November 2024

168 photograph america newsletter™

Where, when, and how to discover the best photography in America

Published since 1989



The office of Antelope's newspaper - The Herald

ABANDONED OREGON

Oregon has over 250 ghost towns. Many of Oregon's "ghost towns" have a population of only a few people. It depends on how you define ghost town. Some people prefer the term "abandoned." Some of my favorite Oregon towns have only a few relics that are worth photographing and some have streets lined with 150 year-old remnants of forgotten times. Some of my favorite Oregon towns are connected to U.S. Highway 97, starting with Wasco and heading south through Moro to Grass Valley, Kent and Shaniko. From there, an eight-mile detour down Hwy 218 leads to the town of Antelope. Every ghost town has stories, most were lost years ago. You can discover some remants of early Oregon by walking the streets and visiting museums while photographing remains of towns from the past.

Start your ghost town trip with a flight into Portland where you can pick up a rental car, with 4-wheel drive if it's a winter trip. Head east on Interstate 84 along the Columbia River. You'll be passing Latourell Falls, Bridal, Wahkeena, Multnohmah, Elowah, Horsetail, and Punchbowl Falls. You can fill several days photographing waterfalls. Punchbowl, my favorite, requires a hike into the woods.



Punchbowl Falls

For overnight stops, I usually choose a river-side town called The Dalles, about 87 miles east of Portland. Fifteen minutes east of The Dalles, on I-84, is a large truck stop at Biggs Junction where you'll head south on Hwy 97. Watch for the left turn onto the **Wasco** Business Route through town. One of your first photo stops in Wasco should be the old Crosfield General Merchandise Building where bricks are falling and paint is peeling.



Wasco's General Merchandise

Walk around the building and check the weathered back side. Your next stop is the depot for the Columbia Southern Railroad. I always drive the backstreets to look for the very old homes left to rot in overgrown yards. There are lots of those along this route.

In **Moro** is the Sherman County Historical Museum that's definitely worth visiting. Old school houses on hills above these towns are a favorite of passing photographers. Many of Oregon's school houses are large, 2-story, and sitting atop the highest nearby hill. Some are being slowly restored to serve a civic need. Most are just weathering away. Four blocks up the hill is another school house that looks like an abandoned prison.



Time for a restoration



The first really interesting subject for your camera is in **Grass Valley**, about 8 miles south of Moro. A well-weathered Methodist Church located at the south end of Second Street is not crowded by surrounding homes. Get out of your car and walk around this building with a round window facing the street. It probably held stained glass in the past. I used a selfie stick to shoot over the tall weeds but the results looked like I was using a drone for commercial use. Wasco, Moro, and Grass Valley were settled many years ago but are still living towns that offer some great photo opportunities. The ghost towns of Kent and Shaniko are farther south. All the roads I've driven so far have been paved.

About ten miles farther south is the smaller town of **Kent**. From a distance, Kent doesn't look like it's worth a stop, but when you approach the left turn into the town, you'll see the Orange Crush sign over a very weathered gas station/cafe.



The pumps have been vandalized but still show a price of 66¢ per gallon. I shot this strange combination from every angle from straight-on to a profile view through the weeds. Across the street is a beehive shaped stone structure. It was built in the 1930s to house a generator to supply electricity to the gas station. Looking east, is a very large white concrete building with one small door and one window. I shot it from a distance and then drove closer and shot it again. I was told that it was once an auditorium and is now used for basketball.



Two streets head east from the highway. I drove to the end of both and found a pair of hundred-year-old buildings, probably a combo blacksmith shop and home.

On the way back to the highway, I spotted an interesting building sitting a few feet back off the street, behind a small black and white car that's probably still there. Very old unpainted wooden buildings are usually black and not easy to photograph. The light cast by an overcast afternoon was perfect for this subject.



Turn onto the 'driveway' and park in front of the house, the best angle. While I was looking for the best angle, I could see every building in Kent. A window in the new Post Office was lighted b probably the only person in town. Kent appears to be the only actual ghost town in this part of Oregon.



About 12 miles south of Kent is **Shaniko**, the reason most visitors drive out here. The Shaniko Hotel has reopened recently and is getting good reviews. The last time I was here, I only photographed the school, built in 1901, with an unusual octagonal bell tower. It was dark weathered wood. Today it is painted green, a strange shade of green.



The rest of the town has been cleaned up and reopened with a few small museums plus shops and an ice cream shop that is being remodeled. It was the victim of a car crash. One of the Victorian-style shops house free and clean public restrooms.

A sunshade covers a large collection of mostly horse-drawn wagons and fire veh - cles. I walked around the collection to find the most photogenic wagons against backgrounds without modern cars and other photographers.





In the distance is the Wool Warehouse

The truck parked nearby is a 1930 International. There were only a few tourists in town on a rainy autumn day.



Halloween is coming

Shaniko was decorated with a Halloween theme, probably the favorite holiday of ghost town dwellers. Shaniko has an RV park within walking distance.

Millions were made around 1900 when Shaniko was named the “Wool Capital” of the world. Thousands of tons of wool were shipped from the bright red warehouse at the end of Main Street. At its peak, a one-day record of $5 million dollars of wool sales was made. The warehouse still stands with “SHANIKO” on the roof.



East side of Hotel



North side of Hotel

Two catastrophic fires nearly wiped out the town in 1910 and 1911. This marked the beginning of the end of the town. But Shaniko Wool is still being produced and sold. Just Google the name.



Saloon and Museum

On the south end of Shaniko is Hwy 218, the detour from Hwy 97 and the road to the town of **Antelope**. Check your gas. It's a long way to the next station. Almost hidden in the cottonwoods and the weeds on the right side of the road, about a half-mile from Shaniko, are the ruins of a very old barn.



Cross Hollows

The barn was still standing the last time I photographed it in 1994. All the old cottonwoods in the photograph mean there was a stream at this dip in the road at this spot. Before Shaniko was built, this spot was a stage stop called Cross Hollows. When the railroad came to Shaniko, everything in Cross Hollows was packed up and moved to Shaniko. By 1900, Shaniko had a population of 170.



Autumn in Antelope

The road to Antelope follows a winding downhill road to the village at an elevation of 2632 feet, a low spot in this hilly country. The community called Antelope began as a stop on a railroad line in the mid-1860s providing service to ranchers and miners in the area. Today the population is about 50.



In the years from 1981 to 1988, a commune with 7000 followers was established here called the Rajneeshpuram Movement. They liked the location and tried to take over the town. Cult followers would line up for a "daily drive-by" to wave at the Guru as he slowly drove by them in one of his 74 Rolls Royceses. They changed the town's name to Rajneesh and changed the town's restaurant to East Indian food. They caused much trouble practicing bio-terrorism and were eventually run out of town for poisoning over 700 people at salad bars in local restaurants. Leaders were arrested for attempted murder in one of the first bio-terror attacks in the United States. No trace of the commune can be seen in Antelope today - except for the building on Main Street (above). Their headquarters was sold and now functions as a museum, focusing on the Rajneeshpuram Movement.

All the cottonwood trees were past the peak of their autumn color when I drove down Antelope's tree-lined main street. I saw several larch trees. These deciduous conifers drop their foliage every autumn and are very long-lived. Many of the abandoned homes were great photo stops, up-close with a wide-angle lens and distant homes with tall grass foregrounds. A very well-restored and photogenic Methodist Church stands at the corner of Union and College Streets. The small building on Main Street, south of Union was the office of the Herald, th local newsletter. (on page 1)



This diagonally planked building, built in 1872 was called Silvertooth's Saloon. It was more recently a Shell Gas Station. Antelope's School house is north of the village and has been painted off-white



Mowed lawns were filled with groups of deer ignoring my car, but running from me when I parked and walked around. I used my telephoto and stayed a distance from the deer. All over town are abandoned buildings.









There are more viewpoints four miles further down the gravel road marked **Painted Cove Trai**l. You can park at the trailhead for a loop hike around a variety of viewpoints. At the trailhead you can go in either direction around the loop. At the far side of the loop you will be following a trail at the edge of the crusty, crunchy formations, a red and green foreground for a distant lake and snow-covered mountains in the autumn. The trail heading left has a new boardwalk that's wheelchair friendly.

After all these ghost towns, you may want to photograph something different, like the **John Day Painted Hills** unit, one of the most scenic places in Oregon known for its vibrant colors spread across bizarre landscapes. At the end of the road through the town of Antelope, head left and follow Hwy 218 through the John Day Fossil Beds, to the town of Fossil (gas and restaurants) where you can turn right/south onto Hwy 19 to Hwy 26 where you will drive 4 miles west to a sign marking the entrance to the John Day Painted Hills unit.
A paved road leads a few miles north to a left turn onto a gravel road. As you get closer to the most spectacular formation, another left turn follows a narrow ridge to a very large parking area. On the edge of the ridge is a covered shelter on one of the best viewpoints for photographers. Heading south from the shelter is a half-mile trail following a gradual climb. At the end of the trail you'll see colored formations hidden from view at the shelter at the parking lot. You'll find the best images at trail's end. Colors across the Painted Hills pop after a rain clears. A cloudy, overcast sky mutes colors, bright reds turn brown here on a cloudy day.

Four miles east of the Painted Hills Unit, on Hwy 26, is the very interesting town of **Mitchell**. You'll find several operating cafes, some very interesting shops, and a card-lock gas station where you can get information on becoming a member. The few hotels here are rotting away. You'll find a much better choice of lodgings in the town/city of Prineville - 60 miles south. Siri recommended the Best Western Motel as the best budget motel in Prineville. I spent a whole day at Painted Hills under dense clouds without shooting anything. So I sat out a few more days of rain at the Best Western in Prineville while editing my images and waiting for a sunny day.



Like old metal, the hills are slowly oxidizing or rusting. About 33 million years ago, iron rich volcanic ash fell on this landscape. Weathering processes slowly changed new ash layers into fertile soils under forests and swamps.

Over time, oxidizing irons stained the clay soils, forming the rusting red hills you see today.







Along the Painted Cove Trail

Back in 2013 I published issue #80 titled Back Roads of Oregon.You might want to photograph these Ghost Towns



McEwen, Oregon

Twenty-five miles east of the town of John Day on Highway #26 turn left onto Hwy 7, drive a few miles west, turn south at the sign marking the main street through the remains of the old logging and railroad town of **Whitney**. The best buildings are scattered along the road. A couple of miles farther to Highway 7, I turned right at the sign pointing the way to **Sumpter**. The road follows some narrow-gauge track where you might see an antique steam locomotive. The restored remains of an old floating gold dredge can be seen on the edge of town. Sumpter was once one of the largest mining towns in this part of Oregon with 5,000 people and three dozen saloons. Most of the original buildings were destroyed by a fire in 1917. My next stop was a nea - by ghost town called **Bourne**. I headed northwest out of Sumpter on the paved highway. Turn right just beyond the bridge over Cracker Creek and follow the graded dirt road for six miles into the pine-covered hills. Five miles in, I made a right turn at the sign and drove up the hill to find the remains of Bourne. A flas flood washed out much of the town in 1937. There are still a few interesting old cabins. By midmorning the village was still in the shadow of the Elkhorn Mountains. A right turn took me fifteen miles west to the larger village of **Granite**. It sits on a hillside on the north side of the road. The village faces the west and the setting sun. After lunch, I headed down the hill, made a left turn and drove back through Sumpter to the pavement of Highway 7 and a return to California.



My life-long career in photography began at San Jose State University in 1957. After college, I enlisted in the U.S. Army Signal Corps, serving as a photographer and darkroom technician. In Germany, my skills and experience with equipment and lab work were developed and polished. I took the opportunity to photograph the beauty of nature in the Black Forest. Returning to California in 1965, I produced industrial and military training films for Raytheon Electronics and began showing my color nature prints. From 1969 through 1981, my photography was exhibited and sold in West Coast galleries. During the early 1980's, I taught color darkroom workshops, then expanded to include field trips. Former customers, who had purchased my framed photographs, wanted to learn photography. My Pacific Image Photography Workshops off red adventures to the Pacific Coast, the Southwest deserts, national parks, Hawaii, New England, Canada, England, and the South Pacific. The workshops evolved into writing and sharing my adventures with others. Photograph America Newsletter provides information on where, when, and how to discover the best nature photography in North America.

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Photograph America Newsletter

is published quarterly (four issues per year)
by Robert Hitchman
1-415-328-2785

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