

BACK TO BODIE

BY CHRISTIAN WILLIS * NIA #5185

As you travel north along California's backbone on US 395, halfway between the quaint towns of Lee Vining and Bridgeport, there's a fairly unremarkable right turn nestled into a rocky canyon: California State Route 270. As you traverse its 10 miles of paved road and gentle curves, savor them! Just ahead, the highway ends and the final three miles out to the venerable ghost town of Bodie are rough—dirt, gravel, ruts and washboards—but it's well worth it. In 1991 when I was 10 years old, my dad Bud took me out to see this historic landmark, and I was instantly enamored. When we returned home, he even helped me build a scale model of the town out of toothpicks for a fourth grade project, complete with little telephone poles and sagebrush.

Now, 28 years later, I was returning to Bodie with my own family—my wife Maggi, and three children: Christian Jr., Caitlin, and Ethan. What made this trip even more special for me was that my dad Bud and his wife Nancy were traveling along behind us in their trusty Subaru. As the pavement ended and our suspensions got a real workout, I smiled as fond memories returned, and of course the kids were having a blast bouncing around in the back!

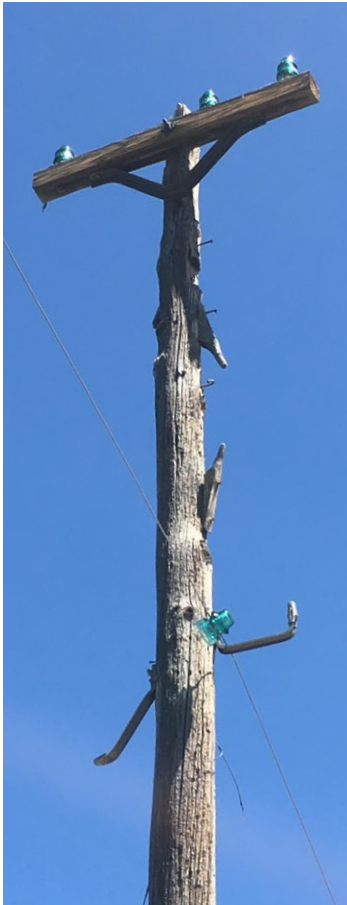
I won't spend a lot of time explaining the history of Bodie here—entire books have been written, and web sites are dedicated to this ghost town. It is a veritable treasure trove of gold mining history. Rather, I'll be describing Bodie from the viewpoint of an insulator collector. However, just to set the scene, here's a quick summary:

Bodie began as a small mining camp following the discovery of gold in the area in 1859 by several prospectors including W.S. Bodey. In 1876, Bodie exploded into a boomtown with a significant gold discovery by the Standard Company. From 1877-1880s, the population soared to an estimated 10,000 people and the town sprouted as many as 2,000 buildings, before its gradual downsizing and abandonment in the 1940s.



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With a town of that size, it was only natural that it would have telegraph, telephone, and electricity. And we all know what that means: insulators... *lots* of insulators!

In 1892, the Standard Company built a hydro-electric plant at Green Creek about 13 miles away from Bodie at a site known as Dynamo Pond. It was one of the very first long-distance electrical transmission lines in the country, and was one of the few locations where the rare CD 244 Pomona style was used. An excellent article written by Carver Mead & Barbara Smith was published in the November 2005 issue of *Crown Jewels of the Wire Magazine*, and describes this line in great detail. You can read an archived copy online at <https://www.cjow.com/archive/article.php?month=11&a=11GoneToBodie>.

Needless to say, I didn't see any Pomonas laying around! Much of the town's resident insulators still present are either porcelain or common fare such as Brookfields and Hemingrays. However, a lot of pieces do still remain, either up in the air on poles or nestled in the museum. As a brand new collector in 1991, to see insulators still up on poles and on the sides of buildings was a new sight for me. They were everywhere, and I was on a mission to find as many as I could.

Now, with 28 years of "spot the insulator in the dusty corner of a junk shop" under my belt, I realized I missed several in my youth!

Some of the ones I didn't miss can be seen inside the museum. I took a picture of these same pieces as a kid. Comparing the photos, I see that

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LEFT: THIS CD 244 WESTINGHOUSE POMONA INSULATOR WAS FOUND ON THE GROUND NEAR THE BODIE TO GREEN CREEK LINE BACK IN 1968. IT IS BELIEVED TO BE THE FIRST CD 244 INTRODUCED INTO THE HOBBY. PHOTO COURTESY OF DWAYNE ANTHONY.

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they rearranged the insulators, but they're all still there! You can see a CD 259 Roman Helmet, a glass Johnny Ball, a CD 287, CD 107, CD 160, CD 162 CREBs, CD 102, CD 164, a dog bone radio strain, a small porcelain power piece (unknown U#) and a small porcelain knob. It's interesting to note the age range of these pieces, spanning the c.1880s-1940s. On the other side of the room, you can see one of the first electric motors that was used in 1892, and a couple of porcelain multipart pieces keeping it company.



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One of my favorite buildings is on Green Street; it's quite unassuming when looking at it from the street. Attached to the back side of the Wheaton & Hollis Hotel, many people just pass by this plain brick building. But, if you look at the side, you can see three large multipart power insulators perched above, and rickety wooden steps lead up to the windows. Peering in, three massive transformers stand shoulder-to-shoulder against the back wall, and several porcelain insulators dot the floor. This was the hydroelectric power substation, responsible for powering the Standard stamp mill just up the hill. Go around to the back of the building and you'll see even more remnants of power lines. Across the creek bed behind the building is one of the original power lines still standing with a lone multipart perched on the crossarm.



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Poles line Green Street and dot other streets as well, and a few crossarms and side pins are even still attached to buildings by various means. Most insulators are still faithfully sitting atop their crossarms, but some have managed to pop free and are swinging in the breeze. Most of the buildings that still stand have all manner of porcelain knobs, wall tubes, spools and cleats still attached. There were simply too many to take pictures of them all, but I tried to include a good representation here.

One area I have yet to see is the stamp mill, which is off-limits except for special tours. There is a small transformer building where the power lines likely came in from the substation down the hill, and there are undoubtedly more insulators to be found inside the many buildings surrounding the mill. I have an excuse to visit again in the future! And Bodie will be waiting for me—perhaps a little older and little more weather-worn, but still the same old Bodie. Until next time! 🍷



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MAMMOTH MUSEUM: HAYDEN CABIN

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Nearly a week after returning to Mammoth Lakes, CA from our Bodie excursion, we attended the town's Fourth of July parade, where we were treated to a Navy F-18 flyover, and all kinds of festooned vehicles, including one from the Mammoth Museum. Intrigued, the next day we decided to visit the historic Hayden Cabin. Located just a few blocks from the parade route on Old Mammoth Road, the rustic 1920s log cabin is situated in a picturesque spot right on the bank of Mammoth Creek. We walked around the grounds, and as we entered the cabin, my gaze was immediately drawn upwards. Lining the walls of the room was a collection of—yep, you guessed it—glass insulators. I introduced myself to docent Mary Canada and asked her about them. They aren't sure how they came to be included as part of the exhibits, but it's possible that the cabin owner was a collector, or they were found on the property or around town. We may never know, but it's good to see insulators represented as part of Mammoth Lakes' history! I told her all about the National Insulator Association.

I counted about 27 pieces in all, representing a fairly good range of manufacturers, colors and styles, including Hemingray, Brookfield, Star, Whitall Tatum, and Lynchburg. CDs primarily consisted of 102, 115, 106, 133, 134, 152 and 154. There were even a couple of true green pieces that stood out. I informed her that most of them probably dated to the 1900s-1930s, which would fit the time frame in which the cabin was built.

The exhibits showing local history were well laid out and engaging, and the cabin and grounds are kept in immaculate condition. It's well worth a visit if you're in the Mammoth Lakes area! The Mammoth Museum at Hayden Cabin is located at 5489 Sherwin Creek Rd., Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546. Hours of operation are 10AM-6PM daily, from Memorial Weekend through September. Phone: (760)-934-6918. Website: <https://mammothmuseum.org>. Admission is free, but donations are encouraged. Special thanks to Mary Canada for showing us around, and teaching us history about the area! 🏠

