

The old Billy Denio Homestead, right, of the early 1900s, still stands intact. At right, center, is the bunkhouse where the posses from two states took turns trying to bed down from the killing snow and cold before setting out on the trail of renegade Shoshone Mike and his band. Opposite page: Our friends Eva and Ken Jacobs, discuss with Al Robertson the possibility of getting into the canyon to view the massacre site when the way is barred by wall-to-wall water!

Northwestern Nevada's Historic Little High Rock Country

by DOROTHY ROBERTSON

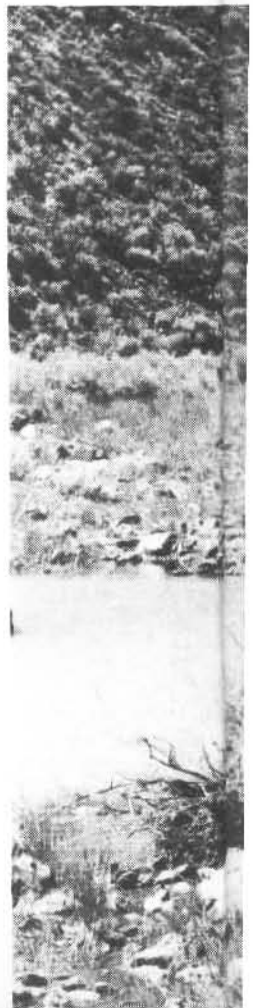


WINTER IN northwestern Nevada is just too cold and windy for an exploring-for-fun trip. Conversely, summer months are much too hot. But both spring and autumn, say the months of May-June and mid-September-October are usually ideal prowling weather months.

This region is wide open sage, rabbit brush, buckbrush, juniper and pinyon pine country. Inhabited homesteads are rare; towns or hamlets are anywhere from 50 to 100 miles apart. So if you like to get away from elbow-to-elbow people, northwestern Nevada is for you!

We love exploring the unmade roads of this outback land. Most of these roads will accommodate the average automobile, but there is a good rule to follow in desert travel: Don't go exploring unknown country without adequate maps, water and gas, and, of course, take a leaf from old Noah's book—go two by two! Then if anything untoward should occur, the second vehicle can go for help.

While poking around this fascinating region we found three areas to be of particular interest. These are: Little High Rock Canyon, where a gruesome Indian





ambush and massacre of four Surprise Valley Basque ranchers (from nearby California) occurred back in 1911; Billy Denio's homestead which lies a few miles northward of the canyon, and site of the infuriated avenging posse that tracked down the Indians, and a knoll of pure opalite that lies between nearby Yellow Rock Canyon and Little High Rock Canyon.

Gerlach is the last gas and potable water stop for approximately the next 100 miles or so. Be sure you have enough of both to see you back to Gerlach, or west to the California line and the little town of Eagleville, on the other side of Forty-nine Pass. Sometimes called the Lonely Road—and for good reason—you could sit by the side of the highway all day without seeing another vehicle—so much for Route 34!

This whole area is Pioneer Country, even from before the days of '49, for this is the Lassen-Applegate Trail road. If you take the time to explore the north-western end of High Rock Canyon you can see the wagon ruts still embedded in the rocky terrain; see the large caves mentioned by the emigrants. Signs pointing directions and mileage are



Plaque set up at the mouth of Little High Rock Canyon, pointing the way to the actual massacre site.



LITTLE HIGH ROCK
MASSACRE SITE
2 MILES →
CEDARVILLE B S A TROOP 53

Massacre Ranch 17 Miles, and Yellow Rock Canyon: 6 Miles. Follow the unmade road which winds around a low hill-slope to skirt a swampy area (in wet weather), then heads in a northeasterly direction. You will notice that en route there is quite a number of colorful Indian chippings to be seen here. This is the road to Yellow Rock Canyon, but at the road fork designating the Canyon road, turn right and follow the gentle rising slope for a couple of miles to a small knoll which you will see glistening in the sunlight. This is Opalite Hill!

The knoll lies to the left of the road—you can't miss it. The beautiful creamy opalescent vitreous-like material comes in shades of yellow, orange and various browns. The poorer pieces make gorgeous decorative garden rocks.

Since this is a hard material to mine, we just picked up small pieces that lay around. Fractures are conchoidal. Some pieces worked up into nice cabochons, larger chunks worked into nice spheres.

After backtracking to Highway 34, proceed south (left turn) for approximately 12 miles where a wide road leads east. Look to the skyline along the eastern hills, and you will notice a rugged, natural gateway-like silhouette. This is the landmark which is the entrance to Little High Rock Canyon. Fairly new redwood signs now point the way. A short drive leads to the canyon-mouth where the Northern California Cedarville Troop 53, BSA has placed a commemorative plaque showing directions and mileage to the actual site of the ambush-massacre of the four Basque ranchers. This is rough, rugged volcanic country!

When we were there, there had been heavy rains just a few days prior to our visit, and the creek that runs through the canyon was now wall-to-wall. We were unable to hike the two miles in to the actual massacre site, much to my disappointment, for I had been told that the Indians' teepee willow poles were still in upright position on their hidden campsite.

Here, too, at the mouth of the canyon, there are many colorful Indian chippings

placed along the highway. Here and there historical monuments and plaques appear.

We made our last trip out on Route 34 which junctioned with Route 8A at Vya—nothing there but an old building hous-

ing a one-time maintenance station, and turned due south, heading for adventure.

Approximately 23 miles south of the Vya junction a signpost on the east side of the highway designates Little Indian Springs: 3 Miles; Nellie Springs: 1 Mile;



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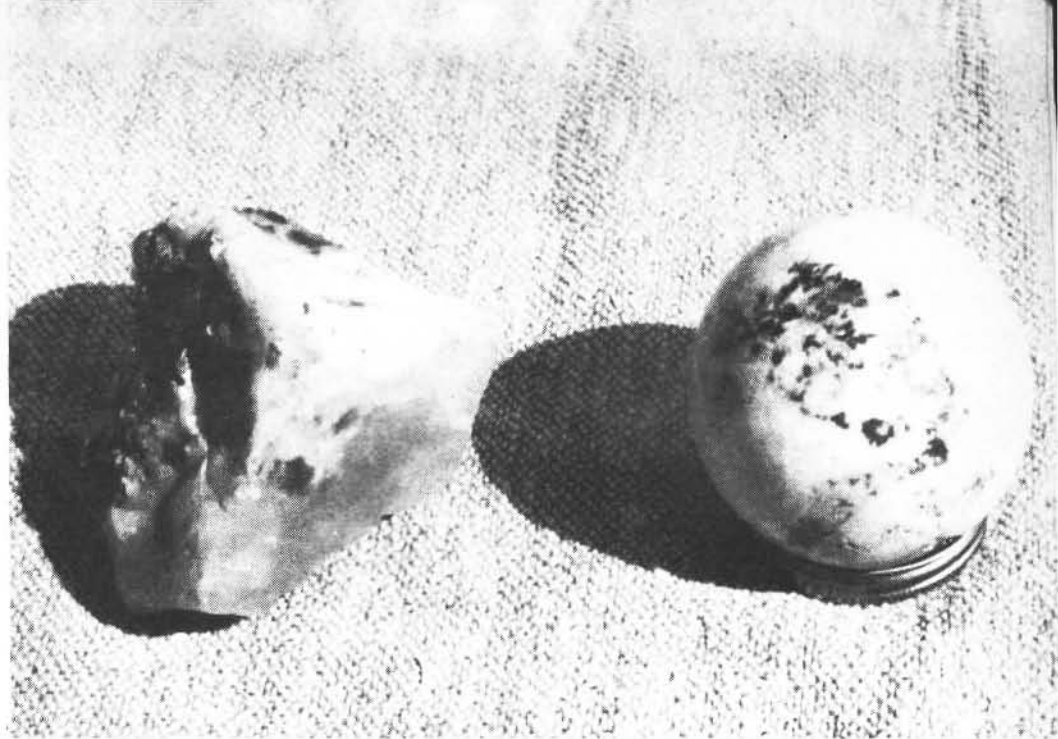
Rough opalite specimen and sphere obtained from a large chunk.

lying around—chippings made from obsidian, chert, rhyolite, jaspagate and chalcedony.

On your way out again you will notice a rough road branching off in a due north direction. This roadway parallels Route 34, and between tall stands of sagebrush, you can glimpse the highway itself. This road leads to Billy Denio's homestead. (If the road hasn't been messed with, it is only a few miles to the old homestead.)

I noticed at the time that the old signpost was missing. Hopefully, a new one is now in place. In any case, you can't miss the homestead because it is at the end of the road which runs beside a fenced pasture, watered by springs—and Route 34 is on the other side.

It is thrilling to those of us who are his-



tory buffs to stand on the site and recreate those olden days, back in 1911 when the old homestead was alive with buckeroos, lawmen and posses of avenging friends and relatives of the murdered men, as they milled around on their horses, getting ready to follow the Indians' trail. Even the old corral still stands, as does the old house and bunkhouse out-buildings.

This high desert country of Route 34—the Lonely Road—is a fascinating place to visit. The air is sweet and fresh and smogless; the effluvia one of sage and pinyon and juniper, besides the ever-present rabbit brush. At night, the coyotes howl and deer and sage hens and chukar call. It is a place to visit and clear the cobwebs of city life from your mind—at least for a blissful few days! □

Almost hidden mouth of Little High Rock Canyon as seen from the access road in. At a distance, the rugged rocks show along the skyline as a sort of gate-way.

