

# Ghost Towns (and Historic Towns) of California

Bodie, Bay Area, Mojave

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[See also my "Nevada Ghost Towns"](#), ["Ghost Towns \(and Historic Towns\) of Arizona"](#) and ["Ghost Towns \(and Historic Towns\) of New Mexico"](#), ["Ghost Towns \(and Historic Towns\) of Mojave National Preserve"](#) and ["Ghost Towns of Death Valley"](#)



Kelso Depot

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## Introduction

This is my second booklet (and accompanying DVD slide show) on **California ghost towns**. The first, *Ghost Towns of Death Valley*, reflects the results of 7 trips to Death Valley over a period of ten years. This booklet examines a wider area, over a longer period of time – the Bay Area, Bodie, and the Mojave/Mojave National Preserve, with photos taken from 1988-2003.

Different people have different definitions of ghost towns. Some are very narrow, such as “abandoned 19<sup>th</sup> century mining towns”. My definition is a bit broader – anyplace where people used to live or work, now abandoned, that shows extant signs of habitation. So, 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century abandoned mining towns fit easily into that definition, but so do abandoned factories, mills, army camps, prisons, Missions, etc. Perhaps “ghost site” would be a more appropriate nomenclature for this broader definition.

I’ve also included in this booklet some sites that aren’t abandoned, but are much smaller than in their heyday – Cima, Kelso, Nipton and Ballarat are examples. Whether these are true ghost towns (i.e. abandoned), or are better described as *historic* towns, I leave to the reader to decide.

For the actual ghost *towns* in this booklet, I have defined several different classifications:

- ✦ **DEAD:** Meaning that the former mining camp or town is completely deserted, and has no inhabitants or businesses. Ivanpah or Drawbridge are examples.
- ✦ **GHOST OF ITS FORMER SELF:** Meaning that the population has decreased radically since the boom days, with just a few hardy souls keeping it alive. Ballarat and Death Valley Junction are examples.
- ✦ **ARRESTED DECAY:** Meaning that a governmental or corporate body is attempting to prevent further decay of the site. Bodie is an excellent example.

Also regarding the ghost *towns* in this study, I have used a personal rating system (0 low; 10 high)

to rank three categories in each ghost town. These include:

- ✦ **REMAINS:** What is the quantity and quality of remaining boom-days structures in the town or area?
- ✦ **ACCESSIBILITY:** How easy is it to get to the site? Paved roads or dirt? Gasoline available within 50 miles?
- ✦ **EXPLORING:** How accessible are the buildings in the town? Posted "No Trespassing" areas are rated low; open areas in National Forests/Parks are rated high.

I hope this little photographic study proves interesting to fans of these lonely reminders of our American heritage.

- Robert Jones, Kennesaw, Georgia, April 2004

## Section One: Bay Area

Considering that the Bay Area is a significant urban area, there are a surprising amount of intact ruins and abandoned sites to visit, including abandoned army camps and artillery batteries, an abandoned immigration station, an abandoned federal prison, and an abandoned town in the middle of the Bay Area wetlands.

### Alcatraz

Alcatraz is, perhaps, the most famous prison on the face of the earth. Located on 12 acres of rock in San Francisco Bay, Alcatraz served as a maximum-security prison from 1933-1963, housing criminals branded incorrigible by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Alcatraz was named *La Isla de los Alcatrazes*, or Island of the Pelicans, in 1775 by Spanish explorer Juan Manuel de Ayala. It was used by the Spanish as both a fortress and prison. The United States Army used Alcatraz as a barracks from 1853-1859, and heavily fortified the island during the Civil War. In 1868, Alcatraz became a military prison.

The most famous phase of Alcatraz's history started in 1933, when the U.S. Department of Justice took over the facility, and turned it into a maximum-security prison. Because Alcatraz was virtually escape proof, only the "worst of the worst" served time there. The most famous inmate was probably **Alphonse Capone, who spent 4.5** years at Alcatraz. The location of the cell of Capone, who died in Florida of syphilis in 1948, is unknown. Another famous inmate was **The Birdman of Alcatraz, Robert Stroud. Stroud** was a violent psychopath, who spent most of his time at Alcatraz confined to a hospital mental ward. He kept birds in Leavenworth prison, but never had any at Alcatraz.

Alcatraz was closed down on March 21, 1963 by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. Among the reasons for the closure were the increasing expense of maintaining an island prison, the deterioration of the buildings, and the fact that there was no rehabilitation program for the prisoners.

Alcatraz has been the subject of numerous movies, including *Escape From Alcatraz*, starring Clint Eastwood, *The Birdman of Alcatraz*, starring Burt Lancaster, and *The Enforcer*, starring Clint Eastwood. *Escape From Alcatraz* tells the true story of a famous escape attempt from the prison. Five men are still listed as "missing" after this escape attempt, and are assumed to have been drowned in the swift (and cold) currents of the Bay. To this day, no word has ever been received from any of the escapees.

Alcatraz was occupied by several American Indian groups from 1969-71. In 1972, it became a National Park. Access to the island is via ferry boats from Fisherman's Wharf.

The main cell block was completed in 1912. It was once the largest reinforced concrete structure in the world. The average cell size is 5'x9'. The average prison population was 260.



Main cell block, with warden's house to right



Dock



Guard tower

## Angel Island

Angel Island, located in the San Francisco Bay near Tiburon, is a veritable treasure trove of U.S. **military and immigration historical sites.** The Island, first charted by Spanish explorer Lt. Juan Manuel de Ayala in August, 1775, passed into American hands after the Mexican War of 1846. The 740-acre Island has served the U.S. government as an immigration center, a bastion of coastal defense, an embarkation and debarkation point for U.S. troops in several wars, a quarantine station, and a Nike Missile Site. Whew!! The island (with the exception of a 7 acre Coast Guard Station) is now a California State Park.



## Camp Reynolds

Camp Reynolds, built during the Civil War, was used as an embarkation point for troops arriving from the east to fight in the Indian Wars. In 1900, it became the West Garrison of Fort McDowell.



Officer's quarters

## Fort McDowell

Fort McDowell, built between 1900 and 1911, served as one of the major embarkation and debarkation centers for soldiers during the Spanish American War, World War I, and World War II. The fort was decommissioned in 1946, after processing hundreds of thousands of embarking and returning troops. Fort McDowell was named after Union Civil War General Irwin McDowell.



600 man barracks

## Angel Island Immigration Facility

The Angel Island Immigration Facility, built in 1905, processed thousands of mostly Chinese immigrants between 1910 and 1940. It also served as a detention camp in World War I for "enemy aliens", and as a prisoner of war camp for Japanese prisoners in World War II.





## Batteries



Battery Ledyard was built in 1898 as a result of raised awareness of coastal defense during the Spanish-American War. It was decommissioned as obsolete in 1909.



Battery Drew, built at the same time as the aforementioned Battery Ledyard, was obsolete in 1909

## Black Diamond Mines

Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve, located near Antioch, once was a thriving coal mining area. Coal was discovered there in 1848, and within ten years, there were a dozen mines, three railroads, and several towns. Thousands of Welsh, Irish and Pennsylvanian miners came to the area to ply their trade, removing almost 4,000,000 tons of coal from the ground. The coal mines (which mined lignite, or soft coal) closed in 1902, and the buildings from the towns of Somersville, Nortonville, and Stewartville were moved to Antioch. From 1922-1949, some of the mines were re-opened to mine silica sand. More than 1.8 million tons of sand were mined from the Somersville and Nortonville mines.

There is not much left from the mining days in the preserve other than the rubble from abandoned mines, and a lonely cemetery. Only the sites of the towns are left - one can only imagine what it was like during the boom days.



Hazel-Atlas mine portal (1930) - used for sand mining (Somersville)



Rose Hill Cemetery- a 19th century miner’s burial ground

## Drawbridge


### Background

Located in the southeastern marshes of the San Francisco Bay is the ghost town Drawbridge, near modern day Fremont. It is located on marshy Station Island, between Coyote Slough and Warm Springs (Mud) Slough. The first building on the island was the cabin of an employee of the South Pacific Coast Railroad, in 1876. The railroad, which ran from Alameda to Santa Cruz, had to maintain a bridge-keeper on the island to raise and lower the drawbridges across the two sloughs.

Eventually, hunters started using the island for weekend retreats, and several cabins and hunting lodges were built. In 1897, the railroad officially named the flag stop Drawbridge. By 1906, there were 2 hotels, and 79 cabins. At its peak in 1926, there were 90 cabins, and over 600 weekend residents. The town had no government to speak of, and was reputed to have been a haven for gambling, liquor, and prostitution during prohibition. During most of its history, though,

Drawbridge was a weekend retreat for middle class Bay Area families.

By the 1940s, Drawbridge was in decline, a victim of pollution, vandalism, fires, and the sinking of the houses. In 1940, there were only 50 cabins left. By 1967, there were 42 taxed cabins, and 25 residents. Increasing vandalism from "dope parties" drove the last residents away. In 1974, the last female inhabitant, Nellie Dollin, left because she was shot at by vandals. In 1979, the last male resident, Charlie Luce, left Drawbridge.

## What is left to see

Today, Drawbridge is part of the San Francisco Bay Wildlife Refuge. There are no plans to preserve the town, so the remaining 20-odd structures slowly sink to their fate in the marshes of the Bay. Check with the Wildlife Refuge for access information. They used to give tours on the weekend, but I haven't seen any advertised for several years. Note that the only access to Drawbridge is by walking across a railroad bridge.





Gordon Gun Club, built in 1880. The first non-railroad structure on the island.



Drawbridge is conveniently located in the middle of nowhere, with no road or path access (Delorme TopoUSA 3.0)

## Marin Headlands

A key ingredient in the late 19th-century defense of the United States was a series of coastal

defense fortifications. The ruins of both brick and masonry fortifications can be found on both sides of the mouth of the San Francisco Bay, as well as on Angel and Alcatraz islands. Guns as large as 12-inch were emplaced here from the 1870s until World War II, when the guns were scrapped for the war effort.



Battery 129, with the Golden Gate Bridge in the background



Battery Spencer, constructed 1895



## Battery Spencer

### Mission San Jose

Mission San Jose, located in the southeastern portion of Fremont, California, was founded on June 11, 1797 by Padre Fermin Francisco de LaSuen. Mission San Jose was the 14th of 21 Spanish missions to be built in California. (Each mission was located one day's ride from the last.)

At its peak, Mission San Jose had 150 buildings, controlled huge tracts of land in what is now East Bay, and had large amounts of livestock. (In 1832, 12,000 cattle, 13,000 horses, and 12,000 sheep were on the books). In 1822, control of the Mission was taken out of the hands of the Catholic priests, and put into the hands of secular authorities by the Mexican government. Control of the Mission Church, and the adjoining adobe was returned to the Catholic church by the U.S. government in 1858. The Mission Church, first constructed as a permanent structure in 1809, was destroyed by the great earthquake of 1868, after having had its buttresses removed for aesthetic purposes the year before. The church was reconstructed between 1982-1985. The bells in the church tower are original, as is the adobe structure next to the church.

Mission San Jose also suffered minor damage on October 17, 1989, when the 7.1 Lorna Prieta earthquake caused cracks in the adobe walls.



Reconstructed Mission Church. The church has walls 4-5 feet thick.



Adobe building, built in 1810 - all that is left of the original mission. It was restored in 1915-17.

## Niles/Fremont

Fremont, California, named after the famous 19th century explorer/general John C. Fremont, was formed in 1957 by incorporating 5 small towns into what would become the 5th largest city (in terms of land mass) in California. Fremont is the home of Mission San Jose, as well as several other historical sites.



Niles Depot. Niles, one of the five towns that formed Fremont in 1957, was the site of several Charlie Chaplin films, circa 1915.





Remains of the Vallejo Flour Mill, which once served nearby Mission San Jose

## Sutro Baths

The eerie remains of the turn of the century Sutro Baths, once a popular weekend resort, dominate the Pacific shoreline near the Cliff House restaurant in San Francisco. At one time, the Sutro Baths' intricate system of tunnels channeled the Pacific's mighty waters into a series of baths for swimming and relaxing (sort of a forerunner of the modern water theme parks). The baths were built by financier (and later Mayor of San Francisco) Adolph Sutro in 1896, at an estimated cost of over \$1,000,000!



A site with similar bath ruins (although based on springs) is Alum Rock State Park in San Jose.

## Section Two: Bodie



## Background

Bodie is named after W.S. Bodey, who discovered gold here in 1859. One version of why the spelling is different is that in the early 1860s, a sign painter painted a sign for the local stable “Bodie Stable”, and the new spelling took hold. Another version is that people weren’t sure how to pronounce “Bodey”, so the town name was eventually changed to the more clearly pronounceable, “Bodie”. Ironically, Bodey died in a snowstorm just a few months after his discovery, and never lived to enjoy the fruits of his labor.

A thriving town in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Bodie miners took \$100,000,000 dollars worth of gold out of the nearby mines. At one point, this remote mountain town sported 65 saloons, 7 barber shops, 2 cemeteries (one for “decent respectable folks”), a large red light district, several newspapers, freight and passenger railroad service, and 200+ buildings (mostly wood, but a few brick). A fire destroyed much of the main street in 1932, and no significant rebuilding was done after that point.

As the quote at the beginning of this section indicates, Bodie had a reputation as a “bad” town, earning the sobriquet “the bad man from Bodie”. During the town’s heyday, multiple killings each week were not uncommon.

Bodie, located at 8,500+ feet in the Sierras, can be cold all year round. When I visited in September one year, a sign said that there has been 18 inches of snow since July 31 of the same year!

Bodie became a California State Historic Park in 1964. Today, Bodie is administered by the

California Parks Department, and they have done a good job of preservation, putting new roofs on the buildings, and installing glass windows.

## What is left to see

Bodie is perhaps the most intact true ghost town in the United States. It boasts over 100 buildings. While the main street of the town burned down in 1932, most of the side streets are intact, and some of the buildings still have furniture in them. Surviving buildings include the Methodist Church, the Miner's Union, the firehouse, the International Order of Oddfellows building, and the huge Standard Mill.



1882 Methodist Church





Firehouse



Standard Mill

# Section Three: Mojave Desert/Mojave National Preserve

This section focuses on ghost towns and historic towns in various parts of the Mojave Desert, including the Mojave National Preserve, located about 30 miles SE of Death Valley. The 1.6 million-acre Mojave National Preserve, so designated in 1994, is the third largest in the National Park system (48-states). This section also includes towns on either side of Death Valley National Park (but none within the Park boundaries – see my “Ghost Towns of Death Valley” for ghost towns within the Park). Some would argue that Death Valley Junction is in the Amargossa, not Mojave Desert, but the dividing line is hard to pinpoint.

## Ballarat


### Background:

- ✦ Named after the mining district in Australia
- ✦ '49ers camped near here on their way to California
- ✦ Prospector "Shorty" Harris died here in 1934
- ✦ Post office closed in 1917
- ✦ Last resident died in 1968 ("Seldom Seen Slim")

### What is left to see:

Ballarat was completely dead for a period after the death of its last resident in 1968, but there are several residents now, and a "General Store" which caters to tourists. There are several intact, abandoned buildings (made mostly out of wood and clay), as well as a maintained graveyard. Ballarat is often the embarkation point for the 10 hour round trip hike to the ghost town Panamint

City.



Calico


## Background

Calico is a tourist town today, but in its mining heyday in the 1880s/90s, almost \$100,000,000 in ore was taken out of the nearby Calico Mountains. It was said to be the largest silver strike in California history.

Abandoned by 1929, Calico was saved starting in 1950 when a former Calico miner, Walter Knott (of Knott's Berry Farm fame), bought the town and started to restore it to its former glory. The town is now a bustling tourist mecca, complete with staged gunfights, wedding facilities, and tours of the old Maggie Mine. The site is now administered by San Bernardino County Parks.

## What is left to see

I've heard various estimated of how much of Calico is "original", with perhaps 33% being the most common figure (another estimate I heard once was that there were five standing buildings in 1950 when Walter Knott bought the site). While the true ghost town fan won't have much of an interest in the gaudy, rebuilt main street of Calico, there are a number of adobe and dugout miner's structures still standing, as well as the Maggie Mine.





## Cima


## Background

Cima, like nearby Kelso and Nipton, was a railroad town, formed c. 1906. It originally served as a shipping center for gold and copper ore from the nearby Excelsior Mine (later, the Standard Mine), when 16-team wagons lumbered on the 10-mile route. In time, it also served as a shipping center for nearby ranches, as well as a site for helper engines on the Las Vegas grade. It was never a large town - the number of buildings standing in the 1920s probably weren't much more numerous than what is there today.

## What is left to see

There are several picturesque abandoned buildings (one looks like it might have been a gas station), as well as some railroad debris. The post office/general store was built in the early 1960s. The general store was open when I visited in 2001, but not in 2002 or 2003, so I don't know its current status. Great place to watch UP trains rumble through the Mojave.





Cima general store and post office

## Darwin



## Background:

Founded in 1874 (Post Office, 1875), Darwin had a population of 2,000 by 1877. The silver mines declined soon after that, and Darwin declined. A second boom occurred from 1937-1951, when the Anaconda Corporation mined lead and zinc here.

From 1926-1937, Darwin was the western gateway into Death Valley, and experienced a small tourist boom. In 1937, SR 190 was completed, bypassing the old mining town. The old road from Darwin to Darwin Falls is still passable, albeit in generally poor condition.

## What is left to see:

The main intersection in town – Main and Market Streets – has interesting buildings on all four corners, including an old post office, a dance hall, the old school, and abandoned residences.

According to the 2000 census, there are 40 occupied households in the town, with a total population of 59. There is an operating post office in Darwin.

The most interesting ruins are posted private property – the Darwin Mines property is being maintained for potential future mining operations (similar to Ryan). There are 20+ buildings on the Darwin Mine property, but they are not open for exploration.



### Darwin Dance Hall (a.k.a. Miner’s Union Hall, Crosson’s Corner)



Old Post Office

## Death Valley Junction


### Background:

Death Valley Junction was created primarily as a railroad town, existing at the confluence of the Tonapah and Tidewater Railroad (which ran roughly north and south), and the Death Valley Railroad (that went west to the mines at Ryan). **At it’s peak, before the mines at Ryan closed in 1927, about 100 people lived there. Today, it is closer to 20.** The two most famous buildings in the town – today the Amargosa Hotel and the Amargosa Opera House – were built by Pacific Coast Borax c. 1923.

### What is left to see:

Various old buildings and ruins associated with Pacific Coast Borax, and the T&T and DV railroads.



Wild horses crossing SR 127, at the wild horse crossing



Goffs


## Background

Goffs was founded in 1883 as a railroad town. In time, it acted as a siding, a turnaround for helper engines up from Needles, and a water station for thirsty steam locomotives. The small town grew as it became a location for Santa Fe railroad workers to live.

It's most prominent building, the 2,000-square foot school, operated from 1914-1937. The school (and Goff's itself) declined after 1931, when Route 66 was re-routed several miles to the south. Also, as railroading technology changed, Goff's importance as a water station declined.

After a brief revival during World War II, Goffs went into a long decline. Today, Goffs claims 23 inhabitants. (For a definitive history of Goffs, see [http://www.desertusa.com/mnp/mnp\\_goff.html](http://www.desertusa.com/mnp/mnp_goff.html))

## What is left to see

Kelso has its depot, Nipton has its hotel, and Goffs has its fabulous Goffs Schoolhouse, restored at a cost of \$150,000 in 1998. The schoolhouse is open to visitors from time to time, as is the nearby outdoor Goffs museum. The museum includes various old cars, farming and mining implements, and Route 66 and railroad memorabilia.

The Goffs General Store looked pretty forlorn when I was there.



Goffs Schoolhouse (1914-1937)



Goffs General Store



Part of the outdoor museum, with the schoolhouse on the left

## Ivanpah


### Background

Ivanpah was founded in 1870 to support mining operations in the Clark Mountains. It was all but deserted by 1900. Ivanpah is located NORTH of I-15 - note that there is also a railroad town named Ivanpah south of I-15 within the within the Mojave Preserve.

### What is left to see

Not much. There are a few crumbling walls, and some debris around the Spring. It's biggest claim to fame today is that it is the site of a geocache.

### A note on getting there

We found Ivanpah a bit of a challenge to get to, so here are some tips:

- ✦ On maps, it may be listed as "Ivanpah Springs"
- ✦ I-15, Exit 289, Yates Well Road
- ✦ Head West from the Interstate.
- ✦ Turn right at the first road you come to
- ✦ Turn left on the dirt road that heads due West towards Clark Mountain. Some maps list it as Coliseum or Colosseum Rd.

☀ After about 6 miles, look for a large flat area to your left (large enough to turn a tractor trailer around). You're there! GPS coordinates:

- Latitude N35° 32.430'
- Longitude W115° 31.671'



Ivanpah Spring

## Kelso





## Background

Kelso came into existence in 1906 as a railroad town. It provided water to thirsty steam engines, a place to hook on "helper" engines so that trains could successfully navigate the grade to nearby Cima, and (in 1924) a stopover for railroad crews at the Kelso Depot. The Depot also served as a food stop for passenger trains, until after World War II.

## What is left to see

The fabulous Kelso Depot is being reconditioned by the National Park Service, and is set to be reopened as a Visitor's Center in 2004 (?). Several buildings from the "old days" are left, including the old Post Office. The town is still "alive", as various Preserve personnel live there.



The Kelso Depot, abandoned by the UP in 1985, will be opened as a Visitor Center by the National Park Service in 2004/05



Old Post Office



Kelso Depot in October 2004

## Nipton


### Background

Nipton was founded as a railroad town in 1905, serving area mines and ranchers. The original railroad, the San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake merged with the Union Pacific in 1910, and today, almost 100 years later, UP trains still rumble through the town.

During the Silent Film era, the Hotel Nipton was a favorite haunt of film star Clara Bow, who owned a nearby ranch. Her husband, Rex Bell, drove cattle to Nipton for shipment to stockyards.

In 1984/85, the Freeman family bought most of the town, and started to recondition it. The RV

park, in which we've stayed many times, was actually constructed in the late 1980s to house miners working at the nearby Morningstar Mine and others. The miners are gone, but the RV park and hotel remain.

## What is left to see

The must-see place in Nipton is the wonderful Nipton Hotel, reconditioned and open for business. The (also) reconditioned general store dates to the 1940s. In addition, there are various aging railroad buildings, including a now unused freight depot.

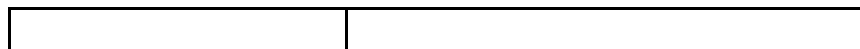
Nipton is one of the choice spots in the Mojave for train watching – many UP freights pass through the town daily (and occasionally stop for engineer coffee breaks at the general store). Nipton is also an excellent embarkation point for visits to the Mojave National Preserve.



The Nipton Hotel, once frequented by silent film star Clara Bow



## Shoshone Caves




### Background:

The Shoshone Caves are one of the unheralded marvels of the Death Valley area. The caves, carved into the rock of nearby cliffs, served as the homes of Death Valley miners and prospectors during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is a story about one miner who bought a propane-powered refrigerator for his cave, but was never able to procure propane in such a remote area. He ended up using it as a storage cabinet.

### What is left to see:

About ten undisturbed “cliff-dweller” homes created and used by Death Valley miners. Notice the chimneys in the photo below.



## Sources

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- ✦ <http://www.bodie.net/>
- ✦ <http://www.nipton.com/history.html>
- ✦ Color photos by Robert Jones

## About the Author

Robert C. Jones grew up in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area. He made his living as a hotel lounge band leader/musician from 1974-1981. In 1981, he moved to the Atlanta, Georgia area, where he received a B.S. in Computer Science at DeVry Institute of Technology. Since 1984, Robert has worked for Hewlett-Packard as a computer consultant.

Robert is an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church. He has written and taught numerous adult Sunday School courses (see front inside cover). He has also been active in choir ministries over the years, and has taught the Disciples Bible Study five times.

Robert is also President of the Kennesaw Historical Society, for whom he has written several books, including "The Law Heard 'Round the World - An Examination of the Kennesaw Gun Law and Its Effects on the Community", "Retracing the Route of the General - Following in the Footsteps of the Andrews Raid", and "Kennesaw (Big Shanty) in the 19th Century".

Robert has also written several books on ghost towns in the Southwest, including in Death Valley, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, and Mojave National Preserve.

His interests include the Civil War, Medieval Monasteries, American railroads, ghost towns, hiking in Death Valley and the Mojave, and Biblical Archaeology.



The author at Kelso Depot

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## Booklet

To purchase the (soft cover) booklet of "Ghost Towns (and Historic Towns) of California: Bodie, Bay Area, Mojave", send a check or money order for \$12.00 (U.S. funds) to:

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The slideshow contains:

- ✦ 100 color photos of "Ghost Towns (and Historic Towns) of California: Bodie, Bay Area, Mojave"
- ✦ Contains all ghost towns on this website
- ✦ Narrated by the author
- ✦ \* DVD+R format - plays on most DVD players and DVD-ROM drives manufactured in the last 4 years.



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# Ghost Towns (and Historic Towns) of California

Bodie, Bay Area, Mojave

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Kelso Depot



Published by Robert Jones

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## **Introduction**

This is my second booklet (and accompanying DVD slide show) on California ghost towns. The first, *Ghost Towns of Death Valley*, reflects the results of 7 trips to Death Valley over a period of ten years. This booklet examines a wider area, over a longer period of time – the Bay Area, Bodie, and the Mojave/Mojave National Preserve, with photos taken from 1988-2003.

Different people have different definitions of ghost towns. Some are very narrow, such as “abandoned 19<sup>th</sup> century mining towns”. My definition is a bit broader – anyplace where people used to live or work, now abandoned, that shows extant signs of habitation. So, 19<sup>th</sup>

century and 20<sup>th</sup> century abandoned mining towns fit easily into that definition, but so do abandoned factories, mills, army camps, prisons, Missions, etc. Perhaps “ghost site” would be a more appropriate nomenclature for this broader definition.

I’ve also included in this booklet some sites that aren’t abandoned, but are much smaller than in their heyday – Cima, Kelso, Nipton and Ballarat are examples. Whether these are true ghost towns (i.e. abandoned), or are better described as *historic* towns, I leave to the reader to decide.

For the actual ghost *towns* in this booklet, I have defined several different classifications:

- **DEAD:** Meaning that the former mining camp or town is completely deserted, and has no inhabitants or businesses. Ivanpah or Drawbridge are examples.
- **GHOST OF ITS FORMER SELF:** Meaning that the population has decreased radically since the boom days, with just a few hardy souls keeping it alive. Ballarat and Death Valley Junction are examples.
- **ARRESTED DECAY:** Meaning that a governmental or corporate body is attempting to prevent further decay of the site. Bodie is an excellent example.

Also regarding the ghost *towns* in this study, I have used a personal rating system (0 low; 10 high) to rank three categories in each ghost town. These include:

- **REMAINS:** What is the quantity and quality of remaining boom-days structures in the town or area?
- **ACCESSIBILITY:** How easy is it to get to the site? Paved roads or dirt? Gasoline available within 50 miles?
- **EXPLORING:** How accessible are the buildings in the town? Posted "No Trespassing" areas are rated low; open areas in National Forests/Parks are rated high.

I hope this little photographic study proves interesting to fans of these lonely reminders of our American heritage.

- Robert Jones, Kennesaw, Georgia, April 2004

## Section One: Bay Area

Considering that the Bay Area is a significant urban area, there are a surprising amount of intact ruins and abandoned sites to visit, including abandoned army camps and artillery batteries, an abandoned immigration station, an abandoned federal prison, and an abandoned town in the middle of the Bay Area wetlands.

# Alcatraz

Alcatraz is, perhaps, the most famous prison on the face of the earth. Located on 12 acres of rock in San Francisco Bay, Alcatraz served as a maximum-security prison from 1933-1963, housing criminals branded incorrigible by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Alcatraz was named *La Isla de los Alcatraces*, or Island of the Pelicans, in 1775 by Spanish explorer Juan Manuel de Ayala. It was used by the Spanish as both a fortress and prison. The United States Army used Alcatraz as a barracks from 1853-1859, and heavily fortified the island during the Civil War. In 1868, Alcatraz became a military prison.

The most famous phase of Alcatraz's history started in 1933, when the U.S. Department of Justice took over the facility, and turned it into a maximum-security prison. Because Alcatraz was virtually escape proof, only the "worst of the worst" served time there. The most famous inmate was probably Alphonse Capone, who spent 4.5 years at Alcatraz. The location of the cell of Capone, who died in Florida of syphilis in 1948, is unknown. Another famous inmate was The Birdman of Alcatraz, Robert Stroud. Stroud was a violent psychopath, who spent most of his time at Alcatraz confined to a hospital mental ward. He kept birds in Leavenworth prison, but never had any at Alcatraz.

Alcatraz was closed down on March 21, 1963 by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. Among the reasons for the closure were the increasing expense of maintaining an island prison, the deterioration of the buildings, and the fact that there was no rehabilitation program for the prisoners.

Alcatraz has been the subject of numerous movies, including *Escape From Alcatraz*, starring Clint Eastwood, *The Birdman of Alcatraz*, starring Burt Lancaster, and *The Enforcer*, starring Clint Eastwood. *Escape From Alcatraz* tells the true story of a famous escape attempt from the prison. Five men are still listed as "missing" after this escape attempt, and are assumed to have been drowned in the swift (and cold) currents of the Bay. To this day, no word has ever been received from any of the escapees.

Alcatraz was occupied by several American Indian groups from 1969-71. In 1972, it became a National Park. Access to the island is via ferry boats from Fisherman's Wharf.

The main cell block was completed in 1912. It was once the largest reinforced concrete structure in the world. The average cell size is 5'x9'. The average prison population was 260.



Main cell block, with warden's house to right



Dock



Guard tower

## Angel Island

Angel Island, located in the San Francisco Bay near Tiburon, is a veritable treasure trove of U. S. military and immigration historical sites. The Island, first charted by Spanish explorer Lt. Juan Manuel de Ayala in August, 1775, passed into American hands after the Mexican War of 1846. The 740-acre Island has served the U.S. government as an immigration center, a bastion of coastal defense, an embarkation and debarkation point for U.S. troops in several wars, a quarantine station, and a Nike Missile Site. Whew!! The island (with the exception of a 7 acre Coast Guard Station) is now a California State Park.



## Camp Reynolds

Camp Reynolds, built during the Civil War, was used as an embarkation point for troops arriving from the east to fight in the Indian Wars. In 1900, it became the West Garrison of Fort McDowell.



Officer's quarters

## Fort McDowell

Fort McDowell, built between 1900 and 1911, served as one of the major embarkation and debarkation centers for soldiers during the Spanish American War, World War I, and World War II. The fort was decommissioned in 1946, after processing hundreds of thousands of embarking and returning troops. Fort McDowell was named after Union Civil War General Irwin McDowell.



600 man barracks

## Angel Island Immigration Facility

The Angel Island Immigration Facility, built in 1905, processed thousands of mostly Chinese immigrants between 1910 and 1940. It also served as a detention camp in World War I for "enemy aliens", and as a prisoner of war camp for Japanese prisoners in World War II.





## Batteries



Battery Ledyard was built in 1898 as a result of raised awareness of coastal defense during the Spanish-American War. It was decommissioned as obsolete in 1909.



Battery Drew, built at the same time as the aforementioned Battery Ledyard, was obsoleted in 1909

## Black Diamond Mines

Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve, located near Antioch, once was a thriving coal mining area. Coal was discovered there in 1848, and within ten years, there were a dozen mines, three railroads, and several towns. Thousands of Welsh, Irish and Pennsylvanian miners came to the area to ply their trade, removing almost 4,000,000 tons of coal from the ground. The coal mines (which mined lignite, or soft coal) closed in 1902, and the buildings from the towns of Somersville, Nortonville, and Stewartville were moved to Antioch. From 1922-1949, some of the mines were re-opened to mine silica sand. More than 1.8 million tons of sand were mined from the Somersville and Nortonville mines.

There is not much left from the mining days in the preserve other than the rubble from abandoned mines, and a lonely cemetery. Only the sites of the towns are left - one can only imagine what it was like during the boom days.



Hazel-Atlas mine portal (1930) - used for sand mining (Somersville)



Rose Hill Cemetery- a 19th century miner's burial ground

## Drawbridge

Founded/ abandoned:	1897/1979
Population:	1926 - 600 (weekend residents)

Economy:	Railroad town; hunting retreat
Location:	Station Island, between Coyote Slough and Warm Springs (Mud) Slough, SE marshes of San Francisco Bay
Remains:	10
Accessibility:	2
Exploring:	10

## Background

Located in the southeastern marshes of the San Francisco Bay is the ghost town Drawbridge, near modern day Fremont. It is located on marshy Station Island, between Coyote Slough and Warm Springs (Mud) Slough. The first building on the island was the cabin of an employee of the South Pacific Coast Railroad, in 1876. The railroad, which ran from Alameda to Santa Cruz, had to maintain a bridge-keeper on the island to raise and lower the drawbridges across the two sloughs.

Eventually, hunters started using the island for weekend retreats, and several cabins and hunting lodges were built. In 1897, the railroad officially named the flag stop Drawbridge. By 1906, there were 2 hotels, and 79 cabins. At its peak in 1926, there were 90 cabins, and over 600 weekend residents. The town had no government to speak of, and was reputed to have been a haven for gambling, liquor, and prostitution during prohibition. During most of its history, though, Drawbridge was a weekend retreat for middle class Bay Area families.

By the 1940s, Drawbridge was in decline, a victim of pollution, vandalism, fires, and the sinking of the houses. In 1940, there were only 50 cabins left. By 1967, there were 42 taxed cabins, and 25 residents. Increasing vandalism from "dope parties" drove the last residents away. In 1974, the last female inhabitant, Nellie Dollin, left because she was shot at by vandals. In 1979, the last male resident, Charlie Luce, left Drawbridge.

## What is left to see

Today, Drawbridge is part of the San Francisco Bay Wildlife Refuge. There are no plans to preserve the town, so the remaining 20-odd structures slowly sink to their fate in the marshes

of the Bay. Check with the Wildlife Refuge for access information. They used to give tours on the weekend, but I haven't seen any advertised for several years. Note that the only access to Drawbridge is by walking across a railroad bridge.





Gordon Gun Club, built in 1880. The first non-railroad structure on the island.



Drawbridge is conveniently located in the middle of nowhere, with no road or path access (Delorme TopoUSA 3.0)

## Marin Headlands

A key ingredient in the late 19th-century defense of the United States was a series of coastal defense fortifications. The ruins of both brick and masonry fortifications can be found on both sides of the mouth of the San Francisco Bay, as well as on Angel and Alcatraz islands. Guns as large as 12-inch were emplaced here from the 1870s until World War II, when the guns were

scrapped for the war effort.



Battery 129, with the Golden Gate Bridge in the background



Battery Spencer, constructed 1895



Battery Spencer

## Mission San Jose

Mission San Jose, located in the southeastern portion of Fremont, California, was founded on June 11, 1797 by Padre Fermin Francisco de LaSuen. Mission San Jose was the 14th of 21 Spanish missions to be built in California. (Each mission was located one day's ride from the last.)

At its peak, Mission San Jose had 150 buildings, controlled huge tracts of land in what is now East Bay, and had large amounts of livestock. (In 1832, 12,000 cattle, 13,000 horses, and 12,000 sheep were on the books). In 1822, control of the Mission was taken out of the hands of the Catholic priests, and put into the hands of secular authorities by the Mexican government. Control of the Mission Church, and the adjoining adobe was returned to the Catholic church by the U.S. government in 1858. The Mission Church, first constructed as a permanent structure in 1809, was destroyed by the great earthquake of 1868, after having had its buttresses removed for aesthetic purposes the year before. The church was reconstructed between 1982-1985. The bells in the church tower are original, as is the adobe structure next to the church.

Mission San Jose also suffered minor damage on October 17, 1989, when the 7.1 Lorna Prieta earthquake caused cracks in the adobe walls.





Reconstructed Mission Church. The church has walls 4-5 feet thick.



Adobe building, built in 1810 - all that is left of the original mission. It was restored in 1915-17.

## Niles/Fremont

Fremont, California, named after the famous 19th century explorer/general John C. Fremont, was formed in 1957 by incorporating 5 small towns into what would become the 5th largest city (in terms of land mass) in California. Fremont is the home of Mission San Jose, as well as several other historical sites.



**Niles Depot. Niles, one of the five towns that formed Fremont in 1957, was the site of several Charlie Chaplin films, circa 1915.**



**Remains of the Vallejo Flour Mill, which once served nearby Mission San Jose**

## **Sutro Baths**

**The eerie remains of the turn of the century Sutro Baths, once a popular weekend resort, dominate the Pacific shoreline near the Cliff House restaurant in San Francisco. At one time, the Sutro Baths' intricate system of tunnels channeled the Pacific's mighty waters into a series of baths for swimming and relaxing (sort of a forerunner of the modern water theme parks). The baths were built by financier (and later Mayor of San Francisco) Adolph Sutro in 1896, at an estimated cost of over \$1,000,000!**



A site with similar bath ruins (although based on springs) is Alum Rock State Park in San Jose.

## Section Two: Bodie

Founded/ abandoned:	1859/1932
Population:	1878 – 3,000/5,000 1879 - 10,000/12,000
Ghost town type:	Arrested decay
Mining type:	Gold
Location:	From a point 6 miles S of Bridgeport on US 395, travel 12 miles E on SR 270 (Bodie Rd.). (Note: The last time I was there, not all of SR 270 was paved.)
Remains:	10

Accessibility:	8
Exploring:	10

## Background

“Good-bye, God, I’m going to Bodie”. – Prayer of a young girl upon finding out that her family was moving to Bodie

Bodie is named after W.S. Bodey, who discovered gold here in 1859. One version of why the spelling is different is that in the early 1860s, a sign painter painted a sign for the local stable “Bodie Stable”, and the new spelling took hold. Another version is that people weren’t sure how to pronounce “Bodey”, so the town name was eventually changed to the more clearly pronounceable, “Bodie”. Ironically, Bodey died in a snowstorm just a few months after his discovery, and never lived to enjoy the fruits of his labor.

A thriving town in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Bodie miners took \$100,000,000 dollars worth of gold out of the nearby mines. At one point, this remote mountain town sported 65 saloons, 7 barber shops, 2 cemeteries (one for “decent respectable folks”), a large red light district, several newspapers, freight and passenger railroad service, and 200+ buildings (mostly wood, but a few brick). A fire destroyed much of the main street in 1932, and no significant rebuilding was done after that point.

As the quote at the beginning of this section indicates, Bodie had a reputation as a “bad” town, earning the sobriquet “the bad man from Bodie”. During the town’s heyday, multiple killings each week were not uncommon.

Bodie, located at 8,500+ feet in the Sierras, can be cold all year round. When I visited in September one year, a sign said that there has been 18 inches of snow since July 31 of the same year!

Bodie became a California State Historic Park in 1964. Today, Bodie is administered by the California Parks Department, and they have done a good job of preservation, putting new roofs on the buildings, and installing glass windows.

## What is left to see

Bodie is perhaps the most intact true ghost town in the United States. It boasts over 100 buildings. While the main street of the town burned down in 1932, most of the side streets are intact, and some of the buildings still have furniture in them. Surviving buildings include the Methodist Church, the Miner's Union, the firehouse, the International Order of Oddfellows building, and the huge Standard Mill.



1882 Methodist Church





Firehouse



Standard Mill

## Section Three: Mojave Desert/Mojave National Preserve

This section focuses on ghost towns and historic towns in various parts of the Mojave Desert, including the Mojave National Preserve, located about 30 miles SE of Death Valley. The 1.6 million-acre Mojave National Preserve, so designated in 1994, is the third largest in the National Park system (48-states). This section also includes towns on either side of Death Valley National Park (but none within the Park boundaries – see my “Ghost Towns of Death Valley” for ghost towns within the Park). Some would argue that Death Valley Junction is in the Amargossa, not Mojave Desert, but the dividing line is hard to pinpoint.

### Ballarat

Founded:	c. 1890s
Population:	c. 1900: 400/500
Ghost town type:	Ghost of its former self

Mining type:	Gold
Location:	On the western side of Death Valley National Parks, at the foot of the Panamint Mountains
Remains:	7
Accessibility:	5
Exploring:	3

## Background:

- Named after the mining district in Australia
- '49ers camped near here on their way to California
- Prospector "Shorty" Harris died here in 1934
- Post office closed in 1917
- Last resident died in 1968 ("Seldom Seen Slim")

## What is left to see:

Ballarat was completely dead for a period after the death of its last resident in 1968, but there are several residents now, and a "General Store" which caters to tourists. There are several intact, abandoned buildings (made mostly out of wood and clay), as well as a maintained graveyard. Ballarat is often the embarkation point for the 10 hour round trip hike to the ghost town Panamint City.







## Calico

<b>Founded/ abandoned:</b>	1881/1929
<b>Ghost town type:</b>	Dead (tourist town)
<b>Mining type:</b>	Silver, borax
<b>Location:</b>	10 miles north of Barstow, Exit I-15 at Ghost Town Rd.
<b>Remains:</b>	4

Accessibility:	10
Exploring:	10

## Background

Calico is a tourist town today, but in its mining heyday in the 1880s/90s, almost \$100,000,000 in ore was taken out of the nearby Calico Mountains. It was said to be the largest silver strike in California history.

Abandoned by 1929, Calico was saved starting in 1950 when a former Calico miner, Walter Knott (of Knott's Berry Farm fame), bought the town and started to restore it to its former glory. The town is now a bustling tourist mecca, complete with staged gunfights, wedding facilities, and tours of the old Maggie Mine. The site is now administered by San Bernardino County Parks.

## What is left to see

I've heard various estimated of how much of Calico is "original", with perhaps 33% being the most common figure (another estimate I heard once was that there were five standing buildings in 1950 when Walter Knott bought the site). While the true ghost town fan won't have much of an interest in the gaudy, rebuilt main street of Calico, there are a number of adobe and dugout miner's structures still standing, as well as the Maggie Mine.





## Cima

<b>Founded:</b>	c. 1906
<b>Ghost town type:</b>	Ghost of its former self
<b>Economy:</b>	Railroad town (shipping center)
<b>Location:</b>	Mojave National Preserve – I-15, Exit 270, head S on Cima Road
<b>Remains:</b>	6
<b>Accessibility:</b>	8 (no gas within the Preserve)
<b>Exploring:</b>	3 (most private property)

## Background

Cima, like nearby Kelso and Nipton, was a railroad town, formed c. 1906. It originally served as a shipping center for gold and copper ore from the nearby Excelsior Mine (later, the Standard Mine), when 16-team wagons lumbered on the 10-mile route. In time, it also served

as a shipping center for nearby ranches, as well as a site for helper engines on the Las Vegas grade. It was never a large town – the number of buildings standing in the 1920s probably weren't much more numerous than what is there today.

## What is left to see

There are several picturesque abandoned buildings (one looks like it might have been a gas station), as well as some railroad debris. The post office/general store was built in the early 1960s. The general store was open when I visited in 2001, but not in 2002 or 2003, so I don't know its current status. Great place to watch UP trains rumble through the Mojave.





Cima general store and post office

## Darwin

Founded:	1874
Ghost town type:	Ghost of it's former self (has a post office)
Population:	1877: 2,000 2000: 59
Mining type:	Silver, lead, zinc
Location:	Just outside of DVNP on West-central side, 5.5 miles off of SR 190
Remains:	10
Accessibility:	10 (paved road access)
Exploring:	2 (mostly private property)

## Background:

Founded in 1874 (Post Office, 1875), Darwin had a population of 2,000 by 1877. The silver mines declined soon after that, and Darwin declined. A second boom occurred from 1937-1951, when the Anaconda Corporation mined lead and zinc here.

From 1926-1937, Darwin was the western gateway into Death Valley, and experienced a small tourist boom. In 1937, SR 190 was completed, bypassing the old mining town. The old road from Darwin to Darwin Falls is still passable, albeit in generally poor condition.

## What is left to see:

The main intersection in town – Main and Market Streets – has interesting buildings on all four corners, including an old post office, a dance hall, the old school, and abandoned residences.

According to the 2000 census, there are 40 occupied households in the town, with a total population of 59. There is an operating post office in Darwin.

The most interesting ruins are posted private property – the Darwin Mines property is being maintained for potential future mining operations (similar to Ryan). There are 20+ buildings on the Darwin Mine property, but they are not open for exploration.



Darwin Dance Hall (a.k.a. Miner's Union Hall, Crosson's Corner)



## Old Post Office

## Death Valley Junction

Founded:	1907
Ghost town type:	Ghost of it's former self
Mining type:	Borate
Location:	On California SR 127, about 7 miles S of the Nevada state line
Remains:	10
Accessibility:	10
Exploring:	5 (some private property)

## Background:

Death Valley Junction was created primarily as a railroad town, existing at the confluence of the Tonapah and Tidewater Railroad (which ran roughly north and south), and the Death Valley Railroad (that went west to the mines at Ryan). At it's peak, before the mines at Ryan closed in 1927, about 100 people lived there. Today, it is closer to 20. The two most famous buildings in the town – today the Amargosa Hotel and the Amargosa Opera House – were built by Pacific Coast Borax c. 1923.

## What is left to see:

Various old buildings and ruins associated with Pacific Coast Borax, and the T&T and DV railroads.



Wild horses crossing SR 127, at the wild horse crossing





# Goffs

Founded:	1883
Ghost town type:	Ghost of its former self
Original economy:	Railroad town (Santa Fe)
Location:	SE part of Mojave National Preserve – about 10 miles NE of Fenner
Remains:	5
Accessibility:	8
Exploring:	8

## Background

Goffs was founded in 1883 as a railroad town. In time, it acted as a siding, a turnaround for helper engines up from Needles, and a water station for thirsty steam locomotives. The small town grew as it became a location for Santa Fe railroad workers to live.

It's most prominent building, the 2,000-square foot school, operated from 1914-1937. The school (and Goff's itself) declined after 1931, when Route 66 was re-routed several miles to the south. Also, as railroading technology changed, Goff's importance as a water station declined.

After a brief revival during World War II, Goffs went into a long decline. Today, Goffs claims 23 inhabitants. (For a definitive history of Goffs, see [http://www.desertusa.com/mnp/mnp\\_goff.html](http://www.desertusa.com/mnp/mnp_goff.html))

## What is left to see

Kelso has its depot, Nipton has its hotel, and Goffs has its fabulous Goffs Schoolhouse, restored at a cost of \$150,000 in 1998. The schoolhouse is open to visitors from time to time, as is the nearby outdoor Goffs museum. The museum includes various old cars, farming and mining implements, and Route 66 and railroad memorabilia.

The Goffs General Store looked pretty forlorn when I was there.



Goffs Schoolhouse (1914-1937)



Goffs General Store



Part of the outdoor museum, with the schoolhouse on the left

## Ivanpah

Founded/ abandoned:	1870/1900
Ghost town type:	Dead
Mining type:	Gold
Location:	Mojave National Preserve, NW of I-15 (indicated as Ivanpah Springs on most maps)
Remains:	2

Accessibility:	2
Exploring:	10

## Background

Ivanpah was founded in 1870 to support mining operations in the Clark Mountains. It was all but deserted by 1900. Ivanpah is located NORTH of I-15 - note that there is also a railroad town named Ivanpah south of I-15 within the within the Mojave Preserve.

## What is left to see

Not much. There are a few crumbling walls, and some debris around the Spring. It's biggest claim to fame today is that it is the site of a geocache.

## A note on getting there

We found Ivanpah a bit of a challenge to get to, so here are some tips:

- On maps, it may be listed as "Ivanpah Springs"
- I-15, Exit 289, Yates Well Road
- Head West from the Interstate.
- Turn right at the first road you come to
- Turn left on the dirt road that heads due West towards Clark Mountain. Some maps list it as Coloseum or Colosseum Rd.
- After about 6 miles, look for a large flat area to your left (large enough to turn a tractor trailer around). You're there! GPS coordinates:
  - Latitude N35° 32.430'
  - Longitude W115° 31.671'



Ivanpah Spring

## Kelso

Founded:	1906
Ghost town type:	Ghost of its former self
Original economy:	Railroad town (shipping center)

Location:	Mojave National Preserve – From Baker (I-15, Exit 244), head SE on Kelbaker Rd.
Remains:	5
Accessibility:	8
Exploring:	8

## Background

Kelso came into existence in 1906 as a railroad town. It provided water to thirsty steam engines, a place to hook on “helper” engines so that trains could successfully navigate the grade to nearby Cima, and (in 1924) a stopover for railroad crews at the Kelso Depot. The Depot also served as a food stop for passenger trains, until after World War II.

## What is left to see

The fabulous Kelso Depot is being reconditioned by the National Park Service, and is set to be reopened as a Visitor’s Center in 2004 (?). Several buildings from the “old days” are left, including the old Post Office. The town is still “alive”, as various Preserve personnel live there.



The Kelso Depot, abandoned by the UP in 1985, will be opened as a Visitor Center by the National Park Service in 2004/05



Old Post Office



Kelso Depot in October 2004

## Nipton

Founded:	1905
Ghost town type:	Ghost of its former self

Original Economy:	Railroad town (shipping center)
Location:	Just outside of the Mojave National Preserve boundaries, on the NE side (I-15, Exit 284)
Remains:	8
Accessibility:	9 (nearest gas in Searchlight)
Exploring:	7 (private, but much is open to the public)

## Background

Nipton was founded as a railroad town in 1905, serving area mines and ranchers. The original railroad, the San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake merged with the Union Pacific in 1910, and today, almost 100 years later, UP trains still rumble through the town.

During the Silent Film era, the Hotel Nipton was a favorite haunt of film star Clara Bow, who owned a nearby ranch. Her husband, Rex Bell, drove cattle to Nipton for shipment to stockyards.

In 1984/85, the Freeman family bought most of the town, and started to recondition it. The RV park, in which we've stayed many times, was actually constructed in the late 1980s to house miners working at the nearby Morningstar Mine and others. The miners are gone, but the RV park and hotel remain.

## What is left to see

The must-see place in Nipton is the wonderful Nipton Hotel, reconditioned and open for business. The (also) reconditioned general store dates to the 1940s. In addition, there are various aging railroad buildings, including a now unused freight depot.

Nipton is one of the choice spots in the Mojave for train watching – many UP freights pass through the town daily (and occasionally stop for engineer coffee breaks at the general store). Nipton is also an excellent embarkation point for visits to the Mojave National Preserve.





The Nipton Hotel, once frequented by silent film star Clara Bow



## Shoshone Caves

Ghost town type:	Dead
Location:	Two blocks W of SR 127 in Shoshone, CA
Remains:	10
Accessibility:	10

Exploring:	10
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## Background:

The Shoshone Caves are one of the unheralded marvels of the Death Valley area. The caves, carved into the rock of nearby cliffs, served as the homes of Death Valley miners and prospectors during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is a story about one miner who bought a propane-powered refrigerator for his cave, but was never able to procure propane in such a remote area. He ended up using it as a storage cabinet.

## What is left to see:

About ten undisturbed “cliff-dweller” homes created and used by Death Valley miners. Notice the chimneys in the photo below.



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- <http://www.nipton.com/history.html>
- Color photos by Robert Jones

## About the Author

Robert C. Jones grew up in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area. He made his living as a hotel lounge band leader/musician from 1974-1981. In 1981, he moved to the Atlanta, Georgia area, where he received a B.S. in Computer Science at DeVry Institute of Technology. Since 1984, Robert has worked for Hewlett-Packard as a computer consultant.

Robert is an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church. He has written and taught numerous adult Sunday School courses (see front inside cover). He has also been active in choir ministries over the years, and has taught the Disciples Bible Study five times.

Robert is also President of the Kennesaw Historical Society, for whom he has written several books, including "The Law Heard 'Round the World - An Examination of the Kennesaw Gun Law and Its Effects on the Community", "Retracing the Route of the General - Following in the Footsteps of the Andrews Raid", and "Kennesaw (Big Shanty) in the 19th Century".

Robert has also written several books on ghost towns in the Southwest, including in Death Valley, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, and Mojave National Preserve.

His interests include the Civil War, Medieval Monasteries, American railroads, ghost towns,

hiking in Death Valley and the Mojave, and Biblical Archaeology.



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