

TALES OF THE OLD WEST

JOE LIPKA

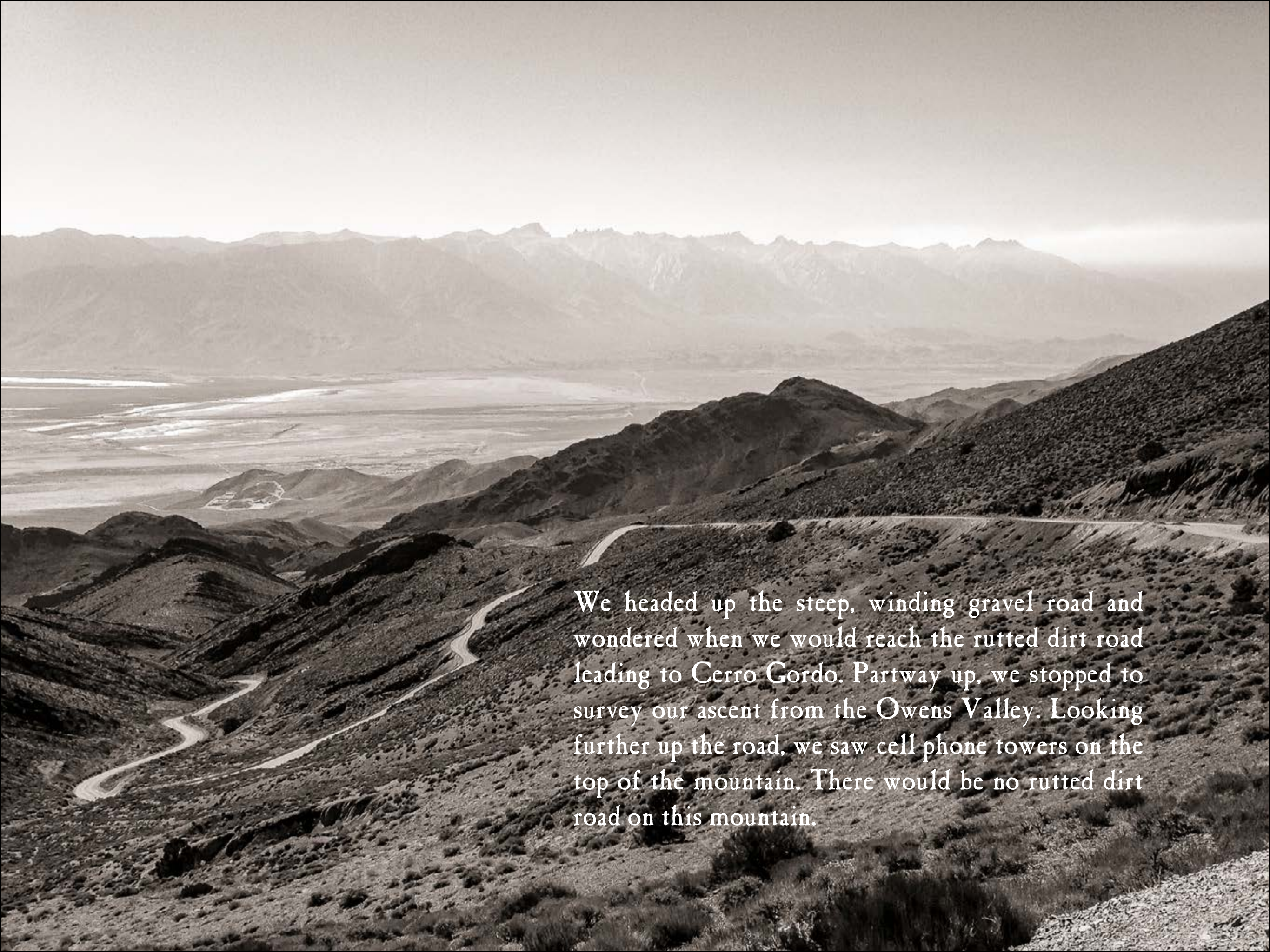


Tales of the Old West are told of a rootin', tootin' six gun shootin' tall lean stranger coming to town on a horse. He meets a young widow being threatened by the evil cattle baron. After rescuing her from the clutches of the evil cattle baron by dispatching his henchmen in a hail of lead, he simultaneously wins and breaks her heart riding off into the sunset.

My tales of the West cannot compare to the masters of the genre. I do not ride a horse, fire nine consecutive shots from my six shooter (without reloading) or strike it rich in the Mountains of California. In fact, I roam the West in air conditioned comfort and use a camera to tell tales from the ghost town of Cerro Gordo.

If what I tell you isn't true, then it should be. Because, "This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."





We headed up the steep, winding gravel road and wondered when we would reach the rutted dirt road leading to Cerro Gordo. Partway up, we stopped to survey our ascent from the Owens Valley. Looking further up the road, we saw cell phone towers on the top of the mountain. There would be no rutted dirt road on this mountain.

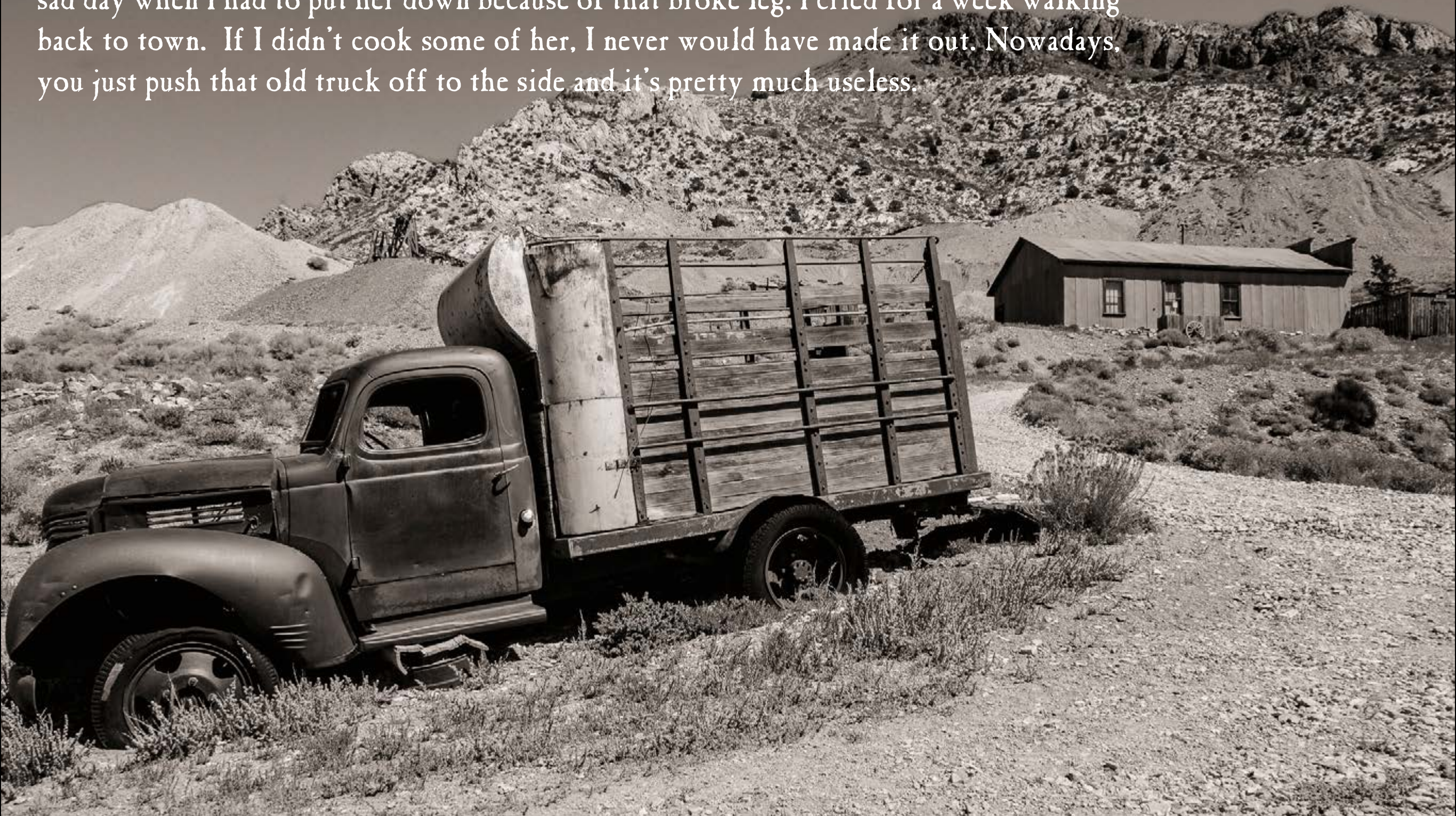
It's pretty much all gone now. When the mine played out, everyone left, taking whatever they could fit in the wagons. We found some tales they left behind.





It's not like it was in the old days. Myrtle, me and my hammer for the rock drill. Now it is paperwork, keeping that pump engine running and that damn hard hat that is hotter than hades and won't protect me against much of anything.

I sure miss my mule, Miss Liza. She packed all my gear while I was prospecting. It was a sad day when I had to put her down because of that broke leg. I cried for a week walking back to town. If I didn't cook some of her, I never would have made it out. Nowadays, you just push that old truck off to the side and it's pretty much useless.



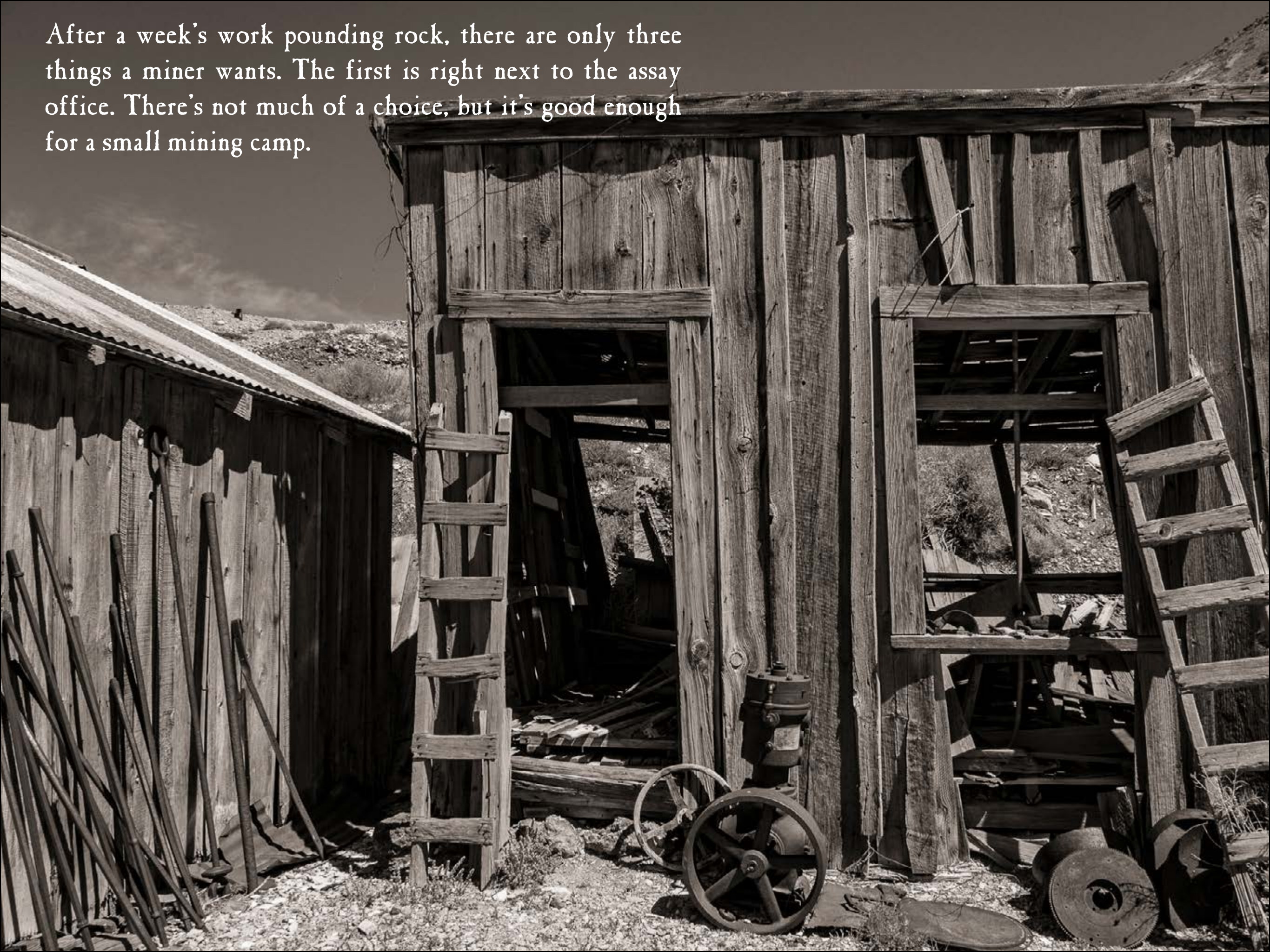


That winter was pretty bad. We were snowed in for nigh on four weeks. Food wasn't the issue, but the cold was. Got so bad we sawed off the handles of the shovels for firewood. You'll freeze to death quicker than you'll starve. Got to stay warm.



Those are Ol' Bob's tools. He would never have kept them like that. Most likely some tourist lined 'em up to make a snapshot or somethin'. I don't understand why they would do something like that. They're just old tools.

After a week's work pounding rock, there are only three things a miner wants. The first is right next to the assay office. There's not much of a choice, but it's good enough for a small mining camp.



The other two things are drinkin' and gamblin'. And you can get 'em both done at the same time at the saloon. 'Cept it's not really gambling, because when you figure the odds on strikin' it rich in a mine and playin' poker, well, poker ain't much of a gamble.



Said they got that back bar painting from a
whorehouse in Nevada. That fine looking
woman didn't have a stitch of clothing when
they opened the crate. Mother wouldn't have
a picture of a shameless hussy in her saloon, so
they hired some lady from San Francisco to
paint a dress on her. What a shame.





Mother ran a respectable (insofar as a mining town could be respectable) saloon. She always said there would be spring water for drinking and kept what she called a samovar of water available for the customers. I guess samovar is a fancy word for a bucket with a lid on it and a spout for water.



Joe Lipka has shared his vision since he began photographing.

In the last thirty years, his photographs have appeared in over one hundred juried exhibitions, more than twenty solo exhibitions and have been printed in both *LensWork* and *Black & White Photography* (UK) Magazines.

His website www.joelipkaphoto.com has continuously evolved since it was launched in 2004. His blog *Postcards from the Creative Journey*, published weekly since 2010, is a collection of his photographs and thoughts on the creative process.

COLOPHON

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*The images in this portfolio
were made in September, 2015
in Cerro Gordo, California*

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