



# FISH SLOUGH • RED ROCK CANYON • CASA DIABLO

BOTH OF THESE ROUTES BEGIN WITH A RARE DESERT WETLAND WITHIN THE STARK GEOLOGICAL WONDERS OF THE VOLCANIC TABLELAND. BOTH END BY SWOOPING YOU DOWN FROM THE HIGH POINT OF THE TABLELAND, CASA DIABLO MOUNTAIN. IN BETWEEN, TAKE ROUTE 13 THROUGH A COLORFUL, RUGGED LANDSCAPE; OR FOLLOW ROUTE 14 THROUGH A LIVING GHOST TOWN.

**What to expect:** Both routes are primarily on graded dirt roads; winter snows will close these routes. Route 13 includes a long passage of rough, narrow two-track roads—don't take it if you are not experienced with 4WD. Map on pages 36-37.

**Lengths:** Route 13 is 33 miles; Route 14 is 67 miles.

**Driving times:** 3 hours for Route 13, 3 hours for Route 14.

**Getting there:** From Bishop at the intersection of U.S. 395 with U.S. 6 at the north end of town, go north 1.3 miles on U.S. 6 and turn left onto Five Bridges Road. Go another 2.3 miles to the intersection with Fish Slough Road—the start of both routes. **Set your trip meter here.** The directions, especially for Route 13, depend upon knowing your mileage.

**Along the route:** To your left is Chalk Bluff, the dramatic southern edge of the Volcanic Tableland. The incredibly violent explosion of Long Valley Caldera created the Tableland 760,000 years ago, blasting out 600 cubic kilometers of rhyolite lava and sending ash as far as Nebraska. Most of the lava poured across the landscape as a pyroclastic flow, a thick, fast-moving sheet of superheated ash. Chalk Bluff is the eroded edge of that flow.

Rising to your right as the pavement turns to dirt is the East Side Bluff. Since the Long Valley explosion, faulting has lifted the bluffs and dropped the land between. The lowland became a wetland, fed by



Red Rock Canyon  
©JOY FATOOH

springs whose waters spread to form Fish Slough. Behind East Side Bluff stand the White Mountains. White Mountain Peak, the high point on the horizon, at 14,249 feet is nearly the equal of 14,495-foot Mount Whitney, highest in the Lower 48 states.

At about 5 miles look left to see many prominent rounded or conical bumps. As the Long Valley pyroclastic flow cooled and fused into the white or pinkish rock called Bishop Tuff, hot water and steam fumaroles vented from beneath the surface and hardened the tuff around each vent. These harder mounds have resisted erosion to stand above the surrounding Tableland.

At 6.4 miles the wetland meets the road. Stop at the interpretive kiosk. This is the site of the Owens Valley Native Fish Sanctuary. The valley's native fishes fared badly when water was diverted for agriculture and municipal use, and when larger, predatory fish were introduced for sport. The Owens pupfish was declared extinct in 1948 but, incredibly, was rediscovered in the 1960s in a small pool at Fish Slough. This sanctuary was established as part of the ongoing rescue effort but continues to be plagued by bass that devour the smaller natives. This is also the site of a stagecoach stop. A jump 150 years back in time would put you on the old stage route between the farm town of Bishop and the thriving Blind Spring silver mines. The kiosk here

gives more information on Fish Slough's history and natural wonders. Desert wetlands, being both rare and isolated, give rise to unique forms of life such as the Fish Slough milkvetch, a flowering plant found nowhere else in the world.

The road soon leaves the wetland and starts to climb. At 11 miles it drops into Chidago Canyon. On your right, protected by a fence, is an extraordinary petroglyph site. Archaeologists speculate about the purpose of these symbols painstakingly chipped into stone, but their meaning is yet to be fully deciphered: the Native Americans here at time of contact attributed them to an even more ancient people. We do know by the effort required to inscribe them that they must have been extremely important. Some theories hold that they were made as hunting magic or represent a symbolic map of the universe. More recent evidence suggests they were the work of shamans communicating with the spirit world.

At 17 miles, Fish Slough Road (3V01) intersects with 3S53 (look for the low brown signs). **For Route 13 go left. For Route 14 go straight ahead.**

**Route 13, continued: Red Rock Canyon** After turning left, continue to climb westward along this wide, graded road. At 19 miles the road narrows to a single vehicle's width and squeezes its winding way between tall vertical walls of red, oddly-shaped rock. Take your time and watch for oncoming traffic! If there's mud or snow, walk into the canyon to see if it will be passable before trying to drive through. The road emerges and re-enters narrow canyon sections a few times. Just as you leave the first narrow section, at about 19.2 miles, look to the right for a bas-relief carving of a miner swinging a pick-axe. This has been here as long as most local people can remember—no one seems to know who carved it, or when.

At 22 miles the road forks; take the left fork, signed "Chidago Canyon Road." At 22.4 miles, "Chidago Loop," take another left fork onto 4S34 and climb into the Benton Range, with fine views of the Sierra.

Turn left at 25 miles onto a narrower road numbered 4S41. This road soon becomes rough and climbs the north face of a steep hill—use 4WD. If the road is snowy at this point, don't attempt to continue Route 13—it will become impassable as it climbs. Instead, continue on Chidago Canyon Road (4S34) to the Benton Crossing Road (see map on following page).

After the climb, you will crest a hill at 26.1 miles and be faced with a magnificent view of the White Mountains. Here, turn right where 4S41 continues and climbs to the south. At 26.9 miles, take the left fork;

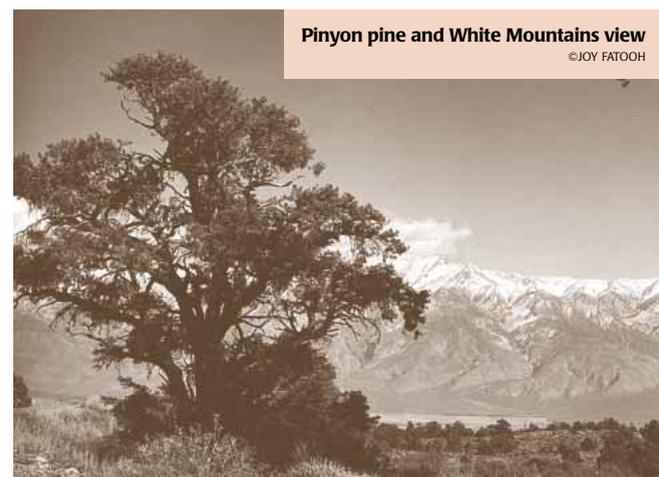


Chidago Canyon petroglyphs  
©JOY FATOOH

another left fork at 27.3; and a right fork at 28.2. Just after 28.8 miles you'll be descending a very steep, rocky stretch—definitely a 4WD experience! At the bottom of the hill go left. A sheep bedding area, bare of vegetation, is on the right.

At 29.4 miles turn right. A little over half a mile farther, 4S41 meets the graded Casa Diablo Road where a sign with arrows indicates "Bishop 19." Go left, toward Bishop.

**Route 14, continued: Benton Hot Springs** Fish Slough Road continues across the colorful Volcanic Tableland and at 20.7 miles meets a narrow, roughly paved road numbered 3V03. Go left onto the pavement and uphill. Take the first right turn onto a graded dirt road, at 22.1 miles: "Joe Main Road," 3V02. At 22.8 miles turn right onto Yellowjacket Road (still numbered 3V02) and pass the small ranch at Yellowjacket Spring that was once a stagecoach stop (continued on page 38).



Pinyon pine and White Mountains view  
©JOY FATOOH

# FISH SLOUGH • BENTON HOT SPRINGS • CASA DIABLO

