

A LONG way from nowhere

STORY BY: JAMIE FRANCIS

Fields, Oregon | Population: 8

Fields Station sprang to life in 1881, on a dry, dusty patch of desert as a roadhouse on the stagecoach line between Burns and Winnemucca, Nev. Fields never lured the masses and nowadays remains unincorporated. It's still a way station for tourists needing to stretch their legs – and fill up the car with gasoline and an empty stomach with snacks and world-famous milkshakes. So today we stop by the cafe, store, gas station, RV park, hotel/motel, post office of tiny Fields. Milkshake, anyone?

With the only gas pump for miles, Fields Station also provides a place to stop for a meal and a pleasant view.



Gayle Davis | Age: 54

Occupation: Retired from the Burns-Hines School District

Birthplace: Banning, Calif.

Home: Florence, Ore.

Family: Husband Eugene “Shorty” Davis; two daughters; sister of owner Sandy Downs

Sandy Downs, owner of Fields Station with husband Tom: “There’s a cafe, grocery, motel. We sell gasoline, propane, fix tires – everything a town needs. Milk, water, beer and chewing tobacco are our best sellers. We drive once a week to Burns and once a month to Bend to get supplies. We hit Cash & Carry, Freddies, WalMart, the Canned Food Outlet. ... If you run out of gas out here, you are a long way from nowhere. They have gas in Dino Junction – 21 miles away – but they don’t take credit cards. Sometimes you can get gas in Frenchglen – 52 miles away – but other than that it’s 112 miles to Burns and 119 to Winnemucca, Nevada. It’s an interesting life.”

“Shorty and I are here for several months to help – cook, wait tables, make milkshakes, clean rooms, anything. It’s surprising how much there is to running this place. We didn’t realize so many people passed through. I’d have to say the best part of this work is the people. We see people that we knew in the ‘60s, and that surprises me. On my days off I sit out in the yard and watch them go past, read my book and watch my garden grow. Out here in Fields everyone talks to you, even the people who live miles away. They are like neighbors. People in town don’t know you – and sometimes they don’t want to know you. Driving back and forth from Florence to Fields, we get to see a lot. You could visit Oregon all your life and never see it all.”

Sandy Downs, left, and her sister Gayle Davis run the kitchen and more at Fields Station. “It’s not strange for someone to tell me they drove 600 miles out of their way to get a milkshake,” Downs says.

