Howdy folks. For those of you traveling to Santa Clarita for the Cowboy Festival, I thought perhaps some of you would consider an extended stay. After all, you'll be in the spirit of the great outdoors by attending the Festival and why not plan a day trip or even a little longer enjoying the great outdoors by HITTIN' THE TRAIL.

This time the trail takes us to what I will call headquarters for either a day trip or even a few days. Bishop, California. As a day trip from Santa Clarita, it would be a long day as you travel 4–5 hours each way. Early risers can arrive in Bishop before noon and still have time to enjoy a lot of sights in town as well as all the visual enjoyment once you enter the scenic area of Highway 395.

Lets first think about the day trip. You will head directly north on Hwy 14 which will automatically put you on Hwy 395. Once on 395, you might consider stopping in Lone Pine at the Museum of Western Film History. At this point you are about 5 minutes from the Alabama Hills, filming location for well over 400 movies from the silent era on up to recent times. Hopalong Cassidy, Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, John Wayne, Tim McCoy, Ken Maynard, Hoot Gibson, Randolph Scott and many other western stars have ridden the hills and visually, there is no other place like the Alabama Hills. You're leaving Lone Pine, still heading north and about 1 hour from Bishop. You'll travel through independence and once north of town, on the left side, is Fort Independence, a place you might consider for gasoline as traditionally they have the lowest price you'll find anywhere on 395. As you drive through Big Pine, you are within 15 minutes of Bishop. Once arriving in Bishop, it might be time for lunch. There are many choices and I'm sure you'll find something to please your taste buds. One place that i consider a must-stop in Bishop is Erick Schat's Bakery. As you drive north, it is located on the left at a stop light directly across from the Bishop City Park. Even if you have no hankering for pastries, bread, delicious deli sandwiches and more cookies than you can imagine, you need to at least just look inside. Nothing quite like it on the planet. Another stop if you like jerky or smoked meats or delicious deli sandwiches, try Meadow Farms Country Smokehouse, 2345 N. Sierra Hwy, which is on 395 after you drive through town and continue left. The smokehouse will be on your right. Another dining option is the Paiute Casino on your left just a short distance north of the smokehouse. Their cafe serves up some great vittles at a very reasonable price and if you're so inclined, a small casino is there to add or subtract to your financial condition. Bishop offers many different dining and shopping experiences. If you're looking for a mall, you've come to the wrong place. Many individually owned business line Main Street. A casual stroll around town is a nice pleasant way to relax and enjoy what a town with a population and elevation about the same, 4,000. Ever hear of or remember a Ben Franklin 5-10-25 store? Bishop has one on main street.

For those that have time for more than a day trip, you will find a multitude of lodging options including most brand names you're familiar with. Staying overnight is really the preferred option if you have time because there is so much to see in the great outdoors and just a few minutes from Bishop. I will tell you about two of my favorite places, but trust me, there is so much more but these places will give you an idea about how wonderful the greater bishop area truly is and how easy it would be to make several trips and enjoy something different each time.

Lets have a picnic lunch packed and head north on 395, through Bishop and get ready to turn left about 24 miles north of Bishop at "Tom's Place." You are on Rock Creek Lake Road. You will travel 9 miles to Rock Creek Lake, and will find the trail head by turning left at the Rock Creek Lake group campground. There are a few gentle inclines on this easy 2 mile trail around Rock Creek Lake. Your elevation will be 9,600 ft. The magnificent views you'll enjoy along the trail are nothing short of spectacular. Picnic tables and benches are on the trail so you can enjoy your lunch with the beauty of the lake and surrounding mountains. If you want more adventure, get back on Rock Creek Lake Road and continue to the end of the road. You are now at the Mosquito Flats parking lot and the Little Lakes Valley Trail head. You have gained another 200 ft of elevation and will gain even more on the easy to moderate trail that will take you 5–10 miles round trip with each new view along the way seeming to be more spectacular than the last. By the way, the Mosquito Flats parking lot is named that for a reason so make sure you have some protection handy if needed. You like wildflowers? You will want to travel Rock Creek Lake Road in the spring. You like fall colors? Rock Creek Lake Road is one of the greatest places to enjoy fall colors. In fact, weather permitting, Rock Creek Lake Road is enjoyable anytime of year.

Another favorite is a hike around Convict Lake. Continue north on 395 past the Tom's Place Cutoff and look for the sign to turn left and the sign will be right near the airstrip on your right. You're just moments away from Convict Lake. Don't let the name fool you, it is a visual treat, far beyond what you might think. A very easy hiking trail that sometimes allows you to go all the way around, sometimes not. The last time I was there, the trail was washed out at about the half way point because of snow melting, but with this 2017–2018 winter season being less intense so far, perhaps the trail has been fixed by the time you arrive. Boat and kayak rentals are available if you want to have a little different adventure at this beautiful area.

Folks, I hope I have inspired you to head north on Hwy 14 and Hwy 395 and enjoy the great outdoors. I've only scratched the surface of all the wonderful sights along the way. Sights to enjoy prior to your arrival in Bishop and many more north of Bishop. In fact, all the way to the CA–NV border, you have so many opportunities to be amazed. Use the Internet to get details on all nature has to offer as you travel this unique trail. Tioga pass to Yosemite, June Lake Loop, Mammoth and so much more. As always, make sure you check road conditions prior to travel. For safety, don't forget to pack water, snacks, layered clothing and first aid kit. C'mon now, you're ready... HIT THE TRAIL.