Nestled at the base of Salt Mountain in the very desolate Skull Valley west of Salt Lake City, Iosepa is a fascinating place with a unique history.

The history of Iosepa begins in 1889 when 46 Polynesian settlers chose lots and began a town. The group was drawn together by more than their common Polynesian roots; they were also very faithful members of the LDS church. They had immigrated to Salt Lake City, mostly from Hawaii, to be close to the Mormon temple, but culture shock and mistreatment by the majority drove them to seek a place of their own where they could settle and build community.

Creating a community in such a stark landscape required incredible hard work, faith, and a tight-knit group of people. The town built homes, a school, a church, and an extensive irrigation system to bring water from the Stansbury Mountains to the east into the town. This hard work grew the town to about 230 people by 1915, despite crop failures, disease outbreaks, and even three cases of leprosy.

In 1915, the Mormon church announced plans to build a temple in Hawaii and offered to pay for the people of Iosepa to move back if they wished to, but could not afford to pay themselves. Just two years later, Iosepa was a ghost town.

Today, all that remains is the Iosepa cemetery, a mile or so north of the original townsite. The cemetery was improved in the late 1900's to include a pavilion, restrooms, and other facilities. Visitors are welcome and encouraged to stop and visit anytime, however, Memorial Day is an especially festive time when 1000+ people converge on the site for a luau and to share in a sense of community.
Trailhead

Iosepa is in Skull Valley, about 50 miles west of Salt Lake City on I-80. Go west on I-80 from Salt Lake City to exit 77, signed Dugway / Iosepa. Go south off the highway on UT-196 for 14 miles to mile post 22.85 and the clearly signed Iosepa on the left (east side).

The good dirt road quickly branches, go right and follow the road about a mile to the cemetery and pavillion.

Route

From the pavilion, the well-kept cemetery is to the west, with several information placards. There are several restrooms, and the large covered pavilion makes an excellent place to have lunch and take in the stark landscape.

Note: If visiting Iosepa, and you have time for a hike, be sure to visit Story Rock as well.