

# GRIMES POINT, NEVADA HOW HAS THE ROCK ART FARED AT A DEVELOPED INTERPRETATIVE SITE

STEPHEN A. STONEY

The Grimes Point Petroglyph Site rests on the shores of prehistoric Lake Lahontan. It is located within "spitting distance" of U.S. Highway 50, eight miles east of Fallon, Nevada. The well known site became a garbage dump and vandalism of the rock art was extensive. The BLM and other concerned individuals and groups worked cooperatively fourteen years ago to reclaim the site, preserve the rock art and develop an educational tool. This paper examines the site, its development and the impact since its creation as an interpretive site. Karen L. Malloy, Visitor Use Specialist for the BLM Carson City District has assisted in the preparation of this paper.

Late in the day on October 11, 1990 I visited the Grimes Point Petroglyph Site for the first time. The sun was low in the west and I expected the visit to be a rather short one although my wife Janis had said to take my time. We had been on the road nearly all day on the drive north from Las Vegas. The opportunity to stretch my legs was welcome, the rock art was more than enough reason.

We drove into Fallon and secured directions which said drive east of town on "Highway 50", you can't miss it. This ribbon of asphalt is very apply named "The Loneliest Highway in America". As we neared the low hills we kept looking for signs. The rock looked promising but where was the site. We should not have wondered. The location was prominently marked for all to see.

As we drove into the deserted parking area I wondered if we had come out of our way for nothing. What soon became apparent to me was a marvelously developed site almost entirely devoid of the type of vandalism and disturbance that you would expect from such a readily accessible site. But I am getting ahead of myself here.

Let's retrace the recent history. Grimes Point has been of interest archaeologically now for almost 50 years. The first formal report mentioning the site appears to be by Steward (1929). Noted Great Basin authors Heizer & Baumhoff (1962:18-20), Bard (n.d.), and K. Nissen (1982:287-298) added to the knowledge.

The Grimes Point petroglyphs were extensively surveyed by Karen Nissen in 1971 and 1972 as part of her Phd thesis work. She counts 923 boulders and believes there are more in unsurveyed

areas bringing the count to over 1000. She reports, "Thus, the Grimes Point site is one of the largest known petroglyph sites in the United States." (Nissen 1982:296) Eileen Green has recently surveyed the site and found more rock art outside the study area. (1991)

Basalt boulders, from eight to twenty feet in diameter, have a heavy, dark patina. They are scattered over the western edge of Eetza Mountain. Nissen also reports (1977) exfoliation that may be a recent phenomena caused by fuel dumping activities at Fallon Naval Air Station.

Four styles of petroglyphs are present: Pit and Groove (29%), Curvilinear (49%), Rectilinear (20%) and Representational (2%). The rock art is believed to be approximately 6000 years old with the Pit and Groove Style being the oldest. (Nissen 1982).

Brian Hatoff, BLM archaeologist, reported in 1977 that all to often repeated story;

"Unfortunately this interest by the scientific community has been matched or surpassed by looters and vandals. Rampant pot hunting among the numerous caves and rock shelters as well as vandalism of the petroglyph boulders, has seriously damaged the cultural resources at the locality." (1977:1)

Negligence added insult to injury. Grimes point was used as a dump site and numerous roads were graded to improve access. Nearby caves fell victim to firearms target practice and exploratory mining. At the time, jurisdiction rested with the Bureau of Reclamation. Even the nomination and placement of the site on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971/1972 did little to stem the tide of abuse. The Nevada State Parks System did the nomination work but then the Nevada Legislature failed to appropriate funds to add it to the state park system.

The Bureau of Land Management took the initiative and acquired an operating agreement with Bureau of Reclamation to manage the cultural resources in 1975. Brian Hatoff, BLM archaeologist, Tom Abbett, a recreation planner, and Bill Garrels (now deceased) were instrumental in planning and implementation.

During the spring of 1976 extensive cleanup was done with the help of Fallon's Army National Guard unit and the Fallon Naval Air Station. The Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) built a fence to restrict vehicular travel into the Grimes site and the caves further to the east.

Improvements came in rapid succession; antiquities signs were placed, patrols developed, the Grimes Point Archaeological Area was designated, a Recreation Management plan completed, and a 2000 foot self guiding trail constructed. Later a self guiding

archaeological/ ecological trail was also placed at the cave sites to the east. (Weiss 1984:15-18). A unique feature of the trail development was the participation of school children on field trips to see which features interested them the most.

Brian Hatoff stated the early goal of this work:  
"It is hoped that by adopting a more positive approach to management of the Grimes Point area the public will become more aware and receptive to the need for conservation and protection of our non-renewable resources."(1977:2)

As part of the public participation a teachers study guide, a trail brochure and slide show were produced. Visitation to the site has been steady as there are 1/4 of a million people in the immediate area.

There is a fundamental problem which we wrestle with when we deal with the public use of an archaeological site. Paul Bahn summarized it well (1986:144);

"..the public has the right to see as much of its heritage as possible, and its desire to see it should be satisfied if at all feasible, whereas archaeologists perceive the need to preserve this common heritage for future generations."

Most visitors to the Great Basin feel a "God given" freedom to visit and do what they want without restraint or restrictions. Generally this attitude is at odds with preserving a site.

Steve Manning expressed well the concerns of most of us when the location of sites are made public. His stimulating essay for the July issue of The Utah Rock Art Research Association - Vestiges (1991:5-7) argued for little or no visitation. Therefore if visits are allowed to rock art sites and the archaeological value preserved, attitudes of visitors must be modified.

Gale and Jacobs summarized results of research in Australia and elsewhere in modifying visitor behavior. (1987:101)

"...people can be controlled in a positive manner which does not result in loss of freedom but which can, in fact, enhance their experience and add to their appreciation and enjoyment of a site."

Site management is then primarily about managing people. Are visitors getting the right experience while at the site? It also requires a regular evaluation of the site condition. Is the rock art deteriorating?

Gale and Jacobs also studied the impact of several types of visitors; they identified three groups with high risk potential: (1) children, (2) large poorly guided tours, and (3) local residents (1987:102). I am sure the children group includes

teenagers!

Further they found that identifying what individuals and groups want when visiting a site is critical to the management process. Basically visitors are expecting three things: meaning, age and authenticity.

Visitor use at the Grimes Point site has been well structured and incorporates the following features which both enhance the experience for the visitor and direct their activities toward education rather than vandalism or abuse:

- (1) A barrier fence which blocks vehicular access
- (2) A designated parking area
- (3) Strategic placement of trash containers
- (4) Well maintained appearance including unobtrusive signs
- (5) An established trail which invites use
- (6) A Trail brochure answering the 3 expectations of visitors
- (7) Interpretative signs satisfying expectations
- (8) Rest stops along the trail
- (9) Visitor register which is periodically maintained

Other contributing factors which have helped preserve rock art at the Grimes Point site are:

- (1) An active interpretive program at the Churchill County Museum involving committed volunteers.
- (2) Educational tour programs involving the public schools, scouts, and youth groups in the surrounding area
- (3) An ongoing commitment and effort by the BLM to manage the cultural resources effectively

Visitor volume at the Grimes Point Site averages about 9000 per year. While this is a relatively low volume for a public site it is significant enough to have impact when taken in the context that during the 14 years the trail has been open approximately 125,000 people have been to the site. (Hatoff 1991) Visitor volume varies greatly during the year with the highest visitor count occurring between March and November. (Malloy 1991)

What impressed me so much about this site is the functional design and the adherence to the standards mentioned above which have been incorporated for protection. The impact to the rock art is minimized. Some damage occurred to signs and register boxes. Recently I asked Brian Hatoff whether he would develop the site if he had it to do over. His response was a very positive YES. The choice for this site is easy. It had already been damaged, it was close to the major highway, and they had nothing to lose.

If you are contemplating reclaiming or interpreting a rock art site, Grimes Point is a good model to follow, although all sites must be analyzed for who the visitor is and what the site's

needs are. This design has proven successful for this northern Great Basin location. Local museum and/or volunteer cooperation can work anywhere. Karen Malloy, at the BLM office in Carson City, Nevada can provide more information if you desire it.

Even more important; we can learn from both good and bad experiences. While the Grimes Point experience is generally a plus, equally important are the failures with site management. I look forward to learning from your shared experiences.

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