

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

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Trip 2006-Part 2: An Arc of Jewels Over the Head of Tonopah

Trip 2006: Day 2, May 28, 2006



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Map of our travels the 2nd day.

As is customary for my first night of most trips away from home, sleep was scant during the night. Forgetting to bring along a pillow didn't help matters any. I lay awake for large time blocks of the night, my mind active and concentrating on minor discomforts, replaying the previous day's travels and whatnot. Although the night felt sleepless to me, Graham told me that I was snoring loudly when he crawled out of the back of his Tacoma during the night to let Toby stretch, sniff and go to the bathroom around 1:00 AM.

At 5:50 AM, I crawled out of the back of my truck and greeted the cold, gray dawn. A tiny bit of snow had fallen overnight as evidenced by fat snowflakes embedded in the icy frosting on my truck's windshield.

First order of business was to take some morning photos and video, then I decided to pull out my thermal overalls and get warmed up. Though not particularly frigid, my truck's outdoor thermometer display was showing 30° shortly after I arose. After suiting up, I busied myself by getting the Coleman stove cranked up to make coffee. Graham warmed himself up by playfully chasing Toby around camp.

After pouring a cup of the much needed internal heat, I walked cup of coffee and cameras in hand around Grantsville close to camp for a while, drinking in hot coffee and the cold scenery. Gray clouds obscured many nearby high points, but it was obvious that snow had stuck to the ground not much higher than we were. The sun was struggling to come through the clouds and it appeared like we might be in for a nice day – we hoped.

While Graham and I were sipping our coffees, I pulled out my well worn and trail weary copy of Stan Paher's "**NEVADA GHOST TOWNS & MINING CAMPS**" and turned to the page with a large historic photo illustrating Grantsville during its heyday. I quickly located the very building that the Tacomas belonging to Graham and I were straddling. The historical photo showed Grantsville in health filled with row after row of wooden and stone structures; taking our eyes off the page and inspecting Grantsville today gave a stark but beautiful view of tall sagebrush with but a couple of worn but standing structures in view. A few more stone ruins lay scattered among the sagebrush that take patience and determination to find.

I was not much in the mood to make my usual camp fare of a big morning meal on this frosty morning, so simply breakfasted with a small bowl of Shredded Wheat with no sugar. We figured we'd get to Austin around late morning and in time something served up hot in a café. So Graham and I packed up our respective camps, tidied our respective trucks and prepared to make our way out of Grantsville. By 8:25 AM we had both Tacomas fired up and ready to roll.

While viewing the large historical photo of Grantsville earlier, my curiosity was piqued by an annotation I had penned on the Stan Paher book of the condition I had found at the cemetery on my trip here in the early 1980s. It simply read: "*Cemetery. Very bad shape.*" So Graham and I decided to try our luck at finding the town's cemetery. Having no maps of Grantsville, I studied the land features and formations where I drew the cemetery in the photo and made our way in that direction. We had no success in finding the town's cemetery in the little time we devoted to the endeavor, so I cannot say with any certainty that the cemetery has been erased by time and elements in the intervening two plus decades; or that we had passed by it blindly; or we went the wrong way looking for it and missed it entirely. We drove out a road that head southeast from the townsite for about a mile before turning back.



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Right after emerging from my chilly cocoon at Grantsville.



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Early morning Grantsville.



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Early morning Grantsville.



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Cacooned in my insulated overalls in the early morning chill.



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The sun finally emerges on Grantsville.



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Historic photo of Grantsville found in Stan Paher's "NEVADA GHOST TOWNS & MINING CAMPS," complete with my annotations on my early 1980s trip to the site.



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Graham warming up himself and Toby in their playful morning ritual.



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Our camp.



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A Grantsville breakfast was simple this chilly morning.



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In search of the cemetery at Grantsville.



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No luck finding the cemetery, returning to Grantsville to continue on our trip.



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Looking at lower Grantsville from the upper part of town. Our camp site can be seen to the right below the large tailing pile.

Back within Grantsville townsite, we found and turned up signed Forest Service route 108 bound for Grantsville Summit and beyond into the Reese River Valley and eventually Austin. The route gently climbed the range and topped out upon Grantsville Summit. We found two stone ruins along the way. Water from ground water seeps coursed along the upper portion of the road; one water crossing was a bit deep and soft, causing my truck to drop hub deep into gooey mud for an instant.

We reached Grantsville Summit at 9:00 AM sharp, 194.2 miles into our trip. Upon the summit, a few small spots of newly fallen snow still lay in shady spots where the wind had piled it up against trees. The wind was brisk and a few snow flurries fell. The Toiyabe Range beyond Reese River Valley was white with new fallen snow.



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Graham C. and Toby at Grantsville Summit. View northeast to the Toiyabe Range.



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Our trucks atop Grantsville Summit.

After enjoying the view from Grantsville Summit and allowing Toby some romp time, we continued eastward, dropping down two miles into the Reese River Valley. At the bottom of the valley, we were in the southern end of the Yomba Indian Reservation, which lay in scattered tracts along the length of the valley. Scattered homes, ranches and administrative facilities of the reservation lay along our route as we ran northward toward Austin; the road alternating between bladed dirt and pavement. The Reese River, where we could see it near the road, was flowing with a strong current.

As my trip odometer turned over 45.8 miles from our perch at Grantsville Summit, we hit old US50. Turning eastward, we soon merged with the current alignment of US50 and reach Austin in 9.3 miles since turning east from the Reese River Valley road. It was high time to gas up the Tacomas and for Graham and I to fill up our personal gas tanks.

Gas at the Chevron station in Austin was at the time going for \$3.⁶⁰ per gallon of regular unleaded fuel, the same price as that at my local Chevron station. Both Graham's Tacoma and mine take nearly identical amounts of fuel – two-one hundreds of a gallon difference between the two.

After fueling up, we looked about for a place for some food. I suggested the Toiyabe Café, as I've eaten there several times in the past and have always been satisfied with its quality and price; Graham, though, liked the looks of the International Bar and Café for its rustic ambiance. So we went with the the International. I enjoyed a bacon cheeseburger with fries, Graham also ordered a hamburger. Both of

us drank copious amounts of coffee. Prices were moderate.

While Graham and I ate, we discussed our next destination and plotted the course of the remainder of our trip. I had hoped to traverse the Toiyabe Range via Big Creek and Kingston Canyons, but due to the current weather and probability of the road still being a mess from snowmelt and the stuck truck at the summit we decided against it. We then determined to head over the Toquima Range – at first via Northumberland Pass, which was nixed when I realized that it was as high in elevation as Kingston thus still likely to be deep with snow; so we then decided to cross the Toquimas via Pete's Summit, east of Big Smoky Valley, and head south through Monitor Valley en route to the area of Belmont.

Coming out of the International, it was dumping snow. We were by now a bit disappointed, as we were getting rather tired of this sort of weather, but it proved to be the last snowfall of our trip.



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Dropping down from Grantsville Summit into the Reese River Valley.



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Northbound through Reese River Valley, destination Austin.



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The Shoshone Range, as viewed traveling northbound through the Reese River Valley.



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One of the scattered ranches along the road on the Yomba Indian Reservation. This particular ranch was quite picturesque and had some very old pole and sod barns.



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My Tacoma all alone in the wide open spaces of the Reese River Valley. View southeast to the Toiyabe Range.



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At the junction of the Elkhorn road that runs west over the Shoshone Range and the road running north-south through the Reese River Valley.



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A couple of sheep alongside the road near one of the ranches at the northern end of the Reese River Valley road.



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Graham and fueling up at the Chevron station in Austin. Our trucks took nearly identical amounts of fuel.



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Downtown Austin, Nevada.



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Downtown Austin, Nevada.



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The International Café, where Graham and I lunched. We came out of the cafe



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Dropping down from Grantsville Summit into the Reese River Valley.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

Northbound through Reese River Valley, destination Austin.



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The Shoshone Range, as viewed traveling northbound through the Reese River Valley.

to this snow squall. Fortunately, it was the last one we would have to endure on this trip.

Graham and I finished our respective lunches at the International Café and then headed eastward on US50, over the Toiyabe Range via Austin and Bob Scott Summits. A bit more than 11 miles east of Austin; we turned south on NV376, then almost immediately turned eastward again on FS001 – the road over Pete's Summit. As we zipped past Spencer's Hot Spring, a lone wild burro was curiously watching us as we stopped to ogle and photograph him. Looking past him, we could see that it was a good idea that we gave up on Kingston Canyon – the upper half of the Toiyabes were buried in heavy snow clouds.

Probably due to the need of an after lunch siesta, I was getting rather crabby as we neared Toquima Cave. I wanted to videotape and photograph the cave, which I thought might be near the road, but I couldn't locate it at first. I then spotted it and attempted multiple times to videotape the cave from the truck, but Graham was on his soapbox via the FRS airwaves about something and kept interrupting my endeavors. That wasn't helping my mood one bit. My notes:

Toquima Cave 280.3. Cave up in granite boulders on hillside, large Cyclone Fence gates. Photographed and videotaped from road. Graham on soapbox via radio while I'm trying to videotape scene. I'm tired, irritable. Having to take multiple scenes because of Graham constantly keying radio to make perturbed comments irk me.

Verbally, I had a few more choice words to say, but fortunately they were confined to my cab and never hit Graham's ears.

Dropping to the Monitor Valley floor east of Pete's Summit, I decided it was time to stop, stretch and pour some hot coffee from my bit thermos bottle. It was a gorgeous scene east and north – big puffy cumulus clouds set against a deep blue sky – very soothing to the nerves. Graham and I enjoyed that as we both shared the remainder of the coffee in the thermos, and it calmed our respective nerves.

Finishing our coffee break, we turned south at a point 286.8 miles on the odometer and coursed our way along the Monitor Valley floor.



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The view westward over Austin as we climbed Austin Summit.



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US50, otherwise known as the "Loneliest Road in America," extends to the far distance across the Big Smoky Valley. But Graham and I elected to turn here onto NV376, then cross Big Smoky via a dirt road to Pete's Summit.



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In less than a half mile after turning onto NV376, we turned east again on this signed road indicating our intended route.



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The weather certainly wasn't conducive to our original plan to visit Kingston Summit in the Toiyabe's. View of the range from the middle of Big Smoky Valley.



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A lone wild burro inspects Graham and I as we ogle and photograph him.



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Toquima Cave as seen from our byway.



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Dropping eastward down from Pete's Summit. This view is due south along the spine of the Toquimas.



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Graham and I pause for coffee and views in Monitor Valley.

At a point 3.5 miles on our southward journey through Monitor Valley, we hit an unmarked wye in the road – which way do we go? Graham was baffled, but I had my Delorme Nevada Atlas with me and quickly ascertained that we needed to take the right leg of the wye. The left leg would take us to Potts Ranch.

Dinah's Punchbowl intrigued me and I've seen reference to it in past reading. My mind was contemplating a nice relaxing soak in a hot

spring surrounded by meadowlands and wide open spaces in such a scenic wonderland. However, I was completely taken aback at what was found.

Turning off the main road 8.6 miles south of our Monitor Valley entry point, we turned east for Dinah's Punchbowl. The punchbowl itself lay another 1.3 miles in the distance, and looked to be either backed or hidden by a mound that rose about 150 feet or so above the valley floor. One road climbed directly up the slope and another circled around to the north. Not knowing what to expect or find, Graham decided to head directly to the top of the mound while I scouted around its backside via the northern route.

As I circled around the northern side of the mound, Graham excitedly yelled out over the radio not to come up fast. My northern leg began to ascend the mound on its northern side. Simultaneous with achieving the summit, I slammed on my brakes! A few yards of me was a 50-foot drop into a cauldron of steaming water!

Dinah's Punchbowl is simply a stunning piece of geologic landscape. The 150-foot high mound of white ground is punctuated at its summit with a volcano-like hole, in which deep down is a pool of water with no visibly discernible bottom. One side of the hole is partially caved, which affords a sliver of "beach," which was green with grass and other plants. No visible means of entrance is afforded, yet we could plainly see several names scratched into the surface of the hole's wall near water level. Graham and I scratched our heads and surmised that some brave souls tied ropes or rope ladders to their vehicles and lowered themselves down into the hole. Graham and I also mused that if this land feature was found in California, it would likely be fenced off to prevent liability by some inattentive individual who either drove into the hole or fell into it.



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The view as we traveled southward through Monitor Valley.



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Which way do we go? At the unmarked wye in the road near Potts Ranch.



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Continuing southward through Monitor Valley, the view southeast into the Table Mountain area of the Monitor Range.



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Approaching Dinah's Punchbowl.



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Be careful when approaching the summit of Dinah's Punchbowl!



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Graham photographing the "volcano vent" of Dinah's Punchbowl. It's nearly impossible to photograph it to satisfaction without resorting to a good wide angle or fisheye lens.



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My truck parked on the rim of the hole gives scale Dinah's Punchbowl - and gives shivers when pondering "what if" I wasn't paying attention when I drove to the top of the mound or Graham didn't warn me from coming up too fast ...



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Dinah's Punchbowl, photo taken by Graham C. With his Minolta Dimage A1 digital SLR camera and wider angle lens, he was better able to capture much of the punchbowl aperture.



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Another shot of Dinah's Punchbowl by Graham C. with his Minolta digital SLR camera.

Graham and I spent about a half hour at Dinah's, then resumed our journey southward. We still had not settled yet on a goal for our overnight stay. Both of us vacillated between which inviting canyon in the Toquima Range or the Monitor Range looked like it might

provide some adventure, scenery and accommodations as we studied the topography and the map as we traveled south.

A large playa called Dry Lake on the map was anything but dry – a blue body of water stretched for more than four miles long and was likely close to a mile wide. We considered camping along its shores, but it was far too open to the elements for our tastes. So we continued along. On the road and over the radio I suggested Barley Creek, which flows from Table Mountain in the Monitor Range; as I had camped there more than two decades ago and remembered the canyon was very scenic. But looking east, the Monitors looked less inviting to Graham, as to him they appeared dry and lifeless. The Toquima's eastern face was far more inviting and scenic with their abundant snow fields left over from winter.

Then we found Pine Creek, flowing off the Toquima Range, on the map and so decided to go have a looksee. We found the road to Pine Creek about 18.25 miles south of the turnoff to Dinah's Punchbowl.

Driving up the road into the canyon of Pine Creek, we found that the abundant snow allowed for abundant runoff – the road and creek were often one. For two and a half miles, the road climbs the gentle alluvial slope to the base of the Toquima Range, reaching the campground as it reaches the mouth of the canyon. As the road climbs, open sagebrush begins to be dotted by junipers then piñons. Pine Creek Campground is found at the end of the road, it forming a loop with designated spots along the course of it. The creek flows down the center of the loop and afforded shady spots dense with willows and aspens. Vault toilets, concrete tables and barbecues are found at most spots. As of our visit, there was no fee to use the campground, which was administered by the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest.

Graham and I found Pine Creek fairly full, but to our liking, so we selected a site at the beginning of the loop. I shut down my Tacoma at 4:00 PM with 321.1 miles on the odometer, which meant that Graham and I had covered 131.7 miles this day since leaving Grantsville. We found our neighbors to be nearly invisible due to the dense brush, the noise of the creek drowned out any noise that they – or we ourselves – may have been making; thus to our senses it seemed we had the place to ourselves.

Graham and I shared the large camp spot, parking our respective Tacomas at each side about 50 feet apart. The nose of my truck was only a few feet from the banks of Pine Creek.

The sun set early, due to the location of the campground at the base of the high Toquima Range. The 11,814 foot and 11,686 foot middle and north summits of Mount Jefferson was directly to our west. Not as cold as the afternoon and evening before, it was still chilly enough that Graham and I donned our coats as soon as the sun set. Both of us were more in a mood to eat, so we set about making our dinners. I even decided to have a can of beer. While eating my supper of canned chicken, shared with Graham's bowls of chips and salsa, my camera and laptop computer sat on my tailgate, downloading the 230 images taken this day.

Though the sun was down at our camp spot, the sun was still shining brightly and beautifully upon the floor of Monitor Valley and upon the face of the Monitor Range to our east. Graham and I took a short walk onto a level and open bench south of our spot and enjoyed the vistas of warm colors upon the landscape and intense cloud studies in the sky.

After returning to our campsite, we decided to enjoy a campfire. Graham and I sat by the fire and talked until 9:00 PM, then we turned into our respective abodes in the beds of our Tacomas.

Last night I had tossed and turned, primarily since I had forgotten to bring a pillow. This night I decided to improvise and used my duffel bag as a pillow, and immediately fall into a deep sleep.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Dry Lake, looking not so dry.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Graham's dust ahead as we progress southbound through Monitor Valley.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
The road to Pine Creek Campground.



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Due to excessive spring runoff, the road to Pine Creek was often a channel of Pine Creek. Here Graham fords the rushing stream.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Pine Creek looking northward up Monitor Valley.



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Graham and I share a campsite at Pine Creek Campground.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Looking up Pine Creek Canyon to one of the multiple summits of Mt. Jefferson. Graham C. photo.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
My Tacoma set up for sleeping.



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A warm and cozy campfire and a cold can of beer was a pleasant nightcap to end our day.

This completes Day 2: May 28, 2006. Please go to [Day 3: May 29, 2006](#).

