

BLM

NRAAF

Rock Art



Ash Springs

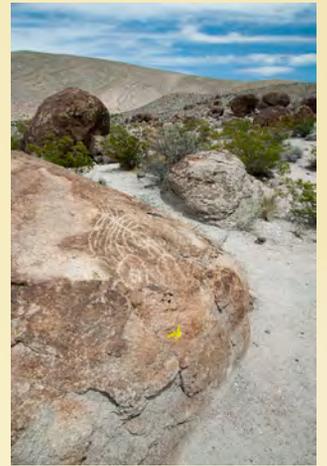


Ash Springs Introduction



The Ash Springs rock art site is located at the north end of Pahrangat Valley, on the southern flank of the Hiko Range. The site is close to a hot spring that was an oasis for prehistoric and historic travelers. Traces of the lives of ancient peoples abound in the Pahrangat Valley area, manifested most visibly by prehistoric rock art.

Ash Springs provides an accessible glimpse into the cultural lives of the Native American peoples who lived in the valley for thousands of years prior to the arrival of Euro-American settlers in the mid-nineteenth century. The remains of prehistoric campsites and rock art co-mingle at Ash Springs. The nearby hot spring was a favored spot for prehistoric hunter-gatherers, as well as early American ranchers and settlers, demonstrating the timeless appeal of this location.



Ash Springs was used by hunter-gatherers from around 6,000 years ago but appears to have been most intensively used as a camp during the last 1,000 years. Historically, Ash Springs was a base camp for the Pahrangat Paiute people, a regional group of the Southern Paiute. During the spring and summer, people lived in small camps of 2-3 family households. They ranged from these camps to hunt large and small game, fish, and gather seeds, fruits, berries, nuts, and roots.

During the winter, family households congregated with several other households in large campsites or villages. Stored foodstuffs (particularly piñon nuts) sustained them during the winter. These larger camps provided opportunities for socializing and conducting important cultural activities. This way of life was probably also practiced by prehistoric hunter-gatherers living in the area.





Introduction

Ash Springs comprises some 60 petroglyph boulders and the archaeological remains of daily life. Repeated visits to the site for camping are marked by grinding slicks, small stone flakes, pottery, hearths, and rock alignments. Grinding slicks indicate the harvesting and processing of plants, nuts, and hard seeds.



Small stone chips or flakes show that stone tools were made and repaired here. The pottery and the hearths indicate food storage and cooking. The small rock alignments likely were foundations for brush windbreaks or shades.

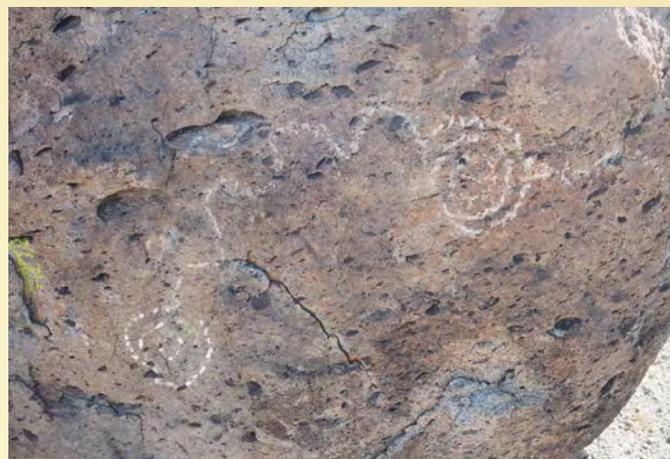
These archaeological remains suggest that several family households camped and lived at Ash Springs for several weeks at a time. The intermingling of daily life with rock art is found at other sites in the Pahranaagat Valley area.

The archaeological significance of the artifacts that you may see is tied to their context or where they are found. If artifacts are removed from the place where they are found, they lose their capacity to give information about the past. Remember to leave any artifacts in place so that future generations and other visitors can experience the same firsthand encounter with prehistory. §

Rock Art Styles



Rock art at Ash Springs is predominantly abstract curvilinear and rectilinear designs, accompanied by stick-figure anthropomorphs and images of animals. This style of rock art is known as Basin and Range tradition and is found widely throughout the Great Basin.



Circles, rectangles, and large complex abstract designs that cover entire boulders are common at Ash Springs. Stick-figure anthropomorphs include many variants that are unique to the site. The most common animals depicted are bighorn sheep, coyotes or dogs, and short wavy lines that resemble snakes.

Without the original artists to tell us, the exact meanings and cultural purposes of rock art at Ash Springs can only be speculated on. But it does show us that this place had a cultural significance beyond its use for settlement.

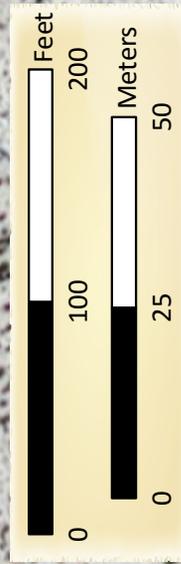
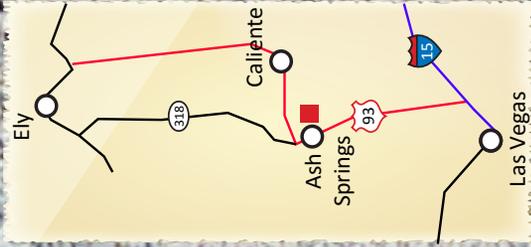
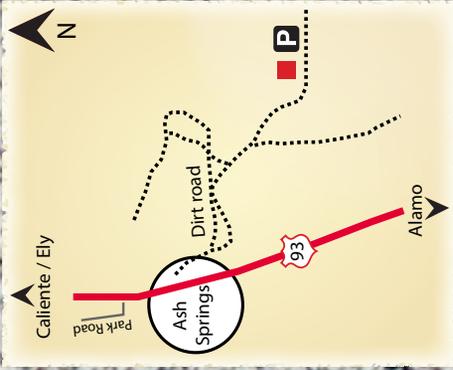
The key rock art features at Ash Springs are marked by numbered trail markers. At the beginning of the trail (Markers 1-10) are clusters of large tuff boulders covered by densely arranged images and also by very large, complex curvilinear designs. Bighorn sheep, an elk, and anthropomorphs are the easiest figures to make out, accompanied by a wide range of complex abstract designs. §



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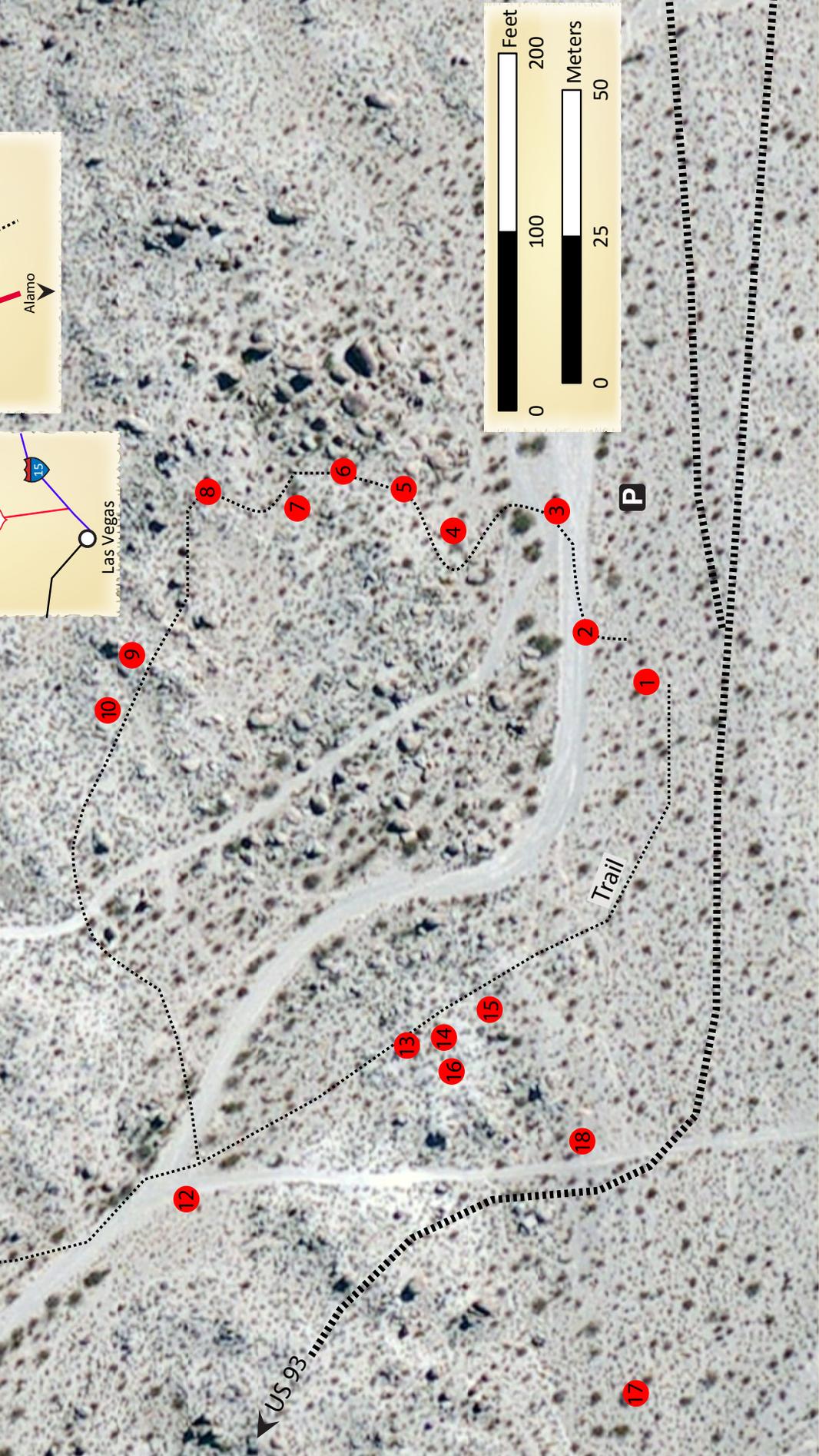
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Ash Springs is located about 100 miles north of Las Vegas, 139 miles south of Ely, and 7 miles north of Alamo. The site is reached by a dirt road on the east side of US 93 and 0.2 miles south of the gas station in the small town of Ash Springs. Follow the dirt road for 0.3 miles to a parking area with a visitor register.

The Ash Springs Site is on public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Calliente Field Office. Help protect the environment by traveling on existing roads only.





Symbolic Images

Rock art communicated important cultural information in a way very different from writing. Visual imagery is used to impart cultural beliefs and ideas (symbolism) rather than specific messages. Knowledge of the meaning of specific images may have varied according to a person's age, gender, and social position.

Although stick-figure anthropomorphs apparently depict people and bighorn sheep figures portray the animal, these images may have also borne meanings that had little to do with the subjects they resemble. Anthropomorphs, for example, may have symbolized ideas about social roles and responsibilities. Bighorn sheep figures may have symbolized mythic characters, group identity, or desirable cultural qualities.



One of the most unusual anthropomorphs is by Marker 4. It is distinguished by its upraised arms and large hands that encircle the figure's head. Another anthropomorph nearby also has upraised arms but lacks hands and feet.

The body posture of these figures is rarely found elsewhere and may be unique to Ash Springs. The symbolism of these postures would have been known to the prehistoric artists but today we can only speculate about their meaning.

Symbolic Images



Anthropomorphs usually do not indicate the gender of the person portrayed in ways that we can easily identify, making the female anthropomorph by Marker 5 very unusual. This does not mean that the vast majority of stick-figures portrayed men or that they portrayed women. In its original context, the gender of the person depicted may have been well-known so that there was no need to reference it visually. This could suggest that anthropomorphs that indicate the gender of their subjects do so to highlight a departure from the normal.



A petroglyph boulder by Marker 15 depicts an ancient dart thrower (atlatl) and numerous bighorn sheep and a dog or coyote. In rock art, atlatls are represented by a long line with two circles at one end. Atlatls had weights (the two circles) to stabilize the dart and improve accuracy.

This boulder might represent a hunting scene as similar to one by Marker 17. Here, dogs or coyotes are depicted with 14 bighorn sheep figures, one of which has dart in its back. The depiction of darts in hunting scenes is rare. This scene may have depicted the desired outcome of a hunt rather than recording an event from daily life.

Certain places at Ash Springs seem to have been particularly appropriate for certain kinds of images. Bighorn sheep figures are noticeably more common in the area of Markers 11-18 where anthropomorphs are rare. Portrayals of people are concentrated around Markers 1-10. Where rock art was made may have been as important as what was depicted. §





Preserving the Past

Ash Springs is on public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, Caliente Field Office. The Caliente Field Office's mission is, in partnership with the public, to provide stewardship of the lands and resources entrusted to it for present and future generations.



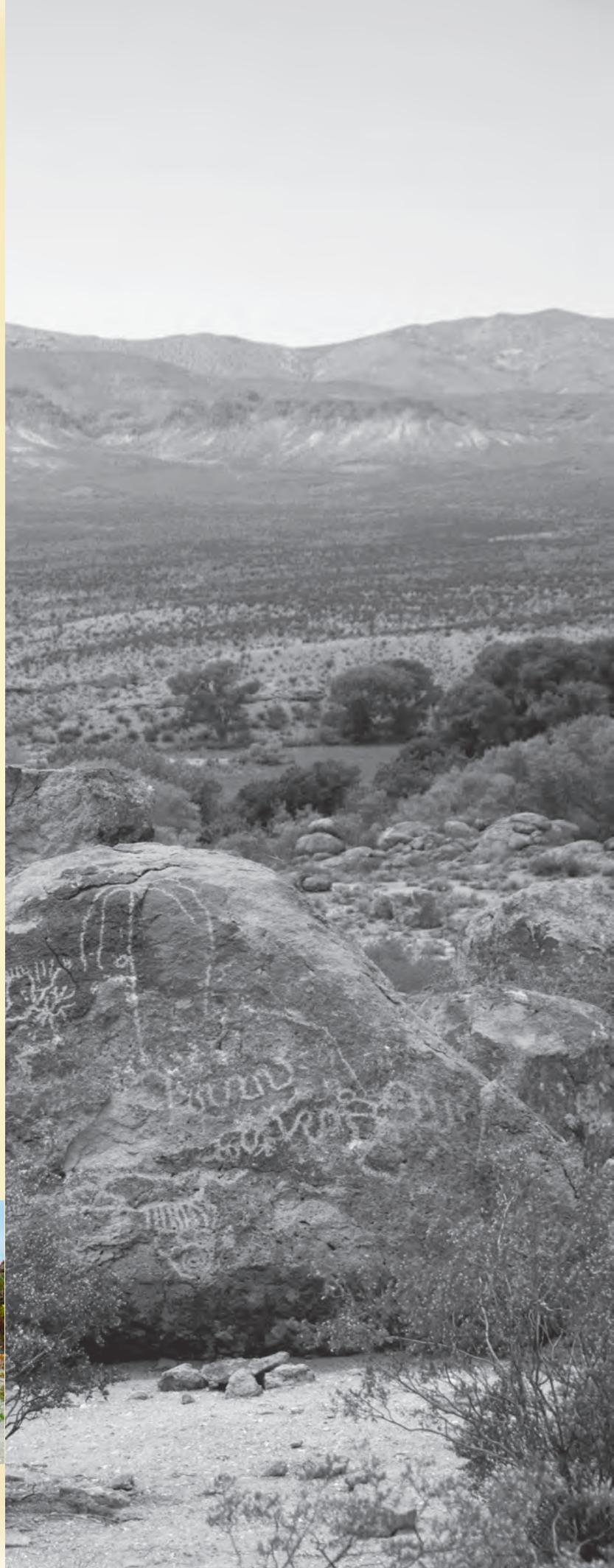
Natural erosional processes, such as weathering from water and wind, are slowly wearing away these ancient markings. Other threats include intentional defacement like graffiti or other vandalism. This damage cannot be removed or even camouflaged easily and is expensive to treat.

Federal and state laws protect archaeological sites from vandalism and theft, and many sites are monitored by concerned local citizens volunteering in the State of Nevada's site stewardship program. Because the past deserves a future, visitors at archaeological sites can help by following a few simple guidelines.

- Take only pictures, leave only footprints
- Be a steward—volunteer to monitor the condition of archaeological sites

For more information on how you can help preserve Nevada's past, visit these websites

www.blm.gov/nv
www.shpo.nv.gov/stewards
www.nvrockart.org



LINCOLN COUNTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL INITIATIVE PROJECT

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