



Scenic Driving Tour

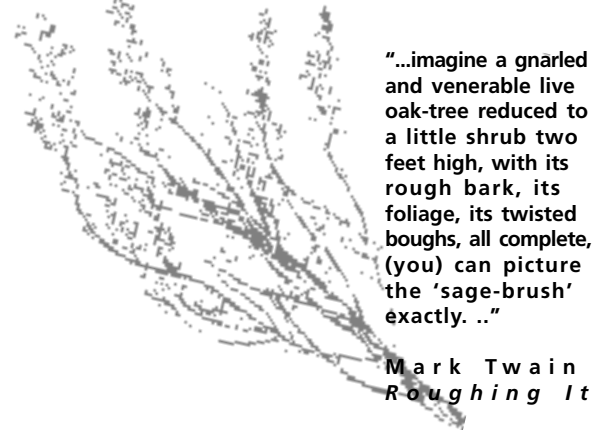
One of the fascinating aspects of Great Basin National Park is its wide elevation range and corresponding vegetation. Desert to alpine ecosystems can be seen within a few short miles. The predominant plants tend to run in horizontal stripes, growing as low as their water needs will allow and as high as they can tolerate the cold temperatures. Watch for these changes as you travel 3000 feet up in altitude during your 12 mile drive.

7,000 - 7,500 ft. (1.1-2.2)

The lower regions of the park are dominated by various species of **sage-brush**. The species with the greatest range, tall sage-brush, is the Nevada state flower. Many people hold the scrubby shrub in low regard due to its prevalence and the misery it inflicts upon allergy sufferers. Others find sagebrush a symbol of hardiness, thriving in the harsh desert climate. If you are lucky enough to catch a summer rainshower, you will smell the sage filling the air.

As you approach **Upper Lehman Campground**, it is common to see mule deer grazing in the roadside meadows which flank the creek or in the shadow of the trees. It is also common for the deer to stroll or dart into the path of approaching vehicles. Please be alert and drive cautiously as you proceed up the mountain for the wildlife's safety as well as your own. Also be

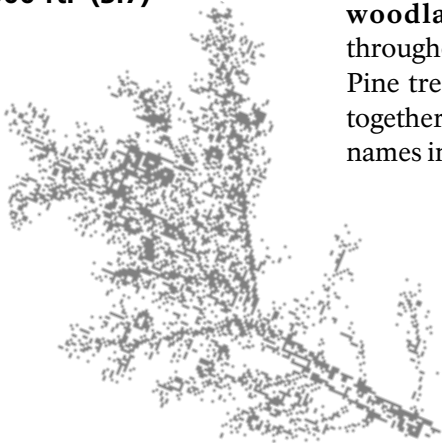
aware that the grade of the road above Upper Lehman Campground is fairly steep. It may be wise to take automatic transmission vehicles out of the "overdrive" position and shift into a lower gear, especially as you descend during your return trip.



"...imagine a gnarled and venerable live oak-tree reduced to a little shrub two feet high, with its rough bark, its foliage, its twisted boughs, all complete, (you) can picture the 'sage-brush' exactly. ..."

Mark Twain
Roughing It

8,000 ft. (3.7)



You are now in a typical **Pinyon/Juniper woodland** or as it is commonly referred to throughout the Great Basin, "P.J." The Pinyon Pine trees and Juniper so frequently grow together that some have difficulty saying the names individually.

Juniper can be recognized by its needle-like scaly leaves and whitish-blue cones that are easily mistaken as berries.

Pinyon Pine nuts were a food staple of local Indian tribes for centuries. A good pine nut harvest was cause for celebration and congregation. When toasted, the seeds could be stored indefinitely, making a reliable food source throughout the winter. The Pinyon tree can be distinguished by its round needles emerging singly from the tree branch.

Juniper bark provided fibers for mats, sandals, diapers, and other utilitarian items. Ranchers later used Juniper for fence posts because of their resistance to decay. Juniper needles are exceedingly short and lay closely together, giving the appearance of scales.

Osceola Ditch (4.6)

During the late 1800's the gold mining town of Osceola blossomed just outside of the present park's northern boundary. The placer mining operation required more water than the town had available. By 1885, the citizens had constructed an 18 mile "ditch" on the west side of the mountain range, diverting water from streams to the ore processing mills in their town. The "ditch" was actually a flume, an elevated wooden tunnel through which the water passed.

Demand grew and another 16 mile ditch was constructed along the east side of the mountains between 1889 and 1891. The ditches proved to be less profitable than expected and were soon, along with the town, abandoned. A short trail leads down the hillside to a sometimes faint and sometimes distinct line through the trees, all that remains of the costly Osceola Ditch.

8,500 ft. (5.0)

The scrappy looking trees around you are Curlleaf Mountain Mahogany. As the name suggests, the small, waxy, leathery leaves curl down at the edges. In late summer, you may see the branches covered with delicate, fuzzy spirals

which attach to the seeds. The trees were commonly used to make charcoal. Vast stands throughout the area were cleared to feed the mining operations of earlier years.

Mt. Moriah Overlook (5.3)

The mountains contained in Great Basin National Park make up the South Snake Range. Across Sacramento Pass you will see our sister range, the North Snake. The crown jewel of the North Snake Range can be seen towards the back and to your left, Mt. Moriah at 12,050 ft. Looking to the east, numerous ranges, including the Confusion and House Ranges, stagger off into

not so distant Utah. On the horizon, you should be able to make out the distinctive Notch Peak. Just across the Utah line and to the north is a dark green patch, the community of Eskdale. The town of Baker is peaking out behind the ridge you have just climbed.

9,000 ft. (6.3)

At this elevation you are surrounded by a forest of mixed conifers. Three main trees create the grove around you. The white fir has flat needles that arch upwards. The Douglas Fir is characterized by dropping branches with three terminal

buds at the end. The Ponderosa Pine is a large tree with reddish bark and long needles. If you have an opportunity, walk up to one, stick your nose in one of the cracks in the bark and inhale. Many argue whether it smells like butterscotch or french vanilla ice cream. Decide for yourself.

Mather Overlook (6.6 – 7.1)

Mather Overlook was named for Stephen T. Mather, the first director (and many would say creator) of the National Park Service. Mather guided the fledgling organization through numerous political and personal conflicts. A historic park photo features Mather on horseback looking out over the area from the rocky outcropping to your east. Below you, Lehman Creek

dances down its valley. A popular trail follows the creek's general course beginning at the eastern edge of Wheeler Peak Campground and descending nearly 2500 feet to Upper Lehman Campground. The trail is most pleasantly traveled one way, down.

Wheeler View (10.0)

At 13,063 feet, Wheeler Peak is the highest point in the park. American Indians traditionally called the peak "Peup" meaning "Big." Since the arrival of European-Americans in the mid-1800's it has been called many things, Jeff Davis Peak, Union Peak, Lincoln Peak, and Williams Peak. Wheeler was selected in the late 19th century in honor of the surveyor of the area. Jeff Davis, the more popular name with locals was shifted to the

mountain to the east. The spire between them is simply known as "The Thumb."

Nestled below Wheeler's cliff face is the northern hemisphere's southern most glacier. Postage stamp size in comparison to it's northern relations, it is clings to life as rising desert temperatures give battle.

10,000 ft. (10.3)

At 10,000 feet, you find yourself in the heart of an aspen grove; or, some would argue, an aspen tree. Aspens reproduce primarily by cloning, sending out runners which become new trees. It is therefore common to find a hillside covered with trees that are both connected and genetically

identical; in an essence, the same tree. You may notice a similarity in branching patterns and bark color as you move from patch to patch. In the fall, the clones also tend to change to the same color at the same time.

Summit Trailhead (11.3)

The Summit Trailhead is the starting point for two scenic yet very different excursions. An easy 1.2 mile walk will take you to mountain meadows and picturesque Stella Lake. Just before reaching Stella Lake, a fork in the path begins the far more arduous trek up the slopes of Wheeler Peak. While taking any high altitude hike, be aware of signs of high altitude sickness such as headaches,

breathlessness, dizziness, and nausea. High altitude sickness is more than an annoying obstacle to your desired destination. It can be fatal. The best cure is to head downhill. Also remember to drink plenty of water while traveling in the high country, as dehydration adds to the effects of altitude sickness.

Bristlecone Trailhead (11.9)

The trailhead to your right leads to the Alpine Lake Loop, the Wheeler Cirque Glacier, and the Bristlecone Pine Grove. Englemann Spruce and Limber Pine are the dominant trees along the way. Engelmanns, like all spruce have square sharp needles. They are also characterized by a flaky, pinkish bark and clusters of dark cones at the top of the trees. Limber Pines are amazing flexible with bottlebrush style needles and a light gray cast to the tree. Bristlecone Pines are a true marvel and are found in isolated high elevations with a major grove approximately 1.5 miles from the trailhead. Interpretive signs throughout the grove will explain many of its amazing features.



Bristlecone pines growing near treeline can live for 5,000 years or more.