



## Great Basin Drive, Yosemite to Las Vegas (C18A-3)

After finishing up with the California parks, I left Yosemite and entered the Great Basin, which spans a large area east of the Sierra Nevada mountains and includes much of Nevada. I had to cancel a Great Basin-focused trip earlier this year, so this allowed me to visit some of the destinations I had planned for that trip as I made my way back to Las Vegas.



Looking towards the Sierra Nevada mountains from Bridgeport, California



Bridgeport Reservoir and the Sierra Nevada



Crossing into Nevada, the highway follows the Walker River through Wilson Canyon.





I took this route so that I could check out Walker River State Recreation Area, one of two new Nevada state parks. The park follows several miles of the East Walker River. Facilities are still under development, but it will feature the usual set of state park amenities.



My route took me past Buckland Station at Fort Churchill State Historic Park, a return stop for a couple pictures with better lighting. The California Trail passed here, and the Pony Express maintained a horse-changing station here.



I also made a return photo stop at Lahontan State Recreation Area. When I stopped at a different site along the reservoir a couple years ago it was all dried up. So it was nice to see water in the reservoir this time.



I stopped at Sand Mountain, an off-roading area, hoping for a closer look than I got a couple years ago. But it wasn't covered by my federal lands pass, and I wasn't going to pay \$10 for a short photo stop, so this is the view from a distance. The dune is about 3.5 miles long, a mile wide and 600 feet high.





My detailed atlas showed something called the Project Shoal Monument somewhat in the middle of nowhere south of Sand Mountain, so I thought I'd check that out instead. I had no idea what it was, but I figured I had time for one more stop before hitting my evening's destination.

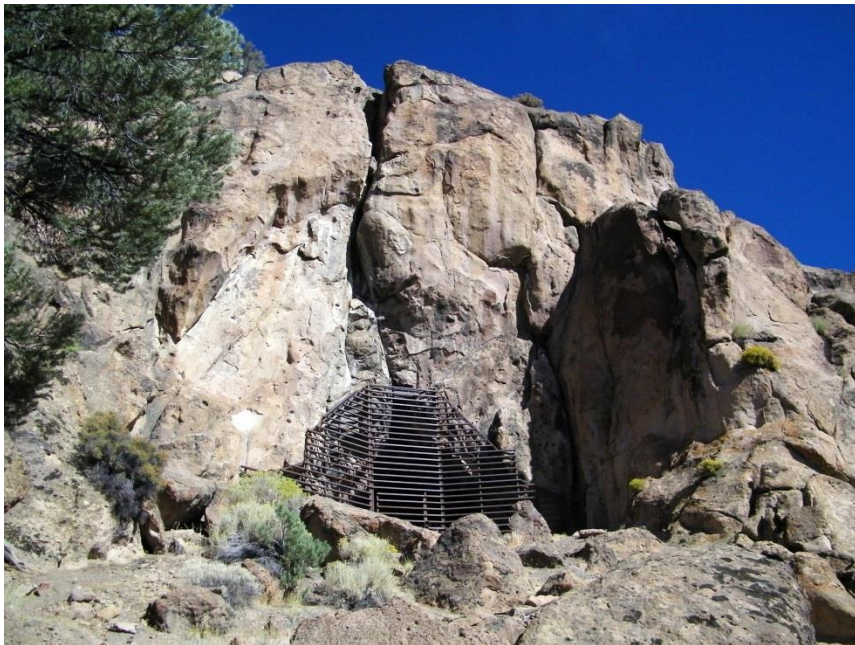
I headed down a two-lane paved road, and then headed west on a dirt/gravel road. I never came across any signs for it, and the roads didn't line up very well with the map. The roads actually reminded me of what I see in gas well areas. Although I didn't see any active gas wells, I occasionally passed something sticking out of the ground that was capped off.

When I was about to give up I saw something man-made on a hilltop, so I headed for that. But it turned out to be a fenced-off military radio facility, so I turned around. I stopped for a few scenery pictures and then headed back to pavement. It wasn't until I was able to get an internet connection a couple nights later that I found out what Project Shoal was.

In 1963 a 12-kiloton nuclear device was detonated here – an active seismic area – so observers could study how it compares/contrasts/impacts seismic signals. They used this to help them learn how to monitor for and detect underground detonations. I also found out that I had stopped near the historic monument at one point, but it was very small and not visible from the road, so I missed it.



After breakfast in Austin, Nevada, I headed east on US 50 (the so-called Loneliest Road in America), and then hit several miles of backroads off the highway to check out four destinations. My first stop was at Spencer Hot Springs, a set of barely developed hot springs on public lands. I didn't plan to soak here but wanted some pictures, so I had to hike around a bit to find a pool that didn't already have people in it. Considering its remoteness and early hour I didn't expect to see anyone here, but several people had apparently camped here the night before.



For me the more interesting destination was Toquima Cave. A short hike leads to a cave that features over 300 pictographs that are believed to be 2500-3000 years old. The site is sacred to the Western Shoshone, so the cave is fenced off.





Some of the Toquima pictographs visible from the mouth of the cave.





My third stop was at another hot springs area. Mineral rich hot water has bubbled up from the ground here for thousands of years, the minerals eventually creating the travertine limestone dome you see here. This dome rises about 75 feet and it is 600 feet diameter at its base.

Water from the springs has created this creek. Some soaking pools have been made along the creek, about 110 degrees near the dome and cooler the further downstream you are.

I did decide to take a hot springs soak here – and discovered that in places there was about 3 feet of muddy silt at the bottom of the pool. Something to keep in mind so you don't get caught off guard like I did.





At the top of the travertine limestone dome you'll find Diana's Punchbowl, also known as the Devil's Cauldron, with a pool of hot water at the bottom. There's no easy way to climb down or back up, but that's good – after all, the water here is almost 200 degrees.



A wild burro, likely a descendant of those brought to the region by prospectors





Photo stop at Monitor Ranch



You're looking out over the geographic center of Nevada (not the post – that's a utility marker).

It's probably not surprising that you'd find me at the center of everything.



After spending a night in Ely, Nevada, I headed home with just one planned stop along the way. I returned to Basin and Range National Monument. I first visited there a couple years ago to explore some of its petroglyph sites. For this stop I targeted a different petroglyph site.



The road was a bit rough, but for the most part not too rough for my Jeep. At least not until I reached this gully, cut about 3' deep from recent rains. So I parked here and hiked the rest of the way to the site.



Petroglyphs in the Mt. Irish Wilderness Area.





More petroglyphs



I made one last sightseeing stop, this for sunnier pictures of the Logan City ghost town in Basin and Range. The obvious ruins look relatively recent. Silver was discovered here in 1865 but the town effectively died just four years later. Some operators did move back into the area before WWII, explaining the “newer” ruins. As I took a look around I found a handful of less obvious stone foundation ruins like this one.

And that was the end of this exploration of the Great Basin.