



Southern California's Best Ghost Towns: A Practical Guide

Philip Varney

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The ghost towns of Southern California—some dramatic and nearly intact, others devastated—are well worth visiting. Most are remnants of once-colorful mining towns, though there are also railroad towns, a World War II relocation center, a promoter's swindle, and a failed socialist colony. Some excellent attractions remain. One of the best-preserved stamp mills in the West is in Skidoo. Smelters, homes, stores, and the remarkable wooden American Hotel can be found in Cerro Gordo, which the author calls "California's best true ghost town."

Seasoned back-roads traveler Philip Varney, who has visited nearly a hundred ghost towns in the area, provides a down-to-earth and helpful guide to more than sixty of the best in Southern California and nearby Inyo and Kern counties. He defines a ghost town as a town with a population markedly decreased from its peak, one whose initial reason for settlement no longer keeps people there. It can be completely deserted, have a resident or two, or retain genuine signs of vitality, but Varney has eliminated those towns he considers either too populated or too empty of significant remains.

The sites are grouped in four chapters in Inyo County, Death Valley, the Mojave Desert and Kern River, and the regions surrounding Los Angeles and San Diego. Each chapter provides a map of the region, a ranking of sites as "major," "secondary," and "minor," information on road conditions, trip suggestions, and tips on the use of particular topographic maps for readers interested in more detailed exploration. Each entry includes directions to a town, a brief history of that town, and notes on its special points of interest. Current photographs provide a valuable record of the sometimes fragile sites.

Southern California's Best Ghost Towns will be welcomed both by those who enjoy traveling off the beaten path and by those who enjoy the history of the American West.

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