



# BEATTY BECKONS

A GATEWAY OF POSSIBILITIES LOOMS IN THIS SOUTHERN NEVADA TOWN.

The Beatty mural was completed in 2008, and depicts the history of the railroad in the town's creation. Bombo's Pond just south of town gives bass fishermen some great catch-and-release fishing.

MURAL PHOTO: MARILYN NEWTON





BY MEGG MUELLER

One of the definitions of gateway is a means of access or entry to a place. A way to pass from one area into another, basically, and while the town of Beatty has rightfully positioned itself as “The Gateway to Death Valley” I prefer to think of Beatty as a gateway to an unexpected adventure in its own right.

While it is true that any visit to Death Valley should begin in Beatty, what is equally true is that it should include at least one night in this most rustic Nevada town. Unfettered by false glamour and pretense, Beatty is a destination for anyone looking to peer deep into the soul of small town Nevada: what you find might not always dazzle but it will always leave you feeling enriched. And who knows? You might even discover a thing or two when you stop and look around.



ERIC CACHINERO



## BACK IN THE DAY

While Nevada is no stranger to remote towns, Beatty's stoic isolation is considerate: south to Pahrump it's almost 75 miles; north to Tonopah is 93; and the drive to Las Vegas will cost you 117 miles. While just 13 miles to the California-Nevada border, once inside the Golden State, all you'll find for seemingly forever is Death Valley. It's a wonderful place to visit, but take my advice and remember from whence you came; you'll want to go back there soon.

Beatty sprang to life in 1904 from the nearby gold discoveries, but it was a plentiful supply of water that kept Beatty alive, long after towns such as Bullfrog and Rhyolite disappeared into the dust. Some 30 years before gold was found, Montillius Beatty had settled in the Oasis Valley to ranch with his Paiute wife, and to occasionally work his claims. As miners poured into Bullfrog and Rhyolite, Beatty became a supply station and the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad came to town in 1906, followed shortly by the Bullfrog Goldfield Railroad. As people, hotels, and restaurants arrived, Beatty began calling itself the "Chicago of the West."

For a town that's never really had more than about 1,000 residents and didn't get power until the 1940s, Beatty is unlikely to be confused with Chicago. Despite a short-lived resurgence from 1988 to 1998 when mining returned to the area, Beatty has held on through its boom and frightening bust years, and is once again searching for an economic driver that will not only keep tourists in town, but will actually entice them to visit on its own merit.

## ON THE VERGE OF DISCOVERY

David Spicer and Karl Olsen believe there's still gold in the hills surrounding Beatty, only this time it's not a finite mineral. Trails are the future, if these two have anything to say about it.

Karl is the Bureau of Land Management's caretaker at the Rhyolite ghost town, four miles outside of Beatty (see story on Rhyolite, 66). Karl is also a former Marine, and when he heard the Strozzi Veterans of Foreign Wars' (VFW) building in Beatty needed renovation, he created the Bullfrog Historical Mining District Course and poker run to help raise funds. The ATV course was about 43 miles its first two years, and for this October's event Karl has added a new segment which will increase the course to 100 miles. What sets this poker run apart is the map and accompanying course guide participants receive; each stop on the course is clearly marked—many with photos—and the guide delves into the history and geology of the area in excellent detail, thanks to author Genne Nelson.

The combination of off-road adventure, history, and geological tour is unmatched and has doubled in size since the first year, bringing more than 120 vehicles to town in 2015.

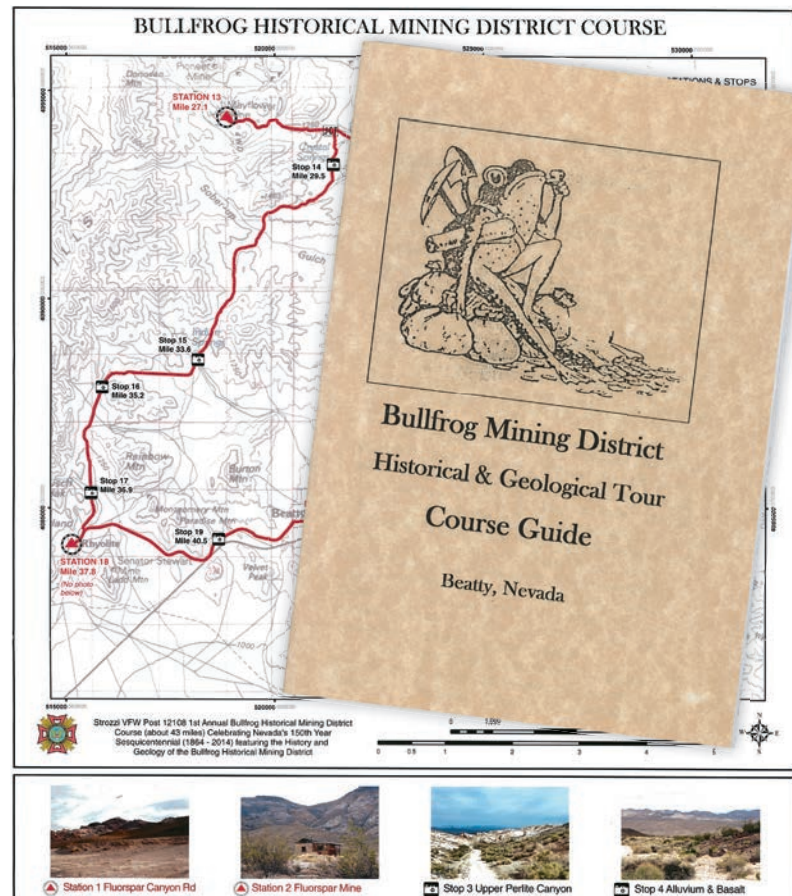
Karl says he's included mining sites, railroad history, some of the area springs, and even petroglyphs, although he's a little hesitant to reveal some of the area's fascinating features. Years of witnessing the vandalism that often occurs in Rhyolite have made him cautious.

"You have to be careful what you tell people about," he says. "You just don't know what they are going to do."



SUZANNE KESSLER

Top: The hills surrounding Beatty are rich with colorful minerals. Below: This year's Bullfrog Historical Mining District Course will be a 100-mile trek.







PHOTOS: MEGG MUELLER

The multi-use trails on Spicer Ranch wind through a horse paddock, and past natural ponds and springs on the working ranch.

## BULLISH ON THE FUTURE

David Spicer, meanwhile, is working toward his goal of creating a mountain bike mecca in the hills of the Oasis Valley, and a proposed four mile, gentle trail from Beatty to Rhyolite on the old railroad bed could connect David and Karl's passions.

David took to riding a mountain bike instead of driving his truck after being stomped into the mud in 2000 by a 2,600-pound bull on his ranch northeast of Beatty. Driving his truck was too jarring on his back, but that unfortunate accident turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

"Honestly, I'm better for my injuries," David says. "I started riding, and I've never stopped."

That's an understatement; along with running the 320-acre ranch his parents bought in the early '60s, he has a decorative landscape business that uses rocks from his own quarries, plus mining business partnerships, and more. David is also creating miles of public non-motorized-use trails on his property. He and his crew hand-built 7 miles of flowing, clean trails in just three months. From his property, they link to numerous natural animal trails in the surrounding area, and his ultimate goal is hundreds of miles of hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian bliss.

Born in Beatty, David has seen the area's ebb and flow firsthand. To him, it's a matter of reinvention.

"In small towns, you can't just focus on one career," David explains. "You have to be flexible."

That flexibility is responsible for not just the multi-use trails, but also the full-fledged events park and recreation facility that is happening at Spicer Ranch. There's 40 acres of graded parking, an information kiosk with trail maps, camping area, and showers due to be completed in mid March. Remember: this is all located on a working ranch where you can see the day-to-day action, which adds to the only-in-Nevada experience. For David, it's just the beginning of things to come. He's already hosted two Tough Mudder events on the ranch, but decided against hosting another.

"They had about 7,200 people come for the event," he says. "It was great, both years, but I decided to focus on smaller events, like the Boy Scouts Mountain Man Rendezvous which is about 2,000 scouts."





MARILYN NEWTON

## HEART AND SOUL

Small is big when it comes to selling the town of Beatty, according to some current residents.

“We’re looking to bring people to town,” David says. “People who want to live in a small town, people who want to raise their families, and grow here.”

Linda Shirley came to Beatty about 3 years ago. Her husband, Rob, was retiring and wanted to find a small town that he could help with his skillset. Linda works for the Beatty Chamber of Commerce, and Rob is the town’s water manager, and while Linda comes from Miami the charms of Beatty haven’t been lost on her.

“If you move here, you’ll know everyone in three weeks,” she says. “No one is ever alone on the holidays. People here take care of one another.”

That care is the heart of what people like Karl, David, and Linda hope will spread through the community into its tourism infrastructure. Without it, the incredible trails, scenery, history, and area attractions can’t hope to bring the needed visitors. David notes that without an infusion of the requisite specialty coffee shops, brew-pubs, and shopping opportunities, many tourists will still consider Beatty just a gateway.



ERIC CACHINERO



LARRY BURTON

Beatty’s neighborhoods are full of quaint homes, while Main Street offers plenty of attractions for weary travelers. Middle photo: David Spicer and Linda Shirley meet with Editor Megg Mueller at Mel’s Diner to talk about their town.



## THINGS YOU NEVER KNEW ABOUT BEATTY

There are more than 350 hotel rooms in Beatty and ample places to eat, not to mention the usual bars and saloons that have enough character and ambiance to satiate even the most adventurous partier. On that note: bring some cash. While ATMs are easy to find, some businesses don't take credit cards. But don't blame them; there is no bank in Beatty.

There is however, a gem of a museum. Amina Anderson is the granddaughter of Claudia Reidhead—co-founder of the Beatty Museum and Historical Society—and the museum's manager. On an informal tour of some of the museum's collections, she tells how in 1995, her grandmother and two other women—Vonnie Gray and Mary Revert—started the museum in a small house next to her grandmother's home in an effort to preserve the history and culture of Beatty that was threatening to be lost.

Fast forward 11 years, and what you'll find is a spectacular collection of photographs from young Rhyolite and Beatty, materials from the Nevada Test Site, military displays, and many other exhibits. And while the museum is an awesome representation of the area's history, it's so much more. The museum receives donations from area families, and the collections are not germane to just Beatty; it's more of a visual history of the people who live there. There's a collection of straight razors, which Amina has artfully displayed along with a clever display of five men who died while using such razors. Touches like this bring the artifacts to life, and create a thoroughly enjoyable experience.

Another discovery is Bailey's Hot Springs, just outside of town. Temperatures of the springs range from 98 to 105 degrees, and there's an RV park, picnic area, and even buffalo on the property. Bet you didn't expect that.

Aside from the myriad trails in the surrounding hills, one of the most startling facts about Beatty is the natural water supply, thanks to the Amargosa River and the number of springs—Vanderbilt Springs and Bombo's Pond, Species Springs, and Little Indian Springs, specifically—in the area. Bird watching, wildlife viewing (including Beatty's famed burros), and catch-and-release fishing are just a few of the delights you may not expect to find in a region so intimately associated with unforgiving deserts. Bet you didn't expect that, either.

The gateway to Death Valley, while again geographically appropriate, doesn't begin to scratch the surface of Beatty's attraction. The town is just 1 square mile in size, and while it does not yet have a shimmery feel to its amenities, it does offer the unique trait of being a very real town that does not trade on its rough and tumble existence. Trendy is not a word you'll find in Beatty, but authentic is. Take time to discover it as it's on the verge of becoming so much more than many expected. ▀







SUZANNE KESSLER



**BEAT IT TO BEATTY**

**Beatty Chamber of Commerce**  
119 Main St.  
Beatty, NV 89003  
beattynevada.org, 775-553-2424

**WORTH A CLICK**

trails-ov.org  
baileyshotsprings.com  
beattymuseum.org  
rhyolitesite.com

PHOTOS: ERIC CACHINERO



The Beatty Museum and Historical Center is free to visit, and is adding 1,200 square feet of space this summer to house its growing collection. Top right: The famous burros of Beatty are found in the surrounding hills and often roaming downtown. Bottom left: The annual Beatty Days celebration is the last Friday in October, and features a classic car show, Dutch oven cooking, chili cook off, music, contests, and even a pet parade.



# Rhyolite

BY ERIC CACHINERO

Rhyolite began with a simultaneous boom and bust. When prospectors Eddie Cross and Frank “Shorty” Harris discovered rich ore in what would eventually become the Bullfrog Mining District in summer 1904, it is said to have created a dusty stampede of prospectors the likes of which the area had never seen, leaving other mining camps in the region behind. “It looked like the whole population of Goldfield was trying to move at once,” Shorty later recalled. “Men even hiked the 75 miles pushing wheelbarrows.”

Named for the green rock of the area, The Bullfrog Mining District sprang up as movement to the district and Rhyolite picked up steam. Rhyolite quickly became more than just an igneous, volcanic rock; it became a booming metropolis. By February 1905, the townsite was established in close proximity to some of the most important mines. Water had to be hauled in from Beatty and lumber was in such high demand that it couldn’t reach the site quick enough. In 1906, steel magnate Charles Schwab invested heavily in the Montgomery Shoshone Mine and the town of Rhyolite, and soon, a school, hospital, train station, electric lights, water mains, newspapers, banks, and other luxuries became commonplace. Some estimates put the population of the town at anywhere from 5,000-8,000 residents at the time, though some sources estimate it could have been as high as 10,000.

But, towns and mining camps don’t become ghost towns by thriving forever; something has to give. That something for Rhyolite was nationwide financial panic in 1907, which folded many mines in the West. By 1910, the town’s mines were operating at a loss, and population had dwindled to near 1,000. A decade later, the population was close to zero.

Rhyolite never truly died, though. The site was a setting for several motion pictures and has evolved into one of the most famously photographed ghost towns in the state. Caretaker Karl Olsen lives in Rhyolite—now owned by the Bureau of Land Management—and protects structures from vandals. Karl proudly lays claim to taking care of the cleanest BLM bathrooms (primitive) in existence, a testimony I can honestly attest to.

Some highlights of the town include the bottle house—a structure built by Tom T. Kelly that is made using approximately 30,000 bottles that were scavenged from the town’s saloons—and the railroad depot. Just south of the townsite is the Goldwell Open Air Museum—a bizarre Bohemian sculpture garden.

The Beatty Museum and Historical Society—located in Beatty—offers a walking brochure of Rhyolite. Pick one up before your visit to Rhyolite for historical information and photos about both towns. ■



ERIC CACHINERO

Above: The Las Vegas & Tonopah Railroad depot was completed in 1908, and was only in use until 1917. Below: The Bottle House was built in 1905 using more than 30,000 bottles of beer, wine, soda, and medicine.



MEGG MUELLER