

Crystal Wash

2 Crystal Wash Rock Art Site - Main Site

The entrance and gate to Crystal Wash Rock Art Site is 3.9 miles from the intersection of State Route 375, State Route 318 and U.S. Route 93 (the "Y"). Traveling east on U.S. Route 93, towards Caliente, it's on the left (north) side of the road just past the 55 mile road marker. Traveling west on U.S. Route 93, the entrance is 38 miles from Caliente, on the right (north) side. The entrance is at a pullout with white trash can and orange netting behind it, and there is a yellow BLM marker just to the left of the gate. Go through the gate, veer left (not right) and continue .6 miles to the register.

Vehicle access rating: 3. Improved / graded dirt road

Useful GPS Coordinates

Entrance and gate coordinates: N 37° 32.917, W115° 09.467, elevation 4225 feet

Register coordinates: N 37° 33.414, W115° 09.671, elevation 4141 feet

Marker 1: Directly behind the register

Marker 2 coordinates: N 37° 33.331, W 115°09.923, elevation 4132 feet

Marker 5 coordinates: N 37° 33.296, W115°09.991, elevation 4087 feet

About the site

Petroglyphs are the dominant rock art form at Crystal Wash and they are etched onto rockfaces by pecking, abrading, scratching, or a combination of these techniques. Pictographs, or painted rock art, is only represented in small quantities at Crystal Wash. A third type of rock art known as cupules or pit-and-groove rock art, are cuplike depressions or pits in boulders and are thought to be the oldest form of rock art, first appearing in parts of the Great Basin 7000 years ago. There is one example of this rock art at Marker #6.

The Main Site of the Crystal Wash Rock Art Site is a large habitation area comprised of a triangular configuration of three



boulder groupings inscribed with rock art. It was frequented by the Pahrnagats, and this site is large enough to have accommodated a village and is thought to have been a winter site. Water was ordinarily obtained from snow meltoff, and the large boulders provided suitable protection against the wind. This location was climatically more desirable than the lower valleys which were colder during the winter months.

Aside from much lithic material and a few ceramic sherds, four hearths and some cobblestone alignments have been found at this site, signifying the presence of wickiups, which were typical camp shelters. During the cold months, less food gathering took place although there was occasional hunting. Instead, winter was a time of visiting, and gambling and story telling were frequent activities. The presence of much 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 and obsidians which were obtained locally. The Pahrnagats 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.

Panels

Marker #1 Welcome to Crystal Wash! 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. The two large boulders in front of you designate a small domestic site. Rock art is frequently associated with domestic sites, and you will observe this tendency throughout the entire Crystal Wash Site. The only rock art at this location not inscribed on these boulders can be found on a smaller, flat rock on the ground approximately 25" slightly to the right behind them. Be careful not to step on the rock art. There is also a grinding slick on this rock in addition to at least seven other known grinding slicks at this site. Two are located under the small overhang in the front, and two can be found to the right and left of these boulders. Foods and other substances (minerals for pigments) were ground into meal on grinding slicks with the use of a mano, or hand-held stone. 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 first dried in the sun, then 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 #3

enabled an individual to hurl a spear 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. bighorn sheep were the only large game found locally. They were hunted by the Pahrnagats, however, their presence in rock art may have had symbolic references having little to do with the hunting of large game. Certain Southern Paiute ethnographies, for example, described the association of bighorn sheep with weather control, in particular the aspect of rain-making.

Marker #4 In front of this marker you will observe two large boulders engraved with petroglyphs. The panel directly in front of you has evidence of superposition. This situation occurs when petroglyphs are engraved over already existing ones, an indication that the worked-over petroglyphs 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. There is a grinding slick on the flat rock face in front of these two boulders. Note the representational content of this rock art (and other rock art throughout the site) in the form of anthropomorphs (human figures) and zoomorphs (bighorn sheep and other quadrupeds or animals). Especially noteworthy is the banded anthropomorph motif found farthest to the right (see insert). Variations of this figure type are found locally and may have been cultural markers.



Marker #2

Marker #2 While facing this marker, you will see a small-to-medium boulder on the left which has most of its rockfaces engraved with petroglyphs. Note the petroglyphs on what looks like the "seat"; these are extremely faded. There is also a tiny mountain sheep on the left side of this boulder that may or may not be readily visible depending on the time of day. In front of the marker is a large boulder with petroglyphs, and the small rock attached to its left displays four bighorn sheep. Directly before the marker is a flat rock with a grinding slick, and to the right are more petroglyphs. There are other petroglyphs

and grinding slicks at this site that are not outlined in this guide – see how many you can find.

Marker #3 Directly in front of this marker is a low boulder with a grinding slick. Note the two sheep motifs to the left. The single sheep to the right is quite faded and difficult to see. Above the grinding slick is a small petroglyph which may depict an atlatl. The atlatl, or spearthrower, was a device which



Marker #5

Marker #5 Situated before this marker are several flat boulders engraved with a great deal of remarkable imagery. Although it is not possible to know the meaning of these images, they undoubtedly contain information meaningful to the Pahrnagats. Like the petroglyphs at Marker #4, there are also some instances of superposition in these

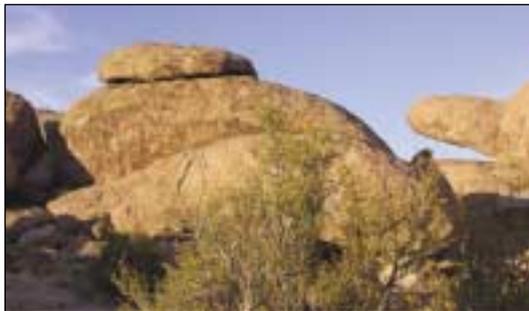
panels. Please be very careful not to step on this rock art, as it is extremely fragile. When you are finished, you may go back carefully the way you came and follow the trail markers to Marker #6.



Marker #6

Marker #6 In addition to rock art, this marker also designates the location of what had been a wickiup, or typical structure used by the Pahrnanagats. These shelters were constructed of frameworks made of poles covered with grass brush, rushes, or arrow weed. They were often conical in shape and usually had a smokehole. For fuel, the Pahrnanagats would have used local brush, which was in ample supply. To the left of this marker is dark stain indicating the remains of a hearth, and in front of it is a flat boulder with several "pocked" impressions, a form of rock art known as "cupules." On the far right end of this boulder is a large hole, or mortar, which was used along with a stone pestle to process seeds, nuts, or possibly to mix pigments.

Marker #7 In front of this marker is a rock shelter engraved with petroglyphs. This panel is unusual in that it is the only rock art at the main site to display pigment, or pictographs (rock art that is painted). The only other example of pigment existing at the Crystal Wash Site is at Marker #5 at the Entrance Site. The red pigment was a frequently used color obtained from hematite, a form of iron oxide. It is likely that at one time more color was present on this panel, but pigment deteriorates very quickly so whatever color was originally here has since disappeared. When pictographs are present, however, they provide an opportunity for dating that is not possible with petroglyphs. Since pigment it is often mixed with an organic binder (saliva, blood, or urine), these binders can then be C-14 dated with a great deal more certainty than organic material in rock art that is engraved or pecked.



Marker #8

Marker #8 The panel before you contains a striking assemblage of anthropomorphic figures and is unique to the entire site. This structure of boulders may have been used as a

speech platform. There is ample room to accommodate an audience, and the rock art itself suggests a gathering of people. Although the Pahrnanagats recognized no absolute political authority, a temporary chief was appointed during times of aggregation. His function was more that of an arbiter and as an organizer of group activities (food-collecting expeditions, certain ceremonies). The village would congregate in the morning to receive the chief's instructions if specific activities were planned for the day, and listen to him orate from the top of the platform. Since it is possible to see a considerable distance from the top of these boulders, they would also have functioned as an excellent lookout.

Marker #9 This rock art panel is one of the few occurring outside of the triangular composition of boulders which comprises the living area of the Main Site. Because of its exterior location, it may have been used as some kind of marker. Certain petroglyphs are thought to have functioned as maps; perhaps the meandering line on this boulder is one example of this site.

Follow the trail carefully to Marker #10, as it involves some climbing over rocks.



Marker #10

Marker #10 This final marker designates the rock shelter in front of you. Inside the shelter are some petroglyphs in addition to three grinding slicks. The private and less accessible nature of this shelter as well as the cramped space within it suggest it had special significance and was therefore set apart from the routine of daily living.

To leave the site, follow the trail markers out to the wash and parking area.