

HISTORY OF THE CALIFORNIA
INTERSCHOLASTIC FEDERATION
SOUTHERN SECTION
CIFSS



30th historical “tidbit.”

TRONA HIGH SCHOOL’S SAND FOOTBALL FIELD

“THE PIT”



Trona High School Football Field



Even in the nicest areas, the front lawns are just dirt, with occasional scrub or cacti. The town is so polluted that grass simply won't grow. (Trona High School's football team plays on [one of only two dirt playing fields](#) in the United States; the other is glacial silt in Juneau, Alaska.)

“The Pit”

Trona Pinnacles – Tufa Towers



“TRONA TIDBITS”

- Trona High School founded 1940...104 students Coed
- Hi-Lo League members...”Tornadoes”...Royal Blue/White
- City of Trona founded 1913
- Trona population 800...decreasing and almost becoming a modern day ghost town
- Nearest fast food is 30 miles away in Ridgecrest
- State Hiway 178 on way to Death Valley...last gas before valley
- Searles Valley...named for mineral called Trona
- SP railroad built to town in 1913
- Big boom in World War I for potash
- Mined soda and potash (used for gun powder)
- Water is brackish and alkali fouled
- Temperatures in the summer can reach 125 degrees
- The wind blows hard and often causing large dust storms
- Drinkable water very expensive and piped in from Ridgecrest
- Sulfur smell caused by saline method of mining
- Town was build and laid out as a Company Town
- Trona High School annually plays Boron High School in the Borax Bowl...other teams hate the sand, Trona loves it
- The football field has always been sand...little vegetation in town
- The field is watered with the local water on game day, dragged, leveled and marked with chemicals from the local plant. Some of the salt from the alkali water remains on the top of the field
- The local kids love the field and dream (“Hoosiers” style) of playing when they get to high school
- Play their games at night due to the heat...field called “The Pit”
- They were CIF runner-ups in Small School Football Championships in 1965...went from 6 man to 11 man and now play 8 man
- When town was owned by Kerr-McGee Corporation from Oklahoma a lot of “Oakies” moved to town and loved their football
- Trona claimed the unofficial 6 Man CIF Football Championship in 1948
- Max Rafferty, former California State Superintendent of Education, once coached at Trona

A Shrinking Team, but a Home Field Advantage

By THE NEW YORK TIMES

TRONA, Calif., Nov. 15 — In the Mojave Desert's 25,000 square miles of sun-blasted earth there is a patch of sand 100 yards long that is looked after as dotingly as any garden, though nothing can ever grow there.

Residents of this mining town proudly call it the Pit, and for 60 years it has subjected the football teams that come to play Trona High to a kind of primal hazing.

Tonight the Trona Tornadoes played a game in the Pit that made sad history. As Trona's fortunes have fallen, the school's enrollment has declined to 105 from 350 — not enough to put 11 players on the field consistently. Next season it will play in an eight-player league, but not before one final shot tonight against its archrival, the Boron Bobcats.

Called the Borax Bowl, the game is a matchup of two mining towns that are world leaders in producing borax, a mineral used in glass, insulation and other products.

Trona versus Boron. Towns that sound like planets in a place that seems fittingly unearthly. Apart from the football field at Juneau High in Alaska, which is made of glacial silt, Trona may have the only all-dirt field left in the United States.

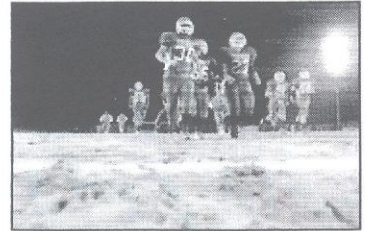
Other teams do not like to play on it. Its hard-packed sand has less give than grass, and the players' skin can be scraped raw. Then there is the heat. In Trona, site of the last-chance gas station before Death Valley on Highway 178, the temperature can hit 120 degrees. So teams play at night, and the air, as always, is tinged with sulfur from the mines.

"No athlete should be subjected to conditions found nowhere else in the country but Trona," Stu Downes, a sportswriter for The Mammoth Times, wrote last year about Mammoth High's troubles with Trona. "This is 2001, not ancient Rome. If they can't grow grass, there's always artificial turf."

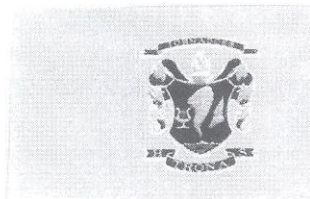
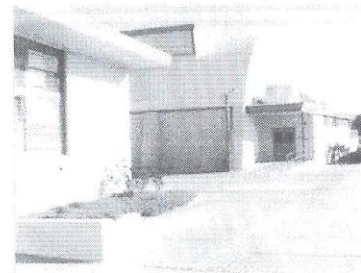
Trona's coaches have heard complaints about home-field advantage from all quarters. The fact that Mammoth High is among the loudest especially galls them since Trona has to play in the snow and cold on Mammoth's field at 8,000 feet in the Sierra Nevada. Then there is the sour-grapes factor.

"We knocked Mammoth High out of the championship last year, and they were very upset," said John Davis, superintendent of the Trona Unified School District.

Grass will not grow on the field because it is wet down daily with brackish water, trucked in because of a water shortage. It is sprayed and leveled every day, and the dirt is compacted and chalked on game day. Trona has never really considered artificial turf. It was seen as too expensive — and just not right, somehow.



J. Emilio Flores for The New York Times
The football field for the Trona Tornadoes is not a place where other teams like to play. It has something to do with the grass: there isn't any.



"We don't want it; we like the sand," said John Parks, the team's coach. "There's something about the mystique of the Pit."

Even the principal at Boron High, Paul Kostopoulos, finds something inexplicable about the Pit. When he was the team's football coach, he beat Trona only once on Trona's home field, and that was Boron's first victory in the Pit in 12 years.

"When we won, I scooped up some of the sand and put it in a Coke bottle," Mr. Kostopoulos said. "I still have it on my desk."

If mining is the nervous system of Trona, population 2,000, football is its heart. There is no youth basketball, baseball or soccer here; only football. Some of the passion for the game was imported in the 1960's and 70's when the Oklahoma-based Kerr-McGee Corporation owned the mining operations and brought scores of football-loving Oakies to the desert.

"We've lived in Oklahoma, Texas, Bakersfield, towns large and small," said Patty Jeffers, whose two sons played for Trona in the early 90's. "And you won't find people that care more about kids than this town. When my boys played, I drove 4,500 miles in one season."

In a blow to its ego, Trona had to forfeit four games this year because it could not field enough players. The school's declining enrollment reflects cuts at the town's mining plants, now owned by IMC Chemicals. About 700 people work at them, down from 1,700 in the early 1980's.

The Boron team has also forfeited some games this year for the same reason as Trona, but it has more underclassman and so far faces no threat of falling out of 11-player competition. The teams' differing futures may have added steam to tonight's final game, but the rivalry did not seem to need help.

"This town stinks," Kalen Hanson, 17, of Boron, said before the game, referring to the sulfurous odor created by Trona's saline method of mining. Boron's mines use a dry-digging method, which is odorless. "It reeks here."

Trona players had their own point to prove.

"Trona has a different breed of kids," said Cody Corrion, 17. "We're tougher. This field makes us tougher."

Who knows if it was the Pit advantage yet again, but in the last four minutes of a bruising battle, Trona scored a touchdown and won 6-0.

"There's nothing that feels better," Mr. Davis said, "than beating Boron."



Trona California: portrait of a mining town

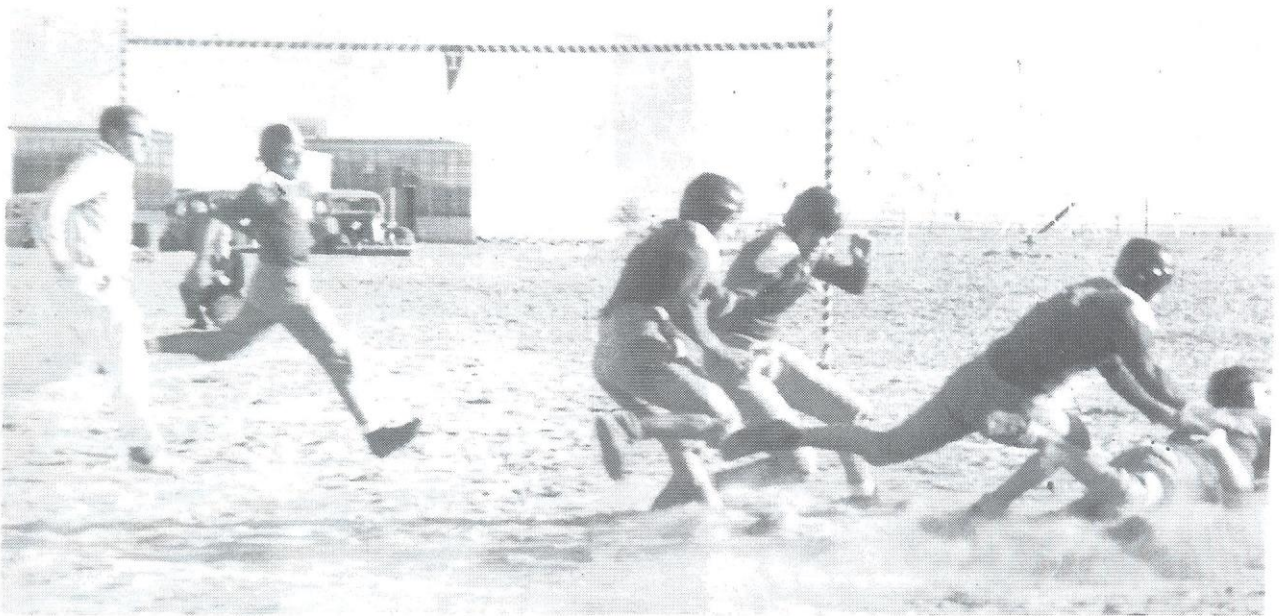
This photographic survey looks at the town of Trona, located along state highway 178 near Death Valley California. Trona developed around the Searles dry lake, a natural resource containing the world's richest deposits of chemicals including 98 of the 104 known naturally occurring chemical elements. The mining industry first set up around Searles dry lake in the late 1800s to mine borax, and the playa has attracted investors ever since.

The company town of Trona was officially established in 1913 as a unique self-contained town operated on a cost basis by the mining company for the benefit of its employees. The company created its own currency, and built a library, grocery store, school, housing and recreation facilities for its residents. The history of Trona is defined by the booms and slow contractions of the mining industry, leaving bits of occupation strewn far away from its original gridded center. One of its largest booms occurred during WWI, as a German embargo of potash fertilizer sharply raised prices, Trona was the only American source of potash at the time, an important element used in the production of gunpowder and a key to victory.

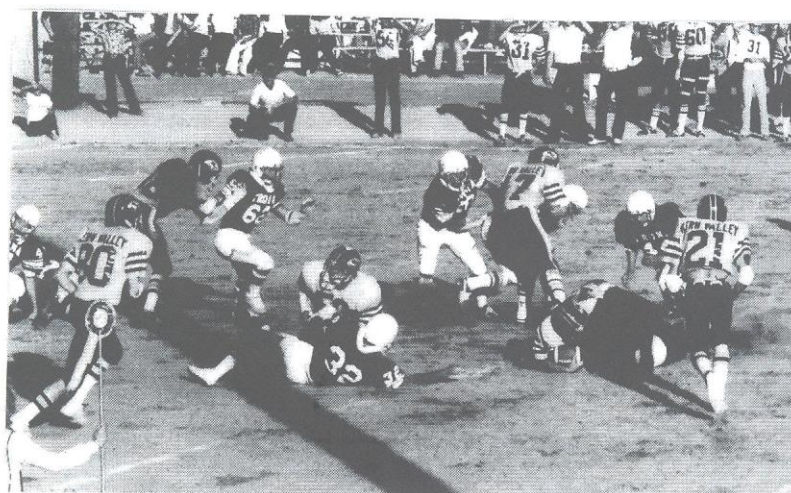
A drive around Trona provides you a unique look at an early example of a master planned community. It was created as a model for urban development on an empty plinth, an abstract gridded development with commercial, residential and recreational districts. It was an urban experiment necessitated by the desolate and inhospitable landscape that held little attraction to settlers except for the employment at the mines. No longer a company run town, Trona's streets show the signs of its shrinking population, down nearly 50% over the last decade, to around 1885 residents. Today, IMC Global Chemical company remains Trona's largest employer at its soda ash processing plant. Other operations nearby include salt extraction from the playa surface through evaporation, and a lime quarry. Trona remains strongly tied to the Searles dry lake and the unique geology of the region, it is a planned town slowly dissolving back into the desert.

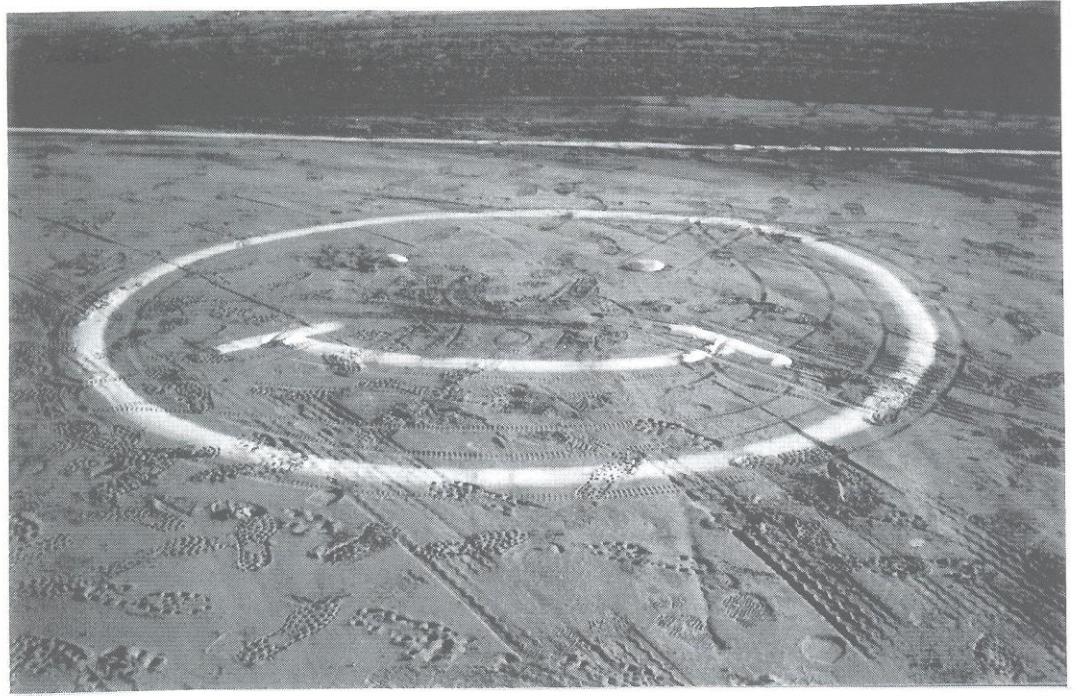


1941 Team Picture



Early football action.





Brian Reeves goes for six.

