



# OWENYO • MANZANAR

THIS VAST, FLAT STRETCH OF THE OWENS VALLEY FLOOR HAS A STRANGE, SAD BEAUTY OF ITS OWN. DREAMS AND DESPAIR BLOW IN THE DUST FROM DESERTED FARMLANDS, ABANDONED RAILROADS AND THE REMAINS OF A WARTIME INTERNMENT CAMP. STILL, THE ENDURING MOUNTAINS AND EVER-CHANGING SKY LOOK DOWN ON TOUGH DESERT PLANTS AND ANIMALS THAT PREVAIL THROUGH ALL BUT THE HARDEST OF TIMES.

**What to expect:** This route starts out paved; first cracked and potholed, then intermittent, the pavement finally fades into graded dirt. Easy to travel and accessible year-round but the valley floor can be very hot in summer.

**Length:** 16 miles.

**Driving time:** about 1 hour, one way.

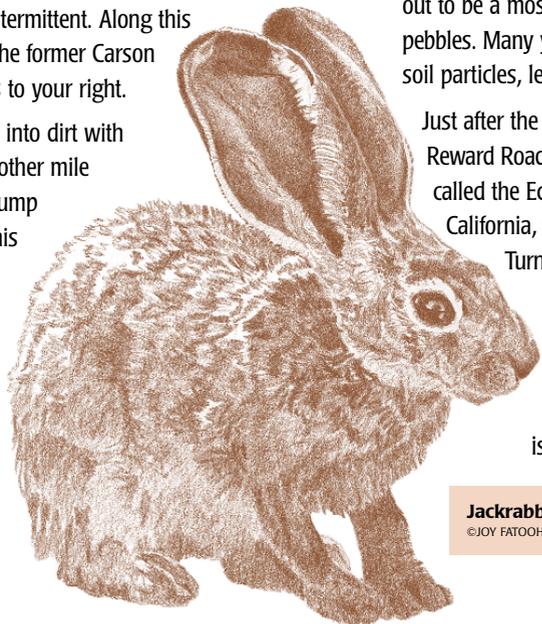
**Getting there:** From Lone Pine starting at the traffic light in the center of town, go north 0.6 miles to “Lone Pine Narrow Gauge Road” on your right (east, toward the Inyo Mountains) – but before turning check out the oak tree from the Sherwood Forest that stands west of the highway at this intersection.

**Along the route:** Proceed straight east. The road curves north and then east again at the old Lone Pine railroad station. This was the northern station of the standard-gauge Southern Pacific line, built to bring equipment for construction of the Los Angeles aqueduct. The movie *Bad Day at Black Rock* was filmed here. The station is now a private residence.

When the road forks about 4 miles into the route, stay on the pavement as it turns north and becomes intermittent. Along this stretch, the old railroad bed for the former Carson & Colorado narrow gauge bed is to your right.

By about 6 miles, the road turns into dirt with fragments of pavement. After another mile and a half you’ll reach a large clump of tamarisk trees on your left. This was Owenyo (from the words Owens and Inyo), a switching yard between the standard and narrow gauge lines, operating from about 1910 to 1960.

The original settlement here was a farming community established by the William Penn Colonial Association, known locally as “the Quaker colony.”



**Jackrabbit**  
©JOY FATOOH

As you continue you can see the mounded banks of a long-dry canal winding along near the road. The canal brought water from the Owens River to irrigate part of the 13,000-acre colony, abandoned when the soils proved unsuitable for farming.



**White-tailed antelope squirrel**  
©JOY FATOOH

The native plant community here is dominated by shrubs well-adapted to the hot, dry, alkaline conditions. Their gray-green color is the result of hairy or waxy leaf surfaces that give protection from intense sunlight. Some drop their leaves completely at the height of summer.

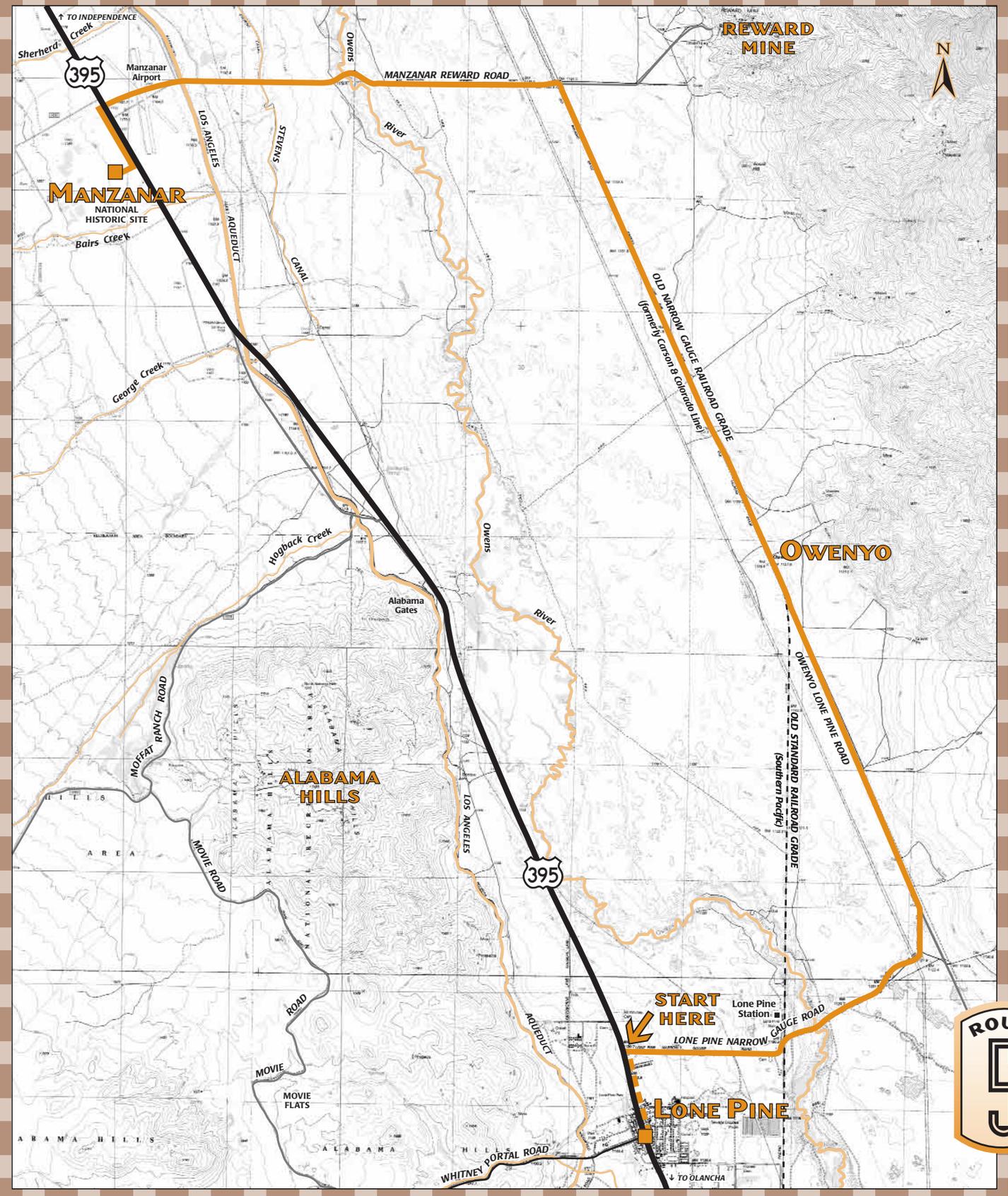
Desert animals also have effective ways of surviving. Most are active only at night, but you may see two that can withstand hot days: jackrabbits, whose huge ears act as radiators to cool their blood, and white-tailed antelope squirrels holding their tails over their backs like a reflective parasol.

Along parts of this route the bare ground, when you look closely, turns out to be a mosaic-like surface of closely-spaced rock fragments and pebbles. Many years of wind and water erosion have removed the finer soil particles, leaving behind what’s known as “desert pavement.”

Just after the 12-mile point the Owenyo Road meets the Manzanar Reward Road. Look east to see traces of the Reward Mine. Originally called the Eclipse, this was one of the richest gold mines in California, with an 8-stamp mill operating from 1880 to 1914.

Turn left here and head straight back toward U.S. 395.

Just before reaching the highway you’ll cross an old airstrip that was part of the Manzanar War Relocation Center, where some 10,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were confined during World War II. The name is Spanish for apple orchard; an important fruit growing industry had been centered here in the early 1900s. Turn left when you reach the highway to visit Manzanar National Historic Site and learn more about its history.



1 0 1 2 3 Miles  
SCALE