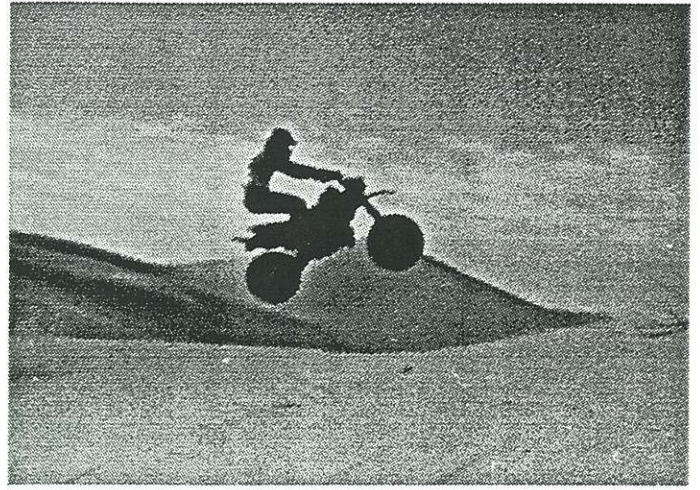


Death Valley Adventure

Bob Schroth

Fall had turned to winter and I was starting to get cabin fever. Sitting in the house with snow over 3 ft. deep I knew that I wouldn't be pouring any concrete for at least 3 days, probably a week. I got out my maps of old mining districts and ghost towns and started planning a desert exploring trip. The hardest part of planing this kind of trip is finding others to make the trip with you. As usual, I was going out alone. I loaded up my truck, and picked a destination: Death Valley. Now that it has become a National Park instead of a Monument, I wasn't even sure which roads were going to be open. The 4 hr. drive is a little tedious so I stopped at the Du-Mont Sand dunes on the way, for those of you who have never seen sand dunes before, these are some of the steeper and highest dunes in the country. I unloaded my bike and took off over the steep hills of sand. I was driving like a kid of 16 and before I knew it I was flying over a razor back and had launched myself 30ft. in the air, I then realized that if I hurt myself now, no one might find me until the weekend. Luck was with me and I landed hard but didn't kill myself. After about 2 hr's. of more *careful* riding I decided to check out some mines in the foothills. I had been to most of these mines before but the desert has a funny way of always changing. I found a small prospect shaft and climbed down the steep incline. I found a level at 40ft. This short level contained a huge pack rats nest, I dug through the nest always worried about some of the exotic sickness that rats carry. I really don't need to catch the Hanta Virus. After about 3 min. I found a base of a Calif. cap tin, a few bits of fuse wrapper and a claim notice. The mine was called the Mary Bell and was first located in the 1920s. I couldn't make out the rest, thanks to the deposits the rats left on it. I then went down to the bottom level, here I found not a single thing. I left the mine with dust in my lungs and a desire to get back on the road. I drove up to Shoshone, this little town is famous for its hot mineral springs. I had read about some small erosion caves in the area and got out of the truck to stretch and explore. After about a 20 min. hike I found some interesting holes in the Green clay hills. I crawled into a few and I was a little to fat to fit very far. A while later I came upon a larger one and explored by belly



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crawl for about 200 ft. The cave then made a sharp turn straight up to the surface and I couldn't force myself through. Great, I have to back all the way out! Now more bad news the cheesy pen light I was using just quit. So here I am in a little hole in the middle of nowhere and I am without light? I tried taking the stupid thing apart but no way was it ever going to work again, I had lost part of the switch. I have been in this situation before so I had learned from my mistakes, I did have a Cylume with me and after breaking it open and shaking it I had a nice glow of green chemical light. I know what some of you are probably thinking, rule 1. never cave alone, rule 2.

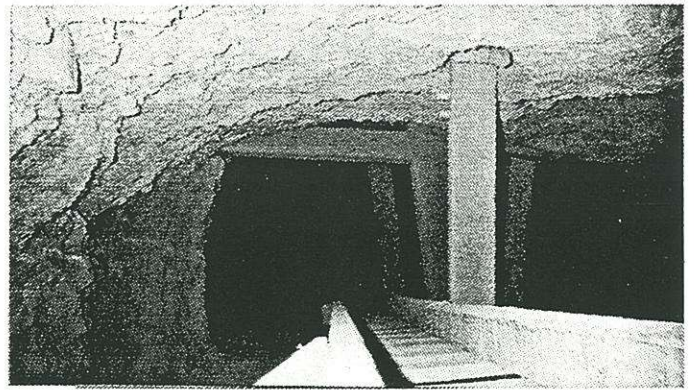


Entering small cave near Shoshone

always have 3 light sources, rule 3. never crawl into small holes in the California desert!! Well you are right on all accounts but this is part of the exploring fun for me? I did escape, and on my way to the truck I found a small dump site, while poking around I found a few early bottles, and a neat toy truck made of tin.

Enough of this, I gassed up and off to the area I planed to explore. Virgin Springs Canyon is the place for me, so I found my way to what I think is the right road and off I went. This wasn't really a road it was a rocky, rutted rip in the earth. I bounced my way out the 1 mile distance, before primitive camping is allowed. After finding a flat place to park I reread my directions to the mine. Quote: "Virgin Springs Canyon, 9 miles one way, Vehicle access, high clearance recommended, for 2 miles on gravel road bed. Beyond that, route is not well defined. Moderately strenuous, to gentle grade. Mining Camp at 4 miles. Camping is allowed beyond 1 mile from highway." Sounds like no problem but I am in a dead-end canyon with no possible way to go much further. Night was starting to set in so I set up camp and decided to spend the night. It got very cold and like a fool I had only brought my 3 season bag. I got in the truck and fired up the heater and listened to the radio for a while until I fell into a fitful sleep with mining relics on my mind.

Morning came and the sun is shining bright, yes a glorious day in the desert. I packed up my ATV and started looking for the right road to the mines. I rode for what seemed like hours and I drove up every wash and side trail I could find, so far no mines or even trash or relics. I was having fun riding around, but I like to find the place I have set off for. I finally found a pile of rocks that must have been a corner marker for a mining claim. I searched for the claim notice, these are usually located in protected part of the marker, in a tin can or bottle. No luck, sometimes people think these are fun to take home as a souvenir. I spotted a faint trail heading up the steep mountain, so I decided to hike. After 15 minutes, I now know this is a mountain goat trail, or might as well be one. Huffing and puffing I climbed up to the top of this mountain, and I saw? You guessed it another higher mountain. Well not one to be easily discouraged, I kept EUREKA July 1996



Looking down the shaft.

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going, and going, I started to feel a little like the energizer Bunny.

I then saw way off on another hill, a reflection of glass, I pulled out my binoculars and found the mining camp, I had only missed it by two washes and 3 or 4 miles. So now for the hike back to the bike and a long ride to the new search area. I am starting to think, hanging out at home wasn't so bad after all? It was almost 3 PM by the time I got back to the truck, I decided to make lunch and

rest for a bit before hitting to road for the next leg of my now, incredible journey. The winter days are so short that darkness was setting in by the time I reached the elu-

sive mining camp. I was glad to find the main tunnel entrance with little problem. I put on all my underground gear and went into the blackness. It is hard to describe climbing into a old mine by yourself, in the middle of nowhere. I imagine what the camp might have looked like in it's prime and what they were mining, and I try to keep my thoughts positive, it is real easy for the bad thoughts to overcome you. I have on occasion had small panic attacks when a rat leaps out of nowhere, or some bats come flying out at you. You always think to yourself is this worth it? I say yes, for some odd reason I enjoy this kind of adventure. This mine wasn't as large as I had hoped or filled with rare mining artifacts but the trip was well worth the effort. I saw some real interesting wildlife, a ring-tailed cat, a couple of coyotes, and of all things a small mountain lion. I came home with some photos and some memories of a neat place in the desert.