

HIDDEN Pioneer History — OF THE — OWENS VALLEY



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Travel to the late 1800s and experience hidden Owens Valley historic settlements and features that fueled the region's settlement by miners, merchants, farmers and others. Create an adventure to discover forgotten frontier locations that have decayed or vanished altogether. Most locations have little or no physical evidence of their past while a few preserve the Owens Valley frontier spirit for guests to enjoy.

The locations below arose from a lust for riches and opportunities benefitting some settlers but not all Owens Valley residents. Farmers, ranchers and merchants who followed prospectors to support them gained the most financially while many miners died penniless.

For more information, contact the Bishop Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Bureau at **760.873.8405** or **info@bishopvisitor.com**.

Owensville

In 1861, A. Van Fleet built a sod and stone dwelling along the Owens River, northwest of Bishop, to raise cattle to feed Owens Valley prospectors. By 1863, mineral discovery in the adjoining White Mountains lured prospectors who named the community Owensville. Subsequent property values and foodstuff prices skyrocketed from the town's rapid growth. Corner real estate lots sold at \$1,500; sacks of flour commanded \$20 each. Paltry mineral deposits shut down the town in 1871. Find the historic monument along U.S. Highway 6 before the Laws Historic Site entrance.

Laws Railroad Museum & Historic Site

The Carson–Colorado Railway built a 300-mile railroad line in 1883 to service the first mines along the valley's east side. It subsequently increased its rail line and expanded operations to transport freight and people throughout Nevada and Southern California. Laws became a pivotal railroad depot sustaining the Owens Valley economy for decades until 1960.



Relive history and take a ride on a 1920's Motor Car. Photo by Joe Pollini.

Laws is the only valley settlement preserved as a Wild West frontier village for history enthusiasts. Visit this 11 acre historic setting to experience 1880's antiquities including historic exhibits and architecture reflecting the valley's frontier culture. It's located off U.S. Highway 6, about five miles north of Bishop.

Tungsten City

The Tungsten City area, associated mines and mill sites flourished in the early 1900s when three prospectors discovered scheelite, a tungsten ore. Discovered in the Tungsten Hills about five miles outside Bishop,



Tungsten City Mine Bunkhouse. Photo Courtesy of Laws Railroad Museum & Historic Site.

tungsten contributed greatly to the World War I and II efforts. Tungsten's unique steel hardening properties became indispensable to armor tanks, battleships, and other war machines.

Dreams of easy wealth lured many residents to go out with pick and shovel to strike it rich. Tungsten City was built near the mill. Area mines flourished for a few decades until tungsten demand waned.

Cardinal Mine

Mining began in the 1880s producing small amounts of gold at Bishop Creek Canyon. Gaylord Wilshire, the namesake of Los Angeles' Wilshire Boulevard, purchased the mining claims in 1906 and proclaimed them as "The Greatest Gold Mine in the World". He built a village and hydropower plant to generate electricity for the mine and residents. The Cardinal Gold Mining Company purchased the property in 1933, renaming it and improving operations. The mine successfully operated until 1938 when gold seams ran out.

Visit the **Cardinal Village Resort Café** to get mine information. Ask about the nearby 1895 Meat House and discover how food was refrigerated without electricity. The resort rents authentic late 19th century cabins to visiting guests.



Cardinal Mill – 1935. Photo Courtesy of Laws Railroad Museum & Historic Site.

Zurich / Alvord

Zurich, originally constructed and named Alvord in 1884, was a railroad stop south of Laws along the Carson–



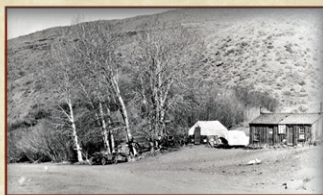
Zurich Railroad Stop – 1954. Photo Courtesy of Eastern California Museum.

Colorado Railroad. It served as a siding station outside Big Pine supporting a few railroad buildings including the railway agent's house. Local teamsters hauled freight and passengers between Big Pine and Alvord.

Its name changed because the snowy Sierra reminded the railway agent's wife of her home in Switzerland. A historic monument is located off Calif. Highway 168.

Deep Springs Valley Toll Road Station

In 1873, three entrepreneurs built a road east of Big Pine, where Calif. Highway 168 currently lies, to provide settlers access between California and Nevada. Travelers paid tolls to use the road, obtain water and rest in



Toll Road Station. Photo by Harry Mendenhall. Photo Courtesy of Eastern California Museum.

cool shade. Operating until 1921, tolls were \$1.00 for two horses while a rider and horse was \$0.50 each. It was the last private toll road in the California. Today, this spring fed oasis contains an information sign, a fresh water spring and water trough.

Fish Springs & Black Rock

Fish Springs and Black Rock are located south of Big Pine. Both communities began in 1864. Fish Springs adjoined the Poverty Hills, where several small gold mines operated. According to legend, a shopkeeper named the Poverty Hills after he went broke because prospectors couldn't pay their bills. Black Rock, further south, contained more isolated, scattered structural features.

By 1870, Fish Springs was the largest settlement between Bishop and Independence; it was small but thriving, consisting of miners, farmers, ranchers, merchants, teamsters, housewives and children. Farms grew grains, corn, beans, potatoes and vegetables. Both communities' sawmills supplied lumber for homes to nearby towns and mines. Fish Springs' commercial diversity stimulated Owens Valley's frontier economy and settlement. The towns began to fold in the 1920s as land ownership and the economy changed.



Cometti Mine Waterwheel. Photo Courtesy of Eastern California Museum.

Camp Independence

Skirmishes between Owens Valley Native American Paiutes and new settlers led to the construction of this garrison to support 200 U.S. cavalry troops who occupied the Oak Creek area on July 4, 1862. The camp was named after the Independence Day holiday. The camp's creation sealed the Paiute Natives' fate who had lived peacefully in the valley for millennia.



Camp Independence Ruins. Photo Courtesy of Eastern California Museum.

When the soldiers first arrived, they dug out shelter caves along the creek until they finished camp

construction that included military related facilities.

After hostilities ceased, the camp became a center of social and civic engagement. An earthquake in 1872 demolished many adobe buildings in the camp. The camp was abandoned years later. Several intact buildings were moved to nearby Independence.

A historic monument lies off U.S. Highway 395 north of Independence. Independence itself contains the Commander's House and Camp Hospital. Get more information at the **Eastern California Museum** on Grant Street.

San Carlos & Bend City

Miners settled San Carlos and Bend City along the Owens River east of Independence in 1862 and 1863, respectively. The camps sprung up when a Camp Independence soldier found a nugget in the nearby hills, igniting the rush to form these camps. Separated by three miles of distance, they fought for territorial, economic, and cultural dominance.

Several hundred residents lived in each community. Bend City built the first bridge across the river to gain commercial advantage over San Carlos, while San Carlos ferried people and horses across on rafts – pulling a rawhide rope. Bend City vied to become the county seat in 1864 but failed due to election irregularities. Residents readily obtained diverse goods and services from numerous merchants in these self-sustaining camps. Poor mineral availability led the towns to empty out by the 1870s.



1864 Owens Valley Map Depicting San Carlos and Bend City. Map Modified Courtesy of Ted Williams.

Independence

Charles Putnam settled Independence in 1861 when it was known as Little Pine. He opened a trading post for miners and others migrating to the valley. Independence, renamed after the nearby military camp, prospered in industries other than mining. Farming, ranching, tourism, and government services sustained its small town economy.

Today it serves as the county seat, reflecting Owens Valley history as a repository of antiquity, architecture, and monuments. Find the **Eastern California Museum**, the county's oldest, on Grant Street for additional information.

At the museum, grab the *Discover Historic Independence Walking Guide* and find numerous antiquities commemorating area history including the Camp Independence Commander's House, noted author Mary Austin's home, the Inyo County Courthouse, and more.

Owenyo

Quaker colonists settled an area southeast of Independence in 1900 they dubbed Owenyo. After the town failed to thrive, they sold it to the City of Los Angeles. The town's location next to the Carson–Colorado Railroad eventually made it a vibrant railroad depot. The depot was then renamed New Owenyo but later changed back to its original name.



Owenyo Train Station - 1947. Photo Courtesy of Eastern California Museum.

Owenyo was a transfer point where standard gauge rails from Los Angeles joined the Owens Valley's narrow gauge. The rail width incompatibility required freight, commercial goods, and mineral ore be transferred from one train to another.

Freight between the two railroad gauges was exchanged manually. Transferring heavy mine ore was facilitated by a raised trestle that narrow gauge cars rode onto. Ore was dropped by opening car dump doors to release its load into the standard gauge cars below.

Nevada gold strikes, the Los Angeles Aqueduct construction, and valley food exports boosted rail operations beginning in the early 1900s. Owenyo thrived on its diversity of industrial goods and services until 1960.

Swansea

Swansea was a transient boomtown adjoining Owens Lake about ten miles southeast of Lone Pine. Beginning in 1869, it smelted Cerro Gordo's silver ore and shipped the ingots across the lake to Cartago by steamship where teamsters then hauled it 200 miles south to Los

Angeles. The steamship, "Bessie Brady", saved three travel days around the lake by wagon.

The 1872 Lone Pine earthquake damaged Swansea's smelter and lifted the nearby shoreline, rendering the pier inaccessible to steamships. Operations then moved to Keeler, approximately one mile south.

In 1874, an intense cloudburst spawned a flash flood burying the town under mud, water, and rock ending its life. Look for the historic monument along Calif. Highway 136.

Keeler

The 1872 earthquake damage to Swansea required a new wharf in a community named Hawley to the south. In 1880, the Owens Lake Mining & Milling Company constructed a mill at Hawley to process incoming Cerro Gordo silver ore. Julius Keeler, a company agent, laid out the townsite and ultimately it was renamed after him.

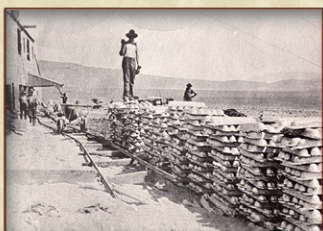
The "Bessie Brady" steamship ferried silver to Cartago, carrying 700 bars in

three hours. In 1882, a fire destroyed the ship. The Carson-Colorado Railroad completed its narrow gauge railway to Keeler in 1883 creating a new economic and transportation boom period as Cerro Gordo's silver mines were depleting.

Zinc and soda ash mining in the early 1900s breathed new life into the town until the 1950s. Over 7,000 residents lived in Keeler at its peak in the 1900s. One pioneer resident described Keeler's inhospitable and uninviting desert landscape as "... the land that God forgot". About fifty people currently live in the town.



Bessie Brady Steamship Painting by William McKeever.
Photo Courtesy of Eastern California Museum.



Cerro Gordo Bullion Ready for Transport to Los Angeles, 1890. Photo Courtesy of Eastern California Museum.