

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

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Trip 2006-Part 3: An Arc of Jewels Over the Head of Tonopah

Trip 2006: Day 3, May 29, 2006



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Map of our travels the 3rd day.

Ah! A good night's sleep at last!

I was so cozy and warm that I didn't want to leave the warmth of my "Hotel Tacoma" bed, even though the air mattress had deflated by about 65% – the poppet cover over the air fill valve had worked its way out overnight, allowing the mattress to leak down slowly. Though still suspending much of my body, my thighs and shoulders were touching the hard rubber floormat of the Tacoma's bed for a portion of the night.

Exiting my sleeping bag cocoon, I noted that the morning wasn't near as chilly as the previous one. The sun shone brightly in a cloudless sky. There was more life sounds here at Pine Creek as opposed to that at Grantsville the previous morning – the rushing creek, a multitude of birds calling and singing, an occasional human voice of one of the other campers broke through the noise of the creek.

Graham and Toby were up shortly after myself, all of us quite hungry this fine, sunny morning. Graham and I combined our eggs and with his camp toaster, we cooked up and wolfed down four eggs each on sheepherder bread toast; followed by second and third helpings of sheepherder toast and jam. All washed down with copious cups of hot coffee.

By 9:35 AM we had our respective camps packed up and ready to roll. Before leaving I had used the Pine Creek Campground bathroom and found it very clean and well stocked – a pleasure over having to use my dreaded “Hassock,” which is basically a small bucket with a toilet seat attachment.

Our immediate destination was Belmont. Graham and I rolled down the road/creek back to the main north-south road through Monitor Valley and turned southward. Along the way I did some movie directing – I had Graham stop while I went up the road a mile or two, then radioed him to come ahead at speed, while I videotaped and photographed him while standing atop my open tailgate. Just south of the Pine Creek Ranch, Graham noticed a memorial to a 19-year old girl who died here in 1997.



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Ol' sleepy head too comfy to get out of his warm cocoon and greet the day.



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Is Graham up yet? Nope. Snooze alarm time ... Nah! I need coffee ...



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Graham and Toby getting up to greet the day.



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Toby in a "barricade situation." While Grahama and I were eating, for some reason Toby suddenly hopped into the back of the truck and pulled Graham's pillows and sleeping bag around him and stayed put.



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Driving back down into Monitor Valley from Pine Creek Campground.



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The Toquima Range from Monitor Valley near the Pine Creek Ranch.



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Graham just coming into view as we swing onto the north-south road through Monitor Valley.



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The Pine Creek Ranch is dwarfed by the summits of Mount Jefferson in the Toquima Range.



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Graham sailing along the smooth roads that prevail in Nevada's outback.



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O! 'sleepy head too comfy to get out of his warm cocoon and greet the day.



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Is Graham up yet? Nope. Snooze alarm time ... Nah! I need coffee ...



[Click to Enlarge](#)

Graham and Toby getting up to greet the day.



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Me and my 2002 Toyota Tacoma TRD 4WD.



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Graham C. stands beside his trusty 2000 Toyota Tacoma TRD 4WD.

At a point 22.0 miles after leaving our Pine Creek campsite, we hit the ruins of East Belmont. This site is dominated by the huge ruin of the Highbridge Mill; as well as the large smokestack of another mill nearby. I was surprised to find two or three newer homes built among the ruins of East Belmont. Though I was a bit put off by this, I did find one hilltop cabin to be particularly appealing as it had a tremendous view of the Monitor Valley and range.

Graham and I spent about an hour poking about and photographing the ruins of the Highbridge Mill, then we decided to make our way up a trail that climbed the face of 7,850 foot Cemetery Hill to the west. Midway up we hit a level bench, upon which we dropped our tailgates and enjoyed a light snack with a incredible view. Looking about a few yards away in a draw, I found the remains of four stone cabins, each with an intricate stonework fireplace. Driving to the top of Cemetery Hill, we found a couple more stone ruins and impressive views. Several individual cactus' were blooming.

Driving back down to the Highbridge Mill, Graham noticed something in the trail – a unique horseshoe. We continued down to the smokestack. A newer modular home sits at the bottom. This stack was unique in that upon closer inspection you will find countless pockmarks in the brick work. During World War 2, pilots from then nearby Tonopah Air Base used this stack as a target for their machine guns mounted in their planes.



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The imposing Highbridge Mill ruins dominate the East Belmont townsite.



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A view out over Monitor Valley from the Highbridge Mill ruin.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

Highbridge Mill.



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Highbridge Mill.



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View from partway up Cemetery Hill, looking northeast over the East Belmont townsite.



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Graham C. and I enjoy a light lunch above the Highbridge Mill and Monitor Valley from our perch midway up Cemetery Hill.



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One of four stone cabins in a gulch on Cemetery Hill.



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another stone cabin on Cemetery Hill.



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A detailed look at the interior of one of the stone cabins of Cemetery Hill.



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View northeast over Monitor Valley from Cemetery Hill.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

View north by northwest from the summit of Cemetery Hill.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

A stone ruin on the summit of Cemetery Hill.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

The imposing Highbridge Mill ruins dominate the East Belmont townsite.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

A view out over Monitor Valley from the Highbridge Mill ruin.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

Highbridge Mill.



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Blooming cactus on the summit of Cemetery Hill.



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View south into the southern end of Monitor Valley from the summit of Cemetery Hill.



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East Belmont and the stack of another millsite. This stack was used for target practice in WW2 by aircraft flying out of the Tonopah Air Base.



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A new home amid ruins of old ones at East Belmont. I envy the owner of this house - I'd love to have the view his home affords!



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East Belmont.



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East Belmont.

After spending a couple hours in East Belmont and vicinity, Graham and I then head over the low saddle and into Belmont, located at the head of Ralston Valley.

Instead of a lengthy historical narrative of Belmont here, briefly noted that Belmont started life in 1865 and quickly grew in size and stature. It grabbed the seat of Nye County government early and kept it until that upstart Tonopah – sixty miles to the southwest – took it away in 1905. Belmont has never been completely ghosted and a handful of people still live in this idyllic nook nestled at the head of the valley.

Graham and I poked about the ruins and picturesque occupied structures that is Belmont. Since my last visit to the town in the early 1980s, the prominent photographic wooden structure of the Cosmopolitan Saloon had collapsed into a pile of rotting lumber enclosed by its stone walls. The main business block of Belmont is a collection of stone and brick walls. The former Nye County courthouse has been restored some years back and still stands conspicuously on Belmont's west side.

I noticed that Dirty Dick's Saloon, which was a popular attraction upon my 1980s visit to town, was now for sale and had just closed down the day previous to our visit. Indian Maggie's Saloon, located within a block of wooden buildings that appeared to make up a bed & breakfast type establishment, was open and Graham, Toby and I popped our heads in for a beer. I paid for a Miller Genuine Draft for Graham and myself and paid \$5.⁰⁰ – a reasonable price given Belmont's relative isolation.

For those with a desire to learn details of the history of Belmont and East Belmont, Alan Patera's fine book, [WESTERN PLACES-BELMONT, NEVADA](#) is a detailed narrative of the town's history.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Belmont.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Belmont. The former Nye County courthouse
dominates the scene at the left center.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Downtown business district, Belmont.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Business district, Belmont.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
The ruin of the Cosmopolitan Saloon, which collapsed
about fifteen years ago.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Dirty Dick's Saloon, Belmont. The business was for
sale when Graham and I visited.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Business district, Belmont.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Belmont.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Nye County courthouse, Belmont.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Nye County Courthouse, Belmont.



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Belmont.



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Belmont.



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Belmont.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Belmont. The former Nye County courthouse dominates the scene at the left center.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Downtown business district, Belmont.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Looking over Belmont southward into the Ralston Valley.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Belmont.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Belmont.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Belmont, view east.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
This old Chevrolet pickup reposes at Belmont.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
A cold one at Indian Maggie's Saloon, Belmont.

While in Indian Maggie's Saloon, Graham and I discussed our itinerary for the few hours that was left of our day. We needed to get home, but wanted to eat supper at some quaint location before making a beeline for Big Pine. Graham struck up a conversation with a woman at the bar, who lived in nearby Manhattan. She told Graham that the Full Moon Café in Big Smoky Valley was a good place to eat. From the description that Graham gave me, I was thinking it was located in Hadley's, the community which basically replaced Round Mountain – now nearly buried within the monstrous tailings piles of the big gold mine there. So Graham and I decided to make our aim at Hadley's, by shooting our Tacomas over the Toquima Range via Manhattan.

Graham and I left Belmont at 5:00 PM sharp. We headed south on the paved road into Ralston Valley, then after about eight miles turned west up the dirt road to Manhattan. Crossing the summit of the Toquima Range, we found ourselves in Manhattan.

Manhattan was basically an early 20th century camp, although initial discoveries were made in 1866. The area was ignored until the boom

cycle brought about by Tonopah/Goldfield beget Manhattan and Round Mountain in the Toquima Range and Big Smoky Valley, when those who couldn't make it big at Tonopah and Goldfield began to widen out in their search for precious metals. By 1906 Manhattan was a full fledged metropolis of 4,000 eager souls. The 1906 earthquake and subsequent Panic of 1907 caused Manhattan (as well as all regional camps) to wither a bit, but Manhattan rebounded and remained an active mining town until World War 2. Afterward, Manhattan remained as a small community, which still operates a post office and has a steady population living in old and new homes scattered along its two mile main street located in a descending canyon among a thick piñon pine forest.



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Following Graham south out of Belmont into the Ralston Valley.



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View of the southernmost portion of the Monitor Range from Ralston Valley south of Belmont.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

Turning onto the road west to Manhattan.



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Ralston Valley, view east.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

Manhattan.



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Manhattan.



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Manhattan.



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Manhattan.

Graham and I drove slowly through Manhattan, but picked up the pace as we exited the canyon and out into Big Smoky Valley. We then sped north along NV376 to the turnoff to Hadley's, it located nearly three miles west of the highway. Graham and I drove around Hadley but found no businesses except for a small market with gas pumps. Driving by the school, we asked a couple of kids where the Full Moon Café was and found out my hunch that it was located at Carver's farther north. Graham and I decided that due to the late hour we best not go out of our way another ten miles further north to Carver's, but best head south to Tonopah. While at the school, Graham and I aired up our tires – which had been aired down since we stopped at Ione on our first day.

To facilitate the speed of airing up, Graham shared his small scuba tank that he keeps for airing up his tires. My 12v compressor takes about a half hour to air up my tires from my usual 18-20psi up to my road pressure of 35psi. With Graham's 3,000psi scuba tank, it took only seconds per tire to bring it back up to road pressure.

Graham and I then head south to Tonopah, located 55 miles from Hadley's. Our bellies were growling and with each rumble of our stomach our speed increased over the wide open highway. The artificially low speed limits imposed from a point about three miles west of Tonopah on US6 is excruciating when you're hungry.

At a point 432.4 miles after beginning our trip, we pulled into the Tonopah Station casino to have dinner. The time was 6:06 PM. Graham and I ordered the chicken fried steak dinner, which was on special that night. The food quality was of typical casino fare, but the waitress ran her butt off as the restaurant was very busy. I leave her an ample tip in appreciation.



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Westbound on NV377 from Manhattan, in the Big Smoky Valley at the junction of NV376. View west at the southernmost peaks of the Toiyabe Range.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

The huge tailings piles of the Round Valley gold mining operation dominate eastern Big Smoky Valley and have all but buried the old town of Round Mountain. The view also takes in the flat-topped summits of Mount Jefferson, the opposite side of which Graham and I spent the night before at Pine Creek.



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The community of Hadley's at the base of the Toiyabe Range.



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Southbound on NV376 enroute to Tonopah.



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Southbound NV376.



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NV376 with its junction with US6. Tonopah is five miles away to the right.



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Entering Tonopah at the junction of US6 and US95.



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The Tonopah Station Casino, where Graham and I dined.

Graham and I left Tonopah Station at 7:00 PM. I pulled in a short distance down the street at the Shell gas station, Graham went on down to Giggle Springs. I paid \$3.⁵⁰ a gallon at the time.

Given the late hour, our Tacomas sped west at 75 miles per hour into the setting sun – based upon my speedometer. Graham's speedometer was reading about three miles per hour slower than mine, his odometer readings toward the end of our trip was reading substantially higher mileage, by the end of the trip his trip odometer read about 20 miles more than mine.

Entering California, we dialed back our speeds to a legal 65mph for the remainder of the way to our respective homes in Big Pine. As Graham pulled off on his street a mile north of town, I bade him goodnight via FRS. At 9:20 PM I pulled into my driveway. 563.2 miles and three fun filled days had rolled under my tires and I was satisfied – and ready for a comfortable bed with an electric blanket!



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The main street, Tonopah.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

Graham and Tonopah in my rearview mirror.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

Cruise set at 75mph.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

Into the sunset on US6. The White Mountains and Nevada's highest peak - Boundary Peak - dominate the background. Home is on the other side.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

US6 westbound.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

Boundary Peak in the White Mountains.



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Junction of US6 and NV360, where Graham and I turned off to begin our trip two days previously. As we passed by this junction, I radioed Graham inquiring if he wanted to start it all over again, a hearty "affirmative" was his response. Too bad I had to go to work the next morning ...



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Graham passing me and another car coming down the west side of Montgomery Pass, still inside Nevada.



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The twin peaks of Mount Montgomery and Boundary Peak from near the California-Nevada border. Mount Montgomery is barely inside California.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
The main street, Tonopah.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Graham and Tonopah in my rearview mirror.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Cruise set at 75mph.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Graham is ahead of me as we speed through Bishop in the night.



[Click to Enlarge](#)
Saying goodnight to Graham as he pulls off on his street to his home.

For further reading/research:

Central Nevada in Winter	My satirical essay based upon an early 1980s trip into Nye County's interior ghost towns of Ione, Berlin, Union and Grantsville in the middle of a heavy winter.
Belmont Photos	Historian Shawn Hall's website. Includes historical photos.
Belmont History	Historian Shawn Hall's website. Includes historical photos.
Berlin Photos	Historian Shawn Hall's website. Includes historical photos.
Grantsville Photos	Historian Shawn Hall's website. Includes historical photos.
Ione Photos	Historian Shawn Hall's website. Includes historical photos.
Belmont Book	Alan Patera's website, where you can purchase WESTERN PLACES-BELMONT, NEVADA.