ground work, exploration and photography for a proposed **WESTERN PLACES** book on Greenwater. They sounded like good excuses to go to Greenwater to me.



Leaving Trona.

I had invited several individuals to go along, which over the time approaching the planned trip dates dwindled down to one - John McCulloch, of southern Nevada, who has the superb website dedicated to the Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad.

On November 22, 2002, I left Trona, California, bound for Greenwater. Though my residence is in Big Pine, my primary occupation is at the chemical plant at Trona, I keep an apartment to stay at during my working week. The trip commenced the morning after my last work day from that point. Weather on the first day ranged from chilly upon my departure at Trona at an early hour; to chilly at Skidoo due to altitude; to balmy and T-shirt weather at Stovepipe Wells and Furnace Creek; to cool and later cold and breezy and later windy in the Greenwater region due to its altitude. High clouds painted the autumn sky with wispy white feathers and the landscape with soft shadows throughout.

Though Greenwater and surrounding territory was my intended destination, I decided to make a short detour to Harrisburg and Skidoo along the way. Recent rumors that the Skidoo Mines Company mill at Skidoo was removed had been circulating. Though I had received word that this wasn't the case from a ranger I'm acquainted with, I decided I wanted to check this out for myself, take photos and put those concerned at ease. On the way I also stopped by the Pete Aguerberry camp at Harrisburg to check on its condition. In recent years I've found it deteriorating rapidly, aided by human hands with ill intent. Sad to say, Pete's camp is still declining badly and likely not long for this world; however I'm happy to report that the Skidoo Mines Company mill is still standing.



Panamint Valley at Ballarat Road turnoff.





Skidoo 2002 and 1907.



Skidoo Mines Company mill still standing.

1907, May 10 *Inyo Independent* **THE FAMOUS SKIDOO MINE**

From Matt Hoveck, superintendent of the Skidoo mine in Inyo county, California, the property which E.A. Montgomery of the Montgomery-Shoshone fame is now developing, the following facts are learned.

The vein crops for 1600 feet and for that distance has been thoroughly sampled, showing a continuous pay shoot. Four shafts have been sunk and five tunnels run in the vein. The deepest shaft is down 250 feet and the lowest tunnel is 750 feet below the highest cropping. These and other workings show a quartz vein averaging eight feet in width, with average gold values of \$60 to the ton, as shone by sampling and mill tests. The ore is free milling.

Water for milling and other purposes will be brought in from Telescope Peak, twenty miles distant, by a pipe line now nearly finished and capable of delivering fifty inches. It is estimated that 120 horsepower can be developed at the mine with this water. The owners intend to build a large mill this summer, for treatment of the company and leasers' ores.

Eight leases have been let on smaller parallel veins with cross the Skidoo property. Of these, several are now operating with excellent prospects of success.

The principal owners of the Skidoo mine are E.A. Montgomery, Matt Hoveck, Charles

M. Schwab, and W.R. Wharton of New York. The mine is forty-five miles from Rhyolite. Good timber is obtainable on nearby mountains. The district is considered by competent men to be one of much promise, and considerable development is now in progress. -- Los Angeles Mining Review



Sand Dunes, Death Valley floor.



Gassing up at Furnace Creek.

Continuing down into Death Valley, a stop at Stovepipe for some coffee and a few whim items, and at Furnace for gas only slightly detained me from my noon appointment to meet John at the road that runs to Ryan ghost town site. John has also recently purchased a 2002 Toyota Tacoma TRD equipped 4x4, his being a double cab model. John has engineered and created some very interesting and excellent modifications to his truck and camper setup to facilitate back country travel as we were embarking on. John was also accompanied by his standard poodle, Shadow.



Above Furnace Creek in Furnace Creek Wash.



Meeting John near Ryan, which can be seen in the background.

After greeting each other and visiting a few minutes, John and I departed to the northernmost townsite of the Greenwater boom, Furnace. We continued our visit while driving on our FRS radios, which aid in pointing out discoveries made by one or the other, and for just plain chatting. Along the way, we decided that a road to the north and up into Coffin Peak looked intriguing, and so we took it. At the end of the road we found interesting stone and wood remains of what we found to be, per an old mine claim map of the Greenwater area, the Greenwater Calumet Mining Company grounds. After exploring, John and I had a light lunch; mine consisting of Wheat Thins and smoked oysters I had picked up on a whim at Stovepipe Wells, washed down with a can of Fosters beer. After the sun went behind the crest, John and I departed for Furnace townsite, the location of our camp for the night.



Greenwater Calumet Mine Camp.



John videotapes the ruins at Greenwater Calumet.



Interesting scraps at Greenwater Calumet.



The view eastward from Greenwater Calumet.

We took an interesting road that contoured along the face of the Black Mountains separating Greenwater Valley from Death Valley. Along the way we were treated to gorgeous views to the east and enjoyed exploring periodic ruins and mine shafts. At Furnace townsite, we selected a large tailing pile above town to park and set up our individual camps for the night. I stayed atop the large tailings, John pulled a short distance down the road and set up his camp.

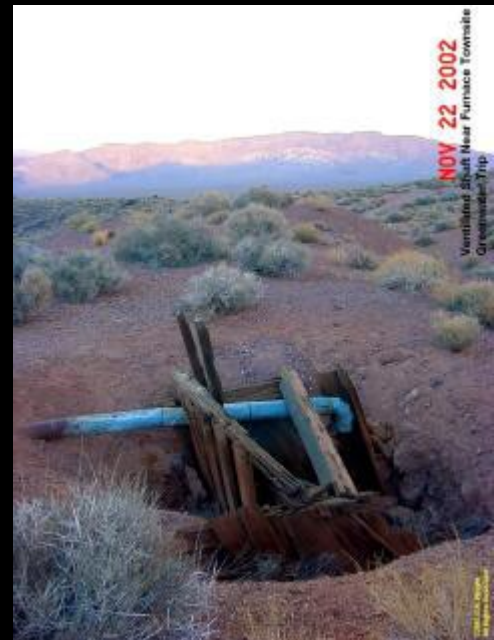
Death Valley Chuck-Walla, January 1, 1907 "THE TOWN OF FURNACE"

The vast extent of the copper deposits in the funeral range has produced a strange condition of affairs, out of which is growing the town of Furnace, a sister city to Greenwater, and located four miles to the north. The new city is justified in its existence and, with that justification behind it, is going merrily along, building stores, restaurants, hotels and business houses, grading streets and doing such a business as any other thriving mining camp with a future before it. The justification and underlying reason for such a condition of affairs is primarily the vastness of the copper deposits of the Greenwater district.

Trolley cars and five-cent fares are not yet a



Near Furnace townsite.



Formerly ventilated mine shaft north of Furnace townsite.

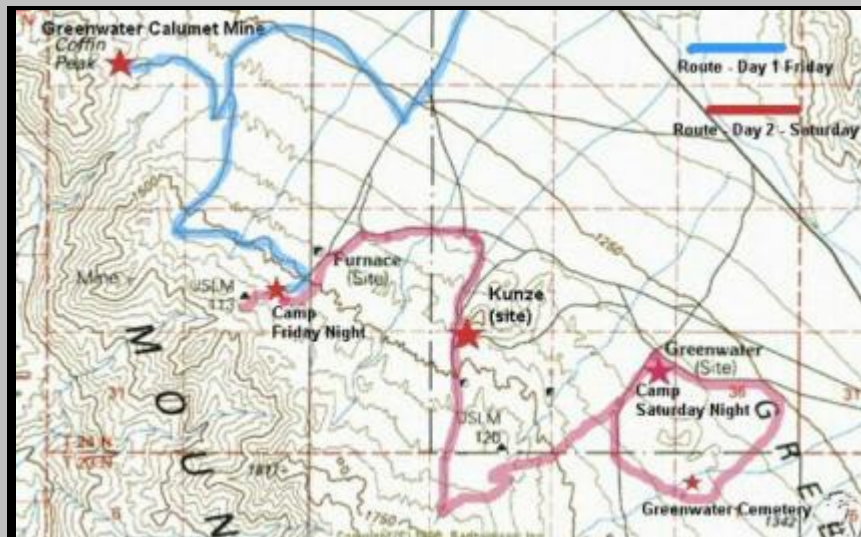
part of the desert attractions, and miners cannot walk the weary miles from town to shaft and home again each day. The copper of the Greenwater district is scattered for many miles, and the men whose interests are centered therein are employed throughout the same wide territory. It is imperative that they should be within reasonable distance of their points of business interest. With an appreciation of this fact the town of Furnace was started and is already giving evidence of the good judgment of its promoters by booming along at a rate which satisfies the most urgent. The great Patsy Clark properties, among the finest in the Greenwater district, are the basis for the town. The many other companies whose valuable holdings are in the same vicinity are adding to the stability and strength of the new city. The vast deposits which are now known on the Death Valley side hold out a still greater promise for its future, for it is to Furnace that these owners will look for headquarters.

Properties equal to any in the district surround the town. Prospects of even greater promise border it, and a wider reach of territory still will be dependent upon its aid and will pay a fitting recompense in business and support. Some wonderful discoveries have recently been made on the Death Valley slope from five to ten miles northwest of Furnace, and to gain the advantages of connection with this territory the townsite company is planning a road at a cost of thousands of dollars to lead into Death Valley and tap the mining properties, thus concentrating the business of that district at Furnace.

A postoffice has been applied for, and the postal department has requested full information as to routes and population, preparatory to granting the application. Stage lines from Amargosa and the end of the Borax Smith road are connecting with the

town daily.

Furnace is a town without a doubt. It is a town to be reckoned with in the development of the district. It has good men and good companies behind it, and contributing to its support. Many of these are already working. Among them are the Furnace Creek Copper Co., Furnace Creek Extension Co., Furnace Creek South Extension Co., Montana-Furnace Creek Co., Copper Oxide Co., Copper Sulphide Co., Clark Copper Co., Kempland Copper Co., Furnace Valley Co., Greenwater-Calumet Co., Butte-Furnace Range and a number of others.



Map of our travels for November 22nd and 23rd.



Closeup of Furnace

John's camp set up is quite comfortable. Since the double cab Toyota has a very short bed, John designed and contracted out a tent setup that has its own frame and fits around the open tailgate of the truck and the open rear door of the camper shell. Inside he has a bed made from square tubing and breaks down into two pieces, which are assembled to create a full length bed. The bed height is the same as the top of the truck's bed, allowing for storage underneath. John has incorporated translucent plastic boxes to store all manner of personal, electronic, food and cooking items, which fit neatly under the bed. If you are looking for ideas for your rig and wish to further question John about his current setup and future plans, contact John via his website at <http://www.ttrr.org/>

I myself prefer a simpler setup. This trip was to be short, so I packed sparingly.

***7-gallon plastic water jug with spigot**

*** Two tote boxes with truck related items: extra oil, anti-freeze, jumper cables, portable compressor, a spotlight, tire repair items and simple hand tools.**

*** Two battery operated Coleman lanterns.**

*** Coleman stove for heating water for coffee and instant foods; also for heating water for bathing and dishes.**

*** Coffee pot for heating water. A mess kit for eating.**

*** Hassock (plastic bucket within a container with toilet seat type toilet).**

*** Sleeping bag for sleeping in, a second bag to throw over the main bag for extra warmth; a pillow; a regular size air mattress for comfort.**

*** Food and drink: instant soups, canned meats, crackers, smoked oysters, smoked kipper snacks, fruit, cheese, milk, instant coffee, Cheerios, a few cans of beer, a jug of wine. A small ice chest contained the perishables.**

*** Cameras: A Sony Hi-8 video camera, Sony Mavica digital camera.**

To keep it simple, I threw all non-perishable food and kitchen items into one tote box, which I regretted since it made it difficult to simply choose an item without having to dig through everything and make a mess. Otherwise I was comfortable.

One interesting aspect of our high perch atop Furnace townsite was that I received a very strong cell phone signal. I was able to check my messages, call my wife and even make a call to my insurance agent to answer his call. All from a ghost town with a tiny phone that sat in the palm of my hand.

Darkness comes early at this time of the year, so John and I set up our camps in the dwindling light of dusk and were tucked in by dark. A brisk south wind had picked up as dusk covered the land and I was glad I was ready to crawl into the back of the truck and close the camper door to seal it out. I had picked up a newspaper at Stovepipe Wells and read to the light of the lanterns and the camper shell's interior light. My camper is a Snug Top Hi Liner shell, the roof raised a few inches above the cab. I found this very comfortable over the cab high shell on my previous truck; allowing me to sit up against the front of the bed with the lights at each side, the top sleeping bag pulled up over me for warmth and a cozy feeling, while reading my newspaper. It also gives so much more room for contortions for a guy my size while trying to dress inside the shell.



Since darkness came early, sleepiness also came early, and so by 8:30 I had the light turned out and hit the sack. None of the ghosts of Furnace came to visit that night.

[On to Day 2: Saturday, November 23, 2002](#)

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Last Revision: 08/14/2006