

# MAY 12 - THE DESERT IN BLOOM

Another day, another RV park. Well, not quite. The RV park had done its job - our batteries are fully charged and the water tank is full. Time to get back to nature and the BLM lands of Lone Pine, CA.

We enjoyed a leisurely drive south on Hwy 395 - a 4-lane highway. We stayed in the right lane and observed the 55 mph speed limit (CA law if towing).

The Sierra Nevada mountains are pretty impressive!



I wanted to take a panoramic picture so we stopped at a pullout that also had a little bit of local history.




### A Misplaced Sidewalk


The idea of building a highway from Los Angeles to Lake Tahoe was very popular with the residents of Inyo and Mono Counties in the early 20th Century. However, the first section to be paved in the region, the 8-foot wide, single-lane concrete road behind this sign, was not popular with local residents, who regarded it as inadequate before it was even completed. A 1930 editorial in the Inyo Register described the concrete strip as "a misplaced sidewalk." Still, paving this notoriously rough section of the Owens Valley made it possible for motorists to pass through here without having to carry a shovel and chains.

The 8-foot wide, 4-inch thick strip of concrete on the west side of the highway here was part of the first highway paving project in Inyo County, and may represent one of the earliest uses of concrete pavement in California. Construction of this 10.25-mile long section of road was authorized by the California Highway Commission on September 6, 1926, to replace the old graded dirt road that ran through the alternately rocky and sandy terrain.

Construction began the following April, but because of the remote location, limited facilities, and the fact that the road was built for day laborers who did not work during the cold winter and hot summer months, this section of highway was not completed until the spring of 1927. The cost was \$397,976, plus \$3,118 for engineering charges, to build this section of what was then State Highway 23.

Pullouts were provided every 1/4 mile to allow cars going in opposite directions to pass each other, but motorists seldom used them. Instead they would typically pass each other by driving with their right wheels off the road. One of these pullouts can be seen approximately 150 yards south of this sign.






### Working on the Road- 1919

Prior to 1920 state road work in this region was done by day laborers rather than contractors. They typically lived in tent camps and slept on cots. Below are the road construction jobs of the time and what those jobs paid. Foremen made from \$28.75 to \$31.50 a week. One dollar a day was deducted for room and board.

Truck Driver	\$4.00 per day
Laborer	\$3.75 to \$4.00 per day
Concrete Laborer	\$4.00 to \$4.25 per day
Teamster	\$4.00 to \$4.25 per day
Dumper	\$4.00 to \$4.75 per day
Flunky	\$4.00 to \$4.25 per day
Barman	\$17.00 per week plus board
Driller	\$4.00 per day
Rollerman	\$4.25 to \$4.50 per day
Blacksmith	\$4.25 to \$4.75 per day
Blacksmith Helper	\$4.25 to \$4.50 per day
Fenderman	\$5.00 to \$8.00 per day
Carpenter	\$4.25 per day
Carpenter Helper	\$2.25 per day
Pine Shaker	\$6.00 per day
Painter	\$4.75 to \$5.00 per day
Miscerman	\$4.25 to \$6.00 per day
Mechanic	\$6.00 per day plus board
Steam expert	



### Highway Construction Changes in Technology, Changes in Business

The first roads here were field engineered and built by locally hired workers using horse-drawn equipment and hand labor. They were built for local transport, and not part of a regional or statewide highway system. The need for a state highway system emerged with both the rapid growth of California and the beginning of the automobile era. In response to the need for a state highway system the California Highway Commission (CHC) was formed. The CHC proposed and surveyed routes, and coordinated local road building efforts where possible. State highway construction began in earnest in the 1910s, and early 1920s.

Technology and business practices changed rapidly during the initial phase of state highway construction. At the close of World War I the state acquired a fleet of surplus army trucks and heavy equipment that was adapted for road work. Highway construction became mechanized.

Local highway work began going out to competitive bid in 1920. The Eastern Sierra was the last region in California to see private contractors on state highway construction. Contractors rapidly advanced the technology of road building. Highway design and construction is a now a high-tech business using computer-aided design, terrain modeling software, Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and laser-guided equipment. Today all major highway construction and maintenance projects are constructed by private contractors.



We continued our drive south and a short while later reached Lone Pine, CA.

Not sure of exactly how to get to the campground, we stopped at the local grocery store where I bought some ice. I asked the clerk for directions and she kindly told me where to go.



We found a nice site and set up. I saw a bit of water so I walked to the back of our site and shot the video of Tuttle Creek.



Okay, it's just after 11 a.m., so it is definitely coffee time. We hopped into Alfie and headed back to Lone Pine. The drive down was interesting - I had no idea we had climbed so far.

At the local Lone Star Bistro, while we enjoyed a nice cup of coffee and a muffin, I checked the internet for the elevations. In 6 miles, we had climbed 1,393' to the campground! No wonder Alfie was a little slow going up!

As we walked to the grocery store, we found this plaque.

Afterwards, we headed back up to the campground. On the way we passed this sign.

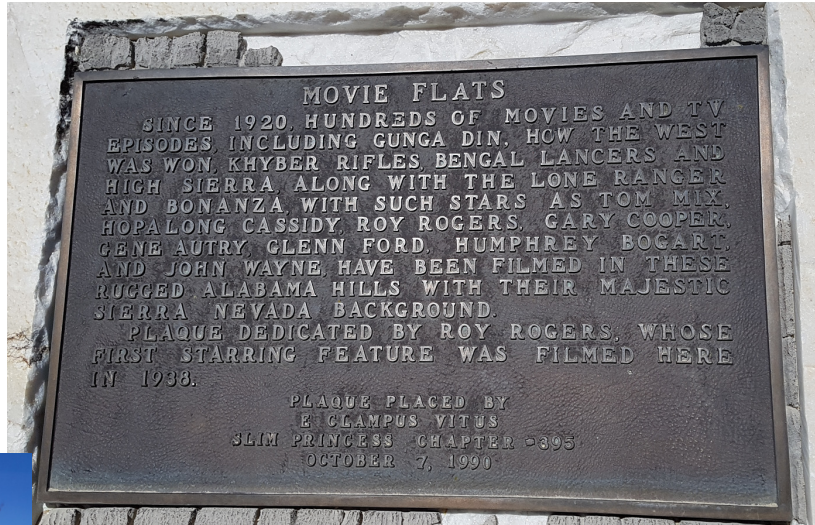




We continued climbing then saw this plaque on the side of the road.



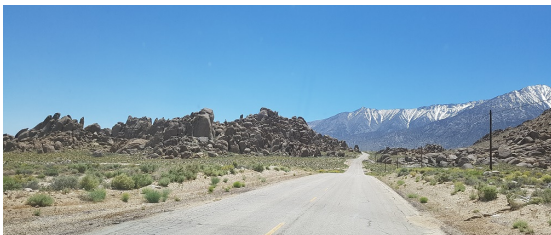
I suggested to Jen that we should check out the Lone Pine campground further up.



Lone Pine c/g is at 6,000', about 800' higher than where we are.

We turned around at the campground entrance and saw this view.

From the main highway, we turned onto the road that leads to Tuttle Creek campground.



The paved road into the campground is quite long. Along the way we saw this - the desert in bloom.



Isn't Mother Nature marvellous?!



On the other side of the road...



We're here for 2 nights if the wind doesn't blow us away. It's blowing hard at times again today. In the shade it is very comfortable. I imagine if the wind stopped, the heat might be quite oppressive.

Just heading back from an afternoon walk. By the way, the camera lies...the mountains are very close.



That's all for today.