A decorative red scrollwork frame with intricate flourishes, enclosing the text. The frame starts with a large flourish on the left, curves around the top, and ends with a flourish on the right. Below the main text, it features a central floral-like motif with small dots.

The Westerners
LOS ANGELES CORRAL
BRAND BOOK
12



**BRAND
BOOK
XIII**



 THE WESTERNERS
LOS ANGELES CORRAL 



Loading Bin at Old Coso

FROM COSO TO CARRICART

by SEWELL "Pop" LOFINCK

STEP SOFTLY AMID THE SAND and sage of the Cosos, friends, for you walk in the paths of history.

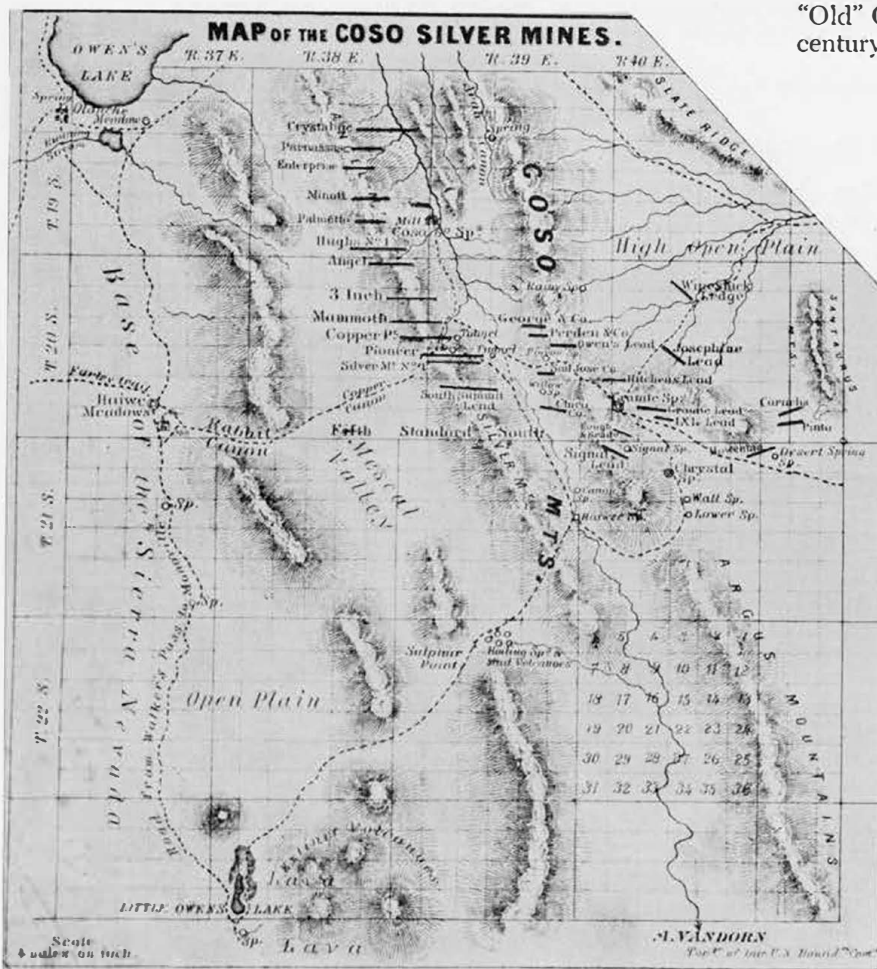
From the surrounding alkali playas of China Lake, within the Naval Ordnance Test Station, the land sweeps up with low gear suddenness to a mountainous center of a series of 5-6000 foot mesas and high desert valleys. Now the only permanent residents are rabbits, rattlers, coyotes, burros and a few survivors of once thriving wild horse herds.

But it was not always so.

The Darwin-Ballarad-Brown stage once rattled and rocked its dusty way down Mountain Springs Canyon. Famed freighter Nadeau's wagons rumbled along the flats below. And by foot and hoof a passing parade of army details, soldiers of fortune, Lost Gunsight seekers and countless miners with dreams of silver and gold wended their way.

"From Wall Spring . . . where the Josephine Mill now stands in Coso," Dr. E. Darwin French, in quest of the elusive Gunsight Lead, progressed into Panamint Valley on his first expedition in September of 1850.

Four years later, Fremont on his little known Fifth Expedition proceeded south from Saline Valley to the Darwin area. With two railroad route possibilities ahead he divided his small force. One group apparently went by way of Junction Ranch and Carricart Lake; the other via Cole's Flat, descending into Coso Basin.



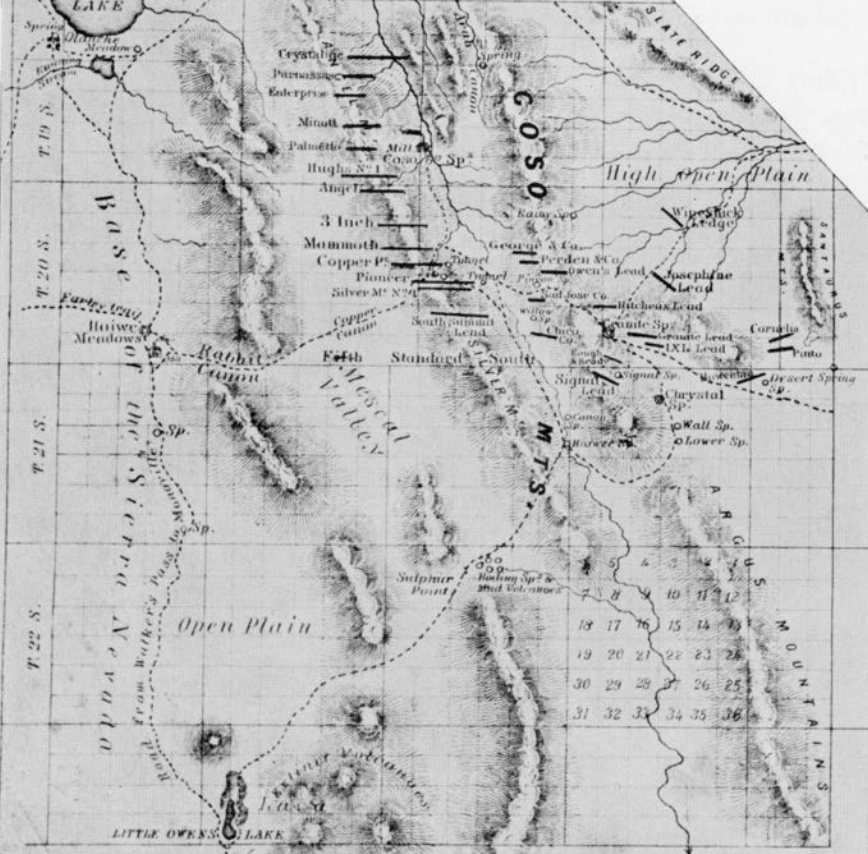
“Old” Coso. Only a ghost of this century-old boomtown remains.

Inset from “Farley’s Map of the Newly Discovered Tramontane Silver Mines in Southern California,” 1861. Courtesy of Bancroft Library.

"Old" Co
century-c

MAP OF THE COSO SILVER MINES.

R. 37 E. R. 38 E. R. 39 E. R. 40 E.



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	17	16	15	14	13						
19	20	21	22	23	24						
30	29	28	27	26	25						
31	32	33	34	35	36						

Scale
4 miles on an inch.

S. VANDORN

Top of the U.S. Bound. Co.

Coso to Carricart

1860 saw Dr. French's second expedition establishing the Coso Gold and Silver Mining Company on their return from Death Valley. Later that year, Dr. S. G. George's party, also on the Gunsight trail, criss-crossed the Cosos and discovered the Christmas Gift Lode (Antimony) in Emigrant Canyon. And he too returned, the following year, as Treasurer of the Rough & Ready Mining Company, founding the Telescope Mining District.

Evidently the good doctors felt there was more gold in them thar hills than in the pockets of their patients.

But they were not alone. According to Farley's 1861 map of "the Coso Silver Mines," things were booming even then. At least enough to put Coso on the map, along with place-naming innumerable mining camps, claims and springs.

And it was in 1861 that Manly, of Death Valley fame, along with Charles Alvord, heard of the outbreak of the Civil War at the town of Coso.

Following the war, the first military exploring expedition, under 1st Lt. Charles Bendère, left Camp Independence in April of 1867 for Coso via Centennial Flat. From here he struck southeasterly past Junction Ranch and into Panamint Valley. By the time of the better known Lt. Wheeler treks of 1871-5 it was becoming a well traveled area. Both Wheeler's mappings and that of Co. D 12th U.S. Infantry of Camp Independence show a toll station in Shepherd Canyon. Altho this was a rugged route between the Panamint and Coso camps it was one of the best in an area where passes are rare.

Signs of the toll station buildings can still be seen altho the boulder-clogged canyon is now inaccessible to vehicles.

Save for a few fragmentary writings, such as Roberts' "The Great Under-stander," relatively little is known of the next few decades. And these were primarily about Darwin, to which the Cosos gave birth in 1875.

But what of the sites that are still spots on the USGS maps—Coso and Cole's Flat, Modoc and Minnietta, Millspaugh and the Mariposa Mine?

Of Coso one must speak carefully, for it apparently was a popular name.

Technically, for it has never been legally changed, Darwin is "New Coso (Mining District)."

According to Geological Survey Professional Paper No. 368, the Darwin quadrangle contained commercially important deposits of lead, silver, zinc, talc, tungsten, copper, gold and antimony, with a total mineral production to 1952 of about \$37½ million.

By 1883 more than \$2 million had already been reported. From 1875 to 1880 Darwin was reported to have had a population of 5000. There were three smelters with a combined capacity of 180 tons a day. The district was idle from 1928 to 1936. In 1945 the Anaconda Company purchased the Defiance, Darwin, Essex, Independence, Lanai, Premonition, Rip Van Winkle and Thompson Mines and operated them for about ten years. The Anaconda

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operations have been shut down for several years and there are indications Darwin may become a retirement town rather than a full fledged ghost town.

And then there is Old Coso, some seven miles southwest of Darwin, of which a number of stone houses and weather beaten board buildings still remain. A real, honest to goodness century old ghost town.

Indeed it was within a few months after Dr. French's discovery of the Coso ore ledges that ninety claims were staked out and 200 men were working claims and prospect holes, according to the *Visalia Delta* and Sacramento papers of that era.

Located in an open flat of unique granitic upthrust and tilted boulders, Coso is pockmarked by little mines and prospect holes. Some found gold Others lived on dreams and Great Expectations.

(Oddly enough, in legal language, claim diggings are prospect holes—until ore values are recovered. Then it's a mine. But not until then, regardless of the length of tunnels or shafts!)

The Coso ores were crushed by horse or burro drawn arrastras, of which several can still be seen. Later larger arrastras were operated by gas engines.

The nearby Josephine Mine, dating back over a century, was one of the best producers. The ore was arrastra crushed in a canyon to the east where there was plenty of water. Altho a flash flood washed it out, parts still stick their skeletal fingers up out of the sands. Eventually it was replaced by a stamp mill which also disappeared except for well built living quarters.

There were several good springs in and around Coso. However, they have dried up to mere trickles since the days they watered the populace and a few trees. But on the nose of a nearby hill an old stone fort still stands guard over the spectral return of marauding Indians, bandits and claim jumpers who oft threatened the town and its more precious than gold water supply.

A rough mile or so west of Coso was the Mariposa Mine, the only mine in the district that was patented. It produced free gold for awhile, then petered out—probably much to the dismay of its rather noted owner, Senator Hearst.

The Hearst family had better luck with the Modoc Mine, perched high on Lookout Mountain in the Argus Range to the east, with a breath-taking view of Panamint Valley and endless miles beyond.

Still owned by the Hearst Estate, the Modoc's first production was in 1875. By 1890 the value of mineral recovery was listed as \$1,900,000. Up until the time it shut down the total value of production of lead, silver, zinc and copper was \$3,740,000.

Until a few years ago many of the Modoc buildings were still roofed. But as happens in the desert, the unpainted boards dried out and the nails loosened. Wind and snow did the rest. So it is that time has taken its toll of Modoc, leaving only the stone walls still standing.

Although Modoc can be reached from Panamint Valley without entering



Modoc, looking northeasterly into upper Panamint Valley



Walled road from Modoc, eastward out of Stone Canyon toward the Panamints

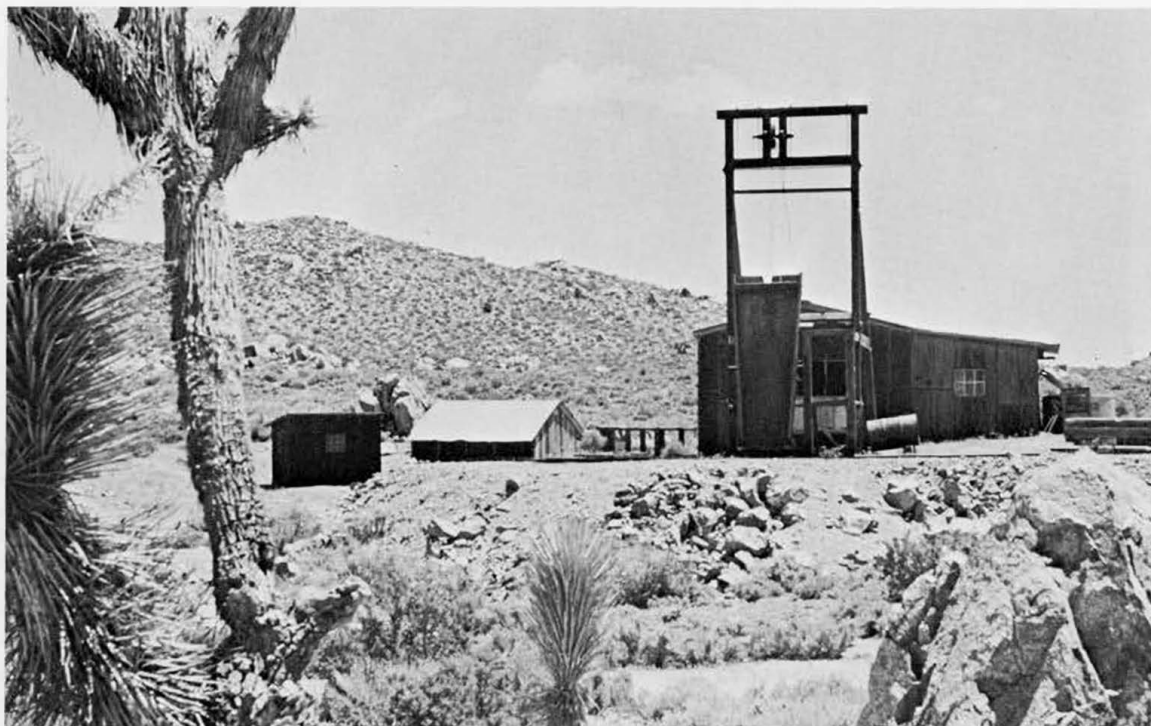
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the Naval Ordnance Test Station, this misses the continuation via Stone Canyon into the Coso area. This is an adventure in itself, cliff hanging along a "road" shirred up by a wall of hand fitted, dry mounted rocks and painstakingly built by the camp's Chinese.

Oddly enough, the Post Office of "Modock" was located at Minnietta, nestled at the foot of the cliffs below Modoc. Dating back to the 1870's and still spasmodically operated, the Minnietta Mine is owned by Helen Gunn Edwards, daughter of "Jack" Gunn who took over the mine in 1883. It has produced approximately \$2,000,000 in silver, gold and lead, with no production recorded after 1954. Of the townsite, little remains but rubble and sands that whisper of days of old and dreams of gold.

South of Darwin a malpai-crusted ridge separates two long Joshua studded valleys. The more westerly leads into Cole's Flat, settled by Dave Cole and his 15 year old bride in 1873. Of this there are no reports of ore findings, only rumors—and the graves of Cole and his son Edward, the remains of an arrastra, a barn-like building, the remnants of a wagon and a shack with the barely discernable sign "PICO SOCIAL CLUB."

Continuing on and up the dusty roadway lies El Conejo, comprising a sizeable shaft structure and expensive equipment—across from an otherwise typical miner's shack except for its obviously cared-for cactus garden. And, until it was removed to the NOTS Maturango Museum, the rusted remains of



El Conejo, between Coles Flat and Etcharren Valley



Coso Hot Springs, with its now dormant geysers, abandoned spa buildings and colorful boiling mud pots

an old Lincoln reposed in quiet solitude in one of the sheds. The lack of ore reports has long pointed a finger of suspicion that the only gold and silver was taken out of stock investors' pockets.

For those inclined to do things the hard way, a road of sorts leads westward and down into still another "Coso"—Coso Hot Springs, nestled in a miniature Yellowstone Park-like valley of colorfully boiling mud pots and now dormant "geysers." It was here that the Indians came for healing in the hot muds and to quarry obsidian from nearby Sugarloaf or Glass Mountain.

Intriguingly, Manly and Alvord, on their 1861 Coso trip, noted the Coso Hot Springs:

"... more than a thousand jets of steam came through the water, making a hissing noise that could be heard a hundred yards away... we looked into some big caldron-shaped holes... and could see... boiling pots of green, red and blue liquid continuously in motion... The man I stayed with on Kern River told me... his mule broke through the crust... (and) the red mud took the hair and hoof off his mule's leg."^o

There are two other phenomena connected with Coso Hot Springs. One,

^oFrom "The Pioneer," August 15, 1893. Reprinted in Arthur Woodward's excellent "The Jayhawkers Oath and Other Sketches."

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the Devil's Kitchen cinnebar workings, of which the still usable Mercury retort furnace has been hauled away to near Tehachapi. The other was Billy Ball.

Billy was born in 1860. At 78 he fathered a son. Don't smile. He was quite a man. He was living at Coso Hot Springs when the Navy took over and made him a Range Guard at 82. At 94 he survived a lung cancer operation. And climbing the stairs to a doctor's office because the elevators were out, he died of overdoing it at the age of 101! The desert does work remarkable wonders!

In the 1920's Coso Hot Springs was a popular health spa, with the natural steam supplying the heat for mud baths, cooking and even heating—piped into 50 gallon drums in each room. Alas, the stacks of empty bottles of "Coso Water—America's Wonder" now lie glistening in a thousand shattered pieces beneath the desert sun.

Backtracking to Coso to swing down the valley east of the ridge, one follows a time-dimmed stage route—from Darwin to Brown via Etcharren Valley where it connected with the stage from Ballarat via Shepherd Canyon.

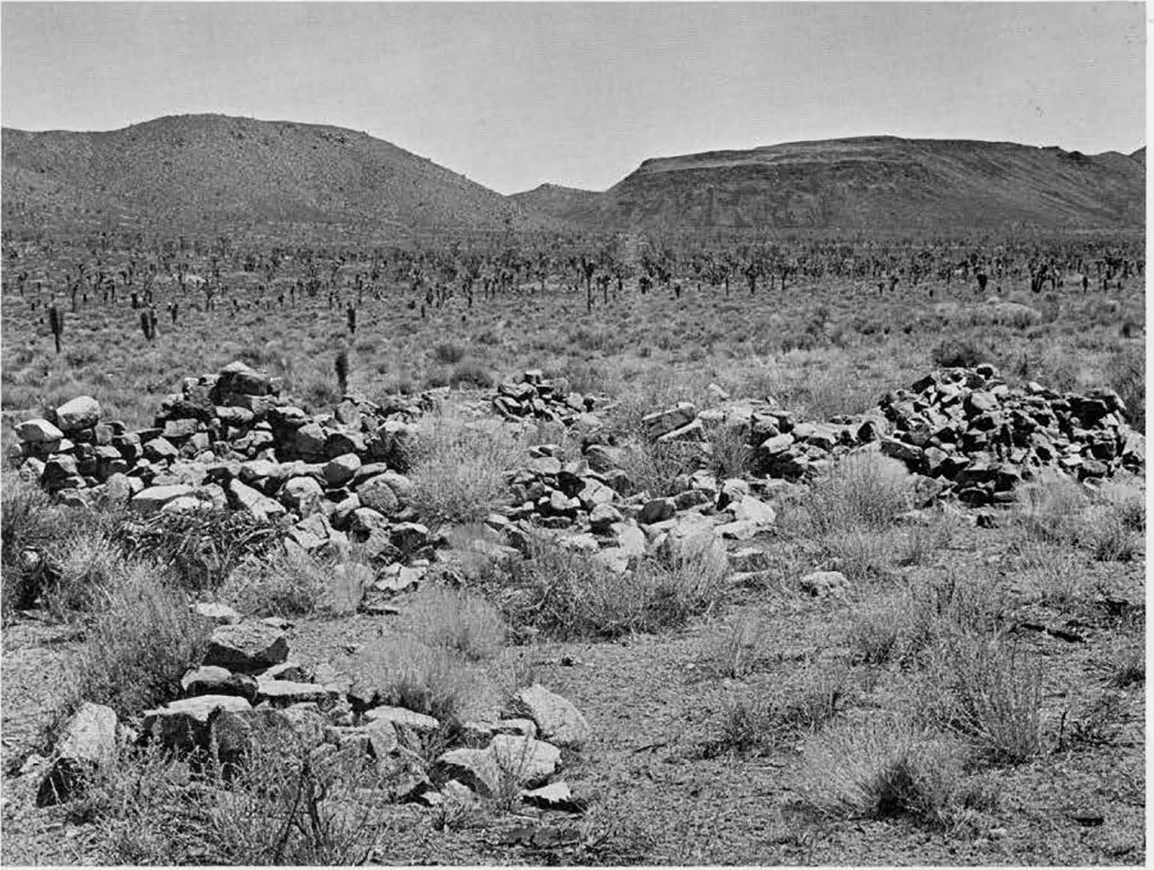
Hastily, for the sharp-eyed, it is to be noted that the correct spelling is Etcharren, not Etcheron as mapped even by the USGS. Also, the lake bed it contains should be Carricart, not Carricut.

The valley was named after old Domingo Etcharren, whose son Ted still lives in Lone Pine.

In 1903 Domingo Etcharren, in partnership with John Carricart, started running sheep in the valley and surrounding hills. The sheep lost so much wool on the brush, which was very abundant in those years of more rain, that they gave up after a year.



Carricart (Carricut) Dry Lake in Etcharren (Etcheron) Valley



Historic Howard Ranch. Faint signs of the old Ballarat stage road lead into Shepherd Canyon beyond.

Carricart went to Johannesburg and established a prosperous blacksmith shop, shoeing the freight teams and repairing the wagons.

Domingo Etcharren then formed a partnership with Silas Reynolds, in 1904, running cattle and horses in the area. They did well. At the same time, they worked some mines on the west slope of the Argus Range.

Etcharren and Reynolds sold their cattle to Charlie Summers about 1912. Summers, now 74 and living in Lone Pine, continued to run cattle and horses as far over as Coso Peak and Coso Hot Springs while headquartering at Junction Ranch for 20 years.

Altho Junction Ranch is popularly presumed to be the changing station for the connecting stages, it was actually the old Howard Ranch at the foot of the Shepherd Canyon grade into Etcharren. Of this only stone foundations outline the site.

Frank Crysler, who lived at Junction Ranch in 1907 and 1908, used to

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drive a four horse stage from Darwin through Etcharren Valley and Shepherd Canyon to Ballarat, changing at the Howard Ranch. Scheduled time: 8 hours "down," 10 hours on the return trip up the steep slopes from Panamint Valley.

Two miles north of Junction Ranch there is another walled outline—of an extensive corral. While it may have been a quick stop for the stages, being well supplied with water from Tennessee Spring on the nearby slopes of 8850 foot Maturango Peak, it appears to have been built in 1880 for the freight wagons hauling supplies into and ore out of the area.

Of Junction Ranch's origin little is known, but as early as 1871-5 it was important enough to be mapped by Lt. Wheeler.

After John Carricart closed his blacksmith shop in Johannesburg, he returned to live at Junction Ranch while prospecting and working a small mine about 3 miles away. Later it became headquarters for cowpokes who herded cattle and broke in the wild horses of the area. One, "Slim" Winslow, recalls that at the rear of the ranch there lived some Indian families who were already wise to the asking price for purple bottles!

The old ranch building, apparently built in the late 1890's, has since been replaced by an aluminum Dallas hut. But out front you can still gaze at a wild horse trap, a rusted arrastra and, ironically, the grilled plates of a helicopter landing mat!

Canting easterly from Junction Ranch one follows the old Ballarat stage route until it drops into Shepherd Canyon. Forking left leads to a real spirited ghost town. In fact, according to "usually reliable sources," Millspaugh was founded by a Spiritualist colony, guided by the spirits to dig where the digging was best.

Unfortunately all they found was a lode of iron ore, too heavy and too costly to ship out of the rugged highlands. Gold was found lower in the canyon about 1897 by a George Davis. About 1899 he sold the claim to Almon Millspaugh who built a mill at Millspaugh to work the gold ore. Why they hauled the ore up the canyon instead of milling at the bottom only the spirits know.

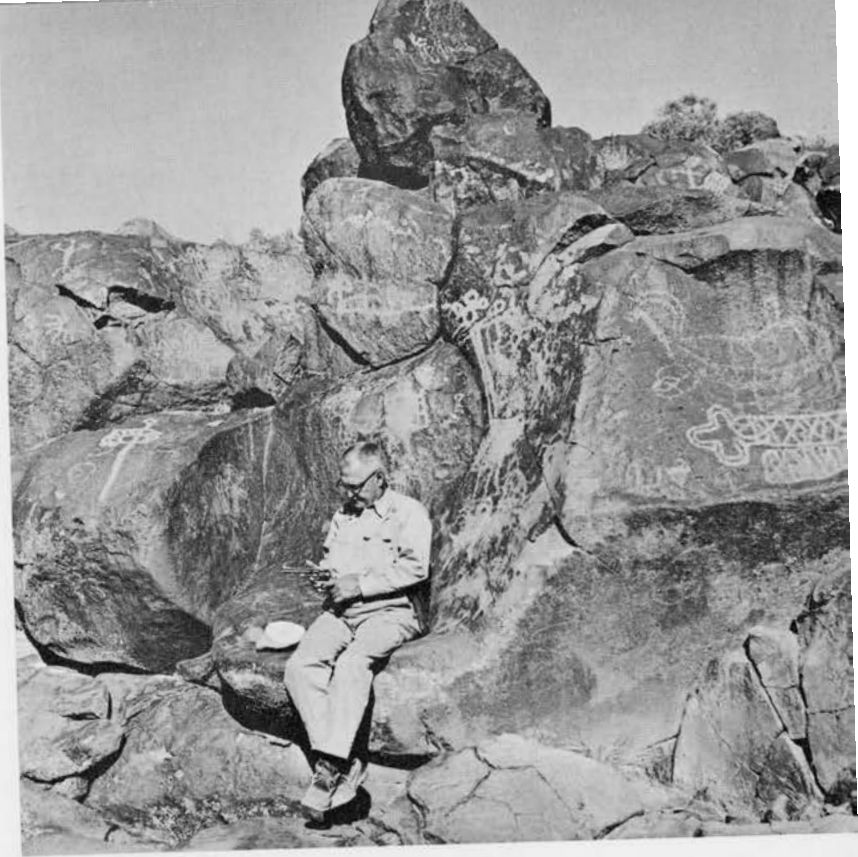
In any event, by 1902 Millspaugh had a store, post office, blacksmith shop, assay office and a population that shifted between 50 and 200. In 1909 a flash flood wreaked havoc with the Shepherd Canyon road and by the following year the populace had dwindled to a handful, including a Mrs. Fowyer and her daughters.

The mill and blacksmith shop were sold in 1914. The boarding house was bought by Summers and Butler of Bishop, sawed in two and moved to Junction Ranch for cattle grazers until it was razed in 1948.

Little is left of Millspaugh save a magnificent panoramic view, sparkling specimens of Specularite Iron and memories of misguided spirits.

While there are countless other trails to go adventuring along in the

The author rests in
Little Petroglyph Canyon



(below) At the head of Big Petroglyph Canyon



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Coso-Argus area, few if any are as notable as the famous petroglyphs. Although they can be seen here, there, most everywhere, the aptly named Little Petroglyph and Big Petroglyph canyons provide the greatest concentration of "the largest collection of Indian rock carvings in North America."

The area was recently designated as a National Historical Landmark. And deservedly so, for Little Petroglyph Canyon is almost a solid mosaic of carvings from cliff top to wash bottom for hundreds of yards.

How old are they? Quien sabe? They could have been put there over a span of thousands of years by prehistoric inhabitants. Certainly the high mesas and malpai valleys provided plenty of piñon pines and ample water for grass, game and Indians in a happy, tho less than lush, hunting ground.

The old trails and mine wagon ruts still finger their way into the shadowy canyons and across the flats. Parts of the old stage routes cling to the slopes where they escaped conversion into the bladed dirt roads that meander back into time. Save as names on maps and in the memories of a few who remember 'way back when, the Coso camps still left are fast fading into a past that will all too soon be forgotten.

Acknowledgment for much of the information is made to the old timers who remember back when and to George Koenig for sharing his unpublished material on the Coso-Argus area.

SEWELL "Pop" LOFINCK

Long before they were sealed off as the China Lake Naval Ordnance Test Station, most of the Coso camps were forgotten history. For over 20 years "Pop" Lofinck rode its vast outer ranges with a six shooter on his hip—by jeep and helicopter. Now by-lined columnist for the NOTS "Rocketeer" his beat covers a fascinating out-of-bounds land of sites and scenes that few have seen and of which even less has been written.



Remains of the old stone fort near Coso, which guarded the camp's precious springs in the canyon below.