

Ash Springs

1 Ash Springs Rock Art Site

The entrance to Ash Springs Rock Art Site is approximately 5.0 miles south from the intersection of State Route 375, State Route 318 and U.S. Route 93 (the "Y"). Traveling south on U.S. Route 93 towards Alamo, it's on the left (east) side of the road. Take the dirt road to the barbed wire gate, approximately .2 miles from the highway entrance. A yellow BLM marker is just to the right of the gate. Continue to the register.

Vehicle access rating: 3. Improved / graded dirt road

Useful GPS Coordinates

Entrance coordinates: N 37° 27.572, W115° 11.620, elevation 3621 feet

BLM marker coordinates: N 37° 27.530, W115° 11.528, elevation 3642 feet

Gate coordinates: N 37° 27.494, W115° 11.466, elevation 3655 feet

Register coordinates: N 37° 27.453, W115° 11.373, elevation 3691 feet

About the site

The petroglyphs found at Ash Springs Rock Art Site are typical of much the Great Basin rock art. All petroglyphs at Ash Springs are pecked and display a wide range of line widths. This rock art adorns surfaces that have been subject to weathering and some marked human defacement. Pictographs, or painted rock art, and cupules, or pit-and-groove rock art, are both absent from this site but can be observed at other Lincoln County sites.

This area is known to have been a winter site for the Pahrnanagats, and might have accommodated a small village of 25-40 individuals. Winter was the most permanent phase of the seasons for these people, and was spent in villages, usually around the lower fringes of the pinyon-juniper forests at an altitude of 5000-8000 ft. Although Ash Springs is not in this type of area, and is at a much lower altitude of 3600-3800 ft., the boulders at this site sheltered people from the cold. Water was



ordinarily obtained from snow meltoff, however, the constant availability of warm water at Ash Springs rendered this unnecessary and made this site extremely desirable.

In general, less food gathering took place during the winter months, although there was occasional hunting. Winter was mostly a time of visiting, gambling, tool making and story telling. The presence of debitage, or stone flakes, indicate that many stone tools were created here. These include knives, drills, scrapers, hammerstones, and a variety of projectile points. Tools were fashioned mostly out of cherts which were obtained locally, and obsidians, which came from farther away in Utah. The Pahrnanagats also had a highly specialized basketry tradition. Baskets specifically fashioned to gather and process plant foods included burden baskets, winnowing and parching trays, bowls, and seed beaters. By contrast, pottery was simple and utilitarian, although some vessels had cord-impressed or fingernail-incised decorations. At the Ash Springs Site, sherds of Fremont-like greyware have also been found, indicating the presence of these Southwestern groups who co-existed in this area along with the Pahrnanagats c. AD 500-1250.

Panels

Marker #1 Welcome to the Ash Springs Rock Art Site. This site is predominantly a habitation site comprised of two high-intensity areas of domestic activity and includes 12 semi-circular cobblestone alignments along with associated lithic material. The site also extends to the top of the eastern-situated hill known as "Shaman's Vista." Due to the availability of diverse and abundant food resources in the valley, this site

could also have been utilized as a base camp in the winter. In fact, there are ethnographic accounts from the turn of the last century which state that the Pahrnagats did in fact spend winter at Ash Springs, and dispersed to the north during the warm seasons. The presence of the warm natural springs added a unique and special feature that would have been particularly welcome during the cold weather.

A suggestion that might make this tour even more enjoyable would be to sketch the rock art as you make your way along the trail.

Marker #2 This panel depicts a large bighorn sheep with very long legs on a flat boulder. This image is an example of a representational motif called a zoomorph. This term includes any depiction that is recognizable as some kind of animal, and includes bighorn sheep as well as other quadrupeds and animals in general. Sheep are not only the most common zoomorph in this vicinity, but are found all throughout the western states as well. This rock art panel is very lightly rendered so the image may be difficult to see in direct sunlight.

Marker #3 This is a simple panel consisting of only a line and a circle. Note the three bullet marks, one inside of the circle and two outside of it. Two smaller milling stones, one on each side, accompany this larger boulder. A grinding slick can be found on each of the milling stones. Foods and other substances (minerals for pigments) were ground into meal on such boulders with the use of a mano, or hand-held stone. Over time this activity would produce a smooth surface, or grinding slick. Portable milling stones, or metates, were also used. Seeds and pinenuts comprised a great deal of the plant foods which were processed. Pinenut meal could be made into soup or mush. Grasshoppers and crickets were dried in the sun, and then also ground into meal and mixed with water and other ingredients (berries, pinenuts) to make cakes. Much of this food could be stored for the winter.

Marker #4 This marker indicates the entry into an area of heightened domestic activity. Note the concentration of engraved boulders that define a living space. Rock art is frequently associated with domestic sites, and you will observe this trend at the Ash Springs Rock Art Site. There are several grinding slicks in this area – see how many you can find.



Marker #4



Marker #5

Marker #5 On this panel are two human figures located on the front of the left boulder. These representational motifs are called anthropomorphs, and include any figure that is recognizably human. There is also an anthropomorph on the right hand boulder with his arms outstretched upwards. He is known as the "Hallelujah Man."

Marker #6 At this marker, is a panel of a large and fantastic zoomorph.

Underneath it is a female anthropomorph known as "Vavavoom Woman," which is visible in bright light. Note the two grinding slicks on top of the flat rock.

Marker #7 The petroglyphs on this large boulder are thought by some to represent solar calendrical devices having to do with the equinoxes and/or solstices. The monitoring of these dates by such methods may have been necessary in determining certain ritual dates that were important to the cultures involved.

Marker #8 This marker designates one of several boulders in the area to have an associated semicircular cobblestone alignment. There is no art at this particular feature. However, other such similar rock arrangements at this site do have associated rock art.

Marker #9 This panel with three bighorn sheep is not associated directly with either domestic area, but is significantly removed from them. This panel is difficult to see in bright sunlight. Bighorn sheep were the only large game found locally and were hunted by the Pahrnagats. One rock art theory associates the presence of sheep with hunting magic. However, their presence in rock art may have also had symbolic references having little to do with the hunting of large game. Certain Southern Paiute ethnographies, for example, describe the association of mountain sheep with weather control, in particular the aspect of rain-making. Considering the presence of a permanent and abundant water source, however, perhaps the sheep had some other significance known only to the Pahrnagats.

Marker #10 From this marker there is a short hike to next rock art panel. Pass to left of the stone formation indicated in the illustration, and look for the trail marker on the other side.



Marker #11

Marker #11 This panel displays an excellent example of superimposition. This situation occurs when petroglyphs are engraved over already existing ones, an indication that the worked-over motifs were made at an earlier time. This can be used as a general timeframe when attempting to date petroglyphs.

We may not know when or how far apart the two sequences were created, but we do know this site was probably multi-generational. In this case a heavy curvilinear line is superimposed over several sheep. The sheep to the center-left has an atlatl spear embedded in its back (see Marker #15). Also note the associated semi-circular cobblestone alignment as well as the modern defacement on the panel.

Marker #12 This boulder has two rock art panels which include several zoomorphs. As you can see, they are very damaged and it is possible that some original rock art is now gone. Natural weathering processes and/or vandalism have created the present situation. Note the modern defacement below to the right of the sheep panel, the initials "AR."

Marker #13 This is a panel of two lightly etched bighorn sheep. Again, this panel is very difficult to see in bright sunlight. Since the time of day seems to be significant in the viewing of so many petroglyphs, it is possible that this may have been done deliberately.

Marker #14 A panel containing bighorn sheep depictions is situated to the left. To locate a small panel on the other side of the boulder, go around it and look for the panel situated near the ground. Afterwards, backtrack to the trail and follow it out down the road.

Marker #15 Note the atlatl spear embedded in the back of one of the bighorn sheep. The atlatl, or spearthrower, was a device which enabled an individual to hurl a spear



Marker #14

at a greater distance than was possible unaided. Spears were supplemented by bows and arrows as hunting implements around AD 500, so this petroglyph may have been created before then.

Marker #16 The location of this marker is situated in the heart of the other locus of concentrated domestic activity. Like the first area, there is a high occurrence of rock art indicating a place of heightened group interaction. Much food processing took place here also, as indicated by the presence of many grinding slicks.



Marker #17

Marker #17 The last rock art panel on this tour contains an impressive display of several bighorn sheep. Like others at this site, some of the sheep have atlatl spears protruding from their backs. On top of this boulder to the right can be found a concentric circle, a common motif found globally in rock art. After viewing this rock art, backtrack to the road and go to the last Marker #18.

Marker #18 This marker indicates the end of the officially marked trail. From this location you can see Shaman's Vista on top of the hill to the right. If you desire to end the tour, follow the road and exit to the parking lot. However, you can extend the tour by making an optional hike to the top of Shaman's Vista (refer to the map since there is no marked trail). There is no rock art, however, although there are a number of features at the summit including three rock alignments. There are also considerable lithic scatters indicating the manufacture of stone tools.