

Mammoth Lakes... ... CALIFORNIA



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Cover picture shows Lake George, one of
the Mammoth Lakes. Photo by Stephan
Willard, Mammoth, Calif.

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505 Franklin St.
Boise, Idaho



MOUNTAIN STATES PRESS, INC., BOISE

Mammoth Lakes...

By

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MAMMOTH LAKES recreation area is one of California's finest and most varied in its scenic grandeur, geologic wonders, and nature-lovers' playground possibilities.

"The largest bonanza outside of Virginia City" was the modest claim of Mammoth's discoverers. California's self-appointed press agents were already bursting with adjectives and enthusiasm. Although Hollywood with its super colossal epics was an undreamed of golden source of fortune, and the "tourist business" was beyond their wildest imagination, even back in 1877 they knew that everything Californian was going to be bigger, grander, more exaggeratedly splendid than anything else on earth. So they named their little pinpoint on the map "Mammoth."

The town was named for the Mammoth Mine and Mining Company organized in 1878 and later the name was applied to the whole region. The story really begins several years before, with the "Lost Cement Mines."

Mark Twain in "Roughing It" gives one version of the "Lost Cement Mines" story, which led to the discovery of Mammoth. He says that three brothers found a ledge of rusty reddish cement 2/3rds pure gold. One brother survived the Indians, desert and mountains and got through

For more historical information on the Mammoth Lakes area, read "Tales of the Pioneers" by W. A. Chalfant.

to the west side of the Sierra, where his samples of ore created a gold fever. Various parties for years braved the dangers of the local Paiute war to find the lost "Cement Mine." In 1877 a dying man in San Francisco told that he and another man had secretly taken \$350,000.00 in gold from such a "cement deposit" over a period of years. This story started another wave of gold seekers. A party of prospectors drifting south from Mono Lake decided to cross one more ridge and try just one more canyon—the one later named "Mammoth." There they struck a rich ledge, the "Alpha", east of Lake Mary on June 20, 1877 and on July 30, another party located the "Mammoth" nearby.

There was little publicity that first year; but early in 1878 news or rumors traveled, and in June the place had a population of 125. Three townsites were located and partially developed. Pine City was near the shores of Lake Mary; Mammoth was centrally located near the present Mill Creek campground; Mineral Park was about a mile and a half farther down the canyon toward what is now called "Old Mammoth."

A wagon road was built from Benton and a more direct southerly toll road was built from Bishop. It was so constructed that it was possible to drive forty miles from Round Valley to Mammoth in a single day. The road followed very closely the route of the present Highway 395, especially in the Sherwin Grade section. In those days vehicles and equipment (even as cars and trucks now) sometimes went over the grade at the sharp turn at the summit and plunged 800 feet into the canyon below. Such an accident happened to a freight team pulling sections of the enormous flywheel for the mill at Mammoth.

This mill contained 40 stamps, each of 900 pounds weight. The flywheel, a massive built-up casting 14 feet in diameter, and the cylinder, 2 feet inside diameter, with

a four foot piston stroke, are still to be seen at the old mill site, which originally covered 1/4 acre of ground with buildings. The Mammoth Company is said to have produced \$2,000,000.00 during its operations and some mining experts think there are indications of important deposits there today, practically untouched.

Judging from the number of business houses, the Mammoth of 1879 compared favorably with the Mammoth of today. There were six general merchandise stores in the region, three clothing houses, three variety stores, two drug stores, two breweries, two livery stables, six hotels, five restaurants, six lodging houses, and twenty-two saloons. Three doctors attempted to look after the physical welfare of the population; the police force numbered three. The population was variously estimated as between 1000 and 1500. Inflated real estate values were in evidence—\$1500.00 for a twenty-five foot frontage lot was not unusual, a mere \$60.00 a front foot. The community had two rival newspapers to make things exciting, the Mammoth City Herald and the Times.

Transportation to the Mammoth region has not been limited to access from the east side of the Sierra. In recent years there has been considerable attention given to plans for a road over Mammoth Pass and down the Middle Fork of the San Joaquin River. In 1878-79 a toll trail was built from Fresno Flats past Beasore and Jackass Meadows so that it was possible to go to San Francisco from Mammoth by horseback messenger in twenty-eight hours. A Mammoth paper ventured the guess that Madera on the Southern Pacific Railroad near Fresno would be the shipping point for the district.

Mammoth's career as a mining community proved short-lived. The mill closed down early in 1880. The dam, so valuable as a control of the water supply was neglected. Production costs were greatly inflated and there were other evidences of mismanagement.



Twin Lakes

Photo by Stephan Willard

Then came the winter of the big snow, 1879-1880, with the terrific storms that proved too much for human endurance. Snow fell almost constantly for eighteen days with a total fall of twenty-eight feet, and eight feet on the level at one time. One livery stable owner gave up his business when he had sunk two shafts and failed to locate his stables. Even buildings made of foot square timbers crumpled under this enormous weight of snow.

The exodus began. A news report said "Men are leaving every day . . . on snowshoes, barley sacks, anything . . ." A train of wagons and sleds was fully a week making 26 miles. In Rock Creek Canyon the advance averaged only 2 miles a day! The next spring, buildings were torn down and their lumber hauled away to other places. Only a few foundations and walls mark the sites of these once active "Mammoth Diggings."

But Mammoth's real wealth was yet to be discovered. Her mineral treasures were of small importance compared to the hunting, fishing, magnificent scenery, desirable camping spots and the freedom from the cares of ordinary life which lure visitors today.

Mammoth Canyon, dominated by Mammoth Mountain, elevation 10,054 feet, is the heart of this vacation paradise. The pumice covered mountain, the steam vents, hot springs and even several small geysers near the lower end of the canyon, huge crystal formations in her cliffs, gem-like lakes studding her towering back drop of tree covered or starkly magnificent and sharp cut ridges testify that Mother Nature planned this as an ideal spot for mankind to enjoy her mysterious wonders.

WHAT TO SEE BY AUTO

The interest of the average Mammoth tourist is divided between sight seeing trips and fishing. Here there are many one-day trips combining these interests.

Mammoth Lakes

The drive around Mammoth Lakes offers many inspiring views of the Mammoth Crest with its outstanding peaks; Crystal Crag, Mammoth Mountain, and Red Mountain. Far across Long Valley can be seen the Benton range and the White Mountains. The Mammoth Lakes highway is only nine miles in length but traverses a great deal of worth-while territory. Leaving Highway 395 at Casa Diablo, the Mammoth road passes through the settlement of Mammoth with its Post Office, Ranger Station, and usual business houses. The road then ascends the lower slopes of Mammoth Mountain from which the Crest and Mammoth Falls are visible. After passing the lower end of Twin Lakes, the road continues to climb by high-gear stages through the Mammoth basin to Lake Mary and Lake Mamie, ending at Horseshoe Lake. The trip around the lakes is not complete, however, without visiting Lake George. This is reached by turning to the left on a dirt road between Lake Mary and Lake Mamie.

Only five of the thirteen lakes in the Mammoth Lakes group are accessible by car. From each lake trails lead to others of the group, to be described later. Views from the lookouts, one above and one below the Twin Lakes, are strikingly beautiful.

Starting point for Mammoth Lakes trip is Casa Diablo on Highway 395. Mileage: 3.5 to Mammoth postoffice; 6.5 to lower end of Twin Lakes; 7.0 to the forks of the Twin Lakes road; 8.0 to Lake Mary; 8.5 to Lake Mamie; 9.0 to Horseshoe Lake; .5 to Lake George from the Mammoth Lakes highway.

San Joaquin River

The trip to the Middle Fork of the San Joaquin River by way of the Minarets Summit offers a day literally filled with enjoyable scenery, good fishing, and geological wonders. The road winds through a beautiful Jeffrey

pine forest in which is found the Earthquake Crack, a result of volcanic action. The Crack can be entered by an easy trail a few hundred feet in length. At the Minarets Summit, pointers near the road call attention to the really spectacular view of the Minarets, Mount Ritter, Mount Banner and the canyon of the San Joaquin River. The dirt road from the summit to the bottom of the canyon is narrow and winding, but worth the effort of driving it.

In the bottom of the canyon are Starkweather Lake, Sotcher Lake, the Devil's Post Pile, Red's Meadows, and Rainbow Falls. All of these are accessible by car except Rainbow Falls which is reached by an easy walk of three quarters of a mile by trail, and the Devil's Post Pile which is a quarter of a mile from the road. The Devil's Post Pile is a basaltic rock formation consisting of four and five sided rock crystals which resemble stacked fence posts standing thirty to fifty feet in height. The top of the Pile, reached by a short climb up the side, has been polished by glacial action.

Sotcher and Starkweather Lakes have beautiful yellow pond lilies which bloom in July and August. Rainbow Falls gets its name from the brilliant rainbow seen in the middle of the day at the base of the 125 foot high falls.

Starting point for San Joaquin River trip, one-half mile west of Mammoth post office on the Mammoth Lakes road. Mileage: 1.7 to the Earthquake Crack; 5.7 to Minarets Summit, elevation 9,250 feet; 6.7 to junction with the Agnew Meadows road; 9.7 to Pumice Flats on the San Joaquin River; 11.5 to Devil's Post Pile; 13.0 to Sotcher Lake; 14.0 to Red's Meadows, the beginning of the Rainbow Falls trail.

Fish Hatchery and Convict Lake

The tourist may watch trout in all stages of development at the Fish Hatchery located a half mile north, off of Highway 395 and 2.7 miles from the Casa Diablo junction

with the Mammoth road. Below the Fish Hatchery on Hot Creek good fishing may be enjoyed near the Hot Creek geysers. Convict Lake, a beautiful expanse of water in rugged surroundings, is situated at the base of Mt. Morrison and Mt. Laurel. This lake was so named because several prisoners, escaping from the Nevada State Penitentiary at Carson City, were cornered here in the 1880's. Whitmore Tubs, a delightful warm plunge supplied by mineral springs, is a pleasant place to relax after the trip.

Starting point. Junction of Highway 395 and the Mammoth Lakes Highway at Casa Diablo. Mileage: 2.7 south to Fish Hatchery Road; turn left 3 miles to Hatchery; then back to Highway 395, continuing south 3.1 miles to Convict Lake turn-off; then right 1 mile to the lake. The road to Whitmore Tubs joins Highway 395 one-half mile below the Convict Lake junction.

June Lake

The visitor will find many interesting side trips on the drive from Mammoth to the June Lake district. A short drive and a short walk will bring the sightseer to the edges of the Inyo Craters each of which contains a small lake. Another short detour west of Highway 395 leads to the base of Glass Mountain, a large crater composed of volcanic glass or obsidian. A loop trip of about fifteen miles past June, Gull, Silver and Grant lakes and down Rush Creek offers a ride through beautiful scenery. After completing the loop the visitor should continue west on Highway 395 to Mono Lake, a large land locked saline lake. Daily boat trips are scheduled to the islands of Paoha and Negit.

Starting point for June Lake trip, junction of Mammoth Lakes road and Highway 395. Mileage: 5.0 to Inyo Crater Lakes left turn-off; 9.0 to Glass Mountain left turn-off; 13.0 to June Lake junction.

TRIPS TO THE GHOST TOWNS

Three buildings are still standing in Mammoth City, which is in the gulch one-quarter mile below the highway, 1000 feet above the intersection with the road to Twin Lakes. The log building farthest down the canyon was one of the old saloons. Across the creek the remainder of the tramway to the mines is visible and several of the old cars are heaped at the bottom of the talus slope. About one mile farther down the road which goes through Mammoth City, at the approximate site of Mineral City, is a lone grave of one of the former residents. At the junction of the highway and the road to Lake Mary, part of an old arrastra, or stone wheel for grinding ore still stands at the site of old Pine City.

Two of the most interesting "ghost towns" near Mammoth are Bodie and Aurora. These are reached by returning to Highway 395 and driving north, left, for approximately 40 miles to a junction marked "Bodie and Hawthorne." From this point it is 15 miles by graded road to Bodie and 25 miles to Aurora. In both of these towns many of the original buildings are still standing as are some of the old grave markers in the cemetery at Bodie.

WHERE TO GO BY TRAIL

The many trails within the Mammoth Lakes region make it possible for tourists to visit the numerous lakes and scenic sections inaccessible by motor car. It is possible to drive part of the way before starting on the trail trips. All trails are well marked with either signboards or cairns, rocks piled on each other, to indicate a trail sign. Horseback trips are available on all trails except the Lava Arch one.

T.J. Lake

The T.J. Lake trip is a short hike through several lovely meadows to two small but beautiful lakes situated at the base of Crystal Crag, a distance of a half mile. Many

people consider T.J. Lake to be the most beautiful in the region. The starting point for this hike is the end of the road at the left end of Lake George.

Crystal Lake

The starting point for the trail trip to Crystal Lake and the Rim is the end of the road at Wood's Lodge, around the right side of Lake George. The forest through which the trail winds is the largest and most beautiful stand of hemlock in the region. Many lovely views in all directions make this a very scenic, interesting trail trip. From the summit of the Rim above Crystal Crag nine of the Mammoth Lakes are visible, as well as Mono Lake, the Minarets, Mount Ritter, Mount Banner, Long Valley, the White Mountains, and range upon range of mountains west of Fish Creek. Mileages are 1.2 to Crystal Lake, elevation 9580; 3.3 to the summit of the Rim, elevation 10,900; and 5.5 to Deer Lake, elevation 10,600.

Duck Lake

For the Duck Lake trail trip the starting point is the end of the dirt road at the upper end of Lake Mary, designated as "Duck Lake by Trail." This is one of the most spectacular trips in the area. The lakes on the way to Duck Pass are both full of fish and scenically charming. At Barney Lake the glacial sediment makes the water a jade green color. Duck Lake is a very beautiful high lake, the largest in the immediate region. Its barren, rugged shores and surrounding high peaks are typical of the very high lakes of the Sierra. Golden trout abound in its waters. Mileages: 1.2 to Arrowhead Lake; 1.7 to Skelton Lake, elevation 9,900 feet; 2.6 to Barney Lake, elevation 10,200 feet; 3.8 to Duck Pass, elevation 10,850; 4.9 to the lower end of Duck Lake, elevation 10,500.

Emerald Lake

The delightful trail to Emerald Lake starts to the right of and just below the parking area for the Duck Lake trail

take-off and is marked by signs. This trail follows Cold-water Creek part of the way and passes through several flower filled meadows situated at the base of the crags. Emerald Lake is a small gem set in meadows and woods in view of the rim. Sky Meadow is so named because it seems one could easily reach up and touch the sky. From the starting point it is .7 miles to Emerald Lake, elevation 9500; 1.0 miles to Gentian Meadows, elevation 9,600; 1.6 miles to Sky Meadows, elevation 10,000 feet.

McLeod Lake

The trail trip to McLeod Lake is an easy climb to a crystal-like lake. The trail then winds down hill to Crater Meadows, a very secluded place. The trail over Mammoth Pass to the Devil's Post Pile forks from the Crater Meadows trail; it joins the Muir Trail about two miles beyond McLeod Lake and continues through Red's Meadows to the Post Pile. The McLeod Lake trail starts from the end of the Mammoth Lakes paved highway at Horseshoe Lake. McLeod Lake with its 9250 foot elevation is reached in a half mile; Crater Meadows is four miles, elevation 8700; and the Devil's Post Pile is six miles.

Mammoth Mountain

The curve in the road after it crosses the upper bridge on Twin Lakes is the starting point for the Mammoth Mountain trail trip. Magnificent views of the Mammoth region are available at all points along this trail. The Lava Cliffs and Lava Arch are especially interesting because of their volcanic origin. The path through the Bottomless Pit is short but very interesting as it passes under the Lava Arch. From the summit of Mammoth Mountain there is a panoramic view unexcelled in the vicinity. Mileages for this trail trip are: 0.8 to the Bottomless Pit, elevation 8,100; 1.1 to Seven Lakes Point, elevation 9,600; 3.0 to the summit of Mammoth Mountain, elevation 11,034 feet.

Twin Falls

The Twin Falls trail has the same starting point as the Mammoth Mountain trail. This is a comparatively easy half mile hike. The trail winds through the trees, coming to the edge of the falls in several places. The view from the top of the falls, also accessible by auto, is worth while.

Panorama Dome

Another short, easy hike is to Panorama Dome on a trail which starts from the Mammoth Lakes highway behind Tamarack Lodge on Twin Lakes. The trail then leads through the forest to a large, flat dome from which there is a magnificent view of the Mammoth basin and Long Valley. The trail then leads down to Valley View Point and returns to the highway past Mammoth Falls which are seen from the highway just below Twin Lakes. Mileages: .3 to summit of Panorama Dome; .8 to Valley View Point; 1.4 to Mammoth Falls and 1.6 to the lower end of Twin Lakes.

Sherwin Lakes

The starting point of the Sherwin Lakes trail is reached by turning south at Mammoth Tavern, driving three quarters of a mile, crossing the creek, and then turning left on a dirt road; then in 1.2 miles there is a sign "Sherwin Lakes Trail." These secluded lakes are not reached by the average tourist and hold a charm all their own, both for the fisherman and the sightseer. It is eight-tenths of a mile to the first lake with its elevation of 8,550 feet and 1.4 to the second, elevation 8,680.

Valentine Lake

Valentine Lake is a high, beautiful lake nestled along the peaks. Fishing is usually excellent. After the first mile the climb is gradual through an open forest and along a creek. This trail is reached by the road to the Sherwin Lakes Trail, continuing about a mile farther on the road.

It is 3.7 miles to Valentine Lake with its elevation of 9,900 feet.

Laurel Lakes

The Laurel Lakes Trail is another reached by the auto road from Mammoth Tavern, going 3.9 miles, and continuing past the starting points on the Sherwin Lakes Trail and the Valentine Lakes Trail. A hike of 4.1 miles brings the visitor to Laurel Lake which has an elevation of 10,000 feet. This trip follows Laurel Creek most of the way, passing through high meadows filled with flowers and up a canyon splashed with brilliant reds and golds. The group of Laurel Lakes is small but their location at the base of vivid mountain peaks is unique.

The visitor may secure information regarding fishing conditions, boats, horses, and available accommodations at the government ranger station.

GEOLOGY

Over a million years ago ocean waters covered the Mammoth Lakes country and the Sierra Nevada in which the lakes are located had not been born. Geologists figure that the earth's crust began to fold and crack to make the mountain ranges in this area around a million years ago and as these land masses came up out of the water the present shape of western America took form. Some of this mountain forming action is still going on as evidenced by earthquakes and earthquake faults.

Many years after the mountains were formed but still before the white people came to America the High Sierra were covered with ice, and glaciers pushed down the mountain canyons. The moving ice cut deep valleys and wide basins and threw up dams across the streams, making lakes such as the Mammoth Lakes.

After most of the ice had left, a great deal of volcanic action took place. The evidence of this action in the form of extinct craters, lava flows, deposits of pumice and

obsidian, earthquake faults and hot springs can be seen in profusion in the country around Mammoth.

WILD LIFE

Although the wildlife of the Mammoth region is not so abundant as in many areas, the patient observer may see many of the animals and birds which inhabit the area. Gray tree squirrels, golden-mantled ground squirrels, marten, "picket-pins," and chipmunks are very common. Deer are often seen in quiet glens and porcupine may be encountered throughout the area. People who dislike snakes will be glad to know that they are almost never seen in the lake area.

Mammoth is the summer residence of a number of species of birds. Some of these are the robin, chickadee, Sierra junco, nuthatch, bluejay, creeper, water ouzel, Western tanager, the native Clark crow, and varieties of sparrows. During the day seagulls visit the region, coming from Mono Lake where they nest on one of the islands.

PLANT LIFE

Flowers, which begin to bloom in early June, are very abundant in the area. There is a constant array throughout the summer including Indian paintbrush, lupine, larkspur, aster, Sierra reinorchis, shooting star, iris, columbine, and numerous others. Among the trees native to the region there are eight varieties of conifers: hemlock, red fir and silver fir, lodgepole pine (commonly known as tamarack), silver pine, timberline pine, limber pine, and Jeffrey pine. Aspens, willow, and alder are commonly found in the region. Among the shrubs some of the most common are manzanita, laurel, snow bush, deer brush, sage brush, ragweed, and rabbit brush.

WINTER SPORTS

In recent years the Mammoth area has been host to winter visitors in search of good ski slopes. Several rope

tows operate during the winter on the north and south slopes of Mammoth Mountain. Excellent slopes for skiers of all abilities are accessible. The road is kept clear of snow as far as the Ranger Station and is often open to Twin Lakes.

BE CAREFUL WITH FIRE

The beauty of the forest can be destroyed by a single careless act. Report fires to a Forest Ranger or to any summer resort or store where there is a telephone.

The fish and game laws help you have a good time in the out-of-doors. Do your part by observing them.

Following are other Parcher Guides which can be purchased at park offices, book stores, tourist resorts or from Frank M. Parcher, 505 Franklin St., Boise, Idaho, for fifteen cents.

Colossal Cave, Tucson, Arizona
Tucson Mt. Park and Old Tucson
Pueblo Grande, Phoenix, Arizona
South Mt. Park, Phoenix, Arizona
Bishop, California
Owens Valley, California
Panamint Valley, California
Salmon City, Idaho
River of No Return, Idaho

