

THE ANCIENT AND HONORABLE ORDER OF
E CLAMPUS VITUS®
AND THE
SOCIETY OF VITUSCAN MISSIONARIES®
PRESENTS ITS
WINTER ICE EVENT
CALICO MINE MADNESS
A FOUR WHEEL DRIVE EXPLORATION OF THE
CALICO MOUNTAINS & THE BISMARCK MINE



JANUARY 18 19 AND 20, 6018

BRIAN NASH, XNGH – P
HEAD ABBOTT

**The Society of Vituscan
Missionaries[®]**

of

**The Ancient and Honorable Order of
E Clampus Vitus[®]**

Presents its Semi-annual
Historical 4-Wheel Drive Trek
(number 49 in a continuing series)

**An Historical Tour of the Bismarck Mine
&
the Calico Mountains**

January 18 - 20, 2013

Held under the Spiritual Aegis of our Patron
Saint Vitus

And the tactical and temporal control of Head Abbott
Brian Nash, XNGH – Proctor

This article was researched, written & prepared by
Paul Renner, XPBC, XNGH, XCP,
DEAD ABBOT VII, T.R.A.S.H. Board

Calico

Earliest Inhabitants

Man's presence in the Calico area dates back at least 20,000 years, to a time when the geography of the region was very different from what it is today. Instead of a harsh desert climate, early man found an abundance of vegetation, water, and animal life. Evidence of man's occupation of the area dating to more than 20,000 years ago was compelling enough that, in 1964, Louis Leaky (who with his wife, Mary, discovered one of the oldest hominid fossils at Olduvai Gorge) convinced the National Geographic Society to fund an archeological dig in the Calico Mountains. Some archeologists, including Leaky, proposed that human occupation of the area dated back over 100,000 years. Soon after the dig and the establishment of the Calico Early Man Site, controversy erupted as evidence was presented that the stone artifacts were in fact "geofacts," naturally occurring pieces of chalcedony, chert, jasper, and agate that closely resemble man-made tools (Hardaker, 2005).

To the east, ancient Lake Manix filled the area from present Troy Dry Lake in the south to Coyote Dry Lake to the north. Some geologists speculate that a seismic event about 14,000 years ago caused Lake Manix to drain to the east, creating present-day Afton Canyon. As the Ice Age came to an end, the Lake Manix/Mojave River basin was likely dotted by swamps and marshes. The human inhabitants of the area may well have used these swamps and marshes to mire larger animals, then closed in for the kill using stone axes and other tools (Smith 1995).

As the climate continued to warm, human activity in the region centered around the remaining springs, waterholes, and, of course, the Mojave River. Emptying the watershed of the north face of the San Bernardino Mountains, the Mojave River flows north through Victor Valley, then arcs northeast and east in the Barstow area before continuing east near Calico, on to Afton Canyon, and finally into the Sink of the Mojave River near Baker. There is evidence that as early as 4000 years ago Mohave Indians from the Colorado River used a route through the desert that connected to the Mojave River to reach the California Coast—this route would later become the Mojave Road. From the Colorado River to the Sink of the Mojave River, Mohave Indians moving west found sufficient water approximately one day's march apart at present-day Paiute Springs, Rock Springs, and Marl Springs. The longest stretch without water was between Marl Springs and Soda Springs (near present-day Zzyzx), a distance of about thirty-four miles. From Soda Springs, it was a relatively short distance to the Mojave River itself, and the Mohave Indian travelers were then assured of plentiful water all the way to Cajon Pass (if heading south) or further west as far as San Luis Obispo. Not only were shells and foodstuffs traded, but slaves as well.

Silver!

The greatest of the western silver strikes was, of course, at the Comstock of east-central Nevada in 1858. Before they played out, the Virginia City mines produced nearly \$400,000,000 in silver. The rush to the Comstock spurred exploration for silver in other parts of Nevada, and in California as well. This led to the discoveries at Cerro Gordo, whose development resulted in a significant growth spurt for the city of Los Angeles. As Cerro Gordo production fell off, miners moved on to Darwin, Panamint City, and

Lookout City. It wasn't until 1881 that significant amounts of silver were discovered in Southern California. There are various accounts of just who made the initial discovery of silver in the Calico Hills, and when. Peyton records that Frank Meacham, George Yager, Tom Warden, E. Hues Thomas, and Ellis Miller made the discovery on April 6, 1881. However, in "Calico Ghost Town: S. California's Greatest Silver Camp," Otheto Weston gives the credit to Charlie Mecham, Johnny McBride, and Larry Silvia on March 21, 1881. In any case, it is known that John C. King, Sherriff of San Bernardino County, grubstaked the prospectors and lent his name to what would become Calico's (and Southern California's) largest silver producer. By the time the mines closed, Calico produced over \$20,000,000 in silver, and its history included two California governors, one Lieutenant Governor, a "borax king," and a restaurant owner turned amusement park millionaire.

It would seem that the discovery of a rich deposit of silver just 100 miles northeast of Los Angeles would lead to an immediate rush, but it wasn't until 1882, after John Porter and Robert Waterman shipped a number of silver ingots from the Calico area to San Bernardino, that the enthusiasm really caught on. Life in Calico during its first year was far from comfortable, however. Miners camped in tents along the floor of what later became known as Wall Street Canyon. Food, water, and mining supplies had to be packed in. A flood later in the spring of 1881 covered the canyon bottom in mud, and the miners were forced up onto the ridge to the east of the canyon. By late June, though, they had constructed a road up to the flats, and on July 5, 1881 the town site was officially surveyed.

According to Weston, Calico's name was the result of a meeting called by the miners:

“...(the) miners gathered in Hank’s Saloon filled with brotherly love and jovial spirits. The meeting got off to a good start. They were about to settle for the name “Silver Gulch” when Shorty’s (Shorty Peabody) enthusiasm again got the better of him. Pounding on the bar with his cane he bellowed, ‘Boys!...Le’sh call ‘er Calico! She’sh as purty as a gals calico skirt...tha’sh what she is!’ The name caught the miners’ fancy and all argument ended.” (Otheto, 1959)

Calico began to grow. By fall more and more wagons were coming into the fledgling camp, bringing lumber, supplies, equipment for the mines, and more men. By the beginning of 1882 Calico was a going concern. Fires in 1883, 1884, and 1887, however, destroyed quite a number of the wooden structures in the town. After each, the damaged or destroyed wood buildings were replaced by adobe, which was fireproof and served as a “firebreak” between the surviving wood structures. Despite the ravages of fire, by 1885 there were 75 thriving businesses in Calico. In its heyday (1886-1896), the town boasted 22 saloons, a newspaper (the Calico “Print”), a one-room school house (a reproduction of which stands on the hill just northwest of town), several general mercantile stores, hotels, a post office, and the usual entertainments customarily found in mining camps. A China Town was located to the east at Jackass Gulch.

When the rush commenced, claims were recorded as quickly as men could set their markers. By 1883 there were over 300 claims. Most of these came to nothing. However, those claims that proved themselves were generally found in one of three areas: first, the area to the northeast of town, which included the Bismarck, Odessa, Birdseye, and Alhambra; second, the area to the west of Calico, which included the Waterloo, among others. Third, there was the area just to the north of Calico in and along the flanks of Wall Street Canyon; this area included the richest of the Calico mines: the Silver King, as well as the Oriental and Red Cloud (Peyton 2012).

Mines

One of the stops on our Vituscan is the Bismarck Mine. Owned at one time by John Daggett (California Lieutenant Governor from 1882 until 1886), the Bismarck, though somewhat isolated from the other Calico mines, was a significant contributor to Calico's silver output. Daggett was a big investor in Calico, and he opened one of the first mills at Yermo to handle Calico's silver. The rock formations and mineralization at the Bismarck allowed for silver ore to be found close to the surface. In fact, deep tunnels and shafts were not required—a miner need only dig a “rabbit hole” and burrow along wherever the silver led him (Mitchell 2004). The ore at the Bismarck, first discovered in 1882, was hand graded on site, then packed onto burros for shipment to the mills. Later, a road built down Odessa Canyon to the east allowed much more ore to be shipped by wagon, and allowed for the shipment of supplies back up to Bismarck. The silver lasted for about 10 years, but by the early 1890's the most valuable ore was gone, and little by little the people moved on. Today we can see the rabbit holes left by the miners, as well as a significant amount of stonework and road building.

Mail delivery to Bismarck was somewhat unique. Between 1883 and 1886 the U.S. Mail and other messages were carried from Calico up to Bismarck on the back of Jack (later renamed Dorsey), a black and white collie owned by the brother of Calico's postmaster. Jack made the mile and a half one-way trip three times a week; saddle bags were attached to Jack's back to allow him to carry the letters and parcels under his charge. In 1886 Jack was given to W.W. Stowe, owner of the Bismarck mine, who gave him a new home in San Francisco (Peyton 2012).

The Silver King was the big producer in the Calico District. At its peak the mine boasted a 90 foot tall trestle and tramway, and an ore bin with a 200 ton capacity (Peyton 2012). In 1888, Owners of the Waterloo Mine built a narrow gauge railroad to bring core to the mills of the Waterloo Mining Company on the north side of the Mojave River. Originally called the Calico Railroad, the line's name was later changed to the Waterloo Mine Railroad.

Decline

The Silver Purchase Act of 1890 spelled the beginning of the end for Calico. Although production at the mines continued, the price of silver fell from nearly \$1.60 an ounce to \$.57 cents an ounce in 1896. At this rate, the mines were no longer economically viable, and one by one they began to close. The post office was shuttered in 1898, and by century's end Calico was nearly a ghost town. The nearby mines at Borate kept a little life in the old silver town, but with the relocation of Borax Smith's operations from Borate to Ryan in 1907, Calico finally died. Many of the original buildings were then relocated to Barstow, Yermo, and Daggett.

There was a glimmer of hope for Calico in 1915, when the tailings of the Silver King Mine were reworked. Among those involved in the construction of the tanks was Walter Knott, whose uncle, John King, was the original owner of the Silver King in 1882. Knott and his wife Cordelia had a homestead to the south of Calico, in Newberry Springs. Cyanide tanks were built by Bert Osborne in 1917 to work the tailings of the Sioux Mine; Jim Riggs built a second set in 1936. After recovering some silver using the cyanide leaching process, these operations came to an end too. When they did, only a few hardy souls stayed on in Calico, including Lawrence and Lucille Coke. The Cokes collected

artifacts from the area, and opened a small museum. They even gave tours of the mines to those passing through. In 1947 the Cokes sold their museum to W.E. Smith and Irene Wolfe of Daggett (Peyton, 2012).

One of Calico's most notable hold-outs was Lucy Lane. With her husband John, Lucy moved to Calico in 1916—she and John had lived there once before, in the 1880s. The two first lived in the general store, then moved into the courthouse and post office. This building is now the Lucy Lane House, in which the Calico Museum is housed. John and Lucy welcomed hundreds of tourists to the ghost town, as well as film crews from Hollywood. They worked a nearby silver claim to help keep food on the table. John died in 1934 (he was 75). Lucy remained in Calico until shortly before her death in 1967 at the ripe old age of 92. She and John are buried in Hemet.

Borax

In the winter of 1882-1883, while prospecting for silver in the area a few miles northeast of Calico, shop owner Hugh Stevens stumbled across a white, crystalline mineral—borax. Stevens sent samples of the mineral to San Francisco for analysis, and received a report that the concentration of ore was sufficient to allow for profitable development. Stevens then informed William T. Coleman, who by 1883 already controlled several borax-producing locales in Nevada and on the floor of Death Valley. Coleman proceeded to secretly purchase any and all borax-rich parcels in the Calico Hills—including those owned by Hugh Stevens. By June of 1883 he was ready to start production. Coleman hired several dozen men from Calico to operate his holdings in what would become known as Mule Canyon.

However, by 1888, Coleman was land rich and cash poor. He therefore sold his holdings to Francis Marion “Borax” Smith. Smith by that time was on his way to becoming the “Borax King,” with several properties in Nevada. By 1890, Smith had 120 miners working his claims. At the new mines and town site he called Borate, Smith built bunkhouses, a dining hall, a store, and a variety of cabins for mine foremen, supervisors, and their families. At the head of Mule cabin, Smith built a large house for his use while visiting Borate (Smith’s mansion was in San Francisco) and for entertaining potential investors.

Between 1890 and 1906, Borate’s peak years, Smith employed more than 600 miners at his borax works. Production in 1888 was a paltry 80 tons per month, but it wasn’t long before the mines at Borate were producing 3900 tons in the same period. However, while the mines were great producers, transportation of the borax to the nearby town of Daggett was a problem. It was at Daggett that the Borax was loaded onto the trains of the Santa Fe Railroad. At first, Smith loaded the borax into wagons drawn by ten mules. Soon, though, this was not sufficient. He contracted for the construction of several large wagons specifically for hauling borax; these were built at Daggett, and were pulled by twenty mules (actually, eighteen mules and two horses). Such a system had been used in Death Valley to haul borax from the Harmony Borax works to the railroad at Mojave. Switching to the twenty mule teams cut transportation costs in half, but it still took two days to transit from Borate to Daggett. The teams would come down the canyon to the east of Calico; hence the name “Mule Canyon.” The wide part of the canyon, at which we will stop on our Vituscan trip, was called “Camp Rock.” It was here that the teamsters would halt and camp for the night.

The image of twenty mule teams pulling wagons full of borax is romantic enough—indeed Smith used the “Twenty Mule Team” moniker as the brand name for his product. However, maintaining such a large number of animals (there were several teams making the round trip at any one time), wagons, tack, and other equipment was very expensive. So, Smith tried a mode of transportation that was popular in the lumber industry—the steam traction engine. The huge engine he ordered, nick-named “Old Dinah,” doubled the output of the mules, and only took 6 hours to make the trip to Daggett. The attempt to replace the mules was a failure, however, as continual break downs and the engine’s insatiable appetite for coal (2500 pounds per round trip) made it a money-loser. After a year, the twenty-mule teams were brought back into service, and construction began on a railroad.

The result was the Borate and Daggett Railroad, a narrow gauge road that covered the distance between the mines and the Santa Fe in only two hours. Although the initial expense was high, the railroad was quick, dependable, and had an enormous load carrying capacity. The Borate and Daggett used two small locomotives, the Francis and the Marion (Smith’s first and middle names, respectively), to take the place of mules, wagons, and Old Dinah. Finally, production and transportation were matched.

But time was running out for Borate, as it had for Calico a few years earlier. In 1906, monthly production of Borax was at 3900 tons per month. This figure fell significantly in 1907. The borax was running out. Smith already had several claims to the east of Death Valley at his Bidly McCarthy Mine, and these were already producing. Thus, in 1907 he began shutting down his Borate operations. The components of the Borate and Daggett Railroad, cabins, shops, and anything else of use was disassembled and moved to the

Death Valley country. With Borate's passing, the few remaining souls in Calico left as well; it too was all but abandoned.

Walter Knott

In 1914 Walter Knott and his wife Cordelia established their homestead in Newberry (now Newberry Springs). Knott attempted to grow grapes on his homestead, but with only limited success. In order to make ends meet, Knott worked in Calico as a carpenter, where he re-roofed several of the old buildings at the Silver King Mine, and helped build the cyanide tanks there. In 1920 Walter and Cordelia moved to Buena Park, where they opened a berry farm and chicken restaurant. He was instrumental in developing the boysenberry (named for Rudolph Boysen), and Knotts Chicken Dinner Restaurant was so popular people waited in line for hours to get a seat. In order to occupy his customers while they waited, Walter built a mock ghost town, which he opened in 1941. This, of course, was the beginning of Knotts Berry Farm amusement park. For several years Cordelia Knott bought her chickens from a chicken farm in Newberry. In 1951, the Knotts bought the Calico townsite, and began a restoration project and tourist attraction.

For the next fifteen years, Knott went about restoring the old town, refurbishing the remaining buildings and, using old photographs, rebuilding replicas of many others. Knott even located a few original buildings that had been moved away from Calico, and brought them back to the town site. Knott built a narrow gauge railroad, which he christened the Calico and Odessa. He also constructed the Bottle House and the Doll House. The site was designated a State Historical Landmark in November, 1962.

In 1966, Knott donated the ghost town to the County of San Bernardino. The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors made Calico a county park, and opened a

campground in 1967. Today Calico hosts several yearly events, including a Halloween Party in October and Civil War Days in February. In addition, Calico is the destination for thousands of mining and ghost town enthusiasts. It would not have been possible, however, without the efforts of Walter Knott. Lucile Weight, who often contributed to Desert Magazine, wrote in the May 1961 edition of that magazine, “The Knotts do not regard this as a commercial enterprise. They are sure they are putting more money and love into it than will ever be returned. They are doing it for the sake of that spirit that made Calico’s days glorious—and for you and me, that we might better appreciate the heritage of our Desert West (Weight 1961).”

Sources

Hardaker, Christopher. "Calico Redux: Artifacts or Geofacts?" Earthmeasure.com. 2005

Knotts Berry Farm. "Calico Ghost Town: Southern California's Greatest Silver Camp."
Calico Print Shop: Calico Ca. 1959

Mitchell, Roger and Loris. "Southern California SUV Trails, Volume 1—The Western
Mojave Desert." Track and Trail Publishing: Oakhurst, Ca. 2004

Peyton, Paige M. "Calico." Arcadia Publishing: Charleston, South Carolina. 2012

Smith, William. "A Brief History of the Newberry Springs Area." Route66.org. 1995

Weight, Lucille. "Calico's Lively Ghost." Desert Magazine, Page 61. Desert Press Inc.:
Palm Desert, Ca. May 1961