

# Amelia's Journal - Silver Trails Territory, Nevada



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

## CATHEDRAL GORGE STATE PARK, NEVADA

Today is Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>, Valentine's Day and I spent it filming with my parents at Cathedral Gorge State Park outside of Panaca, Nevada. Maybe this isn't your idea of a romantic way to spend the holiday, but when you have parents who spend their lives studying and filming nature, you come to expect these things....

Cathedral Gorge is filled with unusual rock formations that look like cathedral spires, which is how it got its name. There was a bit of snow on the ground which added a touch of magic to the place.

We hiked in and around the rock formations, which was like wandering through a maze. Afterwards, Zach Million, a Park Ranger, showed us the skull of a very old bison that had been found here. Again, not very romantic, but still pretty cool.



We were planning to head to Beaver Dam State Park from here, but the snow has made some of the roads dangerous and impassable, so we'll have to wait. So goes the life of a filmmaker!

P.S. When we got home, I got a box of Valentine's chocolates from my parents and we had one of my all time favorite dinners - crab!!!



## BEAVER DAM STATE PARK, NEVADA

April

Finally!!! The roads were clear enough to make it to Beaver Dam, Nevada's most remote State Park located near the town of Caliente. This is a beautiful place, but I was hoping to see beavers. We saw signs of them everywhere - gnawed off tree limbs and dams, but no beavers. I guess this really wasn't too surprising because we were filming during daylight and beavers are nocturnal, which means they're most active at night.

I got to spend some time exploring the stream while my mom filmed my dad's fishing segment for the show. While I may have missed the beavers, I still saw plenty of fish, birds and butterflies.

## PAHRANAGAT NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

As much as I wanted to stay and wait for the beavers to come out, we needed to continue our journey to Pahrnagat National Wildlife Refuge. Much of Nevada is desert, which makes a wetland area like Pahrnagat very important, not only to the people and animals that live here, but also to migrating birds that need somewhere safe to stop, rest and feed.



Nearby is an area filled with ancient rock art. The most well known figure on the rocks that is unique to this area is often referred to as "Pahrnagat Man". Created by an ancient tribal society, no one knows the exact meaning of this figure. Was he a shaman, or medicine man? A supernatural figure? A visitor from outer space? Or, perhaps, a symbolic drawing that was created to provide a message to travelers making their way across this landscape. Hhhmmmmmm.....



## ROYSTON TURQUOISE MINE

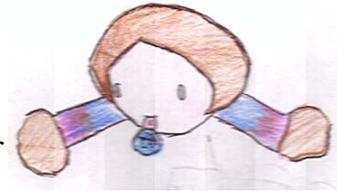
Our next stop was in Tonopah, Nevada. I like gems and minerals, especially when you can go and find them yourself, and that is exactly what we got to do at the Royston Turquoise Mine. They taught us a lot about—well, you guessed it—turquoise.

Living in the southwest, I'm used to seeing turquoise, so I had no idea how rare it is. I learned that the dry environment of this area is one of the key elements necessary to form this mineral. The Royston Turquoise Mining District is famous for the quality and

colors of turquoise it produces.

While we were filming at the mine, I also learned to tell the difference between gem quality turquoise and "chalk" turquoise. Gem quality turquoise looks like it's already been polished to show off its colors, while chalk turquoise is a very pale bluish white. If you touch chalk turquoise to your tongue, it sticks!!

Doesn't taste  
so good.....



## BERLIN ICHTHYOSAUR STATE PARK

Turquoise isn't the only gem hiding among the rocks in Nevada; there are plenty of fossils to be found, too! Millions of years ago, Nevada was an inland sea, filled with all kinds of creatures including ancient marine reptiles, like the ichthyosaur.

The ichthyosaur is Nevada's state fossil and my favorite Mesozoic marine reptile. My parents and I drove to Berlin Ichthyosaur State Park to see the fossilized remains of this ancient creature.

A mural is outside, and a small museum-like structure has been built around the ichthyosaur fossils to protect them and provide educational information to the public. I was in ichthyosaur heaven! If I were a dog, my tail would be wagging really hard.

If you look closely at an ichthyosaur, they look a bit like dolphins with long beaks and big eyes, although they're not related to dolphins at all.



I learned that the reason they had such big eyes was to help them see deep in the ocean where there would be less light. I also learned that ichthyosaurs only had teeth in the front part of their jaw because they only used their teeth for grasping their prey, not for chewing. Like many large marine animals today, they swallowed their food whole.

I really loved this place and didn't want to leave!

Do you know where the tongue twister:  
*She sells seashells by the seashore?*

It's actually about a girl named Mary Anning, who lived in England. She would collect seashells and sell them by the seashore. When Mary was only 10 to 12 years old, she discovered the first specimen of ichthyosaurus to be known by the scientific community of London.

## MOJAVE DESERT, NEVADA

Although ichthyosaurs are now extinct, there is an ancient freshwater creature that is still alive today. Triops, also known as "tadpole shrimp" are small creatures that hatch in desert puddles after spring and summer rains.



The name Triops refers to the fact that these animals have three eyes (they're so small that they're pretty hard to see). Two of the eyes are used to look for food and enemies, while their third eye is used to look for light.

Another interesting thing about these animals is that they breathe through their feet! Fish have gills on the sides of their heads, but Triops have gills on their legs.

Since water in the desert doesn't last very long before evaporating, Triops have a short life span of only 20-40 days. Before they die though, Triops will lay eggs that can survive in the harsh desert climate until the next rains come and the next puddles are formed.

I love learning about the desert, and was feeling a bit depressed about heading toward home, until I learned that we could make a final stop at the County Fair to celebrate another completed episode of *Wonders of the West*! Sometimes, life has a great way of working out just right!



"Til next time,

Amelia

