



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT RIDGECREST FIELD OFFICE



JOSIE BISHOP RADIUM QUEEN OF THE MOJAVE

BACKGROUND: Outside the Bureau of Land Management's Jawbone Station along Jawbone Canyon Road stands a monument dedicated to a pioneering woman of the west. The Monument was dedicated on October 11, 1998 by E Clampus Vitus in honor of Josie Bishop. Josie Bishop was one of thousands of prospectors searching the mountains, rivers and deserts for riches in the form of minerals. Josie eventually found her riches in the form of uranium in the Jawbone Canyon area just west of Highway 14.

GETTING THERE: From the monument erected in her honor, travel west on Jawbone Canyon Road for approximately 2 miles to a graded dirt road and head north on this road for another four miles to the intersection with BLM route SC175. Turn onto SC175 and travel northwest for approximately 2 miles to a few large tamarisk trees. At the base of these trees are the remains of the foundations of her cabins and nearby are the gravesites of Josie and her son, Charley.

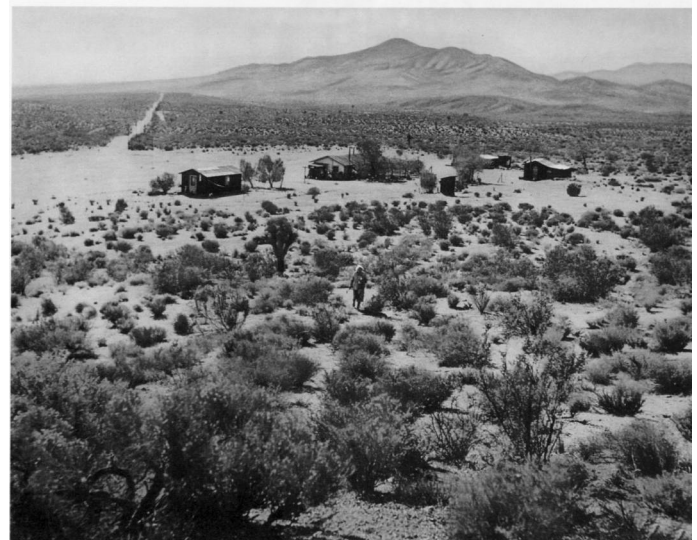
HISTORY: Born June 18, 1875 in Silver City, New Mexico, Josephine Stevens Whitehill was the fifth of ten children born to Sheriff Harvey Whitehill and his wife Harriet Stevens. Soon after graduation from Normal school in 1884, she met Herbert Bishop. They married on March 4, 1896, and she bore him seven children. Over the years they moved to Bisbee, AZ, back to Silver City, NM, then to San Francisco and Kennett in California. Josie's father died, deeding her 80 acres of his ranch near Silver City. They returned to live on the ranch, but in 1918 headed to southern California's oil and mining discoveries. Shortly thereafter, Herbert and Josie separated. He went to Colorado to homestead with two of their sons and Josie remained in southern California.

John Christie, an old friend from Silver City, told Josie of riches to be found north of Mojave. In 1925 she and mining partner, 27-year-old Henry "Scotty" Cook, headed to the desert to work Christie's claims. The site, near Red Rock Canyon, consisted of three tent-cabins. Christie died in 1928 and Josie acquired his claims. During the years, Josie wrote items for the Cantil newspaper and served on juries in Bakersfield while Scotty took odd jobs to survive. They also dug a well and sold water to the locals. When the tent camp burned in 1932, Josie and Scotty moved five miles away to the previously built wooden cabins, near the present day gravesite.

For 12 years they worked the claims. Josie developed a particular interest in one claim and was puzzled as to why when she entered the shaft her eyes would burn. Extracting some ore samples in 1936, she showed them to a San Diego mineralogist who promised to examine them and send her a report. More than a year later he reported to her that the rocks contained radium, a processed gram of which was worth \$72,000, and that she was probably the world's richest woman. Josie became famous overnight. Articles on her rich discovery appeared in Time, and then Life magazines. She was offered large sums to sell her claim, but kept holding out for a better offer. She was named in Who's Who Among Noted Women of America and appeared as a celebrity at the 1939 World 's Fair on Treasure Island. Treated to a tour to Chicago, New York and Washington, DC, she appeared on Robert Ripley's Believe It Or Not radio show on October 25, 1940. While in New York she was the featured guest at a tea hosted by Mrs. Vincent Astor and was introduced to the daughter of Pierre and Marie Curie, the discoverers of radium.



Josie on Front Porch of Main Cabin



Josie in Desert near Mining Camp

In 1941, with the declaration of war, mining of non-strategic minerals came to a virtual standstill and no development was done until February 1945 when three officers of the Canadian Radium and Uranium Corporation visited the mine and confirmed again the presence of radium. In October of that year she entered a one-year lease agreement providing her a payment of \$250 a month, and a share of the profits till she received a minimum of a million dollars. She was seventy years old and would soon be the world's richest woman. In 1946 she appeared as featured speaker at the annual meeting of the Colorado Mining Assn. in Denver, and in 1947 was featured at the American Mining Congress convention in El Paso, TX.

In January 1948 tuberculosis claimed the life of her son Charley and he is buried on the claim. Later Josie would be buried next to him. Easter morning in 1949 Josie and her remaining children gathered and attended the sunrise services in nearby Red Rock Canyon and later ate breakfast at Josie's cabin. In January 1951 scientists from the Naval Ordnance Testing Station at Inyokern again found strong evidence of radium at several locations. She received a letter stating that Chicago-based geologists would soon arrive and do further test drillings. She would, indeed, be the world's richest woman. In June she celebrated her 76th birthday at a gala party at a son's house in Trona.



Josie's Plaque

July 11, 1951 James McCarthy was driving Josie to a meeting in Mojave. They passed Jawbone Road in a howling windstorm. Not wanting her hair mussed for the meeting, she reached to roll up the window. Instead she

grasped the door latch. The door swung backward and threw her to the pavement. Taken to a Bakersfield hospital, she died that night with all her remaining children at her side. The claim reverted to Josie's children. Her son Jack, with help from other children, worked hard to develop the claims, but nothing ensued. Scotty remained on the claim until ill health forced him to return to Los Angeles to live with his daughter. Soon after son Jack died in 1973, arsonists burned everything. When Josie's last child, Gene, passed away, the claims passed to her husband and then to their son, Jim. After recognition by the State as a California Point of Historical Interest and erection of the monument in front of Jawbone Station, it was decided by the family to discontinue maintaining the claims. The claims were released to the Federal Government. The site was recently adopted as a Bonanza Trail site, by the Friends of Jawbone organization, which sees to its upkeep.

All the fabulous riches are still right where they always were!!



Tehachapi Heritage League at Josie's Monument

L to R: Bill Bishop, Del Troy, Mryt Railey, Carol Husted
Kneeling: Evelyn Eccleston, & John Sammis

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The BLM encourages all recreationists and travelers exploring public lands, not only within southern California but throughout the west, to use a propylene glycol based antifreeze/coolant in their touring and recreation vehicles. Proven safer, it will have minimal impacts on both the wildlife and the environment should a leak occur. Please help BLM protect our desert wildlife ... and their fragile desert environment!

Help BLM preserve California's fragile deserts. Please park your vehicle or set up camp in previously disturbed sites.

To protect this special place for your next visit and for future generations be sure to practice these *Leave No Trace* principles:

- ✓ Plan Ahead and Prepare
- ✓ Camp and Travel on Durable surfaces
- ✓ Pack It In, Pack It Out
- ✓ Properly dispose of What You Can't Pack Out
- ✓ Leave What You Find

For information on other recreation opportunities in the area contact:

Bureau of Land Management
Ridgecrest Field Office
300 S. Richmond Road
Ridgecrest, CA 93555
(760) 384-5400

Or visit our Outdoor Recreation website at:
<http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/ridgecrest/recreation.html>

IN MEMORIUM



JOSEPHINE STEPHENS BISHOP

"Josie" was born on June 18, 1875 in Silver City, New Mexico to Harvey and Harriet Whitehill. At 19 years old, she taught school in Pinos Altos, New Mexico. She married Herbert Hall Bishop on March 4, 1896, bearing him seven children. The Bishops moved around the country for several years, finally separating in 1920. While living in Long Beach, Josie began her short acting career and mined this area for gold and silver. After acquiring numerous claims, Josie finally hit pay dirt in 1937 by discovering the richest Radium deposit known at the time. The media gave her the name, "Radium Queen of the Desert" and Josie's fame spread worldwide. As a representative of Kern County and the mining industry, she toured the nation, appearing on various radio shows and in many publications. The only wealth she ever got from her big strike was fifty dollars. Josie Bishop died in an auto accident on July 12, 1951. She is buried at her claim, approximately five miles north of this spot.

California Point of Historical Interest KER-010

Dedicated October 11, 1998 by the Ancient and
Honorable Order of E Clampus Vitus, Peter Lebeck
Chapter 1866, Billy Holcomb Chapter 1069, Slim
Princess Chapter 395