

# **Lake Powell Pipeline Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement**

## **Supplement Number 4 Cultural and Ethnographic Resources:**

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## INCISED STONES AND SOUTHERN PAIUTE CONTINUITY

The Southern Paiute Advisory Committee asserts that Southern Paiute people were placed in their homelands by the Creator at least 13,000 years ago. According to Southern Paiute origin stories, the Creator made Southern Paiute people the sole owners and caretakers of these lands. Southern Paiute oral histories describe how Southern Paiute people have always lived on these lands and how Southern Paiute people have never arrived from someplace else. Southern Paiutes are also the federally recognized aboriginal inhabitants of these lands per the ruling of the Indian Claims Commission.

Because these lands are part of Southern Paiute territory, all Native American sites located within Southern Paiute territory, unless identified and agreed upon by all Southern Paiute tribes as belonging to others, should be defined as Ancestral Numic. The Committee requests that all Native American sites located within traditional Southern Paiute territory be referred to as *Enugwuhype1* or Ancestral Numic. The *Enugwuhype* period refers to the time period from Creation to 100 years ago.

This is an ethnographic analysis of incised stones and their potential role as a cultural indicator for Southern Paiutes. In other words, when certain incised stones are found in specific places, it documents that Southern Paiutes were there involved in ceremony. The analysis is focused on a style of incised stones that is predominately found associated with the Spring Mountains, Southern Paiute origin mountain range located in southern Nevada (Figure 1). This style involves what has been interpreted as a feather pattern suggesting a comparison with what are known as *Pabos* or prayer sticks that are used today by various Pueblo peoples. Southern Paiute field interviews with elders document persistent knowledge of using feathered incised stones in ceremony. Elders maintain that such ceremonies have been conducted since time immemorial on and around the origin place for the Southern Paiutes, the Spring Mountains. We argue that the presence of a feathered incised stone anywhere in aboriginal Southern Paiute territory indicates they were here since time immemorial.

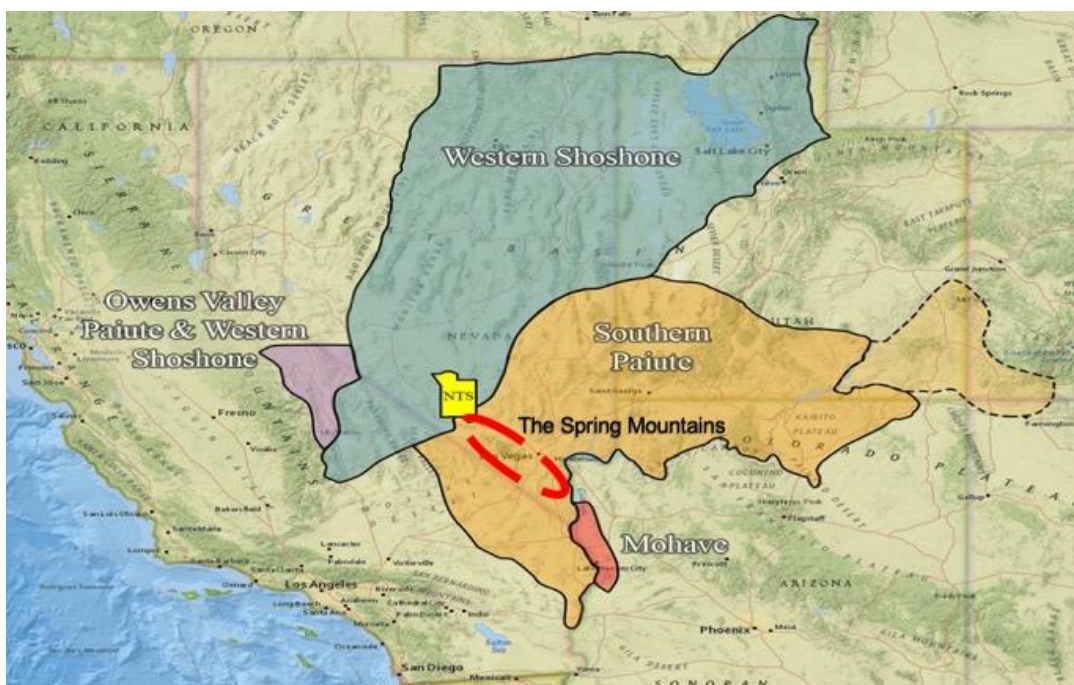


Figure 1 Traditional Southern Paiute Territory with the Spring Mountains Highlighted

Incised stones have been found throughout the western United States, but a particular inscribed feather style is key in this analysis. The feathered incised stones have on one side lines that radiate similar to the end of a feather (Figure 2). This style has been noted as being the Spring Mountains style, by incised stones expert, Congressman James D. Santini (1974). The external feather design is divided by a line which, according to Southern Paiute elders, marks the presence of another dimension.



Figure 2 Incised Stone Etched in the Spring Mountains Style

When placed in the ground these stones serve to constantly transfer prayers and Paha to other dimensions or distant locations. They are like a permanent communication device. So, it is important to talk about feathered stones in terms of where they were placed, especially near or on the Spring Mountains. This mountain range is a 55-mile long massif (860 square miles) with three prominent peaks; one located at each end and *Nuvagant* or Mount Charleston, the highest peak, in the center. When asked, “where is your origin or creation place?” Southern Paiutes always have specified that it was the Spring Mountains. No other cultural group makes this origin place assertion and no other group is known to conduct pilgrimages to this massif. Feathered incised stones have been placed where prayers occurred along pilgrimage trails. Such prayer points occur along the flanks of the massif at large springs, near the trails at key power spots, and at the final destination, which in many cases is the highest peak.

Archaeologist document that incised stones have been found at sites that date from historic times continuously back to 6,000 BP and 10,000 BP in the Great Basin, Mojave Desert, and Colorado Plateau (Thomas 2019; Ottenhoff 2015; Powell 2019). Many of these sites involve a fire pit around which a number of incised stones were placed. Archaeologist, David Whitley (1999:239) has argued that the presence of similar rock art patterns and types of placements in the Mojave Desert represents a continuous religious tradition dating back to the late Pleistocene.

The knowledge of incised stones among Southern Paiute people has been maintained through oral history and shared during our ethnographic studies. Elders maintain that the stones are like Pahos (their comparison) and thus are used during ceremony to carry prayers to another dimension or place. The feathered stones are made of rock instead of wood and feathers and are thus intended to remain longer in their place of prayer. Elders maintain that the use of the stones to carry prayers during ceremonies is an ancient practice and occurs at special places such as around and on their origin mountains. Southern Paiute interpretation of these stones is reflected in their term of reference *prayer stones*.

### **Archaeology of Incised Stones**

Western US incised stones are usually comprised of sandstone or slate and are marked by various designs and paint (Klimowicz 1988). In general, these are oval and thin but substantial in strength. Most are about the size of a human hand. Even with archaeology and geological context, however, the function of incised stones has been difficult for archaeologists to confidentially interpret.

Researchers from our University of Arizona team in 2008 visited archaeology collections, photographed incised stones, and recorded the discovery or excavation locations (i.e. provenience) of public incised stone collections throughout Nevada (O'Meara 2013). Incised stones have been collected and documented throughout southern Nevada over the past 50 years (James 1983; Perkins 1967; Tuohy 1967; Dixon 1987; Santini 1974). Santini noted that his stones came from locations including Flaherty Rock Shelter, located along the southeast slopes of the Las Vegas Range (UNLV Collection). Stones in other collections we visited came from the Moapa Valley (Perkins 1967); Sandy Valley (Lost City Museum Display); Sheep Mountain Range (Perkins 1967); Spring Mountains (Santini Collection; Dixon Collection); Pahrump Valley (Santini Collection; Dixon Collection); Coyote Springs (Lost City Museum); and from the vicinity of the Las Vegas Valley (Schuster 1966; Perkins 1967; Santini 1974:4-5). The number of curated incised stones in southern Nevada was estimated by archaeology expert Don Hendricks in 2013 as more than 1,700 whole items (personal communication with Don Hendricks 2013).

Klimowicz (1988) conducted an analysis of incised stones in 1987-1988, where she analyzed 788 stones from the Santini Collection that were found at over 50 sites. Her data suggested the stones were made with consistent designs over thousands of years which she concluded was an indication of cultural continuity with people of similar cultural beliefs making the stones (1988:8). Caves and shelters represent 40% of the locations where her stones were found; the remaining 60% were found in open-air locations (Klimowicz 1988:24). Shoshone and Paiute pottery were found most often with the stones. The stones were found in proximity to hearths in 42.2% of the cases and next to grinding stones in 66.6% (Klimowicz 1988:26). Ochre (pigment) appears on 11.1% of stones and in two instances stones were found alongside a burial (Klimowicz 1988:32).

Professor Randy Ottenhoff (2015) wrote a two-volume PhD dissertation entitled *Incised Stones of the Great Basin: A Contextual Archaeology* at the University of Central Lancashire in England. In his own words, incised stones are small tabular shaped stones, that are easily portable, and have designs incised on the surface. The landscape was used by prehistoric hunter-gatherers for over 10,000 years. The incised stones were left at caves, rock-shelters and open-air sites. This research focused on five sites that are either caves or rock shelters: Camels Back Cave, Gatecliff Shelter, Hogup Cave, Ruby Cave and Swallow Shelter. A contextual analysis was achieved by employing three analytical methods: chronology, spatial analysis, and design grammar. The chronology of incised stones was

discussed in terms of how climate trends affect the number of incised stones left at sites. The spatial analysis examined the incised stones through a chronology at the unit or trench level. The design grammar classifies the imagery of the incised stones. The results highlight how incised stones were connected with specific activities.

Professor David Hurst Thomas wrote a summary analysis of incised stone archaeology entitled “A Shoshonean Prayer stone Hypothesis: Ritual Cartographies of Great Basin Incised Stones” (Thomas 2019). In his own words the prayer stone hypothesis, grounded in Southern Paiute oral history, holds that selected incised stone artifacts were votive offerings deliberately emplaced where spiritual power (Puha) was known to reside, accompanying prayers for personal power and expressing thanks for prayers answered. Data suggest significant and long-term linkages between 3,500 Great Basin incised stones, an assemblage spanning seven states and seven millennia. Ritualized cartographies matched oral Shoshonean traditions with specific geographic indicators. The results demonstrate that many (but not all) incised stones are consistent with the votive emplacement of prayer stones. Multiple constellations of prayer stone practice operated across the Great Basin for more than 5,000 years and carried forward, without perceptible break, among several (but not all) Numic-speaking populations of the ethnohistoric interval.

## **Methodology**

Ethnographic data for this analysis was collected initially during a 2003 ethnographic study funded by the United States Forest Service (USFS), entitled *Puha Flows from It: The Cultural Landscape Study of the Spring Mountains* (Stoffle et al. 2004). The study focused on a cultural landscape assessment of the Spring Mountain National Recreation Area, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Nevada. The project examined the traditional, religious, and cultural values of Southern Paiute people inherent in the Spring Mountains. The study design involved the University of Arizona team working with tribal representatives from seven Southern Paiute Tribes and the Las Vegas Indian Center to identify sites, areas, trails, and landscapes of cultural and religious importance to the Southern Paiute people. Twenty-two sites were studied, and 216 interviews were conducted. Tribal representatives identified a number of pilgrimage trails that serve to connect and explain ceremonial places on the way to the prominent mountain peaks.

A follow up study was conducted with two Chemehuevi Southern Paiutes in 2008. One participant was the elected Religious Leader or Religious Chief for the Chemehuevi people. The other was his knowledgeable sister. The purpose of these interviews was to further discuss the cultural meanings and uses of incised stones (Van Vlack, O’Meara, Savage 2008). These in-depth discussions greatly elaborated previous understandings.

Following those initial studies, University of Arizona ethnographers conducted subsequent ethnographic interviews with Southern Paiute religious leaders and tribal representatives regarding the meaning and traditional uses of incised stones, the meaning of ceremonial places, and pilgrimage trails as part of other ethnographic projects (Stoffle et al 2008; Stoffle et al. 2009; Stoffle et al. 2018). Findings from these studies were central for further understanding incised stones and the Spring Mountains.

The research team, in 2008, conducted pilgrimage trail research on Nellis Air Force Base involving 271 original interviews, which produced a two-volume summary of findings (Stoffle et al. 2009). The

study was focused on a 22-mile long pilgrimage trail from a hot spring in Oasis Valley, up a deep canyon, to the top of Black Mountain, which is the physical and spiritual head of the Amargosa River cultural and hydrological system. Pilgrimage findings have been summarized in a book chapter entitled *Ethnology of Volcanoes* (Stoffle et al. 2015).

Van Vlack (2012a) used these studies as a foundation and for her PhD dissertation which focused on six Southern Paiute pilgrimage trails that go to (1) Kavaicuwac (Milk Mountain), Utah; (2) Little Springs and the Grand Canyon, Arizona; (3) Goldstrike Canyon and Sugarloaf Mountain, Arizona; (4) Black Mountain, Nevada; (5) Scrugham Peak, Nevada; and (6) Mount Potosi, Nevada. Her analysis tiered on previous research but added her own interviews and document research to develop unique insights about cultural protocol along trails and arguments about the social and cultural function of trails. She now has published her findings (Van Vlack 2012b, Van Vlack 2018).

Most recently the research team has worked with a committee of Paiute and Shoshone cultural representatives of 17 tribes to assess the potential impact of a proposed expansion of Nellis Air Force Base (Stoffle et al. 2019). During this study two new pilgrimage trails to the Spring Mountains were identified (Stoffle et al. 2019). The story, thus, of pilgrimage trails related to the Spring Mountains and nearby sacred mountains has emerged based on the commitment of Shoshone and Southern Paiute tribal leaders and cultural experts and fifteen years of systematic ethnographic interviews.

### **Southern Paiute Ethnographic Interpretations**

Interviews with Southern Paiute tribal representatives indicate that contemporary Paiute people maintain knowledge and understanding of the function and significance of incised stones. Tribal representatives discussed these stones in terms of their cultural importance. Southern Paiute elders have stated that certain incised stones such as those with etchings that resemble feathers would have been produced by a religious leader and placed at certain points of pilgrimage ceremonies at places where there are concentrations of Puha, which is understood as energy that was placed in everything at Creation.

Initial tribal interpretations of the stones occurred in 2003 during the Spring Mountain study at a meeting between tribal representatives and the head archaeologist for the Forest Service. The archaeologist brought a number of incised stones that had been collected in the Spring Mountains including two incised stones from near the Salt Sister site where interviews had occurred that day. Elders said that the incised stones had been used in pilgrimage ceremonies and were left as offerings as gratitude and reciprocity and to conduct prayers. One Southern Paiute representative said:

*I figure they are – they're a prayer, a specific kind of thing that they said, and thanking them for whatever they took from them. It's just like when they went, the medicine men, when they went to pick medicine from trees or bushes, they would say their prayer and clip off one little, not the whole tree, just one little branch...And he would say this prayer, but he didn't leave anything material like that, he just thanked the Creator for giving him the opportunity to cut that tree. That way he knew, he could come back all the time and probably cut a leaf off that plant there, every year, or every so often. I would think that they're prayer stones, an offering to the mountain, because to an Indian they all have life, the trees the rocks and everything like that, and that mountain, it all has life.*

When asked if the rocks incising would have been made by a medicine man, a tribal respondent stated:

*It wouldn't be a doctor. It'd be, probably, a spiritual man. See the way Mt. Charleston is, is they all knew power came from that. All of them, they knew. And according to how in Southern Paiutes inherited their status or their privilege in their chieftainships, they inherited it. They all knew that this man was real powerful, not only that but sunrise across the way – that one was powerful too.*

*So, spiritual people go into the mountains, not only to receive spirit and power, but also to mingle amongst alive things, because it's all alive. And, they would, you know, have rocks that they would consider alive. I guess a lot of it has to do with their story telling too.*

*Doctors are different than spiritual people, and from the traditionals, or spirit runners. But in order to get a run going, they have to go to the person that knows how to bless that run. So they're different. So, I was telling Larry that I didn't think that these were being used for medicinal purposes or doctoring, when they're trying to heal people because, for them to heal a person, you have to be able to call the other world. You have to be able to call it, or transform that place that there in and take them to a different area, spiritually, to heal the person and what's going to be shown to this doctor. So, I wouldn't say doctors would do something like that. There might be an exception if he got a vision to use something like that, because it will be shown to him – what to use. And if this vision was shown to him, then he might want to keep it on his person, but he has to be real careful of what he does because if the healing goes wrong then they're going to – the people will blame that he did something other than [what he was] supposed to do.*

Another tribal representative spoke on the intentional placement of the stones and reasons they were incised:

*Well, to me, I would think that... they may have a spiritual purpose. They do, and it's more like they're giving thanks. They're giving thanks for all the medicines or plants that the mountain provides for their security. I think that would kind of explain why most of it found in that certain area, you know. You know, you look at them rocks there, they're divided in half [...] And that kind of shows you that that has something to do with the two different worlds, and I know I would say, I would definitely say, that those marks on those things they're feathers. I would think that the rest of them that are around the top – the edges around there. They're like prayer stones – you know, you give thanks for being showered with gifts. And you know, somebody that was doing that would pray for their tribe, or pray for seeing that the scoops – this thing here in the middle. That proves that he wasn't just praying for his tribe; he was praying everybody in the four corners of the earth.*

Southern Paiute elders likened the purpose of incised stones to Pahos, feathered prayer sticks that are left by the groups like the Hopi and Zuni. Elders said that Southern Paiutes would have had a similar practice of using the incised stones with their outdoor prayers around hearths in areas known for their sacredness and their association with ceremony, medicine, and pilgrimage (Figure 3). As one tribal representative noted:

*They are probably prayer stones, or prayer rocks to people that went there [Spring Mountains] ...and you know the significant part? The real part of that is that the Chemehuevi – their*

*origination story happens right in that mountain. That's there when you die, when I die, that's where I'm going to go back to [...]*

*You know, it does have some significant factor towards that fate, where they would probably take something like that and leave it there, you know, like an offering to the great spirits. Because the Indian believes that the Great Spirit is still sitting there in the mountain, and he's listening to you. And he's not going to come out and grab you, or whatever. He's going to wait until you decide to talk to him. And that mountain, Spring Mountain, has a story about almost every canyon up there; there's good stories and bad stories about that place. So it was a special mountain, and they respected that, they didn't go up there, unless they gave prayer, and went up into the mountain and did their thing and came right back – after they went through they came right back out. That's why I look at this, and I think, well yeah, that's what they gotta be, they gotta be stones and offerings of different types because like I said, the Indians, they believed that they had life, by putting the markings on them made them that much more alive.*

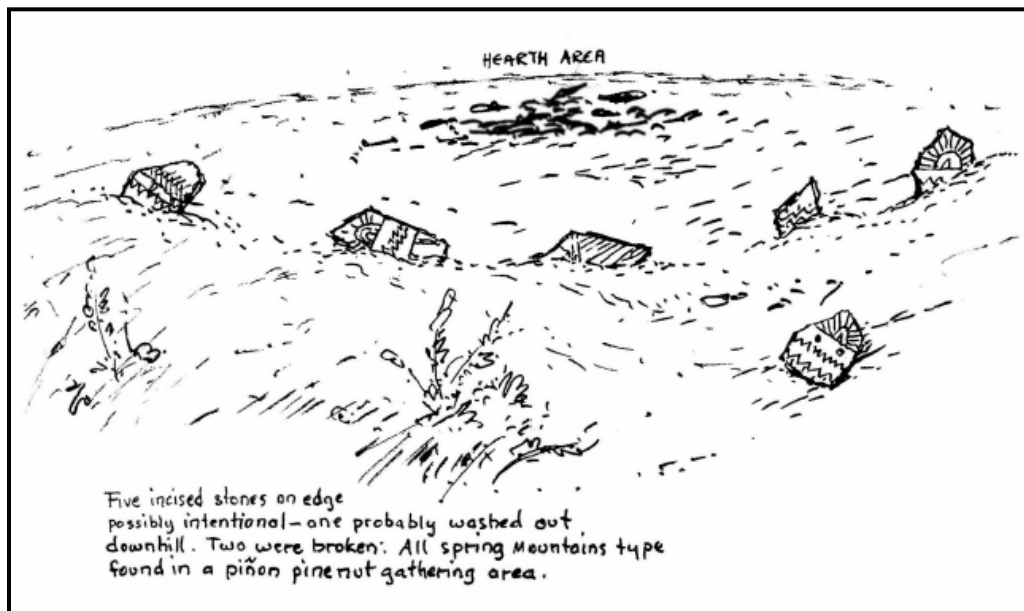


Figure 3 A Diagram of the Placement of the Incised Stones at Stump Springs

The above interpretations indicate that Southern Paiute people maintain a knowledge of these stones, the kinds of places where they were ritually deposited, and associated ceremonial practices. Other ethnographic reports have made similar findings with regards to a continual and sustained Numic connection to storied landscapes throughout the Great Basin, Mohave Desert, and Colorado Plateau (Stoffle et al 1990; Stoffle, Zedeño, and Halmo 2001; Stoffle, Arnold, and Van Vlack 2006; Stoffle et al 2009).

### **Pilgrimage to the Spring Mountains**

For thousands of years Southern Paiute religious leaders embarked on ceremonial journeys to Nuvagantu, their creation mountain. Pilgrimage trails located on either side of the Spring Mountains served as physical and spiritual pathways for a select few people to reach the various mountain peaks for prayer and knowledge acquisition. Along these trails, pilgrims or *Pubabiwats* visited places for prayer and spiritual preparation to reach their destination places (Van Vlack 2012a; Van Vlack



2012b). At these locations, the pilgrims placed feathered incised stones around small fires in order to help, along with smoke, send their prayers to other dimensions and locations. Etchings on these stones resemble the feathers of a hawk or eagle.

In order to understand these pilgrimage trails and the significance of incised stones at places along these trails, the Spring Mountains need to be placed into cultural and historical context. The Southern Paiutes believe that the Spring Mountains are the center of Creation where they and all humankind were created at the beginning of time. As one Southern Paiute religious leader stated:

*The Spring Mountain range is a powerful area that is centrally located in the lives, history, and minds of Nuwvi people. The range is a storied land which exists as both physical and mythic reality, both simultaneously connected by portals through which humans and other life forms can and do pass back and forth. This is as it was at Creation.*

Southern Paiutes believe that the Spring Mountains are a living Being who has a head at the northern end of the range at Mount Sterling, a tail located at Mount Potosi, and—in the center at Mount Charleston—the womb that created life. Mount Charleston is the geographic and cultural center of the Spring Mountains. It is the tallest peak in the range and is usually covered with snow. During times when the mountain top is snow free, the peak is devoid of vegetation. Southern Paiute oral history explains that this occurs because at a time before humans inhabited the Earth and a great flood covered the landscape, the top of Mount Charleston was the only place not under water. So, when the animals sought refuge there, in order to survive they ate all the plants from the peak leaving it permanently bare as it remains today.

Mount Charleston's Southern Paiute name is *Nuvagantu* which translates as “where snow (*nuva*) sits (*gantu*)”. The name implies more than this direct translation and it is a metaphor for Puha or Creation Energy being on and in the mountain. In order to understand the meaning of Mount Charleston and Puha it is necessary to examine the relationship between people and Puha. Shamans are predisposed to have certain kinds of Puha, which they can use to accomplish certain things that may or may not benefit Southern Paiute society. Shamans gain access to additional Puha by visiting special places and through the acquisition of spirit helpers. Sometimes, they use their Puha to bring people, communities, or the world back into balance. During these ceremonies, the shamans are portals through which their Puha and the Puha of their spirit helpers combine during the ceremony to achieve a cure. The term for shaman in Southern Paiute is *Puba'gant* or *Puba'ganti* and its direct English translation is “where power sits.”

The use of the word “-ganti” for both powerful shamans and for Mount Charleston draws comparisons between the two. Each has a close connection with higher elevations in mountains and Puha, and between Puha and water in its various forms. *Nuvagantu*, or Mount Charleston, means more to Southern Paiute people than just “where snow sits.” The mountain is like a shaman in that the mountain is a window in which Puha flows through in its various forms to achieve balance in the world. *Nuvagantu* (and the rest of the Spring Mountains) serves as a gateway between the physical and storied worlds in the Southern Paiute universe.

Origin mountains often are the tallest peaks in an ethnic groups' traditional territory and produce the most rainfall (Stoffle et al 2004). Southern Paiute people maintain that mountains call down the rain and snow. Without this action there would be no water, hence no life. Puha, like water, flows down

from the mountain and like water connects places as it moves and collects throughout the landscape. One Southern Paiute man described the connections between places as:

*All the mountains are a big circle, all connected. Mt. Charleston is where we were created; it is connected with Sunrise, McCullough, and Bird Spring Mountains. People would go to Gypsum Cave in the Frenchman Mountains to get our songs. Mountain sheep would come to them in songs along with other animals used in doctoring. Pintwater Cave, in the Pintwater Mountains is where wolf lived and it is the home of little mountain spirits and the wind. Sheep Mountains are a point of connection between the Indian people living in Moapa, Las Vegas, and Pahrump. There is red paint there too.*

Southern Paiutes explain that the Spring Mountains have a complex relationship with Paiutes and the surrounding environment, which shape how people interact with and understand both places and resources. The deep attachment Southern Paiutes have with the Spring Mountains is a birthright connection of rights and obligations, which has and continues to be transferred from generation to generation since Creation. The Creator taught Paiute people how to talk to the mountains and how to behave in their presence.

### **Pilgrimage and Incised Stones**

Southern Paiute pilgrimages traditionally were unique ceremonial and ritual actions occurring beyond normal worship and not a part of daily cultural activity, like prayers said to greet the morning sun. In Southern Paiute society, only a select group of shamans (Puha'gants) made pilgrimages, which they did on behalf of the entire community, as well as for themselves. Those who went on these journeys were medicine men or medicine men in training. These spiritual journeys were not taken by everyone because great physical and spiritual risks were involved. While ceremonial activities such as ritual cleansing and daily prayers occurred in a pilgrim's home community, most of the ritual associated with pilgrimage took place far from daily living space in controlled settings along trails to powerful places.

The article *Southern Paiute Pilgrimage and Relationship Formation* (Van Vlack 2012b) analyzes relationships between Southern Paiute pilgrims and objects used and places visited during pilgrimage ceremony. Pilgrims ritually deposit materials at special places along the trail creating a permanent relationship between object, place, prayers, and the pilgrim. It has been documented that there are places where pilgrims stopped to pray and have left pieces of obsidian, red and yellow jasper, colorful pieces of pottery, petrified wood, and incised stones (Van Vlack 2012b).

Offerings at places along trails were interpreted by Southern Paiute people as marking critical moments in the pilgrimage such as when the pilgrims encounter a water source, pass a spectacular topographic feature, or see their destination for the first time. Pilgrims placed offerings at a chosen spot where they prayed to the Creator asking for strength, announced their intention to the mountain, and asked for permission to proceed. These offerings served in the past and continue to serve today as the physical representation of the pilgrims' prayers; they are the direct link between people and places. According to Southern Paiute beliefs, the offerings contain the prayers and continue to send them across the landscape and to other dimensions forever. The offerings left at these places are thus linked to Southern Paiute history and cultural memory (Van Vlack 2012a).

Southern Paiute pilgrimages to places in the Spring Mountains are different from other pilgrimages found throughout Southern Paiute territory in that these pilgrimages bring Southern Paiute pilgrims back to the center of all Creation in the Southern Paiute universe. Pilgrims on these journeys would bring with them special designated ritual items such as incised stones to leave with prayers at various locations along the trails.

Pilgrims placed incised stones upright around small fire pits. The etching around the edges of the stones have been interpreted by Southern Paiute elders as symbolic of feathers. For example, Figure 4 is a photograph of an incised stone found in a ceremonial cave on the western side of the Spring Mountains near Mount Sterling. On one side of the stone, lines were engraved in this feather pattern. The stone also has been covered in red ochre also known as *oompi* in Southern Paiute. The presence of red ochre further adds to the ceremonial importance.



Figure 4 Incised Stone found at Ceremonial Cave

For purpose of illustrating that all portions of the Spring Mountains massif are sacred we discuss six pilgrimage trails to both sides of each of the three highest mountains. These trails include: (1.) Indian Springs to Mount Sterling, (2.) Pahrump to Mount Sterling, (3.) Creek Corn Creek to Slot Canyon to Mount Charleston, (4.) Corn Creek to Lower Deer and Salt Sister, (5.) Cottonwood Spring to Mount Potosi, and (6.) Stump Spring to Mount Potosi.

Each trail name includes its beginning at a prominent artesian spring, which is the site of a local farming community whose residents serve to support the pilgrims and at some level guard the mountains. These support communities are the beginning of the trail, but given that the pilgrims came from great distances there are less well-known trails for reaching these support communities.

Ethnographic interviews were conducted with Southern Paiute representatives at multiple places along each of these six trails. Figure 5 documents the known locations of where incised stones were identified by archaeologist along these pilgrimage trails. The map also shows the location of traditional irrigated farming communities associated with the beginning of each trail.

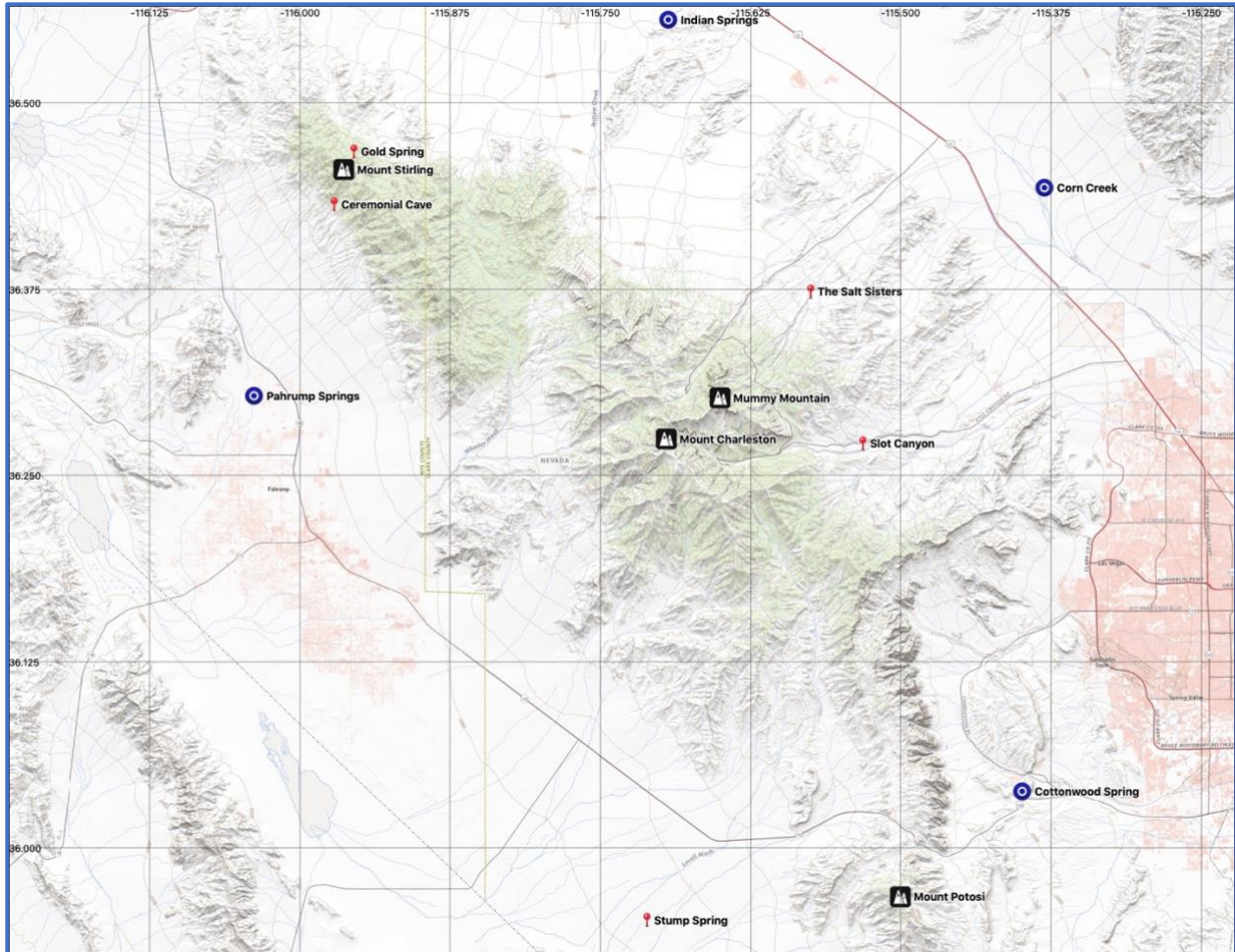


Figure 5 Locations of Pilgrimage Places and Incised Stones Locations in the Spring Mountains

Incised stones have been found along these trails at places such as small rock shelters, caves, and special topographic features. Many incised stone were found around small hearths in caves while others were associated with large fire pits out in the open near springs or on the mountain peaks.

*Trail One: Indian Springs (elevation: 3158 ft.) to Mount Sterling (elevation: 8218 ft.)*

This pilgrimage trail to Mount Sterling begins at the traditional Southern Paiute community of Indian Springs, which is the northern most traditional agricultural community in the Las Vegas Valley. This community like all others discussed were centered on an artesian springs which is fed underground by water from the mountains. This trail is the primary pilgrimage trail to the eastern side of Mount Sterling.

When pilgrims leave Indian Springs, they follow one of the major drainages up into the mountains towards Gold Spring. At this spring, numerous rock peckings were found including images of mountain sheep, knotted strings, and peckings associated with the Salt Song Trail. One pecking has been identified as possibly being a water baby, an extremely powerful spirit helper. Representatives noted lithics near the spring. They also documented a number of grinding slicks used to prepare medicines (Stoffle et al. 2004). There is also evidence of a possible hearth near the peckings. Incised stones likely were placed around that hearth as part of the pilgrimage ceremony. They also would have placed incised stones around a hearth once they reached the top of Mount Sterling.

*Trail Two: Pahrump (elevation: 2579 ft.) to Mount Sterling (elevation: 8218 ft.)*

Mount Sterling is located at the northern end of the Spring Mountains and from a Southern Paiute perspective, it is seen as the tail of the large Creator Being that makes up the entire mountain range. Mount Sterling serves as the destination place for at least two known pilgrimage trails. One of these trails begins in the Pahrump area, one which was traditionally was one of the largest Southern Paiute agricultural communities within the Southern Paiute Nation. Pilgrims leaving this community would travel to the western portion of the Spring Mountains near Grapevine Canyon before heading to Mount Sterling for ceremony and vision questing.

Along this trail, pilgrims visited a ceremonial cave. This cave contains a series of painted figures along the walls and sticks placed ceremonially into cracks in the ceiling. On the floor of the cave is evidence of a small fire pit with an incised stone placed near it. The stone as seen in Figure 4 is marked with red paint and has etchings that have been interpreted as feathers by Southern Paiute religious leaders. They believed the stone like the others found in the Spring Mountains were left during prayers and as an offerings during a pilgrimage ceremony.

*Trail Three: Corn Creek (elevation: 2861 ft) to Slot Canyon to Mount Charleston (elevation: 9470 ft.)*

Mount Charleston is the center point for Southern Paiute creation and the Spring Mountains massif. Pilgrims traveled to Mount Charleston for Puha and knowledge acquisition. Given its cultural importance, pilgrimage to Mount Charleston was different than other pilgrimages that occurred throughout the mountain range.

Once the pilgrims left the Corn Creek area, they traveled up a portion of Kyle Canyon before diverting into the Slot Canyon. In Southern Paiute culture, narrow or constricted spaces such as caves, slot canyons, and washes influence cultural meaning and influence the movement of natural elements like wind and water. Pilgrimage trails such as this one pass through or near these narrow spaces, because this is where Puha converges and collects in a manner similar to how water will pool in constricted places. As a trail passes through this slot canyon, pilgrims experience and draw upon the power of the area and from Mount Charleston as they progress on their journey. Upon exiting the Slot Canyon, pilgrims would be able to see Mount Charleston for the first time, thus leaving offerings and saying prayers. Pilgrims would have continued along this trail until they reached the top of the mountain. Incised stones would have been placed around a hearth on top of the mountain in order to send prayers to other dimensions in the Southern Paiute universe and across Southern Paiute traditional territory.

*Trail Four: Corn Creek (elevation: 2861ft.) to Lower Deer Creek and Salt Sisters (elevation: 6259 ft.)*

This pilgrimage trail begins across the Las Vegas Valley at the large agricultural community of Corn Creek. From Corn Creek, pilgrims traveled to Lower Deer Creek on the eastern side of the Spring Mountain range near the north side of Mount Charleston. In addition to the archaeology of the area, there are two Salt Sister monoliths that figure prominently into both a Southern Paiute Creation story and the Southern Paiute song trail to the afterlife (Stoffle et al. 2004).

In Lower Deer Creek, there are two large monolithic limestone outcroppings next to each other in the upper portion of the canyon (Figure 6). Southern Paiute people have identified these monoliths as the Two Salt Sisters. These sisters are associated with the Salt Song trail which is the physical and spiritual the path to the afterlife. According to Southern Paiute sacred history, the sisters traveled together along the Salt Song Trail until they reached Lower Deer Creek where they parted ways. One sister traveled north and the other traveled south. The monoliths exist at the exact spot where the sisters separated (Stoffle et al. 2004).



Figure 6 The Salt Sisters in Lower Deer Creek

A small rock shelter is located just up canyon from the Two Sisters. This rock shelter is surrounded by powerful medicine plants and lithics. Incised stones like the one in Figure 7 were documented inside the shelter found around a small fire pit. Elders concluded that the incised stones were left in the rock shelter as offerings associated with prayers conducted as part of the pilgrimage ceremony to commemorate the journey of the Two Sisters along the Salt Song Trail.



Figure 7 Incised Stone found at Lower Deer Creek

*Trail Five: Cottonwood Spring (elevation: 3427 ft.) to Mount Potosi (elevation: 8517 ft.)*

Mount Potosi is found at the southern end of the Spring Mountains and serves as the destination place for pilgrimages on both sides of the mountain range. Not only is Mount Potosi unique in that it is one of the tallest peaks in the Spring Mountains, but it also serves as the head the larger Creator being. For pilgrims traveling to Mount Potosi from the east, they would have begun their journey at Cottonwood Spring, a traditionally small but stable Southern Paiute agricultural community. From Cottonwood Spring, pilgrims traveled to places such as Yellow Yucca, Aztec Tank, and Yellow Plug before following the trail up towards the ridge between Mount Potosi's two peaks (Stoffle et al. 2004; Stoffle et al. 2007; Van Vlack 2012a).

Along the highest ridge, there is evidence that pilgrims set up a ceremonial support camp which would serve as spiritual and physical support for the vision seekers. Prior to the 2004 ethnographic study, the camp contained lithics, pottery, and grinding stones. There was also evidence of a fire pit and according to the USFS archaeologist incised stones were found near the fire pit. Southern Paiute religious leaders believed that incised stones would have also been present on top of two nearby peaks.

*Trail Six: Stump Springs (elevation: 2809 ft.) to Mount Potosi (elevation: 8517 ft.)*

Stump Springs is located on the southwestern side of the Spring Mountains in the southern portion of the Pahrump Valley. From the spring, pilgrims have views of both Mount Charleston and their destination, Mount Potosi. Prior to his collection of the incised stones at Stump Spring, Santini (1974:14) reported that the stones were found in an upright pattern with their base pressed into the ground in a concentric circle around a hearth. Figure 8 is a drawing of what Stump Spring looked like during initial archaeological survey (Santini 1974: 14).

The presence of pilgrimage trails from known ceremonial support communities surrounding the Spring Mountain massif indicates how important this origin mountain is to Southern Paiute people. The entire Spring Mountain massif contains portals to other dimensions. Movement in and out of these portals such as through caves and springs causes the mountain to visually blink as portions of it shifts between dimensions, according to a religious leader (personal communication with Larry Eddy). The six pilgrimage trails discussed here are primarily physical leading to high and obvious portals but there are other portals that are entered along spiritual trails like the Salt Song Trail to the afterlife, the Fox Trail, and others.

## **Discussion**

This analysis combines records of incised stones with Southern Paiute oral history to argue they have been in and near the mountain center of their traditional lands since time immemorial. Archaeological observations document the presence of incised stones for up to 10,000 years in the Western United States. Southern Paiute people maintain they were created in the Spring Mountains along with the all other humans at the beginning of time. A feather design is typical of incised stones found in the Spring Mountains and tribal religious leaders say it represent feathers such as those that occur on Pahos used today by Pueblo people to convey prayers to other places and other dimensions.

Cultural continuity in special places is a critical issue for Native American heritage today because it is a foundation for establishing Birth Right connections between a people, a place and the resources occurring there. A preponderance of evidence for these stipulations of continuity is required in the United States because western science and land managers must agree to share land stewardship with Native American groups who maintain cultural connections. The meaning and interpretation of these places and resources are often contested between western scientists, historians, and museum specialists. This analysis argues that the feathered incised stones found in the Spring Mountains are confident documentation of the presence of Southern Paiute people over thousands of years.



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