

Ghost towns offer chance to view past

By Margo Bartlett Pesek

Ghost town buffs revel in the fascinating remains of towns and camps that thrived decades ago in the hills near Beatty, 115 miles northwest of Las Vegas on U.S. 95. Some are simply ruins now, while others still count a few live souls as residents.

Beatty itself was never a mining camp, but it grew up as the result of mining. It served as a transportation center for the entire district, providing nearby towns and camps, as well as far-flung ranches, with goods and services. Today, it is the sole survivor of a boom in the early years of this century which brought thousands of hopefuls to the desert to seek their fortunes.

Beatty's location at the junction of a major entrance to Death Valley, State Route 374, and U.S. 95, the lifeline between Las Vegas and Reno, ensures its continued existence. It is a convenient stopping place for travelers needing gas, a meal, or a place to stay. It is still a service center for a vast, sparsely populated section of Nevada's back country.

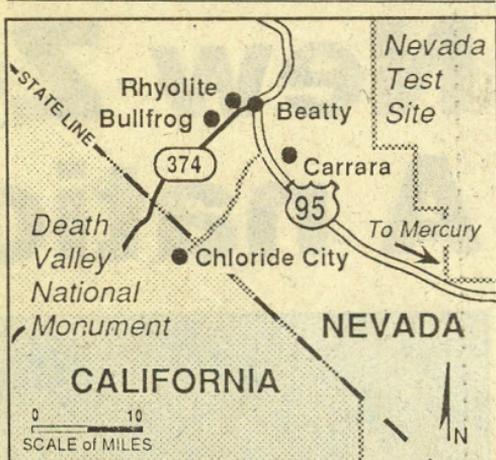
Rhyolite is the area's most celebrated ghost town. It was an overnight sensation when two prospectors found gold in the Bullfrog Hills one hot August day in 1904. Their discovery brought rapid changes to the whole area. As soon as the word got out, miners and speculators dragged themselves, their equipment, and sometimes their families across the desert from every direction. It wasn't long before six-horse teams pulled stagecoaches across the desert wastes on a daily basis from booming Goldfield and infant Las Vegas.

Located just four miles from Beatty a couple of miles off the highway through Daylight Pass into Death Valley, Rhyolite today has an increasing population. It has a long way to go before it reaches the 6,000 residents of its heyday, however.

After a drawing for town lots was held early in 1905, Rhyolite rapidly became a small city of wood, stone and concrete, replacing the early tents and dugouts. Its main street was optimistically named Golden Street, reflecting the promise of the mines nearby. By 1907, Rhyolite had grown to 6,000 people.

It had hotels, restaurants, saloons, and fancy houses. It had opera and symphony. It had scores of businesses and four banks. It had running water, electricity, telephones, and three railroads. What it didn't have was time. When national financial panic struck the mining industry in late 1907, it wasn't long before Rhyolite's mines closed and the town folded. Few

Trip of the week



REVIEW-JOURNAL map by Mike Johnson

original buildings still stand. Look for the town's famed bottle house and the remodeled depot and nostalgic ruins along streets that no longer exist.

People driving into Beatty from Las Vegas pass right by the ghost of old Carrara, a camp built upon the promise of deposits of marble, hence the name taken from Italy's famed quarries. The site of Carrara is just off the highway to the right some nine miles south of Beatty. Quarrying was first begun there in 1904, abandoned, and resumed in 1913. The town then sported a hotel, store, swimming pool, restaurant, post office, newspaper, and a railway station on the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad. It had its own short line to the quarry. Its life was short, over in a decade. Most passersby mistake some concrete ruins of a later attempt at a cement company for Carrara. All that is left of the marble-quarrying community is ruined foundations and the road into the quarry.

For those whose vehicles will stand up to unmaintained desert roads, old Chloride City offers ruins and a splendid view down into the shimmering depths of Death Valley from atop the Funeral Range near Chloride Cliff. It was silver that brought this camp into existence in 1916. Silver was discovered near there in the 1870's and mined for a decade. A new mill in 1916 brought the district back to life briefly. That was when Chloride City arose, doomed to death in about two years. Foundations and ruined wooden buildings are about all that remain.

Chloride City may be reached from U.S. 95 at a junction seven miles south of Beatty just opposite the concrete ruins of the old cement plant near Carrara. The road cuts across the desert to climb precipitately up into the mountains. Chloride City's remains command that sweeping view some 13 miles from the pavement.

There are other little ghosts tucked away in the desert and hills around Beatty. All of them have stories to tell of the folks who came and went in times that have come and gone.