TONOPAH HISTORIC MINING PARK FOUNDATION PRESENTS

Summer 2026

TAILINGS

An Anthology of Central Nevada Excursions

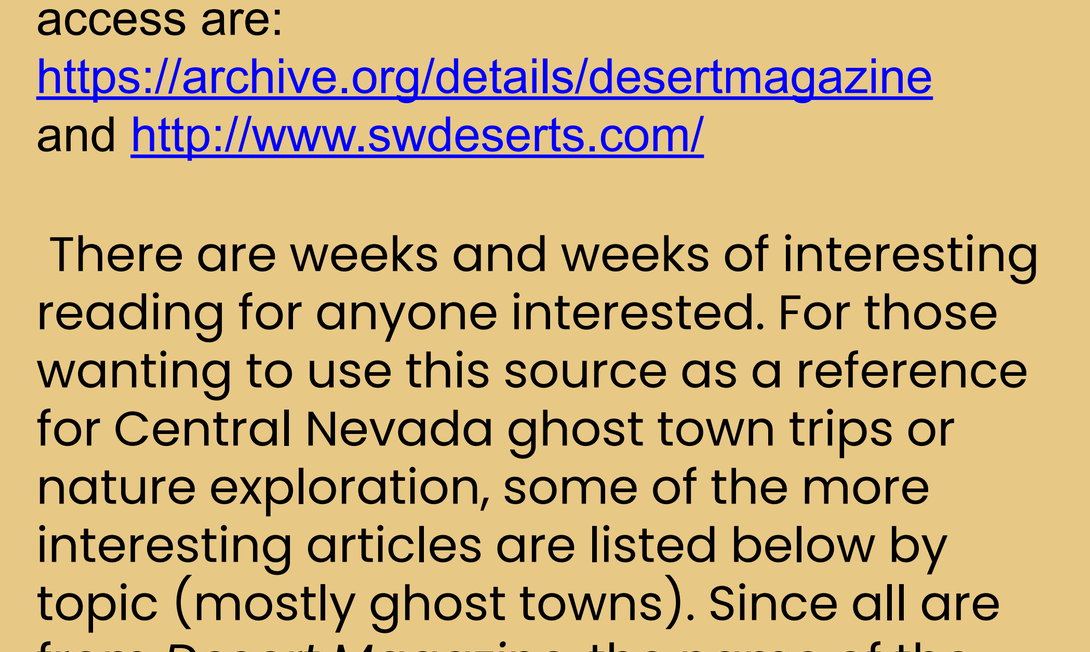
Desert Magazine as a Guide to Local Ghost Towns and Natural Attractions

By: Thomas J. Straka

One of the best things to come from the internet is online access to massive amounts of reading material. A very small portion of it is worth reading. Probably better than any guidebook to Central Nevada ghost towns and natural attractions is Desert Magazine, published in the very late 1930s to the early 1980s. The magazine is now public domain and readily available online. Nell Murbarger, in the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame, published widely in the magazine. Other authors who often wrote of Nevada were Harold O. Weight and Mary Frances Strong.

Combined, the articles on Nevada are more interesting that most ghost town books. Many readers, at least those with internet access, will appreciate that the access is free and truly convenient. Two of the best websites for free access are:
https://archive.org/details/desertmagazine
and http://www.swdeserts.com/

There are weeks and weeks of interesting reading for anyone interested. For those wanting to use this source as a reference for Central Nevada ghost town trips or nature exploration, some of the more interesting articles are listed below by topic (mostly ghost towns). Since all are from *Desert Magazine*, the name of the publication will not be listed in the references or photographs. An occasional annotation is included. Good reading!



Nevada prospector in the days when new gold strikes were being made every few months.

Tonopah and vicinity. Mary Frances Strong, “Nevada Ghosts,” 34:6 (June 1971), 26-29. Corke Lowe, “No Place Like Home: Particularly in Nevada during the Rush for Paydirt,” 24:11 (November 1961), 22-25. Don Miller, “Home on the Nevada Desert,” 43:8 (September 1980), 27-29.

Goldfield. Arthur Woodward, “High- Graders of Goldfield . . .,” 4:1 (November 1950), 11-14. A high-grader is a miner who would go off shift with rich ore concealed in his pockets. Great 40:2 (February 1977), 8-11.

TONOPAH TODAY. VIEW IS FROM LOTTIE NAY'S HOUSE ON BROUGHER HILL

24 / Desert Magazine / November, 1961

photographs of Goldfield. Howard Neal, "Goldfield, Nevada," 40:5 (May 1977), 34-35.

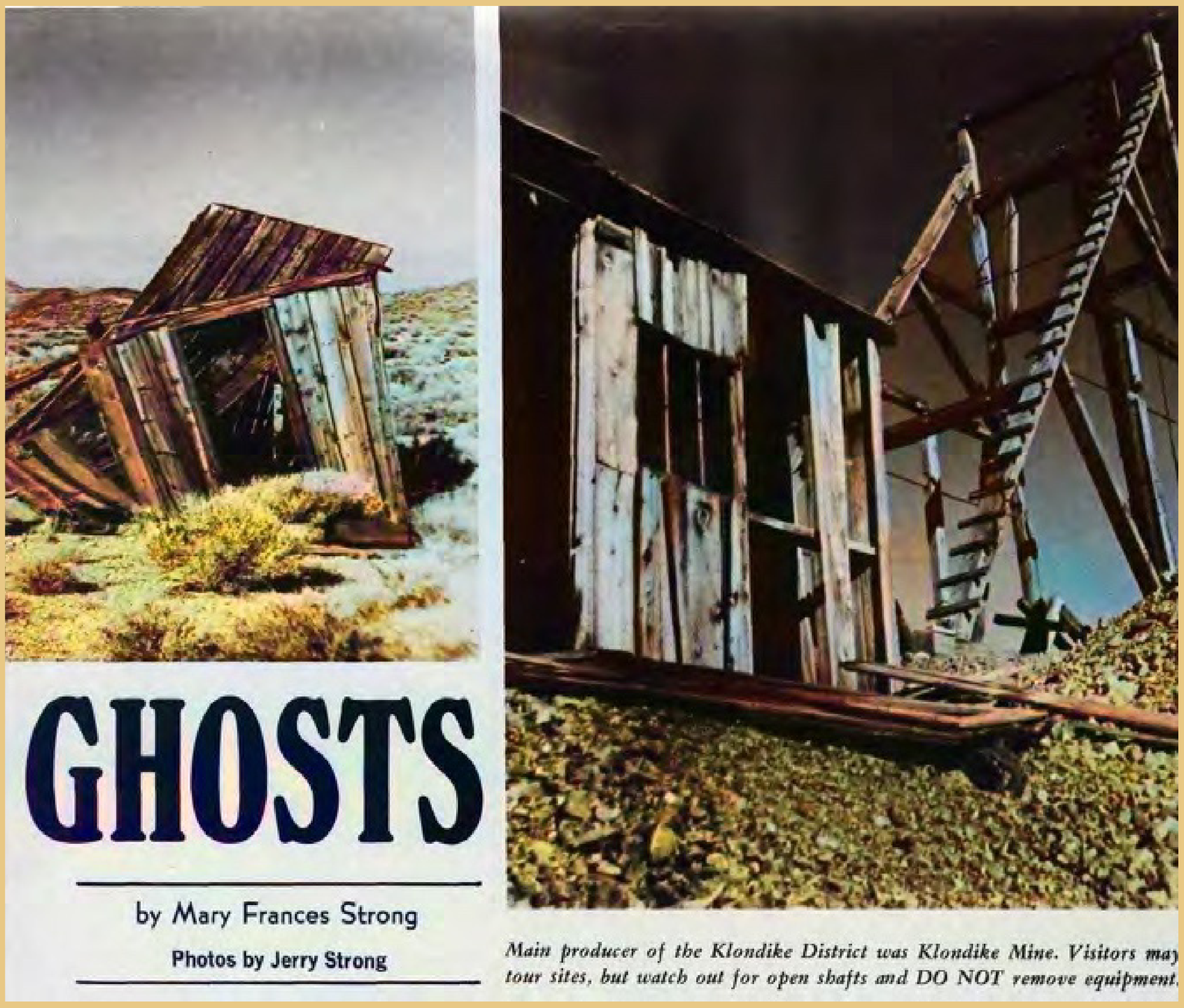
Belmont. Nell Murbarger, "Silver Strike at Belmont," 16:10 (October 1953), 11-15. One of the best articles I've read on Belmont, with great photographs. A second top notch article was by Betty Shannon, "Belmont Never Gave up the Ghost," 39:2 (February 1976), 12-15. Lambert Florin, "Racial Unrest at Belmont," 27:6 (June 1964), 8.

Gold Point, Gold Mountain (Stateline), and Oriental (Old Camp). Nell Murbarger, "Forgotten Ghost of Gold Mountain," 14:7 (May 1951), 8-12. Betty Shannon, "Nevada's Gold Mountain(s)," 40:9 (September 1977), 20-23

Silver Peak. Elizabeth Beebe, "Silver Peak, Nevada: Ghost Town with a Silver Lining," 33:1 (January 1970), 34-36.

Gilbert. Harold O. Weight, "Gem Hunt on a Ghost Town Trail," 14:7 (May 1951), 13-17.

Sodaville. Harold O. Weight, "Jasper at Old Sodaville," 19:1 (January 1956), 4-8. Mary Frances Strong, "Unexpected Sodaville,"



GHOSTS

by Mary Frances Strong

Photos by Jerry Strong

Main producer of the Klondike District was Klondike Mine. Visitors may tour sites, but watch out for open shafts and DO NOT remove equipment.

Lida and Palmetto. Nell Murbarger, "Pilgrimage into the Past," 19:5 (May 1956), 11-15.

Marietta. Nell Murbarger, "Ghost Town Prospector . . .," 20:3 (March 1957), 17-20. Mary Frances Strong, "Naughty Marietta," 35:3 (March 1972), 6-9.

Taylor. Nell Murbarger, "When the Brass Band Played at Taylor," 21:5 (May 1958), 5-8.

Crow Springs. Harold O. Weight, "Monte Cristo Gold: A Nevada Lost Mine Story," 24:7 (July 1961), 30-33. Mary Frances Strong, "Nevada's Crow Springs," 37:8 (August 1974), 20-23.

Berlin. Gene Segerblom, "Nevada's Oldest Graveyard, 41:1 (January 1978), 28-31. The graveyard involves Ichthyosaurs.

Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad. Robert and Ana Cook, “Retracing the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad,” 40:9 (September 1977), 24-27, 46. Donald W. Grantham, “Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad,” 47:1 (October 1983), 11-13.

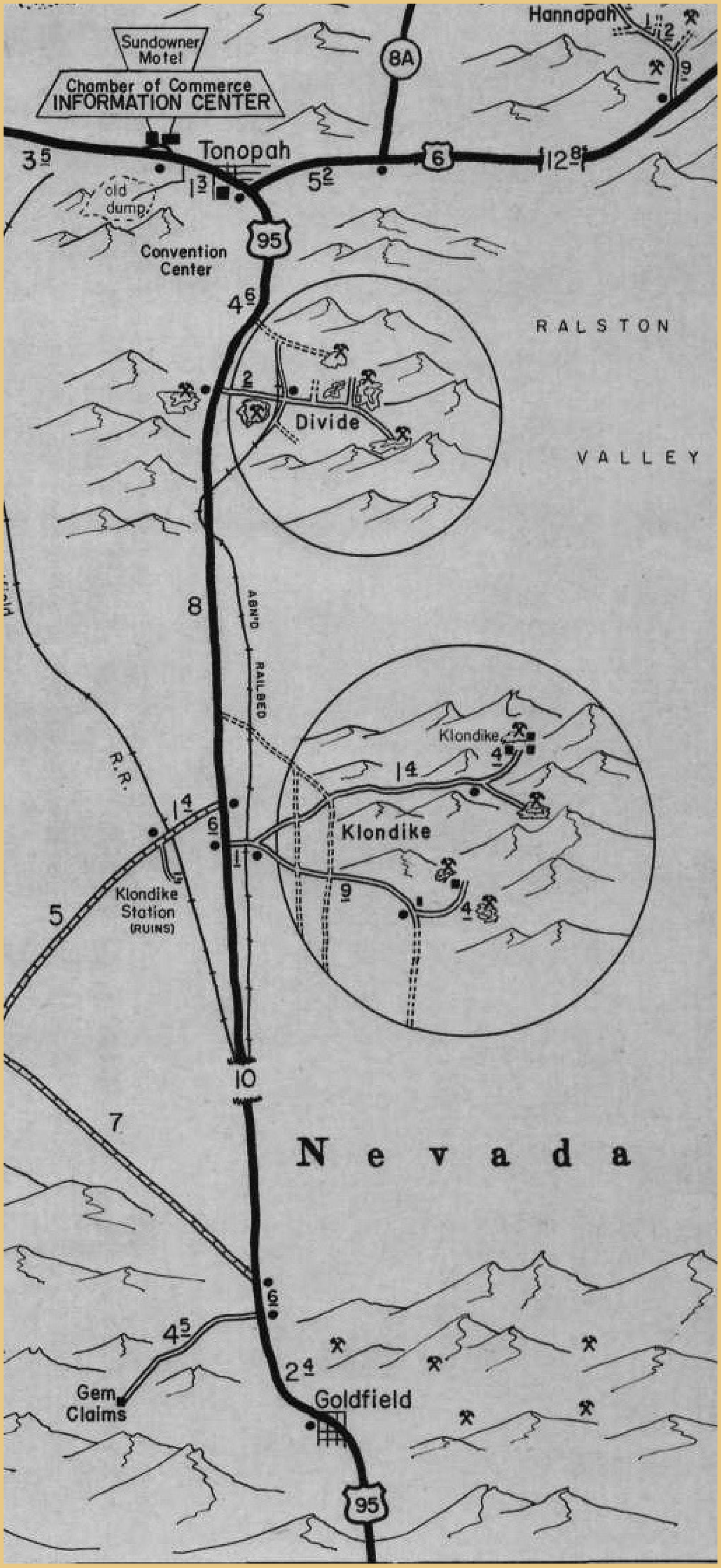
The Sump. Harold O. Weight, “We Explored an Old Nevada Lake Bed,” 15:12 (December 1952), 4-8. Mary Frances Strong, “The Sump,” 36:4 (April 1973), 28-31. The cover has a great photograph of The Sump.

Fish Lake Valley. Mary Frances Strong, “Valley of the Little Smokes,” 41:2 (February 1978), 44-47.

Stonewall Falls. Mary Frances Strong, “Nevada’s Stonewall Falls,” 37:4 (April 1974), 16-19.

Lunar Crater. Mary Frances Strong, "Nevada's Moon Country" 38:4 (April 1975), 8-11.

Lincoln County. Margaret Stovall, "Pioche: Lively Past, Traquil Present, Hopeful Future" 23:1 (January 1960) 24-26. Mary Frances Strong, "Pioche- No Ghost is She!" 40:5 (May 1977) 20-23 Nell Murbarger, "Golden Ghost of the Nevada Hills," 17:1 (January 1954) 20-24. The golden hills are Delamar. Roberta M. Starry, “Discover Panaca,” 35:11 (November 1972), 8- 10. Mary Frances Strong, “Nevada’s Gorge Country,” 37:10 (October 1974), 16-19. Mary Frances Strong, “Exploring Nevada’s Bristol Country,” 38:8 (August 1975), 20-23. Mary Frances Strong, “Delamar: The Golden Ghost,” 41:9 (September 1978), 8-11, 46.



Author: Tom Straka is a forestry professor emeritus at Clemson University in South Carolina..

Gold Mountain Cabin

By: Stanley Paher

Near the edge of Oriental Wash, a large 15 mile-long defile which empties into the north end of Death Valley, is the mining camp of Gold Mountain. Now a ghost town, Gold Mountain consists of about 24 stone ruins, the remnants of a gold mill, and a wooden cabin which is maintained and can offer shelter for visitors. It is generally known as the Gold Mountain cabin, and is similar in size and purpose as many other Death Valley area cabins.

Some mining in the modern Death Valley National Park area started at Salt Springs in 1851, and serious development took place on the west flank of the Panamint Range after 1860 at the Inyo Mines. Thereafter, prospecting in the Death Valley area increased, in part because of stories of lost mines. To the north there was the Lost Cement Mine and to the west the Lost Gunsight and the Lost Bluebucket. To the south was the Lost Pegleg. But the lost treasure story that really brought attention to prospecting in the area was the tale of the Lost Breyfogle Mine.

The lost mines of Death Valley and vicinity fall into two classifications: the Breyfogle and all the others. In 1863 Charles Breyfogle had a hotel in a small mining camp near Austin in central Nevada, but soon tired of renting rooms and headed southward through the Big Smoky Valley toward the undeveloped wilds of Death Valley. On this journey which ended just north or east of Death Valley, the uncovered gold float on a reddish mountain Slope. It ultimately became known as the "Lost Breyfogle," and the story of the fabulous discovery circulated swiftly and widely. Since the discoverer could not retrace his steps to the phantom ledge, others from northern Nevada soon visited the Death Valley area to search for it. Death Valley was the most desolate and deadly wasteland in the entire West.

Though no party of prospectors found Breyfogle's lost mine, which allegedly "was rich enough to pay the national debt," various individuals discovered gold and silver ledges in the Panamint Range and in the Black and Funeral Mountains. Accounts of these gold searchers and what they found regularly appeared in the Austin's Reese River Reveille in the years 1863-1865. Its editor wrote confidently of rich finds, but expectations were not fulfilled. Still, the lost mines stories drew attention to the area of southern Nevada and Death Valley. New settlements sprang up and population increased, so much so that Nevada's Governor Blasdel and the state Mineralogist headed toward southeastern Nevada the area in the spring of 1866 to organize the new county of Lincoln.

To get there from Carson City, the six-foot- five-inch governor and his party journeyed by way of Death Valley, finally reaching Ash Meadows. There, the party found themselves running short of supplies, but fortunately Charles Breyfogle's prospecting party, still in search of the elusive gold find, was able to provide water and a wagon.

All of this attention toward overlooked mineralization in the Death Valley area led many others to strike out from western and central Nevada to prospect the area. The First discoveries at Slate Ridge, where the camp of Gold Mountain would later emerge, took place in the fall of 1865 when three men from Austin found god. These "Breyfoglers" were looking for the lost float gold which Charles Breyfogle had chanced upon less than two years previous. Though a mining district was organized, ore samples assayed upon their return to Austin found values unworkable –just $50 a ton. Other prospectors ventured to the area, staked claims, but soon left.

Thomas Shaw came in 1868 (though a contemporary newspaper editor said 1864) and staked claims which became the Stateline mine, recovering gold at a mule- or horse-powered Mexican arrastre six feet in diameter, at a spring six miles south, across Oriental Wash. Little values were recovered. Others drifted in as values improved, and by 1873 the camp could boast of s saloon, a restaurant and a butcher shop. Still, Gold Mountain's remoteness, inadequate milling facilities and lack of water did not invite additional capital to develop the mines. Late in 1880 the camp of Gold Mountain revived and the Stateline mine was regarded as one of Nevada's best. By the summer of the next year the camp had two stores, five saloons, a boarding house, stable and regular mail serviced by stage. One saloon boasted of a "first class billiard table," while another had a "handsome club room," according to newspaper advertisements. A post office opened in February 1881, with mail brought in from towns to the north twice weekly. Even at this remote district, water was $3.50 a barrel delivered but only a dollar if picked up at the spring.

At one store locals could purchase the usual groceries and tools, and also paint, wall paper, bedding, caps and fuse and other mining supplies. Meals at the chop house were available 24 hours. Sprinkled throughout the camp were many wooden, stone, canvas and dugout dwellings.

The Stateline Mining Co. erected a $40,000 mill with 10 stamps, and a 12-mile long pipe line six inches in diameter was contemplated building from Tule Canyon. The pipe had been shipped in from Austin, where it was loaded onto wagons and hauled by big freight teams over 125 miles of ungraded roads and desert. Delivery took 16 days, plus two days to load all of the pipe which likely had been fabricated at a foundry in northern California. But the pipe proved to be defective, delaying the supply of water to the mill. Author-researcher Alan Patera found evidence that behind the Stateline operation was a cleverly worked out scam involving stock manipulation and the disguising of true ore values. Debts began to accrue, and finally in 1882 the Stateline Company was successfully sued in district court for nearly $20,000. The mines were reorganized, and the camp more or less stabilized for the rest of the decade. However, by 1891 the post office closed after a decline in mining. Beginning in 1905 Gold Mountain revived, as did most of the southern Nevada – Death Valley region. Nearby mining camps sprang up, such as Palmetto, Lida, Tokop, and the Rattlesnake mine flourished to the east. Sylvania, an old 19 thcentury camp saw its silver mines reopen. Ultimately the Stateline mine built a new mill, machine shop and bunkhouse. It was during this revival that the Gold Mountain cabin was built, together with other wooden cabins.

Almost all mining ceased by the time of World War I, and only small operators have recovered small values. The cabin at Gold Mountain is easily reached by traveling six miles southwest from the nearby community of Gold Point into Oriental Wash, then turning right for two miles. Or travel 40 miles north from the Ubehebe Crater road in northern Death Valley National Park, thence eastward and upward 10 miles into Oriental Wash, then two miles north.

Either way into Gold Mountain you enter Main Street in the old camp and you are amid about two dozen rock structures, mostly formerly businesses. Another side road takes you to the foundations of the Stateline mill. The Gold mountain cabin is just two hundred miles to the west, and is available for use anytime. It is stocked with fire wood, canisters of propane, canned goods, magazines, a log book for visitors to sign, and ample furniture including a couch and a table. However, evidence of mice occupying it exists, so it is best to camp outside of the cabin. But with its tables, chairs and a sofa, the cabin is good for day use.

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Carbonari and Charcoal Pits Fueled Nevada Smelters

by Doug Page and Tom Straka

Two fascinating articles by Stanley W. Paher highlighted the charcoal industry near Tonopah in the two 2018 issues of *Tailings*.[1] The most interesting stories about the industry, like the Charcoal Burners' War in Eureka and the Anti-Chinese Movement in Tybo in the Hot Creek Range, were included. These articles focused on charcoal kilns with limited discussion of charcoal pits. However, the pit method was the primary means of charcoal production in Nevada during the period, and the Charcoal Burners' War was directly related the charcoal pits. We provide additional information on charcoal pits and the impact of charcoal production on the local forests. Charcoal, whether made in kilns or pits, was critical to Nevada mining as it fueled the state's smelters, making it a necessary component of the mining industry.

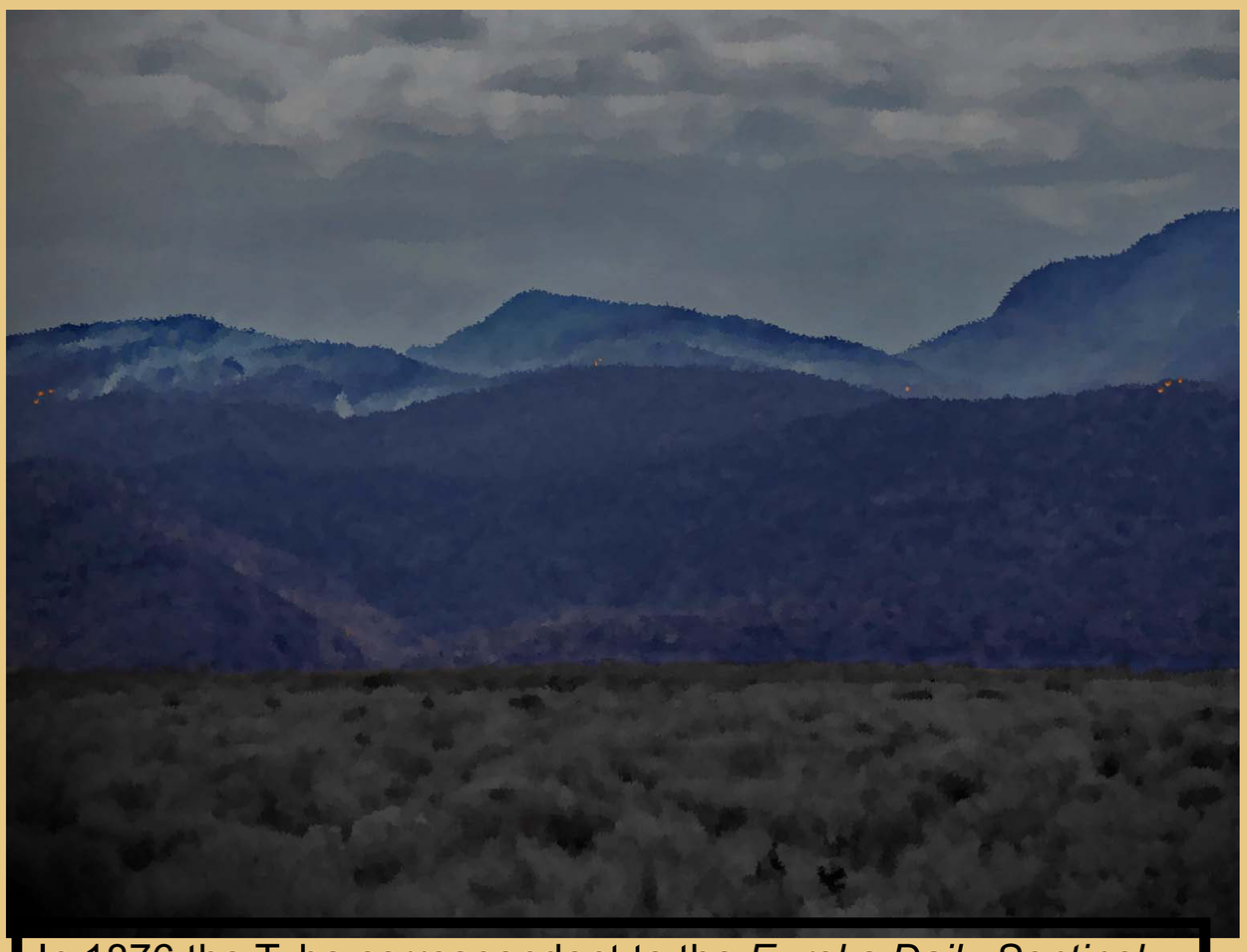
The pit method used a temporary covering of earth to "burn" a pile of wood in an almost airless environment. Charcoal kilns produced charcoal using a permanent covering of stone or brick. The kilns were constructed by immigrant craftsmen and some almost look like works of art. Many charcoal kilns still exist and the best place in Nevada to see kilns, outside of a state historic park, is the Hot Creek Range, centered on Tybo, just over an hour northeast of Tonopah. Paher's two articles emphasized charcoal kilns, as they present a potential adventure for anyone brave enough to venture into the old mining districts. The Hot Creek Range has well-known sets of kilns at Tybo, Kiln Canyon, South Six mile Canyon, Four mile Canyon, and Wood Tick Canyon.[2]

Charcoal pits are also interesting and can even be the focus of an adventure. They are much more numerous than kilns, but their remnants do not stand out to most observers. Near Tonopah the greatest concentration, just like charcoal kilns, would be the Hot Creek Range, but the largest concentration of charcoal pits remains are in the vicinity of Eureka, 80 miles to the northeast of the Hot Creek Range.

So, what would you be looking for if searching for a charcoal pit? Where near Tybo would you find them? Before we explore current remnants of charcoal pits, we'll provide a little background on Tybo and what exactly a charcoal pit is.

The Hot Creek Range and Charcoal

The Hot Creek Range and Eureka are the two big charcoal production areas in Nevada. The Hot Creek Range has the state's largest concentration of charcoal kilns, and, Eureka having only a few kilns, has an abundance of charcoal pit remnants. In 1920 the *Tonopah Daily Bonanza* described woodcutter and charcoal burner activity at Tybo four decades earlier when it was hailed "as the most prosperous camp in the state," and noted that the smelters eventually closed due to a charcoal shortage after the woodlands were exhausted: "Forty years ago, Tybo was the center of activity in Southern Nevada. The name was the synonym for the great successful mining center. Half a score of furnaces belched their fires to the heavens illuminating the mountain wastes. Fire by night and clouds of smoke by day served to guide the feet of investors and prospectors to that district where the nerves of capital pulsed and throbbed with incessant endeavor. The hillsides were dotted with cabins of woodcutters whose charcoal ovens furnished employment for scores of hardy pioneers in a region that was remotely related to the busy centers of commerce and manufacturing. . . . Operations of the wood-burners widened the area of operations until it at last became apparent that smelting could no longer be carried out at a profit."[3]

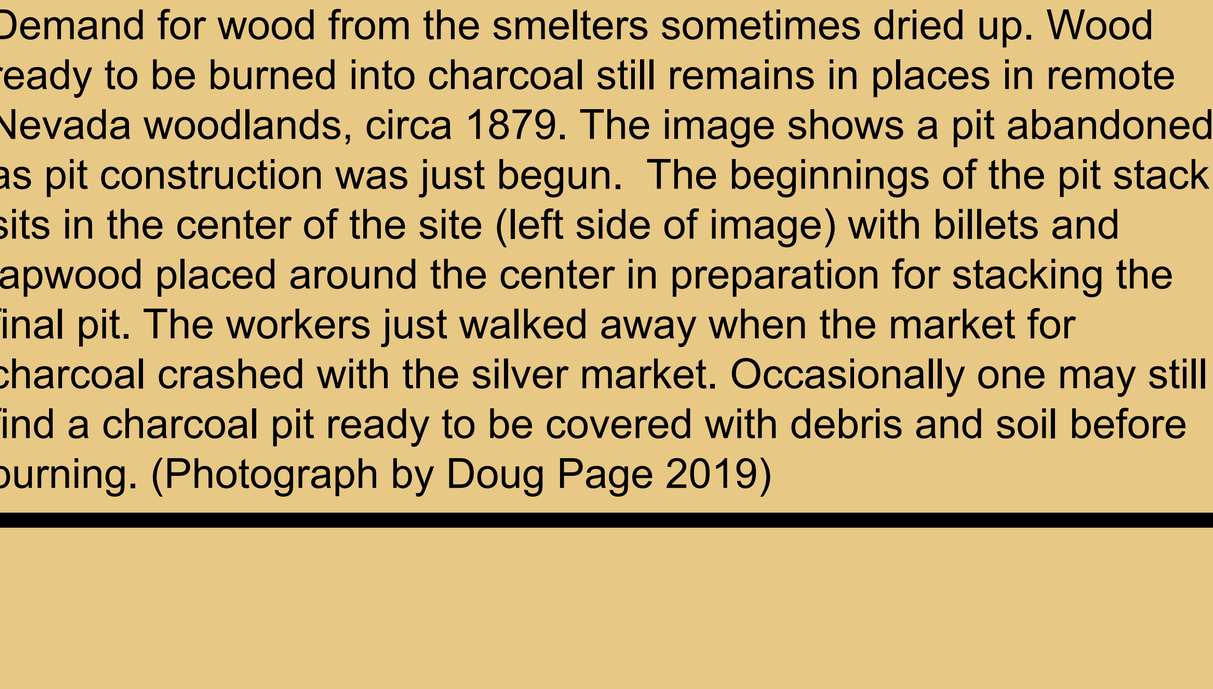


In 1876 the Tybo correspondent to the *Eureka Daily Sentinel* reported: "Next to the mining and smelting operations, the charcoal transactions are the heaviest. The industry is pursued by both Italians and Americans, whose nightly campfires, like those of a besieging army, produces a striking picturesque effect amidst the deep and gloomy solitude of the circumjacent mountains." (Graphic Image by Doug Page)

Woodchoppers

Wood was a critical resource in a mining district. Mine timbers, when in demand, came from the large trees and the smaller trees were cut by woodchoppers for charcoal to fuel smelters and fuelwood to produce steam for engines, stamp mills, or even power drills. Many of the harvested areas had a surplus of large trees and those ended up being cut for charcoal. Field work in a variety of areas by Doug Page, Sarah Page, Peter Weiseberg, and Ron Reno revealed remaining evidence of many large/old trees that were in excess of 300 to 400 years in age, cut for charcoal and prepared for charcoal pits then left where in the hills when the market crashed. [4]

Wood shortages could wreak havoc on a mining district. Charcoal kilns and pits required woodchoppers and wood-packers. Woodchoppers could use any part of the tree and would take the whole tree. Wood was cut into uniform lengths of four feet so that the wood could be stacked in tiers. Lap-wood and billets were produced. Lap-wood was very small wood, up to four inches in diameter, and billets ranged from four to seven inches in diameter. Both were cut on a bias so that they would lean inward to form a pile. Wood larger than 8 inches in diameter had other uses (like mine timbers and lumber). Generally, billets came from tree trunks and lap-wood was produced from branches. [5]



Demand for wood from the smelters sometimes dried up. Wood ready to be burned into charcoal still remains in places in remote Nevada woodlands, circa 1879. The image shows a pit abandoned as pit construction was just begun. The beginnings of the pit stack sits in the center of the site (left side of image) with billets and lapwood placed around the center in preparation for stacking the final pit. The workers just walked away when the market for charcoal crashed with the silver market. Occasionally one may still find a charcoal pit ready to be covered with debris and soil before burning. (Photograph by Doug Page 2019)

Wood needed to be transported from the forest to the charcoal pit or kiln. Wood-packers transported wood, charcoal, and even ore, using donkeys or mules. In a smelter operation the vast majority of employees were associated with woodchopping, wood transport, and charcoal burning.

Wood Hauling in Nevada, “representing a ten-mule team loaded with wood. The three wagons are coupled together like a train of cars—called ‘trail wagons,’—on which are loaded twenty-four cords of wood. , , ,This plan of coupling wagons is quite common on the Pacific Coast, for all kinds of heavy hauling.” Wagons with ore or bullion come to mind in a mining district, but wood and charcoal also required transport by teamsters. (*Crofutt's New Overland Tourist and Pacific Coast Guide* 1870, public domain[6])

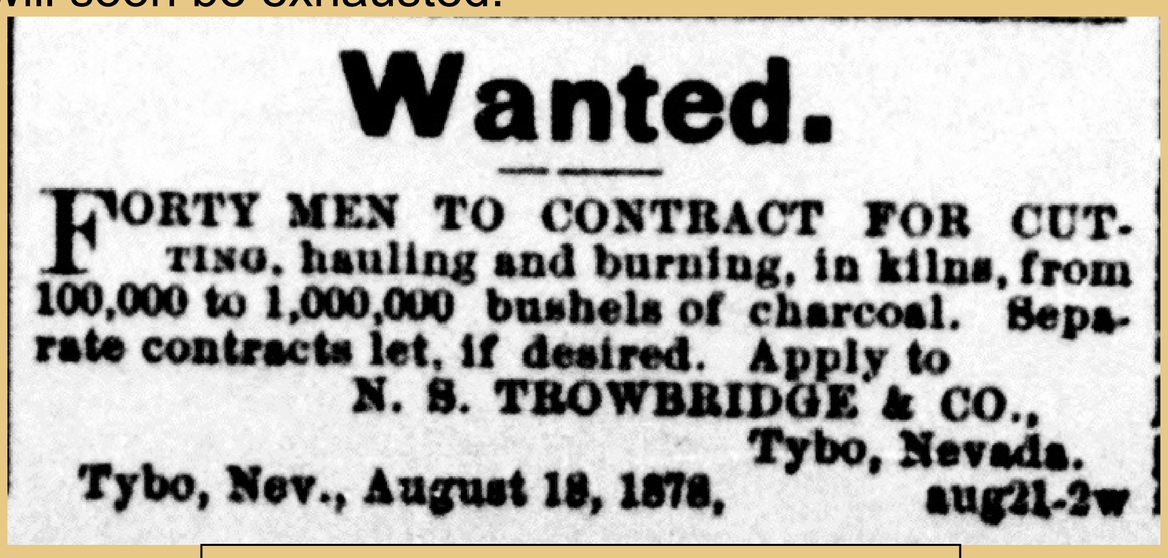
N. S. Trowbridge owned the general store in Tybo. It was an impressive large brick structure that still mostly stands in Tybo. As the most prominent merchant in Tybo, granting credit and investing, he was involved in the camp’s economic activities, like the charcoal industry. He even had general supervision responsibilities for the Tybo Mill. [7] Wood in Nevada tended to be on federal lands. Regulation of woodcutting was loose and theft of wood from federal lands in Nevada resulted in Congressional hearings to address the problem. [8] In 1908 the federal forestry officials issued orders that wood cutting must cease on the Grapevine Mountains, south of Rhyolite, as “the slopes of the hills have been denuded of trees by woodchoppers who sold the wood to near-by camps.” [9]

WANTED!

PACKERS, TO CONTRACT FOR THE Packing of 200 or 300 Cords of Wood per month, a distance of one-half to one and one-half miles. Also, Twelve or Fifteen Wood Choppers. For particulars, apply to
N. S. TROWBRIDGE & CO.
mh18-1w Tybo, Nev.

Eureka Daily Sentinel, March 17, 1878.

A wood shortage could shut down a smelter. In 1905, for example, wood dealers in Goldfield were ordered to cease buying wood from anyone, or even selling wood they had in stock, as it was likely illegally obtained from federal lands. A federal agent even stopped woodchoppers working on the Montezuma Mountains.[10] A “wood famine” was predicated. At the same time, the wood camps east of Tonopah were also in danger of a “wood famine” as “the wood in the section is being rapidly hauled away and the supply will soon be exhausted.” [11]



Wanted.

FORTY MEN TO CONTRACT FOR CUTTING, hauling and burning, in kilns, from 100,000 to 1,000,000 bushels of charcoal. Separate contracts let, if desired. Apply to
N. S. TROWBRIDGE & CO.,
Tybo, Nevada.
Tybo, Nev., August 18, 1878, aug21-2w

Eureka Daily Sentinel, August 21, 1878.

What Are Charcoal Pits?

Cordwood for charcoal production was produced by woodchoppers. Wood was cut into four-feet lengths so wood could be stacked in layers. A charcoal pit is not a pit at all. It is stacked wood on level ground (the ground must be level for proper burning). The wood was sometimes cut on a bias so that it would lean towards the center of the pile. Two or three layers (called tiers) were used to produce a mound shape. The mound shape was important as it had a slope that allowed a covering to be applied that would not roll off. Once a tight mound of wood was created, it was covered first with boughs or some other vegetation and then with a thin layer of soil. Carbonization or charcoal production requires a nearly air-free environment, as it is incomplete burning that produces the charcoal. The earth covering provides a seal against outside air.

Charcoal pit diorama of a three-tier structure. The wood is covered with leaves, then dirt. In the center is a chimney for ventilation and ignition. (Photograph by Doug Page.)

Some air is required and providing the exact amount is a special skill. In Nevada much of that skill came from Italian or Swiss-Italian immigrant called carbonari. Vent holes could be opened and closed at the bottom of the pit to control air flow. Carbonari could tell if the “burn” was progressing evenly and properly by the color of the smoke and the temperature of the side of the pits. While charcoal kilns were permanent structures and wood needed to be hauled to the kiln site, pits were temporary and could be built near the wood. The carbonari received very modest pay for their labor, most of the profit went to teamsters and middlemen.

A charcoal pit could be very large, perhaps 100 cords. A large pit might take several weeks to burn through completely. Then another week to ten days would be necessary for the charcoal to cool. Opening a pit required skill. Unless the pit was completely cold the charcoal could ignite and all that would be left would be ash. Another skill that was important was called “jumping the pit,” and it was a dangerous aspect of the job. The collier (charcoal maker) had to keep a watch for soft spots (mulls) on the top of the pit that sometimes formed as the wood carbonized and settled. Finding one, he would jump up and down on the harder parts of the pit to fill in the space created by the mulls.

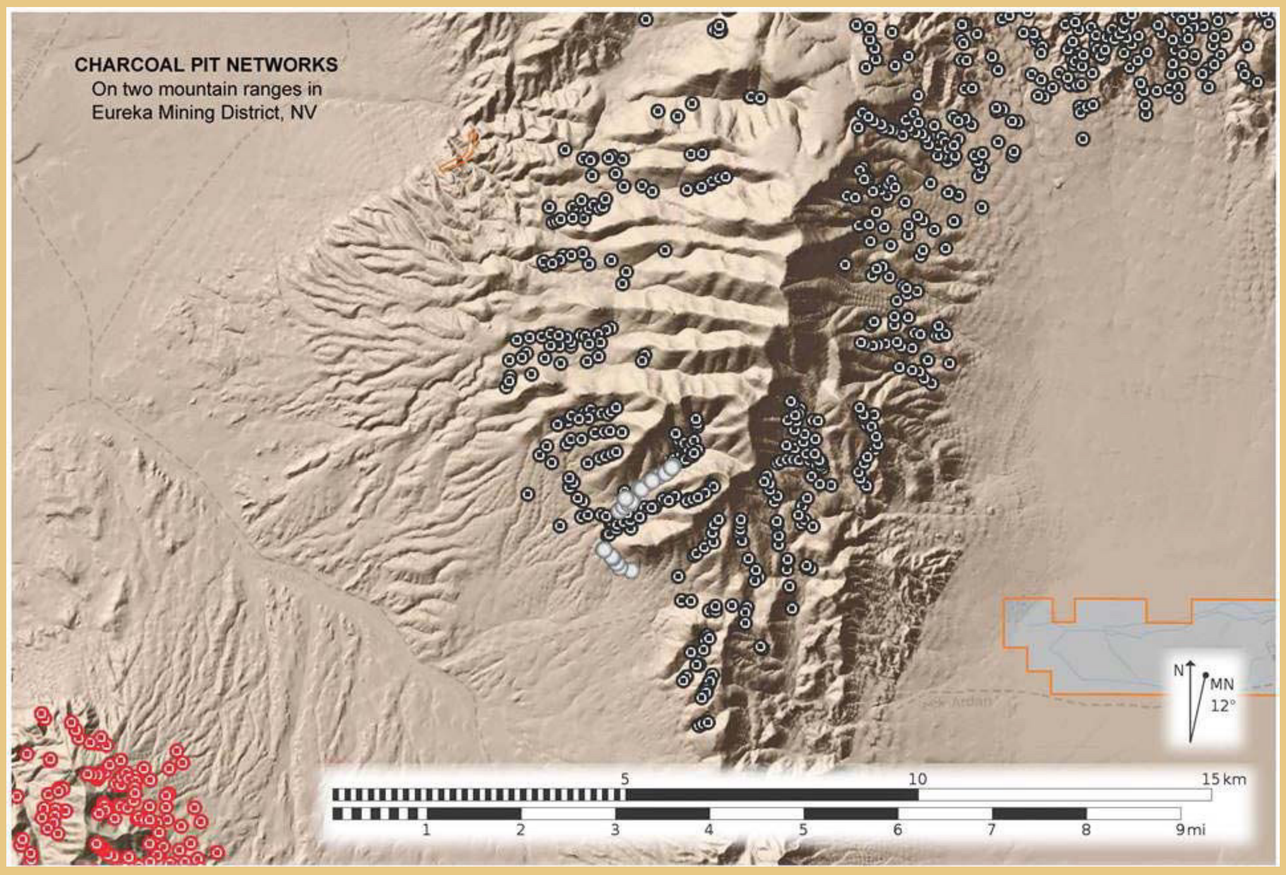
A charcoal pit in the process of burning with charcoal burners atop. (J. B. Monaco Collection [SFP 48], San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.)

Jumping the pit could prove dangerous or even fatal. The Winnemucca newspaper reported a “horrible accident” in 1878 which resulted in the demise of charcoal burner, Giovana Angelo Margorali. He was employed to supervise a charcoal pit and: “The pit had been burned and the deceased was engaged in watching it. On the night of the 25th it is supposed that a fire broke out in the coal, and that in endeavoring to extinguish the flames he became exhausted and fell into the burning mass. John Eseere, a workman at the same place, on visiting the pit on the morning of the 26th, discovered Margorali’s body in the live coals.

He grasped the unfortunate man's legs and attempted to pull him out, but the roasted flesh peeled away from the bones. Assistance was procured, and the victims remains were removed from the pit, but he was literally baked and burned beyond all recognition."[12] It might seem that such fatalities would be limited to charcoal pits. Since charcoal kilns were constructed of stone and/or brick, wouldn't a charcoal burner be safe from incineration? Actually, charcoal kilns had a top that was sealed and sometimes it slid open, and there are plenty of stories of unfortunate souls who slipped into a burning charcoal kiln (especially children who loved to play on them).

Remnant Charcoal Pits in Central Nevada

Where are all these old charcoal pits? There are thousands of remnant charcoal pits in Central Nevada,; they are more common on the Hot Creek Range. Anywhere sufficient pinyon pine and/or juniper existed within hauling distance of a smelter would be prime country. A 2019 article published in *Nevada Archaeologist* by Page, Straka and Page provides the published description of how old charcoal pits appear today. [13] What is left of the charcoal pits is usually a flat or level area with blackened wood chips or charcoal fragments covering the ground (charcoal does not weather and persists even until today). Charcoal pits are usually circular-shaped, perhaps 30 to 40 feet in diameter. The color helps to distinguish them; look for a deep dark color. Where level ground was not already available, a foundation for the pit was often carved out of the hillside with juniper logs used as buttress material.



A sample network of charcoal pits in the Fish Creek Range, surrounding the site of the Charcoal Burners' War. (Map by Doug Page)

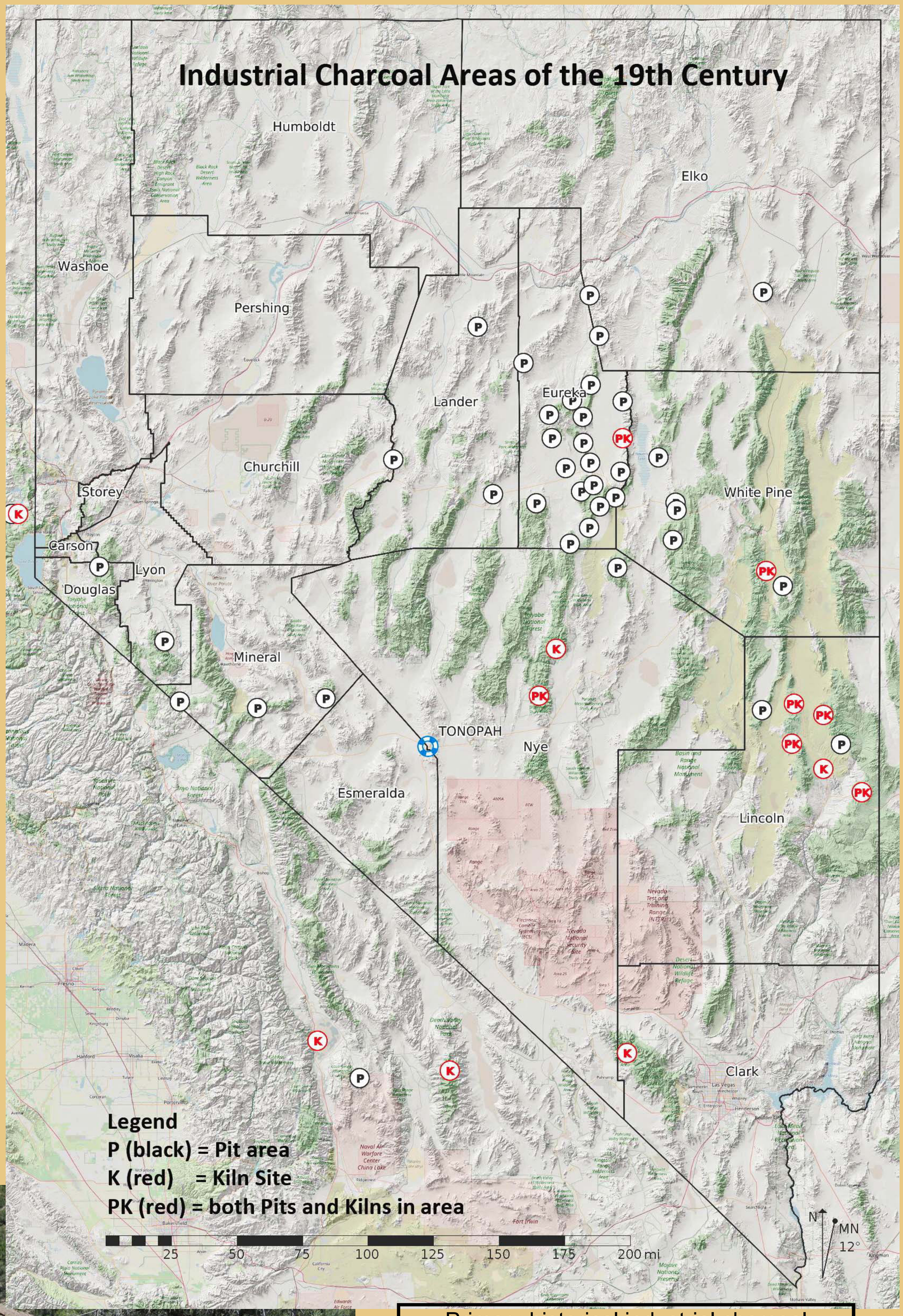
A charcoal pit remnant in the Fish Creek area. Note that it is circular and charcoal fragments still remain (dark coloration). Central Nevada is awash in charcoal pits if you know where to look. (Photograph by Doug Page, 2016.)

Locating charcoal burning remnants in the Hot Creek Range may not be easy (except for the charcoal kilns). We know of no Hot Creek pit sites that are easily accessible from good roads and only a few within a short walk of a road. If you want a location with charcoal pits adjacent to the road and more easily identifiable, the site of the Charcoal Burners' War of 1879 offers that. The Charcoal Burners' War was described by Stan Paher in the Fall 2018 issue of *Tailings*, so we won't give the details, except to say it is an interesting piece of Nevada history where five charcoal burners were killed and six wounded by a sheriff's posse. *Touring Nevada* by Mary Ellen and Al Glass gives a complete description of the battlefield and a charcoal industry tour, with directions.[14] It involves a 13-mile well-maintained dirt road that crosses the Fish Creek Range. As you cross the low range, there are easily discernable charcoal pits near the road, and even a small bread oven that resembles a miniature charcoal kiln. Bread ovens were used for cooking by the charcoal burners.

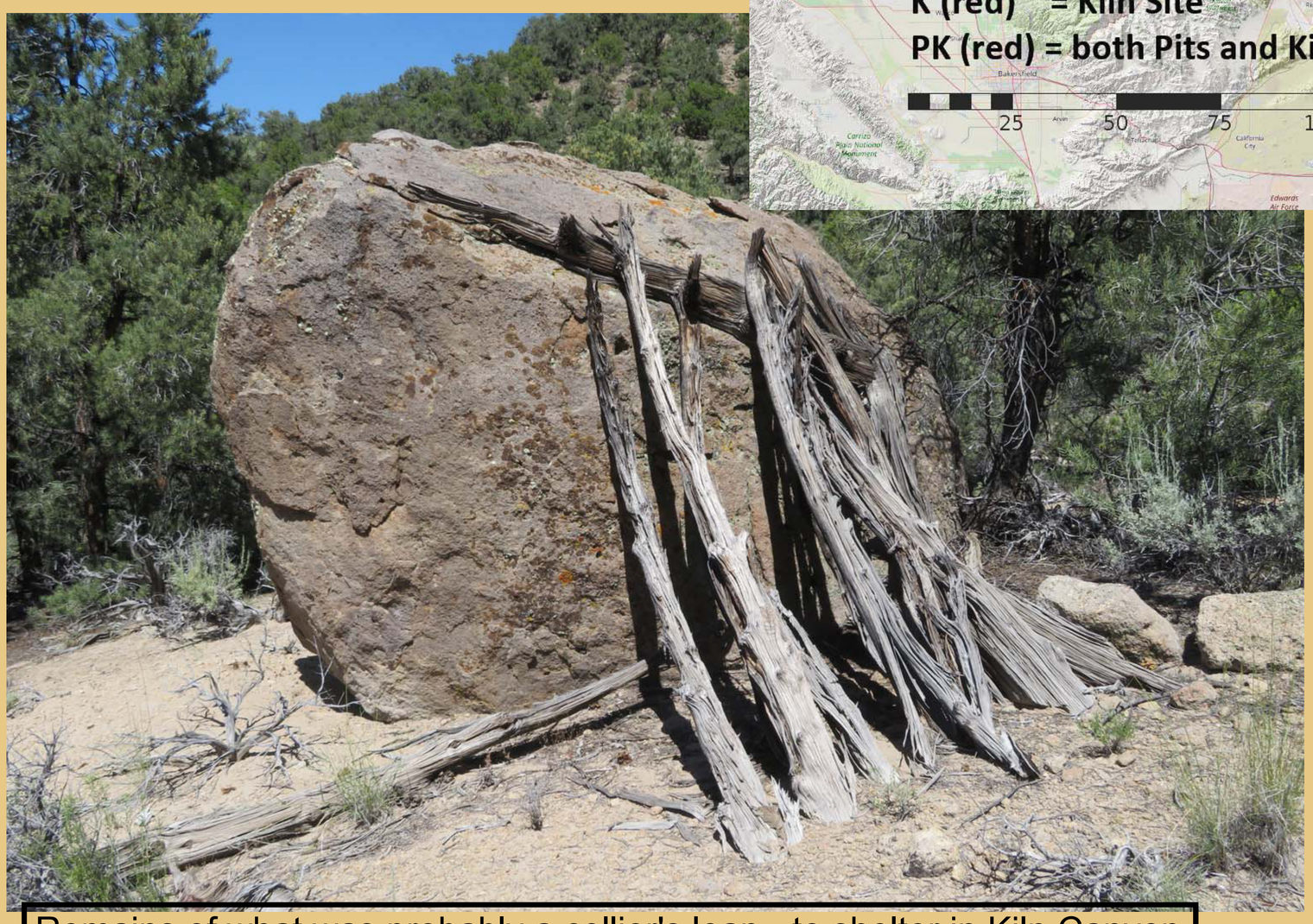
A charcoal pit in the Tybo area. Some show slight elevation and the dark coloration is a giveaway. Charcoal persists for centuries and fragments are still in the soil. This is the most accessible charcoal pit site in the Hot Creek Range. It is less than a mile up a jeep road north of Mule Shoe Spring and the kiln at Tybo. (Photograph by Doug Page, 2019)

The tour begins just over 100 miles north of Tybo; proceed east from the Tybo turnoff on U.S. 6 for 57 miles and turn left to Duckwater on Nevada 379; Duckwater is 20 miles northwest on a paved state highway. The state highway and pavement end at Duckwater, but a well-maintained gravel road continues north to intersect with U.S. 50 just east of Eureka. From Duckwater proceed another 27 miles to Fish Creek, the road to the left that crosses the Fish Creek Range is called Fish Creek Road on Google Maps and Fish Creek-Ardan Ranch Road on MapQuest. Fish Creek actually has water in it and is just north of the turnoff; so, if you see water, you've gone too far.

Central Nevada has many ranges that supported charcoal burning activity. Since the objective was to produce fuel, the locations are close to the mining and smelting activity that charcoal burning supported. Kilns are concentrated in major smelting areas and charcoal pits are more widely scattered. A map of charcoal burning in Nevada corresponds to where mining activity took place. Charcoal burning is a fascinating part of Nevada mining history.



Primary historical industrial charcoal production areas of Nevada; the geography is a combination of smelter fuel demand and woodland location (Map by Doug Page)



Remains of what was probably a collier's lean - to shelter in Kiln Canyon near Tybo. The carbonari left limited evidence of their presence, some of which is still found near old charcoal pits. (Photograph by Doug Page, 2019)

Ecological Effects of Charcoal Production

Harvest activities in the woodlands were not without their ecological impacts, much of which can be discerned today by knowledgeable eyes. Prior to harvest these woodlands were often composed of all-aged forests with trees up to and exceeding 400 years of age as well as a scattering of younger mid-aged trees and tree regeneration. It is said, one could easily ride a horse through the pioneer-era woodlands. The pinyon pine in these woodlands produced pine nuts that were a staple food of the indigenous tribes and even sustained early Spanish explorers, who would have starved had it not been for the indigenous people they met along the way and pine nuts.[15] Harvest for charcoal production effectively "clearcut" these woodlands of all useable material, in particular pinyon pine, the favored charcoal tree in early Nevada. The woodlands today around these charcoal ranches are not of the same character. They are recovering, second-growth forests with few if any of the very old trees that were once commonplace.

Authors: Douglas H. Page, Jr. is a retired forester. Thomas J. Straka is a professor emeritus of forestry at Clemson University in South Carolina.

Notes

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2 Douglas H. Page, Jr., Thomas J. Straka, and Sarah E. Page, "Charcoal's Role in Nevada Mining and Forest History: Kilns," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 61:1-4 (2018), 20-52.
3 "Industrial Regeneration," *Tonopah Daily Bonanza*, June 11, 1920, page 2.
4 Douglas H. Page, Jr., Peter Weisberg, Sarah E. Page, and Thomas J. Straka, "Charcoal's Role in Nevada's Mining and Forest History: Charcoal Pits," *Nevada Historical Society Q* 66:1-4 (2023), 76-112.
5 Thomas J. Straka and Robert H. Wynn, "Pit Production of Charcoal for Nevada's Early Smelters," *Central Nevada's Glorious Past* 29 (2010), 12-16.
6 "Wood Hauling in Nevada," *Crofutt's New Overland Tourist and Pacific Coast Guide*, Volume 1 (Chicago, IL: The Overland Publishing Company, 1878-9), Large View No. 11, page 317. The picture was engraved by Mr. Bross, of New York, from a photograph taken by Satterley, of Virginia City.
7 *Eureka Daily Sentinel*, January 24, 1881, page 3; July 12, 1881, 3; July 20, 1881, page 3.
8 U.S. Senate Committee on Mines and Mining. 1889. Special Report Number 2, Mining Operations in Nevada. Reports of Committees of the Senate of the United States, Second Session, Fiftieth Congress, 1888-1889. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1889.
9 "From Over Nevada," *Yerington Times*, February 29, 1908, page 6.
10 "Goldfield May Have a Wood Famine," *Morning Appeal* [Carson City], April 4, 1905, page 3.
11 "Danger of Wood Famine," *Morning Appeal*, May 12, 1905, page 3.
12 "HORRIBLE ACCIDENT, Roasted Alive in a Charcoal Pit," *The Silver State* [Winnemucca], November 30,1878, page 2.
13 Douglas H. Page, Jr., Thomas J. Straka, and Sarah E. Page. "Anatomy of a Charcoal Ranch and Lessons from the Field." *Nevada Archaeologist* 31(2019), 93-108.
14 Mary Ellen Glass and Al Glass, *Touring Nevada: A Historic and Scenic Guide* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1983), 131-132. This book includes a tour of the "battlefield" of the "Charcoal Burners' War" or "Nevada's Italian War." It involves a 13-mile tour near the Fish Creek Ranch south of Eureka across the Fish Creek Range to the battlefield on a well-maintained dirt road. Detailed directions, to the tenth of a mile, are provided. Free access to the book is available at the Internet Archive (https://archive.org).
15 Ronald M. Lanner. *The Piñon Pine: A Natural and Cultural History.* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1981), 88-98.

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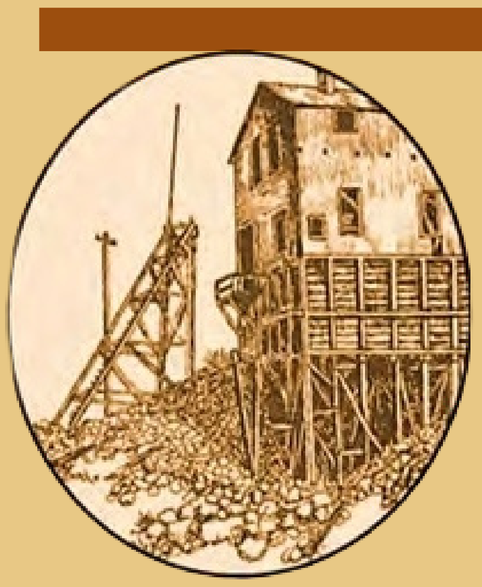

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