



East Kern

January 2018

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An outsider's perspective: Death Valley's harsh environment home to beauty, wonder

BY STEVE STEVENS

The Columbus Dispatch

When naming this seemingly godforsaken patch of earth, the 19th-century miners who first passed through — or perished — weren't thinking of future tourism possibilities.

But today's travelers should take heart. Death Valley is not as bleak and hopeless as its name would imply, as is well known by the Timbisha Shoshone people, who have inhabited the valley for centuries. The Indians call their home "Tumpisa," meaning "rock paint," a reference to the magnificent colors to be found in the minerals and clay of the valley.

They consider it a place of life.

Visitors will appreciate that assessment, especially when arriving in winter or spring, when Death Valley's oppressive and dangerous summer heat is just a vague and distant threat and its severe, colorful beauty is an immediate joy.

My first look at the valley was magnificent, if downright frigid. I had driven in pre-dawn darkness to Dante's View, one of the most popular overlooks in the park. The spot is known for its sunrise views of the lowest point in the western hemisphere, Badwater Basin. It is 282 feet below sea level and more than 5,700 feet below the vantage point.

The temperature hovered around 40 degrees and the wind blew briskly when I got my dramatic, almost theatrical, introduction to Death Valley. As the sun pulled back the curtain of night, the magenta rays of dawn revealed a seemingly unreal scene, more like a painted Technicolor movie backdrop than an actual physical place on Earth.

Mountaintops on either side of the valley glowed with pinks and oranges, as the grays of Badwater Basin, far below, turned into deep blues and sparkles of salt white.

I continued to find magical sights and colors throughout the park as the sun climbed higher.

The short, one-way loop of Twenty Mule Team Canyon passes through what could be gigantic mounds of plowed dirty snow. They are actually odd and slightly menacing formations of rock, salts and minerals, including the borax that was once mined here.

Another one-way scenic park loop, Artists Drive, offers panoramas

STEVE STEVENS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

A photographer takes in the dawn view of Death Valley from Dante's View overlook, Death Valley National Park, California; Dec. 12, 2017.





Huge sand dunes at Mesquite Flats attract hikers and sunbathers in Death Valley National Park, California; Dec. 12, 2017.

STEVE STEPHENS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

that are ever more weirdly beautiful. The 9-mile trip passes through hills laced with minerals that color the rocks in shades of ocher and umber, pale jade green and orchid pink. The term “earth tone” might well have been invented for Artists Palette, a photogenic pull-off where dozens of colors seem to melt and mix on the mountain sides.

Yet another renowned overlook, Zabriskie Point, gives views of badlands that look like a box of gargantuan, melting pastel crayons (earth tones, again) that were flash-frozen and cracked, forming broken ridges and valleys.

History buffs will find wonderful weirdness in Death Valley’s intriguing past. Several sites throughout the park offer information, including the former site of the Harmony Borax Works.

Some of the ruins of the original borax processing plant remain at the site, where an interpretive trail helps visitors understand the history and importance — and some of the joys, loneliness and desperation — of mining in the region. The site also displays an original mule-team wagon, used to transport the

processed borax out of the valley.

The park visitors center at Furnace Creek includes a museum with more information about Death Valley’s natural and human history.

One display there shows an April Fool’s Day “advertisement” from a 1907 mining camp newspaper, headlined, “Would You Enjoy a Trip to Hell? You Might Enjoy a Trip to Death Valley, Now!”

But as the mines played out, a few visionaries grasped the real tourist possibilities in Death Valley, and the exhibit also explores the development of the area as an unlikely attraction and eventually one of the largest national parks in the United States.

Another visitors center is located at Stovepipe Wells, which also is home to a restaurant, gift shop, motel and campground.

Near Stovepipe Wells is Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes, a vast expanse of ever-shifting sand and the most crowded place, relatively speaking, that I saw in the park. I suppose everyone loves the beach, even one without a hint of water. The vast dunes seemed popular with hikers, but also with sunbathers and fami-

lies who just wanted a good place to let the kids run.

My final stop was at the bottom of Badwater Basin, where a marker high on a cliff across from the parking lot shows the location of sea level.

A short boardwalk takes visitors to a sign marking the elevation, a popular spot for photos and selfies, of course. (Once you’re there, there’s nowhere to go but up.)

Visitors can also get a glimpse of a fascinating small, shallow seep, where fresh water bubbles up from some underground spring and makes its way to the surface. The resulting pool of brine is not poisonous, just full of salt and other minerals and certainly undrinkable, as perhaps those first miners discovered.

But the boardwalk does more than provide a convenient access point and photo op. It also protects a unique species of snail found only in this pool and a few other salty springs in Death Valley — proving that life does indeed persist, even in the seemingly harshest of environments.

❖

Plane Crazy Saturdays take off at Mojave airport

Plane Crazy Saturday takes place the third Saturday of each month at the Mojave Air and Space Port – it's a chance to drive in (or fly in!) and check out the planes, hear on interesting aviation-related topics from guest speakers, and have a day of family fun.

The most recent Plane Crazy Satur-



Aircraft and emergency response vehicles are on display at Mojave Air and Space Port during a previous Plane Crazy Saturday. The event is held the third Saturday of each month.

FILE PHOTO

day took place Jan. 20, with guest speaker Jim Payne. Feb. 17 will feature

Bill Guonan, and May 19 will feature Mike Massee. Guests for March and April will be announced at a later time – see www.mojavemuseum.org for more details.

Payne reported on the Perlan II campaign, including the Sept. 3, 2017, flight to 52,172 feet GPS altitude (FL540) setting a new altitude record. The Airbus Perlan 2 is a pressurized sailplane designed for flight up to FL900. The Perlan team was in El Calafate, Argentina, from July to September 2017 for high altitude flights using the Polar Night Jet aka Polar Vortex.

As part of a career that began at the Air Force Academy in 1971, Jim worked many years at Edwards Air Force Base, where he was an F-16XL test pilot, an instructor at the U.S. Air Force Test Pilot School, and a Northrop Grumman manager of Global Hawk flight test. Jim piloted the first flights of the Northrop Grumman Firebird II and the Perlan II.

Payne's talk is typical of what listeners can expect to find at Plane Crazy Saturday. During last November's event, for example, Dick Ewers gave a presentation about flying science missions over the north and south poles, low-level, in NASA's DC-8 flying labo-

ratory. The photos and video looked like he was flying over another world!

Ewers served as a United States Marine Corps fighter pilot for more than 21 years, and after retirement from the military, he flew as an engineering test pilot for Westinghouse Electronic Systems Group for nine years. He joined NASA Dryden, now NASA Armstrong Flight Research Center, at Edwards AFB as a research pilot in 1998. He piloted NASA's DC-8 on scientific missions for more than 15 years and was "over the moon" enthusiastic about flying that aircraft. He told how this airplane was capable of really long flights and he laughed when telling how they would run out of food before they would run out of fuel.

In October, author Barbara Schultz gave a presentation on Amelia Earhart and how she made money by endorsing products for companies, and then used that money to finance her flying.

In addition to each month's featured guest speaker and static aircraft displays, there are art and souvenirs for sale, and the Voyager Restaurant opens for breakfast at 7 a.m. The plane display starts at 10 a.m., and the guest speaker is on at 11 a.m.



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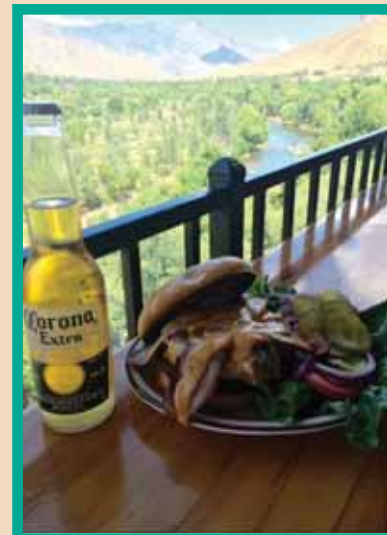
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Reel in the fun at Lake Isabella Fishing Derby



PHOTO COURTESY LAKE ISABELLA FISHING DERBY

An angler shows off her catch during a previous year's Lake Isabella Fishing Derby.

The 29th annual Isabella Lake Fishing Derby is shaping up to be a good time March 24-26. The trout that were delivered to the fish pens at Red's Marina in November are growing fast, fed three times a day by an all-volunteer crew organized by Kern River Valley Chamber of Commerce member Mark Chambers. By the time these trout are released right before the tournament they will all be fat and happy and ready to bite a line.

One of the Kern River Valley's most popular events is the Isabella Lake Fishing Derby, which has become the world's largest amateur trout derby. The derby is fast becoming more popular and widely known as prizes skyrocket to epic proportions. The event takes place annually the weekend prior to Easter, and is hosted by the Kern River Valley Chamber of Commerce, offering over a quarter-million dollars in prizes, most of it cold hard cash.

Each year approximately 15,000 trout are delivered to Isabella Lake in November that are reared in pens at the French Gulch Marina. There are Kern River and California trout, as well as Alpers trout, the Holy Grail of the California angler's fishing experience. The Kern River trout, although less colorful than the native golden trout of higher elevations, are farmed right here at the Kern River Hatchery and are silvery with a reddish lateral band and covered with spots. The California rainbow trout are farm raised in Central California, and the Alpers trout are farm raised in the eastern Sierra Nevada at Owens River Ranch.

The family owned ranch, operated by Tim Alpers and his father, was started in 1971 with the goal of growing farm-raised trout that came as close to wild trout as possible in terms of their appearance, strength, and fighting ability. According to their popularity among California anglers, they have succeeded.

For this year's derby, Mr. Ten Grand is back! The \$10,000 trout as top prize for the longest fish caught is once again the biggest cash prize of the derby. Make sure and get yourself one of those 2018 Derby T-Shirts and have it on while you are fishing, as that's how you can catch that big one and get the largest prize ... and fulfill your destiny!

One other major announcement – a big one. There are always great raffle prizes given away each year at Derby Headquarters, and this year is no exception, but new this year, thanks to the efforts of the Kern River Lake Isabella Chamber of Commerce and all of the gracious tournament sponsors this year, the Boat raffle has been upgraded. This is not just a fishing boat – the winner of the boat raffle this year gets a brand new, Crestliner 1450 Discovery valued at more than \$16,000. This 14-foot-long modified V-hull cruiser will get you to the fish! Complete with a 30-horsepower motor, bass seats and other upgrades along with console steering and trailer, whomever wins this boat is going to be set up!

Make sure to buy some raffle tickets at Derby Headquarters this year to have a chance at this beauty along with other prizes. Make a note, Derby Headquarters this year is at the Lake Isabella Senior Center, located at 6405 Lake Isabella Blvd., right in the center of town. Make a left at the four-way stop coming off of Highway 178 and go about a half mile – it will be on the left. As always, the all-volunteer staff will be there to get you signed up, answer any questions you may have, measure and weigh fish and hand out prizes.

Isabella Lake was created by a dam on the Kern River and was built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers starting in 1948. Many of the residents of the



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PHOTO COURTESY LAKE ISABELLA FISHING DERBY

A fish is weighed during a previous Lake Isabella Fishing Derby. This year's event is set for March 24-26.

Kern Valley were in shock when they were told their homes were in the way of a new lake. The entire towns of Kernville and Isabella were to be under water when the dam was completed. The work, consisting of two side-by-side dams, was finished by 1953. Some of the residents of Old Kernville moved north to what was the Burlando Ranch and started a new Kernville; some moved south and west to the Irvin Wofford Ranch and created Wofford Heights. Isabella moved south to what was historically known as Hot Springs Valley and became the town of Lake Isabella, thus adding to the formation of the Kern River Valley.

The fishing derby began in 1989 by the local Visitors Council to help bring tourists into the Kern River Valley. One of the council members, local banker Bob Bibby, was presented the

idea after a long time resident Pat Norris had returned from a derby at Bass Lake. Pat thought an event like this could help bring tourists to the valley in what was a drought year, to help the economy. The first headquarters was set up in front of what is now West America Bank with teller Sandy Elderbaum taking registrations. Bob convinced the regional office of then Community First Bank to give the Visitors Council a loan for \$10,000 to purchase fish and food and put on the event. Much to Bob and his committee's surprise, they were able to repay the loan and made enough to start the kitty for another derby. The event went from a one-time economy builder to an annual derby. It has grown into a very successful and fun event for individuals, families and serious anglers. ♦



PHOTO COURTESY LAKE ISABELLA FISHING DERBY

Spencer Bothwell was one of the cash prize winners during last year's Lake Isabella Fishing Derby.

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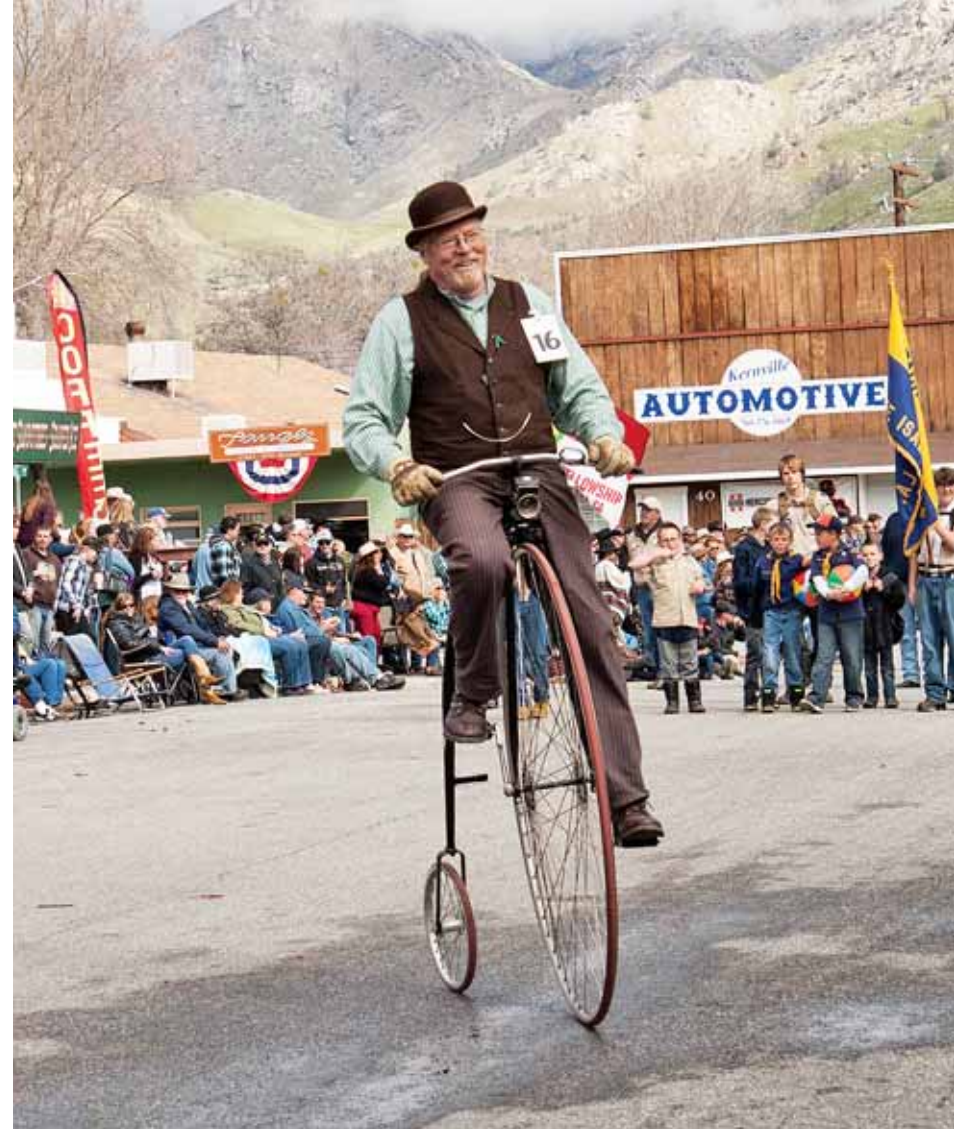
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PHOTOS COURTESY KERN VALLEY SUN

Pictured, scenes from the Whiskey Flat Days Parade in 2017. The 2018 festival will take place Feb. 16-19 in Kernville.



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Even Addresses	Tue, Thu, Sat	8 pm - 8 am	April 1 - Oct 31
Odd Addresses	Wed, Fri, Sun		
Even Addresses	Tue, Thu, Sat	Anytime	Nov 1 - Feb 28
Odd Addresses	Wed, Fri, Sun		
ALL Addresses	In March, transition from the anytime hours schedule to the 8pm to 8am schedule above		
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Whiskey Flat Days celebrates 61 years in Kernville Feb. 16-19

Just a short 3-hour drive from Los Angeles to the Lake Isabella recreation area, you will find the quaint town of Kernville, home to Whiskey Flat Days (50 miles east of Bakersfield on Highway 178).

Whiskey Flat Days is held every Presidents Day weekend. It is a leap back to the good ol' wild west days when the area was settled by gold miners, cattle ranchers and trappers.

Join us when Kernville reverts to its old name "Whiskey Flat" for four nostalgic days of fun for the entire family. Parade, Wild West Daze Rodeo, Wild West Encampment, carnival rides, frog jumping contests, Whiskey Flat Mayor Contest, food and craft booths, Epitaph, costume and whiskerino contests, line dancing, pet parade, bluegrass and country western music, art show, gunfighter skits, kids' activities, games, and much more!





PHOTOS COURTESY KERN VALLEY SUN

Pictured, scenes from the Whiskey Flat Days Rodeo in 2017. The 2018 festival will take place Feb. 16-19 in Kernville.



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SUBMITTED PHOTO

A view of the accommodations at The Ranch at Death Valley.

Furnace Creek Resort has a new name: it's now known as Oasis at Death Valley

The Oasis at Death Valley, formerly known as Furnace Creek Resort, is North America's only authentic desert oasis. One of Death Valley's best-kept secrets has been completely reinvigorated by a well-deserved multi-million restoration and renovation bringing new life and energy to this historical property.

THE INN at DEATH VALLEY

Since 1927, the perfect place to reclaim your senses as you relax near the spring-fed pool, stroll through palm gardens to the melody of the natural springs, watch a glorious sunset at an elegant four-diamond hideaway. All facets of the four-diamond Inn are being updated -- adorned with enhanced landscaping, a new interior re-design with a new lobby, bar and dining room, retaining its classic mission California-style. The Inn's make-over also includes refurbishments in all 66 guest rooms and the vintage pool, with its signature stone work, will have cabanas and a spa added as well as a new pool bar.

THE RANCH at DEATH VALLEY

Accommodations in a casual, open-ranch-like setting. Guests enjoy clean rooms with triple-sheeting, a spring-fed swimming pool, sports courts, large grass lawns, a children's playground and more.

All of this is located adjacent to the National Park Service Visitor Center

and a 18-hole golf course. The Ranch at Death Valley is having a completely new Town Square erected, replacing the former resort center. The new heart of The Ranch will be constructed in a complementary mission California style to its sister hotel, The Inn.

The Town Square will include a new guest registration area, a new restaurant, retail shopping area, and the Last Kind Words Saloon — the Ranch's new signature entertainment space.

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A Death Valley institution and the lowest elevation golf course in the world, the 18-hole golf course has been completely redesigned and offers golfers the opportunity to challenge themselves while playing their "lowest" round of golf guaranteed. The 19th hole continues to serve patrons via its unique golf cart drive-thru, which is a must-do for every guest.

The resort is tucked away on Highway 190 in Death Valley near Furnace Creek, about two hours from Ridgecrest. Take State Route 178 toward Trona, continue on Trona Road and Trona Wildrose Road, left on Panamint Valley, right on to Highway 190 for 53 miles.

For more information, visit www.oasisatdeathvalley.com or call 1-800-236-7916.



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Hop in your car and go for a drive! Bishop is only a few hours from Ridgecrest or Tehachapi, but you'll feel like you are worlds away. The drive north on Highway 395 is incredibly scenic. The highway runs up the middle of the beautiful Owens Valley with stunning views of the majestic Sierra Nevada Mountains on the west and equally impressive Inyo and White Mountains to the east. You'll likely stop many times to take photos; that's okay, there's no need to hurry.

The Owens Valley has several quaint towns - each has something special to offer. The Eastern Sierra Visitor Center is a must stop. Located two miles north of Lone Pine, it offers an awe-inspiring view of Mount Whitney (highest peak in the continental US). Lone Pine's Museum of Western Film

History has an extensive collection of real costumes, cars, props and memorabilia from movies made in the area ranging from early westerns to modern blockbusters. Take a short drive up Whitney Portal Road and enjoy the self-guided tour of Movie Road. You'll get a first-hand look at filming locations in the amazing Alabama Hills. Tip: take the easy Arch Hiking Loop Hiking Trail - a ten minute walk from the parking area will reward you with a view of Mount Whitney through the famed Mobius Arch.

About 9 miles north of Lone Pine, you'll reach Manzanar National Historic Site. Here you'll learn about Japanese American citizens detained in military style camps during World War II. Exhibits include a scale model of Manzanar War Relocation

Center crafted by former internees, restored barracks and dining hall, historic photographs, audiovisual programs and artifacts. Tip: the award winning 22-minute film Remembering Manzanar plays every half hour in the visitor center theater. Don't skip this!

The next town you'll come to is Independence. The Eastern California Museum houses much of the region's history. See historic photographs and artifacts, quality Native American basketry and a grand collection of mining and farming equipment. Tip: be sure to explore the Mary DeDecker native plant garden and ask to see the dentures made from coyote teeth. Just north of Independence is the historic Mount Whitney Fish Hatchery. The architecture and surroundings are breathtakingly beautiful; the

Photo by: Ron Nickerson



Valley Road Trip

wildlife exhibits are interactive and fun.

About 30 miles north of Independence, you'll reach Big Pine. To the east, you'll find the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest (world's oldest living trees) and to the west, you can see Palisade Glacier (southernmost glacier in this hemisphere). Half-way between Big Pine and Bishop, stop for a relaxing dip at Keough's Hot Springs Resort. The historic pools were built in 1919 and the water contains 27

different minerals. The large pool is 86-89 degrees and the smaller soaking tub is kept at 104 degrees year-round. The resort offers camping, showers and a snack bar with yummy sandwiches and ice cream.

The northernmost town in Inyo County is Bishop. With the slogan "Small Town with a Big Backyard," it makes the perfect year-round home base for exploring the Eastern Sierra. Bishop has 21 lodging options ranging from quite luxurious to

quaint & budget friendly. Dine around the world in Bishop – restaurants feature American, Japanese, Chinese, Mexican and Thai cuisine. If shopping is your thing, you'll love the dozens of unique galleries, antique stores, shops & boutiques.

Laws Railroad Museum & Historic Village is a must stop! There you'll find 11 acres of indoor and outdoor exhibits that transport you back in time to the pioneer days. Tour the original 1883 Train Depot and

Agent's House, see mining & agriculture exhibits, visit a turn of the century school house, church, medical office, post office and much more! On certain weekends, you may catch a ride on the restored Death Valley Brill Car. Tip: bring a picnic to enjoy under a shade tree or in the gazebo.

The Owens Valley Paiute-Shoshone Cultural center offers a unique look at authentic Native American artifacts and traditions. Visit the museum, Native Veterans Memorial and native plants trail. Tip: be sure to check out the gift shop for beautiful handmade items made by local artisans.

Bishop has so much to offer. Whether you're here for a few days or a full week, be sure to stop in the Bishop Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Center for friendly, knowledgeable advice on things to do and places to visit. They're located right next to the beautiful Bishop City Park at 690 N Main Street. They're open Monday – Friday 10am – 5pm and Saturday 10am-4pm (they have extended hours during summer months). Check out www.bishopvisitor.com for online travel planning resources.



The Blake Jones Trout Derby is one of the largest single-day fishing events in California. The Bishop Chamber of Commerce started the derby in 1968 and renamed it the Blake Jones Trout Derby in 1988 to honor of one of the region's greatest fishing legends. Jones was the inventor of a form of cheese bait that revolutionized the fishing industry. Whenever you bait your hook with Powerbait or other modern cheese bait, you have Blake to thank. His enthusiasm for fishing was infectious and he helped many people learn to fish and improve their skills. Jones had extensive experience and knowledge of fishing and with his charismatic personality he was the perfect spokesperson for the Eastern Sierra. Sadly Jones passed away before the first derby bearing his name was held, but his legacy lives on.

This pre-season, family-oriented event is held at Pleasant Valley Reservoir, six miles north of Bishop, where fishing is allowed in the reservoir and along a stretch of the lower Owens River year-round. The Derby offers a chance to win fantastic

prizes and an opportunity to get ready for the general trout fishing season opener. The derby follows a "Blind Bogey" format so everyone has a chance to win some of the great cash and gear valued at over \$10,000.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) plants fish regularly at Pleasant Valley Reservoir and Owens River. The Bishop Chamber will purchase extra fish from Desert Springs Trout Farm for the event. There are always lots of fish and plenty big ones too!

March is springtime in Bishop and it's a bit difficult to predict the weather. Locals know to dress in layers. Mornings are chilly, but you'll likely ditch the parka and be in shirtsleeves by mid-afternoon. Springtime can be breezy and may bring a few showers - that's what brings the wildflowers. Bishopites say *"if you don't like the weather, wait 15 minutes and it'll change."*

The 2018 Blake Jones Trout Derby marks the 50th Anniversary of this event. You may have heard that 2017 would have been the 50th consecutive, but the derby was cancelled due to the unprecedented Sierra snowfall and high spring runoff last year. Chamber staff and volunteers are back on

track for 2018 and promise this year's derby will be bigger and better than ever before!

A new venue for registration, check in, weigh station, and prize giving is at the conveniently located Tri-County Fairgrounds in downtown Bishop. The entrance to the fairgrounds is on Sierra Street (turn west at Aaron Schat's Roadhouse). There is plenty of parking and on-site RV camping may be available – contact Eastern Sierra Tri-County Fairgrounds at 760-873-3588 for reservations.

The Pleasant Valley Reservoir is a 6-mile drive from downtown Bishop North on HWY 395 to Pleasant Valley Road. Turn right and follow the road to the closure at the base of the dam. Shuttle service will run between the Eastern Sierra Tri-County Fairgrounds and Pleasant Valley Reservoir all day on derby day.

Online registration for the derby is open now at www.bishopvisitor.com. Fee is only \$20 for adults & \$10 for kids. You may also call (760) 873-8405 to request a derby entry form by mail.

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TROUT FISHING NEAR BISHOP

Bishop is renowned for excellent trout fishing. Did you know certain waters near Bishop remain open all year for fishing? That's right, Pleasant Valley Reservoir and the Owens River are open and stocked year-round! Higher elevation lakes & streams are frozen & blanketed with snow; however, PVR and Owens River remain open and easy to access. Many people say winter and spring are the best times to fish here because fish are hungry and crowds are light. Day-time temps are often in the mid-sixties and days are generally sunny. It's a little too cold to tent camp, but that's okay because hotels offer great off season rates.

Photo by: Julie Faber



Photo by: Ernie Cowan



OPEN ALL YEAR:

The Owens River runs north and east of downtown Bishop. It's easy to access from HWY 395 by driving a few miles north on HWY 6 or east on Line Street or Warm Springs Road. The gentle flowing and truly scenic Owens River offers great opportunity for any angling pursuit, flies, lure or bait. A favorite spot for fly-anglers is just below Pleasant Valley Campground about six miles north of Bishop. Note: there is a posted barbless, catch & release only area below Pleasant Valley Campground so please check CDFW regulation book. Pleasant Valley Reservoir is an outstanding year-round fishery, located in a canyon along the Chalk Bluff six miles north of Bishop off Hwy 395. Turn north at Pleasant Valley Road and follow the paved

road for about 1.5 miles to the reservoir just past the campground. Many anglers drive to the gate then load their bicycles with tackle and pedal up the 2 mile paved road (closed to motor vehicles) that lines the reservoir until they find the perfect spot. Boats are not allowed in PVR, but float-tubing is fine.

You may also enter PVR from the north end at Gorge Road, 9 miles north of Bishop, at the bottom of Sherwin Grade on HWY 395. Turn east, drive a short way up to the pipeline then turn right, this will take you to the power plant where there is plenty of parking. Here you will find the Owens River coming out of the power plant and slowly widening into the reservoir. Excellent stream fishing conditions are found here.

OPEN LAST SATURDAY IN APRIL UNTIL NOVEMBER 15:

Bishop Creek Canyon is a short drive west of Bishop along State Route 168. The environment changes quickly from high desert sage and arid climate of Owens Valley floor to an alpine wonderland of pine forest, rushing streams and gorgeous deep-blue lakes surrounded by mountain peaks. These lakes and streams are really close - in less than a half hour drive from downtown Bishop, you'll have your line in the water! Intake II is heavily planted during the season by CDFW with both pan-size rainbows and large trout. This lake is known as a great lake for both shore and float tube fishing. Intake II also provides wheelchair access for fishing with great opportunities for catching a big one!

At nearly 10,000 feet, South Lake offers breathtaking scenes and cold mountain water loaded with quality trout. The road to the lake is lined with pine and aspen and meanders along the south fork of Bishop Creek. South Lake is also popular with hikers, backpackers, horse packers and photographer; it's the trailhead for Bishop Pass leading to hundreds of high-mountain lakes in the John Muir Wilderness.

The north fork of the Bishop Creek road leads to the spectacular beauty of Lake Sabrina. You will find a splendid setting with magnificent fishing and photo opportunities. The north fork of the Bishop Creek Canyon is particularly beautiful in the fall, with its Aspen-lined slopes ablaze with gold, orange and red hues of autumn.

Located at the end of a quite steep and very narrow dirt road, North Lake feels like the backcountry. The road is a bit of a nail-biter for some, but if you go you'll be rewarded with natural beauty and terrific fishing. Float tubers especially love this spot.

Photo by: Jerry Winstead





Hiking: In winter and spring, explore the Volcanic Tableland and Tungsten Hills. In summer, head for cooler temps at South Lake or Rock Creek Lakes.

Photo by: Katherine Belarmino



Photography: This place is a photographer's dream! Opportunities for wildlife photography include Mule Deer, Big Horn Sheep, Tule Elk, wild horses & burros, eagles, hawks and more. Wildflowers bloom from early spring through mid-summer and people come from around the globe to photograph Eastern Sierra fall colors. Sunsets and sunrises are breathtaking from a variety of vantage points and the night skies are clear as can be.

Photo by: Madison Taylor



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Golf: Bishop Country Club makes it difficult to keep your mind on your game with the beautiful High Sierra as a backdrop. The course is open to the public and offers an 18-hole championship course to challenge even the seasoned pro.

Fishing: Bishop offers terrific year-round trout fishing opportunities. In summer, Lake Sabrina, South Lake, North Lake and Bishop Creek are very popular. In the "off season," Pleasant Valley Reservoir and the Owens River remain open, stocked and accessible.

OHV/ATV Touring: Bring your 4WD, OHV or ATV for some outstanding off highway adventures near Bishop. Drop in the Bishop Visitor Center to request the "Backroad Tours of Inyo County" publication – it has dozens of loop routes that will help you discover treasures along the roads less travelled.

Road Cycling: Warm Springs loop is a popular flat ride south east of town. Round Valley offers a slight climb and outstanding view of Mount Tom. If you want serious elevation gain, consider HWY 168 or Rock Creek Road.

Mountain Biking: Explore trails in the White Mountains, Buttermilk Recreation Area, Alabama Hills and more.



Bouldering and Rock Climbing:

Possibly the greatest location for rock climbing and bouldering in California, America and maybe even the world! From careful beginners to crags that challenge the pros, the climbing opportunities are diverse and many. Start at the Happy and Sad Boulders then head to Buttermilk Recreation Area. The Owens River Gorge is a steep canyon cut by the Owens River. It is California's most concentrated sport climbing area, located just north of Bishop, and provides over 500 routes.

Snow Sports: Snowshoeing, ice skating, sledding, cross country skiing and backcountry skiing are all popular winter activities. While Bishop itself doesn't get much snow, the mountains are just minutes away! Awesome downhill skiing is available about an hour away at Mammoth Mountain and June Mountain.

Horseback: Swing into the saddle for an hour, a day, or a week. Many canyons leading into the back country of the Eastern Sierra offer horseback riding facilities with professional pack outfitters that can deliver a trip just for you. Professional pack outfits offer a wide variety of specialized trips and adventures with gentle, mountain-savvy horses that can make your exploration of the high country more enjoyable.



Trail Running: With up to 10,000 feet of relief on either side of Bishop and the Owens Valley, climate and terrain is as varied as it gets. Cooler temps in winter months are great for runs on the Valley floor. Summer months are hot, so runners usually start early in the day or run on nearby mountain trails.

Photo by: Katherine Belarmino



Photo by: Katherine Belarmino





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‘Exit Prima Donna ...’



The Amargosa Opera House is seen at dusk.

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... enter Amargosa magic

BY JESSICA WESTON
The Daily Independent

Saying that the Amargosa Opera House in Death Valley Junction has a mysterious ambiance is to wildly understate the case. It is probably one of the most atmosphere-laden places in the western hemisphere.

The old theater was famously purchased by dancer Marta Becket, who went on to cover the walls in lavish, spooky murals and give dance performances for over 40 years — sometimes to an empty room. It was OK, she said; the faces she painted were her audience. Becket herself claimed to be sensitive to ghosts and said she would eventually become one herself and remain in the area. She died in 2017.

It is this fascinating, spooky, lavish history that Ridgecrest playwright Daniel Stallings hopes to tap in to with his upcoming production of “Exit Prima Donna,” which will take place at the Amargosa Opera House this spring.

Stallings is well-known for his popular interactive Master Mystery Productions. His first mystery novel “Sunny Side Up,” is coming out March 1 on Pace Press. With “Exit Prima Donna,” however, he takes it a step

further by staging an actual opera with a murder mystery plot featuring historic songs.

“Exit Prima Donna” is set in Venice in 1899. The plot involves a grand opera house about to close out a season and enter a new century. It is replete with intrigue, surprises, threats, backstage secrets, kidnapping, murder and, of course, opera.

Stallings, who wrote the play, said his main source of inspiration is the historic opera house itself.

“It’s fantastic in there,” he said. “You cross the threshold and you are in some magical wonderland. You are not in the middle of the desert anymore. You are not even sure what magical place you have entered. It’s incredible.”

Stallings was particularly taken with Becket’s murals, which may have influenced the grandeur of his operatic vision.

He has said the detailed murals, remote location and even rumored hauntings make it the perfect site for his unique musical celebrating the history of opera.

The story also owes something to classics such as “The Phantom of the Opera” and “The Masque of the Red Death,” he added.

According to Stallings, the show is structured like a traditional stage musical with spoken dialog in Eng-



PHOTO COURTESY MASTER MYSTERY PRODUCTIONS
The front door of the Amargosa Opera House.





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The murals on the walls of the Amargosa Opera House add to the mystique of the building.

PHOTO COURTESY MASTER MYSTERY PRODUCTIONS

lish interspersed with opera songs. The opera songs are from the public domain, and the dialog in English will (hopefully) allow the audience to solve the mystery.

"It's more like an operetta, a little bit more like a traditional musical, using pieces from famous operas and some of the most well-known arias from that period of history and kind of blending them with an original story," he said.

The show involves a mystery and the audience can try to solve it if they choose. Solutions to the murder will be collected and the correct answer announced, but people don't have to guess if they don't want. They will also be free to just relax and enjoy the show.

Stallings cast his show with actors from the Ridgecrest area, including some seasoned singers. The cast includes Heather McGaha, Nicole Johnson, James Aguirre, Rah Herrington, Elizabeth Pomazal, Nate Clair, Devanne Fredette, Beth Sparks-Jacques and Tiffany Cheney.

"Everybody gets a chance to sing in the show," Stallings said. "We have a couple of choral pieces and we have a lot of different arias for individual characters."

This will be the 18th show staged by Master Mystery Productions. Stallings said that he is grateful to have so much experience to draw on during his once-in-lifetime chance to access this historic venue.

"It's one of the best plotted shows that I've done. I am really, really proud of the script. And I am really, really proud of the cast that I have. We have only been rehearsing a couple of weeks but they are so talented, so good. They give me chills every time that we rehearse. This is a high-quality performance that is going on here," he said in January.

Performances will take place March 24, March 31, April 7, and April 14 at 2 p.m. at Amargosa Opera House in Death Valley Junction, Calif. Seating is limited. The theater only seats 100, so get your tickets early. Ticketing information is available online at Master Mystery Productions Facebook page or mastermysteryproductions.com.



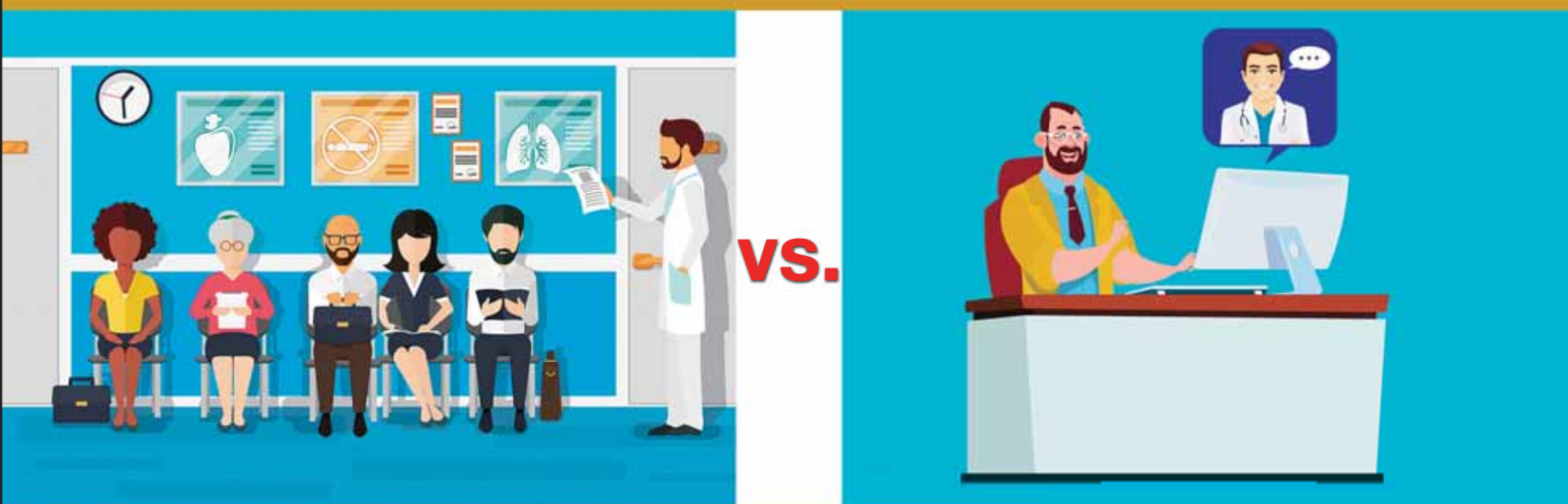
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The stage of the Amargosa Opera House.

PHOTO COURTESY MASTER MYSTERY PRODUCTIONS

Opera house to commemorate Becket's first performance

BY JESSICA WESTON
The Daily Independent

When Marta Becket died on Jan. 30, 2017, some may have wondered if that would be the end of the historic Amargosa Opera House.

It wasn't. Becket may be gone. Or maybe not. She said she expected to eventually haunt the place as a ghost. But in any case, her memory lives on.

Becket, a dancer from New York, famously purchased the place after she and her husband had a flat tire in the area. While waiting for the new tire, she wandered upon the opera house and was struck by its magical sense of history.

She bought it and staged her first performance for 12 adults, children and grandchildren. She went on to

hold regular performances for over 40 years. Sometimes no one came, but Becket had an inspiration. She painted an audience on the walls. The wall murals took four years to complete and the ceiling another two. It was all completed in 1974.

Her striking and haunting artwork became an integral part of Becket's legend.

Becket became world famous after a National Geographic article in the 1970s. Many people discovered that her performances in the opera house provided an almost mystical experience. It became known as a very special tourist destination as people from all over the world travelled to Death Valley Junction to enter her magic world.

Becket eventually transitioned from dancing to performing sitting down.

Her final show was Feb. 12, 2012.

She published an autobiography, "To Dance on Sands," in 2007.

On Feb. 10, 2018, the opera house will host a 50th Anniversary Celebration to commemorate Becket's first performance in on Feb. 10, 1968. The program includes songs, photographs, a commemorative video of Becket's performance highlights, remembrances of Becket, other features and a concluding champagne reception with a 50th Anniversary Toast at the Amargosa Hotel. Also featured will be Lothian Skelton, Red Skelton's widow who was great friends with Becket. She will offer remembrances and a tribute, followed by a question-and-answer session. Tickets are \$25 and can be purchased by calling 760-852-4441.



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Marta Becket performs her final show in 2012.

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The mysteries of Daniel Stallings

BY JESSICA WESTON
The Daily Independent

It all started during a family movie night when Daniel Stallings was 10 or 11. Stallings was, by his own admission, difficult to watch movies with.

"I was a bad child," he said with a laugh. "I didn't like to sit and watch movies because I liked to talk during them."

Undeterred by their chatty son, the family sat down to watch the 1974 film version of Agatha Christie's classic "Murder on the Orient Express" on two VHS tapes.

Stallings was riveted.

"After the first tape, even though it was a school night I begged my parents to throw in the second tape because I needed to know what happened," he said. "At the end of the second tape I was about an inch away from the screen because I was like 'What is this masterpiece that I have just fallen into? This is my world, these are my people.'"

Stallings fell in love with the mystery genre. During the next family trip to Barnes and Noble, he got his first Agatha Christie novel, and his obsession continues to this day.

Stallings, who is a Ridgecrest native, went on to take drama at Burroughs High School where he worked as a publicist for school plays. It all came together when he began to write his own mystery plays, performed at his birthday parties when he turned 15, 16 and 17. He graduated from BHS in 2008.

Then with his father's help he took it to the next level in 2013. His aunt was a member of the Red Hat Society in Bakersfield. Her group wanted to do a murder mystery and Stallings' father suggested his son write one instead. Stallings wrote "Murder at the Red Fez" for the Red Hats, and the rest was history.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHELLE STALLINGS

In 2014, Stallings collaborated with the local Ridge Writers chapter to put on "Goodbye Hollywood," an interactive murder mystery set in golden age Hollywood. The production took place at the romantically retro My Enchanted Cottage. It was a huge hit, inspiring a second production with the same characters and launching Stallings' company Master Mystery Productions firmly into the local stratosphere. His productions are wildly popular and usually sell out.

"It just kind of exploded the group from there," Stallings said. Counting its current one, Master Mystery Productions has put on 18 productions in all. And they are not all local. Stallings' group is branching out to perform in new locations.

One of these is "Exit Prima Donna." The current production is an opera that will be performed at the Amargosa Opera House in Death Valley this spring. (See related story.)

Stallings is also awaiting the publication of his first mystery novel, "Sunny Side Up," which will be published by Pace Press on March 1.

"Pace Press is a division of Linden Publishing in Fresno so I am the third

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author of their brand-new fiction line that they brought out. It's quite exciting," Stallings said.

The stories revolve around Li Johnson, whom Stallings describes as a millennial sleuth. The first book takes place on a luxury cruise. Johnson is working as staff on the ship, a glamorous designer/former model is found dead, and mystery swirls from there.

Stallings' novel takes the cutting-edge glamour and clever plot twists his mystery production audiences have come to expect and enriches and deepens the emotional content of the drama.

"It's much more dramatic than a lot of my plays ... with my books I go a little bit deeper, a little bit more heavily into people's emotions."

Stallings hooked up with his publisher with the help of Donna Rosenthal and Ridge Writers.

Fittingly for someone who got his start writing plays for his birthday parties, the offer to publish the novel came on his birthday in 2017.

"In 2017, I got on my birthday the thing I had been wishing for since I was 14 years old. I got a publishing contract," he said. The publishing house had artist Dominic Grijalva create a striking cover image and even paid Stallings an advance, he said.

The book has already garnered positive attention, with cover blurbs from writers Carolyn Hart and Anne Perry.

Perry called the novel "[a]n Agatha Christie cast of characters seen with a modern eye, and with startling moments of both insight and compassion."

Hart said it offers "an appealing protagonist and a fresh viewpoint."

Local bookstore extraordinaire Red Rock Books called the novel "Snarky and hilarious." In addition, the bookstore will host a book-signing/interactive mystery event later this year.

The novel is the first in the series; Stallings said the second is already done and he has outlines for the third and fourth installments.

Despite chance apparently playing a part, Stallings said his fascination with mysteries may have been inevitable.

"I think it was always kind of there, my favorite cartoon as a kid was Scooby Doo. My favorite board game is Clue. I fall into a pattern."

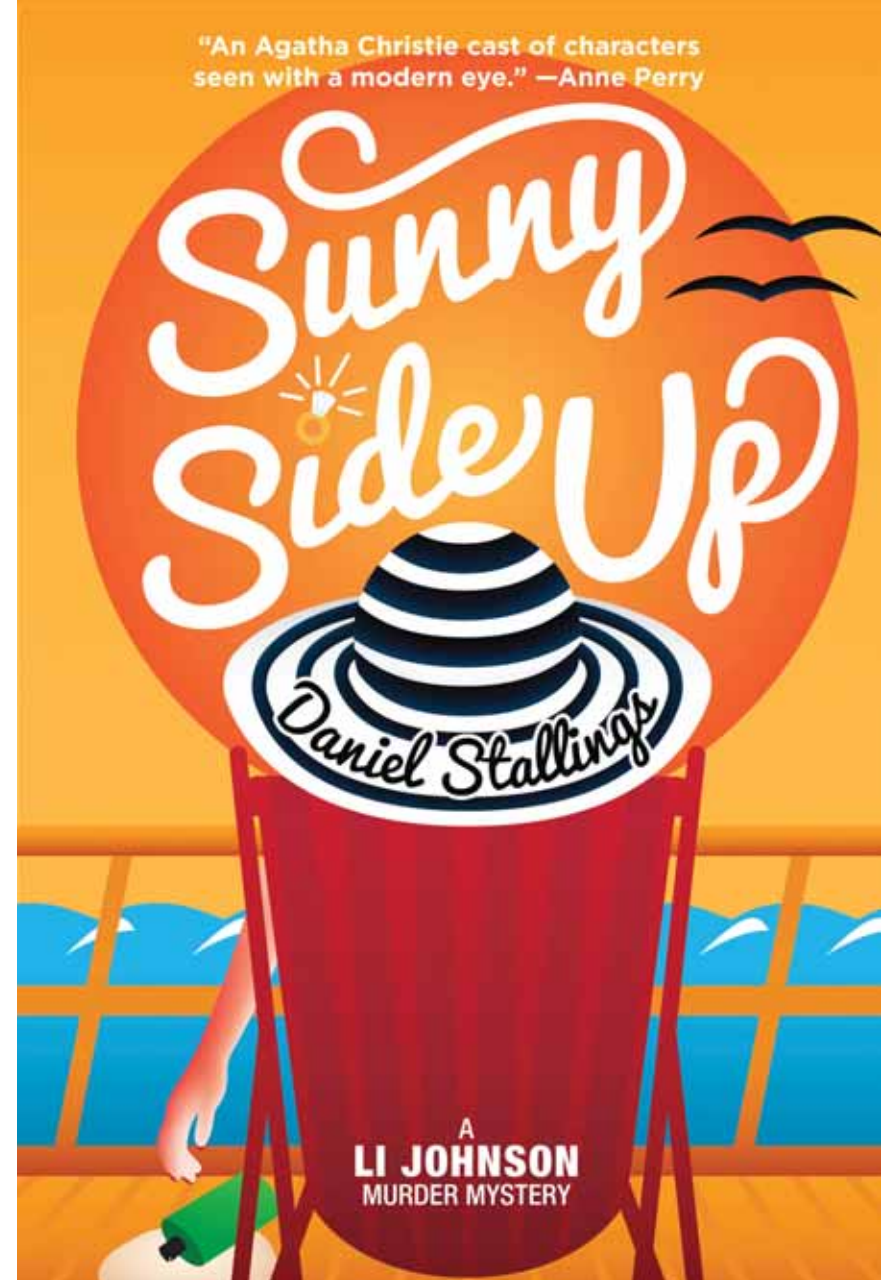
He said he enjoys working with the genre because of its lack of limitations and the sense of resolution at the end.

"I love how it has the freedom to go anywhere. It can be set in any place, time, location. There are not limits to where you can set a mystery, and I like to explore in my imagination."

"It presents this world of chaos: things don't make sense, horrible things are happening. But in the end, it works out and usually justice happens. Good vs. evil but good will win because eventually the truth will be figured out. You cannot have a mystery without the truth being figured out."

For more information on Stallings, see Master Mystery Productions Facebook page, <https://mastermysteryproductions.com/>, or <https://danielstallings.com/>.

"Sunny Side Up" is available for pre-order on Amazon.com.



SUNNY SIDE UP IMAGE BY DOMINIC GRIJALVA, COURTESY PACE PRESS
The front cover to Daniel Stallings' novel, "Sunny Side Up."

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Top fishing spots in the Eastern Sierra

BY JIM MATTHEWS

www.OutdoorNewsService.com



PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM MATTHEWS

For a region that historically never had trout of any kind south of Conway Summit, the Eastern Sierra Nevada has become known across the country for the quality trout fishing that exists there now. Here are the five best spots for anglers interested in landing a quality trout.

Crowley Lake: For Eastern Sierra Nevada anglers, Crowley Lake is the water all other fisheries are measured against. The Crowley watershed has a complex regime of regulations, an aggressive and creative stocking program, and an increasing number of wild trout. Throughout the long fishing season (last Saturday in April through Nov. 15), Crowley Lake produces more and bigger fish than all other waters in the region.

For the first half of the season, Crowley Lake is open to all types of fishing – bait, lures, and flies – and it has a five-trout limit. From August 1 through the close of the season, Crowley has a special two-fish, 18-inch minimum size bag limit and anglers are restricted to using artificial lures with barbless hooks – fondly known as the trophy season.

Surveys done by the Department of Fish and Wildlife show that the average size of the trout caught opening day of the season is 13 to 14 inches most years with those fish weighing in at a pound. Most of those are fish that were planted by the DFW the fall before as three- to six-inch trout and have grown that size on the rich food supply in the alkaline reservoir. Each year the state plants around a half-million or more small trout in the fall, and they grow into trophy sizes quickly. By the end of their first year in the lake, the fish are mostly 15 to 17 inches long and approach two pounds. By the next spring, they are 18 to 20 inch trout in the three-pound class; and by their third year in the lake, they can be four to five-pound class trout.

The DFW now plants the lake with at least two varieties of rainbow trout, Lahontan cutthroat trout, and brown trout in some years. The browns and cutthroats show a proclivity to be long-lived and when trout over six pounds are caught – and there are more of those fish than in decades – they are these two species.

No Eastern Sierra fishing career is complete without at least a few days of fishing this incredible reservoir, and for fly-anglers, it is a nirvana.

Owens River: If Crowley Lake is the hub of all Eastern Sierra trout fishing, the Owens River is Crowley's main artery and a tremendous fishery in its own right. The Owens River is managed with a complex set of rules on gear and bag and anglers need to read these regulations (which are too lengthy to summarize here).

There are three distinct parts of the Owens. The upper river above Crowley Lake is a meadow river that cuts through an ancient caldera. Most of the season, the river has a good population of wild trout from six to 12 inches long, but runs of spawning trout out of Crowley pack the river with rainbows, cutthroats and browns from 15 to 26 inches long and weighing up to eight pounds spring and fall. There is also a short stretch right below the Benton Crossing bridge that gets planted with hatchery trout throughout the summer.

Between Crowley Lake and Pleasant Valley Reservoir, the Owens River flows through a deep gorge that can only be reached by hikes in from the rim or the two ends of the canyon where there is road access. The river here is a series of deep runs lined by tules and canyon walls. While most of the trout are wild eight to 10 inches, the canyon is known to hold some huge brown trout. Fishing "the gorge" is usually done in solitude.

Below Pleasant Valley Reservoir, the Owens River flows through the broad Owens Valley all the way (with recent new flow allotments) all the way to the Owens Dry Lake. The Bishop to Independence stretch is a wonderful trout fishery that is best fished via drift boat because the banks are so brushy. Guide



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services in Bishop offer these floats year-around and the average rainbows and browns are one to two pounders with some bigger browns tucked up beneath deep undercut banks. Below Independence, the river becomes a warm water fishery with bass, bluegill, and catfish in its pools and backwaters. There is a good smallmouth bass fishery in this stretch of river, but that is a secret.

It is amazing this river can be a major component of the Los Angeles City water supply and still provide incredible fishing along its whole length.

Twin Lakes, Bridgeport: The biggest brown trout in California are caught each year in Upper and Lower Twin Lakes out of Bridgeport. So far in 2016, the biggest was a 17-pounder caught and released from Lower Twin. A brown trout just under 10 pounds won the opening day derby.

These two lakes have been producing humongous brown trout for decades. The state record brown is a 26-pound, eight-ounce fish that was caught the beginning of trout season in 1987 by Danny Stearman of Bakersfield from Lower Twin.

If your goal is a giant brown trout, there is no better place in California. That trophy fish will be taken at first or last light by an angler who is willing to troll big, rainbow trout-like lures for weeks on end without getting a strike. It will probably be caught early in the spring – the first week or two of trout season – or late in the fall when the big fish are staging at the creek mouths for the spawn. Is that you?

East Walker River: The East Walker River below Bridgeport Reservoir is one of the finest brown trout fisheries in the entire West. Protected with a one-fish, 18-inch minimum size limit and gear restrictions that mandate barbless hooks, the river abounds with big fish over that minimum size, and most anglers practice complete catch-and-release fishing.

How good is the fishing? Fly-fishermen frequently report 20 to 30 fish days and at least a couple of the trout topping the 20-inch mark. In September and October, when the brown trout stack up in the first mile of water below Bridgeport Reservoir, six to eight-pound trout are caught and re-



A view from one of the Twin Lakes in Mammoth Lakes, California.

CHRISTOPHER LIVINGSTON/DAILY INDEPENDENT FILE PHOTO

leased daily.

If you want to fish in total solitude on this river, you can drive downstream and toss flies on the publically-owned Rosaschi Ranch stretch in Nevada. You will likely not see another angler during the fall on this stretch. The best part is that you can get short-term Nevada licenses at Ken's Sporting Goods in Bridgeport.

Kirman Lake: If you hear someone in Bridgeport say that he was fishing in Labrador, Canada, when showing someone a photo of a huge brook trout, it is an inside joke. It is code that means he was fishing nearby Kirman Lake, which grows brook trout the likes of which most people think are only found in remote Canadian waters.

Because of an incredible aquatic food base (mostly scuds), brookies planted in Kirman Lake as fingerlings quickly grow into "air-brushed footballs." A 14-inch fish will have a 12-

inch girth and weigh nearly three pounds. The 16 to 18-inch brookies will weigh four to six pounds. Cut-throat trout, which are also planted in the lake now, don't get as fat as the brookies, but sleek 26-inch fish that weigh eight pounds have been landed.

The limit is two-fish over 16 inches here, and you have to use barbless artificial lures. You also have to walk or

mountain bike about two miles from Highway 108 (just west of Highway 395 at Sonora Junction). The reedy shoreline makes float tubes a wise option. The best fishing is spring and fall, but it's worth the trip.

While fishing is always fishing, these five spots are the best options in the region.

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Ticket to Write: Mojave Desert oasis teems with wildlife worth seeing

BY STEVE STEPHENS

The Columbus Dispatch

A traveler who has spent several days in Death Valley might be startled by the sweet and unexpected sound of running water.

Devils Hole, a tiny outpost of Death Valley National Park, is separated from the rest of the park by the California-Nevada line and 25 miles of lonely, wind-whipped desert. There, in an isolated, water-filled cavern, the entire population of a tiny species of pupfish lives on a small rock shelf just below the surface.

There's not much reason for a travel-

er to visit the cavern, though. It's surrounded by sturdy fencing and electronic monitors and equipment constantly protecting, tracking and communicating the well-being of the tiny denizens, making it look more like a supervillain's solitary prison than a wildlife refuge.

Devils Hole, however, is surrounded by the biggest oasis in the Mojave Desert. And that oasis, Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, certainly is worth exploring, especially for visitors returning from parched, sere Death Valley.

The refuge contains a number of artesian hot springs, most of them



STEVE STEPHENS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

A boardwalk leads visitors through the seemingly barren landscape to Longstreet Spring in Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge.



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STEVE STEPHENS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Before it became a wildlife refuge, Ash Meadows was planned as the site of a 30,000-home community in the desert, Amargosa Valley, Nev.



STEVE STEPHENS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Delightfully clear and sweet, Longstreet Spring has provided life-giving water to many creatures, including early human settlers in Amargosa Valley, Nev.

smaller than the average backyard swimming pool, but each teeming with life in and near the water. In all, Ash Meadows is home to hundreds of species of plants and animals, including 26 that, like the Devils Hole pupfish, are found nowhere else in the world.

Behind the refuge's large visitors center, I strolled a long boardwalk loop that curved past a dazzlingly azure spring, following the resulting tiny stream as it meandered through the surrounding alkali meadow. The gentle burbling of the stream reminded me how long it had been since I had heard the sound of running water.

Although the Devils Hole pupfish was in protective custody, I easily spied the endangered Ash Meadows Amargosa pupfish at King Spring, which wells up at a site in the refuge called Point of Rocks. I also spotted a roadrunner and a black-tailed jackrabbit — personal firsts.

Ash Meadows has long attracted human visitors and residents. The original stone cabin of one early settler, the legendary frontiersman Jack Longstreet, still stands at Longstreet Spring, a vividly blue and alluring upwelling that convinced the gunslinger to settle down, at least for a spell.

Before Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1984, the valley was farmed and ranched, often with little regard for the delicate natural environment. Many of the springs were plumbed and pumped and the streams channelized.

A planned community with malls, hotels, an airport and 30,000 homes had been proposed.

Instead, the springs and streams have been restored to something approaching their natural state.

And so, at Ash Meadows, the rare, exquisite music of water flowing in the desert still plays.

For more information, call 775-372-5435 or visit www.fws.gov/refuge/ash_meadows.



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