



THE DEATH VALLEY TOUR

Five or six days, 320-400 miles

Most people don't think of Death Valley as a cycling destination: 120° days; dry, desiccating winds; bleached bones on a sere, salt-caked desert. But those who know better—and who know *when* to visit—appreciate the severe beauty of this stark, tortured wonderland. However, this is not everyone's cup of tea. If you like your scenery green and woodsy; if your ideal cycling environment looks like a classic English landscape painting, then this is probably not the place for you.

This region—and this tour—are unlike anything else we offer. Not only are the physical attributes of the place dramatically different, the tour format presented here is unique as well. It can be ridden as a point-to-point progression as we normally do, or it can be modified to include a series of day trips from one home base.

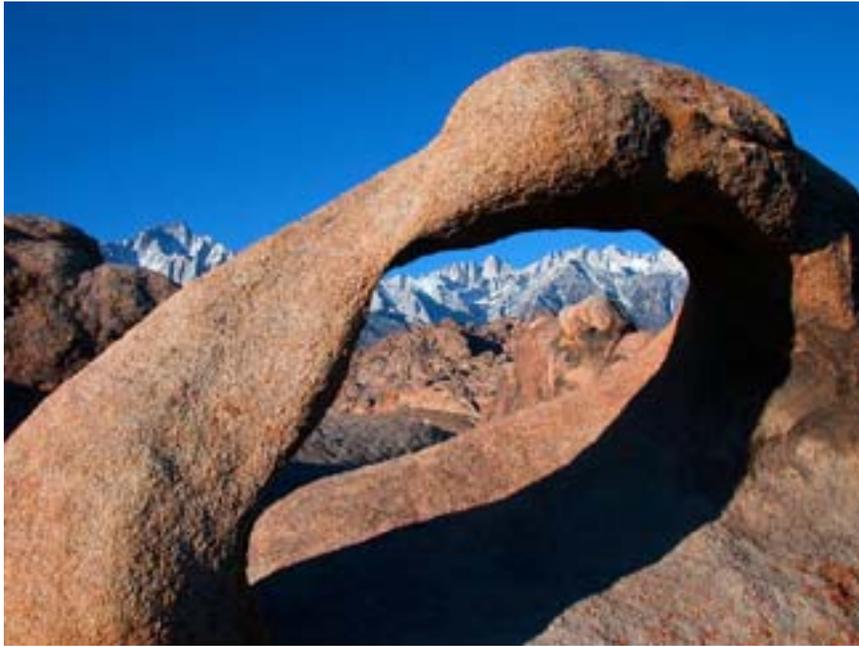
The point-to-point route begins west of Death Valley, way over in Lone Pine, at the base of Mount Whitney, and it takes a day and a half to climb over two quite substantial mountain ranges before dropping into the valley. Furnace Creek, at the heart of the valley, becomes the hub for most of the rest of the tour. You can journey south in a loop up and out of the valley—and back—over more mountain passes, or you can content yourself with staying in Furnace Creek and doing out-&-backs from camp.

Finally, the route returns north and climbs to famous Scotty's Castle and Ubehebe Crater. It seems a shame to end the tour at the top of a long hill (Scotty's Castle), so we offer an optional sixth day where you can zoom back downhill for most of 30 miles (from near 3000' to below sea level), wrapping up the tour at Stovepipe Wells.

Death Valley is a harsh, alien landscape, comprised of rock, sand, and salt flats, with minimal vegetation and only a few green oases scattered about (fortunately within cycling distance of each other). Yet its austere beauty and unreal quiet and solitude can be wonderfully refreshing. Most of these roads are very remote and untraveled. You may only see two stop signs in an entire day, and only a handful of cars. In February and March, when most of the rest of the state is still wearing its winter woolies, Death Valley is a delight, with daytime highs in the 70's and 80's. That's the time to visit. April is good too, but you begin to run the risk of hitting some hot weather. After April, forget it! Late Autumn can also be delightful.

Some of the climbs on this tour are quite daunting, making the entire package a bit of a challenge for a moderate rider. However, most of the tour is quite easy, and with selective use of sags on those few tough ascents, this tour should be manageable for most riders.

The start in Lone Pine is about four hours from Los Angeles and about nine to ten hours from the Bay Area, depending on your route. Add another hour to that for the return trip from Stovepipe Wells at the end of the tour.



may appeal to the more crazed cyclists in the crowd, but unfortunately, during the months when you would be most likely to plan a Death Valley tour, they will still be closed by snow. Even Lone Pine, down at the base of the mountains, can be a bit nippy in the early Spring. Death Valley can be nice in late February, but it will dip below freezing overnight in Lone Pine at that time of year. If you want to do Death Valley in February, you might want to consider skipping this first camp, or spending the night in a warm motel in Lone Pine.

If you somehow manage to be here at a time when both the Death Valley routes and the high Sierra climbs are realistic propositions—and within your cycling ambitions—by all means, do them both. The only time this might be feasible—in a normal year—would be around October, after the killing heat has abated in Death Valley, but before the snow flies in the Sierra. Because there is just the remotest possibility that you might be able to tackle these bad boys, I am including maps and a write-up about both climbs.

The camp in Lone Pine is in the Diaz Lake Recreation Area, a couple of miles south of town on 395. There are 200 campsites strung out along the western shore of the pretty, natural lake, most of them sheltered by stands of cottonwood and willow. There are free showers and all the usual campground amenities. The setting is very pleasant and the overall ambience is mellow and not too regimented. Reservations are accepted and the standard fee for a campsite is \$7.00. Larger groups will be accommodated at a rate of \$1.00 per head. There are also several very adequate motels in Lone Pine.

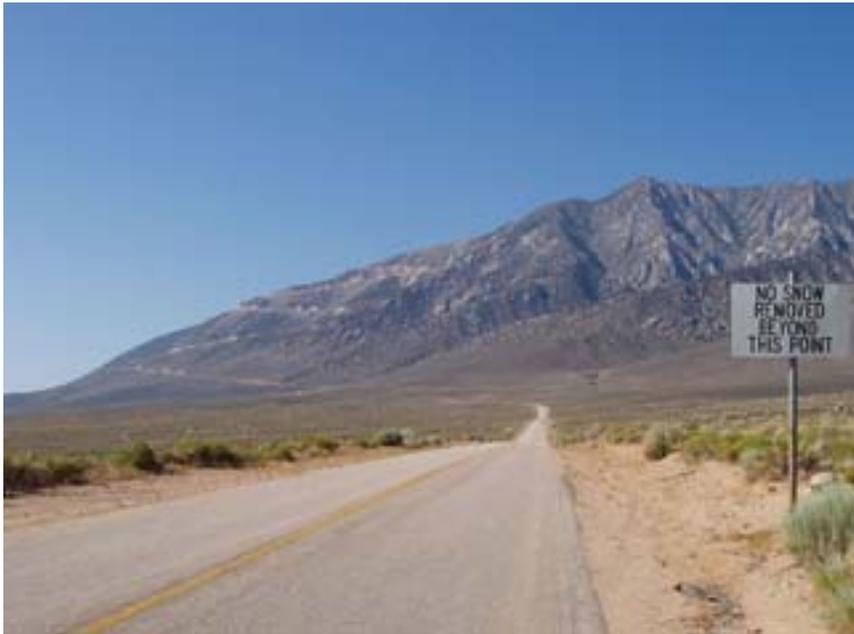
Day 0: Arrive in Lone Pine

The small town of Lone Pine is located on Hwy 395, about four hours from Los Angeles and nine to ten hours from the Bay Area. It sits at the northern end of the Owens Valley and nestles into the foothills at the base of the towering Sierra Nevada mountains. 14,496' high Mount Whitney crowns the rugged range of peaks looming over the town. It's impossible to consider Lone Pine without taking the Sierra into account: they simply overpower everything around them; their jagged, fractured spires dominate the entire western skyline.

For those arriving with enough day left, there are several pleasant roads outside of town that might add up to a good prologue ride. Between the campground and the Sierra is a region of foothills and rocky canyons known as the Alabama Hills (both photos). This was one of Hollywood's favorite locations for shooting outdoor adventure films, from westerns featuring Roy Rogers and the Lone Ranger to classics such as *High Sierra*, *Bad Day at Black Rock*, and *Gunga Din*. If you have the time, I suggest you start in Lone Pine, ride briefly up Whitney Portal Road, then take a right on Tuttle Creek (just outside town). Follow this delightful road through the geological fantasyland of the Alabama Hills. It eventually connects to Horseshoe Meadows Road. Turn right (north) on this road for more exposure to the nooks and crannies of the jumbled stone landscape. Horseshoe Meadows tees into Whitney Portal Road, where you turn right and enjoy a nice descent back to Lone Pine. Total ride: well under 20 miles.

There are two epic climbs into the Sierra out of Lone Pine: Whitney Portal Road and Horseshoe Meadows Road. Both switchback their way from 3700' in town to over 8000'...Horseshoe to near 10,000'. These incredible, larger-than-life ascents





Prologue #1: Horseshoe Meadows

50 miles, 6000' up and down

If you look up from Lone Pine at the looming front rank of mountains above the town, you can't help but notice the Horseshoe Meadows road carved into the cliff face, far above. There are five great, switchback traverses working their way up the wall (above). It is one of the most impressive and intimidating looking climbs around, and once you see it from the bottom, you will think about it and dream about it until you have a chance to do it. If there is one saving grace in this mind-messing climb, it's that each successive leg of the switchbacks is shorter than the one preceding it, like traversing across the face of a pyramid.

The town of Lone Pine sits at 3700' and is the launching pad for both this climb and the famous Whitney Portal climb. The Horseshoe Meadows summit is just below 10,000', plus there is a descent of around 350' near the top of the hill, bringing the total elevation gain to over 6000' for the round trip. I don't think the grade ever exceeds 10% on this big boy, but it stays in the 8% range for long stretches. Those numbers compare favorably with many of the famous climbs in the Alps.

You can take Horseshoe Meadows Road right from its junction with Whitney Portal Road, three miles uphill from Lone Pine. But I recommend taking Tuttle Creek Road out of town and wandering around in the Alabama Hills on the way up to the big climb. The Alabama Hills are not to be missed. They are a jumbled pile of wildly contorted standing stones and boulders, caves and canyons covering

an area maybe 15 miles long (north to south) and five miles wide, all just west of Lone Pine. It's an anomalous geological formation that bears little resemblance to the nearby Sierra, and it's one of the most fantastic landscapes you'll ever see...a wild and crazy place.

Locals tell me Horseshoe Meadows Road was paved in three sections over three consecutive summers by three different contractors. And from the looks of it, following three different sets of paving specs. The paving ranges from decent to deplorable, with large sections in chip seal that more accurately might be called chunk seal, as the aggregate is extremely coarse and abrasive...not a problem on the climb, but rather tiresome on the descent.

What you see in the first photo--the five big switchback traverses--represents the lion's share of the climb. Where the road tips over the crest, you get the 350' descent--which turns into a climb on the way back--and then another few miles of moderate climbing to the road's end. The end of the road is a bit anticlimactic: just a parking lot and trailhead leading up into even higher country...all pretty, but nothing extraordinary. The real scenic payoff is at the top of the last switchback, where there are panoramic views back down to the Owens Valley, most of 6000' below...a huge vista (below).

The photo is misleading in one respect: the traverses are cut at such an even gradient across the cliff face, it appears from below as if each section is a straight run of road. Not so: the road bends out and around an endless number of rock buttresses, so that the traverses are actually made up of many sinuous S-bends...hardly a straight stretch to be seen, except at the bottom, where the road cuts across the





was over 100° every day, and although it does cool down at the higher elevations, you have to climb through the heat to get there. On the day I did Horseshoe, it was 114° when I got back down to the junction with the Whitney road. That made it easy to decide to do the second climb the next morning, rather than in the heat of the afternoon.

I liked the Tuttle Creek meander through the Alabama Hills so much, I did it a second time on the way up the Whitney climb. It was a bit out of the way, and it turned the 12-mile climb into a 16-miler, with a slight downhill run in the middle, bringing the total climb to a nice tidy 5000'. With the three mile round trip on the highway from Diaz Lake added in, the total is 31 miles. Both of these rides would be slightly shorter if you were staying in a motel in Lone Pine.

alluvial fan. (We'll have more to say about alluvial fans later.) The many slinky bends make the descent a lot more interesting than you might expect it to be, and if the pavement were better, it would be off-the-chart fantastic. Even with the slightly abrasive surface, it's still a wild run (above).

Roll Horseshoe Meadows Road out all the way to its junction with Whitney Portal Road on the way back for more of the crazy rocks in the Alabama Hills. Or turn right on Lubken Canyon on the way back down the hill to Diaz Lake and save a bit over three miles.

Once on the main climb, you have to deal with the alluvial fan. What is an alluvial fan? It is that region at the base of the steep mountainsides where, over millions of years, all the little rocks that have tumbled off the big cliffs have fanned out into broad slopes of slightly compacted scree... gravity at work, on a grand scale (below). Almost every big Sierra climb begins with a run across an alluvial fan. They are invariably exposed expanses of rock, with very little vegetation above head height...no shade and lots of heat. They are uniformly boring and frustrating and wearying for a cyclist: they seem to go on interminably, at whatever gradient the road engineers deemed tolerable for car travel...anywhere from 4% to over 10%. Once you're up into the mountain forests and steep cliffs, with little

Prologue #2: Whitney Portal

32 miles, 5000' up and down

Even folks unacquainted with this region will have heard of Whitney Portal. It is the gateway to Mt Whitney, at 14,494', the highest peak in the lower 48. It is justly famed not only for its incredible scenery, but also as an epic cycling challenge. Beginning in 3700' Lone Pine, the road climbs to the 8371' trailhead over 12 miles, and the grades reach a leg-breaking 15%, carrying on at that pitch for way longer than you would think is at all civilized. Total climb is "only" 4700', but I rank this as one of the hardest of the climbs I've done in the high Sierra.

It is possible to combine the Horseshoe Meadows climb and the Whitney Portal climb into one, big stage. You would end up with a day of over 70 miles and over 10,000' of gain, much of it at high altitude...a very butch ride. When I toured here in June, it





streams and grand vistas, things are very entertaining. Out on the fan, you just suffer and wilt and whine, churning away at the pedals but never seeming to go anywhere.

Whitney Portal's alluvial fan (above) is as bad as any of them, and it culminates with an extremely discouraging section that is almost ruler straight for two or three miles and quite steep...9% or more. Once you get to the end of that never-ending chute, you are finally at the base of the real granite mountains, where the switchbacks begin to climb up the cliff face. That's the good news: the alluvial fan is behind you and the scenery gets better. The bad news is the road tilts up to a gnarly 15% just as it claws onto the granite cliff face.

I'm a little fuzzy on the miles here, but I would guess you're about four miles below the summit at this point. You make one long traverse to the north, another equally long and steep tack back to the south, and then you round a corner and point straight back into the deep gorge that leads up to the trailhead. The views down into the valley are spectacular, but they are nothing compared to the view up the canyon to magnificent Mt Whitney and its consort peaks and pinnacles, perfectly framed in the vee of the gorge (right). It really is one of the most impressive vistas anywhere in this beautiful range of mountains. Breathtaking...awe-inspiring...choose your cliché.

All this knockout scenery does a good job of keeping you diverted from the grueling toil you're inflicting upon yourself in these last miles up to the road's end. Sooner than you might expect, you ride into the developed area around the

trailhead: campsites, mountain cabins, and a nice little cafe--what in Italy they would call a *rifugio*--where you can get a wide range of decent eats...hell, anything would taste good after that climb. There is also a pretty little lake there, and above the lake, a very nice, cascading waterfall where you can splash the salt off your face before heading back down the mountain.

Pavement—for the descent—is marginally better than that on Horseshoe Meadows, except in a few spots, where it is marginally worse. Most of the time you can pretty much let it rip on the downhill, except in those places where the nearly sheer drop offs over the cliff act as a reality check on your wilder impulses. You might think those long chutes down the alluvial fan at 9% would allow you to achieve some extremely high speeds on the drop off the mountain, but you have to take into

account the thermals...the hot winds that rise up the cliff face in the afternoon. They blow right into your face as you descend and do an amazingly good job of slowing down a piddly little thing like a bike and rider. In fact, with the wind acting as a brake, and the generally non-technical nature of the runs down the fans, these sections can get downright boring, as descents go. I was joking later that I wished I had had a book to read during these long, uneventful descents. The downhills up on the big granite are very thrilling...everything you could wish for. It's just these runs across the bloody alluvial fans that are somewhat underwhelming.





Day 1: Lone Pine to Panamint Springs

52 miles, 1600' up, 3300' down

Perhaps the one element that most clearly defines this tour is a sense of space...as in wide open spaces. Very little obscures the view: there are next to no trees and absolutely no forests; the terrain consists mainly of long, rolling grades, flat valleys, and vast mesas; and when the air is clear (as it usually is), visibility is unlimited. On the one hand, this can be a wonderful, uplifting experience, as your spirit expands to fill all the available space. On the other hand, it can really mess with your head: there will be many occasions on this tour where you'll be able to see the road ahead of you for five miles or more, like an illustration of the principles of perspective. No matter how diligently you pedal, the vanishing point of road on the horizon just never seems to get any closer, and the lack of variety in the passing landscape only reinforces the feeling that you're riding your rollers...pedaling endlessly, but never getting anywhere.

Paul Fournel, the French writer and cycling aficionado, described it this way: "This sort of landscape is made to measure for the car. Lost in these immense straight lines, I felt like a displaced animal, a Sempé cartoon character who's too small for his surroundings, a miniscule trace of life in Death Valley."

This is particularly true if the road is tilting uphill, and the gentle grades may be tougher (psychologically) than the

steep ones. At least on the steeper pitches, you know you're doing something. But on the one and two-percenters, you slog along forever, never really working very hard, but not making very good time either. Such is the case with the first leg of today's ride. After turning away from Lone Pine onto Hwy 136, the highway begins to slant up into the mountains on a mild incline that will continue—with a few modest breaks—for the next 30 miles. Sounds like a huge hill, right? But it only gains about 1600' over that entire distance, and it also represents all the climbing you'll do today. While you're plugging away at the grade, you

can keep from becoming terminally bored by looking back over your right shoulder at the magnificent ramparts of the Sierra Nevada. I doubt there's anywhere else along the entire length of this beautiful range where the mountains can be seen to such good advantage, or where they look so impressive. The tired old adjective "awesome" is entirely appropriate in this case.

Eventually, at about mile 33, the climb does come to an end. Although it's not named on most maps or with any signs on the road, this is Panamint Pass, a barely perceptible saddle in between the Inyo and Coso Mountains. You'll know you're on the far side of the hill when you pass Olancho Darwin Road. It would be hard to tell otherwise because the roll-out to the top and the downgrade off the other side are both nearly level for several miles either way. After awhile though, you'll notice a gratifying increase in speed, and before too long you'll be hurtling downhill on one of the best descents on this or any other tour. It begins with a few miles of little rollers and flats and false starts, but when the hill finally does get serious (below), you'll be calling upon all the handling skills and courage in your repertoire. While you're letting it all hang out, be aware that there are a few places where you can get into real trouble on this wild ride: there are corners with little in the way of guard rails to keep you from flying off into some of those wide open spaces...not only wide, but deep: a long way down.

The entire downhill is around 22 miles, including the gentle stuff at the top and also four miles that will begin





swallow your pride and take that ride, today might be the day, for the climb ahead is one of the toughest ascents on any tour we offer.

You begin with the final four miles of the downhill that brought you to Panamint Springs. These miles are mostly just a long, straight roll-out to the bottom of the valley, and as you glide downhill, you can let your eyes pan up the Panamint Mountains on the far side of the valley (below) and trace the path of Hwy 190 as it begins its climb to Townes Pass. Then again, perhaps you'd rather not see it: with the unobstructed vistas so common here, you can see for miles up the hill, and the sight is not reassuring. Townes Pass is not the longest climb in this collection of tours, nor is it the steepest, but it is either the longest climb of this steepness (up to 13%) or the steepest

tomorrow's ride. The really hot section is about ten miles long and ends when you hit the resort of Panamint Springs, our destination for the evening. If you've gotten into the spirit of the descent, you'll be flying when the resort comes into view, and you'll have to brake like mad to keep from sailing right on by. Your cue to start backing off is a big billboard announcing the upcoming resort (above). Turn left into the campground and try to find a shady spot under the feathery foliage of a grove of tamarisk trees. This campsite is somewhat typical of what's in store for you in the next few days: rather arid and bleak, with a few trees and a lot of rock and sand. (One more time: if you can't get along without green lawns, babbling brooks, and shady forests, don't come on this trip.)

climb of this length (nearly ten miles). Any way you look at it, it's a monster. This is the biggest test on the legendary Furnace Creek 508 ultra-marathon cycling race, run here each October. Over the years in that event, it has been the scene of some truly grisly meltdowns.

The owners of the resort welcome groups—large or small—and charge \$2.00 per head. You can have them cater a barbecue for you as well. There are showers (free) and a decent little store and cafe, all under the same management.

The first couple of miles aren't too bad, but about six miles into the stage, the road stands up on its hind legs and really starts thrashing about. The next four miles make up the hardest pitch...always over 10% and always out in the open on long, sweeping curves up the bare mountainside. Just beyond ten miles, there is a welcome, but very brief respite in the form of a nearly level stretch, and then the steep climbing resumes, carrying on at grades of up to 10% almost all the way to the 4956' summit.

Day 2: Panamint Springs to Furnace Creek

56 miles, 3400' up, 5500' down

It's a curious fact that the first four days of this tour all have long climbs near their starts, and that in each case, these early climbs account for almost all the elevation gain for each day. This makes it easy to put your sags to use in taming these stages: anyone who wants to avoid the big climbs can just get on the bus at the start and ride to the first summit (that is, if you have a sag along). If ever there were a day to





At mile 37, the long downhill run finally ends (at about 100' below sea level), and you begin climbing again. The center of the valley floor is about as flat as flat can be—an immense salt pan—but the road often skirts the pan and rolls easily up and down in long, gentle grades over the alluvial fans that spill down from the mountains onto the valley below. That's the case for the rest of today's stage: several mellow climbs or descents of a mile or two at a time, taking you from over 100' above sea level to 200' below.

A word of warning about cycling in Death Valley: drink! This is one of the hottest, driest places on earth, with summer temperatures that can climb as high as 134° (for many years the highest temperature ever recorded in the world). Presumably you won't try to ride here in the hot summer months, but even in the mild spring, with highs in the 70's, 80's, and 90's, the air is still so dry that you lose moisture at an amazing rate, especially while exercising. It's almost impossible to overstate this. I've ridden double centuries here and can testify—from grim personal experience—to the severe trauma that advanced dehydration can bring on. You won't be facing those same levels of stress on the shorter rides of this tour, but you nevertheless need to be very vigilant about drinking early and often.

If you're lucky, your visit here may come when the wildflowers are blooming. I hit this perfectly once at the end of February. It depends on the volume of rain in a given season. In 1998—the year of *el Niño*—the endless rains that drowned the rest of California even made their presence felt here. Just prior to my visit, there had been some intense storms, and one of the driest places on earth had been transformed: the surrounding mountains were

Now you get some big-time payback, for the downhill off this pass is one of the best, as you begin the long drop into Death Valley... from almost 5000' to below sea level. You'll be descending almost constantly for the next 20 miles, and while much of that is on gentle grades and straight roads that won't give your adrenal gland too much of a workout, there are other sections—mostly near the top—where you can make things extremely exciting for yourself by simply keeping your fingers off the brake levers. Speeds of over 50-mph are common on the 508—and they mostly do this descent in the dark!—and I have one friend who claims to have hit 64-mph in one of the steeper chutes. His comments about the experience are unprintable.

At mile 31, near the bottom of the descent, you'll pass through Stovepipe Wells (above), a small settlement with a store, motel, restaurant, gas station, and campground. It's the first sign of civilization since leaving Panamint Springs. This is typical out here: widely spaced little oases of humanity, with vast tracts of unpeopled, uncluttered emptiness in between. The borders of Death Valley National Park enclose not only the valley but all the surrounding mountains and extensive lands beyond. In fact, you will have been in the park since before Panamint Springs yesterday. However, Stovepipe Wells—at exactly sea level—marks the point at which you feel you've arrived in Death Valley proper. From here on, the route will pass numerous points of scenic interest, from sand dunes (right) to old mining ruins. Park literature does a good job of describing these sights, so I won't attempt to mention them all here. The entrance kiosk for the park is in Stovepipe and you're supposed to stop here and pay your park entry fee (\$10.00 per car, \$5.00 for cyclists).





Creek, the town that will be the hub of the tour over the next days. This is a classic desert oasis, with a veritable forest of palms and tamarisk and other hardy desert trees, all watered by the many local springs. There are five places to stay in Furnace Creek... three campgrounds and two lodgings. Furnace Creek Ranch is the main attraction at the center of the community. There are something like 250 motel rooms or cabins scattered around the spacious grounds (left). There are tennis courts, shops, a pool, even a golf course (billed as the lowest golf course in the world, at 190' below sea level). There are no showers in the nearby campgrounds, but the pool and showers at the Ranch are open to the public for a fee of \$3. Furnace Creek Inn (just up the hill) is an elegant resort in the tradition of grand old national parks hotels (photo, next page). Its prices reflect the level of luxury it offers: some rooms are over \$300 a night. Both facilities are under the same management.

Of the three campgrounds, one is entirely inappropriate for tent camping. This is Sunset camp: 1000 RV pads, lined up in rows, like a vast parking lot, baking in the sun, with not a tree in the place. Picking between the other two sites is almost a toss-up. Furnace Creek camp (below) is down on the valley floor, next to the Ranch. The good news here is that there are quite a few large trees and the shadier sites are therefore potentially a little more user friendly. The bad news is that there are no group sites, and that RVs are allowed through most of the camp, although there is a large area set aside for tents.

mantled in thick snow, and the usually barren desert was carpeted in flowers, in some places, almost literally as far as the eye could see. Primarily, these consisted of bright yellow desert sunflowers, but in many areas, smaller white, blue, and lavender lupines and snapdragons added their accents. Best of all, the rains had filled the great salt-flat basin with water, creating a large lake.

There was even someone out kayaking in it. (Imagine being able to say you'd kayaked Death Valley!) While not unheard of, this much water is uncommon here, and you're more likely to see little in the way of vegetation beyond creosote bush and mesquite, with a little rank pickleweed down along the briny edges of the salt-pan. (Botanists actually count around 900 other species of plants and shrubs that thrive in this apparently barren landscape, but I'm simply referring to what might be readily observed by the layman.)

The most notable exception to this barren prospect is the resort village of Furnace

At the last camp—Texas Spring—RVs are allowed in only part of the camp and there are two group sites. However, there is hardly a tree to be seen...seldom even a bush worthy of the name. The camp is set in a dry bowl in the hills just above the village (great views over the valley). The





miles to an unnamed and undistinguished summit, after which the ride is almost entirely downhill—if ever-so-slightly—for the remainder of the day.

The climb out of the valley is quite interesting...up past the grand old Furnace Creek Inn (left) and on up the Furnace Creek Wash, a large arroyo or gully that is usually dry, but must carry water on a fairly regular basis, because it supports occasional stands of trees. Up to now, you've been riding out in the open valley, either on the salt-pan or on the nearby fans of sand and scree. Now the distant mountains crowd in around you: rugged cliffs and ragged, boulder-strewn defiles. To my mind, the rock here does not have the aesthetic charms of a Yosemite or of the canyonlands of the southwest, but there is a brutal,

hard-as-nails grandeur to this stone that commands respect and ultimately elicits one's appreciation.

With the exception of a very few stunted trees and bushes, here, rock is all you see, and its various sculpted forms and mineral tinted colors provide the only visual interest there is. Much of the rock has a brick-like tint, due to the iron salts that have leached out over millennia. In other places, decomposing mica has turned the rock green, or manganese deposits give off a purple hue. Elsewhere, alkaline deposits leave the hills rimed in white.

Just out of the valley, at mile 5, you pass the turnout to Zabriskie Point (below) This is definitely worth a look. There is a paved path winding up to the viewpoint, perhaps 100' above the road. It's a steep path, probably approaching

enclosing hills are of a twisted, contorted, and brightly colored rock rather like formations one might expect to see in southern Utah. There is a fairly steep pitch going in on the access road to Texas Spring: 200' up in about half a mile. That may not seem like much after Townes Pass, but bear in mind you'll be doing it over and over if you stay here more than one day and if you frequent the showers and other amenities down in the center of the village. Both camps are reservable through the national parks booking agents, Biospherics. Of the two, I slightly prefer Furnace Creek camp, and I've set up the route slips to reflect that. However, I have cycling friends—longtime desert rats—who much prefer the solitude and “real desert flavor” of Texas Spring.

Day 3: Furnace Creek to Tecopa Hot Springs

67 miles, 3300' up, 1750' down

Bonus miles: up-&-back to Dante's View. 27 miles, round trip, 3500' up and down

You now come to the portion of the route where you can either follow the suggested, point-to-point stages or instead stay put in Furnace Creek and do less ambitious day trips.

If you do follow the prescribed route, over the next two days, you'll leave Death Valley and venture south to Tecopa Hot Springs, then return to Furnace Creek on another road. Together, they form a 150-mile, clockwise loop...nearly 180 miles with optional side trips added in. Leaving the valley and returning to it both involve fairly long climbs over mountain passes. None of this climbing is particularly arduous...just long, steady grinds. Leaving Furnace Creek camp on the outward bound leg, you begin climbing immediately and continue to do so for the next 20



20% in places, but it's less than a tenth of a mile, and you can ride up it if it's not too congested with pedestrians. All around the trail are steeply folded, eroded hills looking like giant, carunculated warts and arthritic knuckles. Some of the cinnamon and sienna colored ridges are capped with topknots of crusty black lava... leftover slag from ancient vulcan forges.

At mile 12.5, you'll come to a turnoff to Dante's View. This



is a very worthwhile side trip for stronger riders who don't mind a little climbing. It's 13.3 miles up to the vista point at 5475'. The junction is at about 2000', so the climb from here is almost 3500'. Most of it is fairly benign, but it gets steeper as you go along, ending with a nasty little pitch in the last half mile that the road signs say is 14% and that maps say is 16%. Once at the top, you're confronted with a panorama that makes all the hard work of the climb seem like money well spent. The entire 150-mile length of Death Valley is spread out 5500' and more below you, and the air is so clear that every landmark is picked out in sharpest detail. You feel as if you're studying a satellite photo of the earth (above).

Across the valley, the Panamint Range rises up to a jagged ridgeline, capped by 11,049' Telescope Peak. (11,000' may not seem such a lofty number compared with other mountain ranges, but when you consider that it rises up in one, steep, uninterrupted sweep from the below-sea-level basin of Death Valley, it seems a lot more impressive.) In its own way, this vista is at least as grand and overwhelming as the 3000' sheer drop from Glacier Point into Yosemite Valley...one of the most famous panoramas around. It's not straight down, but for all the obstruction the rocks below make to the view, it might as well be, and it's a heck of a lot farther to the bottom. I wonder: do they allow hang gliding here?

Your ride down will be almost as thrilling as a hang glider's flight. That first half-mile is a little too steep to really rip, but after that, you can let it run. The upper few miles are especially fun, with one snappy S-bend after another, as you

careen down a rocky gorge. Be careful for loose gravel and sand in the corners though...a hazard common throughout this area.

Now, let's consider some options. If you were to add the Dante's View excursion to the trip to Tecopa, you'd end up with a 90-mile, 7000' day. Not absolutely killer, but a pretty good pull, especially when you factor in the return trip from Tecopa on the following day: 85-90 miles with some stout climbing. On the other hand, if you choose to stay camped in Furnace Creek and do Dante's View as an out-&-back, you'll end up with a round trip of about 52 miles and 5600' of climbing (all of it in the first half, with the second half being all downhill). I'll come back to this option at the conclusion of the description of tomorrow's stage.

Beyond the Dante's View junction on Hwy 190, the road leaves the wash and climbs up and over the gentle ridgeback of the Greenwater Range in the Funeral Mountains before descending very gradually to the tiny town of Death Valley Junction (below) at mile 31. There's an ice cream parlor in town that may look very inviting at this point.

Turn right here and head south out of town on Hwy 127. The highest point on the climb out of Death Valley is just over 3000', and you'll end up at about 1400' in Tecopa...but it will take over 35 miles to lose those 1600'. In other words, it's downhill, but so gradual you'll rarely be coasting. It would be a nice place to settle in behind a strong tandem and just churn out the miles. Once outside Death Valley, the scenery becomes a bit less interesting: no tortured rock formations to catch the eye...just long, low





journey...the getting there that is always at least half the fun. Up at the top of the campground are the bath houses. Signs direct bathers to either the men's or women's pools and also note that clothing of any kind is prohibited...nude bathing only.

Inside each bath house are showers, a courtyard open to the sun, and two small pools: a "cool" pool (100°–104°) and a hot pool (105°–108°). Everything is clean, if rather basic and no-frills, and all of it comes free with the camping fee. The baths are frequented by the elderly parties from the assembled RVs, and you're likely to find a few leathery old specimens lolling about, rolling lazily from the mineral-water pools to a patch of sun in the courtyard, rather like basking iguanas.

Campsites at Tecopa Hot Springs may be reserved. Note: since I surveyed this area, management of the camp and hot springs has been transferred from Inyo County Parks and Rec to private concessionaires. Prices for the campsites are more expensive than they used to be, and according to some of the oldtimers, the baths aren't being maintained as well as they were before. Overall though, I suspect the Tecopa Hot Springs experience remains about the same.

hills rolling up to iron-hard mountains and miles and miles of empty, quiet space. If you were born and raised in the wide open spaces of the American west, this vastness is like a balm to your soul.

The village of Shoshone (where there is a market) pops up at mile 58, and then, for the next five miles, you cruise downhill through a zone of bizarre, knobby hills, like giant dumplings or puff pastries, all frosted with crusty white mineral deposits. After this strange, lunar landscape, you turn onto Tecopa Hot Springs Road and are subjected to some of the worst, most abrasive pavement you'll ever experience. It lasts for most of two miles, with perhaps a third of it mercifully patched with something a little less jarring. This brings you to your destination at the Hot Springs.

I have to warn you: on the basis of appearance, this is probably the least attractive campground I have ever recommended. Large tracts of dusty, bleached gravel sprawl over an empty, treeless hillside. Most of the space is given over to RV sites (some with hookups), with an assortment of ramshackle trailers scattered about, some of which look as if they've come here to die. Down at the far end of the campground, there is a slightly more pleasant site designated for tents only, and it even boasts a couple of brave little trees and struggling, scrubby brush (right). Hey...this is the desert. Get used to it! (The best way to relieve the bleakness of a campsite like this is to cluster your tents in a brightly colored little village, rig some canopies or awnings for shade, and just generally reinvent the world around you. That's one nice thing about a group: given enough people with the right attitude, you can create your own reality, regardless of what may be happening next door.)

But we didn't come here for the scenery. We came for the hot springs, and of course for the
THE DEATH VALLEY TOUR

Day 5: Tecopa Hot Springs to Furnace Creek

85 miles, 3300' up, 5500' down
90 miles, 4800' up, 7100' down

You begin the return trip to Furnace Creek by retracing yesterday's route as far as Shoshone. Then, a mile and a half north of town, you turn left on Hwy 178—also known as





was as still as a bank vault...all in the same Spring season. There is no prevailing weather pattern and no way of predicting which scenario you'll encounter. If you do catch a headwind, it could make this long, flat section seem a lot longer than it really is. On the other hand, if you luck into a tailwind, you'll begin to feel like a real stud as you blow up the valley at well above your normal average, and you'll be in Badwater before you know it.

Badwater is the official lowest point, at 282' below sea level. There is a vista point (where you mostly look *up*) and rest rooms. Technically, the lowest point is not on the road, but out on the salt flat a ways, so don't be disappointed if your altimeter only says -270' or so. There's a marker way up on the side of the cliff that shows where sea level is, and imagining yourself that far underneath the ocean does drive home the strangeness of this spot.

Badwater Road—and begin climbing. This road is usually featured in the Death Valley Double, and getting over the next few hills is always one of the bigger challenges in that event. The good news is that although you'll be climbing a lot in the next few miles, you'll soon be descending even more. You're at 1650' as you begin the climb and you'll be below sea level when you finish up on the far side of the hill. Hills plural, actually: this is two, back-to-back passes made up of three separate pitches. First is an easy, 4-mile grade up out of Shoshone, followed by a 2-mile section that's level or even slightly downhill. Then you hit the big climb (below) up to Salsberry Pass: 1200' in five miles to the summit at 3315' (above).

A couple of miles north of Badwater, the rollers resume, as you move from the salt pan to the alluvial fan and begin climbing and descending the same sort of gentle grades that brought you into Furnace Creek from the north a couple of days ago. It continues like this all the way to the finish...unless you choose to do the optional loop on Artists Drive. If you've become bored with the nontechnical, not-too-challenging terrain of the past few days, here is the perfect antidote. Artists Drive is a 9-mile loop off the main road and up into the hills that yields a net gain of only five miles on the ride, but adds a huge infusion of excitement. It begins with a stiff climb (960' in 2.6 miles) to a short, flat traverse across the hillside.

Now you get to descend for a long time, losing 2200' in nine miles. There's nothing technical about this descent...top speed 35-mph—40 if you really work at it—and no tight turns or nasty surprises, except for the occasional pothole. At the bottom you sweep uphill very briefly—up 200' in 8/10ths of a mile to the summit of Jubilee Pass at 1280'—and then resume your descent, dropping steadily for another six miles before the road levels out at exactly sea level (right). Over the next five or six miles, you'll bump up and down through a series of rollers that will eventually drop you to the lowest point in the hemisphere...the real bottom of Death Valley at Badwater.

There are nice views from here out over the valley. Admire the scenery now, but then get focused on the road ahead, because you're heading into a white-knuckle roller coaster ride. The road is one lane wide, and not a very wide lane either. Fortunately, it's also a one-way loop, because there are numerous blind corners and brows of hills where you

You're now about halfway through the stage and are facing a long, nearly level run north along the vast salt pan that occupies the bottom of the valley. This is a good time to mention the wind. I've ridden here when the wind was blowing half a gale straight out of the north. I've also seen it blow just as hard straight out of the south, and I've been here when it





do the Badwater/Artists Drive run first, and the Dante's View out-&-back second, adding up to a very buffed-out 90-mile, 8000'+ day. If you do the Dante's View leg last, your hard work (climbing) will be done by mile 64 or so, and the return trip from the mountaintop will all be downhill duck soup.

This "doubleheader" knocks a day off your total tour and it also offers your group some flexibility: the hammerheads can go for the whole enchilada while less ambitious riders can do one out-&-back or the other and then spend the rest of the day at the pool or napping in the shade of a tamarisk tree. One final suggestion for adventures in the Furnace Creek neighborhood: four miles south of camp on the Badwater Road is the entrance to Golden Canyon. This is a narrow side canyon that curls up into the

can't see what's ahead. As you plunge downhill from the summit (above), the road cuts through deep notches in the surrounding rock and zigzags madly down slot canyons no wider than the one twisting lane of asphalt (below). A word of caution: not only are the corners frequently blind, there is often sand or loose gravel shoaled across the surface, sometimes in the most inopportune places, such as hairpin corners. If you can't see what's around the corner or over the brow of the hill, don't be pushing the envelope. Besides, the rocky gorge you're riding through is magnificent, and you ought to either slow down and admire it or stop altogether for a closer look.

The gnarly downhill ends abruptly after three miles with a tight hairpin turn that immediately ramps up into one of the steepest pitches on this tour: 560' up in one mile, sometimes reaching 17%. This is serious work. Hey, you said you were bored, right? But you get what you pay for: as soon as the climb stops, the downhill picks up again, as wild and crazy as before...more slot canyons and extreme, technical challenge, followed by a fast run across the open hillside back to the main road. From here it's just a 7-mile run through the rollers to the finish back at Furnace Creek camp...time to go hang out at the pool!

If you chose not to do the loop down to Tecopa, you could enjoy much of what this day's stage has to offer by doing an out-&-back to Badwater with the Artists Drive loop thrown in on the return leg. That ends up being just over 42 miles with 2700' of climb. If that doesn't seem like a respectable mileage total for the day, just noodle along past Badwater as far as you like and then turn back. Or...for a really monster day, you could

towering rock formations below Zabriskie Point (see map). The further you hike up the canyon the more little side canyons there are branching off and tunneling into the rock walls. You could spend a whole morning prowling around up in there and still not explore all the little nooks and crannies (next page). It is here, deep in the stone canyons—rather than out on the open playa—that one most forcibly confronts the geology of this rock-ribbed region.

Bereft of most flora and fauna, the land itself takes center stage (hand in hand with the climate). It is not within the scope of these modest tour notes to fully examine the geological history of Death Valley, but I must at least note





section to be a separate valley and called it Lost Valley. That notion has now gone by the board, and this is all taken to be the same valley, and its only distinguishing place name is a small area beyond the dunes known as Mesquite Flat. As the valley narrows, the Grapevine Mountains rise up on your right—you're climbing through their foothills—while across the valley, the Cottonwood Range of the Panamints closes in and eventually pinches off the valley. The first 40 miles aren't that hilly or curving, gaining only around 900' over that entire distance, but from there on, the further you go, the hillier and twistier the road becomes, ending up at over 3000' in elevation. You pass the access road to Mesquite Spring camp at mile 50 and then, just a few tenths later, pass the ranger station marking the northern

in passing that the area is considered a veritable variety store of geology, with every era since the creation of the earth represented in the stones and strata of one part or another of the valley or surrounding mountains. To make things even more entertaining and intriguing for rock hounds, the many types of rock from all these epochs have been jumbled and tumbled together—through subsequent upheavals of the planet's crust—to such an extent that you can expect to find almost any sort of formation almost anywhere. A geological sampler pack.

gateway to the park. (The actual park border is a few miles further north.) Three more uphill miles—now with a few trees crowding the road—bring you to Scotty's Castle.

It isn't really much of a castle, and even as grand mansions go, it's just a bit above average in size and splendor (both photos). Set down amid similar piles in some wealthy suburb, it would hardly turn a head. But as realtors are forever saying: "Location! Location! Location!" And that,

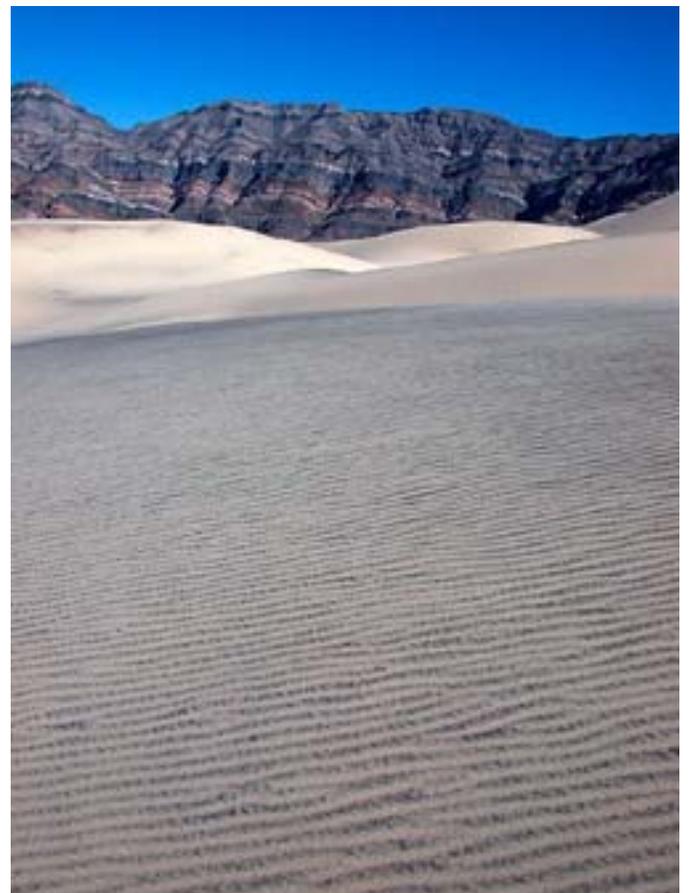
Day 5: Furnace Creek to Mesquite Spring (via Scotty's Castle)

60 miles, 3500' up, 1500' down

Now that you've thoroughly explored the middle and southern end of Death Valley, it's time to head north and see what the other end of the valley has to say for itself. Although the route ends at the Mesquite Spring campground, the real destination for the day is Scotty's Castle, perhaps the best known tourist draw in the valley.

To get there, you retrace the final 17 miles of Day 2, back through the low, rolling hills to Sand Dune junction. At the junction, you leave the backtrack and strike out to the north on the road to the castle. From here on, the theme of the day will be climbing, but again, it will mainly be of a very gentle nature, and in this case, it will be interspersed with plenty of rollers and saddles to keep things interesting. Just after turning north, you ride along an area of sand dunes that look as if they drifted here from the Sahara (right). This sea of rolling dunes may be what people think of when they conjure up Death Valley in their imagination, but this is the only place in the park where such dunes are visible from the road.

Because the valley narrows here and is broken up by a few low hills, some early visitors considered this northern





National Monument in the mid-30's. It's a measure of Scott's flair for self-promotion that, although the castle was ostensibly built as a home for Johnson, it is now immortalized in the name of his more colorful sidekick and construction foreman.

Enough history. If you're interested, you can learn all this and much more when you tour the place. (Admission is \$8.) Plan to have a sag meet you here with walking shoes. In theory, you could just peel off at the turn to Mesquite Spring camp and drive up here in walking shoes and street clothes later, but I recommend you ride up... because it's a nice road, and because you then get to ride back downhill afterward. In fact, if you want a little more good riding, consider continuing up Grapevine Canyon beyond Scotty's for a few more miles before turning around. It's nice.

Mesquite Spring is a small, rather pretty campsite, with more trees and vegetation than almost all of the rest of the camps on this tour put together. Unfortunately, it has two drawbacks: there are no showers (and no swimming holes) and they don't take reservations. The latter item shouldn't be a problem, as the camp host says he's never seen the site full except on a few holiday weekends. The lack of showers for rinsing off the day's road work is certainly inconvenient, but at least they do have well water, so a sponge bath is possible.

Scotty's certainly has, in spades. Situated 50 miles from the nearest settlement, and in one of the harshest, most desolate spots on earth, it sticks out like a tarantula in a tea cup. This monumental edifice complex was constructed by Walter Scott, a Kentucky native raised as a cowboy in Nevada. He did a tour of duty as a professional cowpoke in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in the 1890's, and apparently absorbed that production's ideals of flamboyant showmanship and ersatz glamor like mother's milk. For the rest of his life, he survived and even prospered as a fast talker and glad-handing con man. He was reputed to have discovered several fabulous gold mines, but in fact, his real mother lode for making money was extracting it from the pockets of wealthy eastern investors.

During the 20's, he and his good friend Arthur Johnson (a well-to-do Chicagoan and the source of much of the ready money) began building the vast, sprawling Spanish-Moorish-style estate at the head of the valley...even though they hadn't bothered to file a claim for a deed to the property. That slight oversight was rectified with some hasty legal scurrying that allowed Johnson to buy 1500 acres when the surrounding land was being incorporated into the Death Valley





Day 6: Mesquite Spring to Stovepipe Wells

50 miles, 500' up, 2400' down

62 miles, 900' up, 2800' down

Because this route essentially retraces miles you've already done, there isn't much new to add, except to note that all your former climbs will now be descents, and the few downhills you did before will now be very mild climbs. The only all-new addition today is the optional, 12-mile out-&-back to Ubehebe Crater (*see map*). Speaking of maps, this should all be familiar to you now, so I'm not providing a new map for today. Refer to yesterday's map.

Ubehebe Crater is what's left after a violent volcanic eruption blew a hole in the earth here in relatively recent geologic time. (Little Hebe Crater nearby is only 1000 years old...hardly a blink in rock years.) You have to reclimb a bit of the hill toward Scotty's before peeling off on the spur road to the craters (above). You then cross a wide, mostly flat hillside before climbing a couple of hundred feet to Ubehebe. After that, it's all retracing of previous routes...first yesterday's outward bound stage and then the short section from Day 2 between Sand Dune Junction and Stovepipe Wells.

You may have noticed the campground at Stovepipe Wells on your rollout from Townes Pass on Day 2. From the road, it looks just marginally less bleak than the camp in Tecopah Hot Springs. On closer inspection, you'll discover a reasonably pleasant area set aside for tents down along the brushy fringe of the camp that can be turned to good advantage as a

campers' village. Just across the road from the camp is the motel of Stovepipe Wells Village, and you can use the showers and the swimming pool there. (There seems to be some confusion about whether you'll be charged for the use of the pool or not. Some folks tell me it comes with the camp fee; others say there's a \$2.00 fee.) Once again, there are no reservations, but I'm assured that there is almost always space available, except for the rare weekend when some big event is scheduled. In the case of Stovepipe Wells Village, I suggest calling the resort management (at the motel) ahead of time to see if any such conflicts may exist.

During my travels in Death Valley, I have twice stayed in the motel here. It is fairly bare-bones basic, but is decent. It's pleasant to hang out on the veranda in front of your room, taking in the view across the valley

as the sun sets at your back and lights up the rugged peaks of the Amargosa Mountains to the east. The restaurant here is also quite nice...always a plus for hungry cyclists.

So there you have it. Death Valley in a nut shell, or at least in a manageable package of cycle-tour stages. It's an extraordinary world...a unique landscape. It is forbidding and intimidating, and yet also warm—very warm sometimes—and welcoming...at least if you visit during the right seasons. Barren and brutal; balmy and beautiful. It is a very special place, and these few words do a poor job of describing it. You will simply have to come here—and ride here—to fully appreciate it.



• **Details** •

Day 0 (Arrive in Lone Pine):

Diaz Lake Recreation Area
Two miles south of Lone Pine on Hwy 395

Inyo County Parks and Recreation 760-876-5656

Camp fees:
Per site \$7.00
Group camping (per person) \$1.00
Reservation fee \$3.00

Camp facilities: 200 camp sites, open all year; showers, restrooms, water, swimming at beach

Nearby lodging, food:
Alabama Hills Inn 760-876-8700
Best Western Motel 760-876-5571, 800-231-4071

There are several restaurants in Lone Pine, as well as more motels, further from camp.

Lone Pine Chamber of Commerce 760-876-4444

Day 1 (Panamint Springs):

Panamint Springs Resort
PO Box 395, Ridgecrest, CA 93556
702-482-7680

Camp fees:
Per site \$15.00
Group camping (per person) \$3.00

Camp facilities: 52 campsites, open all year; showers (free), restrooms, water, barbecues, gas & propane.

Nearby lodging and food: 14-unit motel, restaurant, and small store/gift shop adjacent to the camp; catered barbe-

cue available.

Days 2 & 4 (Furnace Creek):

Furnace Creek Campground, Death Valley NP

Ranger station 760-786-2441

Reservations through Biospherics 800-365-2267

National park campsites may be reserved through Biospherics up to three months in advance, beginning on the 15th of each month. For example, on April 15, sites may be reserved for any date through August 14. (Note, the booking agents keep changing these policies, so be sure to check in advance of your particular reservation date.)

Camp fees:
Per site \$16.00

Camp facilities: 135 sites, including tent camping area, also an overflow camping area, open all year; restrooms, water, some RV hookups, dump station.

Texas Spring Campground (approximately 1.5 miles south of Furnace Creek Camp)

Camp fees:
Per site \$10.00
Group sites \$50.00

Camp facilities: 92 campsites, two group sites (H & K), open October through April; restrooms, water.

Nearby: showers and swimming pool are available free of charge at Furnace Creek Ranch, midway between the two National Park Campgrounds; gift shops, store, desert history museum, tennis courts, golf course, and gas station at Furnace Creek Ranch; Sunset Campground offers 1000 RV sites (also reservable through Biospherics)

Nearby lodging and food:
Furnace Creek Ranch 760-786-2345



Furnace Creek Inn 760-786-2345

Day 3 (Tecopa Hot Springs):

Tecopa Hot Springs Park

Inyo County Parks and Recreation 760-852-4260

Camp fees:

Per site (no reservations) \$6.50

Camp facilities: 250 campsites, open all year; additional tent camping area; showers and hot springs (free), restrooms, water, dump station.

Day 5 (Mesquite Spring):

Mesquite Spring Campground

Campground 760-786-2331

Camp fees:

Per site (no reservations) \$6.00

Camp facilities: 30 sites, open all year; restrooms, piped water.

Day 6 (Stovepipe Wells):

Stovepipe Wells Village Campground

PO Box 559, Hwy 190

Death Valley, CA 92328

Camp fees:

Per site \$6.00

Camp facilities: 200 sites, including tent area, open October through April; restrooms, water.

Nearby: showers and pool available at motel across street (\$2.00 fee); store/gift shop.

Nearby lodging and food:

Stovepipe Wells Village Motel 760-786-2387

There is a restaurant adjacent to the motel.



The Death Valley Tour

Prologue #1: Horseshoe Meadows

50 miles, 6000' up and down

MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0	L	Hwy 395	Leave Diaz Lake (3700')
3.2	L	Whitney Portal Road	Town of Lone Pine (3700')
3.7	L	Tuttle Creek Road	Explore the Alabama Hills
9.1	R	Lubken Canyon Road	
9.5	L	Horseshoe Meadows Road	
24.5	180°	Horseshoe Meadows Road	★ Horseshoe Meadow (9900')...turn around
43.1	R	Whitney Portal Road	
46.7	R	Hwy 395	Town of Lone Pine (3700')
49.9	R	Diaz Lake driveway	Finish

Return to camp via Lubken Canyon Road: save 3.5 miles.

Prologue #2: Whitney Portal

32 miles, 5000' up and down

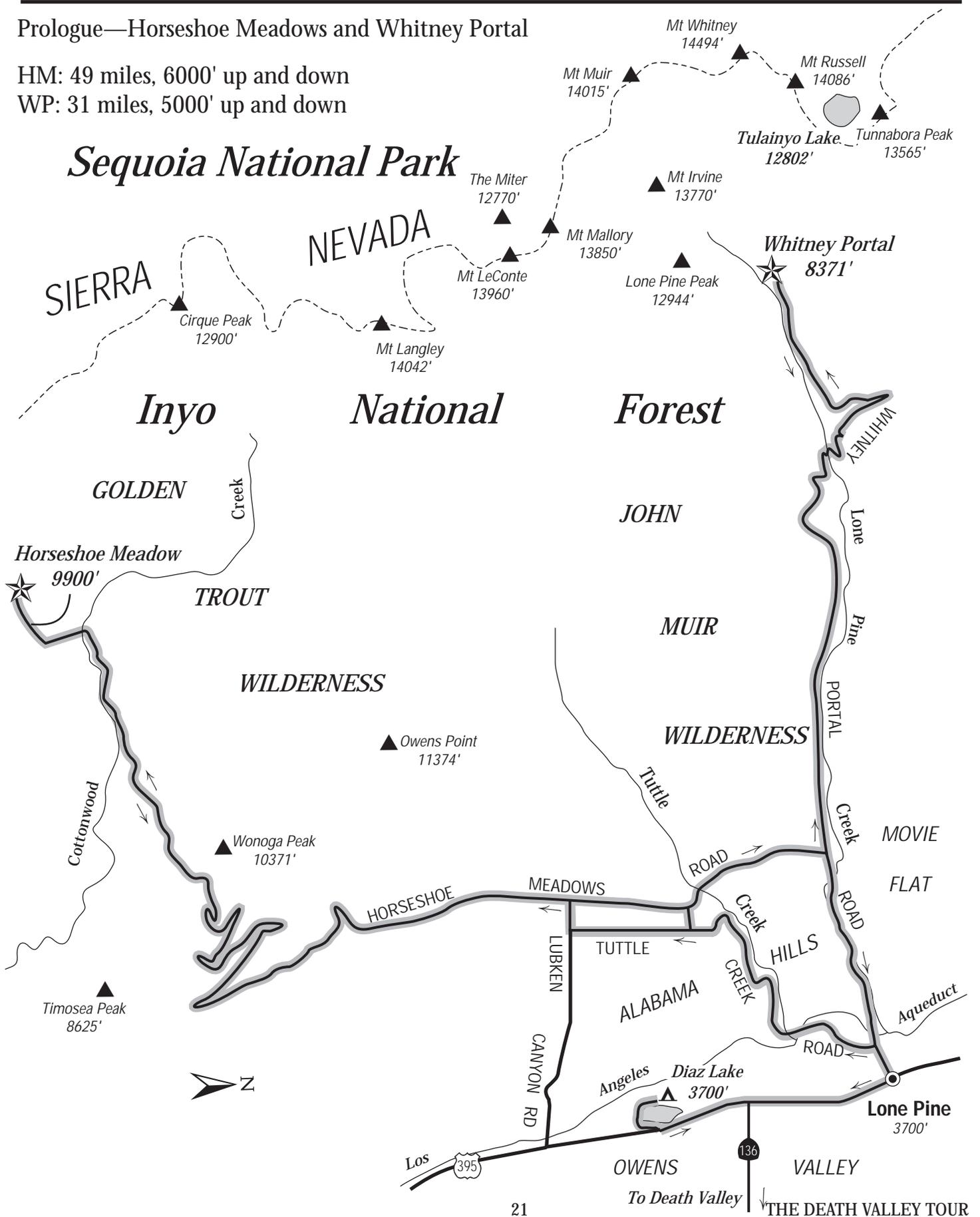
0.0	L	Hwy 395	Leave Diaz Lake (3700')
3.2	L	Whitney Portal Road	Town of Lone Pine (3700')
3.7	L	Tuttle Creek Road	Explore the Alabama Hills
7.6	R	Short connector road to Horseshoe Meadows Road	
7.9	R	Horseshoe Meadows Road	
9.9	L	Whitney Portal Road	
18.9	180°	Whitney Portal Road	★ Whitney Portal (8371')...turn around
31.0	R	Hwy 395	Town of Lone Pine (3700')
34.2	R	Diaz Lake driveway	Finish

Death Valley Tour

Prologue—Horseshoe Meadows and Whitney Portal

HM: 49 miles, 6000' up and down

WP: 31 miles, 5000' up and down

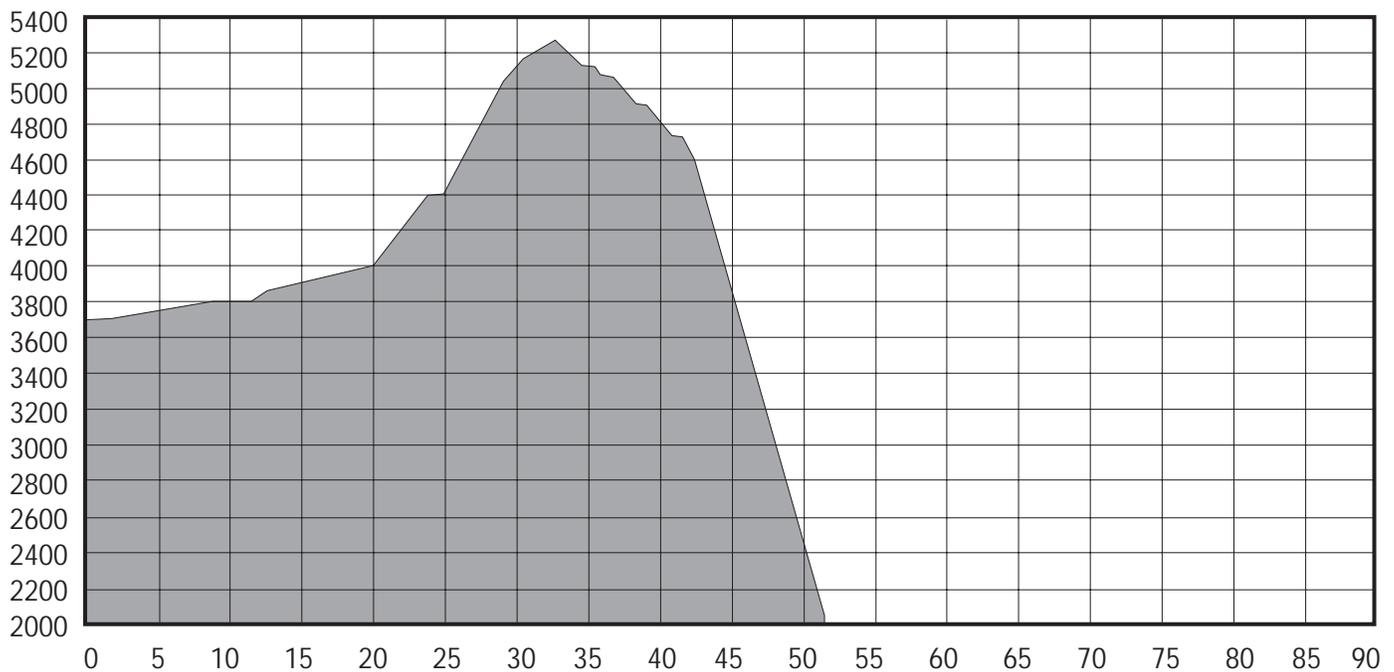


The Death Valley Tour

Day 1: Lone Pine to Panamint Springs

52 miles, 1600' up, 3260' down

MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0	L	Hwy 395	Leave Diaz Lake camp.
1.5	R	Hwy 136	Begin long, gradual climb.
20.2	S	Hwy 190	Hwy 190 joins from the south.
32.9	S		Panamint Pass summit (5300').
38.9	S		Descent becomes steeper...
51.3	L	Into Panamint Springs camp	2040'

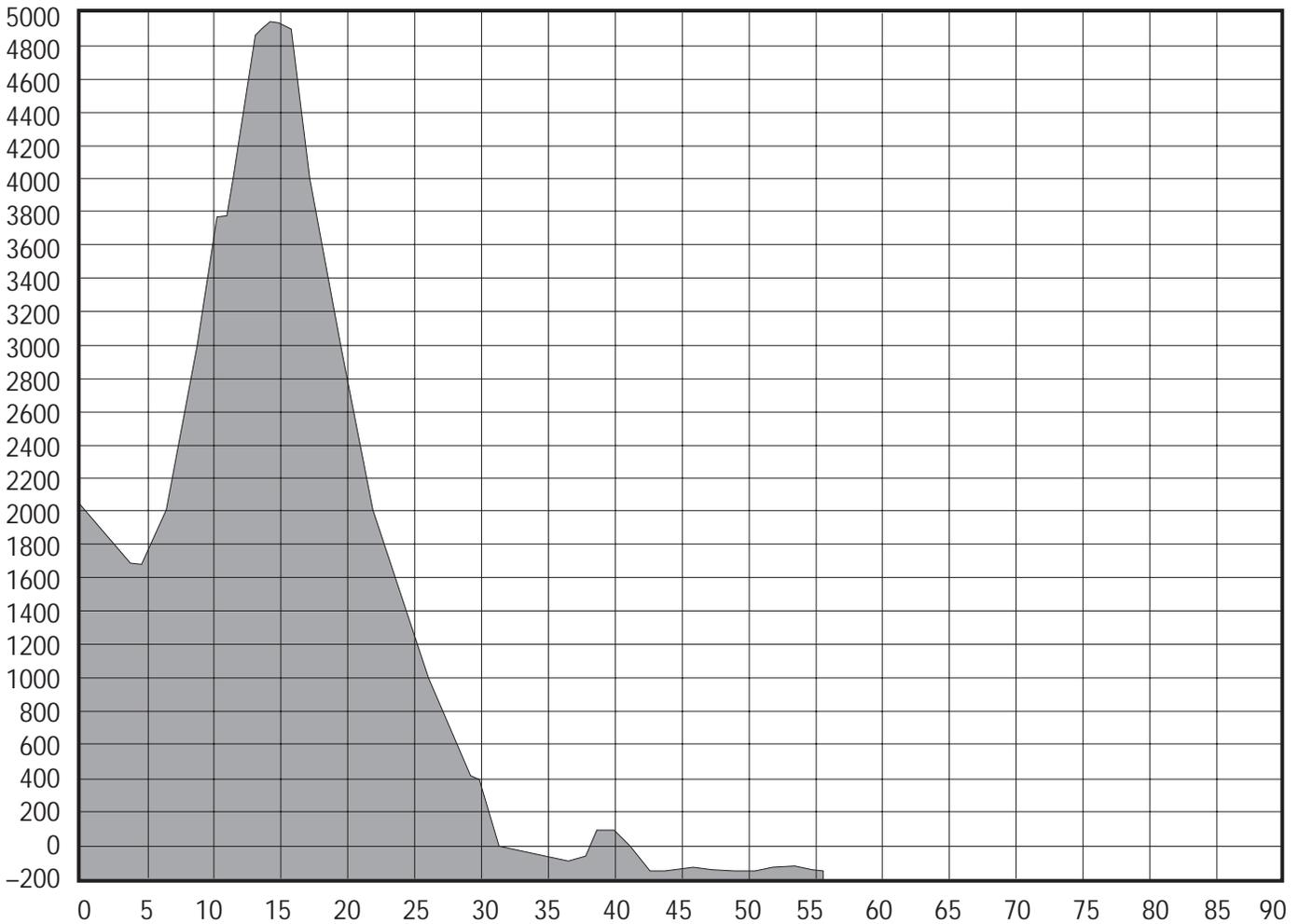


The Death Valley Tour

Day 2: Panamint Springs to Furnace Creek

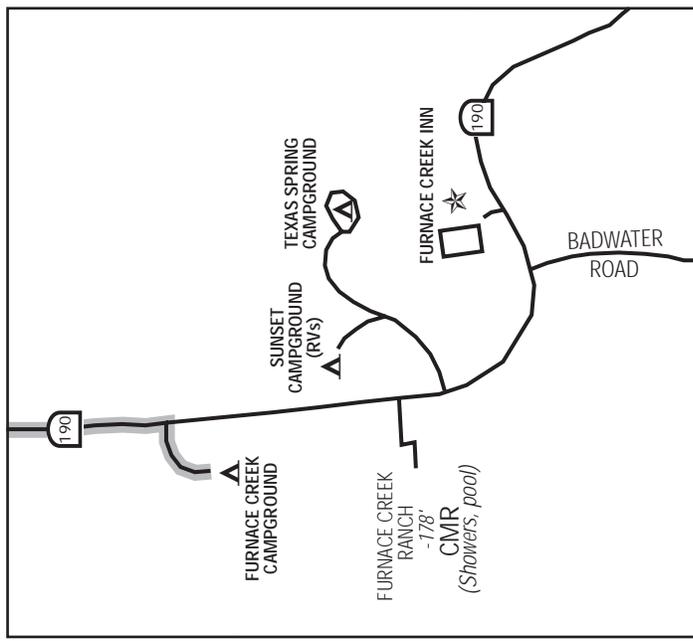
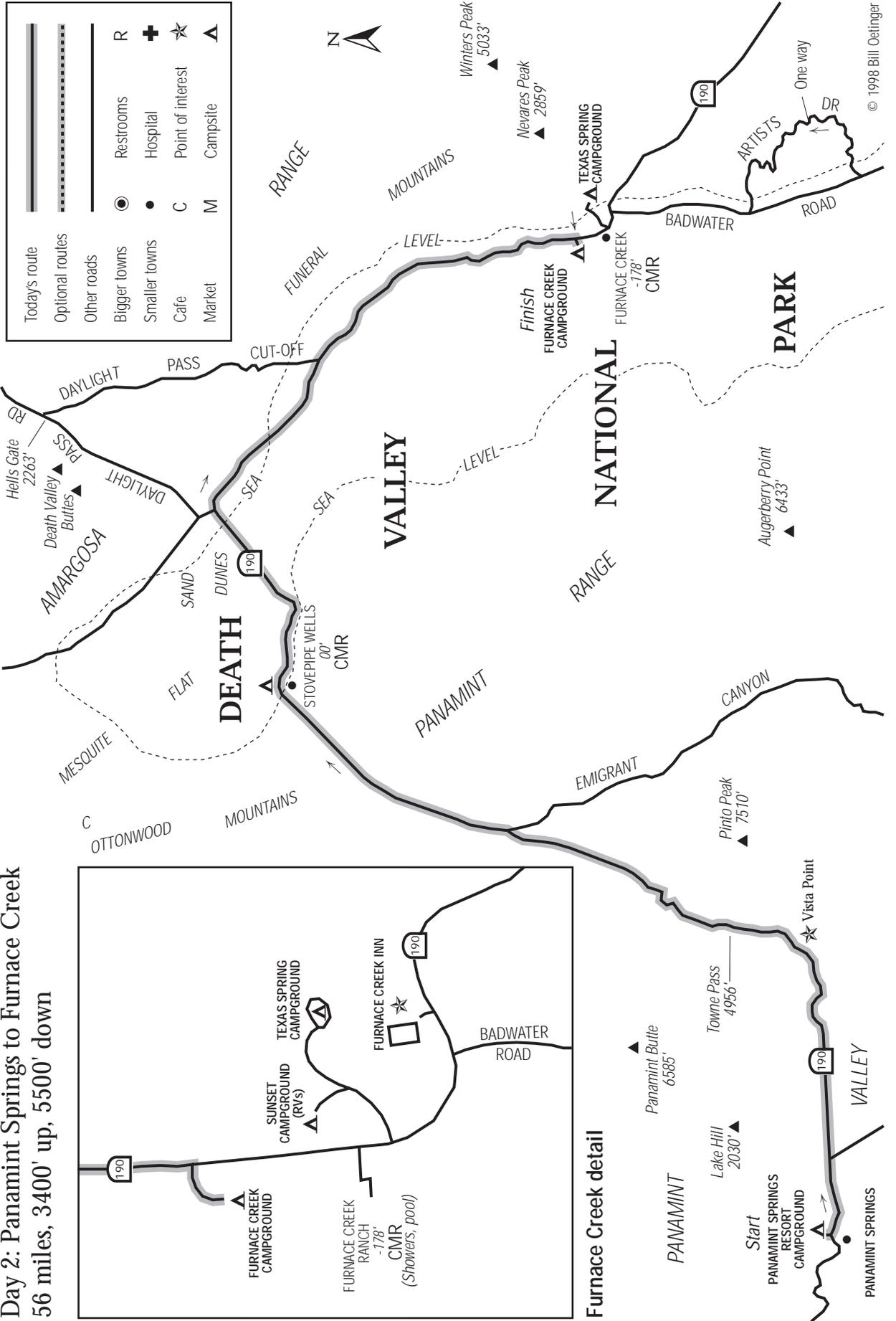
56 miles, 1600' up, 3260' down

MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0	L	Hwy 190	Leave Panamint Springs camp. Descend.
4.6	S		Begin Townes Pass climb. Up to 13%.
14.0	S		Townes Pass summit (4956').
31.0	S		Stovepipe Wells Village (sea level).
38.3	S		Bear right at Sand Dune junction.
55.3	R	Into Furnace Creek camp	-190'
Or...			
56.3	L	Texas Spring access road	-100'
57.0		Texas Spring camp	0'



The Death Valley Tour

Day 2: Panamint Springs to Furnace Creek
56 miles, 3400' up, 5500' down



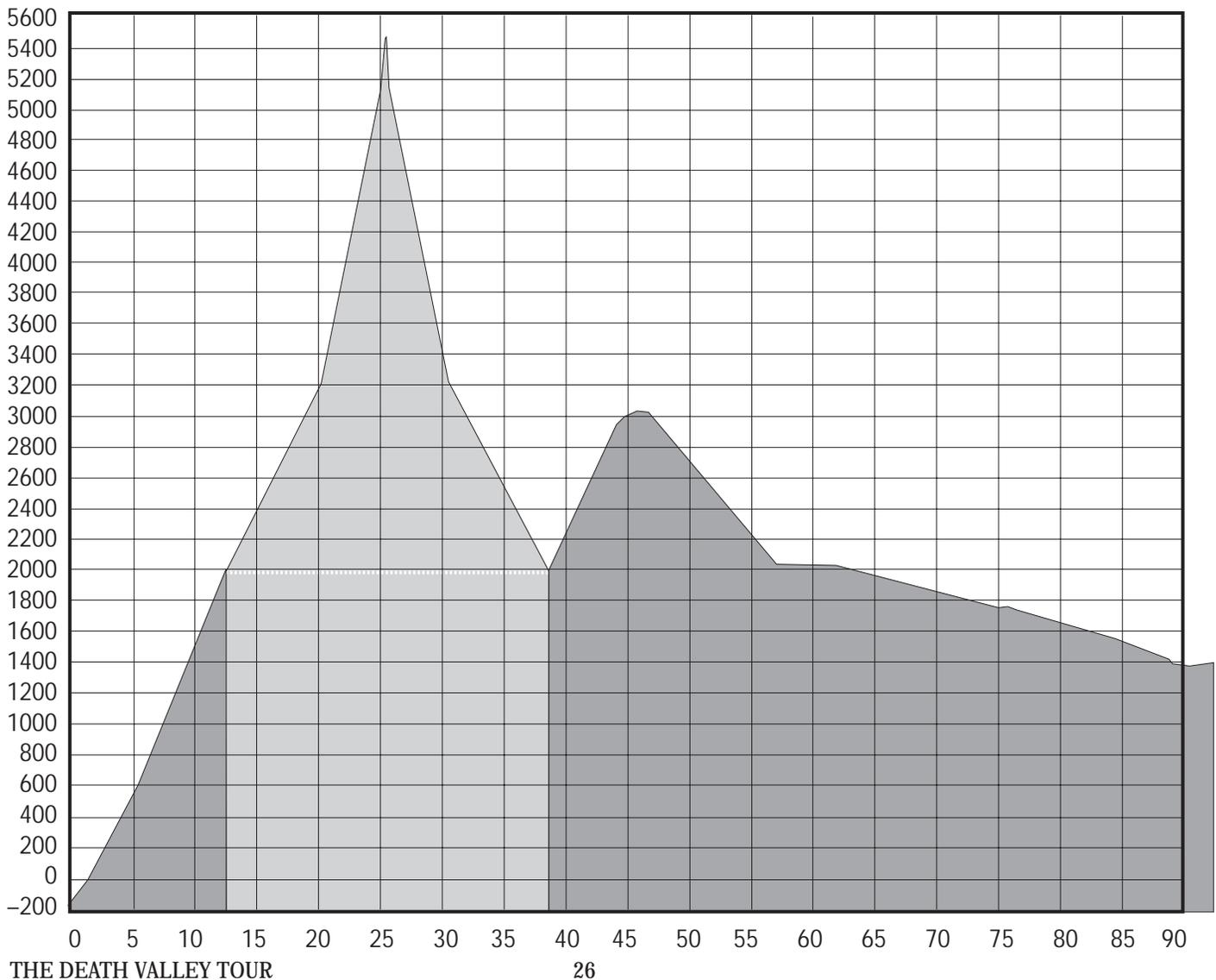
The Death Valley Tour

Day 3: Furnace Creek to Tecopa Hot Springs

67 miles, 3300' up, 1750' down

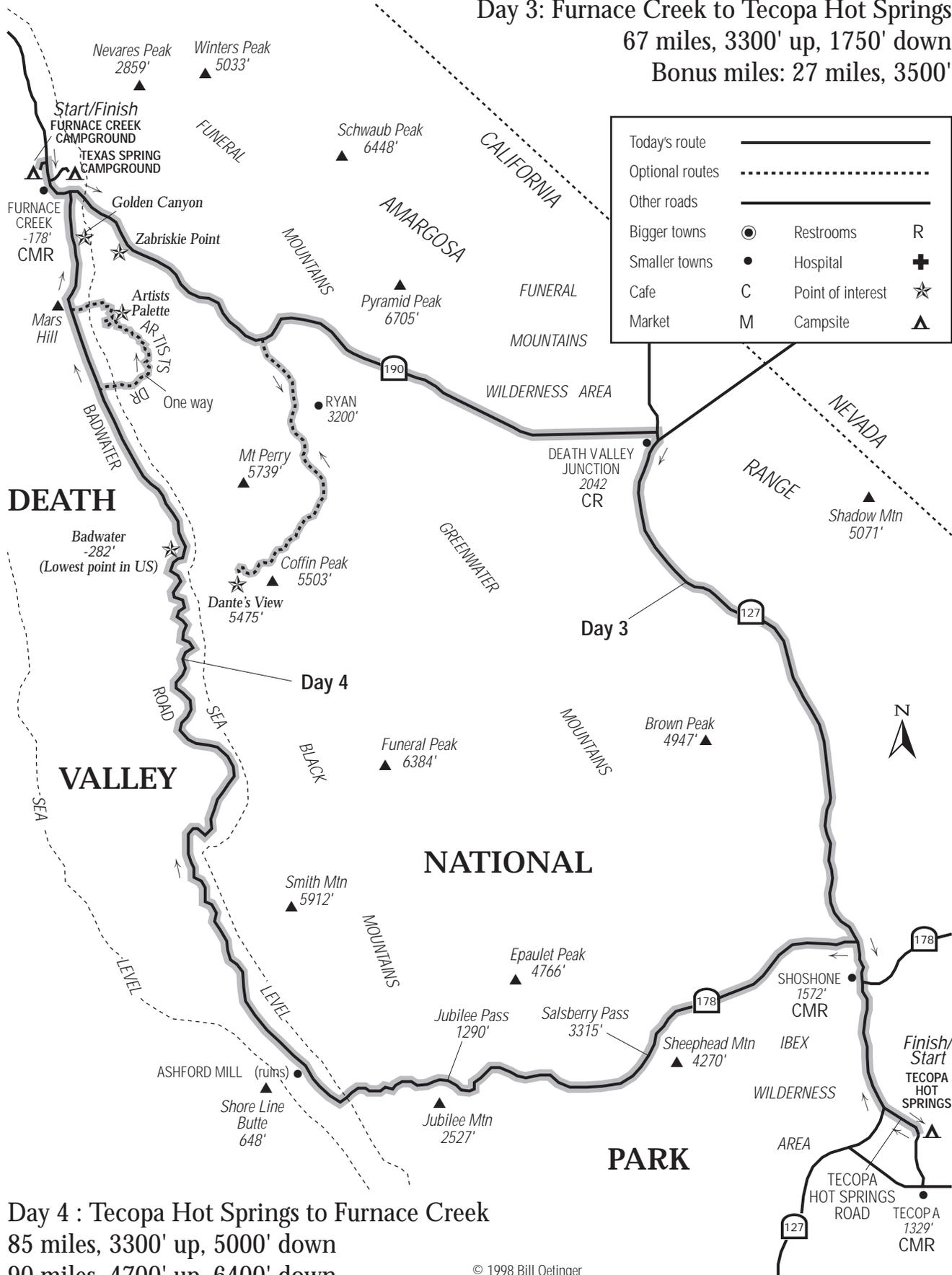
MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0	R	Hwy 190	Leave Furnace Creek camp.
1.7	S		Bear left at Badwater Road junction.
5.2	O		★ Zabriskie Point.
12.5*	O		Dante's View junction.
19.9	S		★ Summit (3070').
31.0	R	Hwy 127	Into Death Valley Junction (2040').
58.3	S		Town of Shoshone (1570').
63.8	L	Tecopa Hot Springs Road	Terrible pavement.
66.5		Tecopa Hot Springs	1400'

*Optional up-&-back to Dante's View: 13.3 miles each way; 3475' of gain; final 1/2 mile up to 16%.



The Death Valley Tour

Day 3: Furnace Creek to Tecopa Hot Springs
 67 miles, 3300' up, 1750' down
 Bonus miles: 27 miles, 3500'



Day 4 : Tecopa Hot Springs to Furnace Creek
 85 miles, 3300' up, 5000' down
 90 miles, 4700' up, 6400' down

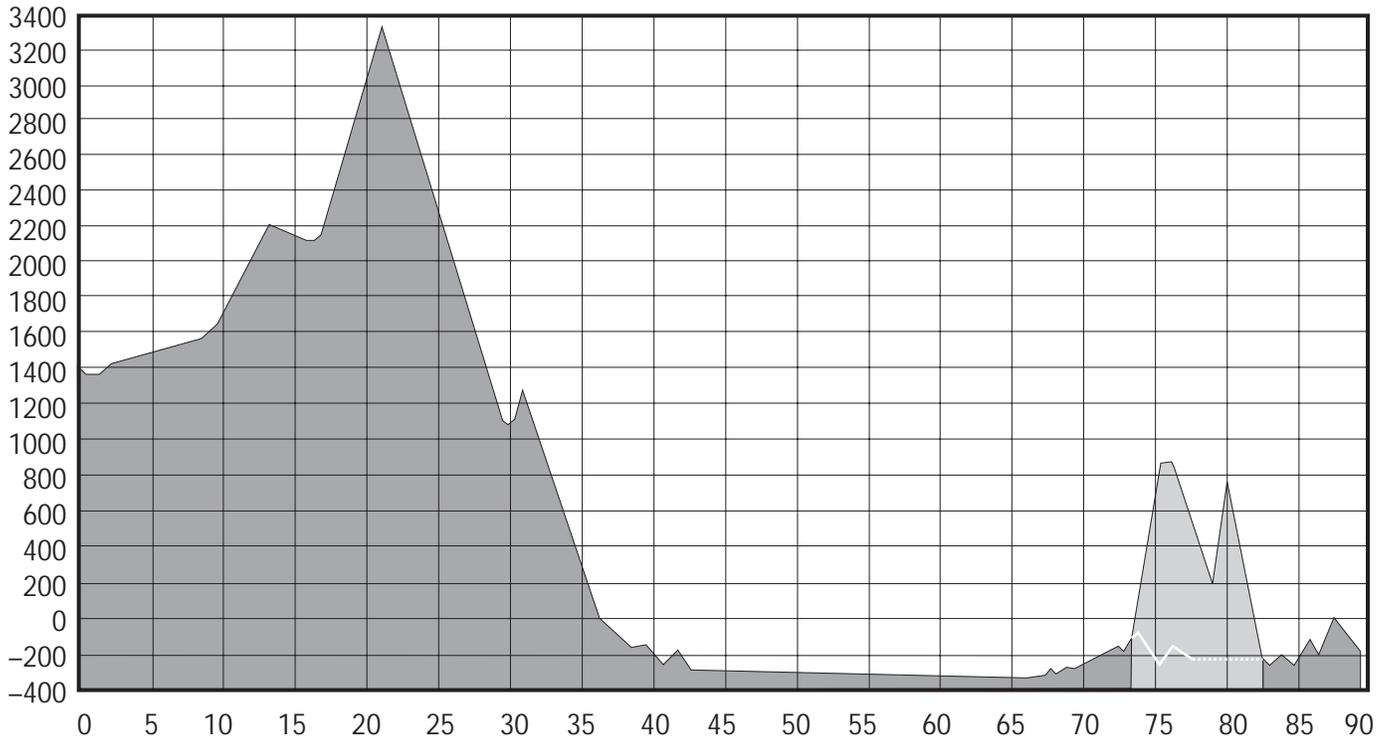
The Death Valley Tour

Day 4: Tecopa Hot Springs to Furnace Creek

85 miles, 3300' up, 5000' down

MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0	L	Tecopa Hot Springs Road	Leave camp.
2.7	R	Hwy 127	
8.0	S		Town of Shoshone (1570').
9.5	L	Hwy 178/Badwater Road	Begin climbing...
20.7	S		Salsberry Pass summit (3315').
30.5	S	Badwater Road	Jubilee Pass summit (1280').
65.7	O		★ Badwater (-282')
74.0*	S		Artists Drive junction.
77.8	S		Artists Drive rejoins.
80.5	O		★ Golden Canyon
82.6	L	Hwy 190	Downhill into Furnace Creek
84.3	L	Into Furnace Creek camp	

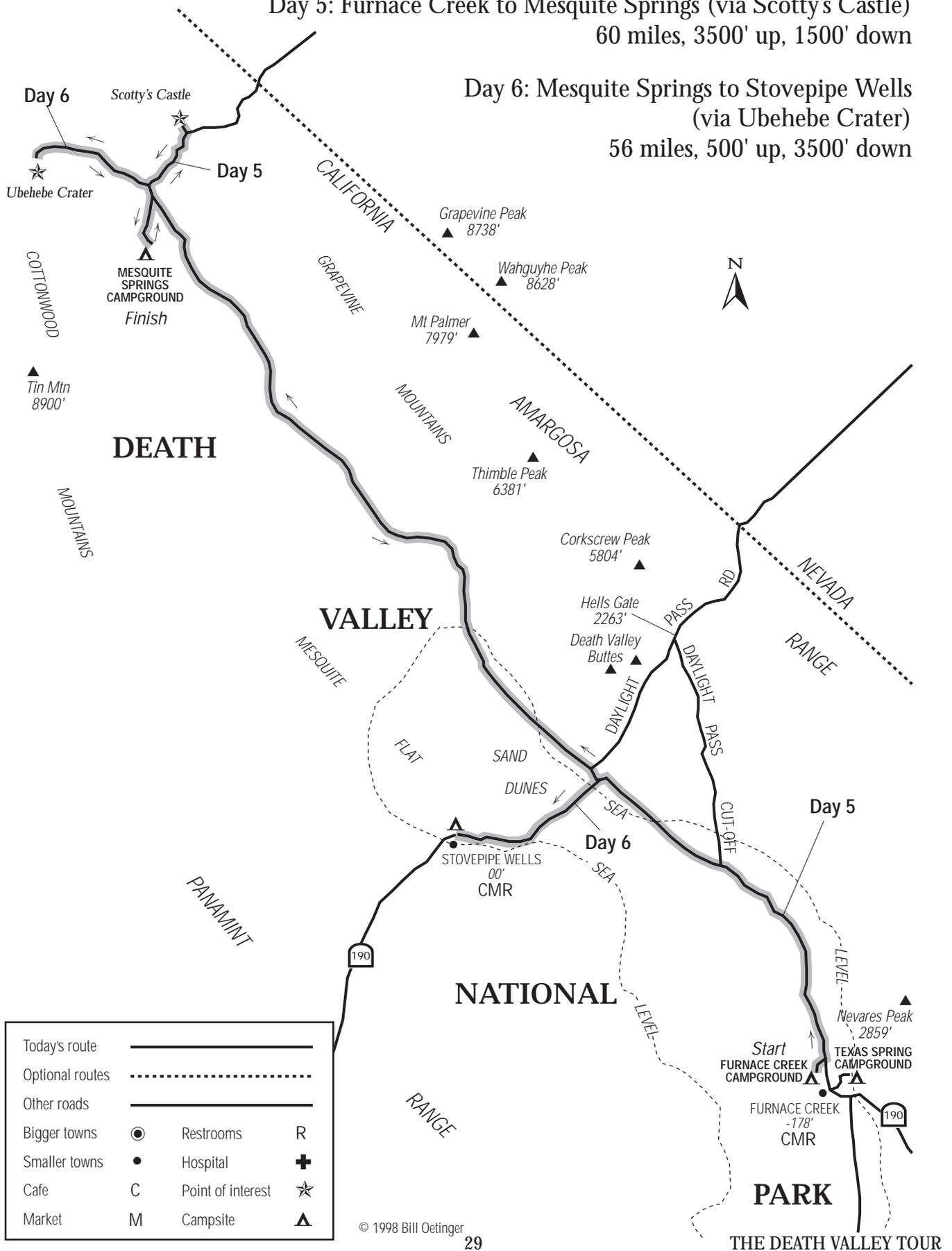
*Optional Artists Drive loop: 9 miles, 1500'; net gain of 5.2 miles over regular route.



The Death Valley Tour

Day 5: Furnace Creek to Mesquite Springs (via Scotty's Castle)
60 miles, 3500' up, 1500' down

Day 6: Mesquite Springs to Stovepipe Wells
(via Ubehebe Crater)
56 miles, 500' up, 3500' down



The Death Valley Tour

Day 5: Furnace Creek to Mesquite Spring (via Scotty's Castle)

60 miles, 3300' up, 1500' down

MILE	DIR	ROAD	COMMENTS
0.0	L	Hwy 190	Leave Furnace Creek camp.
17.0	R	At Sand Dune junction	Follow signs to Scotty's Castle.
50.2	S		Mesquite Spring junction.
53.8	L	Into Scotty's Castle (3000') ★	Retrace route to...
57.5	R	Mesquite Spring access road	
59.4		Mesquite Spring camp	1800'

Day 6: Mesquite Spring to Stovepipe Wells (long option via Ubehebe Crater)

50 miles, 500' up, 2400' down

62 miles, 900' up, 2800' down

