

Bodie

State Historic Park



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Bodie State Historic Park

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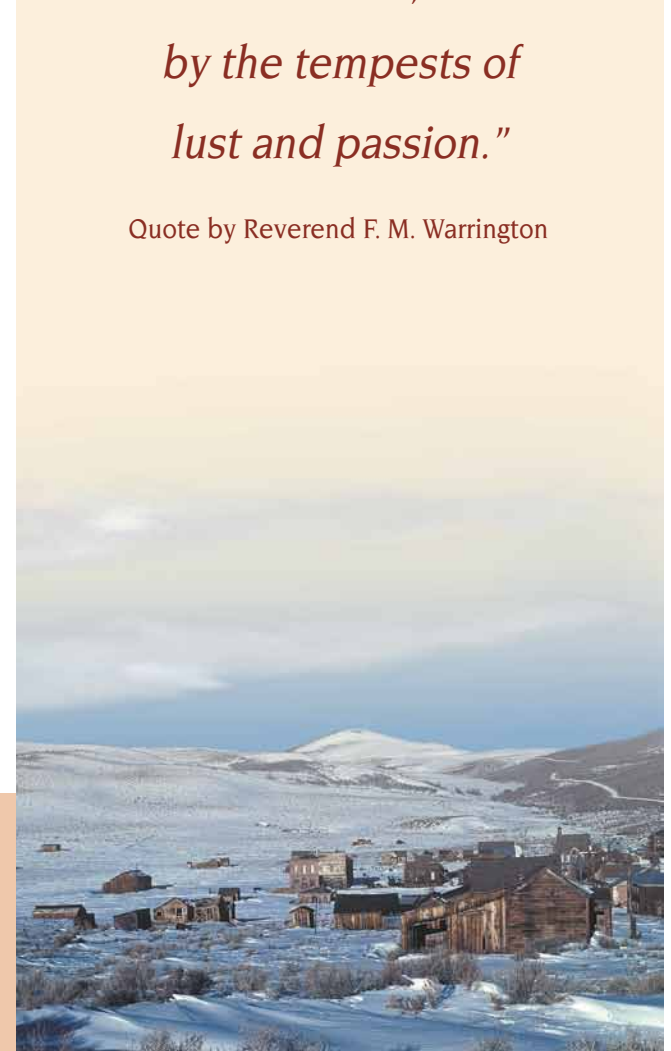
Bridgeport, Ca 93517

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*Bodie—a town
so lawless that in 1881
it was described as
“. . .a sea of sin, lashed
by the tempests of
lust and passion.”*

Quote by Reverend F. M. Warrington



Spread across the landscape of a high, remote valley of the Bodie Hills, the historic gold mining town of Bodie—one of the richest gold strikes in California—was once known as the most lawless, wildest and toughest mining camp in the West. To walk the streets of this ghost town and peer into the windows of the remaining homes, businesses and sites is to be transported back to the days when Bodie was a thriving mining town.

Located northeast of Yosemite National Park, Bodie is 13 miles east of Highway 395 on S.R. 270, seven miles south of Bridgeport. The last three miles to the park are on a very rough dirt road. At an elevation of 8,375 feet, Bodie is subjected to high winds. Summer can be warm with highs in the 80s. Winter is unpredictable, with daytime temperatures reaching into the 60s and by sundown dropping below zero. Snowfall can average between three to six feet on the flat ground, with drifts up to 20 feet high.

PARK HISTORY

Native People

The Eastern Sierra Nevada region of Mono County was home to the Northern Paiute and Mono Lake Paiute Indian groups. These two groups lived in loose family units. Primarily hunter-gatherers, the Northern Paiutes subsisted by gathering native plants, hunting small game, and fishing in local streams. They migrated seasonally, following food sources. Although the Mono Lake Paiutes hunted small animals and gathered native plants and seeds, their diet was more dependent on Mono Lake, where they gathered alkali

fly larvae and brine shrimp. Basket weaving was a common form of art among the Paiute tribes. The baskets, tightly woven with creative and artistic designs, were used for food gathering, storage and cooking.

The flood of miners drawn by the Bodie gold discovery pushed the Native Americans out of their traditional territory. By the early twentieth century, only five percent of the original area remained under the control of the local tribes. Food supplies dwindled as settlers clear-cut the forests for lumber and firewood, killed or displaced local wildlife, and destroyed meadow grasses by grazing livestock. As their traditional way of life was impacted, some native people adapted by working in the local towns. Paiute Indians worked at a limekiln in the Mono Lake Basin, loading the sacked lime onto flatcars for delivery to Bodie, where it was used in milling and cyanide processing of gold and silver ores. They were also employed in service jobs and as ranch hands.

The Standard Mining Company

As placer mining declined on the western slopes of the Sierra, gold discoveries in the high desert of the Eastern Sierras captured the attention of thousands of gold seekers. In 1859 W. S. Bodey and E. S. “Black” Taylor stumbled upon one of the richest goldstrikes. The ore extracted from the Bodie Hills amounted to millions in gold and silver. Unfortunately, Bodey was not able to enjoy his discovery—he froze to death in a blizzard while returning with supplies in November 1859.

Mining in Bodie was slow in the 1860s and 1870s due to rich strikes in Aurora, Nevada and at the Comstock Mine in Virginia City. From 1863 to 1877, only a small handful of industrious miners and prospectors worked the Bodie mines. In the mid-1870s, the Bunker Hill Mine (later renamed the Standard Mining Company) made a rich strike of gold and silver ore. Almost 10,000 tons of rich ore was extracted from this mine, yielding close to \$15 million in 25 years.



The Bodie Reputation

Stories of the quality and amount of gold being mined by the Standard Mining Company sparked a rush of people, and Bodie became a boomtown in 1877. By 1879 Bodie had a population of approximately 8,500 people and more than 2,000 buildings.



A visitor surveys some of the park's historic buildings.

General stores and saloons supplied the needs of the miners. More than 60 saloons and dance halls lined the streets, providing a source of relaxation and entertainment for the miners after a hard day's work in the depths of the mines. Gunfights, stage holdups, robberies and street fights contributed to its reputation of lawlessness and the legend of the "Bad Man of Bodie." Historians believe that the "Bad Man of Bodie" is a composite of outlaws and men like Tom Adams and Washoe Pete who contributed to the wild atmosphere of Bodie.

Chinese Settlers

Other businesses and individuals also profited from the boom. As lodging for the miners and stamp mills to process the ore were built, a need arose for a steady supply of wood to power the

mills and to warm the houses, especially during severe winters.

Bodie's Chinese residents, many of whom had come from Southern China as contract laborers in 1878, used mule trains to transport wood 20 miles from the sawmills along the eastern slope of the Sierra to Bodie. By 1881 the Bodie and Benton Railroad was transporting the heavy loads of lumber from

Mono Mills more efficiently.

With a population of several hundred people, the Chinese created a town within a town in order to maintain their own customs and traditions and because they were not welcome members of white society. Located along King Street, Chinatown offered general stores, laundries, boarding houses, gambling halls, saloons and a Taoist temple. The Chinese also earned income by selling vegetables, making charcoal, and working on the Bodie railway.



Coyote

Bodie's Decline

Bodie's heyday was short-lived. The year 1881 saw the town in the grips of decline. The rich mines were depleted, and mining companies went bankrupt as the miners and business people left for more lucrative areas. By 1886 Bodie's population had decreased to approximately 1,500 people.

Six years later a disastrous fire threatened the town, destroying a number of homes and businesses. The introduction of the cyanide process in the 1890s, and the use of electricity as a source of cheap power, made mining profitable again and boosted the town. But success was transitory—another fire in 1932 destroyed all but 10 percent of the town.

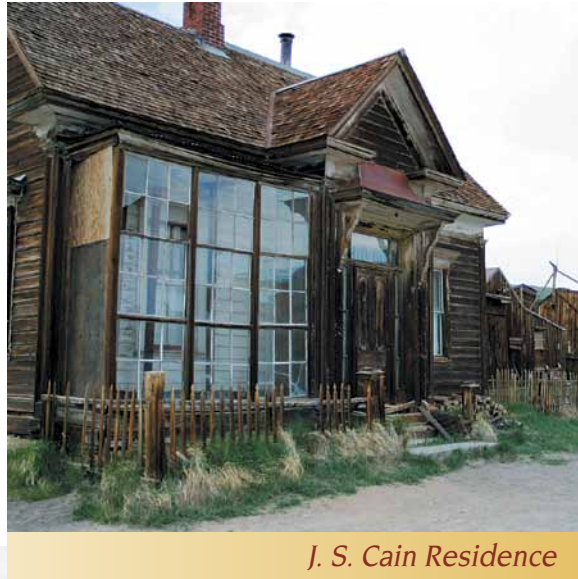
Today's Ghost Town

Bodie faded into a ghost town during the 1940s. In 1962 the small part of the



Winter in Bodie

town that had survived the 1932 fire was designated a State Historic Park and a National Historic Landmark. What remains of the town of Bodie, preserved in a state of “arrested decay,” exists as it did when the last residents left. The interiors are maintained as they were left, still furnished and stocked with goods, providing a snapshot of the past.



J. S. Cain Residence

This legislation withdrew the right of new patent or mineral claims on public lands of the Bodie District, and paved the way for California State Parks to purchase the mining claims of the now bankrupt Canadian mining company,

preserving this unique California treasure.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

- Bodie State Historic Park is generally accessible, but the protected historic structures, uneven surfaces and high-altitude desert terrain may be a challenge for individuals with limited mobility or difficulty breathing.
- Access to window views for structures on boardwalks requires the climbing of stairs from the street.
- The Museum/Visitor Center is generally accessible, but assistance may be required at the entry ramp.
- The restroom near the parking lot is accessible.
- A captioned video on Bodie's history is available.

Accessibility is continually improving. For current accessibility details, call the park, or visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.



Methodist Church on the corner of Green and Fuller Streets

In 1988 a Canadian mining company's proposal for a large-scale open pit gold mining operation on the bluff above the townsite threatened this landmark. These actions had the potential to compromise Bodie's historic ambiance, fragile buildings and wildlife habitat. Preservation groups, concerned citizens groups and government agencies successfully lobbied for the passage of the Bodie Protection Act of 1994.

PLEASE REMEMBER

- The Museum/Visitor Center is open from mid May to mid October. Park and Museum hours can vary seasonally depending on the weather. Call the park when planning your visit. Park closure hours are strictly enforced to protect the historic structures and artifacts.
- Everything in Bodie is fully protected. Nothing may be collected or removed from the park. No metal detectors are allowed.
- Dogs are permitted in the park, but must be on a leash at all times.
- There is no camping in Bodie. Inyo and Toiyabe National Forests provide camping at several nearby locations.
- There are no commercial facilities in Bodie.
- For safety reasons certain unstable areas of the park are closed to visitors. These areas are posted as prohibited.
- Winter visits require snow transportation. Four-wheel drive vehicles often get stuck in snow that is deeper than it appears. Towing facilities are not available. Snowmobiles must stay on designated roads within the park and on surrounding public lands as posted.
- Restrooms are located at the parking lot and picnic area.

