The "Motor Touring Guide to the Eastern Sierra and Death Valley," which chambers are hoping will be well-used this month.

Oct. is 'Motor Touring Month'

Chambers, public officials team to promote exploration of Inyo

News staff

While classic car enthusiasts converge on the Owens Valley this weekend for the area's annual Fall Colors Car Show, they and other visitors are being encouraged to check out the event's living namesake.

With the leaves starting to change colors and a crispness in the early morning air, this is a great

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time of the year to venture out and tour the back roads of Inyo County, according to the Inyo County Coalition of Chambers. And with this in mind, the coalition, working with the county Board of Supervisors, have designated October as Motor Touring Month in Inyo County.

The board, at the request of the coalition, adopted a special resolution at its meeting last week that sets October 2003 aside as Motor Touring Month and also extolls motor touring as an activity that is beneficial for visitors and the local economy.

According to the resolution, motor touring offers "unique personal encounter(s) with Inyo County's rich history and natural wonders," and raises awareness of the area's natural and commercial resources. It is the hope of the board and coalition that celebrating Motor Touring Month "will continue to promote responsible motor touring in Inyo County."

They invite both local residents and tourists to come out and explore the hidden, less-traveled roads of Inyo County. "It's a great opportunity to 'slow down' and experience the beautiful landscapes of the Eastern Sierra and Death Valley," a spokesperson said.

To get motorists headed in the right direction the chambers suggest that they pick up a copy of the SUV guide titled, "Motor Touring in the Eastern Sierra and Death Valley," available at all Inyo County chambers of commerce and visitor centers. This popular guide contains 18 touring routes from which motorists can choose to explore Inyo County.

For each of the tour routes, the guide includes an introduction describing the tour, along with a wonderful write-up of the natural history and history motorists will encounter along the way.

The guide, for example, describes the route from Big Pine to Furnace Creek (Route 18), which is especially unique. "This long, rarely-traveled, adventurous route is the 'Northwest Passage' into Death Valley National Park, crossing two mountain ranges and linking two great North American Deserts. Within the park it brings you to the colorful geology of Ubehebe Crater and the equally colorful history of Scotty's castle," the guide states.

Those with less time for their adventures can choose one of the shorter routes contained in the SUV guide, the coalition reported. Route 2 out of Lone Pine – Alabama Hills & Movie Flat – may be the ticket. "Bizarrely-shaped boulders and pinnacles of stone; behind them the snow-capped peaks of the High Sierra. No wonder the Alabama Hills have been the setting for hundreds of films – depicting deserts of the Old West, the Far East, and even Distant Galaxies!"

Each of the routes start from one of the small communities of the Eastern Sierra or Death Valley, so it's a good idea, the coalition suggests, for motorists to check their gas gauges and consider putting together a picnic lunch to enjoy along the way. Tour-goers are also urged to check the road conditions before venturing out.

In addition to the SUV guide, motorists should be sure to stop at the Scenic Byway interpretive sites along U.S. 395. An attractive brochure describing the sites is available at many locations.

The SUV guide was originally developed as a cooperative effort of the Bureau of Land Management, the California State Parks OHV Division, the Coalition of Chambers of Commerce of Inyo County, the County of Inyo, the Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. The Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association was responsible for its production.

Recently the County of Inyo was awarded a grant for $30,000 dollars from the California State Parks OHV Division to reprint the SUV Guide. Coalition representatives reported that this grant had broad community support, including from Senator Roy Ashburn, Inyo County's representative in Sacramento.

"Overall, the guide has proven to be extremely popular, with close to 70,000 guides having been distributed in the last year and a half," a spokesperson reported. "It simply highlights another great activity visitors to the area can do to enjoy and appreciate the beautiful natural landscapes of Inyo County."

The guide is also available online at: http://www.ca.blm.gov/bishop/