

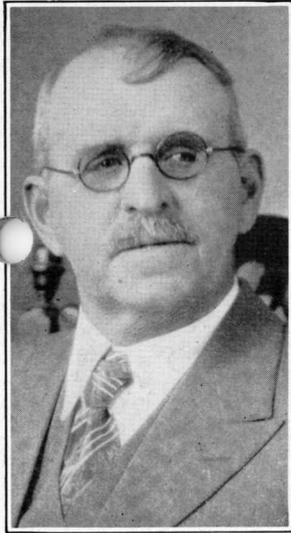
March 1931

Closing the East-of-the-Sierras Gap

By F. G. SOMNER, District Engineer, District Nine

ON FEBRUARY 22d "Closing the Gap" in the State highway improvements, Mojave to Sherwin Hill in Mono County, distance 200 miles, was celebrated.

The celebration was held under the auspices of the High Sierras Recreational Association and took place in Red Rock Canyon in eastern



F. G. SOMNER.

Kern County, 24 miles north of Mojave, a fitting place for the scene of this celebration and an appropriate section chosen to mark the completion in the last link in this thoroughfare. The

completion on January 31, 1931, of the George Herz contract from Cinco to seven miles north of Ricardo,

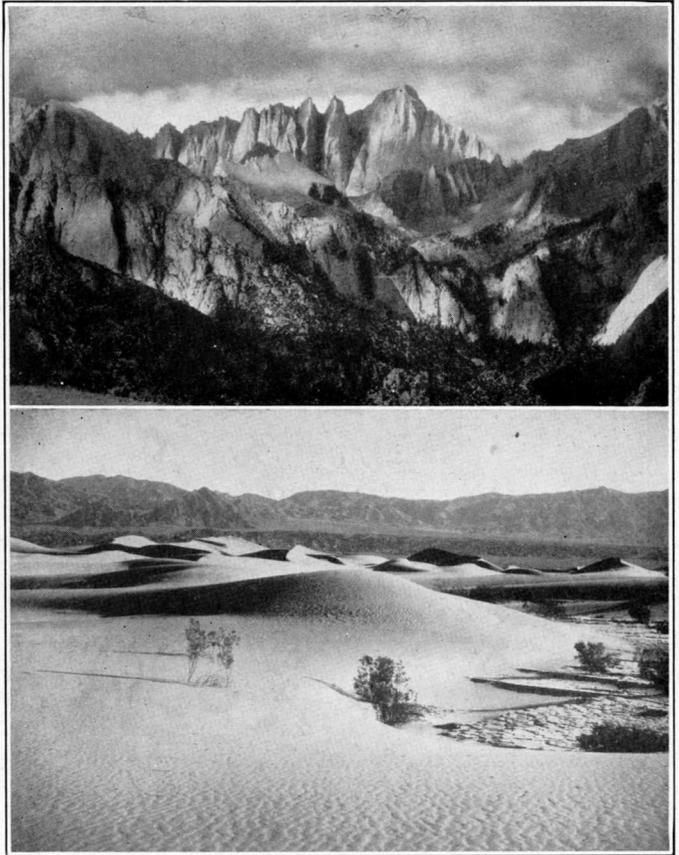
length 15 miles, sets at rest forever the terrors of Red Rock Canyon, the greatest barrier to travel within District IX, owing to the old road having occupied the floor of the canyon, subjecting travelers to the dangers of being caught in roaring currents from periodical cloudbursts originating within a vast drainage area at the head of the canyon. The new highway, 36 feet wide, is constructed on excellent alignment, well above the flood waters of the creek. Portions of embankments exposed to the flood have been protected by rock slope pavement well anchored below the creek bed.

State Highway Commissioner Harry A. Hopkins of Taft was the official representative of Governor Rolph at the celebration. Earl Lee Kelly, chairman of the Commission, was also present. Both commission-

ers addressed the gathering, extending the felicitations of Governor Rolph and the California Highway Commission upon the happy occasion that the day celebrated.

Above the canyon portions of Red Rock the creekbed widens, with consequent decrease of both velocity and depth of the flood waters, admitting of the crossing and recrossing of the waters in order to secure proper alignment. The crossings are accomplished by means of concrete paved dips. As a substitute for expensive bridges this type of construction was deemed advisable by reason of the freakish character of the cloudburst floods, including indeterminable flow, together with impending treacherous channel changes.

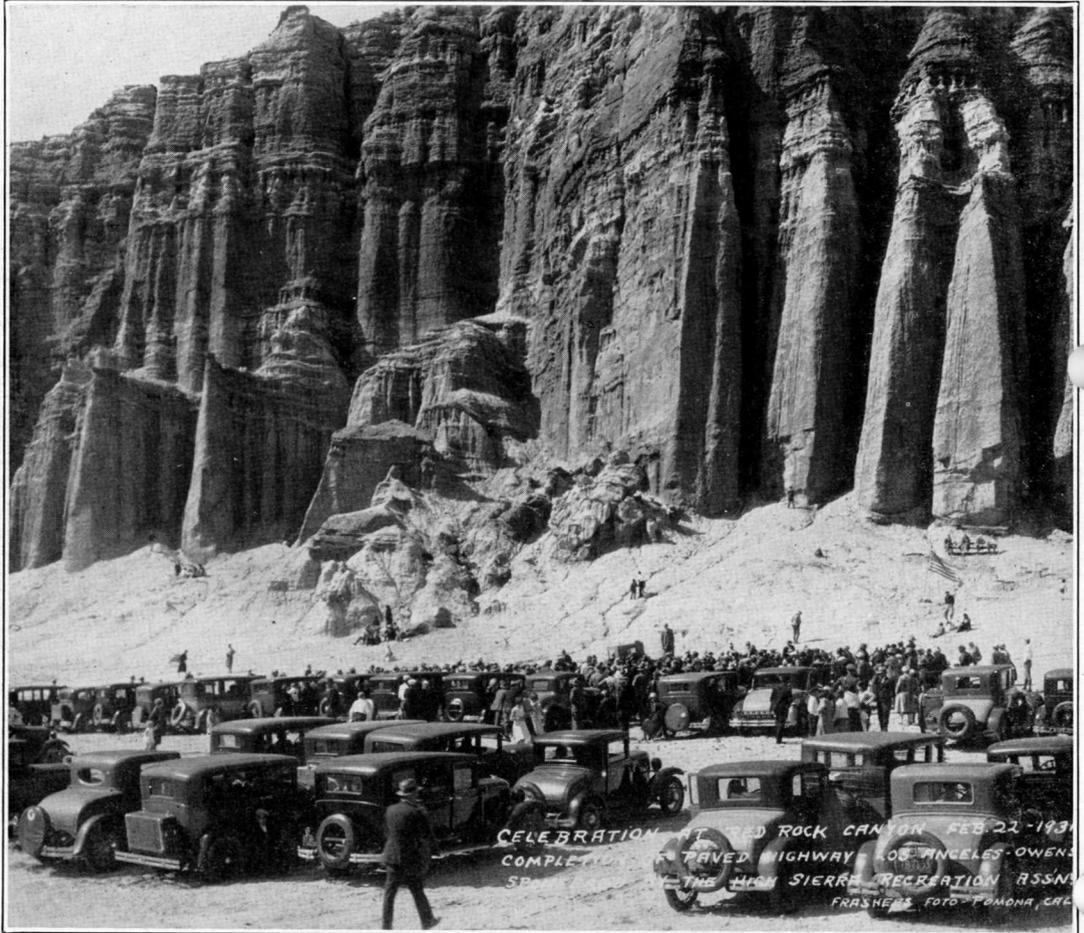
Red Rock is presided over by Rudolph



The highest and the lowest points in the United States: The upper view shows the summit of Mt. Whitney, elevation 14,496 feet; the lower view is in Death Valley, 310 feet below the sea level; both are served by the highway, of which this article tells.

Hagen, who has lived there some thirty years and who jealously guards from vandalism the fantasies of nature's handiwork engraved on the canyon's walls, intermingled with glistening and varying colors. The canyon is extremely popular as a week-end sojourn, the visitors gazing in awe at these tremendous formations. Much has been written of its scenic specialties, such as the White Chapel,

State Highway Department. Such conjectures were set aside by State Highway Engineer Purcell, who gave the assurance that the Organ Rock would not be disturbed by the highway construction. This monument of nature's handiwork stands intact but the injured little "Lady at the Organ" sits in mute appeal to the passersby for restoration of her former self.



View at the Dedication Ceremonies in Red Rock Canyon.

Sand Temple, Capitol Rock, Liberty Dome, Royal Gateway, etc. The Iron Canyon, a tributary from the west, affords equal attractions, a result of the most peculiar freaks of nature's erosions.

The outstanding scenic feature is the Organ Rock, with the "Lady at the Organ," now a pathetic figure, having been disfigured by vandals. Organizations interested in the preservation of nature's handiwork, and feeling that the erection of the State Highway in such close proximity to the Organ Rock would result in its destruction, made protests to the

THE LAST LINK

Route 23 of the California State Highway extends from Saugus, in Los Angeles County, to Markleville, county seat of Alpine County.

The "Closing the Gap" relates to the last link in the completion of a hard surfaced road constructed to modern standards on Route 23, from Mojave, distance 200 miles, to the Sherwin Hill summit in Mono County, entrance to the extensive recreational area, and far beyond.

When the first California State Highway fund of \$18,000,000 was created, effective

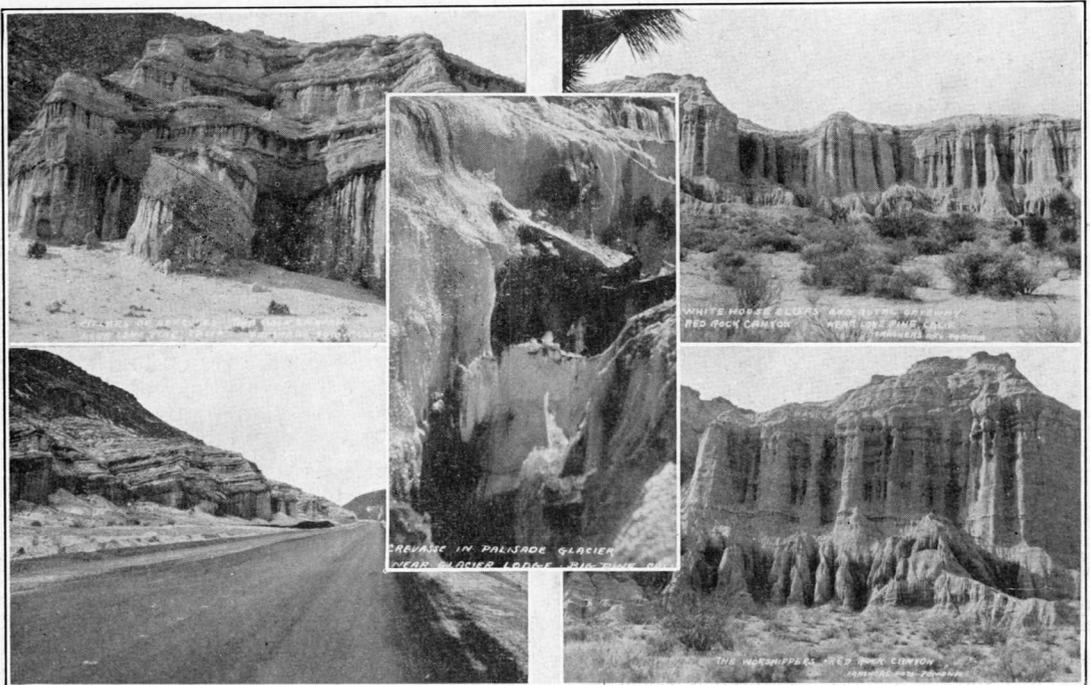
January 1, 1912, there were many demands for the limited allocation of funds to District Six, which covered an extensive mileage. Sand, interminable sand, was the problem east of the High Sierras, accompanied by narrow roadway, crooked alignment and poor drainage. It was imperative that the limited funds be devoted to removal of actual barriers to travel, and very little could be done in the way of permanent improvement. An eight-mile stretch of oiled macadam, together with eight miles of concrete pavement eight feet in width, comprised the hard surfaced roads at the creation of District Nine in October, 1923.

Very little relief was afforded by subsequent bond issues or the Two-Cent Gas Tax

an oiled rock surface. Between Sherwin Hill and George's Creek, ten miles north of Independence, distance 73 miles, the road mix method was employed, the work having been accomplished by day labor. From George's Creek north to Mojave, distance 124 miles, the plant mix method prevailed, and the work all done by contract, divided into eleven jobs, with strict adherence to the precepts of the Research and Material Departments insisted upon.

The roads were built at a reasonable expense. The result is a road reputed to be as fast as any in California.

The trip from Bishop to Los Angeles is no longer a task but a pleasure, and to be added



More views along the highway in Red Rock Canyon: At the upper left are the Pillars of Hercules; upper right, the White House Cliffs; lower left, The Organ Rock; lower right, the Worshippers; inset, Crevice in the Palisade Glacier, the farthest southwest glacier in the United States.

Measure enacted in 1923. The "two ruts in the sand," as the conditions then existing may best be described, received little attention prior to the One-Cent Gas Tax Measure in 1927. Meantime every effort was made to facilitate travel over the whole of the district, and despite the lack of funds a noticeable transition from very bad to easy travel conditions was effected.

"CALIFORNIA MIX" PAVEMENT

The type of pavement employed in the improvements is the well-known California Mix, consisting of a crushed rock base with

is the decreased cost of operating motor busses and freight lines, with corresponding reduction in tariffs.

"SOMETHING OF EVERYTHING"

"Something of everything" is nature's dispensation to the travellers along the State Highway from Mojave to the summit of Sherwin Hill, distance 200 miles. Across the Mojave Desert and through Red Rock Canyon, described in the first chapter of this narrative, and on to Indian Wells Valley. Try the bass fishing, quail and duck hunting at Little Lake, then through Rose Valley past

Cowan Station and Olancha. Look to the left when you reach Lone Pine, at snow capped Cathedral Peaks of the High Sierras, including towering Mount Whitney, the highest mountain in the United States, elevation 14,496 feet; continuing on alongside the Los Angeles city aqueduct and through Owens Valley, cultivated landscapes of hills and valleys, peaceful towns, including Independence, the county seat of Inyo County, and Big Pine.



State Highway Commissioner Harry A. Hopkins, who officially represented Governor Rolph at the Red Rock dedication.

Just to the west lies the Palisades Glaciers, notable as the most southerly glaciers of the United States. You have passed the Panamint Range on the right, bordering on Death Valley, lowest point in the United States, elevation—310 feet, wonderland of thrilling adventure, with all the attributes that make up desert appeal. Still along the base of the High Sierras and passing through Bishop, the metropolis of Inyo County; on twenty miles further, ascending the summit of Sherwin Hill, the gateway to the vast amphitheatre of recreational area, a wonderland of unsurpassed grandeur, known until a few years ago only to disciples of Isaac Walton and nimrods. Look in all directions, snow-capped Cathedral

COMMISSIONER REARDON TAKES PUBLIC WORKS REARDON TO TASK OVER FENCE

(From the *Oakland Tribune*)

Timothy A. Reardon, State Highway Commissioner and President of the San Francisco Board of Public Works, today is conflicting with himself over the repair of a worn out fence on Twin Peaks Boulevard.

According to the story, Reardon, as Highway Commissioner, inspected the worn out fence and decided that himself as President of the Board of Works should do something about it.

As President of the Board of Public Works, he told himself that he was too busy to attend to the job.

"I almost came to blows with myself," he said, "but anyway, the fence will be built. I've promised that to the State Highway Commissioner."

Peaks of the High Sierras, over the summit the famous Minarets overlooking the Thousand Islands at the head waters of the San Joaquin River, home of the golden trout. Also the Mammoth Lakes and thousands of other lakes and streams. This virgin country which man has done nothing to wreck, free from litter and stench, goes on and on as far as eye can see. Those "weary of the roar of the great cities, the fretful stir, unprofitable, and fever of the world" may spend a lifetime of vacation periods reveling each year in new scenes amidst the quiet of mountains, lakes and streams, and their slogan will ever be "See the High Sierras first."

So much for the recreational value of this improvement to the traveling public and commercial interests of Inyo and Mono counties. The closing of the gap is a not unworthy chapter in the epics of the accomplishments of the State Highway organization. Route 25 through eastern Kern County, Inyo and Mono counties furnishes the following interstate connections: From Big Pine to Goldfield, Nevada, via Oasis; from Bishop north to a connection with the Nevada Highway over the Montgomery Pass and on to the east and to the boundary between Mono County, California, and Nevada at the north limits of District IX. A connection extends from the Mono Basin over the Tioga Pass to the San Joaquin Valley, and also from a connection with the Sonora Road, 18 miles north of Bridgeport.

OF MILITARY IMPORTANCE

The relations between Route 23 and the munitions plant under construction at Haw-

(Continued on page 18.)

Accident Record of Young Drivers Alarmingly High

MORE rigid enforcement of the operator's license law to curb reckless youths operating motor vehicles has been recommended to the courts and the various police departments of the State and the California Highway Patrol by the Bureau of Research, Statistics and Traffic Safety of the Patrol.

This follows a study of accident statistics made by the bureau indicating that youths between the ages of 14 and 19 are involved in twice as many accidents as would be the same number of older drivers.

A study of the records for the first six months of 1930 shows boys of this age group were responsible for more than 1600 accidents involving death or injury to themselves and others.

The bureau believes that if the reckless youth persists in endangering his life and the lives of others there is only one thing to do and that is to cancel his license.

Reports of accidents among this group of drivers show a greater variety of surprising causes than in many of the groups of older drivers.

"The immature youth is inclined to be indiscreet and often does the most irrational and unusual things in his driving," the bureau's report said.

"The courts can aid materially in effecting a correction by promptly revoking or suspending the youthful driver's license in flagrant cases. After the license has been revoked, the courts should demand substantial proof from each driver whose license has been revoked that he has not driven a motor vehicle during the period in which his license was suspended.

"Unless a youth can drive as prudently and as carefully, as an adult, he should not be permitted to drive."

CLOSING THE EAST-OF-THE SIERRAS GAP

(Continued from page 12.)

thorne, Nevada, are set forth in an article by W. G. Scott, a member of the American Society of Military Highways, who played an important part in the promotion of State highways east of the High Sierras. In a comprehensive report on the proposed Military Highway from the munitions plant at Hawthorne to tidewater, he dwells upon its relations to Owens Valley as follows:

"As to the importance to Owens Valley of a highway between the munitions base and

tidewater open all the year, the advantage both to the naval depot and to the valley are so self-evident that little need be said. Allowances must be made for several distinct classes of traffic; that resulting from active operations by Los Angeles at the Mono Basin and other sources of water supply; traffic that will be inevitable between the naval depot and tidewater; commercial traffic by motor truck along the route; the stream of motor buses both ways; stage traffic and the possibilities of an increased traffic; important traffic occasioned by hydroelectric systems. All of these features point to the absolute necessity of a distinct two-way traffic system, which will place the towns of Owens Valley on one of the most important highways of America.

DREAMS OF FUTURE REALIZED

The closing of the gap is the bright spot in the lives of the people of this country. The dreams of many years of a smooth thoroughfare reaching for 200 miles along the base of the High Sierras has been realized, resulting in a tendency of a better understanding of the citizenship with each other, with corresponding closer relationship in both social and business life. There is sure to come a closer bond of understanding and neighborliness between Inyo and Mono counties and the southland.

This sportsman's paradise and remarkable scenic area unsurpassed is an everlasting heritage. The thoroughfare, which increases in popularity from year to year, will play a greater part from now on in the lives and happiness of the citizenship of Inyo and Mono counties.

Thus endeth the story of the "Closing the Gap." Fate will some time decree that the writer shall leave these parts, whether the journey be long or short, but his sojourn can be looked upon with great satisfaction. I has increased his respect and confidence in men, and sad will be the parting from a people virile, of high character and appreciative qualities, whom one learns to be fond of and enjoy.

It lies where Nature spread it,
Bringing gladness to our eyes,
Like a jeweled flame of tapestry
Beneath the azure skies;
The Owens Valley below it,
Where creeks and rivers swirl,
Just the High Sierras stretching
Down the middle of the world.

Revised classic: Hush, little ash dump, don't you cry—you'll be a golf course by and by.—*Virginia Pilot.*