NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM
FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES
(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

1. NAME:

COMMON: Saline Valley Salt Tram Historic Structure
AND/OR HISTORIC: Saline Valley Aerial Tramway

2. LOCATION:

MDM. One mile north of Swansea on Highway 136. The tram runs NW across the Inyo Mts. between Cerro Gordo Peak on the south & New York Butte on the Code: 06 County: Inyo, Code: 027 North through Daisy Canyon, NE end (Saline Valley Terminal): T. 14 S., R. 38 E., Sec. 26, MDM, 13 mi. NE of Swansea at the S end of Salt Lake in the Saline Valley.

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)
- District
- Site
- Object
- Building
- Structure

OWNERSHIP
- Public
- Private
- Both

STATUS
- In Process
- Being Considered

ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
- Yes:
- No
- Restricted
- Unrestricted

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)
- Agricultural
- Commercial
- Educational
- Entertainment
- Government
- Industrial
- Military
- Museum
- Private Residence
- Religious
- Scientific
- Park
- Other (Specify) Recreational Scenic
- Transportation
- Comments

4. AGENCY

U. S. Bureau of Land Management
REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: Bakersfield District
STREET AND NUMBER: 800 Truxtun Avenue
CITY OR TOWN: Bakersfield
STATE: California
CODE: 06

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
Office of County Assessor
STREET AND NUMBER: 325 W. Elm
CITY OR TOWN: Bishop
STATE: California
CODE: 06

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
None
DATE OF SURVEY:

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
STREET AND NUMBER:
CITY OR TOWN: Bishop
STATE: California
CODE: 06

FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE: DEC 5 1974
STATE: California
COUNTY: Inyo
ENTRY NUMBER: PH0047163
NATIONAL REGISTER RECEIVED OCT 16 1974
The Saline Valley Salt Tram was built in 1911 and 1912 to carry salt from Saline Valley to Owens Valley. In its 13½ mile length it rose from an elevation of 1100 feet at the east terminal to 8500 feet at the crest of the Inyo Range and dropped to 3600 feet at the west terminal.

The double-cabled tramway was divided into five sections, three on the east slope and two on the west. Each section was in effect a separate tramway at each end of which was a control station where both the carrier wires and the traction wires terminated. The carriers, which were suspended from wheels that ran on the carrier wires and attached to the traction cable by friction grips, passed through the control stations on rails. At each control station a 75-horsepower electric motor supplied power to the endless traction cable through a grip sheave eight feet in diameter. Power was obtained from a three-phase line that paralleled the tramway. The maximum horizontal angle, about 30°, was at control station one at the head of Daisy Canyon, while the vertical angle was as much as 40° in places.

The carriers weighed 800 pounds and held about 700 pounds of salt giving the tramway a capacity of 20 tons per hour. Unlike most tramway buckets, they were cylindrical in shape, and the suspension was designed so that they hung horizontally regardless of the angle of the carrier.

The tramway required for its operation two men at each of the terminals, two men at each of the four control stations, and four "line riders" who performed lubrication and other maintenance work. All stations were connected by telephone. At the loading terminal carriers were dispatched at the gong and were automatically released when the carrier reached the end.

The construction of the tramway required one million board feet of lumber and six hundred tons of iron, which had to be transported over rough, inaccessible, precipitous mountain country. Grades of up to 25 percent required a team of eight horses to move 5000 pounds of equipment.
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The salt deposit in Saline Valley was discovered in 1864. Its potential value, (contained less than one percent impurities) was known to the early miners but lack of transportation delayed its development.

The salt deposit was first worked on a small scale in 1903 and 1904 by the Saline Valley Salt Company. Transportation required a two-day roundabout journey by wagon across the Inyo Range by way of Waucoba Canyon, a distance of only 12 miles. The death of the president, J. L. Bourland, in 1905 brought an end to this phase of the salt development.

Several years later the Saline Valley Salt Company made a thorough study of the transportation problem. Building a railroad was impracticable, so an aerial tramway and a pipeline through which the salt could be pumped as brine were considered. The tramway was chosen because it provided a means for shipping supplies into Saline Valley in addition to shipping the salt deposits out.

In 1911 the Trenton Iron Works, a subsidiary of the American Steel and Wire Company, began construction. Other tramways that had been built were longer and had greater capacity, but the Saline Valley line had steeper grades than any other in the United States.

The construction of the tramway exhausted the Saline Valley Salt Company financially, and in 1915 the operation was leased to the Owens Valley Salt Company. This company produced salt until 1918 when it, too, went out of business. Between 1912 and 1918 several tens of thousands of tons of salt were produced.

The Taylor Milling Company acquired the Saline Valley plant and produced some salt in 1920. After five years of inactivity the Sierra Salt Company was formed; and in 1926 salt was produced once more. Trucks were used to haul the salt to Keeler over the newly built Saline Valley road until the tramway was overhauled in 1929. The plant was last operated in 1930, and in 1935 the Sierra Salt Company went into receivership.

Most of the structures within easy access of roads, including both terminals, have been carted off by wood gatherers and junk collectors. The stout 10 x 10 timbers are especially prized. However, many of the towers still remain, some with steel buckets still clinging to their steadfast cables high over deep canyons.

(continued)
Desert Magazine - "The Purest Salt in the World" (pp. 27-28)
"The Most Spectacular Aerial Ride in the World" (pp. 19-21)
"Salt in California" (pp. 116-118)

Palm Desert, California, August, 1959.

### 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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<th>CORNER</th>
<th>LATITUDE</th>
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| NW     | 36° 41' 41" | 117° 48' 52"
| NE     | 36° 41' 02" | 117° 47' 24"
| SE     | 36° 31' 24" | 117° 53' 52"
| SW     | 36° 31' 59" | 117° 55' 16"

**APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY:** 164

**LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES:**

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**DATE:** 10/31/73

**BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

**STATE:** California

**BUSINESS ADDRESS:**

800 Truxtun Avenue

**CITY OR TOWN:** Bakersfield

**PHONE:** 323-7676

**FORM PREPARED BY:**

**NAME AND TITLE:** Richard D. Conrad, Natural Resource Tech.

**DATE:** 10/31/73

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

**Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation**

12/31/74

**ATTEST:**

**Keeper of The National Register**

12/31/74
Besides being the steepest tramway in the United States, the Saline Valley Salt Tram is one of the most scenic, historic, best preserved, oldest, and largest of its kind remaining today.
#10. **Geographical Data**

- **Latitude and Longitude**
  - **lat. 36°31'24''**
  - **lon.117°55'16''**
  - **lat. 36°41'02''**
  - **lon.117°47'24''**
  - **lat. 36°41'41''**
  - **lon.117°48'52''**
  - **lat. 36°31'59''**
  - **lon.117°53'52''**

1/2 scale