

LONE PINE GEOLOGY

The Sierra crest above you may seem tall, but believe it or not, what is right under you may even prove more surprising. The vertical distance from the summit of Mt. Whitney to the town of Lone Pine is approximately 10,700 feet. However did you know that the distance to solid rock below your feet in Lone Pine is nearly the same vertical distance? If the sediments that fill Owens Valley under Lone Pine were removed, the distance from the summit of Mt. Whitney to the real bottom of the Owens Valley would be nearly 20,000 feet! That's even deeper than the "deepest valley"

In geological vocabulary Owens Valley is not a true valley, but instead is what is called a graben. A graben is formed when a block of the earth's crust slips down between two adjacent blocks of the crust. Thus the depression is formed by faulting and not by stream or river action as is the case with a true valley. Don't expect any name changes soon such as Owens Graben or Death Valley Graben. These locations have for too long been called by their incorrect names which is just fine with the local inhabitants. Another graben is visible if you visit Diaz Lake 3 miles south of Lone Pine. Here the ground dropped in 1872 and allowed a lake to form. A depression can be seen that can be followed north through the Mt. Whitney Golf Course and the back portion of the Anchor Ranch on through the rodeo grounds in the town of Lone Pine.

Perhaps the single most well known image that visitors see of Lone Pine before their arrival to the town itself, is the row of rounded rusty hills known as the Alabama Hills that rise just west of Lone Pine. These hills are composed of the same granite rock that comprise the Sierra but have faulted off of the Sierra and separated over time.

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