

# D-M Field Trip

## Wallapai Mining District



Located in the Cerbat Mountains of northwestern Arizona, the Wallapai Mining District, valuable for its rich silver deposits, was founded in the late 1800s, comprising many historic mining camps, including Mineral Park, Cerbat, Chloride, and Stockton.

Extending northward from Kingman for about 10 miles, the locality was established after prospectors discovered deposits rich in silver minerals (mainly argentiferous galena, cerargyrite, and argentite). From 1863 to 1900, hundreds of prospects were located, and dozens of mines were developed—mainly on the western slope of the range—thus justifying recognition of a full-fledged mining district. Interestingly, the mines yielded only minor values in gold! Later, encouraged primarily by the need for various materials during the wars years, other strategic metals were targeted. Between 1904 and 1948, lead and zinc production (and to a lesser extent, copper) exceeded by far the value of all other metals extracted. The most significant of the many mines in the district included the Mineral Park Mine near the camp of Mineral Park, and the Tennessee and Golconda mines near Chloride. Overall, upwards of \$30 million worth of precious and base metals (at early 1900 prices) were recovered from the Cerbats!

However, the mountain range offers much more than just mines to explore and minerals to collect. Such activities as hiking, camping, and birdwatching are just a few of the many attractions to this underrated and sparsely visited wilderness area.

To explore the region, I invited friends Tara, Alex, and Dennis to accompany me on a multi-vehicle field trip. From Las Vegas, we made our way through the city, heading southeastward on US 95 to Railroad Pass outside of Boulder City—the town built specifically to house the workers at the then-under-construction Boulder Dam (later to be renamed the iconic **Hoover Dam**). Here, the highway veered south to take motorists to Searchlight (another historic mining district) and onwards to the gaming town of Laughlin, NV, on the west bank of the Colorado River.

We, instead, stayed on what now is Interstate 11, which bypasses the dam using the **Mike O'Callaghan-Pat Tillman Memorial Bridge**. Once across, the highway enters Arizona as US 93. Heading southeastward towards Kingman, we exited onto **Big Wash Road** just passed mile marker 51. This marked the beginning of our trek into and through the Cerbat Mountains, then down into the former mining camp of Chloride, now a small mountain village that draws





attention from outdoor enthusiasts, history buffs, and even curious tourists. Here, the route begins as a well-maintained, hard-packed dirt road (left) easily traversable by ordinary street vehicles. About three miles in, we spotted our first location to explore—a conspicuous unnamed pegmatite carved out of the



surrounding terrain (right). The mine is not far off the road, so if you're in a street vehicle, a short hike will get you to pay dirt. However, to get close to it without having to resort to trekking, we turned onto a rugged Jeep trail worn into the desert—definitely *not* for street vehicles. Though a relatively small excavation, this pegmatite still surrenders impressive specimens of large black pods of schorl tourmaline embedded in white microcline feldspar with pink rose quartz (this variety of quartz is light sensitive, so most specimens that have been laying out in the sun will be paler in color, but still worthy of collecting). After claiming our share of some worthy samples, we packed up our treasures and continued on our journey through the Cerbat Range.



**rose quartz**



**tourmaline**



**microcline**



**all combined**

## the Cerbats yield their treasures



**inspecting the pods**



**Tara and Alex**



**a successful campaign**



**a few for the museum**





The road winds up the flank of the range, working its way to near the crest. Along the ride, we stopped often to mingle and chat with the numerous free-ranging horses and cattle we encountered. As we continued our ascend up and through the mountain, the surrounding habitat



from neighs...



...to moos



changed gradually from the typical desert scrubland at the lower elevations to juniper-pinyon woodland higher up, which offers a distinctively different array of wildlife, plants, and geology. As the name denotes, this life zone in the Cerbat is dominated by the **Utah Juniper** *Juniperus osteosperma* (often clad with clumps of **Juniper Mistletoe** *Phoradendron juniperinum*) and **Singleleaf Pinyon Pine** *Pinus monophylla* that begin to appear at an elevation of

juniper-pinyon life zone



about 5,000 feet. However, other companion plants in the underbrush community make their appearance in the transition between the two life zones. Most notable are striking, large groves of **Beargrass** *Nolina microcarpa* that are distinguished by their stemless grass-like fronds and a short stalk sporting a pale inflorescence at

beargrass grove



its tip. Other notable species include yerba santa, manzanita, thistles, and various types of prickly pear cacti.

manzanita



yerba santa



beargrass



thistle



prickly pear







Finally, the road levels out below the crestline at an elevation of about 6,000 feet, providing spectacular views of the western vista, including Chloride far below. Had we intended on staying overnight, we could have chosen one of two dispersed campgrounds just ahead, administered



by the **Bureau of Land Management**. The first one travelers reach is the **Packsaddle Recreation Site** (9 miles from US 93). This free site offers a vault toilet, picnic areas, and trash cans. This is the location you would chose if you intended to climb to the lofty peak looming above, as the **Cherum Peak Trail** begins nearby. Two miles farther ahead is the **Windy Point Campground**, which also features a vault toilet, picnic sites, and trash cans, plus campsites with metal fire grills and rock mason fire rings. Unlike the previous campground, staying at this site requires a fee of \$8 per site per night. Both are available on a first-come, first-served basis for a maximum 14-day stay limit. Note that



inspecting a dump

due to the steep and curvy nature of the road, travel trailers are not recommended!



Samoa Mine



rough descent

## great vista intrusions

After a brief reconnaissance, we said goodbye to these sites, since overnight camping was not on our agenda. We were off to conclude our journey at Chloride. Whereas the road had been nicely maintained up to the campgrounds, not



rock murals

far beyond this point it transforms into a Jeep trail suitable only for true off-road vehicles with high clearance. For those interested, a road branching off from the main passage leads explorers to investigate the **Samoa Mine** above on the flank of the mountain. We continued on, passing the **Silver Age Mine** along the way, which we did briefly inspect. In the past, I have found specimens of galena and arsenopyrite at this site. Farther ahead, about a mile from the town site, the road encounters impressive rock murals painted in the late 1960s by acclaimed artist Roy Purcell. Then it was on into Chloride, a **Census Designated Place** with a population of over 200, and considered to be the oldest continuously inhabited mining town in Arizona! Stop into the **AZ Tourist Information Center** for maps, brochures, and info, then visit the **Mineshaft Market** for souvenirs and refreshments. The main road leads back to US 93 four miles west for a safe and easy conclusion to a rewarding excursion into the Cerbat Mountains!

