

# Amelia's Journal - Cowboy Territory, Nevada



Map courtesy of Nevada Division of Tourism  
<http://travelnevada.com>

## ELKO, NEVADA

Sept. 2008

We traveled to Cowboy Territory in northern Nevada for a new episode of **Wonders of the West**. We live in Las Vegas, Nevada, which is in a "low desert" climate zone, so I usually think that ALL of Nevada looks the same. Boy, was I wrong!!



Cowboy Territory is in a "high desert" climate zone, which means there are lush green meadows and sagebrush prairies that seem to go on forever. The area around Elko is a big cattle ranching community, where cowboys are still very much a part of the culture.

We visited the 71 Ranch, which has been an operating cattle ranch since 1877. I learned that a lot of the work is still done the same way as it was 100 years ago.....on horseback. The Ranch is available for guests to stay and become a part of the "cowboy experience". I got the chance to watch cowboys rope some of their cattle for some medical check-ups (you can only keep a cattle ranch going if you keep your animals healthy), and we got the chance to take a horseback ride. Riding a horse is a lot more fun than driving in a car!

South of Elko, we visited Lamoille Canyon at the base of the Ruby Mountains. The Ruby Mountains are often called Nevada's Swiss Alps. I haven't been to Switzerland to see the real Alps, but this is exactly how I'd imagine them. We passed through a small community that looked like a picture postcard as we drove along a narrow, winding road. Fall was quickly approaching, so the leaves on many of the trees were beginning to turn yellow. We hiked along a trail and followed a stream that cut through the mountains. I found a huge beaver dam, but I couldn't see any signs of beavers moving about.

It was great to see the foothills of the Ruby Mountains by car and on foot, but the next morning, my parents woke me up really early so that I'd have the chance to see them.....by BALLOON!

This was my first time traveling by balloon. What an amazing experience! I was nervous at first as the balloon was made out of very thin nylon. I couldn't quite figure out how it was going to keep me up in the air. Did you ever wonder how a hot air balloon works?

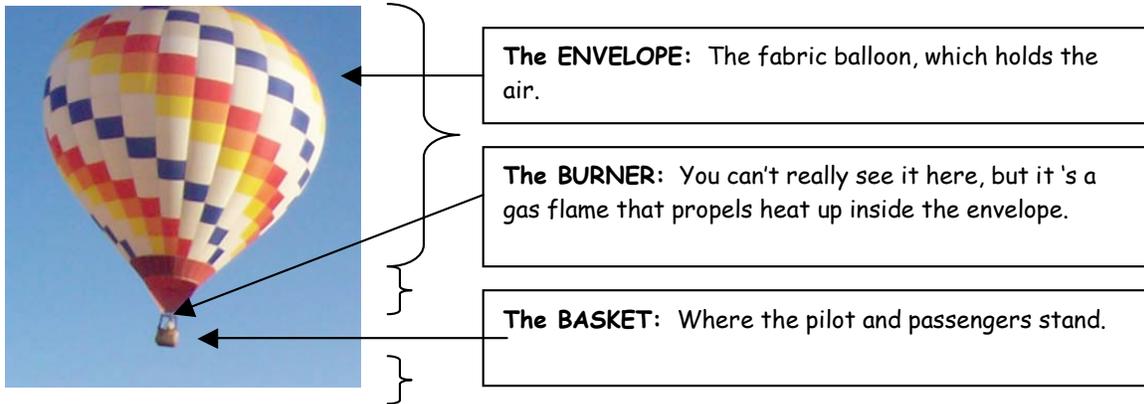


I took this picture while we were waiting for our balloon to arrive.

Our balloon pilot let us help get the balloon ready, so I got an idea of how this contraption actually functions. Once we took off, I lost all sense of fear and really enjoyed the ride!

## HOW A HOT AIR BALLOON WORKS

Hot air balloons are based on the scientific principle that warmer air rises in cooler air (that's because hot air is lighter than cool air). A hot air balloon is made up of 3 parts :



To get the balloon in the air, the pilot turns on the burner. Propane gas flows to the burner, which fires a flame up into the envelope. The bigger the flame, the faster the balloon rises. The balloon pilot has to keep firing the burner regularly throughout the flight to keep the balloon up in the air.

To return to the ground, our pilot pulled on a cord which opened a valve to let hot air escape. As the balloon cooled, we gently drifted down to the ground. I can't wait to try this again!



My mom and me in the basket.

Back on the ground, we made our way to downtown Elko where we attended a concert of Cowboy Poetry by Baxter Black. Cowboy poetry is a form of poetry that began when cowboys gathered around a campfire at the end of a long day and entertained each other with tall tales and folk songs. All of the poems are about the west, and many of them are very funny. Baxter Black is a well-known poet. He gave such a good performance I tried to write a Cowboy Poem of my own :

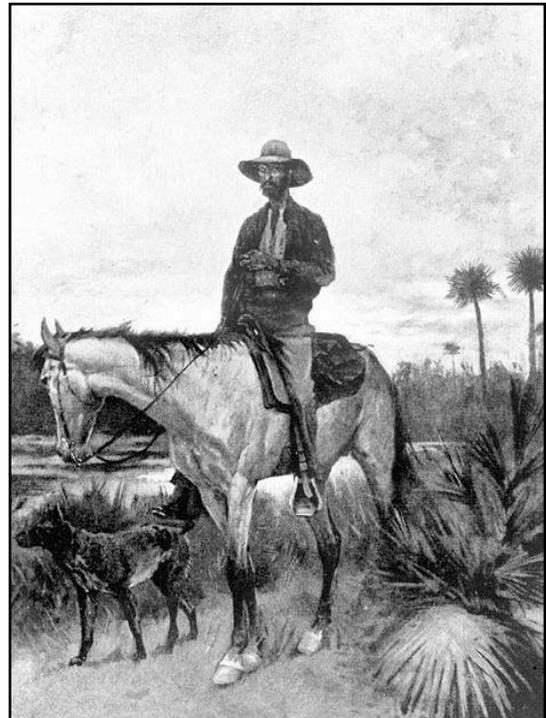
## Amelia's Cowboy Poem

Riding on a horse  
over a sagebrush range  
I come from the city  
and don't know quite how to  
handle the reins.

The horse knows his way 'round here  
better than I  
He steps over a small cactus  
and around a big cow pie.

I'm trying my best to write down  
this poem  
But it's way past time that I headed  
for home.

In the future, I think  
that Cowboy Poetry  
Should be written by Cowboys  
instead of by me!!



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"A Cracker Cowboy" by Frederic Remington

If you want to know what REAL cowboy poetry is like, visit Baxter Black's website at: <http://www.baxterblack.com>

## WINNEMUCCA, NEVADA

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From Elko, we headed to Winnemucca. Winnemucca is home to one of the largest Basque populations in the United States, and we wanted to learn more about their culture.



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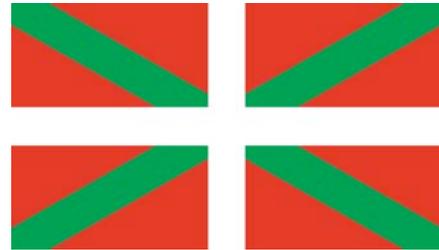
The Basque are a people who originally inhabited a region of the Pyrene Mountains in north-central Spain and southwestern France. Although no one knows for sure how old the Basque culture actually is, several coins with Basque inscriptions have been found dating back to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries B.C.

While there are still Basques in the Pyrenees, large populations left the Basque Country for other parts of the world in different historical periods, often for financial or political reasons.

Many Basques came to the United States during the time of the California Gold Rush (1848), but a lot of other people had the same idea. The Basques soon learned that it was easier to make money by using the skills they already had raising sheep and cattle than searching for gold.

Everyone we met in Winnemucca was warm, friendly, and eager to share Basque culture with us.

We met Pauline Salla and her dad, Pete, who is a sheepherder. Pete told us how he came to the U.S. and he showed us a few of his sheep. Pete has a beautiful voice, and he sang for us in the Basque language, called "Euskara".



This is the Basque flag.

A local woman, Brenda Willey arranged to have her student dance troop show us Basque folk dancing .

Anna Marie Smith, who runs a local hotel with her husband, showed us how to play the Basque card game of Mus (pronounced "Moose").

Once you learn it, Mus is a quick and fun game with lots of bluffing and joking.

If you're interested in learning the game, there are directions on the webpage of the North American Basque Organization.



A deck of Spanish cards for the game of Mus.

Visit: <http://www.nabasque.org/NABO/mus.htm>

There's a well-known local restaurant at the Martin Hotel that serves food in the Basque family-style tradition. I learned something very important here -- that Basque food is delicious!! There's tons of food made with lots of garlic. We tasted soup, salad, potatoes, stew, a special bean dish, and a wonderful bread pudding. I felt stuffed for 2 days!



From left to right:

Hominy, Lamb Stew, and Mashed Potatoes



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## DENIO, NEVADA Sept. 2008

Denio, Nevada is just south of the border to Oregon. There's only one motel here with a few rooms connected to a gas station. From Denio we drove another half hour to Virgin Valley, home of the Bonanza Opal Mine. This area is world famous for the precious opal specimens that were first discovered here in 1905.

The Virgin Valley is an ancient lake bed. A series of volcanic eruptions between 12 and 20 million years ago buried wood from local forests under rock and ash. Over time, water seeped through the layers of ash, picking up rich silica deposits and penetrated the buried wood. Over time, the wood decayed, providing a cavity that was replaced with the silica solution, making opals.



Opals can contain all the colors of the rainbow.

R. WELLER/COCHISE COLLEGE

We visited the Bonanza Opal Mines, where visitors are allowed to dig through piles of tailings to find opals (tailings are the broken pieces left from the digging of the mine owners). Don't let the term "tailings" mislead you - there were tons of opals to be found!!

Larry Olds, the Mine Manager, showed me how to look for the flashes of red, blue, yellow, green and purple when the sunlight hits the ground. The brilliant flashes of color tell you that what you're looking at isn't any ordinary rock!

I love rock hounding, and Larry and I shared stories about some of the things we've found in the past. I kept a lot of my rocks and fossils in old jewelry boxes, which were stolen during a burglary at our home last year (I'll bet the thieves were surprised to find rocks instead of jewelry!). Larry's sharp eye and patience not only helped me to find opals, but he also gave me 2 amazing meteorite pieces to help me start up a new collection of rocks, minerals and fossils! Larry's a great guy who really made my day!! ☺

After digging for opals, we stopped to film a segment of my dad fishing (my dad is always looking for an opportunity to fish!). The weather was cooling down as my mom filmed my dad, but I was too busy studying my new opals and meteorites to notice.



Me with my pet cat, Tumbleweed

I feel very lucky to live in a state with so many different and unique places, cultures, and resources. I love to travel and learn new things, and traveling through Cowboy Territory let me do just that!

'Til next time,

Amelia

