
BONNEVILLE

Douglas Tolman

Traveling west on Interstate 80 (speed limit 80mph) out of Salt Lake City I first notice the Oquirrh Mountains to my left, a familiar elongated range which stretches north to south, signaling the eastern edge of the Basin & Range Physiographic Province. To continue west, I could drive past similar ranges all the way to California. The parallel uplifts are created by the tectonic extension pulling my home on the Wasatch Fault away from the Sierra Nevada Uplift at a rate of millimeters-per-millenia. Formerly islands of prehistoric Lake Bonneville, the ranges are now islands of the sky separated by miles of sagebrush, ephedra, phalaris, cheatgrass, coyotes, rattlesnakes, antelope, jackrabbits, hot springs, cold springs, caves, mines, evaporation ponds, salty playa, incineration facilities, monumental earthworks, and military testing ranges.

My drive west continues, the smokestack of Kennecott Smelter rises sharply into the sky at the northern terminus of the Oquirrh range; the mountains spilling into the Great Salt Lake, a hyper-saline remnant of Lake Bonneville. The freeway cuts through the lake's southern marshes, distant piles of salt moving closer. Looking south, I see the extensive grid of Tooele Army Depot's weapon storage facility. I think back to my formative years in Tooele, where weekly disaster alert tests would wake us up in preparation for possible accidents or attacks at the depot. To the north, I notice the lake becoming shallow and segmented into evaporation basins for extraction of sodium, potassium, and magnesium. Across the endless evaporation basins, a hazy smokestack releases chlorine into the airshed as a byproduct of magnesium extraction. Another couple of ranges pass by, as do hazardous waste incineration facilities, nuclear waste storage facilities, and an OHV recreation site. Hills and shrubs slowly give way to vast salt flats on both sides. As far as I can see to the south is Dugway Proving Ground, and

to the north Hill Air Force Base Training Range; collectively known as the Utah Test & Training Range. I'm reminded of conspiracy theories posing Dugway as "Area 52", and a 1960's news story where 6,400 sheep in neighboring Skull Valley were found dead from a chemical weapon test on the range. The interstate slices a straight line through the adjacent testing ranges, soon passing a colossal, colorful "tree" which punctuates the flat, monochrome playa. Wendover's Casino complex begins to show itself in the distance.

Seconds before the Nevada border, I exit the interstate to find the Wendover Air Force Base - a historic World War II military base which is used today as a civil airport. To the south I see hangars, including the Manhattan Project's Enola Gay hangar. To the north are hundreds of dilapidated barracks - some of which have fallen down, some hold the base's antique relics, and a few are occupied by the Center for Land Use Interpretation, a quasi-museum on the Great Basin's human history. I take some time to enter any with an open door. Back in the car, I coast out on the dusty road with a new understanding of the structures around me. Across the Nevada border are hundreds of Utah tourists entertaining their vices in the false-oasis. A stop at the grocery store for rations reveals the townspeople - a mix of modern OHV cowboys and latinx casino employees. The nice man at the deli offers me free potato wedges, and I'm back on the road for a sunset swim in the real oasis - a deep geothermal spring within the training range boundary south of town. I dig up some dirt from the range to include in a sculpture back home. The sun sets as I fly home at 80mph, nearly blinded by the full moon's reflection on the playa.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of fluid, connected strokes that form a name, possibly "R. Z.". The signature is positioned to the right of the main text block.