



# TRAILS & TALES

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## CERRO GORDO or BUST, *By Mary Grimsley*

It's October 30, so it seemed an appropriate day to go visit the "almost" but "not quite" a ghost town of Cerro Gordo in preparation for Halloween. Those who wanted to hear the stories of the fabled mining camp were: Dan Burkhart; Warner & Pam Fellows; Jim & Donna Kenney; Mark Pahuta; guests Brian & Ronnie Packitt, Donna's nephews; and the trail bosses Jerry & Mary Grimsley. We picked up Gary Luckerth in Pearsonville on our way through.

A quick stop was made in Olancha to fill someone's gas tank and then we were off across Hwy 190 on the south end of Owen's Lake. It was a pretty day and no infamous Owens Lake dust was in the air. We could see clearly our destination in the bottom of the "Vee" at the 8500-foot elevation of the Inyo Mountains.

Since this was a historical tour of the area, our first stop was on the south end of Keeler at the "Keller" pioneer cemetery (spelled wrong on the sign). A few graves are still in respectable shape, but one wonders who has been washed away, as the gullies from the Inyo's go through the sacred ground.

We then started up the 8-mile long road to the top of the saddle, with a few history pointers along the way, such as the **Lieschen Bros Wire-rope Tramway** – circa 1916, which was electric, ran from Cerro Gordo to Keeler, where they dumped the ore into the narrow gauge cars on the west side of the highway. We could see the visible hanging bucket suspended some 300 - 400 feet above the canyon on heavy "wire rope". The tram towers are still standing but are only visible from lower down on the road. The Inyo's have the distinction of having 4 tramways cross over or go up her slopes.



The only fancy steel fence in the Keeler Pioneer Cemetery.



Built in 1871, the American Hotel is the oldest standing hotel in eastern CA.

**GEAR GRINDERS WEB SITE:** <http://www.geargrinders.org/>

When we got to the Estelle Tunnel turnoff, we pointed out the second, the **Morning Star Tram** – circa 1906-1916 approximately. It was a gravity tram with visible tram towers. It started at the Estelle tunnel and terminated up the mountain at the Morning Star mine. The third tram was the **Montgomery Tram** - circa 1904-06, which started in Cerro Gordo and went down the mountain to the Four Metals smelter, east of the highway on the south end of Keeler.

The fourth tram was the **Salt Tram** – circa 1913, which transported salt from the Saline Valley, over the mountain where the cross-over tower and buildings are on the Inyo Crest Trail, then on down to the Owens Valley floor.

We arrived in Cerro Gordo to be greeted by Mike Patterson, the owner and 1 person to live on the mountain with his 4 Kelpies and 3 cats. Also on hand was Maria from Northridge, the web master for the new web page, up to take more pictures and work on the website with Mike. (See the web page at: [cerrogordo.us](http://cerrogordo.us).)

Introductions were made, we discussed what to do first - tour, work, or eat lunch. So the history lesson began first, with descriptions of each of the buildings interspersed with the colorful happenings of a time gone by.



The guys unloading a load of "stuff".

We then toured the Belshaw house before going down to the hotel to have lunch. We all brought our own lunch, which was followed by dessert brought by Mary. We had pumpkin pie, chocolate chip cake, and butterscotch chip cake, complete with whipped cream, huh Jim????

Mike gave us a choice of a couple of small projects, but we picked one that would help him out the most. It was moving a bunch of "junk" (as defined by us) or "stuff" (as defined by Mike) that had been stored in his shop. We moved it to the changing shack, using Mike and Dan's trucks to transport it. 4 loads & we were done.

Our newer vehicles  
Parked along –side the old.



Mike then traded vehicles, his big 4x4 truck for his 4-wheeler and led us on over into the Morning Star mining district. Our first stop was to see a galena modori, or crude silver/lead smelter used by the early Mexicans. Then on to the Morning Star mine and buildings. We found some neat rocks in the tailing piles, while some explored the old buildings below us and others, wearing our "hard heads", explored the mine.

In the 21 years Jerry & I have been friends and volunteers with/for Mike, Jerry had never been to the Morning Star. It is pretty unprotected from the wind, as it is perched on the side of the mountain with views unbroken all the way to Keeler and the Owens Lake.

We headed back to the American Hotel, where we talked a bit more and Mike unveiled the old stained glass from Germany for his chapel "to be". Soon we said our good byes and headed for the Ranch House in Olancha for dinner



Looking down the wire-wrap cable of the Morning Star tramway, which ends at the Estelle tunnel. Circa 1906-1916. What a view.

## RENEGADE CANYON PETROGLYPH TOUR *By Jerry Grimsley*

Bill & Samela Dory with grand-daughters Marissa & Dawnya; Warner & Pam Fellows; Matt Lemons & Ashley Hinds; Gary Luckerth; Bill & Kathy Martin; Kevin & Denise Serpa and myself met at 730am on Saturday, November 5, at the theater parking lot. This was the long promised guided tour of the Renegade Canyon Petroglyphs on the Naval Air Weapons Station, China Lake. Co-leaders for the day were Kathy, Gary, and myself. The traumas of fire, flash flood, road closure, temporary cancellation of all tours, and lost paperwork were overcome to make the tour happen.

After completing the required security checks, the caravan traveled north across the test range, crossing ancient China Lake in route to Wild Horse Mesa and Renegade Canyon. One story has it that China Lake was named after Chinese laborers who used to collect borax off the lakebed in the 1800's. After traveling about 20 miles north, the route of the 1872 freight road built to connect the mines of Darwin with Brown and points south could be seen snaking down off of Wild Horse Mesa. At this point we turned up Mountain Springs Canyon. In just a few miles the topography changed from desert sage and creosote to pinion pines and a lush Joshua tree forest.

The evidence of the recent flash flood remains with several sections of the pavement now completely gone. Evidence of mining before the Navy took control of the land could also be seen. The route then crossed Etcharren Valley where several wild stallions were spotted warily guarding their small herds of mares and colts. One final turn onto a good graded dirt road dropped us on to Wild Horse Mesa and the parking area for the petroglyphs.

The section of canyon we were set to explore is about 1 ¼ mile long and is reported to contain over 6000 petroglyphs. A local rancher named John Carricut discovered the petroglyphs in 1923. They were first recorded in 1929 by UCLA. Renegade Canyon is famous for its patterned bodied anthropomorphs, shields, and thousands of sheep depictions. It is universally recognized as the finest petroglyph site in the far west. The canyon itself is a sand and rock wash varying in width from ten to 100 feet with basalt walls on both sides from ten to 100 feet in height.



anthropomorphs

About ¾ mile down the canyon we came to a series of waterfalls in the canyon narrows. There were ponds of water at the bottom of the falls due to the recent rains, which made negotiation of this section of the canyon tricky. Pam, Bill Martin, and I stopped at the sheep fence while the rest of the group continued to the end of the canyon, which ends at the top of a 75' sheer drop with a spectacular view out across the Indian Wells Valley.

After exploring the canyon we backtracked across Etcharren Valley where more wild horses were spotted, arriving in Ridgecrest about 400pm. The Grimsleys, Fellows, Surpas, Doreys, and Martins were joined by the Grahams for dinner at Casa Corona to finish the day off. My thanks to all who attended and to Kathy and Gary for helping out with co-leader duties.



A "newspaper" rock in Little Petroglyph Canyon

## CARAVAN to CENTENNIAL FLAT. *By: Jerrv Grimslev*

On November 6, we rendezvoused at the theater parking lot with: Andy & Lisa Couch; Warner & Pam Fellows; Jim Kenney & passenger Chuck Cutler; Gary Luckeroff picking up passenger Kathy Martin; Kevin & Denise Serpa; and Mary & I at 800am at the theater parking lot for a day trip to upper Centennial Flat. I had not been on this trail for about 10 years, so was anxious to see the trail condition.

We made a final gas stop at Olancho, where we met up with guest Barry Lewis driving a 1957 Willys pickup. The turnoff for Upper Centennial Flat is just a few miles shy of Darwin. We aired down and for the first few miles rolled across relatively smooth desert terrain. Our first stop was at Lower Centennial Spring, where there is a BLM adopt-a-cabin. The cabin is small and the rodents have been very busy so we did not stay long.

From Lower Centennial Spring, the vehicle route follows an un-named canyon southward to the Navy Base boundary. The trail was fairly easy, but there were a couple of rock piles that gave our guest in the longer wheelbase pickup some problems. It was "rumored" that Jim got to be on the pulling end of the tow strap for once.

The trail ended at the base boundary. Our altitude was about 6000 ft with high hills, Joshua

trees and pinion pines around us. The temperature was perfect with a bright sun. We had a leisurely lunch after which some of the folks went off on foot to explore the rock formations at the head of Centennial Canyon. This area is within the Coso Mountain Wilderness.

We backtracked down the canyon, but instead of returning to the highway, we bore northwest through the hills toward Owens Lake. We paid a short visit to the Sierra Talc Mine, which produced Fullers Earth (a very fine talc) in the 1940s and 50s. From there it was a short, easy jaunt to the highway, where we aired up. Some of us required one more gas stop at Olancho before returning home. The Couch's and Grimsley's enjoyed dinner at Nickoletti's to finish off the day. Thanks to all who attended.



**Vehicles parked at Lower Centennial Spring.**

### October Meeting Hilites

Pres George Graham was back from Utah. VP Warner Fellows asked for upcoming run trail-boss information. The petroglyph tours were reinstated on base, so the tour was back on for Nov. 5.

T-shirts were distributed. President Graham announced nominations for upcoming officers.

Mary had talked to Sparrow regarding the "road" and we were asked to not go on our work trip as it was already being repaired.

Curtis & Jim would both be leading runs at PVD this year, with the rest of us as trail hands. We voted to again buy prizes for the kids and the adults for PVD.

Red Rock Canyon State Park has closed a road leaving the canyon floor in the hook area of Last Chance Canyon for public safety. This is one way to close a road they have wanted to close for some time . . . without public input.

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**DON'T FORGET** to check out the club forum under our **Members Only** page and to add your 2-cents worth.

# *Annual Christmas Party*



This years Christmas Party is at The Sizzler. It will be on Friday, Dec. 2 at 6:30pm and will cost \$13.00/person. Menu is limited to 3 items (for simplicity) 8oz. steak, Hibachi Chicken or Salmon (sorry, but we can't do the salad bar). The \$13.00 includes entree, side, salad, beverage, gratuity, & room charge.

We'll have the banquet room so we'll have room for our usual festivities. Bill Maddux will be hosting his popular "Gear of Fortune" game.

There will be a gift exchange just like the previous years with a \$10.00 limit per gift. You can bring one gift per family or per person; it's your choice.

Mary will need a head count by Monday, November 28. Humbugs will be checked at the door!

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