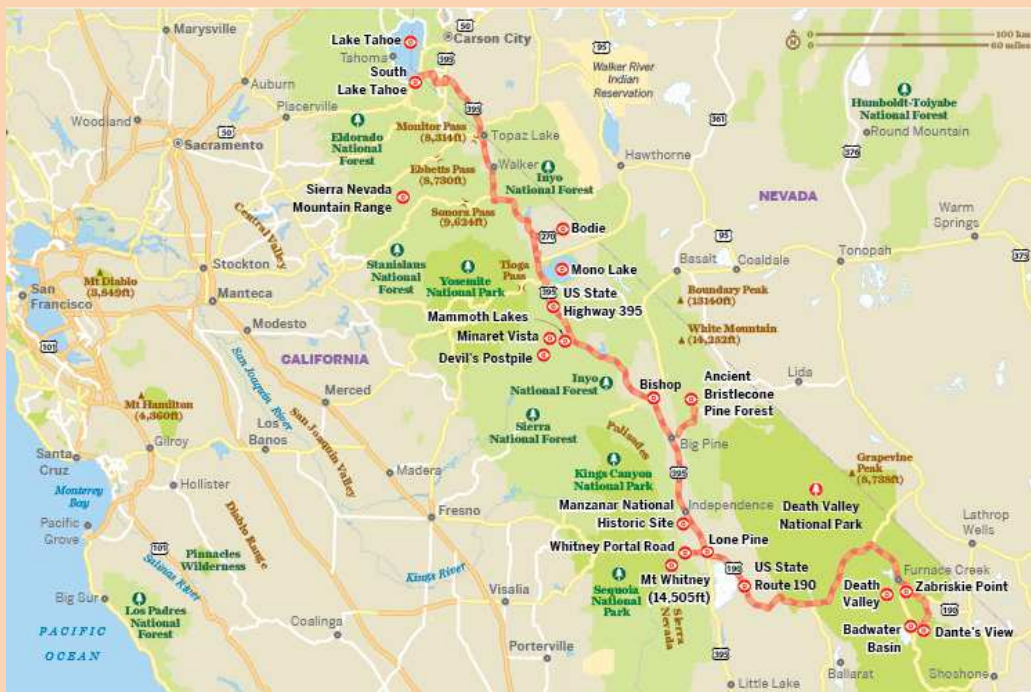


## Drive California's scenic Highway 395 - Thanks to Clifton Wilkinson



A road trip along Hwy 395 from outside of Mojave, CA to Lake Tahoe will take your breath away. US Highway 395 is California's backbone. It runs north-south east of the Sierra Nevada mountain range and west of the Nevada border. You'll see the highest mountain in the contiguous United States, the major (and historically first) source of Los Angeles' water, California geology, ghost towns, film locations, ski resorts, tufa formations at Mono Lake and more.

Yet for all its many attractions, it's relatively unexplored, especially compared to California's other big name draws. It takes about four days to get a good feel for the region so join us on a north-south, semi-secret, always spectacular road trip.



*\*\*"We" will start from the south in Los Angeles*  
*\*\*Also – Death Valley NP will be covered on a separate webpage*



## Day one: Los Angeles to the 395 to Lone Pine



Start your adventure early to catch sunrise on local Los Angeles County mountains. Take the 405 Fwy thru the Sepulveda Pass into the San Fernando Valley. At the north end of the valley, look right for '**The Cascades**' where the water from Inyo Mono Counties still flows. It marks the end of the LA Aqueduct. On the left is the original aqueduct (piping), opened in 1913. William Mulholland's famous quote, "There it is: take it".

In 1930 the Los Angeles DWP diverted water from the Mono Basin, drastically lowering Mono Lake's water level.

In 1970 the Second LA Aqueduct was added. This is the modern spillway shown prominently in the photo here.

Pick up the Antelope Valley Freeway (SR 14) heading east. On the left you'll see signs for the **Vasquez Rocks State Park**. Check it out on separate (shorter?) trip!





You won't actually pickup the I-395 until after you've passed north thru Mojave town and **Red Rock Canyon SP** in Kern County. You'll enjoy the many colors and erosion effects as you drive right thru the middle of this state park.



The 395 will take you thru Inyo County. You'll be in Owens Valley driving parallel to the Eastern Sierra (and LA Aqueduct). On your right you'll notice **Little Lake Reservoir** lined with black basalt. In the photo background you'll see Red Hill cinder cone rising above the valley floor. Don't pass Red Hill without turning right onto Fossil Falls Rd.





**Fossil Falls** is a 'must' stop and short walk to the basaltic 'fossil' of an Ice Age Owens River waterfall. (Not your typical animal or plant fossil!) The whole area is a volcanic field with multiple lava flows. Over time the river smoothed the basalt which one can touch and perhaps, carefully climb down.



The plan is to overnight in the beautiful town of Lone Pine. This alone would be a great destination out of LA. A short drive up to Whitney Portal will find a small trout pond, some waterfalls and the trailhead for those hiking to Mt Whitney, that highest mountain in... There's a huge fault scarp and a small cemetery – evidence of the famous Lone Pine Earthquake of 1872. You can even take your car on a driving tour of the **Alabama Hills** where so many movies have been shot. Fittingly, there's a nice, little film museum with old memorabilia (throw in a Robert Downey Jr Iron Man suit).





## Day two: Lone Pine to Lake Tahoe



A few miles out of town is the **Manzanar Relocation Camp – Historic Site**. The modern visitor's center includes authentic artifacts, an prisoner information library, a motivational film and **barracks** living quarters (see photo above) and a guard tower. Outside one can drive to the remains of a Japanese garden built beside the camp hospital and an inspirational **monument** for those who died there (photo below).





Bishop is the 'bit city' in Owens Valley, but before that is Big Pine. I mention it because it is the gateway town to the oldest living thing on earth. Not technically a part of this road trip, it's a bit of a drive across the valley and up into the White Mountains over 10,000ft high to get to the **Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest**. Not a typical 'forest' but one grove of Great Basin bristlecone pines contains Methuselah which is about 5000 years in age!



Past the Mammoth Lakes basin (think famous ski area) but before you get to Mono Lake, turn off at CA-158, the **June Lake Loop**. It's a short, scenic drive by 4 lakes. If there's any snow in the mountains, you'll get to see waterfalls up close! You'll pop back onto 395 before Mono Lake, so you can take this loop road either coming or going on your big drive.





Mono Lake is a salt lake with no outlet for freshwater from creeks such as Lee Vining. Its ecosystem is based on brine shrimp and alkali flies. This lake area is a crucial habitat for two million migrating birds which were endangered by LA City's Mono Extension of its aqueduct system. The diversion of water from Lee Vining Creek and Rush Creek caused the lake water level to fall. This exposed the once underwater **tufas** (towers) but more importantly endangered the bird species. After decades of legal battles, Mono Lake now maintains a more stable ecosystem.



Bridgeport is the governmental center of Mono County. I know it from my Dad's trout fishing trips. There's a well-known ghost town, **Bodie**, which I recall was quite a long, bumpy drive. Not much to look at, but if you like to visit old buildings and cemeteries?



Continue on 395 past Topaz Lake and up the Kingsbury Grade...

## Lake Tahoe!



**Emerald Bay State Park**

The end of Hwy 395