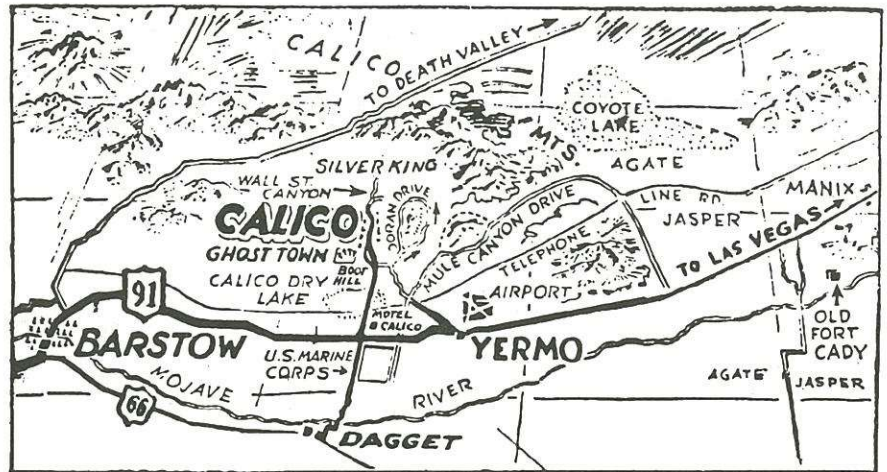


# The Summer of 72

by Bob Schroth

The year was 1972, It was early in June, myself and some friends were looking for something exciting to do. We decided to head out to the Mojave desert and do some exploring. The group piled into my friends 1955 4 door Chev. Belair and took off down the road. Neil Young's song, Heart of Gold was playing on the AM radio, and we were carefree and excited to be doing something without parental permission. Our 2nd stop after getting gas, was to buy some exploring gear and some food. We all



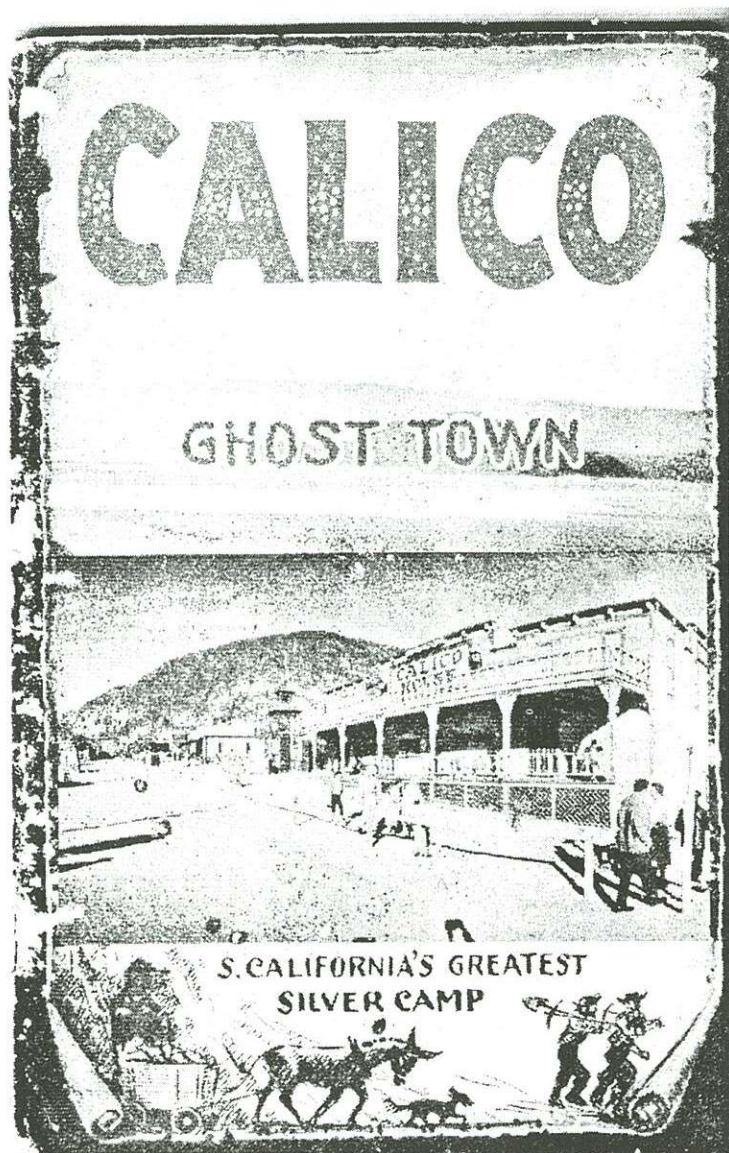
pitched in and bought a big red plastic flashlight, some Space Food sticks, and some chips and Coke. Now we had everything needed for the weekend. My buddy Jim looked at our Auto Club map in Barstow, and decided to check out a place called Calico Ghost Town. All of us laughed when Don Mcleans song American Pie came on the radio, especially at the part where (This will be the day that we Die,) was sung. We pulled into the Ghost towns parking lot and we were shocked to find out that you had to pay to get in! No way were we going to pay to look at some old building. so other plans were made. We hiked up a steep dry wash canyon and thought we would be able to find a way into the backside of the ghost town, on the way up a few mine dumps high on the hillsides were seen. All of us thought it would be interesting to climb into a old mine. So off we went , four of us with only two flashlights. As we entered the mine opening, cool air blowing out was a great relief. The desert air outside was at least 100 and the air blowing out fell like it was 75. We weren't the only people to have explored this part of the mine, as beer cans and other trash were tossed everywhere. It was decided that we would take all the right side passages so we couldn't get lost. The four of us hiked farther in the mountain and every time we spotted a place to climb down we went that way. After about 2 hours of this ,the small flashlight started to grow dimmer and dimmer. (Kind of like the explorers that carried them!) We decided to take a break and opened our supplies. While drinking our Cokes and looking around in the total darkness, I started to wonder what it was like a 100 years ago to be down here digging this hole to Hell. This also looked like a great place to play a joke on my friends and while they were taking a break, I took the big flashlight and crawled off in the dark to find a hiding place and scare my friends. Why I had a rubber Gorilla mask in my pack has long ago been forgotten, but at the time I seemed to have it close by at all times. Yes I was a prankster even way back then. I hid in a small side passage with my nifty mask on for what seemed like hours until they other guys decided to get going again, all three of them with one dull flash light calling for me, and looking for a way out. I jumped out of the dark and scared one of them so bad that he ran off screaming into the darkness. In hindsight he could have fallen down a shaft or ran into a wall. But at the time we all laughed about it for several minutes. A while later, after a long down climb, into a large room we came upon a wooden structure, that had a iron pipe going down into it, there was just enough room for us to fit into the box so we all climbed down, holding on to the pipe. After about 70 feet there was a side passage running off to our right. When entering this tunnel we came to a small ore cart! This was great, 2 guys got into the cart and the other's pushed it . Going down the tunnel as fast as we could run. Screaming like maniacs.

I think this is when I started my collecting hobby. All of us wanted to take the cart out but there was no way we could, even if we took it apart. The thing was just too big to fit in the box we climbed down.

We had been underground now for about 4 hours and we were getting kind of tired of exploring, so now came the hard part, how do we get out of here? Going back the way we came in didn't seem to be an easy choice, so we kept going down tunnel after tunnel. One of us brought up the American Pie song and we didn't laugh as hard this time. Now our big flashlight was starting to grow a little dim.

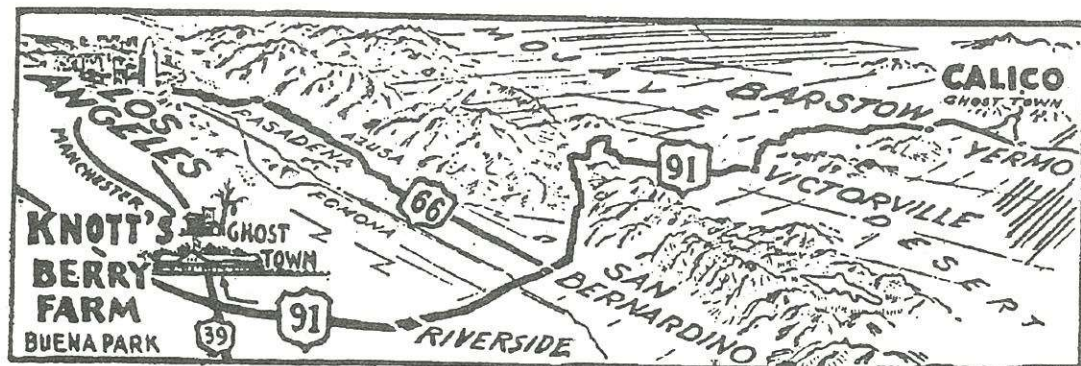
We were all turned around and each of us had a better idea of which was the right way out. At this point someone said that we weren't good Boy Scouts and that we should have been better prepared. We all agreed, but it is a little too late for that! My older friend, Ken (18) at the time, said that we would start to stagger using each flashlight, and that we would start going up every time we found a ladder or chute that went up. Sounded good to the rest of us, now that he was our new leader! At this point I knew there was a God because, none of us had been killed yet and we seemed to be making progress back to daylight! We came to a double set of ladders going straight up, and farther than our light could shine. Two of us got on each ladder, and we were instructed to make sure that we kept our feet to the side of the rungs and have at least one hand and one foot on the ladder at all times while climbing. I was a little worried knowing that these ladders were almost 100 years old, but they looked brand new, thanks to the dry desert climate, and little use for the last century.

Things were going pretty good now, a good air movement was felt. I was hoping that an exit passage would soon be found. What happened next was the scariest thing I have ever seen. We were all off on a timbered loading station. Ken our fearless leader was climbing up the last ladder. We had counted the rungs that we had just climbed up, they were about 16 inches apart. There were over 320 of them. Ken was up about 40' feet and then one of the steel U shaped spikes pulled out of the rock and the ladder started to come off the wall. Ken was hanging over the 400' pit and the ladder was coming apart. This was the first time I had ever heard him swear, he yelled out OHHH @#%#@# and then the ladder stopped moving. It had gotten hung up in some timbers and was stuck fast. It was amazing that the whole thing didn't collapse on top of us and him. Ken carefully climbed back down and we all decided that we were up high enough now to find a way out. The small light was totally dead now and the reality set in that if an exit out wasn't found soon, total darkness was



*Cover of the book that inspired us.*

next. Water would have been a good idea to have along at this point, so would have some common sense. I guess teenagers don't have a whole lot of that, but I sure learned a lesson on this trip. At this point most of the



things that had been collected, drill steel, bits of early newspaper and even a wire miners candle stick, had been tossed back to the mine floor. All we wanted was to find our way out. We followed the strongest air flow and after about 15 minutes a point of light could be seen from the darkness of the tunnel. It is funny how your perception of things changes after you know your safe from danger. When we got back the car we laughed about how close we had come to being lost in the mine and how we had beat the odds. We then took off down the road to get some food and find a place to spend the night.

Calico has become a major tourist Ghost Town, it features rides, a western theme and a mine tour. The History of the Calico Mining District goes back to 1881 When the Sheriff of San Bernardino County John C. King had one of his investments pay off. He had grub staked some miners who had just discovered the not yet named, Silver King Mine. King was the Uncle of Walter Knott and Knott, (of Knott's Berry Farm Fame), worked at this mine as a young man.

In 1950 the Knott family bought the Calico Town and several of the old mine holdings, and by 1966 they had rebuilt most of the town to better than it's original glory. In the fall of 1966 Walter Knott gave to the people of San Bernardino County full title of their holding in the Old Calico Ghost Town. It is now owned and operated by the park system of the San Bernardino County. Calico got it's name during a town meeting held at the General store.

Several names were brought up, such as Silver Gulch, Silver Canyon, and Buena Vista all were argued brought up again and voted down.

A old miner named Shorty Peabody pounded his cane and shouted "a dang grub store ain't no fitt'n meetin' place nohow! I vote we meet in Hanks Saloon come Friday night at candle light!" This proposal met with unanimous approval. Strikes proved good during the next few days and on Friday the Miners gathered in Hanks Saloon. The meeting got off to a good start, and they were about to settle for the name Silver Gulch. When Ole Shorty's enthusiasm got the better of him and he shouted out while pounding the bar with his Cane " Boys! Let's call 'er Calico! He yelled She's as purty as a gals Calico skirt. That she is" That name caught the miners fancy and that's the name that has stuck with the town. Eighty-six million dollars worth of silver was mined in the next 10 years. 10 million from the Silver King alone. Other huge producers were the Bismark, Waterloo, Red Jacket, Runover, Oriental, Occidental, and the Odessa claims. More than 30 miles of underground shafts and tunnels. Veins of four foot width were uncovered showing from 200 to 400 ounces per ton.

Over the past 25 years myself and several other collectors have been exploring the old workings of this district. Even after all this time new finds are being made in the harder to reach areas. In no mining district in the state were working conditions more favorable than in Calico. The solid rock formations allowed tunnels with little timbering. Ore values were high and fuel and water supplies were found nearby. There are several interesting stories of this old camp and I will write a little more about this area in the future.