

**Northern Nevada has
many interesting places
such as seen on . . .**

A Trip to Leadville

by Doris Cerveri



Leadville, Nevada



LEADVILLE, a small town now ghostly and deserted, did not make much of a splash in mining circles although production of lead and silver continued regularly each year from 1910 to 1923. Like all ghost towns it is an interesting place to visit and equally interesting is the route leading to it which passes through several communities abounding with historical significance

The stretch of highway from Reno to Leadville goes through Sparks, follows the Big Bend in the Truckee River at Wadsworth, is contiguous to Pyramid Lake, and continues north past now dry Winnemucca Lake. Sparks, three miles from Reno on U.S. 40 (Interstate 80), got its start when the Southern Pacific Railroad constructed a new installation and moved its round house and about 150 dwellings from Wadsworth. Although considered by many as a suburb of Reno and often called East Reno, it now has a population of approximately 10,000. It started out with about 1000 residents, mostly former Wadsworthites and by 1905 was the railroad terminal for northern Nevada.

From Sparks it is a smooth, scenic 25-mile drive through rugged Truckee River Canyon over a high-speed, four-lane freeway which by-passes Wadsworth. To pioneers of a century ago this portion of their long journey to the California gold

fields was an arduous one. The road was so narrow and canyon walls so steep that cumbersome wagon trains had to travel in the bed of the stream for many miles. The river was so crooked they had to cross it as often as ten times in the course of a mile. The present highway was realigned and improved throughout the canyon although most of it still follows the Central Pacific right-of-way.

Known to weary emigrants as early as 1844 was Big Bend where the Truckee River turns before winding crookedly through this canyon. After crossing the Forty-mile Desert upon leaving the Humboldt River they were grateful when they reached the Truckee. Most of them camped at Lower Crossing, now Wadsworth, where there was a refreshing supply of grass for their cattle, cool water to drink, and an abundance of fish to eat. Reportedly the Townsend-Stevens-Murphy Party encountered the well-known Paiute guide, Capt. Truckee, at this place and named the river for him. Capt. John Fremont also camped in the area before continuing south to complete his expedition. Before the coming of the whites, Wadsworth was a seasonal village site for the Paiutes. The most disastrous conflict of whites and Indians in Nevada occurred in the vicinity of Big Bend during the Pyramid Lake Massacre of May 1860.

About 1854, William Gregory set up a trading post here known as Drytown which was a division point for teamsters. Later, when a railroad and supply depot

was created by the Central Pacific, Wadsworth came into being and Drytown faded out. One might say Wadsworth started out with a bang for the tough little burg was only three months old when a bartender, Charles W. Humphries killed one W. Merritt. No trial was held because the victim had cursed his slayer prior to the shooting and in those days that was considered justifiable homicide.

The bustling town was considered one of the prettiest in Nevada, and as it was the maintenance point on the Central Pacific Railroad division between Salt Lake City and Sacramento, many people expected it would become the largest in western Nevada. The Southern Pacific Railroad later absorbed the Central Pacific, but Wadsworth continued to be a very prosperous community from 1890 to 1903. As mechanical progress shortened runs across the once perilous desert need for a base town was less urgent. Consequently the railroad decided to close the station and move the shops to Sparks.

Sleepy little Wadsworth received its second setback when the freeway bypassed the town, but the final blow came last fall when the Southern Pacific was granted their request made to the Public Service Commission to abandon a small rarely-used spur which was Wadsworth's only connection to the railroad system.

From Wadsworth the road continues for approximately 16 miles to the Pyra-

mid Lake Indian Agency at Nixon. A few hundred Paiutes living on the reservation hold their tribal council meetings here, and there is a trading post, post office, school, and community recreation center. For the most part Nixon consists of shacks. Recently, however, several attractive houses have been constructed.

As early as 1860 prospectors probing mountain ledges a few miles west of the south end of Pyramid Lake thought they had found another bonanza when they discovered traces of gold and silver resembling Comstock ore. Five town sites sprung up including Pyramid City, Cold Springs and Jonesville. For the most part, though, mineralized rock uncovered at all these sites proved of little value and the entire district died. Pyramid Lake today is noted for its good fishing, primarily cui-ui and cutthroat trout, and as a recreation area.

Winnemucca Lake, the south-west portion of which is included in the reservation, could be called Pyramid's twin. Actually both lakes are remnants of ancient Lake Lahontan, which once submerged the entire area. Until 1934 Winnemucca contained an abundant supply of fish, and geese and ducks lived in tule marshes along its shoreline.

The paved highway paralleling this dry lake bed traverses low hills, and sage-alkali-covered flatland meets the eye for many miles. In the surrounding area are many curious formations and perfectly shaped tufa mounds, some of which are called beehives. In the distance, and from both sides of the highway, spectacular mountains create a panorama of awesome scenery and desolate landscape. At the north end of the lake is Kumiva Peak, 9240 feet high; on the left Granite Peak rises 8990 feet out of precipitous Granite Mountains.

Numerous caves are located in both Pyramid and Winnemucca Lake areas. Field workers of the Nevada State Museum spent two months several years ago exploring high rocky buttes overlooking Winnemucca Lake where they excavated 10 different sites. Thousands of valuable artifacts were uncovered, as well as other evidence pointing to the habitation of man in the Lake area dating back approximately 10 to 20,000 years. Interesting and unusual petroglyphs, too, have been discovered in the Winnemucca Lake area.

Approximately 78 miles from Nixon, is the small community of Empire. This town is activated by the Pacific Portland Cement Company whose huge gypsum quarry and plant is the largest of its kind in the West. From 15 to 20 carloads of gypsum are shipped out each day and it is estimated their large deposit contains enough gypsum to last for at least 50 more years.

Six miles farther down the highway is the companion of Gerlach, with a population of about 400. This is a division point on the Western Pacific Railroad. It also serves as a supply base for mines, and a few cattle ranches scattered in the area. One mile north of town is Great Boiling Springs. The waters are comfortable for swimming all year around. Fremont camped here in 1843, as did many emigrants who followed the established route across awesome Black Rock Desert to California.

Traveling approximately 18 miles in the opposite direction from the Springs over a fairly good dirt road which skirts the edges of the Desert, one finds to the right about a mile off the road at the Fly Ranch, a multi-colored geyser. This is a geological oddity standing majestically in swampland. It is not a true geyser, although hot water spouts out day and night without a let-up. It started out in 1916 as a drilled artesian well. Throughout the years a large perpetual column of beautifully-colored substance formed by a flow of heavily mineralized water has slowly built up. Now over 20 feet high and still growing, it presents a most

unusual sight. At the base of the geyser small holes and apertures constantly burp and spit up little bubbles of hot water.

Leaving this wonder, one continues down the same dirt road until reaching Fireball Junction. A left turn here leads up a narrow, winding road to Leadville. Numerous mine dumps adorn steep hill-sides overlooking the Black Rock Desert. About six cabins and the ruins of a mill dot the terrain. Lead and silver ore was found at the Tohoqua mine in quartz veins. Minor deposits of zinc and gold were also found, as well as niter in crevices of rhyolite uncovered on the western side of the range.

In 1920 the Leading Mining Company took possession of the area. Production under this concern was \$153,000 in 1921, and about \$254,600 in 1922. The property consisted of three main claims developed by two shafts, a 1700-foot tunnel, and a 500-foot winze equipped with two 75 and one 100-horse power and semi-Diesel engine, compressor, electric locomotive, auto trucks, 7500-foot water line, and 30,000 gallon tank. Also in operation was a 35-ton mill and flotation plant. All this was incorporated in 1920 with capital stock of \$1,500,000.

Like all mining activities, ore petered out, and production ceased. No one is living in Leadville at the present time, but some prospecting and leasing was done a few years ago. Prospectors and would-be miners never give up; there is always the possibility of finding a new vein leading to a rich bonanza. □



Big Bend of the Truckee River