

REGIONAL POINTS OF INTEREST

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Mount Whitney (Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park)

Mount Whitney is the tallest peak in the continental United States at 14,494 feet tall. The most direct hiking route to the peak is 10.7 miles one way from Whitney Portal, 13 miles west of the town of Lone Pine in the Eastern Sierra. Mt. Whitney is the most frequently climbed peak in the Sierra Nevada, compelling the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service to implement a permit system to minimize the impact of both day-hikers and overnight backpackers.

For more information, contact the Whitney Portal Ranger Station at: (760) 876-6200
or online at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/mwrs/r5/inyo/recreation.html>

Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest



High atop the dry mountains of the Great Basin are the oldest known living organisms on earth, the bristlecone pines (*Pinus longaeva*). Found in six western states, these ancient trees can be seen in the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest, a 58,000-acre reserve in the White Mountains of eastern California's Inyo National Forest.

The average age of these trees is 1,000 years old, but they often live more than 2,000 years. The oldest known living tree in the world, "Methuselah," resides in the Bristlecone Pine Forest and is more than 4,700 years old.

Bristlecones have developed several strategies for survival and have the ability to live in very harsh climates where no other trees can survive, allowing them to flourish for thousands of years in a competition-free environment. Their needles can live 20 to 30 years, providing ample photosynthetic energy even during years of severe stress.

Bristlecones are not susceptible to invasions from bacteria, fungus, or insects due to their dense, highly resinous wood, and even the oldest trees can still produce cones with viable seeds. They can also remain standing for hundreds of years after death, falling only after supporting roots have been decayed or weakened by erosion. The older bristlecones live in exposed areas with considerable space between each tree, an



open stand structure that prevents fire from spreading throughout the entire forest.

These amazing trees will continue to live well into the future if their environment is protected and they are given the respect they deserve.

For more information, contact the White Mountain Visitor Center at: (760) 873-2500 or online at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inoyo/wmrs/r5/inoyo/recreation.html>

Devils Postpile National Monument



Once protected as part of Yosemite National Park, Devils Postpile National Monument was established in 1911 by presidential proclamation. The Monument protects and preserves the Devils Postpile formation and Rainbow Falls, and is a popular portal to the scenic Ansel Adams Wilderness. The Devils Postpile formation is a rarity in the geologic world, ranking as one of the world's finest examples of columnar basalt from an ancient lava flow. The columns tower 60-feet high and display unusual symmetry. Downstream along the San Joaquin River, the 101-foot Rainbow Falls provides a spectacular performance on sunny days, with colorful rainbows highlighting its mist.

Devils Postpile National Monument is located in the Red's Meadow/San Joaquin River Valley west of Mammoth Mountain. Due to the popularity of the area and limited parking, a mandatory shuttle bus (the Red's Meadow Shuttle) runs during summer months for a minor fee.

For more information about Devils Postpile National Monument, contact the Park Service at: (760) 934-2289 or online at: <http://www.nps.gov/depo/>

For more information about the Reds Meadow Shuttle, contact the Mammoth Lakes Ranger Station at: (760) 924-5500 or online at: www.fs.fed.us/r5/inoyo

The Lost Cement Mine

Like many historic ghost mines of yesterday, the Lost Cement Mine has a cloudy history with few concrete facts. Local legend describes an incredible mine where lumps of pure gold were "cemented" together in a rich gold vein, hence the name. Two German brothers claimed they discovered this strike in 1857 while crossing the Sierra Nevada near the headwaters of the Owens River. They supposedly found so much gold that they doubted it was real. Consequently, only one brother took a sample and drew a map to its location. He later confirmed that it was gold, but became terminally ill before he could return to the mine. He paid his physician, Dr. Randall, with the gold and map to its location.

Dr. Randall shared this knowledge with a few friends and together went searching for the mine. Whether or not the gold vein was ever found remains a mystery and point of local debate. Today, the search for the mine continues in hopes of "striking it rich." A historic plaque recounting this debatable history is located at the rest stop on Highway 395, just north of the Mammoth Lakes Scenic Loop junction. For more information, read *The Lost Cement Mine* by J. Wright.

Yosemite National Park

Yosemite National Park, established by Congress in 1890, is one of the "Seven Wonders of the World," harboring a grand collection of waterfalls, meadows, and forests that include groves of giant sequoias. Highlights of the park include Yosemite Valley, the Mariposa Grove, Glacier Point (summer-fall), Tuolumne Meadows (summer-fall), and Hetch Hetchy. The



eastern entrance to the park is located at Tioga Pass, 12 miles west of the town of Lee Vining.

For more information, contact Yosemite National Park at: (209) 372-0200 or online at: <http://www.nps.gov/yose>

Mono Lake

Mono Lake is one of the oldest continuously existing lakes in North America, dating back at least 760,000 years to the Long Valley eruption. The lake survives from the ice ages of the Pleistocene Era (two million to 10,000 years before present) when water levels were approximately 720 feet higher (7,140 feet above sea level) than 1941 levels (prior to water diversion by Los Angeles). As the Pleistocene era ended, lake levels fell to a new, stable elevation that fluctuated between 6,400 and 6,425 feet above sea level. The two islands in Mono Lake, Negit and Paoha, were formed by volcanic eruptions and are part of the Inyo-Mono volcanic chain. Paoha Island was formed approximately 250 years ago.



Mono Lake is naturally salty because it is a “terminal lake” within a closed hydrologic basin, meaning water flows in but not out. Minute traces of alkali minerals and salts enter the lake through freshwater streams and remain behind as water evaporates from the lake’s surface, concentrating the salts and minerals over thousands of years, with salinity typically 2 to 3 times higher than the ocean. Because of the high salt concentration, Mono Lake can only support a very simple food chain consisting of brine shrimp and alkali flies, once an important food source for the Paiutes and still critical to thousands of nesting and migratory birds. Mono Lake hosts nearly 100 species of birds, including the second largest colony of California Gulls in the United States. The lake is a vital stop for migrant birds along the Pacific Flyway, including eared grebes, Wilson’s phalaropes, and red-necked phalaropes.

When fresh water, which contains traces of calcium, enters the carbonate-rich lake waters through underground springs, calcium carbonate (or limestone) precipitates out. Over time, the limestone builds up around mouths of the underground springs, forming “tufa towers.” Tufa towers are currently visible because recent water diversions by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) lowered the lake level.

In 1941, the LADWP completed an aqueduct that diverted water from four of the six streams that feed Mono Lake, causing the lake to shrink from an elevation of 6,417 feet (86 square miles) to 6,372 feet (57 square miles). The 33% decrease in volume caused an extreme increase in salinity, endangering the delicate ecological balance of the lake. Concerned citizens organized the Mono Lake Committee to fight for the ecological survival of Mono Lake, and in 1994, the California State Water Resources Control Board passed a bill limiting the amount of water diverted from Mono Lake’s tributaries. The rising lake level is restoring Mono Lake’s ecosystem, but the struggle to protect this ancient lake continues as Los Angeles’ need for water continues to grow.



Many sources are available for additional information about this unique, world-famous lake. For a detailed account of the battle with LADWP over Mono Lake and Long Valley water, read *Cadillac Desert* by Marc Reisner. For additional information about the Mono Lake basin, see *Geology of the Mono Basin* by Timothy Tierney.

For more information, including educational events and interpretive tours, contact the Mono Lake Committee at: (760) 647-6595 or online at: <http://www.monolake.org>

Bodie State Historic Park

Nearby to Mono Lake, Bodie State Historic Park is the largest unrestored ghost town in the American west. The town was established by Waterman S. Bodey (William Bodey), who discovered gold in the hills north of Mono Lake in 1859. The find caused no excitement until 1877, however, when an accidental cave-in revealed a lucrative gold vein. The Standard Company erected a mill to mine the vein, triggering a gold rush that transformed Bodie into a boomtown of 10,000 people. Bodie yielded an estimated \$35 million (in historic dollars) in gold and silver between 1877 and 1888, and was infamous for gambling, drinking, shooting, and general lawlessness. The stock-market crash of 1881 ended Bodie's notorious days. Mines closed and the population plummeted to only four or five hundred by 1888. Miners fled the town, leaving behind goods and structures that have been well-preserved by the dry high desert air. The State of California purchased the town in 1962 and declared it a State Historic Park in 1964. The town is located seven miles south of Bridgeport, and 13 miles east of Highway 395 on Bodie Road.

For more information, contact California State Parks at: (760) 647-6445
or online at: http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=509



In partnership with the Inyo National Forest

