

# EICHBAUM TOLL ROAD HISTORIC CONTEXT REPORT

## Towne Pass Curve Correction Project

Inyo County, California

09-INY 190, PM 69.2/69.8

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## Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. RESEARCH METHODS .....	1
3. DESCRIPTION OF RESOURCE.....	1
4. HISTORIC CONTEXT .....	2
4.1 Tourism and Recreation.....	2
4.2 Transportation.....	6
4.2.1 Toll Roads.....	6
4.2.2 Development of Roads in the Death Valley Region.....	7
4.3 History of the Eichbaum Toll Road.....	11
4.4 Establishment of Death Valley National Monument and Sale of the Eichbaum Toll Road to the State Division of Highways.....	26
5. NATIONAL REGISTER SIGNIFICANCE.....	34
6. PREPARERS' QUALIFICATIONS .....	36
7. REFERENCES .....	37

Image from cover: "Sign at the Western Entrance to the Eichbaum Toll Road," 1927, Photo No. MEN-71b, Accessed via the Virtual Transportation Museum of the Eastern California Museum

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

JRP Historical Consulting, LLC (JRP), has prepared this report under subcontract to Parsons Transportation Group Inc. (Parsons) for the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 9 (Contract No. 06A2138, EA 09-35320) as part of the Towne Pass Curve Correction Project (Project ID: 09-1200-0007). JRP has prepared the below historic context for the Eichbaum Toll Road (P-14-005199) to be suitable for a typical National Register Nomination that meets the National Park Service guidelines and requirements for nomination, as per the contract task order. The historic context includes discussion of the themes of mining, tourism, and transportation in the region, and a history of the Eichbaum Toll Road's planning, construction, and use.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODS**

At the outset of this study, Caltrans provided JRP with a broad range of reference material, including current project information, previous documentation, and primary and secondary research materials that cultural resources staff has collected thus far. This documentation formed the basis of source material that JRP used to prepare this report, which, to a great degree, is a synthesis of this rich body of existing knowledge. To supplement this information, JRP staff conducted research for this project at the Inyo County Courthouse and Eastern California Museum, both in Independence, seat of Inyo County; and in Division of Highways, Department of Public Works, and Caltrans records on file at the Caltrans Transportation Library and California State Archives in Sacramento. In addition, research included accessing documents such as historic maps and newspaper articles from on-line sources, and utilizing JRP's extensive in-house library and archives. This additional research yielded new information about the history of the Eichbaum Toll Road, as well as numerous historic photographs, all of which are included in this report.

## **3. DESCRIPTION OF RESOURCE**

The general alignment of the Eichbaum Toll Road is from Darwin Wash, east of the town of Darwin, over the Argus Range via Darwin Canyon, across the Panamint Valley, over the Panamint Range via Towne Pass, and into Death Valley, terminating at the Stovepipe Wells Resort. The exact beginning point is not clear, as research did not locate the original survey map. Much of the route has been paved, widened, and improved to current highway standards to serve as State Route 190. A few sections of the original toll road were bypassed when the state built the highway. These are a long section from Darwin Wash to Panamint Springs, and short segments in the vicinity of Towne Pass. The Darwin Canyon section is currently used by four-wheel-drive vehicles, and therefore may be subject to occasional grading or other minimal maintenance. No field survey was conducted as part of this project, so the road width and exact nature of the road surface for the bypassed sections are not known, but they likely are similar to the original construction, being a natural surface roadway from 15-20 feet wide. The original road was 35.5 miles long.

## 4. HISTORIC CONTEXT

H.W. Eichbaum built the Eichbaum Toll Road in 1925-26 from just outside the town of Darwin, California, to Stovepipe Wells in Death Valley, within the current boundaries of the Death Valley National Park. Up until this time, commercial and settlement activity in this remote and sparsely populated desert area had principally revolved around mining. In the midst of the auto-tourism trend of the 1920s, Eichbaum built his toll road primarily for use by motorists to visit his Stovepipe Wells Resort, constructed at the same time. The below section provides a historic context for the Death Valley region with special attention to those contexts relevant to the Eichbaum Toll Road, and also provides a history of the toll road's planning, construction, use, and eventual acquisition by the State Division of Highways and conversion into a state highway. This historic context is intended to facilitate an assessment of the toll road's historic significance using the National Register Criteria.

### 4.1 Tourism and Recreation

Virtually no tourism existed in the Death Valley region until the 1920s and the rise of automobile ownership and auto-tourism. The dry, hot, and remote area was largely the realm of hardy miners. Tourists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tended to prefer ocean- or lake-side hotels, hot springs resorts, or cabins in the Sierra Nevada forests. Deserts, generally at this time, did not register in the minds of people as vacation destinations, and, certainly, the name "Death Valley" did not have immediate appeal for the typical tourist. A road survey and mapping crew of the Automobile Club of Southern California visiting Death Valley in 1921 put the public perception of Death Valley succinctly, calling it the "terror of the west" and "the most maligned natural attraction America has to offer."<sup>1</sup> Another article written of the experience of motorists in 1922 called it "hell on earth" and a trip made only by "daredevils."<sup>2</sup>

To raise interest in Death Valley, the Automobile Club of Southern California and others in the tourism trade employed a vocabulary not previously used to describe destinations. Promoters defined the desert landscape in unique terms in an effort to entice the public to see something they had never seen before. Words like "weird and enchanting" and "mysterious" were common in articles about Death Valley. Interestingly, the perils of the valley and stories of past travelers who died in the valley were also recounted to stir morbid curiosities, or to provide a comparison for the increasingly safe conditions brought about by better mapping and signage produced by the auto clubs. For scenic value, writers and promoters often compared Death Valley to Grand Canyon and Yellowstone National Parks. These articles, however, and many others like it printed in

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<sup>1</sup> "Boost Death Valley as Playground for Motorists," *Owens Valley Herald*, 30 March 1921.

<sup>2</sup> "Intrepid Motorists Brave Death Valley," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 December 1922; "Boost Death Valley as Playground for Motorists," *Owens Valley Herald*, 30 March 1921; "Intrepid Motorists Brave Death Valley," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 December 1922; Linda W. Greene, "Historic Resource Study: A History of Mining in Death Valley National Monument," Prepared for the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, March 1981, 884, 885.

newspapers and magazines around this time, served to change public perception, create intrigue, and raise the public's appreciation of deserts by calling to attention the unique and beautiful aspects of the desert, effectively marketing deserts as tourist destinations.<sup>3</sup>

The federal government furthered the appeal of places like Death Valley by encouraging and accommodating recreational activities on public lands. Agencies such as the National Park Service (NPS) and US Forest Service (USFS) began promoting tourism on the public lands in the 1910s and building hotels, campgrounds, trails, bathrooms, and other facilities for the public enjoyment. Included in these lands were desert locales such as the Natural Bridges National Monument (Utah-est. 1908), Grand Canyon National Park (Arizona-est. 1916), Zion National Park (Utah-est. 1919), Bryce Canyon National Park (Utah-est. 1924), and Chiricahua National Monument (Arizona est. 1924). At the same time, rustic vacation accommodations such as tents and rudimentary cabins had become more acceptable to the general public, and "roughing it" had become fashionable for even the wealthy. The automobile played a large role in this travel trend, not only allowing people to reach remote destinations, but providing motorists the means to carry camping supplies with them on the road. These touring motorists often pitched tents wherever they found themselves after a day of driving, and the term "auto-camping" entered the American lexicon.<sup>4</sup>

As Death Valley started to come into the public's consciousness as a tourist destination, automobile ownership in the US skyrocketed. In the decade from 1920 to 1930, the number of registered automobiles went from approximately 8 million to 23 million, and Americans were doing more than just driving to work. So long confined by the restrictions of distance and locale of horse and train travel, excited drivers enthusiastically embraced the freedom, convenience, and limitless range of the automobile. Auto-tourism during the 1920s became a *de rigueur* way to spend leisure time. Places not previously thought of as travel destinations were now open for consideration; virtually anywhere was within reach. Death Valley was tailor-made to fit this trend, as it was the type of place that was best experienced with an automobile. Prior to the 1920s, tourists would travel to a single destination such as an ocean-side hotel—usually by train—and remain at that hotel for the duration of their vacation. And while the Tidewater & Tonopah Railroad had reached Death Valley in 1908, Death Valley had a variety of attractions and sights located across long distances that could only be seen using an automobile.<sup>5</sup>

The first tourist resort in Death Valley was H.W. Eichbaum's Stovepipe Wells Resort completed in 1926, and discussed further below (see Section 4.3). Inspired by Eichbaum's successful resort

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<sup>3</sup> "Flyers to Map Death Valley," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 February 1921; "Boost Death Valley as Playground for Motorists;" "Safe as a Mother's Lap," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 July 1922; "Death Valley Stingless," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 May 1921.

<sup>4</sup> US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "Antiquities Act, 1906-2006—Monuments List," Accessed March 21, 2018 at <https://www.nps.gov/archeology/sites/antiquities/MonumentsList.htm>; US Forest Service, Mono National Forest, Recreation Map. 1917; Allan D. Wallis, *Wheel Estate*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) 39-45; James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 185.

<sup>5</sup> Allan D. Wallis, *Wheel Estate* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 39-45; D.E. Christensen, "The Auto in America's Landscape and Way of Life," *Geography* 51, no. 4 (November 1966): 339; James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 185.

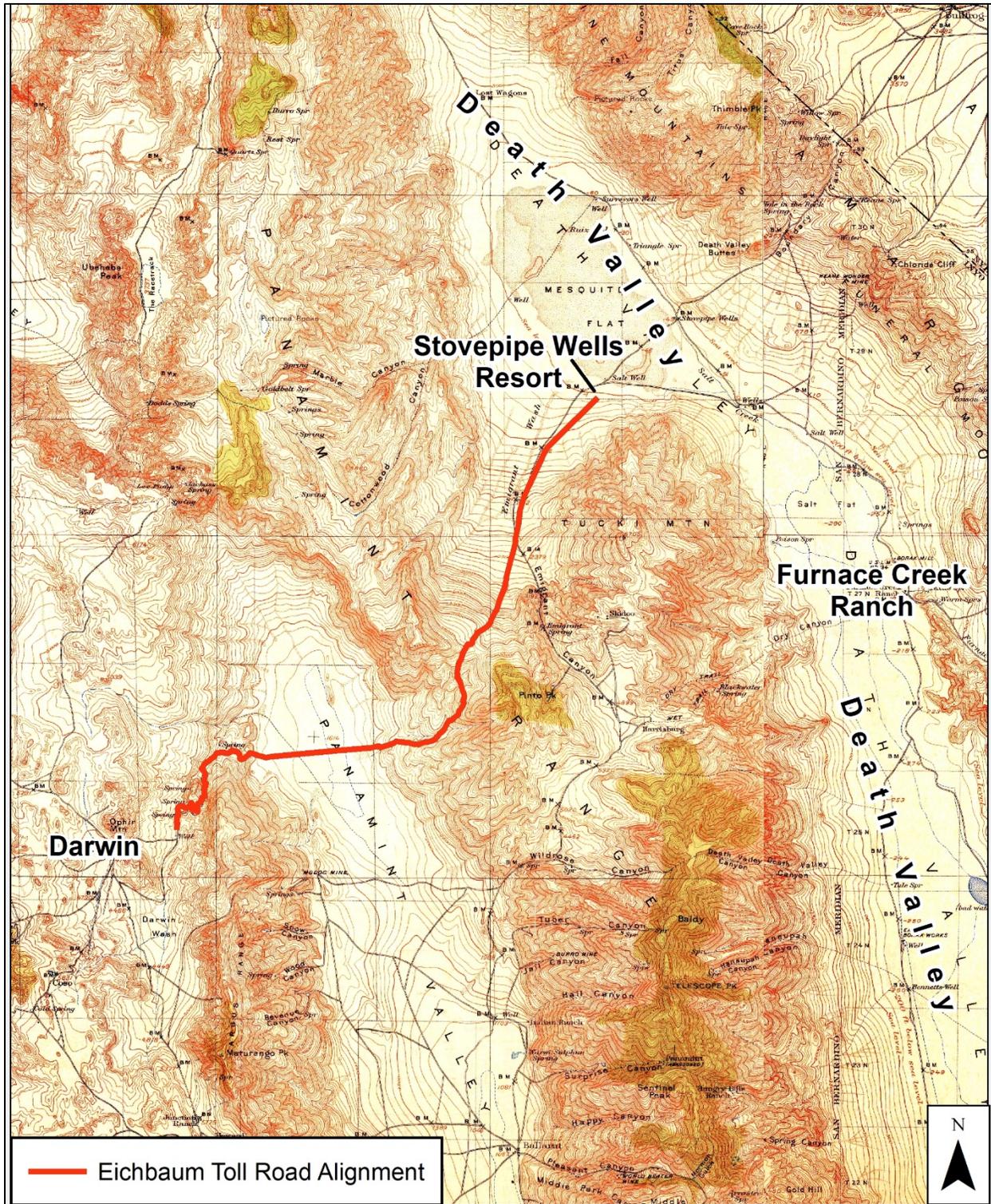
venture, and in light of the waning borax mining in Death Valley, the Pacific Coast Borax Company built the second area resort at their Furnace Creek Ranch (**Plate 1**). The company completed the Furnace Creek Inn in 1927 in an elegant Spanish architectural style that contrasted sharply with Eichbaum's rustic complex of tent cabins at Stovepipe Wells. Tourists were encouraged to take the company's Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad and the Death Valley Railroad spur line to the inn. The Furnace Creek Inn offered tourists open motor coach tours of the valley and deluxe accommodations. The hotel experienced immediate success and constructed multi-room additions each of the first four years it was in business. While the hotel flourished, the railroad transportation aspect of the endeavor failed and the railroad stopped running in 1930. Guests visiting the inn largely traveled via automobile, and most of these took the Eichbaum Toll Road (see Section 4.3).<sup>6</sup>

The combination of the construction of the Eichbaum Toll Road, Eichbaum's Stovepipe Wells resort, the Furnace Creek Inn, and publicity in newspapers and magazines helped to establish Death Valley as a tourist destination by 1930. During this period, the Death Valley tourist season was regarded as only the winter months and data was kept accordingly. In the winter of 1928-29, more than 10,000 tourists visited the valley, an increase from virtually none prior to construction of the toll road. Tourist visitation steadily increased to 21,500 during the winter of 1933-34--the first full winter tourist season following the establishment of Death Valley National Monument--and about 45,000 in the winter of 1934-35.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Linda W. Greene, "Historic Resource Study: A History of Mining in Death Valley National Monument," Volume 1 of 2, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, March 1981, 884, 918-927.

<sup>7</sup> Avery, "Stove Pipe Wells Hotel," 8.6; S. W. Lowden, "Famous Death Valley Toll Road Purchased, Making It a Free Highway," *California Highways and Public Works* (January 1935); S.W. Lowden, "State Completes Extensive Surfacing Project on Death Valley Highways," *California Highways and Public Works*, 13, No. 2 (February 1936), 16, 27.



**Plate 1.** USGS base maps ca. 1913 shows the Eichbaum Toll Road, the Stovepipe Wells Resort, and the Furnace Creek Ranch, location of the Furnace Creek Inn.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> USGS, *Ballarat Quadrangle*, 60-minute, 1:250,000 (Washington: USGS 1913); USGS, *Furnace Creek Quadrangle*, 60-minute, 1:250,000 (Washington: USGS 1910).

## **4.2 Transportation**

### **4.2.1 Toll Roads**

Toll roads have a long history in California, dating to the founding of the state in 1850. In these nascent years, neither the State of California nor the individual counties had the administrative and financial capacity to construct or maintain roads, so toll roads came to be out of necessity. Toll roads owned by individuals or companies would finance, build, and maintain roads with the objective of making a profit by directly charging travelers for use. Lawmakers enabled the creation of toll roads when drafting the first general laws of incorporation for California in 1850, and included a chapter on granting toll road company franchises. Certain features of the 1850 legislative act inadvertently hindered toll road development, and only two companies were organized by 1853. The State Legislature amended the law in 1853, and the new act allowed toll road companies greater power to determine routes, facilitated company formation by reducing the required subscription of capital stock from \$2,000 to \$300 per mile, and protected toll road investors by restricting counties from setting toll rates that yielded profits less than 20 percent. The 1853 amendments unleashed entrepreneurial action as more than 222 companies filed Articles of Incorporation in subsequent years, although not all applications were successful. The other main method of toll road company formation during this period was by special legislative act, generally at the request of a company wanting to be exempt from the restrictions of the 1853 law. By 1870, the state had granted 102 toll road franchises by individual special legislative acts.<sup>9</sup>

Toll roads continued to be a common method of road construction in the state through the end of the nineteenth century. Throughout this time, the State Legislature remained active with regard to toll roads to facilitate and encourage their construction, and methods for the establishment of new roads continued to evolve. Growing antipathy to chartering toll roads by special legislative act led to its prohibition in 1870. Another amendment to the law passed at the same time and meant to stimulate toll road construction reduced the required number of incorporators to three and raised the limit for a franchise from 10 years to 50 years. In addition to forming a toll road company by state incorporation, counties also had the power to grant franchises without involvement of the state government, and this became a common method. In some cases, toll roads came into existence by a combined county/private process whereby a county would issue bonds for road construction and begin work, but then, as public funds ran out, authorized the remainder of the road to be completed privately in exchange for the assignment of a toll franchise. In other instances, mining companies, lumber companies, stage lines, and freight companies would form subsidiary toll road companies, or be substantial investors in such companies as they had a direct interest in having passable roads. In Inyo County, eight toll road companies filed Articles of Incorporation between 1850 and 1902.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel B. Klein and Chi Yen, "The Private Provision of Frontier Infrastructure: Toll Roads in California, 1850-1902," UC Berkeley: University of California Transportation Center, 1994: 1-10.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth N. Owens, "Historical Trails and Road in California: A Cultural Resources Planning Study," Volume 1: Historical Context and Typology, Prepared for the California Department of Transportation, March 1990: 24-26;

Because toll roads operated as businesses, entrepreneurs built them where entrepreneurs felt sufficient traffic existed to make money and owners' principal concern was turning a profit. The profit motive led to many problems with toll roads and, ultimately, contributed to their eventual demise. When toll road operators stopped earning satisfactory profit, they would go out of business, leaving an abandoned, unmaintained road that would deteriorate. Such an occurrence would throw transportation into disarray and counties would try to grant the toll road to another company, or attempt to take over the road itself. The toll road method also failed because it did not result in a cohesive, comprehensive, interconnected system, but was a fragmentary patchwork of road segments built on an *ad hoc* basis.<sup>11</sup>

This situation lasted into the early twentieth century when the state and counties began to recognize the inherent problems with profit-based private toll roads, and the need for a comprehensive, well-maintained road system. By this time, both the state and counties had developed departments with administrative and financing processes to undertake road construction and funding. The state established the Bureau of Highways in 1895, and counties developed better equipped and funded road departments. Toll roads by this time had lost favor with general public too, as travelers were tired of poorly maintained roads and came to believe that roads should be free. This combination of factors led to very few new toll road franchises granted after 1900, and the state or counties gradually taking over ownership and maintenance of all others. By the 1920s very few toll roads existed in California, and the California Division of Highways had officially adopted a policy to discourage construction of new private toll roads and to rid the state of existing toll roads.<sup>12</sup>

#### **4.2.2 Development of Roads in the Death Valley Region**

Early roads in this part of Inyo County and the Death Valley region were built as a result of the mining activity in the area. These roads, used by desert-wise miners, had minimal engineering and generally took the form of two wheel tracks worn into the ground by use with occasional hillside cuts. The roads existed on routes to the larger mines and associated settlements, places sufficient in size to require wagon traffic for delivery of equipment and supplies, and to carry extracted materials out of the area. Trails utilized by horses, mules, and people on foot provided access to the smaller mines. By the 1870s, roads existed to mines in the Darwin area, the Panamint Mine, through Wild Rose Canyon to the Skidoo and Star of the West mines, and north/south through Death Valley. The mining of borax in southern Death Valley spurred the establishment of more roads used by the famous 20-mule teams. The discovery of rich deposits around 1900 in the Goldfield and Rhyolite districts of Nevada, adjacent to the northeast of Death Valley, inspired new

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Thomas Frederick Howard, *Sierra Crossing: First Roads to California*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 155; Klein and Yin, "The Private Provision of Frontier Infrastructure," 1-10; State of California. Department of Transportation. "A Historical Context and Methodology for Evaluating Trails, Roads, and Highways in California." 2016, 60-63.

<sup>11</sup> Owens, "Historical Trails and Road in California," 24-26; Howard, *Sierra Crossing: First Roads to California*, 155; Klein and Yin, "The Private Provision of Frontier Infrastructure," 1-7.

<sup>12</sup> B.B. Meek, "Highway Policies in California," *California Highways and Public Works* 5, no. 4 (April 1928): 18-19; "Road Builders Meet in Detroit," *California Highways and Public Works*, 9, no. 6 (June 1931) 31; Klein and Yin, "The Private Provision of Frontier Infrastructure," 10-11.

waves of prospectors into adjacent Inyo County and Death Valley and led to the establishment of a few substantial mines and more roads to carry equipment and supplies to the mines, and extracted materials out of the area. Many of the roads in Death Valley linked to Goldfield or Rhyolite as these were the nearest commercial centers of the time and the location of a railroad. In the Panamint Valley, the nearest commercial centers were to the west at Keeler, or to the south at places such as Mojave, Barstow, and Baker, all of which had railroad connections.<sup>13</sup>

Three railroads influenced the routing of early roadways. The Carson and Colorado Railroad Company extended its line south into the Owens Valley in 1883, terminating at Keeler on the east shore of Owens Lake to provide service to the nearby Cerro Gordo mine. Roads connected the Keeler station to the nearby mines at Darwin and the Panamint Mine. In 1900, Southern Pacific Railroad bought the Carson and Colorado Railroad, and in 1910 Southern Pacific built a line north from Mojave through the Owens Valley to connect with the former Carson and Colorado line near Keeler.<sup>14</sup> Mining interests built the Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad to facilitate the transportation of mined materials from Death Valley and the Goldfield, Nevada, mining district. Construction started on the Tonopah & Tidewater in 1905 in Ludlow, California, in the Mojave Desert well south of Death Valley on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. From Ludlow the Tonopah & Tidewater went north through Crucero, California where it made a connection with the Union Pacific Railroad, and continued northward along the Amargosa River Valley to Death Valley Junction, where it had a station. A short spur line was built west from Death Valley Junction to serve borax mines and a borax refinery was built at Death Valley Junction. The Tonopah & Tidewater then continued north, reaching its terminus at Goldfield in 1908 where it made a connection with the Tonopah & Las Vegas Railroad. Construction of the Tonopah & Tidewater and establishment of Death Valley Junction contributed to the popularity of the motor vehicle road over the Amargosa Range via Shoshone and Death Valley Junction to Furnace Creek, later becoming one of the well-traveled routes into Death Valley. Similarly, the road from Keeler to Darwin became the principal connector road with the west end of the Eichbaum Toll Road. Places such as Keeler and Death Valley Junction later functioned as waystations for auto-tourist traveling to Death Valley.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> George M. Wheeler, *Part of Eastern California*, Atlas Sheet No. 65D in *Topographical Atlas Projected to Illustrate United States Geographical Surveys West of the 100<sup>th</sup> Meridian of Longitude Expeditions of 1876 and 1877* (Washington: GPO, 1876); USGS, *Lida Quadrangle*, 60-minute, 1:250,000 (Washington: USGS 1913); USGS, *Ballarat Quadrangle*, 60-minute, 1:250,000 (Washington: USGS 1913); USGS, *Furnace Creek Quadrangle*, 60-minute, 1:250,000 (Washington: USGS 1910); USGS, *Searles Lake Quadrangle*, 60-minute, 1:250,000 (Washington: USGS 1915); Edward E. Eitel, *County Atlas of California and Nevada*, [San Francisco: n.p.], 1895; Harlan D. Unrau, "A History of the Lands Added to Death Valley National Monument by the California Desert Protection Act of 1994," Prepared by the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, September 1997, 78; Greene, "Historic Resource Study: A History of Mining in Death Valley National Monument Volume 1 of 2, 63, 441-443, 788, 790, 791.

<sup>14</sup> Unrau, "A History of the Lands Added to Death Valley National Monument by the California Desert Protection Act of 1994," 55.

<sup>15</sup> Unrau, "A History of the Lands Added to Death Valley National Monument by the California Desert Protection Act of 1994," 56; Greene, "Historic Resource Study: A History of Mining in Death Valley National Monument Volume 1 of 2," 979-982.

Topography has played a large role in the location of early roads in the Death Valley region as well. The area generally consists of a series of north/south mountain ranges and valleys. The two largest being Death Valley and Panamint Valley, separated by the Panamint Range. Both Death Valley and Panamint Valley also have high mountains defining their northern boundaries, whereas the mountains tapered off at the south ends. These conditions contributed to many of the early roads running north/south through the valleys with ingress/egress being at the south ends, which were routes with less grade and much easier for loaded freight wagons than going over mountains. These routes connected with mining towns further south in the Mojave Desert such as Johannesburg, Daggett, and Barnswell.<sup>16</sup>

While a network of roads had been built in the Death Valley region to provide access to the mines by 1920, these were crude paths built for wagons and rugged miners, and unfit for automobiles and general public use. Certainly some drivers had taken automobiles through this country in the 1910s and early 1920s, but these were adventurers with a dare-devil spirit, not typical tourists. A charting crew for the Automobile Club of Southern California visited Death Valley in 1921 to examine its roadways. An article on the journey reported that two roads into the south end of Death Valley, one via Barstow, and the other via Mojave, “not at all bad,” but indicated that all roads into the north end of the valley were much worse. The tepid “not at all bad” assessment was far from an enthusiastic endorsement of the roads, and the article generally discouraged tourist travel at that time, saying that Death Valley as a destination for auto tourists was a “possibility in the near future.”<sup>17</sup> Another motorist in 1922 who traveled over the Wild Rose Canyon/Emigrant Canyon route from Panamint Valley into Death Valley said Emigrant Canyon was “nothing but a babble of canyons and rocks. There is no road.”<sup>18</sup> The section through Wild Rose Canyon was described similarly. Other visitors’ reports from around that time agreed, saying that the area was “impassable except by pack-train, horse-drawn wagon, and the smallest types of powerfully motored vehicles” and not suitable for the “general motoring public.”<sup>19</sup> The poor and inadequate condition of the roads in the Death Valley region remained unchanged until the Eichbaum Toll Road was completed in 1926, and following its construction the toll road continued to be the best road and most traveled road to access Death Valley for several years thereafter (**Plate 2**).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Unrau, “A History of the Lands Added to Death Valley National Monument by the California Desert Protection Act of 1994,” 28-29; USGS, *Lida Quadrangle*; USGS, *Ballarat Quadrangle*; USGS, *Furnace Creek Quadrangle*; USGS, *Searles Lake Quadrangle*.

<sup>17</sup> “Boost Death Valley as Playground for Motorists,” *Owens Valley Herald*, 30 March 1921.

<sup>18</sup> “Intrepid Motorists Brave Death Valley,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 December 1922.

<sup>19</sup> “Stage Conquers Death Valley,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 March 1927, B6; “Modern Bungalow City at End of Death Valley Trail,” *Owens Valley Herald*, 24 November 1926.

<sup>20</sup> “Intrepid Motorists Brave Death Valley,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 December 1922; “Boost Death Valley as Playground for Motorists,” *Owens Valley Herald*, 30 March 1921; “Stage Conquers Death Valley,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 March 1927, B6; “Modern Bungalow City at End of Death Valley Trail,” *Owens Valley Herald*, 24 November 1926; “Death Valley,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 January 1929, E4; Greene, “Historic Resource Study: A History of Mining in Death Valley National Monument Volume 1 of 2,” Part 2 of 2, 900; Avery, “Stove Pipe Wells Hotel,” 8.6; Greene, “Historic Resource Study: A History of Mining in Death Valley National Monument Volume 1 of 2,” 919; Mary DeDecker, *The Eichbaum Toll Road*, (Death Valley, CA: Death Valley ‘49ers Encampment, 1970): n.p.

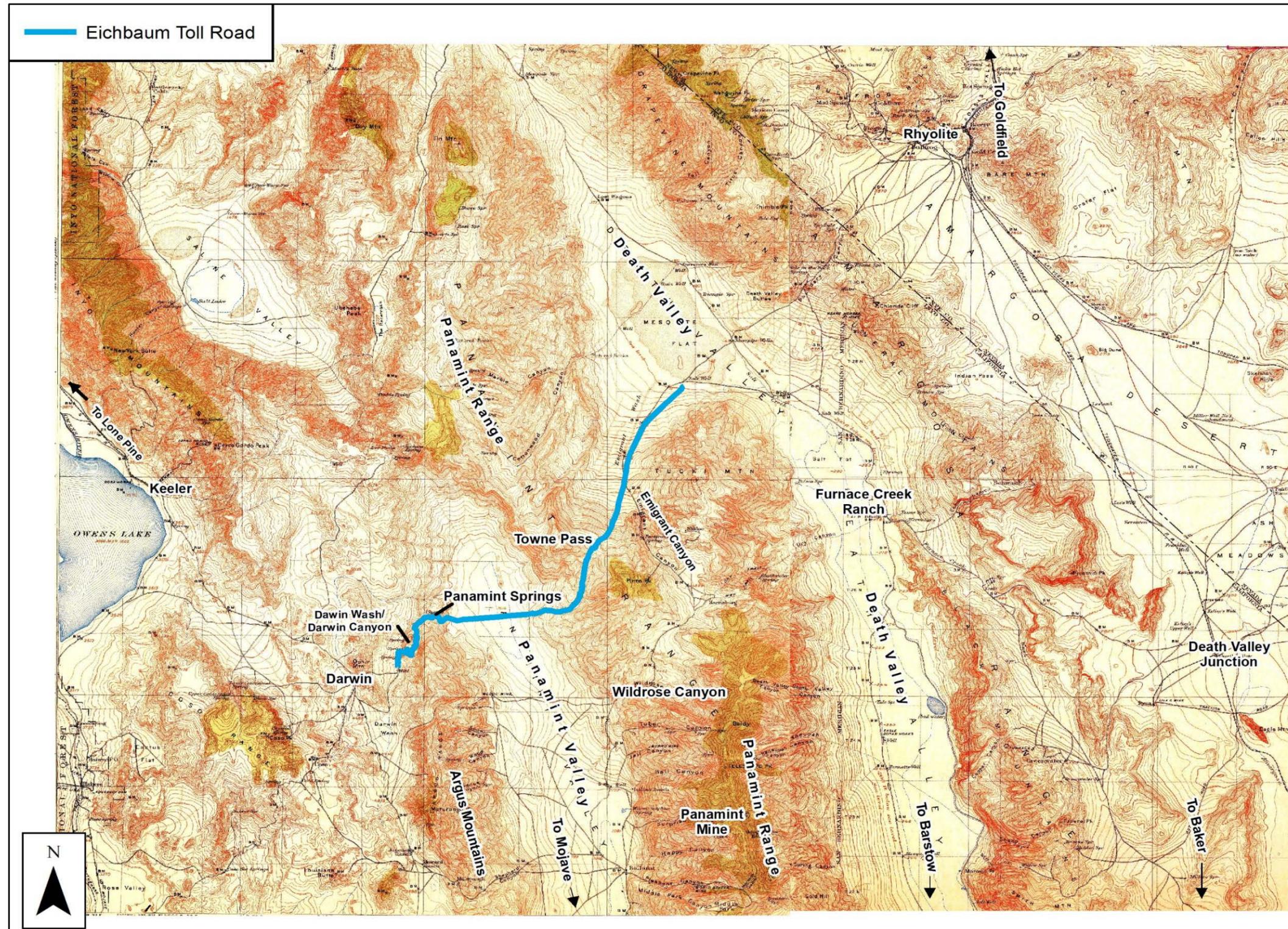


Plate 2. USGS map ca. 1913 shows major topographical features, roads, places, and the Eichbaum Toll Road alignment.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> USGS, *Ballarat Quadrangle*, 60-minute, 1:250,000 (Washington: USGS 1913); USGS, *Furnace Creek Quadrangle*, 60-minute, 1:250,000 (Washington: USGS 1910).

### 4.3 History of the Eichbaum Toll Road

Herman William (H.W.) Eichbaum moved to California in 1905 from the eastern US upon earning an engineering degree from Blacksburg College in West Virginia. Eichbaum's training and desire for adventure led him west to the mining boom then occurring in the Death Valley region. Eichbaum eventually settled in Rhyolite, Nevada, northeast of Death Valley, where he engaged in mining activity in the Rhyolite/Goldfield region. He is also credited with designing and building the first electricity plant in Rhyolite in 1906, providing power for the mining operations and the town. During this time, Rhyolite was at the peak of its boom and had a population of about 5,000 people. Eichbaum remained in the Rhyolite region until 1911, by which time the mines had played out.<sup>22</sup>

Following Eichbaum's experience in the desert mining industry, he moved to western Los Angeles County where he met and married Helene Neepser on October 31, 1914, and entered into the tourism business. The young couple settled on Catalina Island and Eichbaum started a company that took visitors to the island on sightseeing tours. Called the Catalina Jaunting Car Company, Eichbaum utilized a fleet of Moreland Roadrunners to take visitors around the island. A unique and innovative vehicle for its time, the Moreland Roadrunner was an open-topped bus that could seat 20 passengers. Built on a truck chassis, the Roadrunner had the power and carrying capacity to haul the weight of 20 people and handle the rough and steep roads of the island, and its capabilities help make Eichbaum's endeavor a success. Eichbaum also played a role in the establishment of the Eagle's Nest hunting lodge, another element of Catalina Island's tourism industry. On the mainland, Eichbaum became involved in transportation in Venice, California, developing a patented design for electric trams and owning the Venice Tram Company. Eichbaum appears to have maintained some of these business interests until around 1930.<sup>23</sup>

Despite having success with his enterprises on Catalina Island and Venice, Eichbaum's entrepreneurial spirit led him back to Death Valley in 1925. Recalling the beauty of this desert landscape, Eichbaum believed that many others would share his fondness for the desert if given the opportunity to experience it and envisioned building the first hotel and resort in Death Valley at Stovepipe Wells. By this time, Eichbaum had become savvy in the marketing and transportation aspects of tourism. Eichbaum's engineering background and knowledge of the Death Valley terrain would also prove useful in his endeavor.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Greene, "Historic Resource Study: A History of Mining in Death Valley National Monument Volume 1 of 2," 817, 897, 898; DeDecker, *The Eichbaum Toll Road*, n.p.; "Death Valley Leader Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 1932.

<sup>23</sup> "Hear Testimony in Venice Tram Case," *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, January 16, 1918; Herman W. Eichbaum, Design for a Vehicle Body, U. S. Patent 50125, filed June 20, 1916; "Scenic Island Trips Offer Visitor Treat," *The Los Angeles Times*, April 24, 1927; "Skyline Drive Catalina Island as Motor Tour," *Bakersfield Morning Echo*, August 14, 1927; Ernest Windle, "South Sea Island Scenes in Winter," *The Catalina Insider*, January 14, 1925; F. M. Paulson, "Hunting Lodge to Open Here Soon," *The Catalina Insider*, August 10, 1927; "Building! Building!," *The Catalina Insider*, June 4, 1914; Greene, "Historic Resource Study: A History of Mining in Death Valley National Monument Volume 1 of 2," 897, 898; DeDecker, *The Eichbaum Toll Road*, n.p.; Christy Avery, "Stove Pipe Wells Hotel," 8.2.

<sup>24</sup> "Trip to Death Valley Over New Toll Road," *Lone Pine News*, 8 October 1926.

In order to realize his dream, Eichbaum first had to build a road to reach the site of his planned Stovepipe Wells Resort. As discussed above, Death Valley in 1925 had no automobile roads suitable for general tourist traffic. Eichbaum, however, wanted broad appeal and knew from his experience on Catalina Island that the average tourist on vacation would not find traveling on these crude and bumpy tracks a pleasant experience.<sup>25</sup> Eichbaum began his efforts for a new road into Death Valley in 1925 with a series of appeals to the Inyo County Board of Supervisors to build, maintain, and operate a toll road. At his first appearance before the Board on May 4, 1925, he proposed a route into the north end of Death Valley from Lida Valley Road via Sand Springs. The Board minutes from this meeting describe Eichbaum as a “promoter of sightseeing tours” from Catalina. The Board took no action and voted to carry the matter over to the next meeting. Lida Valley is in the vicinity of Rhyolite, Nevada, and Eichbaum was familiar with this area. The Board likely rejected this route because it was in a remote part of eastern Inyo County and would not have generated traffic through the main towns in the Owens Valley. About one month later, on June 1, Eichbaum again went before the Board and proposed a different route entering Death Valley from west. This route is described in the minutes as from the “end of Darwin Wash, through Townsend Pass into northern Death Valley.” Darwin Wash was just east of the small mining town of Darwin, about 40 miles southeast of Lone Pine. At that time, a county road existed to Darwin Wash and Eichbaum’s proposed road would begin where it ended. The Board again took no vote and no action on the matter during this meeting.<sup>26</sup>

It is not known why Eichbaum’s first two proposals to build a toll road did not gain Board approval. One individual, John Salsbury, heard about Eichbaum’s first two appeals and sent a letter to the Board of Supervisors dated July 15, 1925 in which he wrote he objected “as strongly as possible” to “the granting of any franchise for a toll road.” Salsbury described Eichbaum as a “Los Angeles promoter” and called this attempt by Eichbaum “confiscation.” Salsbury had been a mine owner with mining property in the northern Death Valley area who had built a road to access his mine via the north end of Death Valley in about 1907. By 1925, this road had been taken over the Inyo County, but was in very poor condition. Salsbury suggested the county improve this road rather than allow Eichbaum to build a new road. That Eichbaum was being referred to by Salsbury and in the Board minutes by the somewhat pejorative term “Los Angeles promoter” suggests local objections may also have been rooted in a general disdain at the time for outsiders from Los Angeles, as this was during the period of the “water wars” between the City of Los Angeles and the people of the Owens Valley. Other objections may have been rooted in the general lack of popularity of toll roads by 1925, which had proven problematic in the past. By the 1920s, very few privately owned and operated toll roads still existed in California as the public had come to expect

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<sup>25</sup> Avery, “Stove Pipe Wells Hotel,” 8.2, 8.3.

<sup>26</sup> DeDecker, *The Eichbaum Toll Road*, n.p.; Inyo County, Board of Supervisors, Supervisor’s Proceedings, Book I, Page 70, May 4, 1925; Inyo County, Board of Supervisors, Supervisor’s Proceedings, Book I, Page 72, June 1, 1925.

free use of roads, and that counties and the state were the best entities to undertake road construction and maintenance.<sup>27</sup>

After the June 1<sup>st</sup> Board meeting, Eichbaum appears to have engaged in some lobbying of local Inyo County residents to muster support for this project. Eichbaum came back to the Board on August 3 with an application to build two roads that would reach Stovepipe Wells. One of the proposed routes was from the west beginning at Whippoorwill Springs (in Darwin Wash), up Darwin Canyon, east across Panamint Valley, over Towne Pass, and into northern Death Valley, terminating at Stovepipe Wells. The other proposed road entered Death Valley from the south and went north past Furnace Creek Ranch to Stovepipe Wells, continued north and terminated at Mesquite Spring, near the far north end of Death Valley. At the meeting many testified in favor of the proposal including G.W. Dow, owner of the Dow Hotel in Lone Pine, a businessman who would profit from increased tourism; R.R. Henderson, editor of the Mt. Whitney Observer; and local residents R.W. McCrea and Peter W. Smith. But many presented testimony in opposition as well, specifically C.M. Rasor, chief field engineer for the Pacific Coast Borax Company, and Fred Corkill, superintendent of the company's borax mine, who presented a petition of objection. The above-mentioned John Salisbury also appeared at the meeting to express his objections in person. In a close vote of three against and two in favor, the motion to grant Eichbaum permission for the toll road failed.<sup>28</sup>

The feeling that Eichbaum was an outsider from Los Angeles with a scheme to coffer profits from Inyo County as expressed by the likes of John Salisbury may have been shared by many local residents. But Eichbaum, having spent many years in the Death Valley region upon arriving in the west in 1905, was not a true outsider, and not a typical Los Angeles profiteer. Those years in the desert as a young man instilled a deep love and appreciation for the beauty and allure of the desert. Eichbaum once said, "You can see lots of things in Death Valley, and you see something different every day."<sup>29</sup> How else to explain the motivation of a man with a successful business and home on Catalina Island to pursue this endeavor to build a road and the first hotel resort in one of the most inhospitable environments in California.<sup>30</sup>

Eichbaum's motivation kept him focused on his objective and despite standing before the Board three times and still not having approval for his project, he pressed on. Needing only to swing one more Supervisor, Eichbaum sought the advice of the two Supervisors who voted in favor of his latest proposal, Amos P. Hancock and C.E. Johnson. The two appear to have recommended that Eichbaum obtain more local support, particularly from the powerful Pacific Coast Borax

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<sup>27</sup> John Salisbury to Inyo County Board of Supervisors, July 15, 1925, On file at Caltrans District 9; B.B. Meek, "Highway Policies in California," 18-19; "Road Builders Meet in Detroit," 31; Greene, "Historic Resource Study: A History of Mining in Death Valley National Monument Volume 1 of 2," 789, 790.

<sup>28</sup> US Census, Population Schedule, Inyo County, Death Valley Precinct, Enumeration District 44, Sheet 2B; Board of Supervisors, Supervisor's Proceedings, Book I, Page 82, August 3, 1925; Inyo County, Board of Supervisors, Supervisor's Proceedings, Book I, Page 107, October 5, 1925; Greene, "Historic Resource Study: A History of Mining in Death Valley National Monument Volume 1 of 2," 898; DeDecker, *The Eichbaum Toll Road*, n.p.

<sup>29</sup> "Trip to Death Valley Over New Toll Road," *Lone Pine News*, 8 October 1926.

<sup>30</sup> "Trip to Death Valley Over New Toll Road," *Lone Pine News*, 8 October 1926.

Company. Eichbaum met with C.M. Razor who informed Eichbaum that the company had no objection to the proposed road entering Death Valley from the west between Darwin Wash and Stovepipe Wells, but that the road must terminate at Stovepipe Wells and that Eichbaum must abandon plans for the road into Death Valley from the south via Furnace Creek. Razor's objection to the southerly route likely stemmed from the fact that this course passed directly through the heart of the company's borax territory in Death Valley, and Razor wanted nothing to interfere with the mining operations. It is also likely that with borax mining waning in Death Valley, the Pacific Coast Borax Company was already entertaining its own tourism scheme, and eventually would build the Furnace Creek Inn in the southern part of Death Valley in 1927.<sup>31</sup>

Eichbaum readily agreed to Razor's suggestion and also sought out support from residents of Death Valley and Lone Pine before appearing before the Board of Supervisors a fourth time on October 5, 1925. At the meeting, Eichbaum submitted an application to the Board "for authority to take the necessary land and construct a toll road in Death Valley." Attached to the application were documents of support including a petition signed by 384 people, as well as testimony in favor from representatives of the Pacific Coast Borax Company, and eight other individuals. A letter of support from the Automobile Club of Southern California read by Dr. M.A. Williamson of Lone Pine furthered Eichbaum's case. Following the hearing of testimony, the Board unanimously voted in favor of the application. The act was formally codified as Inyo County Resolution No. 25-16, which authorized Eichbaum "to take the necessary real property necessary for the construction of said toll road." The proposed route was 40 miles long and had a 100-foot wide right-of-way. The Board appointed G.W. Dow of Lone Pine, Cash C. Clark of Darwin, and Peter W. Smith of Lone Pine as road commissioners to oversee the surveying and construction of the road. Eichbaum hired Burkett E. Sherwin, who was also the Inyo County Surveyor, to survey the route. While this road is commonly called the Eichbaum Toll Road, in the official county documents at this time it was called the Death Valley Toll Road.<sup>32</sup>

The route of the Eichbaum Toll Road was not completely laid out on untrodden land. The section through Darwin Canyon had several springs, and its route, therefore, likely followed a Native American trail that existed prior to Euro-American exploration and settlement. In 1871, Captain George M. Wheeler of the US Army Corps of Engineers led an expedition of this area and a member of his party, Lieutenant D.A. Lyle, traveled through Darwin Canyon into the Panamint Valley, then tacked southeast to cross the Panamint Range via Wildrose Canyon and Emigrant Canyon. Lyle did not go over Towne Pass. With the mining activity at Darwin in the nineteenth

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<sup>31</sup> "Death Valley," *Los Angeles Times*; Greene, "Historic Resource Study: A History of Mining in Death Valley National Monument Volume 1 of 2," 900; DeDecker, *The Eichbaum Toll Road*, n.p.; Board of Supervisors, Supervisor's Proceedings, Book I, Page 82, August 3, 1925; Inyo County, Board of Supervisors, Proceedings, Book I, Page 107, October 5, 1925.

<sup>32</sup> "Death Valley Road Certain," *Inyo Independent*, 10 October 1925, 2; DeDecker, *The Eichbaum Toll Road*, n.p.; Inyo County, Board of Supervisors, "In the Matter of The Application of H.W. Eichbaum to Construct Toll Road," Resolution No. 25-16, Proceedings, Book I, Page, 108, October 5, 1925; Inyo County, Board of Supervisors, "In the Matter of the Application of H. W. Eichbaum to Construct a Toll Road," Approval of Application and Certificate of Completion, October 5, 1925.

and early twentieth century, this route through Darwin Canyon continued to be in use as a trail, and then as a crude road by 1913.<sup>33</sup>

Towne Pass was named after a Captain Towne, who led a small group of lost emigrants out of Death Valley over the pass in 1850. Owing to the steepness of Towne Pass, it never became a popular travel route until Eichbaum built his toll road. On the east slope of the Panamint Range, through Emigrant Wash, Eichbaum's Toll Road closely followed the route of the Wildrose Canyon/Emigrant Canyon Road, which also followed Emigrant Wash into Death Valley.<sup>34</sup>

Certainly the route that Eichbaum chose, and that the Board of Supervisors approved, had something to do with the personal interests of the Board of Supervisors, and the interests of their constituents. Other routes, such as the Lida Valley route, or routes accessing Panamint Valley and Death Valley from the south, may have been easier and cheaper to build, but Eichbaum understood that he needed the approval of the Board of Supervisors to build a toll road and such a southern route would not pass through any of the commercial centers in the county. Eichbaum, therefore, proposed a route that began at Darwin Wash and would bring traffic through Lone Pine, one of the main towns in Inyo County at the time along with Bishop. The many tourists passing through the area would benefit business owners, and provide new business opportunities.<sup>35</sup>

Survey work and construction commenced on the road soon after the Board's approval on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1925. Eichbaum hired a Mr. Miller (first name unknown) to be construction superintendent. The work crew consisted of six to eight men, including a team driver, a grader, rock throwers, and a cook. The workers lived in tents, migrating across the desert as work progressed. Construction began on the west end at Darwin Wash and moved eastward. A main implement of construction was a Caterpillar tractor pulling a seven-foot road grader that cut the road through the terrain. In an effort to save money, Eichbaum did not use dynamite for blasting; instead, the road went around immovable rocky outcroppings. This decision led to the road being, in places, very narrow, steep, or with severe curvature, particularly through Darwin Canyon and Towne Pass. Through the winter of 1925-1926, rain and landslides delayed construction, but by Christmas 1925 the crew had reached the summit of Towne Pass. With the most difficult sections behind them, the crew had about 16 miles of road to build down the gently sloping Emigrant Wash to the Death Valley floor. In addition to challenges presented by the wet weather, the remoteness of the region made it difficult to obtain construction supplies, and drinking water for the workers had to be hauled to the work camps from various springs. By the spring of 1926, road construction had progressed over the 4,962-foot-high Towne Pass summit and down Emigrant Wash onto the floor of Death Valley.

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<sup>33</sup> Wheeler, *Part of Eastern California*; USGS, *Ballarat Quadrangle*; Unrau, "A History of the Lands Added to Death Valley National Monument by the California Desert Protection Act of 1994," 1, 2; USGS, *Emigrant Canyon Quadrangle*, 15-minute, 1:62,500 (Washington: USGS 1952).

<sup>34</sup> Wheeler, *Part of Eastern California*; USGS, *Ballarat Quadrangle*; Unrau, "A History of the Lands Added to Death Valley National Monument by the California Desert Protection Act of 1994," 1, 2; USGS, *Emigrant Canyon Quadrangle*, 15-minute, 1:62,500 (Washington: USGS 1952).

<sup>35</sup> Board of Supervisors, Supervisor's Proceedings, Book I, Page 82, August 3, 1925; US Census, Population Schedule, Inyo County, 1920.

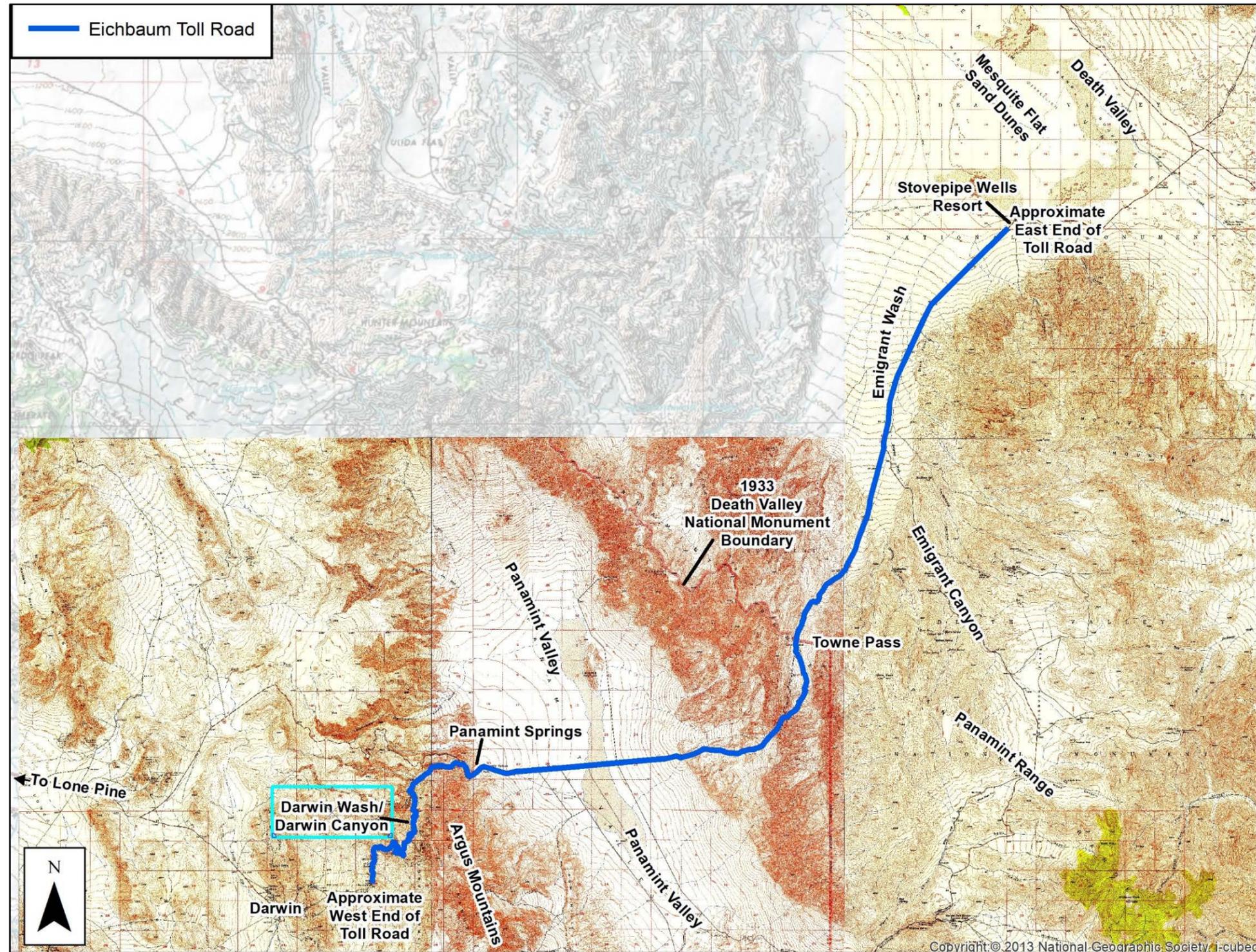
Here, Eichbaum encountered another obstacle, the deep and constantly shifting Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes, which stymied all attempts to establish a road and halted construction. Eichbaum, realizing the futility of building a road on sand dunes, made the difficult decision to end the road four and one-half miles short of his objective, the Stovepipe Wells spring. Although he did not make it to the actual Stovepipe Wells, Eichbaum still applied the name to his resort (**Plate 3**).<sup>36</sup>

Following an inspection of the road by Amos P. Hancock, Inyo County Supervisor and ex-officio road overseer, the county issued a Certificate of Completion for the Death Valley Toll Road on May 4, 1926. The road's total distance was about 35.5 miles and, at this time, it was not surfaced with gravel or any other material. Rather, the surface was whatever natural materials the road passed over. Helene Eichbaum later stated that the exact cost of construction was unknown because Eichbaum did not account for road's cost separately from the Stovepipe Wells resort. Upon its completion, the Board of Supervisors set the toll rates for the road. Rates for trucks, trailers, and wagons ranged from two dollars to ten dollars depending on weight, automobiles cost two dollars, and there was an additional fifty-cent charge for each occupant of any vehicle, though animals cost one dollar. The toll schedule specified that county employees traveling in the line of duty could use the road free of charge. To provide water for the travelers, Eichbaum developed several springs along the road. Although somewhat crude by modern standards, the Death Valley Toll Road when completed was a vast improvement over any existing local road and the best road into Death Valley at the time. It also became a convenient route from most parts of California including Los Angeles, the San Joaquin Valley, and the Owens Valley. Following its construction, Eichbaum employed a small crew that maintained the road, grading away blown sand and repairing damage caused by storms to keep the road passable.<sup>37</sup>

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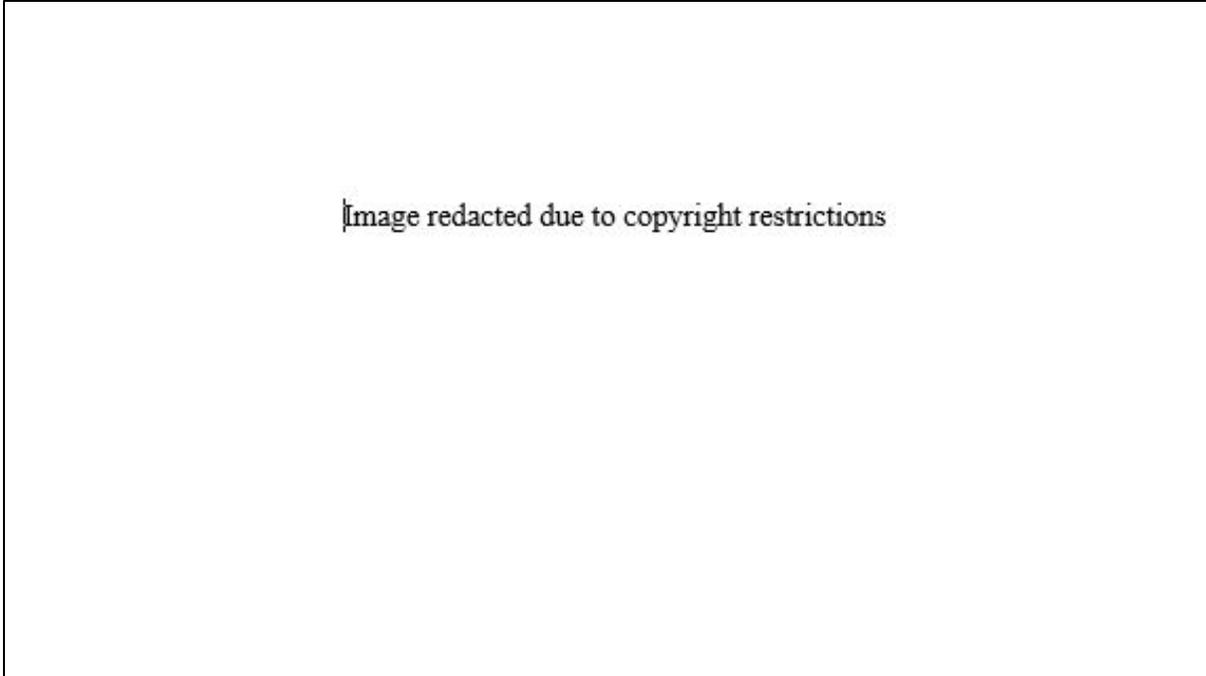
<sup>36</sup> DeDecker, *The Eichbaum Toll Road*, n.p.; Avery, "Stove Pipe Wells Hotel," 8.3.

<sup>37</sup> J.W. Vickrey, State Division of Highways, District 9 to C.H. Purcell, State Division of Highways, Headquarters, July 14, 1933; Inyo County, Board of Supervisors, "In the Matter of the Death Valley Toll Road-Certificate of Completion," May 4, 1926; Inyo County, Board of Supervisors, "Toll Rates for Death Valley Toll Road," Resolution, May 4, 1926; DeDecker, *The Eichbaum Toll Road*, n.p.; "Trip to Death Valley Over New Toll Road," *Lone Pine News*, 8 October 1926.



**Plate 3.** USGS base maps ca. 1950 showing the alignment of the Eichbaum Toll Road and places and features relevant to construction of the road.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> USGS, *Stovepipe Wells Quadrangle*, 15-minute, 1:62,500 (Washington: USGS 1952); USGS, *Emigrant Canyon Quadrangle*, 15-minute, 1:62,500 (Washington: USGS 1952); USGS, *Darwin Quadrangle*, 15-minute, 1:62,500 (Washington: USGS 1950); USGS, *Panamint Butte Quadrangle*, 15-minute, 1:62,500 (Washington: USGS 1951).



**Plate 4.** West entrance of the Eichbaum Toll Road at the foot of Darwin Wash. Photograph ca. 1927.<sup>39</sup>

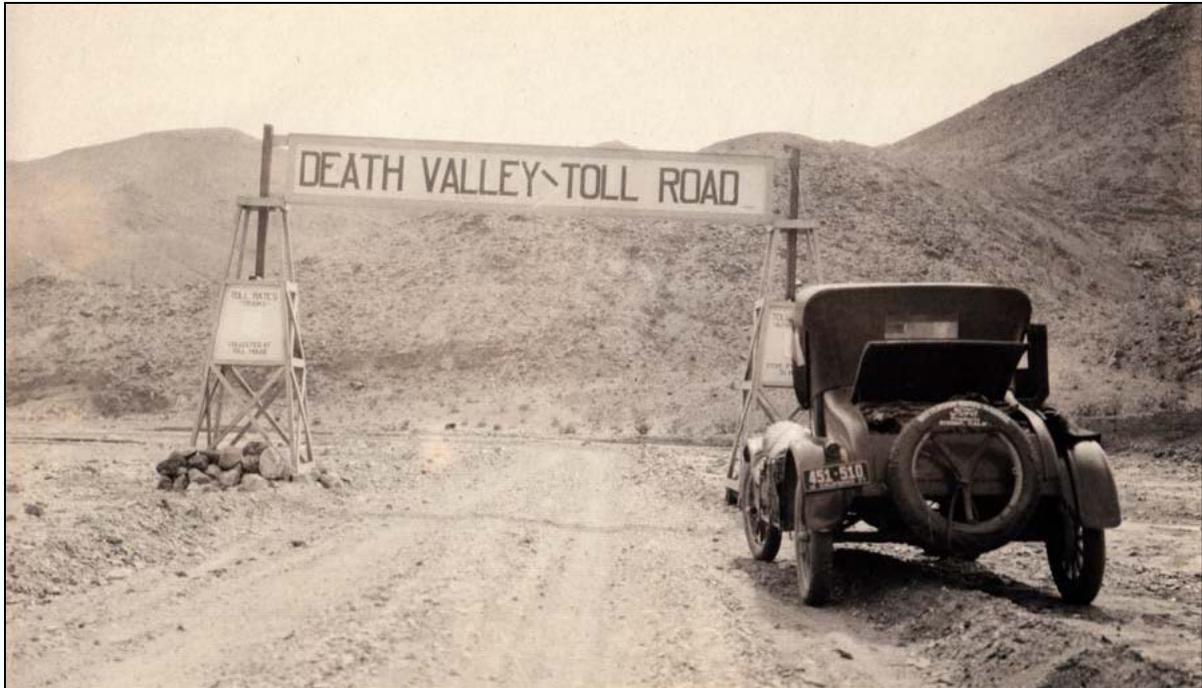


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**Plate 5.** Photo taken by the Division of Highways March 2, 1934, from the same location as the photograph in **Plate 4** above—Darwin Wash.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Burton Frasher, "Darwin Wash Eichbaum Toll Road to Stove Pipe Wells Death Valley, Calif.," [ca. 1927], E.F. Mueller Postcard Collection, California History Room Picture Collection, California State Library, Accessed via Calisphere.

<sup>40</sup> State of California, Division of Highways, "Eichbaum Toll Road, Mile 0.0," May 2, 1934, Inyo County, Route 190 file, Caltrans Headquarters Library.



**Plate 6.** Another photograph of the west toll gate at the foot of Darwin Wash, 1927.<sup>41</sup>

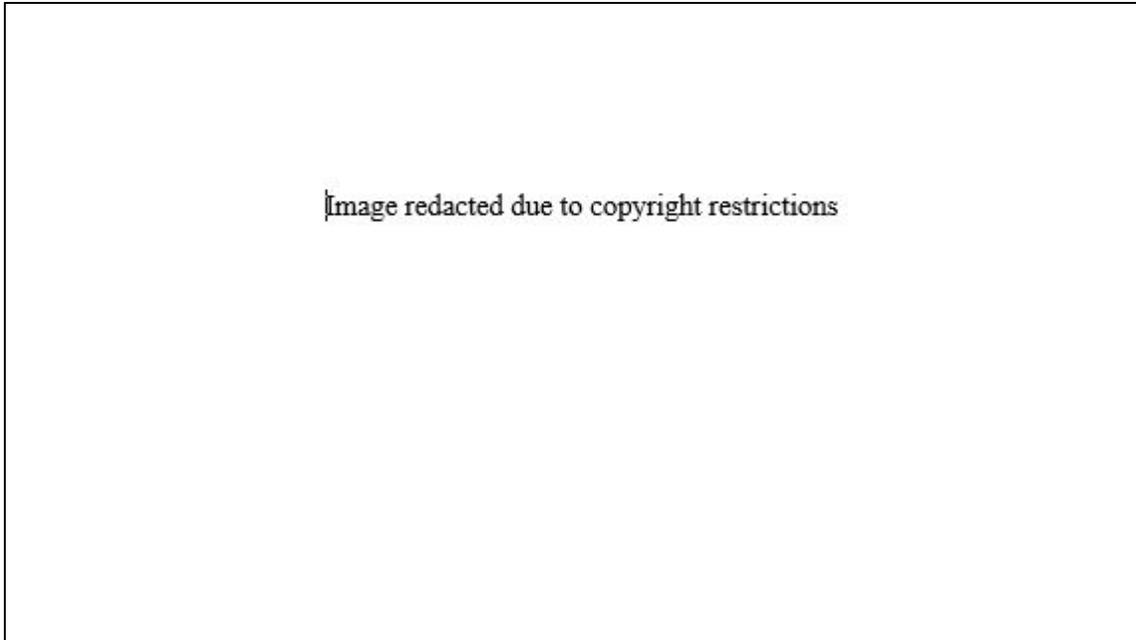


**Plate 7.** Eichbaum Toll road at Stovepipe Wells in 1926. Photo view is looking east at the Grapevine Mountains.<sup>42</sup>

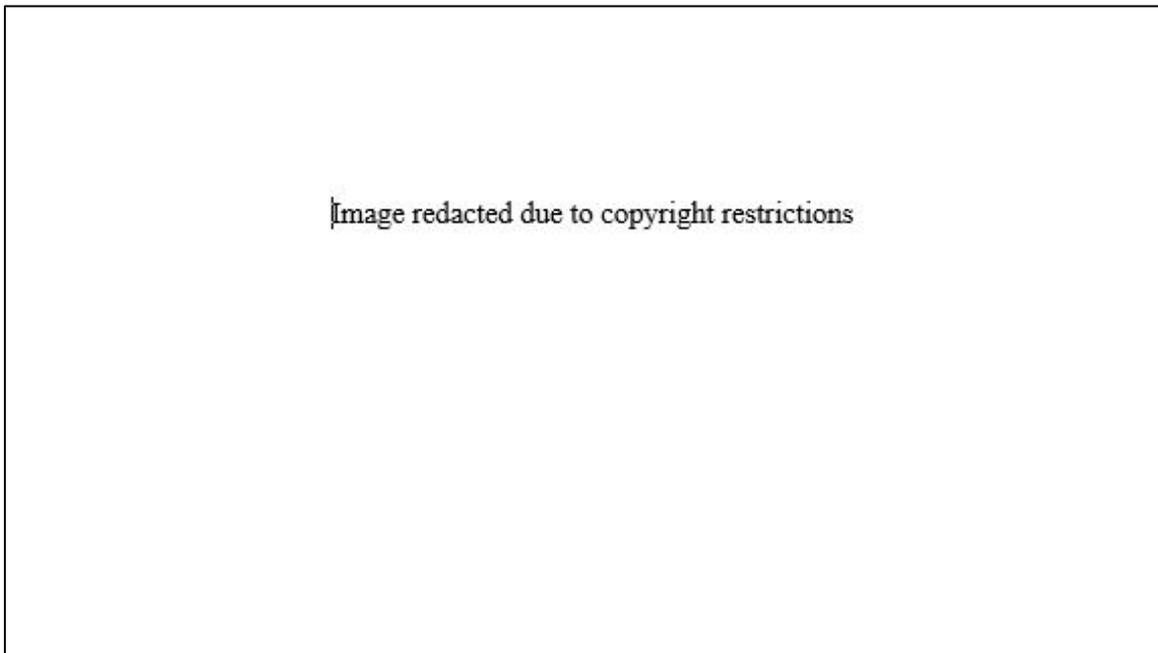
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<sup>41</sup> “Sign at the Western Entrance to the Eichbaum Toll Road,” 1927, Photo No. MEN-71b, Accessed via the Virtual Transportation Museum of the Eastern California Museum.

<sup>42</sup> Burton Frasher, “Eichbaum Toll Road Across Death Valley at Stove Pipe Wells,” 1926, Frasher Foto Postcard Collection, Pomona Public Library, Accessed via Calisphere.



**Plate 8.** Eichbaum Toll Road in 1927 looking west over the Panamint Valley from the base of the Panamint Range. This is the Towne Pass section of the road.<sup>43</sup>

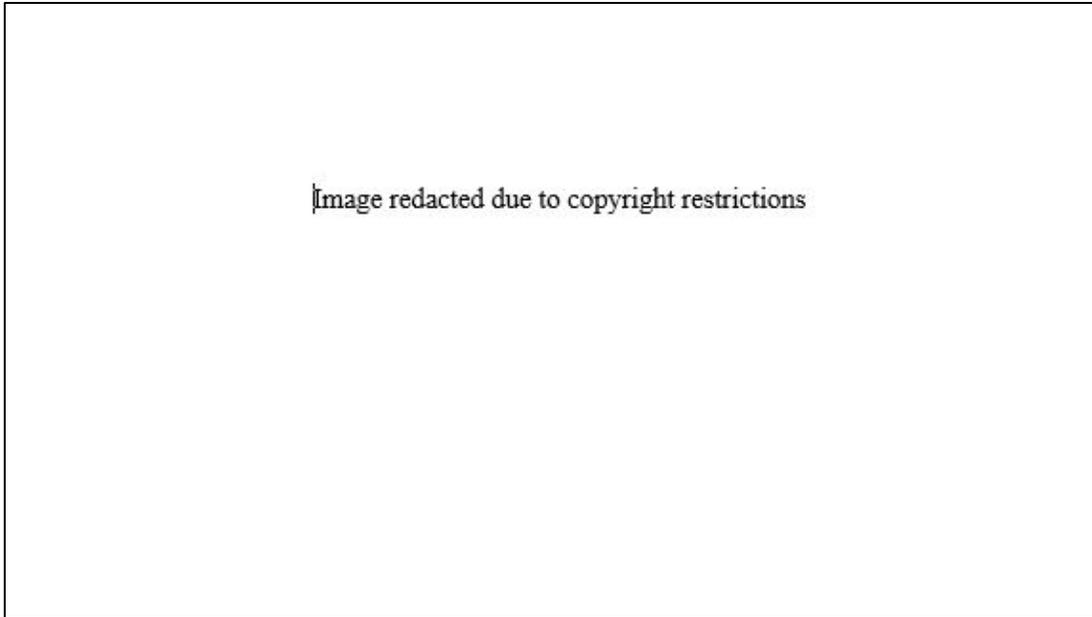


**Plate 9.** Eichbaum Toll Road with car going through Darwin Canyon in 1927.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Burton Frasher, "Eichbaum Toll Road Across Panamint Valley Death Valley National Monument, Calif.," 1927, Frasher Foto Postcard Collection, Pomona Public Library, Accessed via Calisphere

<sup>44</sup> Burton Frasher, "Darwin Wash Eichbaum Toll Road To Stove Pipe Wells Death Valley Calif.," 1927, Frasher Foto Postcard Collection, Pomona Public Library, Accessed via Calisphere.



**Plate 10.** East toll gate of the Eichbaum Toll Road with the Stovepipe Wells resort just past the gate. This picture was taken ca. 1927 and looks west with the Panamint Range in the distance. While the Eichbaum Toll Road did not lead to Mt. Whitney, from this point in Death Valley the toll road was the best route for the first leg of the journey. Identifying the road at this location as the “Mt. Whitney Toll Road” appears to have been an attempt to inform and entice tourists to take his road.<sup>45</sup>

After construction of the toll road, Eichbaum proceeded to build his resort in Death Valley, known as the Stovepipe Wells Hotel and Bungalow City. The facility opened in November 1926 and originally consisted of twenty small cabins or "bungalettes" and a handful of larger buildings supplemented with tents. The resort boasted electric lights, running water, and first-class service. Eichbaum advertised the resort regularly in the Los Angeles newspapers and travelers destined for the resort accounted for the majority of the travel on the Eichbaum Toll Road. The first tourist buses that Eichbaum operated from Los Angeles passed over the road on November 4, 1926. By 1927, the Automobile Club of Southern California had signed the route, an important endorsement with broad public reach that made travelers aware of the road, reduced fears of traveling in Death Valley, and fostered additional traffic. One newspaper article proclaimed that “Eichbaum is making it possible for Californians and visitors to see” Death Valley.<sup>46</sup> Eichbaum’s importance to tourism was later echoed in 1933 by John R. White, the Superintendent of Sequoia National Park and first administrator of Death Valley National Monument, who lauded Eichbaum for “pioneering the tourist business into Death Valley.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Burton Frasher, “Stove Pipe Wells Hotel,” [ca. 1927], Photo No. FRAS-93, Accessed via the Virtual Transportation Museum of the Eastern California Museum.

<sup>46</sup> “Modern Bungalow City at End of Death Valley Trail,” *Owens Valley Herald*, 24 November 1926.

<sup>47</sup> “Modern Bungalow City at End of Death Valley Trail,” *Owens Valley Herald*, 24 November 1926; Greene, “Historic Resource Study: A History of Mining in Death Valley National Monument Volume 1 of 2,” Part 2 of 2, 901, 902; Avery, “Stove Pipe Wells Hotel,” 8.3-8.6. This historic context is focused on the Eichbaum Toll Road and does not present a detailed account of the history of the Stovepipe Wells Resort. Such an account is contained in the “Stovepipe Wells Hotel” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form prepared by Christy Avery of the National Park Service, dated April 10, 2012; “Desolate Colors of Death Valley Draw Autoists,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 November

An important component of Eichbaum's resort development plans in Death Valley included providing transportation service between Los Angeles and Stovepipe Wells. Eichbaum's service enabled tourists who did not want to drive their own vehicles to buy a round trip fare on a bus, called a "stage" at the time, from Los Angeles to Bungalow City at Stovepipe Wells (**Plate 11**). To conduct this aspect of his business, Eichbaum formed a separate company called the Mount Whitney-Death Valley Transportation Company. The buses ran daily leaving Los Angeles each morning, arriving at Lone Pine by evening where the tourists would stay overnight, and continue on to Stovepipe Wells the next day. Once at Stovepipe Wells, Eichbaum also operated a 125-mile sightseeing motor stage tour of Death Valley that took in all of the major points of interest. Eichbaum's route from Los Angeles to Death Valley passed through Lone Pine, located at the base of Mount Whitney. Eichbaum routinely used in his promotional literature the close proximity of Mount Whitney and Death Valley, the highest and lowest points in the US, as a lure for tourists, suggesting both could be experienced on the same vacation. Eichbaum published regular advertisements in the *Los Angeles Times* promoting his resort at Stovepipe Wells and his bus service.<sup>48</sup>



**Plate 11.** Photograph of a bus or "stage" in Death Valley in 1927. This one was carrying a film crew from Hollywood to shoot a movie in the valley. This is likely the same type of vehicle Eichbaum used to transport tourists.<sup>49</sup>

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1927, G1; John R. White, Superintendent, Sequoia Nation Park, to S.W. Lowden, State Division of Highways, District 9, October 14, 1933; John R. White, Superintendent, Sequoia Nation Park, to Joseph Scott, October 14, 1933.

<sup>48</sup> "Resort Notes," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 February 1927, G10; "Resorts [advertisement]," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 December 1926, 6.

<sup>49</sup> "Stage Conquers Death Valley," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 March 1927, B6.

Eichbaum's acumen at promotion resulted in his resort being successful for many years following its opening. The advertising in the *Los Angeles Times* not only increased business for his enterprises, but also served generally to raise awareness of Death Valley as a tourist destination, and increased tourism overall. In these early years of Death Valley tourism, the tourist season was only the winter months, and Eichbaum would promote visiting on holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, and Easter (**Plate 12**, **Plate 13**, and **Plate 14**). One of the most popular events put on by Eichbaum was his annual Easter morning sunrise mass on the sand dunes near Stovepipe Wells (**Plate 15**). Eichbaum held the first Easter service on March 26, 1927, with Judge Benjamin F. Bledsoe as master of ceremonies. The event was a great success, attracting many tourists from Los Angeles arriving in buses and private vehicles. Eichbaum's promotions were a great boost to his Death Valley enterprises and increased traffic on the toll road. Tourism steadily grew over the years, and in December 1929 Eichbaum claimed that the numbers of people staying at Stovepipe Wells had increased 200 percent over the previous year. No accounting of the number of vehicles using Eichbaum's road appears to have been kept, but the count would have increased in direct proportion to general visitation to Death Valley, which went from very few to an estimated 10,000 people during the winter of 1928-29.<sup>50</sup>

During the same time as Eichbaum's toll road and resort enterprises, he also invested in minor mining ventures. In 1929, Eichbaum formed the Emigrant Springs Mining and Milling Company with other investors. The company purchased several nearby claims in the Wild Rose Mining District in the Panamint Range including the Pima, K.K. Lode, Palma Lode, and Saddle Rock. The company established a mill on the site and by 1930, this mine was yielding ore worth up to \$10,000 per ton. The mine remained active for several years and generally had modest success.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> "Resort and Hotel Notes," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 December 1929, B5; J.W. Vickrey to C.H. Purcell, July 14, 1933; Avery, "Stove Pipe Wells Hotel," 8.5-8.6.; DeDecker, *The Eichbaum Toll Road*, n.p.

<sup>51</sup> Greene, "Historic Resource Study: A History of Mining in Death Valley National Monument Volume 1 of 2," 676, 705-706; Inyo County Recorder, E.E. Sterling, et al. to H.W. Eichbaum, Deed, OR:17:137, June 28, 1929.

**WELCOME THE NEW YEAR IN**

**DEATH VALLEY**

*Stove Pipe Wells  
Bungalow City*

American Plan. Big New Year dinner. Watch the Old Year Out in the strangest and most fascinating region in the world—see on New Year's Day the highest and lowest points in America—Mt. Whitney, 14,501 ft. ele.; Death Valley, 276 ft. below sea level. Stages daily from 33 Arcade Bldg. Reservations—Times Information Bureau or phone TU. 9325.

Plate 12. *Los Angeles Times* advertisement from December 1926 promoting New Year's at Eichbaum's Bungalow City resort at Stovepipe Wells, and the visual allure of Death Valley, calling it "the strangest and most fascinating region in the world." The "stages daily" from downtown Los Angeles is Eichbaum's bus service.<sup>52</sup>

CALIFORNIA'S WINTER PLAYGROUND

**EAT THANKSGIVING DINNER**  
**in DEATH VALLEY at**  
**STOVE PIPE WELLS**

modern resort in the lowest point in America and the most fascinating.  
A DINNER AND A PLACE you will never forget.

Take stage or drive your own car via Mojate, to Olanchia, Darwin and via new Eichbaum Road over Townsend Pass to STOVE PIPE WELLS. Reser. and Info. at 749 So. Hill St, VA. 7763.

Plate 13. Advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times* from November 1927 promoting Thanksgiving dinner at Eichbaum's resort in "California's Winter Playground." Note the transportation information at the bottom directs tourists to take the "new Eichbaum Road."<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> "Resorts [advertisement]," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 December 1926, 6.

<sup>53</sup> "Resorts [advertisement]," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 November 1927, 6.

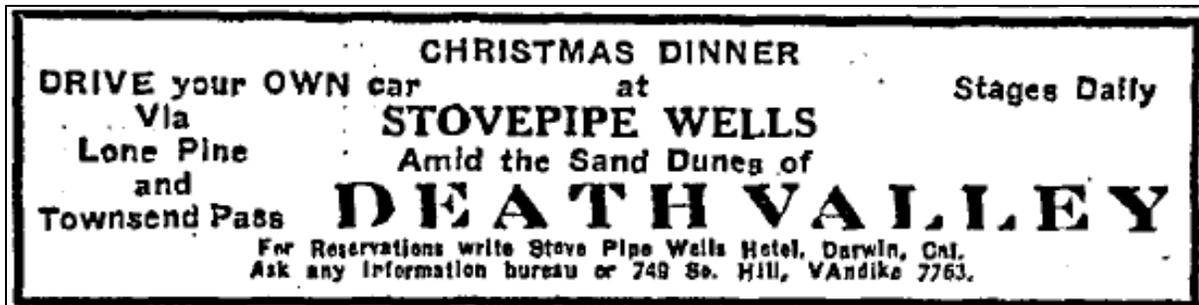


Plate 14. Advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times* from December 1929 promoting Christmas Dinner at Stovepipe Wells. The ad offers stages from Los Angeles and also informs drivers they have to option to drive their own cars via the Eichbaum Toll Road over Townsend Pass.<sup>54</sup>

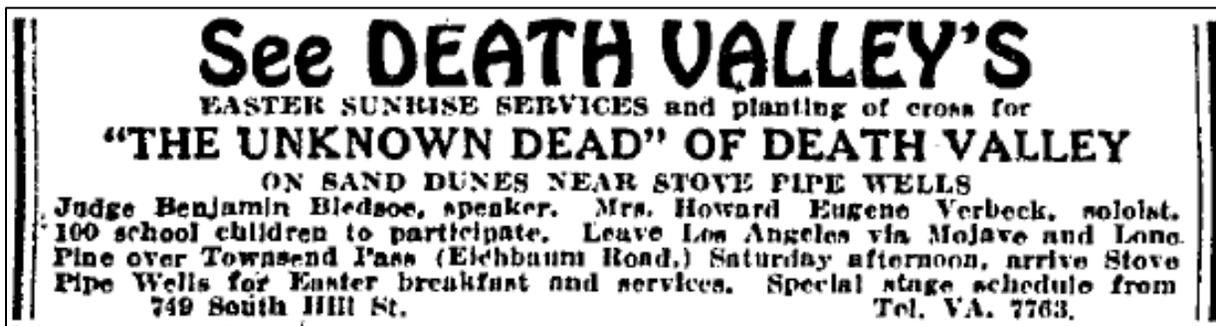


Plate 15. Advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times* from March 1927 promoting Eichbaum's Easter Sunrise Service for the "Unknown Dead" of Death Valley.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> "Resorts [advertisement]," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 December 1925, 20.

<sup>55</sup> "Resorts [advertisement]," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 March 1927, 6.

#### **4.4 Establishment of Death Valley National Monument and Sale of the Eichbaum Toll Road to the State Division of Highways**

H.W. Eichbaum died on February 16, 1932, in Los Angeles from a sudden attack of meningitis and did not live to see the final chapter of his toll road written. By this time, the end of the toll road was nigh owing to the steadily increasing popularity of Death Valley that Eichbaum played a central role in creating, and then generally decreasing popularity of toll roads. Death Valley tourism and awareness of its attractions had steadily increased from 1926 through 1932, largely because of Eichbaum's toll road and Stovepipe Wells Resort, and his vigorous promotion of Death Valley as a tourist attraction. Death Valley's many unique and precious attributes appreciated by thousands of tourists each year also came to be recognized by National Park Service Director Horace Albright. On February 11, 1933, at the urging of Albright, President Herbert Hoover designated Death Valley a national monument to be administered by the National Park Service for the public enjoyment.<sup>56</sup>

The creation of Death Valley National Monument (DVNM) hastened the end of the Eichbaum Toll Road. The opening of DVNM led to more tourist, and, therefore, more complaints about paying a toll. Furthermore, many found it inappropriate for a private toll road to exist within a public national monument. In 1933, John R. White, Superintendent of Sequoia National Park, who initially administering Death Valley National Monument, began urging the sale of the toll road to either the State Division of Highways or Inyo County. At the time, the Division of Highways was in the process of studying the toll road route to determine its feasibility as a state highway. White, believing that such studies might take years, felt that the most expedient course of action would be for Inyo County to buy the road. White wrote to Joseph Scott, the attorney employed by Helene Eichbaum to administer the estate of the deceased H.W. Eichbaum, and advised Scott that if Helene Eichbaum wanted to dispose of the toll road quickly, Scott should contact the Inyo County Board of Supervisors with a proposition. Scott did just that and wrote to the Board of Supervisors in November 1933, but Inyo County balked at the idea and did not purchase the road.<sup>57</sup>

The State Division of Highways was also actively pursuing acquisition of the Eichbaum Toll Road by early 1933. J.W. Vickrey, Division of Highways District 9 Engineer, met personally with Helene Eichbaum to discuss sale of the toll road to the state. Eichbaum traveled from her home in Los Angeles and met Vickrey on July 17, 1933, at the Dow Hotel in Lone Pine. After the meeting, Vickrey stated that Eichbaum was "quite anxious that the state take [the road] over."<sup>58</sup> Joseph Scott followed up immediately with a letter to Division of Highways District 9 suggesting that the state buy the road. Scott concluded by saying, "Anything you can do for us in this matter will be appreciated."<sup>59</sup> S.W. Lowden, the Acting District 9 Engineer, replied to Scott that the Division of

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<sup>56</sup> J.W. Vickrey to C.H. Purcell, July 14, 1933; Greene, "Historic Resource Study: A History of Mining in Death Valley National Monument Volume 1 of 2," 910, 911; Avery, "Stove Pipe Wells Hotel," 8.7.

<sup>57</sup> John R. White to S.W. Lowden, October 14, 1933; John R. White to Joseph Scott, October 14, 1933.

<sup>58</sup> J.W. Vickrey to C.H. Purcell, July 14, 1933.

<sup>59</sup> Joseph Scott to J.B. Woodson, State Division of Highways, District 9, September 28, 1933.

Highways was analyzing various route options and would conduct a field survey of the Eichbaum Toll Road over the winter of 1933-34.<sup>60</sup>

It is easy to understand the Eichbaum Estate's eagerness to sell the toll road at this time. With more good roads into Death Valley in 1933 than existed in 1926, tourists and local residents not wanting to pay a toll could simply choose another route. This declining use of the road is reflected in the revenue from the road between 1929 and 1933. From 1929 through 1931, the tolls from the Eichbaum Toll Road earned about \$6,000 per year. Income dropped in 1932 to \$4,581, and in 1933 Eichbaum collected only \$2,823 in tolls. Subtracting the average maintenance expenses for the toll road of \$1,475 per year left for a very small profit indeed. Eichbaum was also facing the possibility of the Division of Highways building a new road along an entirely different route into the Stovepipe Wells area, a scenario that would render the Eichbaum Toll Road virtually worthless for sale.<sup>61</sup>

By this time it appears Helene Eichbaum had completely lost interest in the road. Engineer Lowden inspected the Eichbaum Toll Road and examined alternate routes in 1934. On October 31, 1934, he reported that the condition of the Eichbaum Toll Road was "very poor" with washouts and in need of "intensive maintenance work." Lowden noted that it appeared the road was no longer being maintained by Mrs. Eichbaum. However, Lowden gave the road high grades from an engineering standpoint, noting that for the purposes of a state highway the road alignment was "very good" and the grades generally "within reasonable limits" as laid out by Eichbaum and his surveyor, B.E. Sherwin (**Plate 16, Plate 17 and Plate 18**). The only exception was the Darwin Wash segment at the west end. Lowden specifically cited excessive grade and curvature through Darwin Wash and Darwin Canyon to Panamint Springs. Lowden recommended this section be entirely bypassed by a new route over the Argus Mountains. Lowden noted the road as a whole had an average road width of 16 feet, with the widest sections about 20 feet, and the narrowest 15 feet. The surface in 1934 consisted of "natural materials" of "excellent quality" with the exception of two miles in the Panamint Valley that had been surfaced with gravel. The road had no drainage culverts or pipes; rather, drainage was "by means of dips in the grade line."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> S.W. Lowden, State Division of Highways, District 9, to Joseph Scott, October 9, 1933; John R. White to S.W. Lowden, October 14, 1933; John R. White to Joseph Scott, October 14, 1933; S.W. Lowden, State Division of Highways, District 9 to C.H. Purcell, State Division of Highways, Headquarters, March 16, 1934; Helene Eichbaum to J.W. Vickrey, Western Union Telegram, June 14, 1933. On file at Caltrans District 9; J.W. Vickrey to C.H. Purcell, July 14, 1933; Inyo County, Board of Supervisors, Supervisor's Proceedings, Book J, Page 348, November 7, 1933; J.W. Vickrey, State Division of Highways, District 9 to George W. Naylor, Inyo County Board of Supervisors, June 6, 1933; S.W. Lowden to Joseph Scott, October 9, 1933; Joseph Scott to J.B. Woodson, State Division of Highways, District 9, September 28, 1933.

<sup>61</sup> J.W. Vickrey to C.H. Purcell, July 14, 1933; DeDecker, *The Eichbaum Toll Road*, n.p.

<sup>62</sup> S.W. Lowden to C.H. Purcell, March 16, 1934; State of California, Division of Highways, *Road Map of the State of California, 1934* (Sacramento: Division of Highways, 1934).



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**Plate 16.** Photo taken of the Eichbaum Toll Road by the Division of Highways on March 2, 1934, likely by District 9 Engineer S.W. Lowden during his inspection of the road prior to its acquisition by the state. This photo, taken one-half mile east of the west entrance to the toll road, faces the eastbound direction with the Argus Range in the distance.<sup>63</sup>

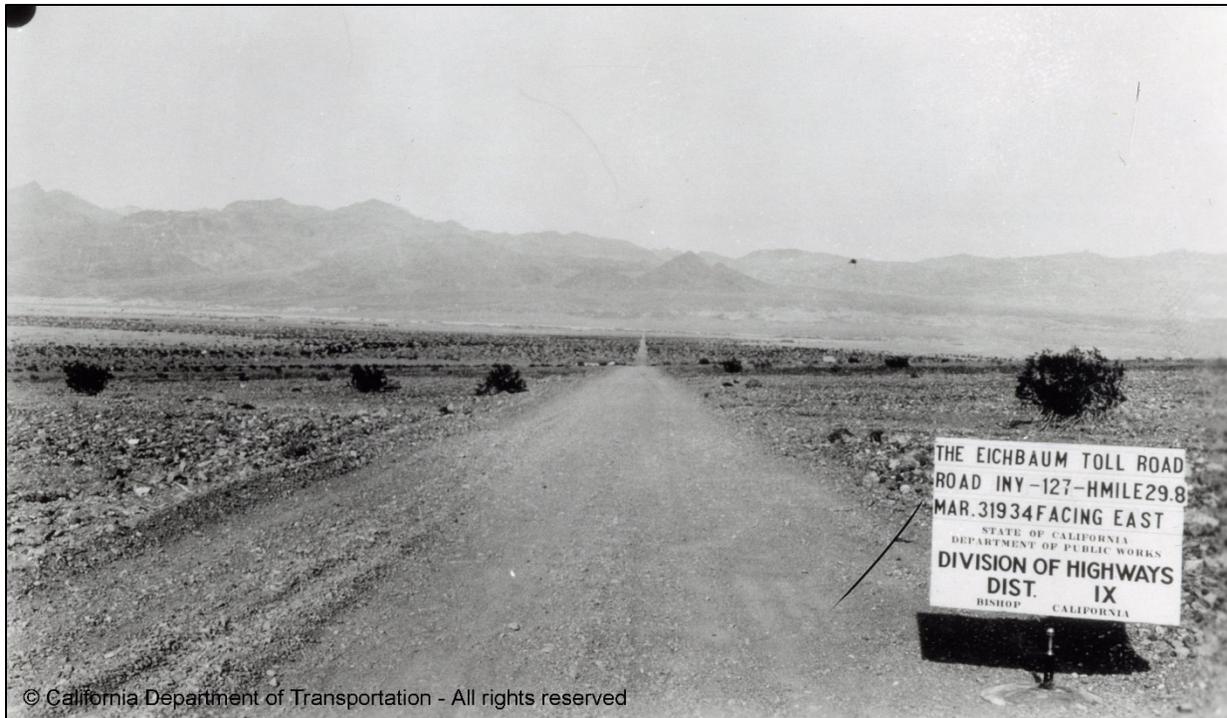


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**Plate 17.** Photograph taken of the Eichbaum Toll Road by the Division of Highways on March 2, 1934. The photograph faces the eastbound direction near the foot of Darwin Canyon, just west of Panamint Springs.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> State of California, Division of Highways, “Eichbaum Toll Road, Mile 0.5,” May 2, 1934, Inyo County, Route 190 file, Caltrans Headquarters Library.

<sup>64</sup> State of California, Division of Highways, “Eichbaum Toll Road, Mile 10.7,” May 2, 1934, Inyo County, Route 190 file, Caltrans Headquarters Library.



**Plate 18.** Photograph taken of the Eichbaum Toll Road by the Division of Highways on March 3, 1934. This photograph is looking in an eastbound direction and shows the road in Death Valley near its terminus. Eichbaum’s Stovepipe Wells resort is barely visible in the center of the image.<sup>65</sup>

While Lowden assessed the Eichbaum Toll Road in generally favorable terms, he also closely examined the feasibility of two other routes before making his final recommendation. The Division of Highways needed a route with the same general end points as the Eichbaum Toll Road to complete its State Route (SR) 127, which had recently been designated a state highway in 1933 following the adoption by the state of several Inyo County roads. The section of SR 127 from Lone Pine to Baker via Death Valley was complete up to Darwin on the west and Stovepipe Wells on the east. The missing section was the general route of the Eichbaum Toll Road. One alternative route Lowden considered was through Wild Road Canyon and Emigrant Canyon, an old county road that ran generally south of the Eichbaum Toll Road through Panamint Valley, Wild Rose Canyon, Emigrant Canyon, and Emigrant Wash into Death Valley and Stovepipe Wells. Lowden rejected this route because of its very poor condition and large sections of new highway would need to be built to avoid steep grades and sharp curves. Another route Lowden examined had been suggested by his predecessor at District 9, Engineer J.W. Vickrey, in 1933. This route entered the north end of Panamint Valley, well north of the Eichbaum Toll Road, thence across the Panamint Range into Death Valley. Lowden also eliminated this alternative from consideration, citing the rough and broken terrain of the northern Panamint Valley that would make road construction difficult and prohibitively expensive. He calculated the cost of this 35-mile-long northern Panamint Valley route at \$25,000 to \$30,000 per mile. After failing to find an acceptable alternate

<sup>65</sup> State of California, Division of Highways, “Eichbaum Toll Road, Mile 29.8,” May 3, 1934, Inyo County, Route 190 file, Caltrans Headquarters Library.

route, Lowden recommended to C.H. Purcell, Division of Highways State Engineer, that the State buy the Eichbaum Toll Road. Lowden appraised the value of the road at \$30,000, but recommended offering the Eichbaum Estate, \$25,000, as he believed Mrs. Eichbaum was “hard pressed for money at the present time.”<sup>66</sup>

The Division of Highways took Lowden’s advice and decided to make an offer to Helene Eichbaum, the administratrix of the Estate of H.W. Eichbaum, in the summer of 1934 for \$25,000. After some discussion with Eichbaum regarding the particular terms, the state made a formal offer on December 5, 1934. Because the Division of Highways lacked sufficient on-hand funds for the full amount, the two parties came to an agreement for \$6,100 to be paid upon receipt of title and \$18,900 paid by August 1, 1935, in the next fiscal year. Of the \$25,000, \$100 was for the 100-foot-wide highway easement past the Stovepipe Wells resort complex. Before the title to the road officially changed hands, the state needed to determine if Eichbaum had clear title to the property. When Eichbaum built the toll road, the alignment was on unsurveyed federal land and Eichbaum had gained possession of the land solely via the 1925 Inyo County Board of Supervisor’s resolution granting him the land and right to operate a toll road. Inyo County had this authority under a federal law that allows for granting of rights-of-way over unreserved public federal land for the establishment of roads and highways. No deeds, patents, or other documents granting H.W. Eichbaum the land for the toll road were ever filed or recorded. The transfer of all “right, title, and interest” of the Eichbaum Toll Road—named as the Death Valley Toll Road in the deed—from the Estate of H.W. Eichbaum to the State of California officially came on December 19, 1934.<sup>67</sup>

After the purchase of the Eichbaum Toll Road and its adoption into the state highway system as part of SR 127, the Division of Highways made plans for improvements to the section that included the former toll road. Upon the designation of SR 127 in 1933, and acquisition of the toll road in 1934, the state had responsibility for maintenance the entirety of SR 127, including that part within DVNM. Approximately 16 miles of the former toll road were inside the DVNM boundary. This arrangement remained until April 1937 when the state and NPS came to an agreement whereby NPS would assume maintenance of that portion of SR 127 within DVNM, providing labor and equipment, while the state would provide materials. At the time NPS had access to Civilian Conservation Corps work crews to undertake the work. NPS made improvements to the road such as widening, gravel surfacing, and ditch work. It is unclear if these improvements occurred on the entirety of SR 127 within DVNM, or only certain sections. It is possible and likely that NPS made improvements to the Eichbaum Toll Road segment of SR 127 within DVNM during the period it

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<sup>66</sup> J.W. Vickrey to C.H. Purcell, July 14, 1933; S.W. Lowden to C.H. Purcell, March 16, 1934; California Division of Highways, County Route Adoption, Inyo County, 1933.

<sup>67</sup> S. Ray, State of California Division of Highways, District 9 to Alan S. Hart, State of California, District 9, Re: Right-of Way for Existing State Highway Within Boundaries of Death Valley National Monument, July 20, 1951; C.H. Purcell, State Division of Highways, Headquarters by Frank B. Durkee to S.W. Lowden, State Division of Highways, District 9, January 8, 1935; C. H. Purcell, State Division of Highways, Headquarters, to John R. White, Superintendent, Sequoia Nation Park, August 7, 1934; Estate of H.W. Eichbaum, Helene W. Eichbaum, Administratrix to State of California, Deed, OR:32:338, December 19, 1934, Recorded December 21, 1934; S.W. Lowden to C.H. Purcell, November 19, 1934.

had maintenance responsibility. NPS also made alignment changes to sections of the state highway in the Furnace Creek area, and following a flash flood in 1942, large sections of this part of SR 127 were rebuilt. This section of SR 127 is southeast of the Eichbaum Toll Road segment of the state highway. The maintenance arrangement between the state and NPS continued until November 1944 when the state took over maintenance of the entire highway.<sup>68</sup>

The Division of Highways did not undertake any major improvements to the former toll road section of SR 127 from its acquisition in December 1934 to early 1937, and the toll road remained basically unchanged during this period. The first major improvements came in January 1937 when work began on a 17.6-mile section of new roadway to bypass steep and acute curvature of the Darwin Canyon section of the former toll road, a suggestion first proposed by S.W. Lowden in March 1934. The realignment passed through the Argus Mountains well north of the toll road route and rejoined the toll road alignment at Panamint Springs at the west edge of the Panamint Valley. The bypass reduced the maximum grade from 19 percent of the toll road to 7.3 percent, and reduced the number of curves from 245 to 72. Around this same time, the state oiled the surface of the toll road section from Panamint Springs to three miles west of the DVNM boundary. Another major improvement came in January 1938 when work began on a 2.9-mile realignment project on the west slope of the Panamint Range to Towne Pass to eliminate steep grade, ending approximately at the DVNM boundary (SR 190 PM 66.1-69.0). This realignment bypassed a large section of the toll road.<sup>69</sup> In 1940, the state completed a small project, building a new one-mile section of SR 127 through Panamint Springs. The project began where the 1937 Darwin bypass project ended, and roughly one-half of this new highway was an improvement of the Eichbaum Toll Road, while a few very short segments of the toll road were bypassed. The completed new highway section through Panamint Springs was 25 feet wide with an oiled surface.<sup>70</sup> A final realignment occurred in 1970 when a 4.9 mile section of new highway was built on the west slope

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<sup>68</sup> S. Ray to Alan S. Hart, Re: Right-of Way for Existing State Highway Within Boundaries of Death Valley National Monument, July 20, 1951; S. Ray, State of California Division of Highways, District 9 to Alan S. Hart, State of California, District 9, Re: Road in Death Valley National Monument, June 1, 1951; W.L. Savage, "State Assumes Maintenance of Route 127 Within Death Valley," *California Highways and Public Works* (January/February 1945): 30-31.

<sup>69</sup> State of California, Division of Highways, "Plan and Profile of State Highway in Inyo County Between the 3.5 Miles East of Saline Valley Rd. and Panamint Sink," August 31, 1936; State of California, Division of Highways, *Fifteenth Biennial Report*, November 1946, Completed Contracts, Inyo County, 211; State of California, Division of Highways. "Plan and Profile of State Highway in Inyo County Between the 4 ¾ Mi. E. of Panamint Sink and Death Valley Nat. Mon." October 20, 1937; A.C. Briney, Milton Harris, J.N. Stanley, "State Constructing New Road Leading Into Death Valley," *California Highways and Public Works* 15, no. 7 (July 1937): 6-7, 27-28; H. F. Caton, "Towne's Pass Highway to Death Valley Improved," *California Highways and Public Works* (June 1938): 24-28.

<sup>70</sup> State of California, Division of Highways, "Plan and Profile of State Highway in Inyo County At Panamint Springs," January 13, 1940.

of the Panamint Range. This bypassed part of the Eichbaum Toll Road alignment, as well as part of the bypass built 1938 (**Plate 19**).<sup>71</sup> The state re-designated SR 127 as SR 190 in 1964.<sup>72</sup>

These few realignments are the only documented changes to the route of SR 190 that diverged from the original alignment of the Eichbaum Toll Road. A recent visual survey of the road at PM 69.2-69.8, however, has revealed other realignments and bypassed toll road segments. Most of SR 190 between Panamint Springs and Stovepipe Wells was built on the same alignment as the toll road, thus destroying those sections of toll road. The toll road section of SR 190 remained “gravel or oiled gravel, or oiled earth” into the 1970s, the only exception being the short section at Panamint Springs, which was paved in 1940.<sup>73</sup>

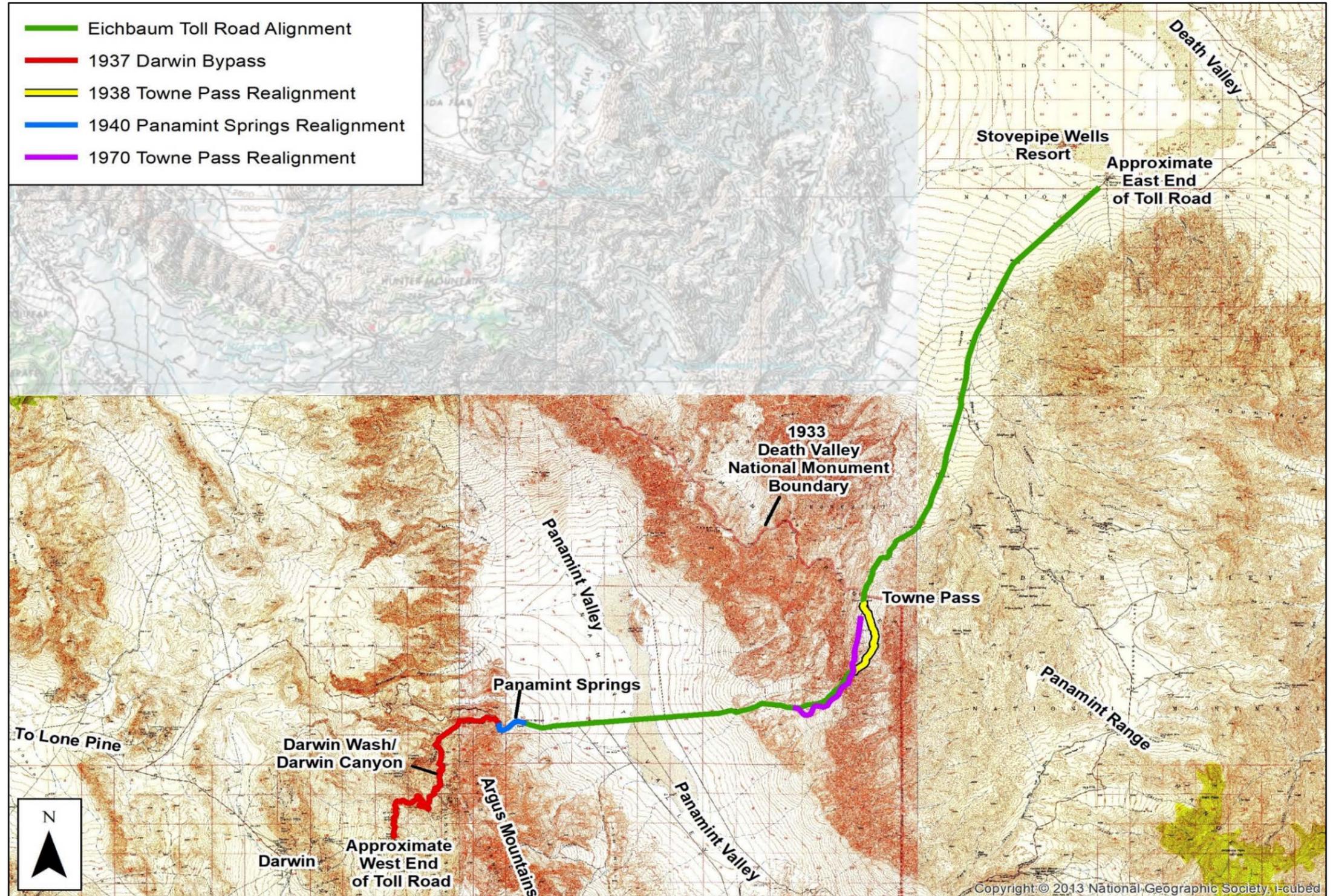
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<sup>71</sup> USGS, *Stovepipe Wells Quadrangle*, 15-minute, 1:62,500 (Washington: USGS 1952); USGS, *Emigrant Canyon Quadrangle*, 15-minute, 1:62,500 (Washington: USGS 1952); USGS, *Darwin Quadrangle*, 15-minute, 1:62,500 (Washington: USGS 1950); USGS, *Panamint Butte Quadrangle*, 15-minute, 1:62,500 (Washington: USGS 1951).

<sup>72</sup> State of California, Division of Highways, “Plan and Profile of State Highway in Inyo County Between 8.3 Miles East of Panamint Springs and 0.6 mile West of West Boundary of Death Valley National Monument,” May 25, 1970.

<sup>73</sup> State of California, Division of Highways, *Road Map of the State of California, July 1940* (Sacramento: Division of Highways, 1940); State of California, Division of Highways, *Road Map of the State of California, 1942* (Sacramento: Division of Highways, 1942); State of California, Division of Highways, *Road Map of the State of California, 1960* (Sacramento: Division of Highways, 1960); State of California, Division of Highways, *Road Map of the State of California, 1970* (Sacramento: Division of Highways, 1970); State of California, Division of Highways, *Road Map of the State of California, 1974* (Sacramento: Division of Highways, 1974).

**Plate 19.** USGS base maps ca. 1950 showing the alignment of the Eichbaum Toll Road and those sections bypassed by realignments undertaken by Caltrans after the state acquired the toll road. The Darwin Bypass (red line) and the Towne Pass Bypass (yellow line) are the two longest bypassed toll road sections. The Panamint Springs realignment (blue line) resulted slight and fragmentary deviations from the toll road alignment, and these bypassed segments are not apparent given the scale of this map. The purple line shows the new route built in 1970, bypassing the toll road alignment on the west end of the project. The east end was an improvement to the highway built in 1938. Plates 1 through 3 show the full original alignment of the Eichbaum Toll Road.



## 5. NATIONAL REGISTER SIGNIFICANCE

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act defines a historic property as a historic district, site, building, structure or object included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register. The eligibility criteria for listing properties in the National Register are codified in 36 CFR Part 60 and explained in guidelines published by the Keeper of the National Register.

Eligibility for listing in the NRHP rests on twin factors of significance and integrity. A property must have both significance and integrity to be considered eligible. Loss of integrity, if sufficiently great, will overwhelm any historical significance a property may possess and render it ineligible. Likewise, a property can have complete integrity, but if it lacks significance, it is also ineligible.

*Historic significance* is judged by applying the NRHP criteria identified as Criteria A through D. The NRHP guidelines explain that a historic resource's "quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture" is determined by meeting at least one of the four main criteria at the local, state, or national level:

- Criterion A: association with events or trends significant in the broad patterns of our history;
- Criterion B: association with the lives of significant individuals;
- Criterion C: a property that embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, represents the work of a master, or that possesses high artistic values;
- Criterion D: has yielded, or is likely to yield information important to history or prehistory.

Criterion D is generally used to evaluate historic sites and archaeological resources. Although buildings and structures can occasionally be recognized for the important information they might yield regarding historic construction or technologies.

*Integrity* is determined under NRHP guidelines by applying seven factors to a historic resource: location, design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association. These seven can be roughly grouped into three types of integrity considerations. Location and setting relate to the relationship between the property and its environment. Design, materials, and workmanship relate to construction methods and architectural details. Feeling and association are the least objective of the seven criteria, pertaining to the overall ability of the property to convey a sense of the historical time and place in which it was constructed.

The Eichbaum Toll Road is potentially significant under Criterion A for its important association with the development of tourism in Death Valley.<sup>74</sup> Prior to construction of the toll road, the

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<sup>74</sup> A comprehensive assessment of the integrity of the entire Eichbaum Toll Road was not within the scope of the Towne Pass Curve Correction Project. Therefore, Caltrans has assumed that the Eichbaum Toll Road is a historic property eligible for listing in the NRHP under National Register Criterion A, as the first road constructed into Death Valley for strictly recreational purposes making Death Valley a destination point for tourism, with a period of significance of 1926 to 1937. The period of significance begins in the year of the road's completion and ends the year

general public at large did not view Death Valley as a tourist destination. Furthermore, no good roads suitable for the average automobile and auto-tourist existed to access Death Valley. Eichbaum built the toll road with the sole intention of use by tourists to reach his resort. Thanks to Eichbaum's promotion of Death Valley, and the construction of a good, passable road into the valley, Death Valley blossomed into an extremely popular tourist destination during the relatively brief period of the Eichbaum Toll Road's operation. The period of significance under Criterion A is 1926 to 1937, the year of the road's completion to the year of the first major alterations, being the Darwin Cutoff and possible alterations by NPS within DVNM.

The Eichbaum Toll Road is also potentially significant under Criterion B for its association with H.W. Eichbaum. National Register guidelines state that under Criterion B historically significant persons refer to "individuals whose activities are demonstrably important within a local, State, or national historic context." For a resource to be eligible under this criterion it must illustrate a person's important achievements, and must be associated with the person's productive life, reflecting the time period when he or she achieved significance.<sup>75</sup> H.W. Eichbaum is a historically significant person at the local level for his successful efforts to promote Death Valley as a tourist destination and facilitate access to the traveling public. Eichbaum's efforts in this regard included not only construction of the Eichbaum Toll Road, but also building the Stovepipe Wells Resort, establishing bus service from Los Angeles, and vigorously advertising and promoting the destination in the *Los Angeles Times*. The evolution of Death Valley into a popular tourist attraction was important to this part of California because it brought a substantial number of tourists into this formerly sparsely traveled area, and thus spurred regional economic activity that extended beyond the national monument's boundaries. It is largely through H.W. Eichbaum's initiative, vision, and efforts that Death Valley became a heavily visited tourist locale.

The other aspect of Criterion B that must be met for a property to be significant is the property must also be the resource that best represents the individual's historic contributions and is most directly related to his or her achievements. Eichbaum was directly involved in the planning, construction, and operation of the toll road until his death, and the road is directly related to his most important historical achievement. While Eichbaum had other successes and accomplishments during his lifetime, from his early mining days as a young man in the Rhyolite region to this successful tourist transportation endeavors on Catalina Island and Venice, these achievements are less notable than his principal role in promoting Death Valley as a tourist destination. The Eichbaum Toll Road is also the best property to reflect Eichbaum's achievements relative to Death Valley tourism. Other properties associated with this period of Eichbaum's life are the Stovepipe Wells Resort, his home, and perhaps an office or other place of business. While elements of the

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of the first alterations to the road, namely establishment of the Darwin Cutoff and possible alterations by the National Park Service (NPS) within Death Valley National Monument. The Eichbaum Toll Road is being assumed eligible for listing in the National Register for the purposes of this project only, per Stipulation VIII.C.4 of the Caltrans Section 106 PA.

<sup>75</sup> National Park Service, Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1997), 14, 15.

Stovepipe Wells Resort still exist from Eichbaum's period of ownership, this property is known to have been substantially altered and is therefore not the best representative property. Eichbaum also appears to have lived and worked out of the Stovepipe Wells Resort part of the year. Research did not determine if he had an office in Los Angeles. The Eichbaum Toll Road, therefore, is the best known resource to represent Eichbaum's historic contributions to local history as a person who was demonstrably instrumental in opening up Death Valley to visitors and promoting the national monument as a resort and tourist destination. The period of significance under this criterion would be 1926, the year of the toll road's completion, through 1932, the year of Eichbaum's death.

The Eichbaum Toll Road utilized common road construction methods for the period, and was not notable for its design or engineering. It does not, therefore, appear to have the potential to meet Criterion C requirements.

Under Criterion D, the Eichbaum Toll Road is otherwise documented in a broad range of documentary materials and, therefore, is not likely to yield information important to history.

The character-defining features necessary to convey the property's significance would be the physical characteristics of the road as they existed during the 1926-1937 period, being: a road having width between 15 and 20 feet; graded, natural material road surface; the road original alignment; and any associated features dating to the period of significance, such as road signs or right-of-way markers. Non-contributing elements would include the sections widened, paved, and otherwise improved to modern highway standards; drainage culverts and pipes; and post-1937 roadside signs or paddles.

## **6. PREPARERS' QUALIFICATIONS**

JRP Partner Bryan Larson (MA, Public History, California State University, Sacramento) has 19 years of professional experience working as a consulting historian on a wide variety of historical research and cultural resource management projects. He provided project direction, oversight, and quality control, and conducted research and contributed to preparing this report.

JRP Staff Architectural Historian Steven J. "Mel" Melvin (M.A., Public History, California State University, Sacramento) was the lead historian for this study. In his more than 12 years of experience, Mr. Melvin has conducted research and written historic contexts on an array of themes including historic trails and roads. He was the primary author and researcher for this report. Mr. Melvin qualifies as an architectural historian and historian under the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards (as defined in 36 CFR Part 61).

Research Assistant Shelby Kendrick (M.A., Public History, California State University, Sacramento) assisted with research and the preparation of this report.

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