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## Transforming space into place: Development, rock climbing, and interpretation in Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, 1960-2010

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TRANSFORMING SPACE INTO PLACE: DEVELOPMENT, ROCK CLIMBING,  
AND INTERPRETATION IN RED ROCK CANYON NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION AREA, 1960-2010

by

Megan Sharp Weatherly

Bachelor of Arts  
Stephen F. Austin State University  
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

**Master of Arts in History**  
**Department of History**  
**College of Liberal Arts**

**Graduate College**  
**University of Nevada, Las Vegas**  
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THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the thesis prepared under our supervision by

**Megan Sharp Weatherly**

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**May 2010**

## ABSTRACT

### **Transforming Place into Space: Development, Rock Climbing, and Interpretation in Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, 1960-2010**

by

Megan Sharp Weatherly

Dr. Andrew G. Kirk, Examination Committee Chair  
Professor of History  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Though Americans tend to view wilderness as separate from nature, environmental historians have argued that wilderness is a cultural construct more than a quantifiable geographic category. Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area (NCA), a 195,000-acre tract located west of Las Vegas, Nevada, is one such cultural construction. Since 1960, this BLM-managed parcel has served as a local and regional expression of broader, national trends in outdoor recreation, interpretation, and development and thereby forced visitors to engage (often unknowingly) in a cultural dialogue about consumerism, technology, and identity. With information from newspapers, archival collections, oral histories, and government documents, this thesis illustrates the complex relationship between humans and nature by examining the stories of climbers, environmentalists, developers, and interpreters in Red Rock Canyon NCA.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT..... iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..... v

LIST OF FIGURES ..... viii

VICINITY MAP..... ix

INTRODUCTION ..... 1

CHAPTER 1 DRAWING LINES IN THE SANDSTONE:  
RED ROCK & DEVELOPMENT ..... 22  
Government Development..... 24  
The Possibility of Picnics in the Shadows of Derricks: Oil and  
Gas Leasing in Red Rock Canyon ..... 33  
The Summerlin Dilemma: Establishing a Buffer Zone ..... 39  
Blue Diamond South Pumped Storage Power: Playing  
Inside Politics..... 48  
Home Developers: Eyeing Green Near Red Rock..... 51  
Red Rock Resort and the Fight for Viewshed Protection ..... 63

CHAPTER 2 FROM PTERODACTYL NESTS TO LEGISLATED MORALITY:  
THE CULTURE OF CLIMBING IN THE CANYONS ..... 70  
The Rise of Rock Climbing in America ..... 72  
Climbing in Red Rock Canyon ..... 85  
Legislating Morality for Climbers ..... 105

CHAPTER 3 THE NATURE OF INTERPRETATION, THE INTERPRETATION  
OF NATURE: TELLING STORIES AT RED ROCK..... 115  
Interpretation in the National Park Service..... 118  
Interpretation at Red Rock Canyon..... 125

CONCLUSION..... 162

APPENDIX TIMELINE OF EVENTS RELATED TO RED ROCK CANYON.... 168

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 172

VITA..... 197

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At UNLV, I also found a lively cadre of fellow graduate students who were always willing to suggest other avenues of thought, to offer words of constructive criticism and kindness, and to help me develop intellectually and professionally. Mike and Leisl Childers, Adla C. Earl, Chris Manning, Debbie Rayner, and Rachel Rinn all deserve the utmost of thanks. Supporting me in my “off years” and earning a hearty *domo arigato* are my Okinawa pals Pebbles Banez-Sambolanay, John “Russ” Burgreen III, Carrie

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Research is a time-consuming task that often depends on the benevolence of others. I am fortunate to have been the recipient of goodwill from a multitude of individuals. Jeff van Ee spent several hours helping me fill in the gaps in my knowledge of development issues related to Red Rock Canyon. His memory and environmental awareness have few equals. Howard Booth gave generously of his time and energy as I unleashed a barrage of questions on him one Friday afternoon at his home in Boulder City. He also graciously allowed me to borrow more than 40 years of his personal files and Sierra Club correspondence on Red Rock Canyon. Larry DeAngelo explained aspects of the Red Rock climbing scene to me with patience and kindness, always providing helpful anecdotes and a dose of good humor. Joel Mur, Rodger Schmitt, Chris Miller, and Elsie Sellars all worked hard to recall details of jobs they left years ago, and each helped me reconstruct the history of interpretation at Red Rock far better than I would have been able to do with documents alone. Athena Sparks kindly gave me a sneak peak at the 2010 Visitor Center exhibits before they opened, and Red Rock BLM rangers Jim Cribbs and Kate Sorom patiently answered questions and helped me track down photos. The staff at UNLV's Lied Library Special Collections Department, especially Su Kim Chung and Delores Brown, always greeted me with a smile, demonstrated exceptional courtesy and professionalism, and did everything possible to help locate necessary materials. The good folks in Lied's ILL and DDS departments ensured delivery of dozens of off-site books and documents.

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Finally, this thesis would have been impossible without my best friend and husband, James. He's the ultimate autodidact, the sharer of adventures, my favorite conversationalist, ever a gentleman, and the keeper of my heart. Shabbai, Ursus!

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 KLAS advertisement ..... 2

Figure 2 Map of Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands showing BLM plans for development according to 1968 *Recreation Management Plan* ..... 27

Figure 3 Map of Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands showing BLM plans for development according to 1976 *Master Plan* ..... 32

Figure 4 Map from 1976 *Master Plan* showing views within and out of Red Rock Canyon ..... 54

Figure 5 Wired nuts, or chocks ..... 80

Figure 6 Wired Hexcentrics ..... 80

Figure 7 Cams, or friends..... 80

Figure 8 Bolt and bolt hanger ..... 80

Figure 9 Karma (K.K.) Miller with petroglyphs..... 125

Figure 10 Karma (K.K.) Miller with squash..... 125

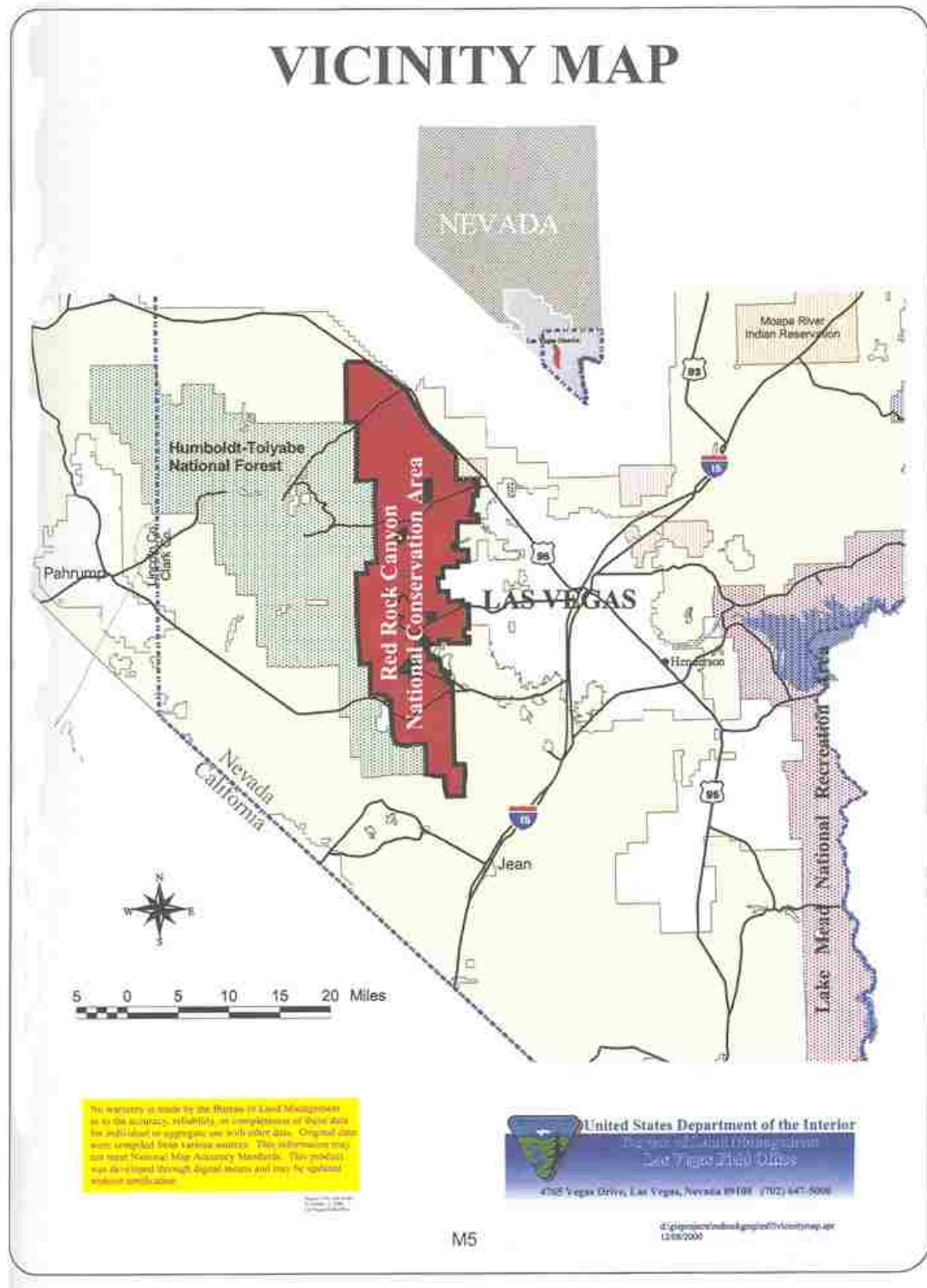
Figure 11 Architect Hugh Taylor’s 1965 conception of a visitor center ..... 127

Figure 12 Proposed Layman’s Herbarium Exhibit, 1969 *Interpretive Plan*..... 132

Figure 13 Sketch of proposed Tower of Power exhibit from 1977 *Red Rock Canyon: Interpretive Plan* ..... 137

Figure 14 Sketch of portion of the interior of the proposed Visitor Center from 1977 *Red Rock Canyon: Interpretive Plan* ..... 144

Figure 15 Exhibit explaining geology of Red Rock in the original Visitor Center. .... 144



Vicinity map showing Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area in relation to Nevada and Las Vegas metropolitan area. Courtesy of Bureau of Land Management.

## INTRODUCTION

“This is the most beautiful place on earth. There are many such places.”<sup>1</sup>

Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*

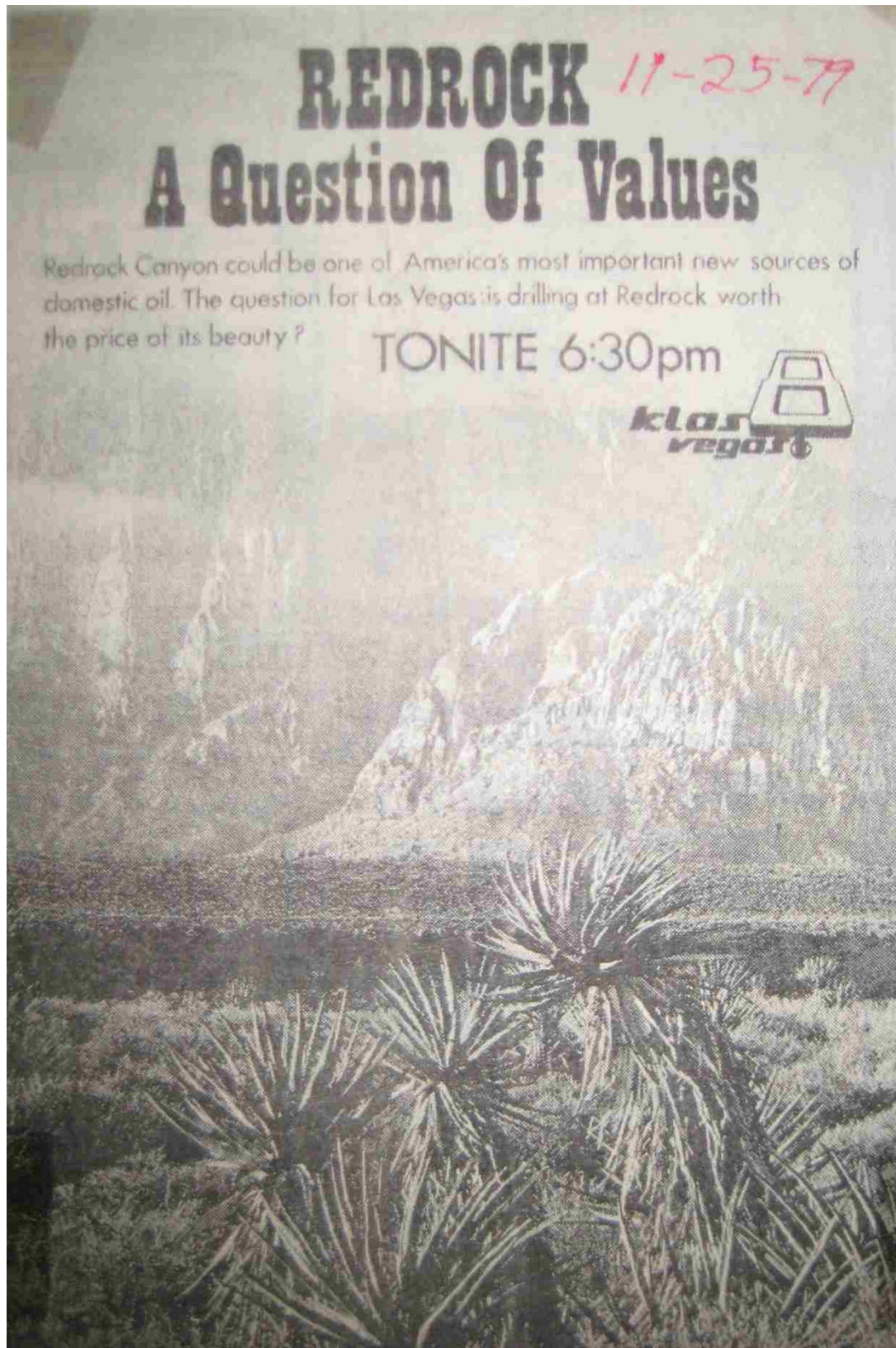
On November 25, 1979, KLAS, the CBS television affiliate for Las Vegas, Nevada, ran an ad in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* for a half-hour report to be aired that night at 6:30 p.m. In the foreground at the bottom of the ad was a Joshua tree, and in the background loomed the magnificent sandstone bluffs of Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands (RRCRL). The station had entitled the program “Redrock: A Question of Values,” and used only two sentences to promote the piece to readers: “Redrock Canyon could be one of America’s most important new sources of domestic oil. The question for Las Vegas: is drilling at Redrock worth the price of its beauty?”<sup>2</sup>

Though the ad’s text was slim, Las Vegas residents needed little overview of the dilemma at hand. Though Red Rock’s 1967 designation as recreation lands exempted it from public land laws and general mining laws, it offered no similar exemption from oil and gas leasing. In 1978, a Wyoming filing service applied for leasing rights on nearly all of the 62,000-acre RRCRL, and other wildcatters soon followed. The BLM then completed an environmental analysis, released the draft copy of the document, and allowed public comment in November 1979. In the wake of the drop in Iranian oil

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Abbey. *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968; New York: Touchstone, 1990), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Advertisement, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 25 November 1979, clipping in Personal Papers of Howard Booth. Additionally, local radio stations and all of the city’s newspapers gave coverage to the story. The BLM described the coverage as “even-handed.” See U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Team Leader William T. Civish, *Oil and Gas Leasing in the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Final Environmental Assessment* (Las Vegas: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Las Vegas Field Office, 1980), 205-206.



**Figure 1.** KLAS advertisement for report on drilling for oil and gas in Red Rock Canyon.

production due to protests surrounding the overthrow of the Shah and return of Ayatollah Khomeini, the Carter administration's deregulation of domestic oil prices, and the completion of the Alaskan Pipeline and subsequent glutting of the U.S. market with oil from the Prudhoe Bay fields in Alaska, Las Vegans found themselves standing in line for gasoline in the summer of 1979. Adding to the tensions related to world energy was the November 4 invasion of the American embassy in Tehran and subsequent hostage crisis. Thus, when the BLM released the *Draft Environmental Assessment* for public comment, reactions were sharp. Two venues in which the arguments for and against leasing played out were the Letters to the Editor sections of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* and the *Las Vegas Sun*. Leasing advocate Gena Lopez argued, "I think people are going nuts. Who needs rocks? I say we need oil and if Red Rock has some, what are we waiting for? Let's drill that oil. But give the rocks to the people that care about them. Me? I like oil and gas."<sup>3</sup> Charles Ten Eyck echoed her opinion, writing, "I say drill for oil anywhere it might be found...When the welfare of a human being is jeopardized by a tiny fish or a few red rocks, then we humans become the endangered species."<sup>4</sup> But the anti-leasing delegation argued its views just as forcefully. Gloria Freedman took on Ten Eyck directly. "The 'welfare of human beings' involves just a little more than energy needs," she wrote. "Perhaps there are those, like Mr. Eyck, who go to beautiful places like Red Rock and see no more than 'red rocks.' But there are also those who get from such natural beauty areas a rebirth of the joy of life, a wonderful confrontation with reality, a cherishing of the God-given gifts of nature. It's called mental health. We humans will

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<sup>3</sup> Gena Lopez, "Letter to the Editor," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 16 December 1979.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Ten Eyck, "Letter to the Editor," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 27 November 1979.

indeed become an ‘endangered species’ when we have destroyed all to get all.”<sup>5</sup> All told, more the BLM received 204 letters, 200 phone calls, and 1,818 signatures on petitions against allowing oil and gas leasing in Red Rock Canyon; it received 212 phone calls, 74 letters, and 11 petition signatures in favor of leasing.<sup>6</sup>

The parrying between pro- and anti-leasing advocates in the *Review-Journal* and the *Sun* throughout November and December of 1979 not only revealed the typical battle between preservation and utilitarian use, it also demonstrated the ways in which nature and environmentalism became part of the American political and cultural dialogue in the second half of the twentieth century. Though outdoorsmen such as Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir had engaged in weighty environmental debates in the first two decades of the century, such conversations generally captivated only a small number of Americans. But environmental issues became hot-button topics for both powerful politicians and ordinary citizens in the 1960s. As books and news media began to expose the environmental degradation caused by industrialization, nuclear testing, and petrochemicals, Americans began to see how such acts resulted in polluted rivers, strontium-laced milk, and other negatives that affected their homes, families, and communities. Activists argued that Americans—individuals and corporations—had the same ethical responsibility to protect nature as they had to protect each other. The value of nature, they argued, should not be seen as economic, but spiritual. The Red Rock-related letters to the editor mentioned above demonstrate the extent to which ordinary citizens—not just political figureheads—had begun to ascribe intangible, metaphysical

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<sup>5</sup> Gloria Freedman, “Letter to the Editor, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, December 1979.

<sup>6</sup> *Oil and Gas Leasing in the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Final Environmental Assessment*, 205.

value to land and worked to insert their voices into discussions about nature. For some, such as Lopez and Ten Eyck, Red Rock was little more than *space* to be used for maximum gain. For others, such as Freedman, Red Rock was a *place* whose preservation as a scenic and recreational area was necessary to maintain a decent quality of life for Las Vegas residents and humanity in general.<sup>7</sup>

Over the years, the transformation of Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area (RRCNCA) from just another tract of land on public domain maps to a valued and protected place has reflected the shifting concerns of American culture and society. Though it is a sublimely beautiful swath of land, Red Rock Canyon is also a cultural landscape. Richard White reminds us that “[land] always arrives to the eye fully stocked with expectations, fears, rumors, desires, and meanings.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, as D.W. Meinig asserts, “landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads.”<sup>9</sup> In this sense, Red Rock is a symbol, a representation of cultural values, social mores, and singular actions concentrated in one location in the past half century. Though the players in this story are each looking at and working in the same location, each sees the Red Rock landscape as something different—perhaps as wealth, nature, aesthetic, or ideology. This thesis, however, considers the landscape of Red Rock as history. On the sandstone walls of the canyons and the dirt floor of the valley is a complex record of man’s interactions with nature. The fights over the character of development, climbing,

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<sup>7</sup> For quality-of-life perspective similar to Freedman, see also Melody Daffner, “Letter to the Editor,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 2 December 1979.

<sup>8</sup> Richard White, “Discovering Nature in North America,” *Journal of American History* 79, no. 3 (December 1992), 874.

<sup>9</sup> D.W. Meinig, “The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene,” in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, ed. D.W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 34.



and interpretation showcase how modern man transformed Red Rock Canyon from space to place. I argue that, in this transformation, Red Rock is a local and regional expression of broader, national, cultural trends in environmentalism, outdoor recreation, and visitor services.

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Though this thesis limits examination of Red Rock to the second half of the twentieth century, the area has a lengthy and complex human history.<sup>10</sup> Pottery shards found in the area indicate that Anasazi from the Virgin and Muddy River valleys, the Upland and Lowland Patayan from along the Colorado River, and the Southern Paiute visited the area as early as 700 A.D. An abundance of yucca (which provided cordage, string, sandals, and combs), agave (a food source whose evidence is found in the form of mescal pits and grinding implements), piñon nuts, and game drew these early peoples to the area. Though archaeologists contend that much of the Native American use of Red Rock was temporary and transitory, they also suspect that the area, especially Brownstone Canyon, might have been used for special ceremonies.<sup>11</sup>

Travelers and entrepreneurs similarly came to Red Rock to take advantage of its natural amenities. The Old Spanish Trail and Mormon Trail passed through the southern portion of present-day Red Rock Canyon NCA, and travelers on the trails often stopped at Cottonwood Springs and Paiute Springs for water.<sup>12</sup> John C. Frémont passed through

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<sup>10</sup> Sources refer to the designated Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands and subsequent Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area by several names, including Red Rock, Red Rocks, Red Rock Canyon, the canyon, etc. I will use these names interchangeably.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Shutler, Jr. and Mary Elizabeth Shutler, "Archaeological Survey in Southern Nevada," *Nevada State Museum Anthropological Papers*, No. 7 (Carson City, Nev.: Nevada State Museum, 1962), 17-32.

<sup>12</sup> At the time, Blue Diamond was known as Cottonwood Springs, and Mountain Springs was referred

this area during his travels in 1844. On May 2, his party, “descending to a small valley-plain, encamped at the foot of the ridge, on the bed of a creek, where [they] found good grass in sufficient quantity, and abundance of water in holes.” Of the Red Rock escarpment, Frémont wrote, “The ridge is extremely rugged and broken, presenting on this side a continued precipice, and probably affords very few passes.”<sup>13</sup> Roughly three decades later, in 1876, James Wilson staked out Sandstone Ranch.<sup>14</sup> Following on his heels were a series of companies that quarried sandstone blocks between 1905 and 1912.<sup>15</sup>

Las Vegans have used Red Rock Canyon, particularly the area around present-day Spring Mountain Ranch, as a place of recreation ever since the city’s inception, with picnicking being documented as early as 1905 and fruit picking in the ranch’s orchards taking place throughout the 1910s. However, “[l]ittle thought was given to affirmative efforts to preserve or develop the recreational resource, largely because no need for that action was perceived.”<sup>16</sup> At the time, Red Rock Canyon was part of the public domain,

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to as Paiute Springs. See U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Proposed General Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement for Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area (An Amendment to the Las Vegas Resource Management Plan)* (Las Vegas: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Las Vegas Field Office, 2000), 152.

<sup>13</sup> John Charles Frémont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1842 and to Oregon and North California in the Years 1843-44* (Blair and Rives: Washington, D.C., 1845), 266.

<sup>14</sup> Sandstone Ranch is presently known as Spring Mountain Ranch, which is operated by the Nevada Division of State Parks. James Wilson is the namesake of Mount Wilson, which, at 7,070 feet, is the highest peak on the Red Rock escarpment.

<sup>15</sup> The sandstone blocks cut from the mountainside with channeling and gadding machines, hoists, and derricks were destined for transportation to Utah and California. But the enterprise proved too costly and was abandoned. See “BLM to lead historical hike of Sandstone Quarry area,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 11 April 1982, 3D.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Oil and Gas Leasing in the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Draft Environmental Assessment* (Las Vegas: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Las Vegas Field Office, 1979), 33. See also Las Vegas District Office and Nevada State Office, Bureau of Land Management, “The Red Rock Experience,” in Box 1, Folder 3, Red

and it remained so until 1936, when Congress included it in the initial establishment of the Desert Game Range (today known as the Desert National Wildlife Refuge). Later, the BLM removed Red Rock and the Spring Mountains from the Desert Game Range and designated them as the Spring Mountain-Red Rock Recreation Complex. In 1961, the National Park Service (NPS) visited Red Rock and evaluated it for possible inclusion in its system, but passed on the opportunity.<sup>17</sup> Undeterred by this initial rejection, a small group, including members of the Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Nevada Outdoor Recreation Association (NORA), began scouting the area and devising possible boundaries for a future national park, national monument, or other protective designation.<sup>18</sup> But the administrator of and advisory commission for the Nevada State Park System also recognized Red Rock's aesthetic, recreational, geological, and biological uniqueness and value and saw the area as an answer to concerns about providing a natural area for recreation for residents of the rapidly-growing Las Vegas

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Rock Canyon National Conservation Area Collection (MS 98-03), Special Collections, UNLV Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Hereinafter, I will refer to this collection as the Red Rock Canyon Collection.

<sup>17</sup> For information on the NPS's 1961 study of the area (approved by the Associate Director of the NPS on October 27, 1961), see Sub-Committee for the Administration, Development, Protection, and Maintenance of the Red Rock Canyon-Spring Mountains Recreation Complex, *Sub-Committee Report, Spring Mountains Planning Unit* (Las Vegas: n.p., 1965), 22.

<sup>18</sup> T.H. Watkins and Charles S. Watson, Jr., *The Lands No One Knows: America and the Public Domain* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1975), 243. Watson, a cartographer by trade, has been a BLM watchdog for more than a half century and has worked tirelessly for the protection of public lands in the West (largely as Director of the Nevada Public Domain Survey, the Nevada Outdoor Recreation Association, and the National Public Lands Task Force). His undergraduate degree in geology and his cartographic skills were very useful in the production of the report proposing Red Rock Canyon as a national monument, but he believed wholeheartedly that the lands should be managed by the BLM. The Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club felt the NPS would be the better managing agency. Because of this disagreement, Watson split from the Sierra Club. (More on the split can be found in Letter to Suzanne Taylor of Gibb Publishers from Charles Watson, 12 January 2005 in Box 3, Folder 9 of the Nevada Outdoor Recreation Association (NORA) Collection (MS 13), Nevada State Museum and Historical Society, Las Vegas, Nevada and in Charles S. Watson, Jr., *The Great Terrain Robbery* (n.p.: Xlibris Corporation, 2009).) However, he continued to quietly lobby lawmakers over the years for Red Rock's protection. For more information on NORA's advocacy, see "The Big Book" and the NORA Collection at the Nevada State Museum in Las Vegas.

Valley.

Nineteen-sixty-four proved a banner year for Red Rock Canyon. First, the BLM utilized the recently-passed Classification and Multiple Use Act to place a 10,000-acre parcel of Red Rock's on protective withdrawal status.<sup>19</sup> Seeing the recreational potential available in the canyons west of Las Vegas, the Provisional League of Women Voters conducted a survey of Las Vegas residents to gauge public interest in and usage of Red Rock Canyon for recreational purposes.<sup>20</sup> Also in 1964, after a lengthy drafting process, the Nevada Survey and the Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club submitted a document in which they advocated for a 64,000-acre stretch of land surrounding Red Rock Canyon to be assigned status as a national monument. The report noted,

Ideally the Red Rock Canyon area...cannot quite properly be a National Park and its scientific values may not quite qualify it for National Monument status. It is more than a Recreation Area, and it is beyond the scope of the Nevada State Park System at this time. The Forest Service might administer it as a Scenic Area, but it is under the administration of the Bureau of Land Management. Of all the categories under which the area might be managed, that as a National Monument makes the best sense. If the BLM were deeper in a comprehensive recreational management program of scope commensurate with the scientific, recreational and scenic land treasures under their jurisdiction, we would feel it should remain with the BLM.<sup>21</sup>

Though the NPS did send representatives to re-evaluate the Red Rock area's potential as a national monument, officials decided the land was too close to Las Vegas and was more

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<sup>19</sup> For details of the withdrawal process, see Howard Cannon Collection (MS 2), Box 27, Folders 264 and 265. (I am indebted to Leisl Childers for bringing these Cannon documents to my attention.) Prospecting continued illegally in Red Rock due to invalid mining claims filed after the area's withdrawal. See, for example, information on activities of Russell Farr, Herb Kaufman, and William Shaughnessey on Terrestrial Monarch No. 1 in Box 19, Folder 3, Jean Ford Collection, UNLV Special Collections.

<sup>20</sup> The group conducted the survey at the request of the BLM. Members distributed questionnaires throughout the valley and received more than 3,500 responses.

<sup>21</sup> The Nevada Survey – Southern Section (Armin Behr, Howard Booth, Dudley Zoller, and Virlis Fischer), *Red Rock Canyon, A Proposed National Monument, Clark County, Nevada*, prepared by The Nevada Survey, Charles S. Watson, Jr., Director at the request of the Toiyabe Chapter Conservation Committee, Dr. Richard C. Sill, Chairman, 1964, ii. Copy in Personal Papers of Howard Booth.

of a regional park.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Red Rock was destined to be managed by the BLM or the Nevada State Parks Division.

In 1965, an ad hoc committee of representatives from Clark County issued a report with recommendations for the administration and development of the Red Rock Canyon area. The *Report on the Spring Mountains Planning Unit* called for the land to not only be retained and managed by the BLM but for the State Parks Division to assume an active role in its development. The *Report* also called for a master plan to be crafted and outlined a 10-year development plan and budget.<sup>23</sup> In 1966, the committee's call for dual management moved closer to fruition when the State Parks Commission passed a motion to form a cooperative agreement for management with the BLM. That same year, the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (now a part of the NPS) studied the Red Rock area and proposed that it be designated a recreation area via federal legislation.<sup>24</sup>

Late 1967 proved a crucial time in the history of Red Rock Canyon. On October 5, nearly 62,000 acres were designated Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands, not only providing the scenic area with a significant degree of protection but also giving the BLM its first recreation management project.<sup>25</sup> On October 29, 1967, Nevada Senator Alan

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<sup>22</sup> The Sierra Club attempted to counter this logic by noting that Point Reyes, which was very close to San Francisco, served similar recreational functions and had recently been adopted by the NPS, but the Park Service washed its hands of the idea of managing Red Rock. Interview with Howard Booth, 18 September 2009. Additionally, Joel Mur, a BLM employee with the Las Vegas District since 1980, believed that the NPS rejected Red Rock simply because it could not afford another park at the time. Interview with Joel Mur, 25 January 2010.

<sup>23</sup> For Master Plan drafting recommendation, see *Sub-Committee Report, Spring Mountains Planning Unit*, 116-117. For budget, see pages 101-107.

<sup>24</sup> "History of Actions Leading to Management of Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands," in Box 1, Folder 3, Red Rock Canyon Collection.

<sup>25</sup> More precisely, 61,881.27 acres were designated by the authority of Code of Federal Regulations Subpart 1727. See U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Final Environmental*

Bible and Assistant Secretary of the Interior Harry Anderson presided over dedication ceremonies for Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands.<sup>26</sup> Two months earlier, the BLM had formed a team to design a master plan; the team completed its work in December, and the BLM state director and the Nevada State Parks administrator signed off on the plan and sent it to BLM's national office in Washington, D.C. Red Rock became the BLM's highest recreational priority.<sup>27</sup>

Notably, the 1968 *Recreation Management Plan (RMP)* called for extensive development of Red Rock Canyon so as to optimize public access to and use of the space.<sup>28</sup> As neither the BLM nor the State Parks Division could gain funds for Red Rock's development, little happened in the park in 1969 or 1970. But in 1971, the BLM finally secured funding to construct Segment A of the Scenic Loop, and construction began quickly. The newly paved road opened in May 1972. As the BLM pursued plans to create Segment B, some area residents rose up in arms, and Mary Kozłowski and Howard Booth of the Nevada Outdoor Spaces Council utilized the National Environmental Policy

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*Impact Statement for Red Rock Recreation Lands* (Las Vegas: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 1975), I-12.

<sup>26</sup> Program from the dedication of Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands, Personal Papers of Howard Booth; "Red Rock Canyon area open to public on Sunday," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 28 October 1967; "Bible says Red Rock project Vegas 'triumph'," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 30 October 1967; "Red Rock park dedication set," *The Nevadan*, 15 October 1967, 2.

<sup>27</sup> See "State of Nevada Involvement in Red Rock Canyon" in Jean Ford Collection, Box 19, Folder 1. Also note that the BLM did not manage Red Rock exclusively. In 1966, Eric Cronkhite, Planning Coordinator for the Nevada State Park System, recommended that the BLM and State Parks Division cooperatively manage Red Rock. See Nevada State Park System, "Role of the Nevada State Park System in the Development of Interpretive Facilities at the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Complex, Clark County, Nevada," (Carson City, Nev.: Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, 1966). Copy available in Jean Ford Collection, Box 19, Folder 2. In 1969, the State and the BLM formalized an agreement to cooperatively manage the area.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management and State of Nevada, Division of State Parks, *A Recreation Management Plan for Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands* (Las Vegas: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 1968).

Act to demand that the BLM draft an environmental impact statement (EIS) to study the effects of the *RMP*.<sup>29</sup> Many members of the public, together with the Clark County Red Rock Advisory Committee and the State Parks Advisory Commission, staunchly opposed the amount of development proposed for Red Rock Canyon. Their persistent heckling of the BLM resulted in limited development compared to what was called for in the 1968 *RMP*, and the BLM eventually asked the architectural firm of Royston, Hanamoto, and Beck to craft a revised master plan. The firm delivered in 1976. The new *Master Plan* dropped many of the development initiatives proposed in 1968 (and accordingly won the blessings of many environmentalists) and focused on completing the Scenic Loop, crafting an interpretive program, and devoting more capital and personnel to resource protection.<sup>30</sup>

After the *Master Plan* became Red Rock's governing document in 1976, the BLM conducted more than two years of design and feasibility studies to construct Segment B of the Scenic Loop. By 1978, road crews completed the loop, and the BLM shifted its focus to the construction of a Visitor Center. Interpretive development duties fell to Barry Howard and Associates, Inc., while Blanchard Construction Company and J & D Construction Company handled erection of the physical structure.<sup>31</sup> Work began in 1980,

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<sup>29</sup> Letter from Mary Kozlowski and Howard Booth to Dennis Hess, 1 June 1972 in Jean Ford Collection, Box 19, Folder 5.

<sup>30</sup> Royston, Hanamoto, Beck, and Abey, *Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Master Plan*, prepared for U.S. Bureau of Land Management by Royston, Hanamoto, Beck, and Abey (Mill Valley, Calif.: Royston, Hanamoto, Beck, and Abey, 1976). The firm also crafted Royston, Hanamoto, Beck, and Abey, *Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Background Report*, prepared for U.S. Bureau of Land Management by Royston, Hanamoto, Beck, and Abey (Mill Valley, Calif.: Royston, Hanamoto, Beck, and Abey, 1976).

<sup>31</sup> "History of Actions Leading to Management of Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands," Box 1, Folder 3, Red Rock Canyon Collection. See also Barry Howard and Associates, Inc., *Red Rock Canyon: Interpretive Plan*, prepared for the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management by Barry Howard and Associates, Inc. (n.p.: Barry Howard and Associates, Inc., n.d.)

and the Visitor Center opened to the public on May 22, 1982.<sup>32</sup> Also notable in late 1980 and early 1981 was the hiring of three visitor management personnel devoted expressly to Red Rock. But the BLM still lacked sufficient personnel to manage Red Rock entirely on its own. So, in 1981, the agency and the State Parks Division signed another cooperative management agreement.<sup>33</sup> In 1982, the entities also agreed to jointly handle law enforcement.<sup>34</sup> Also notable in 1982 was the designation of Pine Creek and La Madre Mountain Wilderness Study Areas.<sup>35</sup> In both cases, the federal government noted that each area offered opportunities for solitude as well as primitive and unconfined recreation.

The BLM struggled throughout the 1980s to gain funding from the Reagan administration to staff positions and obtain monies necessary to maintain Red Rock. It was, however, successful in acquiring a 5,000-acre parcel of land from Summa Corporation (a subsidiary of Howard Hughes Corporation) to maintain a buffer between the park and the soon-to-be-constructed Summerlin planned community. In the late 1980s, a push began among southern Nevadans and state politicians to gain more

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<sup>32</sup> For information on the Visitor Center, see Diane Russell, "Visitors' center added to Red Rock landscape," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 19 July 1981, 2B.

<sup>33</sup> "History of Actions Leading to Management of Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands," Box 1, Folder 3, Red Rock Canyon Collection.

<sup>34</sup> "BLM, state to police 45,000-acre Red Rock," *Las Vegas Sun*, 13 July 1982, 18.

<sup>35</sup> The former encompassed some 24,618 acres of wilderness bounded by Lovell Canyon Road on the west, private land on the south, Red Rock Summit Road on the north, and the Red Rock escarpment (Sandstone Bluffs) on the east. See U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Nevada Wilderness Study Area Notebook (Las Vegas)* (Las Vegas: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Las Vegas Field Office, 2001), sec. 13, 1. La Madre Mountains WSA contained some 61,630 acres, bounded by the Toiyabe National Forest on the north, private lands on the east, Red Rock Scenic Loop and Red Rock Summit Road on the south, and private property near Trout Canyon on the west. Notably, it included Calico Hills, White Rock Hills, Brownstone Basin, and Little Red Rock. See *Nevada Wilderness Study Area Notebook (Las Vegas)*, sec. 12, 1.



protection for Red Rock by having Congress designate it a national conservation area (NCA). By April 1990, U.S. Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) and Nevada Representative James Bilbray (D-NV) introduced bills to this end.<sup>36</sup> The bills quickly garnered support from the Bush administration, and after debate in the House and Senate, passed in late October. President George H.W. Bush signed Public Law 101-621 into effect on November 16, 1990, officially designating Red Rock Canyon as an NCA.<sup>37</sup>

The new designation not only brought more federal funds but required a revision of the 1976 *Master Plan*. Accordingly, the BLM drafted the *Proposed General Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* and released it to the public in 1994.<sup>38</sup> However, in November of that year, President Bill Clinton signed a bill that more than doubled the size of Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area (RRCNCA), from 83,000 acres to 196,000.<sup>39</sup> This increase required the BLM to develop an entirely new general management plan (GMP). As the drafting process would inevitably take several years, and the BLM needed a governing document quickly, the Bureau developed the *Interim General Management Plan* in 1995. This came none too soon, as visitation had increased

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<sup>36</sup> *Congressional Record*, 101st Cong., 2d sess., 1990, Vol. 136: H4559; *Congressional Record*, 101st Cong., 2d sess., 1990, Vol. 136: S 2464; Mary Manning, "Red Rock bill attempt to preserve Nevada's natural 'crown jewels'," *Las Vegas Sun*, 7 May 1990, 4B.

<sup>37</sup> *Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area Establishment Act*, Public Law 101-62, 101st Cong., 2d sess., (16 November 1990). See also Steve Adams, "Red Rock Canyon bill backed," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 27 June 1990, 1B; "Red Rock Canyon conservation bill debated before House panel," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 7 September 1990, 4B.

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Proposed General Management Plan for Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area* (Las Vegas: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Las Vegas Field Office, 1994).

<sup>39</sup> The bill had been introduced by Representative James Bilbray as H.R. 3050. See *Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area Boundary Expansion*, Public Law 103-450, 103d Cong., 2d sess., (2 November 1994). See also Tony Batt, "Clinton signs Red Rock expansion bill," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 1 November 1994, 1B.

dramatically. In 1990, annual visitors numbered 630,000, but by 1994, the number of visitors reached nearly 1 million.<sup>40</sup>

On November 12, 1997, the BLM instituted a fee program for cars and motorcycles entering RRCNCA. Whereas entrance to the park prior to this point had been free, the Bureau now charged \$5 for cars, \$2 for motorcycles, and offered a \$20 annual pass for frequent visitors. Pedestrians and bicyclists paid no fee. Congress had authorized the program the previous year by passing the Recreation Fee Demonstration Act, and allowed Red Rock to keep 85 percent of the fees generated, thus financing projects such as trail maintenance, Visitor Center improvements, and the addition of permanent restrooms. The fee implementation did not affect visitation, which continued to grow and soon topped 1.1 million. The manager of Red Rock Canyon NCA in the late 1990s, Greg Gnesios, cited the fee program as one of the key reforms that occurred during the NCA's life. He noted, "It turned this place around...It's given us the opportunity to provide the services that [the public] deserve[s] and expect[s] when they come to places like this."<sup>41</sup>

Congressional passage of the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) in 1998 added another 1,002 acres to Red Rock Canyon NCA, bringing the park's total acreage to 198,002.<sup>42</sup> In late 2000, the BLM finally completed the new

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<sup>40</sup> Keith Rogers, "Happy birthday, Dear Red Rock," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 16 November 2000, 5B.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. For more information on the implementation of fees in Red Rock Canyon, see Keith Rogers, "Fee first for fun," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 13 November 1997, 1B, 2B; Elizabeth Dutton, "Red Rock visitors find fee, not free," *Las Vegas Sun*, 13 November 1997, 8A.

<sup>42</sup> The SNPLMA provided for the disposal of nearly 30,000 acres of public land in Clark County to companies pursuing commercial and light industrial projects. However, it stipulated that roughly 85 percent of proceeds from such sales be used to buy federal environmentally sensitive lands and make improvements to facilities at parks such as Red Rock Canyon and Lake Mead. See *Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act*, Public Law 105-263, 105th Cong., 2d sess., (19 October 1998).

*Proposed General Management Plan.*<sup>43</sup> In 2002, the Pine Creek and La Madre Mountain WSAs became Wilderness Areas, which qualified them for protection under the 1964 Wilderness Act.

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Scholars have devoted considerable attention to the study of nature and culture.<sup>44</sup> In his seminal essay “The Trouble with Wilderness,” historian William Cronon outlines how Americans have increasingly posited wilderness as a pure expanse untouched by humans opposite to the industrialized, technological world in which we live. This veneration, Cronon argues, has resulted in the construction of a dangerous dichotomy that posits nature as a distant, mythical abstraction when in fact nature is intricately intertwined with the world in which humans live. Wilderness, Cronon further asserts, is a cultural construction. The very fact that we reify and seek out such places is the product of centuries of intellectual evolution; indeed, 250 years ago, Europeans viewed wilderness as a terror-filled wasteland, while humans in Biblical times associated wilderness with darkness and moral confusion. But, if the Devil resided in such places, so too must Christ, and thus wilderness became the home of a mystical boundary between Good and Evil. Though a journey to such area might bring temptation, it might also yield a glimpse of the Divine. In search of this opportunity, Romantics lighted for wilderness and began to espouse its spiritual values. Years later, wilderness took on new cultural meaning when

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<sup>43</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Proposed General Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement for Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area*.

<sup>44</sup> Though I will be devoting my attention here to wilderness scholarship of the past two decades, the topic of man and nature has been examined for more than two centuries. Notable works include George Perkins Marsh, *Man and Nature* (New York: Scribner, 1865); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: The Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness from Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

individuals such as historian Frederick Jackson Turner began pointing to it as the place in which Americans had hewn their national character and, indeed, democracy.<sup>45</sup>

Cronon's thoughts have important implications for discussions about Red Rock Canyon. The transition from space to place is inherently cultural because seeing Red Rock as something other than land requires valuing it. Thus, Red Rock becomes an important lens through which to view changes in American culture and politics. The "wilderness" in Red Rock Canyon differs vastly from the forested expanses many Americans imagine at the mention of the word. It is a desert space, and for years, many Americans perceived such tracts as ugly and accordingly used them as locations of deleterious endeavors. In *Desert Passages*, historian Patricia Limerick argues that an examination of humans interacting with the desert provides the opportunity to study attitudes toward nature (as a biological reality in human life, as an economic resource, and as an aesthetic spectacle).<sup>46</sup> Similarly, journalist David Darlington notes that deserts have shifted from being dumping grounds to being valued spaces.<sup>47</sup> Red Rock serves as a case study of these shifts in attitudes toward both deserts and nature.

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<sup>45</sup> William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, 2nd ed., ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 69-90. Other scholars arguing for cultural construction of natural spaces include Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Richard White, "From Wilderness to Hybrid Landscapes: The Cultural Turn in Environmental History," *The Historian* 66, no. 3 (September 2004), 561.

<sup>46</sup> Patricia Limerick, *Desert Passages: Encounters with the American Deserts* (Niwot, Col.: University Press of Colorado, 1989).

<sup>47</sup> Red Rock, which had a serious littering and vandalism problem for years, is a prime example of this transition. See David Darlington, *The Mojave: A Portrait of the Definitive American Desert* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1996). See also Eric Charles Nystrom, *From Neglected Waste to Protected Space: An Administrative History of the Mojave National Preserve* (M.A. thesis, University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2002).

Scholars have paid relatively little attention to Red Rock Canyon. Academic literature on the area is limited to anthropological and scientific studies.<sup>48</sup> Some popular literature exists on the canyon, but it provides only a brief overview of the area's history and offers little interpretation.<sup>49</sup> A handful of climbers, however, have devoted considerable time and energy to chronicling the history of their athletic community.<sup>50</sup> Until recently, there was also no modern scholarly analysis of Red Rock's managing agency, the BLM, or areas it oversees.<sup>51</sup> Comparatively, a wealth of literature exists on the history the NPS and the national parks, and such literature is important for tracing the contours of the federal

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<sup>48</sup> Shutler and Shutler, "Archaeological Survey in Southern Nevada,"; Kevin Rafferty, "The Archaeology of a Desert Oasis: Red Rock Canyon and the Spring Mountains," *Nevada Archaeologist* 4, no. 2 (1984): 14-26; Nevada Archaeological Survey, *Cultural Resources Inventory of Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands, Clark County, Nevada*, prepared for the Bureau of Land Management, Las Vegas Office (Las Vegas: University of Nevada Las Vegas, 1977); Priscilla Kathleen Bowman, *Life History and Population Dynamics of Daphnia in Seven Ephemeral Pools in Red Rock Canyon, Nevada* (M.S. thesis, University of Nevada Las Vegas, 1997); Cheryl McDonnell-Canan, *Morphology and Development of the Red Rock Canyon Alluvial Fan, Clark County, Nevada* (M.S. thesis, University of Nevada Las Vegas, 1989); Gregory T. Adams, *Laminar-Layered Calcium Deposits on the Red Rock Canyon Alluvial Fan, Clark County, Nevada* (M.S. thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1974). Additionally, there has been one business/public administration analysis of fee impacts; see Jack Tribble, *User Fee Impacts on Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area: Attitudes and Expectations of Visitors* (Professional Paper, University of Nevada Las Vegas, 1997). There has also been one political science thesis related to Red Rock; see Linda Lee Nations, *Achieving Compliance: Cultural Resources Management at Red Rock Canyon NCA* (M.A. thesis, University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2005). See also Watkins and Watson, *The Lands No One Knows*.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Cheri C. Madison, *Nevada's Red Rock Canyon: A Bureau of Land Management National Conservation Area* (Las Vegas: KC Publications, 1996); Cheri C. Madison and Howard Booth, *Nevada's Red Rock Canyon Trail Guide* (Las Vegas: Red Rock Canyon Interpretive Association, 1991); La Rae Bringham, *Spring Mountains, Red Rock Canyon: Petroglyphs of Clark County, Nevada* (n.p.: n.p., 1996).

<sup>50</sup> Joanne Urioste, *The Red Rocks of Southern Nevada* (New York: The American Alpine Club, 1984); Larry DeAngelo and Bill Thiry, *Red Rock Odyssey: Classic Traditional Climbs* (Las Vegas: Verex Press, 2004); Todd Swain, *Rock Climbing Red Rocks* (Guilford, Conn.: The Globe Pequot Press, 2000); Randy Faulk, *A Climber's Guide to the Red Rocks of Nevada* (Las Vegas: n.p., 1992); Greg Barnes, *Red Rocks Climbing* (Mill Valley, Calif.: SuperTopo, 2004); Roxanna Brock and Jared McMillen, *Red Rock Canyon: A Climbing Guide* (Seattle: Mountaineers Books, 2005); Jerry Handren, *Red Rocks: A Climber's Guide* (Las Vegas: Handbook Publishing, 2007). Additionally, there are numerous climbing-related articles on Red Rock Canyon.

<sup>51</sup> James Skillen's *The Nation's Largest Landlord: The Bureau of Land Management in the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009) fills this gap in scholarly literature.

government's efforts at recreation and land management and for contextualizing the early management of Red Rock Canyon. (As Red Rock was the BLM's first attempt at recreational management, the agency often looked to the past actions of the National Park Service for guidance.) Much of the NPS literature focuses on development. As David Louter notes in *Windshield Wilderness*, the NPS's policy on development within parks changed dramatically from the time the automobile was introduced through the mid-1960s. Cars modified the way Americans visited and recreated in nature, and early on, the NPS worked to facilitate "a new preservation ideal in which it seemed possible to commune with nature by car."<sup>52</sup> But preservationists, rallying against the threat of hordes of consumers inundating parks, championed the idea that wilderness should be roadless—or at least have as few roads as possible.<sup>53</sup> This push for limited development proved important for Red Rock Canyon because environmentalists and environmentally-minded Las Vegans blocked the initial management plan that called for extensive future development.

Unlike the parks about which Louter and many other historians of national parks write, Red Rock is located on the edge of a sprawling metropolitan area with two million residents and a sizable, steady influx of tourists. It effectively functions as an urban park for Las Vegas. Thus, this study of Red Rock is not only informed by works focusing on national parks but also those examining the history of urban parks. Galen Cranz, in *The Politics of Park Design*, outlines four eras in the history of American urban parks and

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<sup>52</sup> David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington's National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Sutter's *Driven Wild* offers an excellent narrative of how the fight against cars resulted in a push for roadless wilderness. See Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).

argues that park design and use reflect changes in the social structure, intellectual evolution, and cultural values of American society.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, changes in plans for Red Rock's design and use highlight important changes in environmentalism and broader American culture. But because Red Rock has become both an urban park for residents and a federally-managed tract attracting many outsiders since the early 1990s, there is little precedent for its management. One exception to this statement is Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), an unusual conglomeration of natural areas such as Muir Woods, former Army posts such as Forts Baker and Mason, and attractions such as Alcatraz and the Sutro District. In *The New Urban Park*, Hal Rothman discusses how the NPS has established a new method of management because of the GGNRA's homegrown, inclusive method of creation, administration, and interpretation.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Red Rock's proximity and heavy use by Las Vegas residents has meant it has had a core constituency that has not only worked with the BLM to develop effective management but has also played host to micro-constituencies that have led largely self-contained debates over proper use of the park and the proper place of man within it.

Though Red Rock Canyon is comprised of layers that tell a chronological history, this thesis tells a history that is far more nebulous. It is not an administrative history but rather an account of various patterns of use and human interactions with the land in the second half of the twentieth century. Thus, chapters do not follow a sequential progression. The first chapter, "Drawing Lines in the Sandstone: Red Rock and Development," utilizes

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<sup>54</sup> Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1982).

<sup>55</sup> Hal Rothman, *The New Urban Park: Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Civic Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

newspaper articles and government documents to trace fights over development in and near Red Rock Canyon. In so doing, it highlights the evolution of trends in American environmentalism, such as the call for open space and the efforts of grassroots environmental organizations. The second chapter, “From Pterodactyl Nests to Legislated Morality: The Culture of Climbing in Red Rock Canyon,” draws on climbing guidebooks and articles to chronicle the sport’s history in the park. It examines not only the disputes about clean climbing but also debates over guidebooks and guiding as climbing became a more mainstream sport. The final chapter, “The Nature of Interpretation, the Interpretation of Nature: Telling Stories at Red Rock,” considers the changes in the ways the Bureau of Land Management and local cooperating associations have presented Red Rock to visitors. Interpretive plans, government documents, and oral histories provide important insight as to the development of interpretive plans and the strategies for their implementation. Viewed separately, the stories of development, climbing, and interpretation in Red Rock Canyon offer unique examples of how the park, though revered as a natural escape from the unnatural neon and asphalt of Las Vegas, is far from being a pure and untrammelled space. Considered together, they illustrate the degree of human involvement in constructing a much-loved place.



## CHAPTER 1

### DRAWING LINES IN THE SANDSTONE:

#### RED ROCK & DEVELOPMENT

“Something should be done to preserve the natural beauty of [Red Rock Canyon and its] surrounding area before the bulldozer and dynamite make the scene. Las Vegas i[s] growing very rapidly, so steps should be taken to preserve part of the natural topography as soon as possible.”<sup>1</sup>

League of Women Voters survey respondent, 1964

When Howard Booth occasionally passed through Las Vegas in the 1950s and stopped to fill his car’s tank with gas, he couldn’t imagine how people lived in the small city in the middle of the Mojave Desert. But in 1957, he became a resident, moving to Sin City for work as a meteorologist at the Nevada Test Site. “When I moved here, I didn’t intend to stay any longer than I had to,” he recalls.<sup>2</sup> He thought he’d remain a few years at most, then move on. Fifty years later, Booth calls southern Nevada home.

One of the things that kept Booth in the area was the phenomenal number of outdoor activities. As a young man, the New Jersey native had been captivated by the majestic images of the West that graced the Sierra Club literature that arrived in his mailbox. One of his favorite activities was exploring such locations. “Once I got [to Las Vegas], I realized that [it] was a fabulous place for an outdoorsman. It was like the hub of a wheel, with spokes pointing to some of the West’s finest places—in one direction Zion, in another direction the Grand Canyon, and on and on.”<sup>3</sup> But the city had its own outdoor

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<sup>1</sup> Provisional League of Women Voters of the Las Vegas Valley, *Recreational Survey, Las Vegas, Nevada*, 27, in *Sub-Committee Report*.

<sup>2</sup> Booth interview, 18 September 2009.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

gems, including Red Rock Canyon. “I can’t claim that Red Rocks alone made me decide to make my career in this area,” Booth noted, “but I can honestly say that this beautiful area was an important factor in my decision.”<sup>4</sup> In the evenings after work, he often headed to the canyons for solitude, watching the animals come out as the sun faded. He led hikes up Bridge Mountain and into the canyons and even helped a new generation of outdoor enthusiasts get to know and appreciate the area. That such a place could be developed in ways that exceeded the land’s capacity was a daunting prospect for Booth. Through his membership in organizations such as the Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Nevada Open Spaces Council and as a concerned citizen, he worked tirelessly to keep Red Rock free of excessive development. Fellow environmentalist Jeff van Ee remembers that Booth served as “the moral consciousness of Red Rock” for decades.<sup>5</sup>

Howard Booth wasn’t the only protector of Red Rock. Only the persistent efforts of local residents and environmentalists, combined with occasional assistance from government agencies, politicians, and a handful of private corporations, shielded the park from the machinations of developers. Examination of the fights over development in and near Red Rock Canyon illustrates larger trends in American environmentalism, notably the call for preservation of open space and the effectiveness of grassroots environmental organizations.

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<sup>4</sup> Letter to John Boyles (Las Vegas District Manager, BLM) from Howard Booth, 30 November 1979, Personal Papers of Howard Booth.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Jeff van Ee, 1 May 2009. Indeed, Booth’s environmental activism has been so great that, in 2005, the Sierra Club presented him with the John Muir Award, its highest honor. Past recipients of the Muir Award have included David Brower, Ansel Adams, Jacques Cousteau, and Olaus Murie. See “Outdoor man,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 9 September 2005.

## Government Development

Questions of how best to accommodate the public's recreational needs yet still retain Red Rock Canyon's unique character plagued the Bureau of Land Management during its early years of managing the area. In late 1964, the Provisional League of Women Voters conducted a survey to learn if the Las Vegas population was aware of the recreation potential in Red Rock Canyon and what type of recreation developments and facilities residents would prefer if Red Rock were developed. Among the recreational facilities respondents suggested were picnic sites, hiking trails, a museum, self-guided nature trails, and camping sites.<sup>6</sup> Many Las Vegans indicated that they were eager to see Red Rock developed for recreation, making comments such as "This is needed very badly. Lets [sic] get going fast!" and "Red Rock needs development...Nevada can be beautiful and fa[s]cinating for recreation as well as arid and a gambling spa."<sup>7</sup> But there was a small contingent hesitant about any development. One citizen wrote, "Is it really necessary to take every available lovely spot of nature and fit it out with all the trappings of civilization? Are there no spots to be left where one can go and be free of the shackles, a few spots to allow communion with nature alone? Parks and playgrounds in cities, yes. Let's leave some of our great outdoors just as it is, or are we to gradually give up all our rights and freedoms?"<sup>8</sup> Another added, "Please leave some areas available for use of true

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<sup>6</sup> The Survey was "the result of a cooperative study by the Provisional League of Women Voters of the Las Vegas Valley and the Las Vegas District Office of the Bureau of Land Management. The study was initiated by the Bureau of Land Management to gain insight into the recreational habits and demands of the rapidly growing Las Vegas area population." The ladies intended the results to "aid the Bureau in making land management decisions which will best serve local and national recreation needs in southern Nevada." See Provisional League of Women Voters of the Las Vegas Valley, *Recreational Survey, Las Vegas, Nevada*, 20, in *Sub-Committee Report*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

outdoorsmen, no trails, no camps, no organized facilities, just God’s great outdoors.”<sup>9</sup> Clearly, development—even limited development—was too much for some.

Using information from the League survey and adding opinions of its staff and a consulting board, the BLM developed *A Recreational Management Plan for Red Rock Recreation Lands (RMP)* in 1968.<sup>10</sup> First among the plan’s objectives was “[t]o designate quality recreation facilities commensurate with the identified needs of the general public.”<sup>11</sup> As the BLM had never managed an area for recreation purposes prior to the designation of Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands in 1967, the intense development proposed in the *Recreation Management Plan* of 1968 suggests that it looked to the National Park Service (NPS) for examples of how best to turn Red Rock into a facility to be used by thousands of Americans.<sup>12</sup> The NPS had recently wrapped up Mission 66, a ten-year development push in the national parks that resulted in nearly 1,200 miles of new roads, 1,502 parking lots (capable of holding 156,000 vehicles), and more than 550 miles of trails.<sup>13</sup> Though the BLM’s *RMP* addressed issues such as administrative management and protection of cultural and biological resources, it devoted the most

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management and State of Nevada, Division of State Parks, *A Recreational Management Plan for Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands* (Las Vegas: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., unnumbered pages of Introduction.

<sup>12</sup> James Skillen notes, “In the early 1950s, the BLM signed an agreement with the National Park Service that when it discovered ‘public land areas having scenic, scientific, historical, archeological, or other recreation resources which should be protected and made available for public use,’ it would ‘look to the Service for technical advice and consultation in this field.’” See Skillen, *The Nation’s Largest Landlord*, 44.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Barringer, *Selling Yellowstone: Capitalism and the Construction of Nature* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 128-129. For more information on Mission 66, see Ethan Carr, *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).

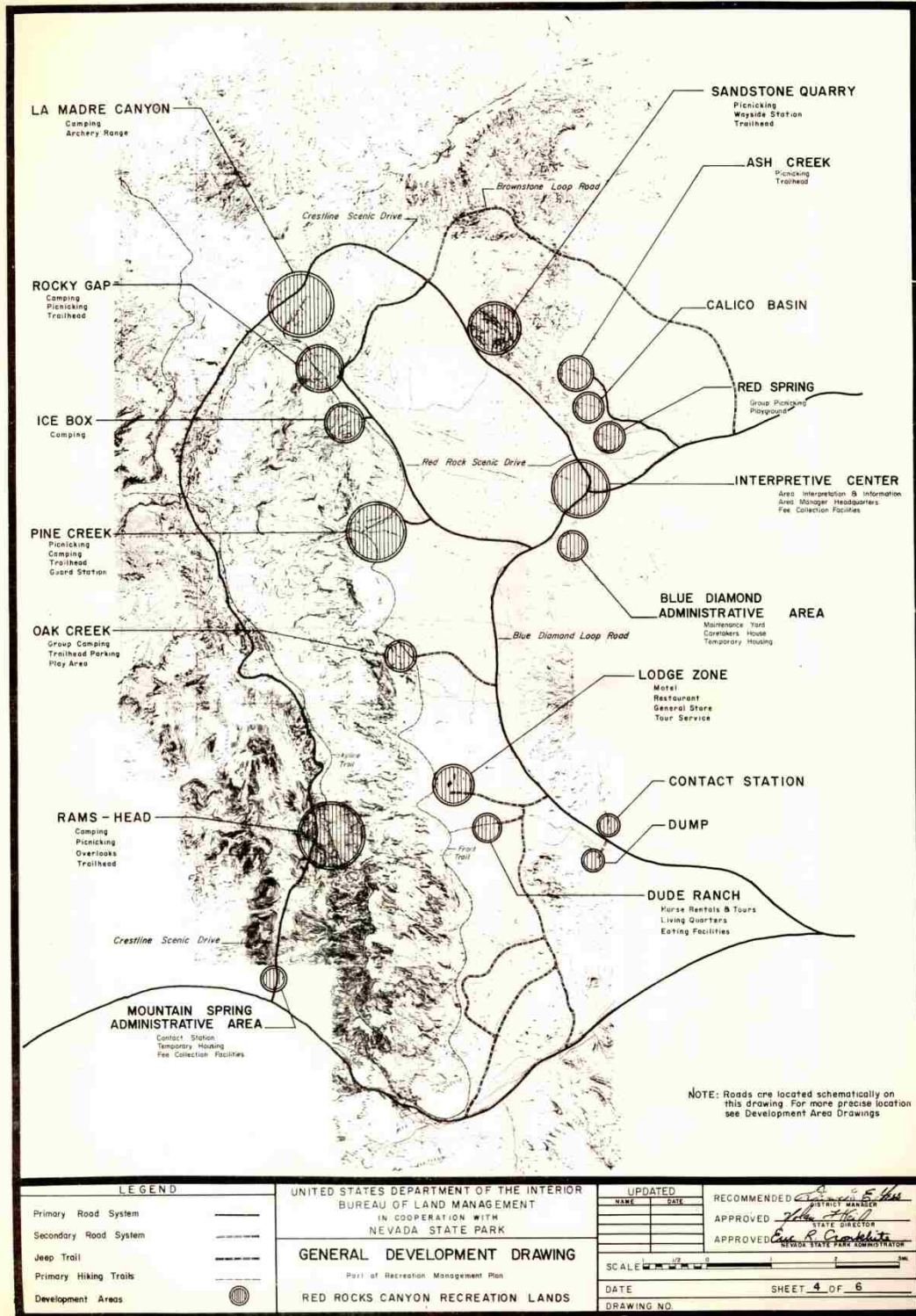
space to delineating sizeable construction projects. Notably, it featured a proposal for a giant loop called Crestline Scenic Drive to surround the escarpment, penetrating the backcountry near Willow Spring, turning south along the west side of the Spring Mountains, and connecting with present-day Highway 160 at Mountain Springs. The road would also feature camping and picnicking facilities, including 450 family camp and picnic units at Pine Creek and 60 to 100 picnic or camp units each at Willow Springs, Lost Creek, and Ice Box Canyon. At Ramshead, a location on the southern portion of the escarpment, a 400-space camp and a 100-unit picnic site would be constructed. Additional roads included the Scenic Loop, which would ring a small portion of the valley floor, and a four-wheel drive loop to Brownstone Canyon. Furthermore, Red Springs and Ash Creek would feature 225 picnic spots and a park for trailers. But the most significant project was construction of a lodge-motel, complete with restaurant, swimming pool, general store, tour service, and automobile service, to be built southeast of Oak Creek. Nearby would be a dude ranch, and just to the south would be a dump to accommodate the refuse generated by the hordes that would inevitably swarm Red Rock.<sup>14</sup> Such development was a far cry from the previous years' limited and low-grade use. (See Figure 2.)

Some residents (and one environmental organization) supported and even praised the BLM's plan.<sup>15</sup> They agreed that "a recreation area as close to a major urban area as Red Rock was, ought to have facilities which could respond to the demands of that population

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<sup>14</sup> Bill Vincent, "Master Plan for Red Rocks," *The Nevadan*, 31 December 1967, 27.

<sup>15</sup> The Nevada Wildlife Federation adopted a resolution to support the plan. See Letter from Virlis Fischer (Secretary of Nevada Wildlife Federation) to Emmett Herbst, 5 August 1968, Personal Papers of Howard Booth. It should be noted, however, that the Nevada Wildlife Federation was located in Incline Village, Nevada (on the northeastern shore of Lake Tahoe).



**Figure 2.** Map of Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands showing BLM plans for development according to 1968 *Recreation Management Plan*.

[and] that the demands would not be for such a pristine recreational experience, but for a diversionary, interpretive, and picnicking type of outing.”<sup>16</sup> The Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club, however, immediately protested many aspects of the *RMP* that it felt exceeded the capacity of the land. It argued that “construction of roads and recreation facilities should not be based purely on maximum development to meet an anticipated usage.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the Red Rock Resource Committee disliked the idea of the many roads and buildings the *RMP* destined for the canyons.<sup>18</sup> Both groups “wished management in the canyon to be largely protective in nature, with minimal development of roads and facilities...to make the recreation experience as close to pristine as possible.”<sup>19</sup> The BLM defended the *RMP* by arguing that development democratized access, making the scenic canyons available to many instead of a few with the means to reach them in their then-unpaved state. Nolan Keil, the BLM state director, summed up the access-versus-use issue at the August 1968 public unveiling of the plan by posing the simple question, “Do you want [Red Rock to be] for a few people—or a lot of people?”<sup>20</sup> Though the Sierra Club and other local environmental groups suggested significant revisions, the BLM made no changes to the *RMP*.

Funding problems prevented the BLM and Nevada State Parks Division from

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<sup>16</sup> *Oil and Gas Leasing in the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Final Environmental Assessment*, 204.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Marvin Pistrang (Conservation Chairman, Las Vegas Group of the Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club) to Nolan Keil (BLM State Director), 28 August 1968, Personal Papers of Howard Booth.

<sup>18</sup> Statement of the Red Rock Resource Committee sent to Nolan Keil, Personal Papers of Howard Booth.

<sup>19</sup> *Oil and Gas Leasing in the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Final Environmental Assessment*, 204.

<sup>20</sup> Jerry Palya, “Red Rock Canyon Park Master Plan presented,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, clipping from the Personal Papers of Howard Booth.

enacting the *RMP* quickly and in its entirety. However, in 1970, the BLM secured money for the construction of the Scenic Loop's Segment A, a paved road of about seven miles that began at an intersection with Charleston Boulevard (near the present-day Visitors Center) and stretched to Willow Creek. Crews completed construction in May 1972, and when environmentally-minded city residents saw firsthand the scars caused by cutting and filling methods used to construct the road, a "public opinion dam burst."<sup>21</sup>

Environmental dissatisfaction with the development of roads and concessions in national parks reached critical mass in the 1960s, and the impacts of this displeasure resonated at Red Rock. Though some environmentalists, such as Adolph Murie, had protested increased park development since the mid 1950s, the issue came to national attention a decade later in part due to the 1963 Leopold Report, the 1968 publication of Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, the success of the first Earth Day in 1970, and the growth and lobbying power of the environmental movement.<sup>22</sup> Environmentalists in southern Nevada resented the BLM's plans for extensive development, but it wasn't until the institution of the National Environmental Policy Act in 1970 that they had power to demand an assessment of the potential environmental impact of the *RMP*.<sup>23</sup> The Nevada Open Spaces Council called for the BLM to draft an environmental impact statement (EIS) on June 1, 1972, and the groundswell of dissatisfaction with the scars caused by the placement and paving of Segment A was so great that the BLM called a public meeting to

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<sup>21</sup> *Oil and Gas Leasing in the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Final Environmental Assessment*, 204.

<sup>22</sup> The Centennial Report, a successor of the Leopold Report, was also instrumental, but came in 1972.

<sup>23</sup> Booth interview, 18 September 2009.



discuss the unrest.<sup>24</sup> The BLM noted that during the meeting, “the whole concept of development as projected in the 1968 master plan was severely mauled.”<sup>25</sup>

In the 1974 *Draft EIS* for Red Rock Canyon, BLM officials offered several alternatives for development that abandoned many of the '68 *RMP*'s proposed projects, including the lodge-motel and dude ranch.<sup>26</sup> But they continued to endorse the construction of the vast majority of the *RMP*'s proposed roads by arguing that not building roads removed opportunities for those who enjoyed driving for pleasure. Citizen Terri Long called the BLM's insistence on the roads for the purpose of allowing access to a larger number of people “a bunch of hogwash.”<sup>27</sup> Charles Watson, speaking as head of the Nevada Outdoor Recreation Association, bemoaned the destruction of open space that would come at the expense of such roads. In the minds of those who spoke against the *RMP*, the goal was that proposed by Aldo Leopold: “...not of building roads into lovely country, but of building receptivity into the still unlovely human mind.”<sup>28</sup>

At the public hearings on the *Draft EIS* in the County Commission chambers at the Clark County Courthouse on the evening of April 16, 1974, many attendees pointed out that the *RMP*'s emphasis on development diverged from then-current environmental thinking. Eric Cronkhite, the administrator of the Nevada State Park System, was one

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<sup>24</sup> The Nevada Open Spaces Council was a collection of environmentalists and environmental organizations that resisted affiliation with the Sierra Club.

<sup>25</sup> *Oil and Gas Leasing in the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Final Environmental Assessment*, 204.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Nevada State Office, *Draft Environmental Statement for the Red Rock Recreation Lands, Las Vegas, Nevada* (Reno, Nev.: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 1974).

<sup>27</sup> *Final Environmental Impact Statement for Red Rock Recreation Lands*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Aldo Leopold, “Conservation Esthetic,” in Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: With Essays on Conservation from Round River* (1949; reprint, New York: Ballantine, 1970), 295.

such individual who felt that the plan needed to be updated. He stated, “I think... we have developed an EIS Statement around an obsolete plan, it was one that was developed some five or six years ago; and things have happened, there have been new attitudes in regard to the protection of the environment; many new things have entered into the picture in that last six years.”<sup>29</sup> Roger Scholl, Wilderness Consultant on the staff of the Wilderness Society’s Western Regional Office in Denver, agreed. He added, “The 1968 plan can be said to be the result of pre-Earth Day thinking...[P]ark and recreation planning has come a long [w]ay since turning the corner in 1970.”<sup>30</sup> Because of the outcry against the level of planned development, the BLM adopted an alternative in the EIS that proposed limited development below the escarpment and none above it. The Bureau concluded, “Except for the interpretive aspects of the visitor center and the scenic drive, most recreation would be primitive, concentrating on non-mechanized use of the natural resources.”<sup>31</sup>

Grassroots action on the part of environmental organizations and concerned citizens successfully halted construction of Segment B of the Scenic Loop and caused the BLM to alter its management concept in Red Rock Canyon. The BLM, which did not want its first foray into recreation management to crash and burn, responded to such concerns by scrapping the *RMP* and commissioning a new master plan. (See Figure 3.) The result, *Master Plan for Red Rock Canyon* (prepared by the architectural firm of Royston,

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<sup>29</sup> *Final Environmental Impact Statement for Red Rock Recreation Lands*, Supplement 1, 51.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Supplement 1, 60.

<sup>31</sup> *Oil and Gas Leasing in the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Final Environmental Assessment*, 205.

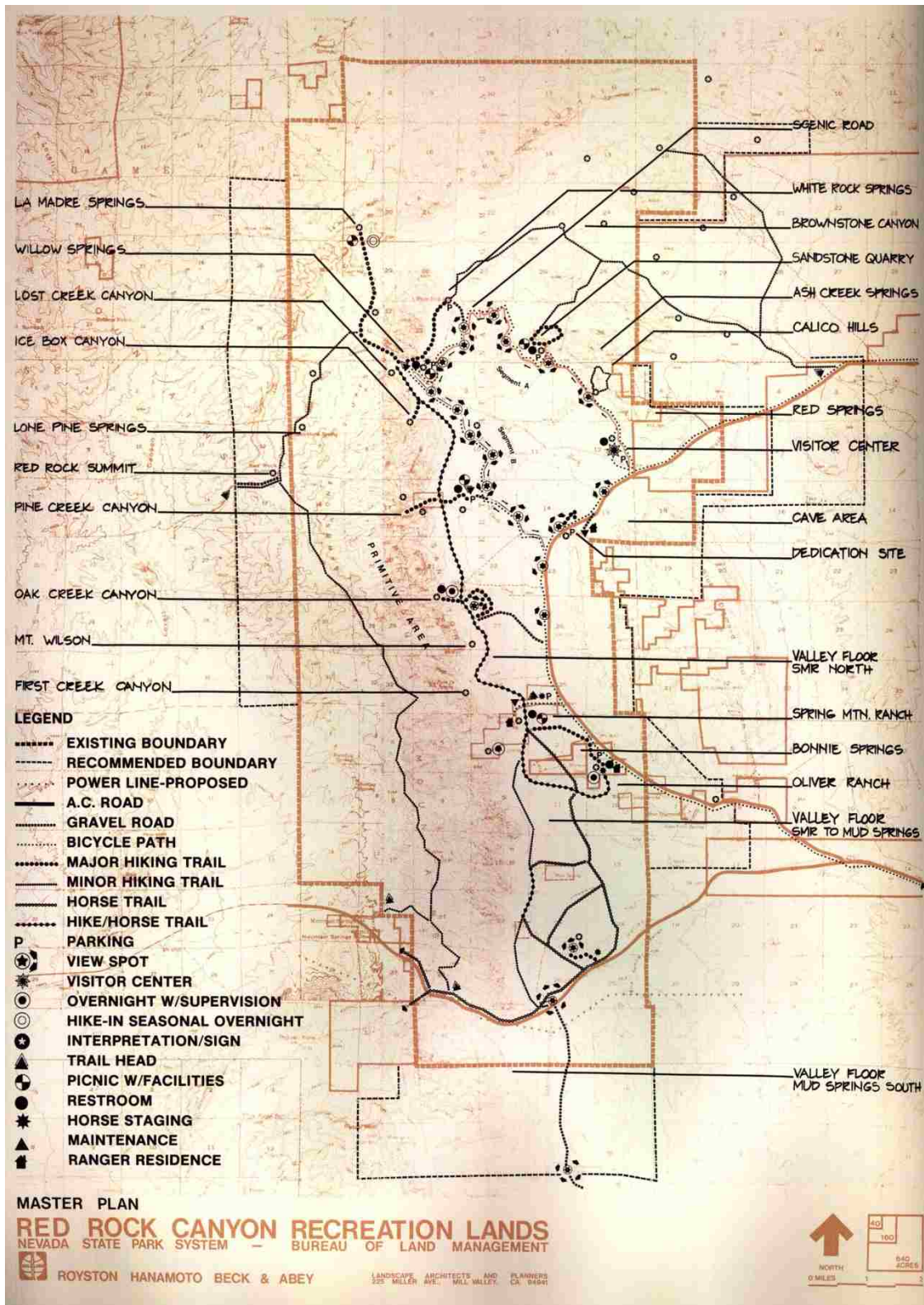


Figure 3. Map of Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands showing BLM plans for development according to 1976 Master Plan.

Hanamoto, Beck, and Abey),<sup>32</sup> called for far less development than the 1968 *RMP* and shifted from an emphasis on visitor *facilities* to visitor *services*. It stressed education, interpretation, and maintenance of ecological integrity.<sup>33</sup> Content with the new plan, environmentalist protests about Red Rock subsided—but not for long. A new threat soon materialized.

### The Possibility of Picnics in the Shadows of Derricks:

#### Oil and Gas Leasing in Red Rock Canyon

Not long after debates over the extent of government development of Red Rock quieted down, heated discussions broke out over whether or not to allow oil and gas leasing in the park's boundaries. In 1977, amidst momentum to develop domestic oil fields and mineral resources and thus free the United States from reliance on foreign sources of those goods, geologists began searching the West for possible oil and gas deposits. Though there had never been much interest in exploring southern Nevada for petroleum, geologists became fixated on the possibility of reserves in the Overthrust Belt, a geologic fold-and-thrust belt stretching from British Columbia to southern Nevada and “formed by horizontal squeezing and sliding of the upper few thousand feet of the Earth's

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<sup>32</sup> This same firm had crafted master plans for the South Rim of the Grand Canyon as well as Yosemite National Park. See Jan Strobel, “Red Rock master plan too dated?” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 15 February 1976, 27.

<sup>33</sup> Examination of the two plans' approaches to trail construction provides a case in point. The 1968 *RMP* suggested more than 45 miles of four-foot wide trails be constructed for use by hikers, equestrians, and motorbikes. Trailheads would be located at major points such as Ash Creek, Sandstone Quarry, Pine Creek, and Oak Creek, and parking lots would be constructed at each trailhead. By contrast, the new *Master Plan* suggested that all trails except two be constructed on “existing impacted routes...now travelled by some without benefit of signs” in order to “concentrate the impact of the visitor thereby giving access to the escarpment and canyon mouths to the hiker while protecting the ecological communities along the routes.” Additionally, the plan purported to control access to trails with barriers, so as to prevent use by OHV and motorcycle riders. The *Master Plan* even proffered solutions to mitigate the impact of the increasing swarm of automobiles: a shuttle system.

crust.”<sup>34</sup> Spurred by successful exploratory drilling on the belt in Wyoming and Utah, wildcatters scampered to file lease applications on land in the southernmost portion of the belt—located in Clark County, notably Red Rock Canyon. Oddly enough, the canyon’s colorful escarpment, the very geologic feature that attracted most visitors, was “a striking example of the thrust-faulting which created the [Overthrust Belt].”<sup>35</sup> First a Wyoming filing service, then individual businessmen from Colorado, and soon Chevron Corporation, filed applications to lease lands in Red Rock Canyon for oil and gas.<sup>36</sup> “By the end of 1979, lease applications had been filed on “all of the 60,910 acres of [f]ederally-administered oil and gas rights in RRCRL.”<sup>37</sup>

According to NEPA, before the BLM could allow such leasing, it had to conduct an environmental assessment.<sup>38</sup> A team led by geologist Peter Ertman completed the task of crafting the *Draft Environmental Assessment (Draft EA)* in 1979. Among other things, the *Draft EA* determined that “[r]oads built to drill sites would destroy the open and natural appearance of the land;” “[d]rill rigs, pads, vehicles... would create visual

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<sup>34</sup> Keith Heyer Meldahl, *Hard Road West: History and Geology on the Gold Rush Trail* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 8. At the time, however, geologists suspected that the belt stretched from Alaska to Guatemala. See *Oil and Gas Leasing in the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Final Environmental Assessment*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Oil and Gas Leasing in the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Final Environmental Assessment*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Among the individuals filing were Dean Rowell and G.W. Anderson, both of Salt Lake City, and W.E. Hanley and W.A. Gillespie, both of Denver. See “Oilmen seeking to drill vast Nevada recreation area,” *New York Times*, 2 December 1979, 69.

<sup>37</sup> *Oil and Gas Leasing in the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Final Environmental Assessment*, 1. Furthermore, 2.1 million of the 2.7 million acres eligible for leasing in Clark County (about 77 percent) were either under lease or under application for lease. Claims similar to those filed in Red Rock had also been filed on state parks and lands with cultural and scenic values. See Joanne Townsend, “Canyon drilling conflict ‘not unique’,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 7 November 1979.

<sup>38</sup> An environmental assessment is a situation appraisal done to see if an environmental impact statement is needed.

intrusions whenever they occur;” and “[w]ilderness character and solitude would be gone from most, if not all, of the lands” where drilling might take place. Furthermore, “[t]he sounds from the subject activities would be heard throughout the area...Wildlife, in particular bighorn sheep, would probably leave.”<sup>39</sup> The *Draft EA* contended, “Allowing oil and gas leasing development on these lands would contradict the intent of all previous plans and actions and may severely alter an area of prime scenic, scientific and recreational value.”<sup>40</sup> Additionally, there was no certainty of finding oil or gas pockets in Red Rock. Indeed, the United States Geological Service (USGS) classified southern Nevada as a “‘rank wildcat area,’ its lowest rating of a site’s oil and gas potential based on data availability.”<sup>41</sup>

The BLM released the *Draft Environmental Assessment* in November 1979—just as news broke of the taking of American hostages at the American embassy in Tehran—and allowed public comment throughout the month. Thousands of Las Vegans took time to register their opinions on the issue of allowing leases. Leading the fight against leasing was the Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club, which went on the offensive shortly after the BLM released the *Draft EA*. In a letter to BLM Las Vegas Director John Boyles, the group stated its position: “[E]ven if oil were found in Red Rock Canyon, we believe that the recreational, aesthetic and ecological values of the Recreation Lands are too great to

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<sup>39</sup> *Oil and Gas Leasing in the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Draft Environmental Assessment*, 26-27.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>41</sup> *Oil and Gas Leasing in the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Final Environmental Assessment*, 6.

justify their destruction for the oil that might underlie this small portion of our country.”<sup>42</sup>

In a press release issued to the city’s major papers, long-time Sierra Club member Howard Booth encouraged Las Vegans to look beyond the decade’s energy crises to the long term. “Red Rock should not be destroyed by the oil crisis,” he asserted. He then pointed to the high aesthetic costs of drilling, noting that “[n]ot many people want to have a picnic in the shadow of a drilling rig.”<sup>43</sup> Booth seemed confident that the public could again sway the BLM on the issue of development. He wrote to friends, “They (BLM) will probably deny the leases if public outcry is sufficient. We are trying to ensure that the public responds to this issue.”<sup>44</sup> The Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society both filed statements with the BLM against allowing the leases and did their best to rally citizens.<sup>45</sup>

But not all Las Vegans opposed drilling. In the midst of the 1970s energy crisis, many wanted domestic oil reserves to be found and opened to ease American dependence on foreign oil—no matter what the price. A lively conversation between citizens for and against leasing took place on the Letters to the Editor pages of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* and the *Las Vegas Sun*. Sheldon Stueber came down clearly on the side of allowing leasing, arguing, “We need all the domestic oil we can find... We may find foreign products unattainable one day. Due to bureaucratic bungling, we may find the so-called endangered environment so difficult to enter and explore [that] no one will be able

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<sup>42</sup> Letter from Jeri Morgan (Toiyabe Chapter Group Conservation Chairman) to John Boyles (Las Vegas District Manager, BLM), 23 November 1979, Personal Papers of Howard Booth.

<sup>43</sup> Sierra Club Press Release, 26 November 1979, Personal Papers of Howard Booth.

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Howard Booth to Roger and Amy \_\_\_\_, 20 November 1979, Personal Papers of Howard Booth.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from Roger Scholl (Nevada-Utah Regional Representative of the Wilderness Society) to John Boyles (Las Vegas District Manager, BLM), 29 November 1979, Personal Papers of Howard Booth; Letter from Morgan to Boyles, 23 November 1979, Personal Papers of Howard Booth.

to financially develop it. It seems to me we are trying to save something for our kids that they may never see, and worst of all, may never be able to use.”<sup>46</sup> Carol Petritz called “put[ting] a recreation area before using the site to drill for oil under it...short-sighted.”<sup>47</sup> Resident Ed McLaughlin continued, “Here is a possibility of an ocean of oil and gas right under our feet. The EPA nuts are going all out to stop it. How about the opinion of the rest of us?”<sup>48</sup> Similarly, in a letter to Senator Howard Cannon, Jason Dennis argued, “The United States is possibly in it’s [sic] worst position since 1941, what with it being hog-tied by the Arabs over their oil!! I say that any way that we can achieve oil independence, let’s DO IT and to hell with the environmentalists...Drill for oil in Red Rock, or Yellowstone, or anywhere and get those Arabian shackles off of us!”<sup>49</sup>

But members of the anti-drilling contingent had strength in numbers. Their rationales ranged from wanting to maintain Red Rock as a sanctuary for animals to keeping it as a place of recreation and solitude for humans, to not letting corporate greed spoil scenic public lands. Marilyn Duran stated, “I hate to think we need oil so badly we would be willing to sacrifice the beauty and serenity of Red Rock Canyon to obtain it.”<sup>50</sup> Others noted how Red Rock contributed to local quality of life, which had no price tag. Maureen Parco wrote, “In this day of wall-to-wall concrete, bumper-to-bumper people and pollution alerts, it becomes necessary to escape back to nature...In the forthcoming years,

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<sup>46</sup> Sheldon Steuber, “Letter to the Editor,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 13 December 1979.

<sup>47</sup> Carol Petritz, “Letter to the Editor,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 16 December 1979.

<sup>48</sup> Ed McLaughlin, “Letter to the Editor,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 27 November 1979. See also Roy G. Miller, “Letter to the Editor,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 16 December 1979.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from Jason L. Dennis to Senator Howard Cannon, 19 December 1979, Senator Howard Cannon Papers, 96th Congress, Box 35, Folder 442.

<sup>50</sup> Marilyn Duran, “Letter to the Editor,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 22 November 1979.



our isolated areas will become precious. Let's realize this before it's too late."<sup>51</sup> Other responses included "ones which say the natural beauty should be...left unspoiled for generations to follow because the same area provided current residents with many happy childhood memories."<sup>52</sup> The local press also weighed in on the issue, with both the *Sun* and the *Review-Journal* disapproving of the idea of allowing leasing. Anti-leasing advocates continued to press the BLM beyond the deadline for public comment. They also organized protests on March 22, March 29, and April 12, 1980 and submitted petitions with thousands of signatures.<sup>53</sup>

Ultimately, the BLM's Decision of Record found that—because many of the negative effects of drilling could be mitigated—the applications for leasing (and thus, for exploratory drilling) would cause no significant impact. Thus, despite a valiant push by local citizens and environmental groups such as the Sierra Club, the BLM approved 22 of the leases—on about 30 percent of Red Rock's lands—with stipulations such as surface disturbances only in non-critical, peripheral areas of Red Rock.<sup>54</sup> The decision ultimately belonged to Ed Spang, Nevada BLM Director, who noted that the area off limits to leasing consisted of the "core recreational area that most Southern Nevadans perceive as Red Rocks." He felt his decision "fully protect[ed] that key recreational zone the people

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<sup>51</sup> Maureen Parco, "Letter to the Editor," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 27 November 1979.

<sup>52</sup> Joanne Townsend, "Red Rock drilling opposed," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 20 November 1979.

<sup>53</sup> "Red Rock drilling petition given to the BLM," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 24 April 1980, 10A; "Second drilling protest slated at Red Rock," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, n.d., clipping from Personal Papers of Howard Booth; *Oil and Gas Leasing in the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Final Environmental Assessment*, 206.

<sup>54</sup> See U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Draft Decision of Record/Rationale and Finding of No Significant Impact, Oil and Gas Leasing in Red Rock Recreation Lands* (Reno, Nev.: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Nevada State Office, 1980).

are concerned about.”<sup>55</sup>

The public, which had called and written in record numbers, was stunned by the decision. The editors of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* noted, “The decision makes no sense...Unfortunately, it’s in complete accord with the BLM’s track record of ignorance and arrogance. That arrogance was best illustrated by the response of a BLM spokesman to the public’s opposition to drilling: ‘It’s not a popularity contest.’”<sup>56</sup> In short, drilling would be allowed, and lessees had ten years to make good on their filings. But none of the speculators ever invested the capital and time required to do so. The option to drill ended in 1990 when Red Rock became a national conservation area. But this wouldn’t be the last development proposal to threaten Red Rock.

#### The Summerlin Dilemma: Establishing a Buffer Zone

Though the initial development battles over Red Rock dealt with government development of the land, fears of private development had always loomed large for admirers of the canyon. Jean Ford recalled that in the early 1960s, “[t]here was this feeling that the downtown businessmen...and some of the city ‘fathers’ were really looking at buying up this land and building wall-to-wall condominiums out there and calling it the Beverly Hills of Las Vegas.”<sup>57</sup> Car dealer Fletcher Jones Sr.’s purchase of Spring Mountain Ranch in the 1960s was emblematic of this effort. Yet, despite these rumblings, a tangible threat didn’t materialize for nearly two more decades.

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<sup>55</sup> Joanne Townsend, “Red Rock oil drilling set,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 28 September 1980.

<sup>56</sup> Editorial, “BLM’s philosophy: ignore the public,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 1 October 1980.

<sup>57</sup> Jean Ford, *Jean Ford: A Nevada Woman Leads the Way*. Transcript of oral history interviews conducted and edited by Victoria Ford (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program, 1998), 81.

In the spring of 1988, Howard Hughes Corporation unveiled the final draft of its plans to turn a 25,000-acre parcel of land purchased by its namesake billionaire in 1952 into a master-planned community.<sup>58</sup> Corporate officials projected that the area, for years known as Husite but renamed Summerlin in honor of Hughes's grandmother, would one day be home to 250,000 people. Summerlin represented the latest trends in community design, with the proposed 28 villages containing residential homes and also commercial developments intended to provide the community with its own economic base. But this wouldn't be another crowded suburb with houses stacked upon each other as far as the eye could see; plans called for more than 20 percent of the acreage to be left as open space in the form of parks, golf courses, and pedestrian trails.<sup>59</sup> Part of the area's main draw would be its westerly location within the valley, yielding superb views of and quick access to the nearby Spring Mountains and Red Rock Canyon.

The BLM's 1968 *Recreation Management Plan* called for the purchase of in-holdings within the RRCRL, and though the BLM did acquire acreage throughout the 1970s and 1980s, one parcel of privately-owned land near the canyons remained particularly troubling to many Las Vegans.<sup>60</sup> A portion of the 25,000 acres owned by Summa Corporation (a subsidiary of Howard Hughes Corporation) and planned for inclusion in Summerlin ended only 200 feet from the recently-opened Red Rock Canyon Visitor Center. By 1984, as Summa began securing permits to extend municipal sewer lines west past Rainbow Boulevard toward the Husite development, BLM officials and

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<sup>58</sup> Geoff Schmacher, *Sun, Sin, and Suburbia: An Essential History of Modern Las Vegas* (Las Vegas: Stephens Press, 2004), 116.

<sup>59</sup> Diane Russell, "Summerlin to house 250,000," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 9 March 1988, 1B.

<sup>60</sup> *A Recreation Management Plan for Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands*, 4-A. See also Vincent, "Master Plan for Red Rocks."

environmentalists realized that homes could soon be on the canyon's doorstep.<sup>61</sup> Until that point, "few...questioned the environmental and aesthetic impacts on the western bench of a coming sea of construction projects. But now, in the face of an unparalleled development march west," warning cries began to echo from the canyon.<sup>62</sup>

Environmentally-minded Las Vegans formed the Red Rock Organization for Concerned Citizens, and, together with the Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club, called for Nevada's congressional delegation to act. The BLM and environmentalists proposed a green belt—essentially, a buffer zone—separating Red Rock from encroaching development.<sup>63</sup>

Las Vegas was hardly the first city to attempt to defend its dwindling stretches of open space from development. After World War II, as the home-building industry mobilized armies of earth-moving machines and utilized mass-production techniques to alleviate the country's housing shortage, Americans from coast to coast watched as developers transformed millions of acres of countryside into neighborhoods of cookie-cutter homes. Literature of the postwar years expressed concern about the psychological costs of such growth, took issue with the transformation, and argued that, especially as the population boomed and more people became entangled in a web of steel, asphalt, and concrete, Americans needed open space. Such expanses not only provided visual relief from monotonous urban sprawl but were "key to providing adequate opportunities for

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<sup>61</sup> Howard Booth had brought the issue to the BLM's attention as early as 1980. See Letter to BLM Las Vegas District Manager from Howard Booth, 4 December 1980, Personal Papers of Howard Booth.

<sup>62</sup> Larry Werner, "Booming Vegas vs. scenic treasure," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 8 July 1985, 1A. Rodger Schmitt recalls that Howard Booth discussed the issue with him early during his tenure (1980-1984) as Red Rock's first park manager. (Interview with Rodger Schmitt, 8 February 2010.) Booth also mentioned the issue to the BLM's Las Vegas District manager; see Letter from Howard Booth to Kemp Conn, 13 February 1981, Personal Papers of Howard Booth.

<sup>63</sup> For more on development encroaching on nature, see Lincoln Bramwell, *Wilderburbs: Nature, Culture, and the Rise of Rural Development in the Rocky Mountain West, 1960-2000* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of New Mexico, 2007).

recreation and to meeting the need for the sort of refreshment that natural beauty provided.”<sup>64</sup>

Though Las Vegas’s population had steadily grown in the two decades after World War II, it mushroomed in the 1980s and 1990s. As new people arrived and the city began expanding and eating up the massive tracts of open space that had once surrounded the valley, Las Vegas began to fear that if Summa were allowed to develop the acreage right up to Red Rock’s gates, the city they needed to escape would follow them into the canyons. Red Rock would no longer be a getaway if condos, homes, and office complexes were visible from the canyon floor, reminding them of the urbanity that fenced them in.

The open space near Red Rock wasn’t the only thing at stake; the ridges and escarpments remained an integral part of the area’s visual character. In cities across the country, “[t]he urban fringe [became] a major battleground in the conflict between environmental and developmental objectives.”<sup>65</sup> Those leery of suburban development at Red Rock Canyon’s doorstep maintained that the transformation of the visual landscape from one of geologic beauty to one of hillside homes would not only ruin the canyon’s integrity but would also mar the western horizon for everyone in the valley. Hillside construction had increased exponentially during the post-war construction boom, and lovers of Las Vegas’s western vistas feared that Red Rock and the Spring Mountains would become another Scottsdale.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 145.

<sup>65</sup> Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 92-95.

<sup>66</sup> Werner, “Booming Vegas,” 4A. A Phoenix suburb, Scottsdale began as a small agricultural

Developers looked at their encroachment on Red Rock Canyon from a bottom-line perspective. In 1984, as infrastructure for Summerlin began to take shape, Hughes Development Corporation's president, John Goolsby, maintained that the company had not yet decided what to do with the acreage at the doorstep of the canyon, though he noted that, of the Husite lands, the parcel nearest the Visitor Center was "the most desirable from a development standpoint." Pro-development city councilman Ron Lurie similarly noted, "What I envision, as development goes up those mountains, is beautiful, expensive homes to be built that overlook the valley."<sup>67</sup> Lurie had already begun pushing for the proposed Las Vegas Beltway to be extended through Husite lands to encourage development. BLM Area Manager Bill Civish felt that, without action on the part of concerned citizens, such intrusion would certainly happen, noting, "In five, 10, or 15 years, development will be right up the boundaries of Red Rock."<sup>68</sup> Approaching urbanization had already resulted in a significant increase in visitation over the years, as well as increased vandalism. Party-going teenagers destroyed stalactites and stalagmites in caves, spray painted graffiti on the rocks, and used petroglyphs as target practice.<sup>69</sup>

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community at the turn of the twentieth century. City leaders became serious about advancing growth in the 1950s, billing the settlement as "The West's Most Western Town." But its proximity to nearby mountain ranges proved alluring for snowbirds and affluent Phoenicians seeking to escape the valley heat and congestion. Leaders redirected planning to accommodate these groups in the 1970s, and by the 1980s, the mountains began to be overrun by developers seeking lots with expansive views. Near the end of the decade, the Scottsdale Town Enrichment Program advocated to hillside control and saving what undeveloped portions of the mountains were left, but their efforts proved too little too late. See Bradford Luckingham, *Phoenix: The History of a Southwestern Metropolis* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989), 131-132, 264-265.

<sup>67</sup> Larry Werner, "Urbanization imperils scenic Red Rock," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 14 October 1984, 15A.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 15A.

<sup>69</sup> Incident Records for Red Rock Recreation Lands, 1981, 1982, 1983 in Box 1, Folder 4, Red Rock Canyon Collection.

Supporters that had organized on Red Rock's behalf began to advocate federal purchase of a tract of land just outside the protected area's eastern boundary. Sierra Club member Jeff van Ee implored the House Subcommittee on Public Lands and Parks to secure federal funds to purchase 9,000 acres of land for a buffer zone. The money, he asserted, could come from the Air Force as compensation for its illegal seizure of 89,600 acres of public land in the Groom Mountains in 1984.<sup>70</sup> Others simply wanted the money to come from federal appropriations. In 1982, the BLM had offered to swap other federally-owned land in the valley for a 5,000- or 6,000-acre parcel bordering the canyon. Negotiations, however, fell through, as Summa insisted "that the property's value be based on its lucrative development potential, due in large part to the expansive view."<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, the Las Vegas community coalesced around the land-swap idea in an effort to save its beloved Red Rock. A *Review-Journal* editorial argued, "It's worth preserving for our progeny...[D]evelopment so close to Red Rock could destroy—or seriously damage—whatever pristine qualities it now enjoys." The ultimate responsibility, the newspaper's editors argued, lay with residents. "Citizens...can do it," editors asserted. "Red Rock does not have to become part of urban development. With foresight and good planning, Red Rock can be preserved, and Las Vegas can continue to visit paradise—only a few minutes from downtown."<sup>72</sup> By the end of the summer of 1985, Senator Paul Laxalt, Representative Harry Reid, an influential county commissioner, and a city councilman had all expressed support for a buffer zone.

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<sup>70</sup> The Air Force withdrew this land because it overlooked Groom Lake, the location of secret testing of Star Wars technology. See Cheri Cinkoske, "Broken Landscape Maladies," *Las Vegas City Magazine*, December 1986, 15.

<sup>71</sup> Werner, "Urbanization," 14 October 1984, 15A.

<sup>72</sup> Editorial, "Paradise: It's only a few miles away," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 9 July 1985, 6B.

In early 1986, Summa agreed to trade or sell a 5,000-acre portion of the westernmost Husite lands to the BLM.<sup>73</sup> Once again, the *Review-Journal* called for action against the “clear and present danger that development of the area will further degrade the natural beauty of the Red Rock Recreation Area.” The buffer, editors noted, though less than the 9,000 acres the Sierra Club requested, was nonetheless “adequate,” and if the Air Force refused to provide compensation for the Groom Mountains withdrawal, then Nevada’s congressional contingent should acquire funds for purchase, even amidst the harsh budget cuts being orchestrated by Reagan devotees Phil Gramm of Texas and Warren Rudman of New Hampshire. “At stake,” *Review-Journal* editors argued, “is the environmental character of this valley, the quality of life here for the indefinite future.”<sup>74</sup>

But quality of life and protection of the viewshed came at a price. Summa’s first asking prices ranged from \$7 million to \$50 million. But in May 1986, the corporation announced that it would accept a paltry \$3 million for a 2,000-acre parcel on Red Rock’s western boundary. The breakdown included \$2.8 million for 280 acres, \$200,000 for administrative costs, 1,250 acres donated, and 3,470 acres to be traded for other developable BLM lands in the valley. As the Air Force remained adamant that it would not compensate the state for its 1984 land seizure, the money needed to come from Congress. Into the fray stepped The Nature Conservancy, a San Francisco-based group that volunteered to act as a middleman, holding the option to purchase the 5,000 acres, purchasing it, and selling it to the federal government.<sup>75</sup> Summa, which maintained it was

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<sup>73</sup> Kent Lauer, “Summa willing to sell land to protect Red Rock Canyon,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 20 February 1986, 1B.

<sup>74</sup> Editorial, “A move to protect Red Rock’s integrity,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 21 February 1986, 12B.

<sup>75</sup> Kent Lauer, “Red Rock protection proposal priced at \$3 million,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 4 May



trying to be a “good corporate citizen” by agreeing to sell the land and at a less-than-market price, understandably wanted a speedy transaction. “We’re patient,” said Hughes Development Corporation Vice President Dick Bonar. “We’ve been talking for a number of years about making this land available. I don’t think we’re going to steal it out from under [the BLM] in a few months. But if it goes a year or more we’re going to have to solidify our planning...we should really know what is happening out [near Red Rock].”<sup>76</sup>

Pushing the appropriations bill through Congress proved slow going due to political strategies for altering the national economy. Though the Senate pushed through a funding proposal rather quickly, the House version of the bill lacked a provision for appropriating monies for the land purchase. In the face of the sweeping Gramm-Rudman budget cuts, many worried the \$3-million price tag might stall the appropriations bill.<sup>77</sup> Secretary of the Interior Donald Hodel feared that the purchase funds would have to “come from somewhere else in [the BLM’s] budget.”<sup>78</sup> By the end of the fall of 1986, a conference committee of Senate and House members had hammered out a compromise bill, but when the Reagan administration handed down recommendations for budget cuts in early 1987, Department of the Interior land acquisition projects were among the items it had slashed. Blame for the bill’s possible failure flew; Representative-turned-Senator Harry Reid criticized Hodel for allowing Interior projects to be placed on the chopping block, but

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1986, 1B.

<sup>76</sup> David Koenig, “Senate panel OKs funds to buy land near Red Rock Canyon,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 8 August 1986.

<sup>77</sup> Editorial, “Saving Red Rock for the future,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 18 August 1986.

<sup>78</sup> Laura Wingard, “Hodel backs land swap, eyes price tag,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 17 September 1986, 1A.

Hodel remained confident that Congress would reject the cuts.<sup>79</sup>

As Red Rock's fate hung in the balance in the halls of Washington, citizens back in Las Vegas continued to rally for the buffer zone and placed pressure on elected leaders. That dedication, according to Nature Conservancy officer Dave Livermore, ultimately resulted in Red Rock's protection. He noted that because of issues such as the buffer zone, Nevada was at an "environmental crossroads. People in [the state] can plan their future with conservation methods or become another Los Angeles."<sup>80</sup> After the Notice of Realty Action was placed in the Federal Register on May 12, political leaders asked citizens to submit comments of support during the 45-day comment period.<sup>81</sup> Lands finally changed from Summa Corporation to BLM hands in the fall of 1988, proving "that private enterprise, government and concerned citizens can work together for an equitable future."<sup>82</sup> The buffer zone's dedication followed in December.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> David Koenig, "Hodel predicts preservation of funds for Red Rock land buy," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 20 February 1987.

<sup>80</sup> Laura Wingard, "Environmental group quiet but effective," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 5 December 1988, 1B.

<sup>81</sup> See letters from Thalia Dondero to Friends of Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands, Box 65, Folder 8, Thalia Dondero Collection.

<sup>82</sup> Laura Wingard, "Red Rock Canyon land deal OK'd," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 30 September 1988, 1A; Editorial, "Nature Conservancy wins fight for Red Rock buffer," *Las Vegas Sun*, 4 October 1988, 6B; Mary Manning, "Preserving Red Rock's beauty," *Las Vegas Sun*, 28 March 1988.

<sup>83</sup> For information on the dedication, see Caryn Shetterly, "Red Rock buffer zone dedicated," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 10 December 1988, 6B. Additionally, the threats posed by development loomed so large in the minds of Nevadans that Senator Harry Reid introduced legislation to Congress in March 1990 to designate Red Rock as a national conservation area. The change promised increased appropriations and protection from mining and other extractive industries. In preparing for the bill's passage, BLM officials conducted a cartographic review and "pointed out that the actual acreage set forth in Red Rock maps was 83,100 acres," as opposed to the 62,000 acres referenced in Reid's initial draft of the bill. (See "Red Rock Canyon conservation area 'grows'," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 12 September 1990, 4B.) After a series of complicated negotiations dealing with water rights, President George H. W. Bush declared Red Rock Canyon a national conservation area in November 1990. Following this designation, fights largely (though not exclusively) centered on protecting the view from within the canyon and the view of the canyon from within the city. For information on the bill's journey through Congress, see Manning, "Red Rock bill attempt to preserve Nevada's natural 'crown jewels'," *Las Vegas Sun*, 7 May 1990; Adams, "Red Rock

## Blue Diamond South Pumped Storage Power: Playing Inside Politics

Less than a year after Red Rock's designation as a national conservation area, development again threatened to disturb the viewshed from within the park. In September 1991, Blue Diamond South Pumped Storage Power (BDS) announced intentions to build a hydroelectric power plant just outside the NCA boundary. Plans called for two covered storage ponds: one to be located atop Blue Diamond Hill due east of the Visitor Center and another to be located 1,400 feet downhill. At night, when energy demands and the price of electricity dropped, the company planned to pump water uphill to the first storage pond. During hours of peak energy demand (such as midday during the summer, when air conditioners strain to keep residents cool in the desert heat), it would release water from the top basin to flow to the lower pond and through to two 100-megawatt turbines to generate electricity that it would sell to Nevada Power.

BLM officials and locals alike objected to the idea. BLM Las Vegas District Manager Ben Collins issued a written recommendation to deny the project's required permits because of potential effects on Red Rock Canyon. "The impacts would create a highly negative visual impact to the recreation lands, would not be consistent with BLM management guidelines, and would not be in the public interest," he argued. BLM area

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Canyon bill backed," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 27 June 1990; "Red Rock Canyon conservation bill debated before House panel," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 7 September 1990; "Red Rock Canyon conservation area 'grows'," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 12 September 1990; Steve Adams, "House committee OKs bills on land swap, Red Rock," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 20 September 1990; Steve Adams, "House stalls Red Rock Canyon bill," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 25 September 1990, 1B; Mary Manning, "Red Rock bill passes House," *Las Vegas Sun*, 26 September 1990; "Panel OKs Red Rock bill," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 27 September 1990, 7B; "Red Rock gets conservation designation," *Death Valley Gateway Gazette*, 28 September 1990; "Reid says Red Rock Park bill gives homerun for the people of Nevada," *Death Valley Gateway Gazette*, 26 October 1990; "House passes bill declaring Red Rock conservation area," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 27 October 1990; "Senate passes Red Rock Canyon bill," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 28 October 1990; "Red Rock gets more of feds' green," *Las Vegas Sun*, 16 November 1990, 2A; Steve Tetreault, "President signs Red Rock Canyon bill," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 17 November 1990, 1B.

resource manager Runore Wycoff grumbled about the “aesthetics of power transmission lines” that would transport electricity from Blue Diamond Hill to the valley, noting that they would be seen by Red Rock visitors.<sup>84</sup> The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* called Blue Diamond South’s plan “cockamamie” and sarcastically asked, “Could there be a worse idea? Maybe a landfill in the middle of the Red Rock loop...A power plant complete with transmission lines drooping all the way back to town is just what this gorgeous area needs to enhance its attraction.” Though the paper’s editors acknowledged that the supplemental electricity might benefit valley residents, they questioned the price: “Is it worth blighting one of Southern Nevada’s treasures to accomplish? No. This is simply not the right location for a power plant.”<sup>85</sup>

As months wore on, Blue Diamond South met with residents to address their concerns. The company promised that the plant “would blend with the hilly desert landscape,” with turbines and power generators located 180 feet below ground; anti-development advocates pointed out that this necessitated massive excavation and scarring of the land.<sup>86</sup> The St. George, Utah-based company further contended that “[o]nly transmission wires linked to a substation at the end of Flamingo Road, and two concrete-lined ponds, one on top of the mesa and one below it, both covered with large, camouflaged caps, would be visible.”<sup>87</sup> All of this infrastructure would barely be

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<sup>84</sup> Keith Rogers, “Utility seeks to build plant near Red Rock,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 18 September 1991, 1A.

<sup>85</sup> Editorial, “Red Rock no place for a power plant,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 19 September 1991, 6B.

<sup>86</sup> Keith Rogers, “Hydroelectric plant company meets with panel, residents,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 21 November 1991, 5B.

<sup>87</sup> Keith Rogers, “Utah company touts hydroelectric site,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 27 November 1991, 1B.

noticeable to those at the Visitor Center, company spokesmen argued. But environmental advocate Jeff van Ee and others countered that, while impact on the viewshed from the Visitor Center might be negligible, the pumping complex would be blatantly obvious for those on Red Rock's Upper Loop Road and the escarpment—more primitive areas where citizens went to avoid congestion on the park floor and to escape further from burgeoning urbanity.<sup>88</sup> Citizens also railed against the inefficiency of the proposed plant. It would use 37 to 43 percent more power to pump the water uphill than it would generate. To top off the environmental insult, the power used would come from coal-burning plants owned by Nevada Power. Even after BDS offered to move the facilities one mile farther away from the NCA, citizens and nature lovers still blasted the plans. “We don't want to hear a hum coming over the hill,” said one regular hiker of the canyon ridges.<sup>89</sup> Red Rock's visitors didn't want to look at the source of the hum, either.

Blue Diamond South stuck with its propositions, even in the face of competition from Peak Power Company (a San Diego-based firm proposing a nearly identical plan only one mile away) and Representative Jim Bilbray's proposal to expand the conservation area.<sup>90</sup> However, not long after submission of its license application to the Federal Energy Resources Commission (FERC), Peak Power saw the writing on the wall. Faced with mounting opposition, it decided to relocate its facility 19 miles away near Jean, Nevada.<sup>91</sup> But Blue Diamond South pressed on, keeping meetings quiet and playing the

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<sup>88</sup> van Ee interview, 1 May 2009.

<sup>89</sup> Keith Rogers, “Concerns raised over hydroelectric plant,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 21 January 1992, 1B.

<sup>90</sup> “Second company proposes hydroelectric power plant,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 6 June 1992, 5B.

<sup>91</sup> “Generator plan shifts southward,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 4 March 1994, 3B.

political game shrewdly. Before FERC would issue the company a license, it required local governmental approval of construction, and that meant requesting a zoning variance from the Clark County Commission. In a tense commission meeting, Red Rock advocates voiced opposition to BDS's plans. The commission split on the issue and tabled the request, but Commissioner Erin Kenny made clear to anti-development advocates that she resented their challenge of the proposed zoning variance.<sup>92</sup> Only a few weeks later, upon reviewing the FERC docket, van Ee found a letter to the FERC from pro-development Commissioner Dario Herrera. In the correspondence, Herrera endorsed the hydroelectric project, which implied that the commission, even though it had not taken a vote, gave the consent needed for the granting of Blue Diamond South's license.<sup>93</sup> Though BDS did soon win a license from FERC, it lost it only a few months later, in June 2001. Despite an attempt to convince Senator Harry Reid to pass a bill granting a construction extension, plans died due to quick and convincing lobbying on the part of local environmentalists.<sup>94</sup> No power station would sit atop Blue Diamond Hill and tarnish the viewshed held dear by anti-development advocates. But the environmentalists' work was far from over.

### Home Developers: Eyeing Green Near Red Rock

A series of squabbles beginning in 2001 and lasting through 2003 raised the ire of

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<sup>92</sup> Frank Geary, "Commission delays decision on hydroelectric plant," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 18 May 2001, 4B.

<sup>93</sup> van Ee interview, 1 May 2009.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.; "Reid bill extends deadline," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 15 June 2001, 5B; Christine Dorsey, "Power plan bill stalled until local governmental approval received," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 21 July 2001, 3B.

environmentalists and residents of Blue Diamond, a quirky hamlet of 300 located on private land within Red Rock Canyon NCA's boundaries. For visitors entering Red Rock via State Highway 160, the hamlet is a scenic gateway marking a transition from the urban environs of Las Vegas to the rural lands of Red Rock Canyon. In 2001, Australia-based home builder John Laing Homes announced it had acquired an option to purchase 2,000 acres near Red Rock owned by James Hardie Gypsum Company. James Hardie's namesake company had mined the property for roughly 80 years, having purchased the land prior to the government designating the area as protected; thus, the Hardie lands constituted one of the major in-holdings within Red Rock. The BLM had no desire to purchase the land, as doing so would mean a costly reclamation project.

John Laing Homes's purchase of the acreage hinged on a BLM land transaction. The agency had been negotiating a land swap with James Hardie Gypsum in which the mining company would trade 533 acres of land that was home to the rare Blue Diamond cholla for 979 acres of property beside the mine.<sup>95</sup> This exchange would form a contiguous area that Laing Homes saw as perfect for development.<sup>96</sup> The multinational developer released plans in November 2001 that proposed the construction of more than 7,600 homes (housing roughly 20,000 people) atop Blue Diamond Hill, the rise located southeast of the Red Rock Visitor Center. Also included in the plans were 3,170 units of "high-density residential development, a category including apartments and condominiums" as well as

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<sup>95</sup> The Blue Diamond cholla is a rare species of cactus that exists only in parcels surrounding the Blue Diamond community. Though it has never been placed on the endangered species list, it has long been a candidate for addition. See Frank Geary, "Residents fear plan final blow to area's rural beauty," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 14 August 2002, 1A.

<sup>96</sup> "Development threat angers residents, environmentalists," *Las Vegas Sun*, 16 July 2001; Michael Weissenstein, "Hill east of Red Rock weighed for development," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 17 July 2001.

schools and commercial development.<sup>97</sup> The homes, prices for which would range from \$250,000 to \$10 million, would capitalize on the sweeping views of the valley provided from the vantage point of Blue Diamond Hill. (For a map of the viewshed in Red Rock Canyon, see Figure 4.)

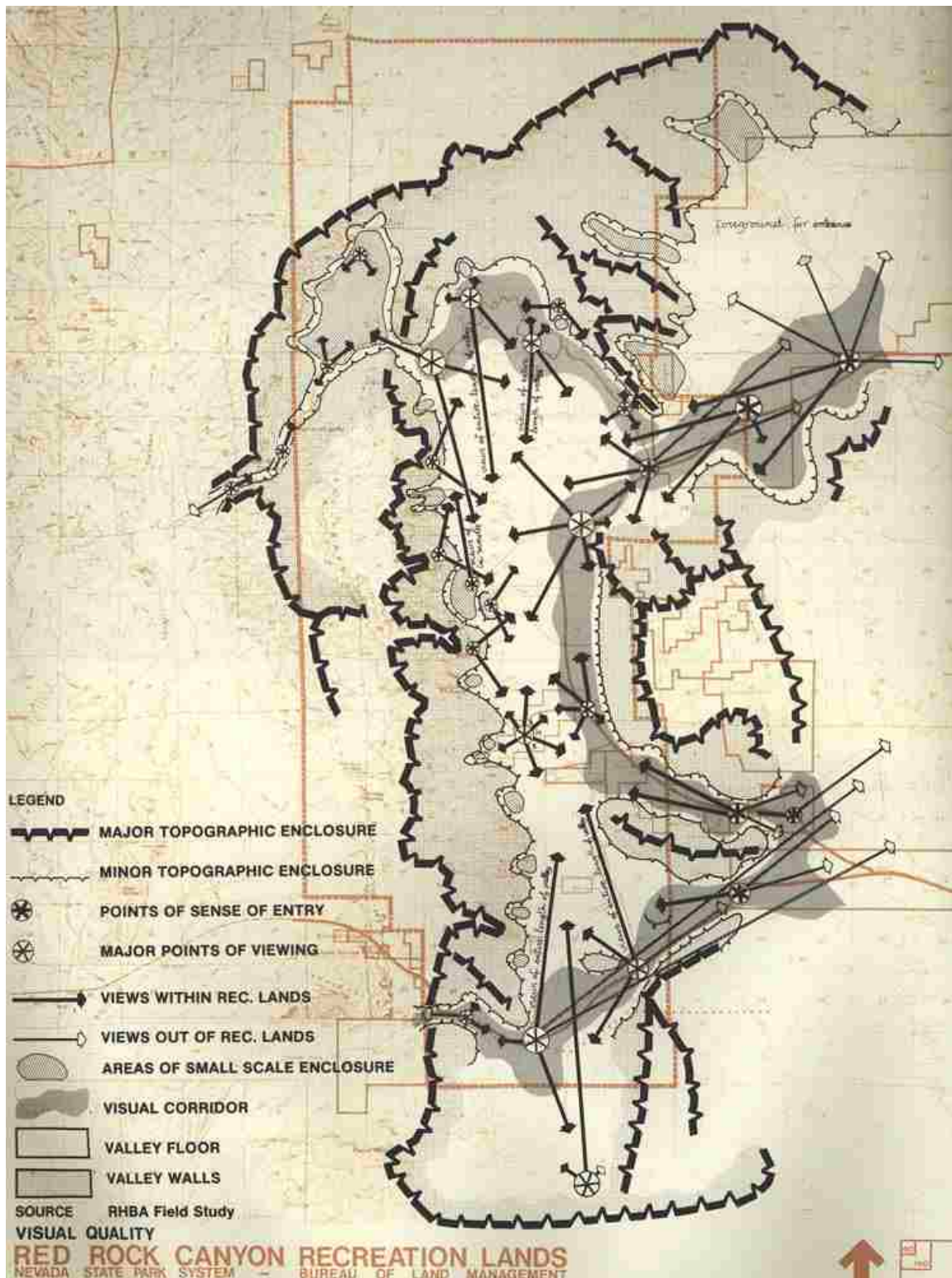
Blue Diamond residents and environmentalists immediately lambasted the scheme, raising both environmental and quality-of-life issues. Construction of the community, which the developer named Cielo Encantado, meant scarring of the hillside, assured environmental degradation caused by runoff and erosion, and would easily be visible from Red Rock Canyon. Developers shot back that their plans would have less of an environmental impact than current mining operations. The planner who designed the community said steps had been taken to mitigate the impact on nearby neighborhoods and the environment. Roads leading to the community would come up the east side of the hill (so as not to be visible from Red Rock Canyon), as would utilities. The hill featured a depression in which the development would sit, and thus “ridgelines [would] obscure lights from the houses on top of the hill from viewers at Blue Diamond and the Red Rock scenic overlook.” But residents and canyon-protection advocates took no comfort in those assurances. Sierra Club member Sandy Finley noted that the development would “be a permanent scar on the viewshed. The light that it is going to give off is going to destroy the whole atmosphere of the canyon.”<sup>98</sup> In a letter to the editor of the *Las Vegas Sun*, Las Vegas native Jennifer Kruleski noted, “The impact of this preposterous exploitation will forever alter the majestic beauty of Red Rock by increasing the traffic, smog, light and

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<sup>97</sup> “Document offers glimpse at development plan for Blue Diamond Hill,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 19 November 2001, 1B.

<sup>98</sup> “Not all ‘enchanted’ with plans,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 31 July 2002.





**Figure 4.** Map from 1976 *Master Plan* showing views within and out of Red Rock Canyon. James Hardie Gypsum Mine is the inholding in the center right of the map.

dust pollution, not to mention the financial burden that would be laid upon us taxpayers for infrastructure costs...[I]t saddens me to know that should this development plan pass, there will be no escape from the congestion of the Las Vegas Valley.”<sup>99</sup>

Concerns about increased traffic congestion also bolstered anti-development arguments. More people meant more cars, which meant increased pollution and additional safety concerns. Carolyn Gilmore, a volunteer with Friends of Red Rock Canyon (an organization that helps the BLM staff the Visitor Center and clean up the park), said, “It’s up to us now to ensure that visitors are overwhelmed by the area’s natural beauty, not by the traffic encountered to get there. We want to keep it natural. We don’t want the cars.”<sup>100</sup> Bicyclists also expressed concern about increased traffic. Jim Smallridge, president of the Silver State Bicycle Coalition, noted, “We don’t want to see development on the highway [leading to Red Rock Canyon]. Just the sheer number of vehicles out here would create a hazard.”<sup>101</sup> To further complicate the situation, the nearest fire and police stations were more than eight miles away.

The Clark County Planning Department got on board with the naysayers and recommended that Laing Homes’s plans be shucked because they were “inconsistent with the area’s rural character.”<sup>102</sup> Even the UNLV *Rebel Yell* joined the fray, noting that “[t]he only local spot where you can escape the smog and tourists is also the only place

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<sup>99</sup> Jennifer L. Kruleski, “Letter to the Editor,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 14 August 2002.

<sup>100</sup> Editorial, “Red Rock’s gateway should be pristine,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 18 August 2002.

<sup>101</sup> “Signatures gathered at Red Rock,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 9 September 2002.

<sup>102</sup> Frank Geary, “Land-Use Experts: Rejection of housing plan urged,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 21 August 2002.

that nullifies the sparkle that labels our town cultureless.” Student journalists went on to ask, “Why would anyone want to litter our beloved sweet spot with Mercedes-driving, cell phone-gabbing snobs[?] That’s what Summerlin is for.”<sup>103</sup>

Blue Diamond residents argued that the light pollution extending skyward from street and home lights would affect the area’s quality of life. They, along with canyon visitors, had long doted on the views of the night skies possible because of the distance from the Las Vegas valley. In fact, the BLM had offered star gazing programs in Red Rock Canyon regularly for more than two decades.<sup>104</sup> But a development on a hill, even if it sat in a depression, would surely throw light into such cherished starry skies. Such pollution was at the fore of Blue Diamond resident Roger Scime’s mind at a meeting of the grassroots Red Rock Citizens Advisory Council in August 2002 when he asked, “What is the BLM going to require of...the developer...for stealing our view of the Milky Way?” Others feared the glow coming from atop the hill directly adjacent to Red Rock campsites, destroying campers’ chance at a rural experience. But the *Review-Journal* argued that if issues such as water, fire, and police services could be resolved, the development should be allowed to proceed. Editors wrote, “[W]e’re still looking for the phrasing in the Constitution which states, ‘nor shall any person...be denied life, liberty or property unless it disturbs someone’s view of the Milky Way’.”<sup>105</sup>

At the heart of the development issue was whether or not visitors would be able to see the development from the canyon floor. Developers confirmed that roughly 70 acres of

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<sup>103</sup> Editorial, “Red Rock should be saved from development,” *Rebel Yell*, 26 August 2002.

<sup>104</sup> Alan Tobin, “Red Rock Canyon Star Trek program proves a shining desert recreation,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 25 July 1982, 15.

<sup>105</sup> Editorial, “Spoiling views,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 19 August 2002.

the 3,000-acre development would be visible to hikers and other visitors.<sup>106</sup> That was unacceptable to individuals who viewed the open space and absence of development as key to Red Rock's character and key for individuals going there to escape the claustrophobia of urbanization. Hazel Martin, a Blue Diamond resident since 1955, pointed out that a visit to Red Rock brought a certain kind of experience unavailable elsewhere near the city. She noted, "In the evenings, you can hear the donkeys braying. You can hear the horses calling to each other, and you can hear the coyotes. You don't hear sirens or the screeching of tires, and that would all be taken away" if Cielo Encantado proceeded.<sup>107</sup>

To make Cielo Encantado a reality, John Laing Homes needed the county commission to change the acreage's zoning from rural to residential. In September 2002, the company successfully requested a delay of a vote from the Clark County Planning Commission, which meant the county commission would not vote on the zoning change until after the November elections. The company hoped that county residents would elect a slate of commissioners more sympathetic to development. Blue Diamond residents chartered a bus to take as many as possible to the September meeting, which more than 100 people attended. When the commission approved the delay, the crowd's boos and heckling became so intense that commissioners scampered away to a back room and called police.<sup>108</sup> Metro made no arrests, but grassroots environmentalists pressed on, holding a protest the following weekend in Red Rock Canyon and collecting more than

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<sup>106</sup> Initial estimates of the development's size reached 2,000 acres, but as developers pursued construction and looked for more land, size estimates topped 3,000 acres.

<sup>107</sup> Geary, "Residents fear plan," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 14 August 2002, 1A.

<sup>108</sup> Frank Geary, "Panel delays vote on Red Rock development," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 6 September 2002; "Police called to quell crowd," *Las Vegas Sun*, 6 September 2002.

4,000 signatures on a petition they planned to present to the county commission asking it to vote and sidestep Laing's delay tactics.<sup>109</sup> The county's commissioners saw environmentalists' side of the argument, and soon, it became clear that a majority of the commission would oppose the zoning change upon voting.<sup>110</sup>

Anti-development advocates won the fight; John Laing Homes withdrew the project from the county commission's consideration on September 30, 2002. But advocates called Laing's attempts "the beginning salvo," and knew that as long as James Hardie Gypsum offered the land for sale, some other developer would surely be interested.<sup>111</sup> They were right; developer Jim Rhodes entered negotiations to purchase the Hardie mine only a few weeks later.

Before another developer could attempt to build atop Blue Diamond Hill, residents used political means to tackle their cultural concerns by creating a zoning overlay to impose development limits. It was "a last-ditch effort...to curtail the bleeding if a developer propose[d] another monstrosity."<sup>112</sup> Since the James Hardie Gypsum lands were private, no government entity could ban their development, as doing so would devalue the land and constitute a taking. However, environmentalists reasoned that the county could impose zoning restrictions to prevent high-density developments like the one Laing proposed. County planning staff authored an ordinance that "would restrict the

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<sup>109</sup> "Signatures gathered at Red Rock," *Las Vegas Sun*, 9 September 2002.

<sup>110</sup> Frank Geary, "Embattled Housing Project: Opposition to plan builds," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 16 September 2002, 1B.

<sup>111</sup> Jan Moller, "Developer withdraws plans for Blue Diamond Hill homes," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 2 October 2002, 1B; "Red Rock developers scrap project for now," *Las Vegas Sun*, 1 October 2002.

<sup>112</sup> Susan Snyder, "Residents have a case of the Blues," *Las Vegas Sun*, 20 December 2002.

density of new residential subdivisions [in the Red Rock Canyon NCA] with more than 10 homes. The draft ordinance also would prohibit homes within 600 feet of the eastern and western ridgelines on the top of Blue Diamond Hill...New homes would have to be built on an average of two acres, or 500 homes on 1,000 acres.”<sup>113</sup> In addition, the overlay “would...dictate design standards that complement the area, limit access from residential developments to canyon roadways, prohibit home construction on scenic ridge lines and limit lighting near Red Rock.”<sup>114</sup> But for many in the Blue Diamond community, the overlay was little more than a stop gap, as the county commission could capriciously discard the guidelines at any time.

State Senator Dina Titus wanted more protection than a zoning ordinance. From her office in Carson City, Titus frequently watched environmentalists battle with developers over Lake Tahoe and knew that the pro-development county commission’s protection of Red Rock could cease with any election. So, she authored a bill to freeze rural zoning restrictions and thus limit development to one home per two acres. Passage meant that future Clark County commissioners would have to abide by the state law and would be unable to change zoning unless county residents voted to do so. Effectively, her “proposal would go further than the county’s proposed Red Rock Overlay District. It would solidify those development guidelines by taking away the commission’s discretion to alter, modify, or ignore them.”<sup>115</sup> At first, county commissioners balked at state

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<sup>113</sup> “Development limits proposed,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 12 December 2002.

<sup>114</sup> Frank Geary, “Red Rock Canyon: Plan limiting development goes to vote,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 12 February 2003, 5B.

<sup>115</sup> Frank Geary, “Senator to enter Red Rock debate,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 16 February 2003.

interference in county matters, but eventually each voiced support for Titus's bill.<sup>116</sup> Even Howard Hughes Corporation (developers of Summerlin) and the Southern Nevada Homebuilders Association supported the bill, proving that not all developers favored exploiting Blue Diamond Hill.<sup>117</sup>

As the political battle waged on, residents adopted a not-in-my-backyard attitude and continued to remind friends and neighbors of the quality-of-life issue that development near Red Rock represented. Concern over the views from the park's floor and the area's character remained paramount. Resident Linda Lewis, who relished exploring and hiking in the canyon on a regular basis, noted, "Placing a sea of rooftops out [near Red Rock Canyon] would be tantamount to stealing and destroying one of life's most precious treasures."<sup>118</sup> Resident John Tominsky felt the same way: "Why destroy a beautiful

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<sup>116</sup> Initially, Commissioner Mark James voiced opposition to the overlay and Titus's bill. With regard to the former, he initially maintained that all parties had not been involved in meetings pertaining to development. A media frenzy later revealed that James had been influenced both by developer Jim Rhodes and former county commissioner Erin Kenny. However, after meeting with Blue Diamond residents, James changed his mind and voiced support for both the overlay and Titus's bill. His about face yielded lawsuits from Rhodes and a media firestorm surrounding Kenny's and James's violation of a county ethics code that required a cooling off period of one year in which former and present county commissioners could not speak each other about county business. For information on James's delay of the overlay, see "Dueling plans: Delays cited on local proposal for gypsum mine development," *Las Vegas Sun*, 7 March 2003; Frank Geary, "Land Near Red Rock: Development opposed," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 28 March 2003, 1B. For James's change of heart, see "Sale of land to developer draws wrath of residents," *Las Vegas Sun*, 28 March 2003; Frank Geary, "James wants Red Rock restrictions," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 20 March 2003. For information on Rhodes's lawsuit, see Frank Geary, "Overlooking Red Rock: Rhodes files lawsuit," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 12 April 2003; "Developer sues commissioner over Red Rock," *Las Vegas Sun*, 14 April 2003; Steve Sebelius, "Rocking Red Rock," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 15 April 2003; Editorial, "When is a conflict not a conflict?" *Las Vegas Sun*, 15 April 2003; Frank Geary, "Development Near Red Rock: Judge won't bar James," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 16 April 2003; Launce Rake and Erica D. Johnson, "Judge: It's too soon for Rhodes' suit on James," *Las Vegas Sun*, 16 April 2003; Jeff German, "Red Rock deal raises ethics issue," *Las Vegas Sun*, 16 April 2003; "Ordinance introduced to protect Red Rock," *Las Vegas Sun*, 17 April 2003; Frank Geary, "Developer accused of attempt to sway commissioner's vote," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 17 April 2003; Steve Sebelius, "The importance of being Erin," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 17 April 2003.

<sup>117</sup> Heidi Walters, "Seeing Red Rock: New players emerge in battle for Blue Diamond Hill," *Las Vegas Mercury*, 13 March 2003.

<sup>118</sup> Linda Lewis, "Letter to the Editor," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 18 March 2003.

scenic area in order for some high rollers to impress the rest of us of their disregard for the beauty of Red Rock?”<sup>119</sup> A *Sun* editorial also reminded residents of what was at stake: “If a high-density housing development goes up near Red Rock Canyon[,] it will irreparably damage the character and beauty of the area.”<sup>120</sup> After developer Jim Rhodes’s purchase of the Hardie mine on March 26, 2003, *Review-Journal* columnist John L. Smith also chimed in, asserting, “If this community can’t muster enough outrage to defeat a threat to the valley’s last good place, then this is no community at all.”<sup>121</sup> He encouraged readers to “take a picture of Red Rock. At the rate it’s being preserved, it’s all you’ll have left to show your grandkids of Southern Nevada’s last good place.”<sup>122</sup>

Seeking to end the controversy, U.S. Senators Harry Reid and John Ensign suggested that the county purchase the James Hardie Gypsum mine using SNPLMA funds. Then, “[t]he stripped land...would be rehabilitated. Once the land [wa]s fit for public use, Reid and Ensign said, they would introduce legislation directing the [BLM] to purchase the site from the county and expand the conservation area’s boundaries.”<sup>123</sup> This meant that Rhodes, if he were willing to sell, would make a handsome profit. Meanwhile, Rhodes launched a public relations campaign, “fighting spin with spin” and urging Las Vegas to tour the mine site, see the scarring of the land, and decide for themselves whether or not

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<sup>119</sup> John Tominsky, “Letter to the Editor,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 17 March 2003.

<sup>120</sup> Editorial, “Red Rock needs state protection,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 28 March 2003.

<sup>121</sup> John L. Smith, “It’s time to draw a line in the sandstone to block Red Rock developers,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 30 March 2003. For information on Rhodes’ purchase, see “Purchase of mine revives Red Rock land battle use,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 27 March 2003.

<sup>122</sup> John L. Smith, “No shortage of populists in debate over Red Rock development,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 11 May 2003.

<sup>123</sup> “Halting Development: Red Rock proposal unveiled,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 29 April 2003; see also “Senators propose purchase of mine,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 29 April 2003.



his proposed development would be an improvement.<sup>124</sup> He offered helicopter tours of the site to the media, and greeted them with a banner that read “A mine is a terrible thing to waste.” But the *Sun* complained, “All we can see...is years of construction traffic along the road leading to the canyon, followed by the endless traffic of thousands of homeowners, who will need their convenience stores, strip malls, gas stations, slot saloons and movie theaters.”<sup>125</sup> The refrain of development damaging Blue Diamond residents’ quality of life and Red Rock visitors’ vistas continued.<sup>126</sup>

Reactions to the various development projects (Blue Diamond South, John Laing Homes, Jim Rhodes Homes) that threatened the viewshed from inside Red Rock Canyon echoed a shift in the American environmental movement. Concerns over protecting unique lands have always been cultural, but whereas battles in previous decades had taken issue with logging, mining, grazing, dam building, or automobile tourism, battles over Red Rock centered on physical development that altered the vistas of the canyon.<sup>127</sup> Those vistas became consumables; individuals ventured to the conservation area to take them in, and, as explained in the next section, even purchased homes to be able to see them every day. From within Red Rock Canyon, those vistas enabled people to “see the world as it really is, and so know [themselves] as [they] really are—or ought to be.”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Jon Ralston, “Rhodes sage is classic film noir,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 9 May 2003.

<sup>125</sup> Editorial, “No breaks for plans on canyon,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 2 May 2003.

<sup>126</sup> Facing a federal lawsuit from Rhodes, the Clark County Commission introduced a code in April 2010 that would allow the developer to build homes on the former Hardie lands, barring visual intrusion on Red Rock. Blue Diamond residents quickly began protesting the move. At the time of this thesis’s publication, the issue was unsettled. See Scott Wyland, “Rhodes rides again at Red Rock,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 18 March 2010, B1; Scott Wyland, “Residents challenge Rhodes plan anew,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 1 April 2010, A1.

<sup>127</sup> For information on automobile tourism and the push for wilderness areas, see Sutter, *Driven Wild*.

<sup>128</sup> Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 80.

The marring of those scenic ridgelines meant that “the opportunity for a certain kind of experience was being lost.”<sup>129</sup>

### Red Rock Resort and the Fight for Viewshed Protection

In a 1990 encomium, *Las Vegas Review-Journal* columnist John L. Smith waxed poetic about Red Rock Canyon. The combination of flora and fauna, seclusion and serenity, made it “one of the last good places in Southern Nevada,” he said. But as the column concluded, he bemoaned the city’s encroachment on the canyon. “Now that the area has been all but swallowed up by the valley’s overwhelming growth, attempts are being made to preserve its delicate nature. It has come years too late, but perhaps legislation will prevent some smart aleck from building a Calico Casino or a Red Rock Resort on the edge of the overlook.”<sup>130</sup> To the credit of the Red Rock Resort’s eventual constructors, they weren’t so brash as to perch their casino atop one of the canyon’s overlooks. In fact, they wanted to place it several miles away, on Hughes Corporation lands at the edge of Summerlin. But that positioning was not without controversy, either. The resultant development battle proved different from its Red Rock-related predecessors. This time, instead of citizens crying about the view *from* Red Rock Canyon being damaged, they bemoaned the view *of* the canyon falling prey to developers.

Howard Hughes Corporation had always planned for a casino complex to be built in Summerlin. In fact, it envisioned the future Red Rock Resort as a significant anchor in Summerlin Centre, the economic hub and downtown of the master-planned community.

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<sup>129</sup> White, “From Wilderness to Hybrid Landscapes,” 560.

<sup>130</sup> John L. Smith, “Red Rock’s beauty soothes, but man’s threat persists,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 12 October 1990, 1B.

Station Casinos (one of the two gaming operators that controls Las Vegas's neighborhood casino market) saw the proposed casino-resort as filling a costly void; though the giant had casinos in eleven other neighborhoods throughout the valley, it offered nothing to Summerlin residents, who had to drive 10 minutes if they wished to patronize a Station gaming complex. The company's plans for Red Rock Resort included a 23-story hotel tower and two 15-story condominium towers. The former required a variance from the county commission, as Clark County had zoned the site for a tower with a maximum height of 100 feet.

In October 2003, when Hughes Corporation began the motions to file for such a variance, a contingent of Summerlin residents immediately denounced the towers, arguing that they would "violate [their] quality of life...and the beauty of Red Rock Canyon National Recreation Area." Evan Blythin, chairman of the Red Rock Citizens Advisory Council, said, "I think the canyon is something everyone in Vegas shares, and I think the biggest thing they share is the view. [The towers] will impair that view. It's almost obscene. It shows casinos are more important than anything natural here." Louis Kleber, a member of Friends of Red Rock Canyon, echoed Blythin's aesthetic concerns. He noted, "If you are approaching Red Rock from Charleston, instead of seeing the beautiful mountains and cliffs[,] you are going to see these 200-foot and 300-foot towers. It's like having a wart on your nose. You can't miss it."<sup>131</sup>

Plans for a 300-foot tower surprised many Summerlin residents. The height proved especially shocking considering Summerlin's design scheme. The community's buildings all featured subdued hues to blend with the desert landscape. Ordinances also kept

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<sup>131</sup> Dave Berns, "Company seeks pause for casino plan," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 9 October 2003, 1A.

retailers from installing glaring, tall signs. Others residents remained flabbergasted at the scope of the Red Rock Resort project. When residents bought their homes, builders included disclosures that the nearby land had been zoned for a casino. However, residents had envisioned a low-key, neighborhood casino similar to Green Valley Ranch, a Station-owned casino-resort-shopping complex that opened a few years earlier in Henderson. In a letter to the editor of the *Review-Journal*, Summerlin resident Gabriel Lither, who lived within a half mile of the towers' proposed site, stated that he and his neighbors had never been opposed to a casino being constructed nearby. However, "[o]ur position changed when we learned that Station Casinos...never wanted a neighborhood casino (such as the Suncoast or Green Valley Ranch Station). Instead, Station has stated in open meetings that they want a 'destination resort' similar to the Rio."<sup>132</sup> He and others felt such a property would be out of character with the area and that Station should be bound by the existing zoning ordinances.

Though the larger issue involved determining whether such a sizeable complex constituted responsible growth, the viewshed continued to be a leading issue as well. Resident Darius Raffie noted, "I bought my house thinking I would have a nice view. Nobody ever told me I would be looking at two towers." Dean and Kim Bennett similarly stated that they didn't oppose a casino in their neighborhood; they just didn't want "Strip-sized buildings standing between them and the mountain views they moved to Summerlin to see."<sup>133</sup> In November 2003, Members of Summerlin Residents for Responsible Growth, a grassroots organization formed to fight the height of the towers, launched an

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<sup>132</sup> Gabriel Lither, "Letter to the Editor," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 5 November 2003, 10B.

<sup>133</sup> Brian Haynes, "Zoning Battle: Residents oppose tower," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 13 November 2003, 2B.

automated phone blitz hoping to encourage residents to put pressure on the county commission to uphold the zoning ordinances. Station countered with a letter to their Summerlin-based Station Casino members, stating that the proposed towers would not block views of the canyon.<sup>134</sup>

Station wanted the towers to be high so that guests in the penthouse suites, the top-floor restaurant, and the observation deck could have a commanding view of the valley, Spring Mountains, and Red Rock. The view would attract more visitors, thus yielding greater profits.<sup>135</sup> Residents also feared that if the county allowed the 300- and 200-foot towers, it would set a precedent for future building projects along the edge of the conservation area's lands.<sup>136</sup> In Henderson, planners had been able to squelch plans for a 250-foot tower at Green Valley Ranch, whittling the resort's maximum height down to a mere 80 feet. Summerlin residents wanted similar accommodations.<sup>137</sup> The county refused to hear the issue, indicating that it intended to side with the resort, and encouraged the dueling parties to strike a compromise. Accordingly, in early January 2004, both sides agreed to a 198-foot tower, roughly 100 feet different from the outcome each desired.<sup>138</sup> Station, having consented in December 2003 to reduce the height of the timeshare towers to 100 feet, also scrapped plans for those towers entirely, instead

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<sup>134</sup> Frank Geary, "Red Rock Station: Call goes out to fight casino," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 14 November 2003, 1B.

<sup>135</sup> Dave Berns, "Red Rock: Building on the edge," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 23 November 2003, 1E.

<sup>136</sup> Adrienne Packer, "Commissioners today to shape area's growth," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 3 December 2003, 1B.

<sup>137</sup> Adrienne Packer, "Tale of Two Stations: Casino projects handled differently," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 2 January 2004, 1B.

<sup>138</sup> Adrienne Packer, "Red Rock Station: 198-foot tower in works," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 7 January 2004, 1A.

incorporating the “lost” rooms into the resort complex. Additionally, recognizing that Summerlin residents would be future customers, the gaming company agreed to place 100-foot height caps on the three other Summerlin parcels zoned for casinos.<sup>139</sup> Yet again, grassroots organizations won a victory against developers—not nearly as decisive as the victories over Blue Diamond South or home developers, but important nonetheless.

In each of the Red Rock-related development stories—the fight against development proposed in the 1968 *Recreation Management Plan*, the outrage over allowing oil and gas leasing, the push for the establishment of a buffer outside the canyon’s eastern boundary, the movement against a hydroelectric station, and battles over home developments on Blue Diamond Hill—the fight for open space and the actions of environmental agencies and grassroots activists mimicked larger trends in the American environmental movement. The battles for open space harkened back to the postwar construction boom that, in 1963, spurred Stewart Udall to point to cities as focal points of “the quiet crisis of conservation.” Udall noted, “We must act decisively—and soon—if we are to assert the people’s right to clean air and water, to open space, to well-designed urban areas, to mental and physical health.”<sup>140</sup> Though Las Vegas thought they averted such crisis in the late 1960s when they set Red Rock aside for protection, none envisioned that the city’s population would top two million four decades later, bringing with it suburban sprawl that decimated the valley’s open spaces and threatened Red Rock’s vistas. Each time development seemed imminent, environmental agencies and grassroots organizations came to the rescue and did their best to assert that it wouldn’t be monied

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<sup>139</sup> Adrienne Packer, “Red Rock Station plan gets county OK,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 8 January 2004, 1A.

<sup>140</sup> Stewart Udall, *The Quiet Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963), 159-160, 172.

developers that decided on an appropriate definition of “wild” and left others to deal with the consequences.

D.W. Meinig, like Richard White, notes that no two individuals looking on a scene at the same time see the same landscape. Though such individuals may see the same elements—houses, trees, rocks, roads—how they organize and make sense of those elements differs wildly.<sup>141</sup> Such is the case with the characters involved in the preceding stories of development in Red Rock Canyon. To environmentalists and residents of Blue Diamond, the Red Rock landscape is Nature (an inherently beautiful and, ideally, pure good) and Habitat (a place in which man works continually at maintaining a viable relationship with Nature). To developers, the Red Rock landscape is Wealth. Its prospective value hinges on the vistas, neighborhood quality, and accessibility it can provide; the landscape is capital exchanged in the market economy, and thus developers take a quantitative approach to it. Each group brings a unique understanding of Red Rock’s landscape to the table, giving insight to the ways in which Americans have ascribed value to nature over time.

However, development was but one issue in which parties conflicted over differing uses of Red Rock; recreation was another. In particular, rock climbers engaged in heated discussions about appropriate levels of access and use. Red Rock’s skyward stretches of sandstone ceased being solely natural spaces and instead became backgrounds for social and cultural discussions about the merits of clean climbing, the purpose of climbing guidebooks, and roles of climbing guides. Much as developers and environmentalists viewed the Red Rock landscape based on previous, individual experiences, so too did

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<sup>141</sup> Meinig, “The Beholding Eye,” in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, 33.

climbers. For some climbers, Red Rock was Nature. For others, it was a Recreational Commodity.



## CHAPTER 2

### FROM PTERODACTYL NESTS TO LEGISLATED MORALITY:

#### THE CULTURE OF CLIMBING IN RED ROCK CANYON

“Any significance we try to impose on rock, any grails we quest for, we contrive for ourselves.”<sup>1</sup>

Joe Kelsey

On a clear May day in the late 1970s, Frenchman Andre Langenbach hung in a belay seat in Red Rock Canyon whistling the Beatles’ “Michelle.” Some 80 feet above him was the veritable Joe Herbst, a reputable climber and native Las Vegas. Hands tinted orange from tincture of benzoin, Herbst had just negotiated a lengthy crack that widened and opened into a small alcove.<sup>2</sup> He waited there for Langenbach to join him. Alternating between admiring the view and watching his friend below, Herbst glanced around the alcove and noticed a small hole in the wall. After his partner finally reached the sandstone niche, Herbst headed for the hole. It opened onto an airy perch. There, he recalled, rested “in surrealistic splendor...simply the largest bird’s nest I had ever seen...In recurring dreams, the nest is usually bathtub sized but it may well have been somewhat larger (or smaller).” Assembled from entire branches (not just twigs), the nest held remnants of meals—“big meals...ribbed pieces of snake, rabbit bones, and the half-eaten black and white tail of a ring tailed cat.” Langenbach joked that the duo had found a pterodactyl nest. Herbst knew it was more likely an eagle’s.

Sharing a meal in the recess, Herbst and Langenbach agreed that their climb was

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Wendy Rex-Atzet, “Narratives of Place and Power: Laying Claim to Devils Tower,” in Liza Nicholas, Elaine M. Bapis, and Thomas J. Harvey, eds., *Imagining the Big Open: Nature, Identity, and Play in the New West* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Tincture of benzoin is a mixture of benzoin resin and alcohol that many climbers used because they felt it toughened the skin and prevented it from tearing on the rocks.

over. Though they had planned to continue to the top of the bluff, it became clear their route was “‘Not to be’ (in the full Shakespearean sense of ‘Not to be’). We were ‘not’ going ‘to be’ The Army Corps of Engineers,” wrote Herbst. “We were ‘not’ building a high-speed autobahn through this magic place...Every climb is not for every day. We were clearly trespassing on the eagles.” They rappelled down and headed for home, “so damned happy.”<sup>3</sup>

For years, Joe Herbst promised himself that he would never be involved in the writing of a guidebook. He felt they created “dotted line adventures” for “paint by numbers climber[s]...looking for adventure number 32.5 see diagram B on page 38”<sup>4</sup>—exactly the kind of climbing that didn’t allow for the discovery of pterodactyl/eagle’s nests and that often destroyed such treasures. Yet the story above appears as the foreword to Larry DeAngelo and Bill Thiry’s *Red Rock Odyssey*, and Herbst considers it one of his best climbing memories of Red Rock Canyon. He hesitated putting it in the book for fear that it would be of little consequence to the “beautiful young people standing in line in tights at the bottom of chalk covered cliffs.”<sup>5</sup> He concludes his description of the May day with his French friend by noting,

[T]hat’s it. No numbers, no grades, no topos, no diagrams, no insults, no equipment lists- that’s it, just a most memorable day in the mountains. No, and of course I’m not going to tell anybody where it was. Not only that, we saw a big green rattlesnake on the way down and I found an arrowhead too. We left the arrowhead there but I think I could find it again. Now it’s your turn: you tell me a story.<sup>6</sup>

In Red Rock are walls of stone that have been shaped over eons by the forces of

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<sup>3</sup> Joe Herbst, “Foreword,” in DeAngelo and Thiry, *Red Rock Odyssey: Classic Traditional Climbs*, 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

nature. But those same walls are also thick with stories like Joe Herbst's—stories that explain American culture and how it, like the canyons, has changed over time. The park's unique geological features, which existed for thousands of years before man arrived in the Las Vegas Valley, have taken on special significance in the past century due to political, social, and cultural events. In the process, a natural landscape has become a cultural one. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan notes, "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value."<sup>7</sup> Place-making is a process constantly in progress, changing according to cultural sentiments. Yet, a *sense* of place depends on individual experience, and "memories of place almost certainly depend in some degree upon landscape, upon the external visible character of localities."<sup>8</sup> The story of climbers in Red Rock is one of space becoming place.

### The Rise of Rock Climbing in America

The rise of rock climbing in America was closely tied to increases in leisure time and income and the resulting rise of sport. The Industrial Revolution, which took place in America in the latter decades of the 19th century, sparked a transition from Victorian to modern culture. In only a few decades, America shifted from an agrarian society to an industrial one, from rural to urban settings, and from small, intimate shops to large, impersonal corporations. Confronted with daily life that often no longer included strenuous manual labor but instead placed individuals at the helm of a machine, thousands attempted to combat perceived enervation. Further complicating America's

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<sup>7</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Meinig, ed. *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, 3.

transition to an industrialized nation was “frontier anxiety.” As military forces subdued Native American populations and placed them on reservations, and rural population density topped two people per square mile, some individuals such as historian Frederick Jackson Turner declared the frontier—the conquering of which they felt had made Americans unique—dead. This prospect caused millions, from farmers to novelists to academics, to lament the demise of western figures (such as the cowboy) and experiences (such as cattle drives).<sup>9</sup>

For elites, the outdoors provided a perfect counter to anxieties of the era, not only because its “otherness” was so starkly juxtaposed with the routinized, mechanical characteristics of industrialization, but also because it offered a place to engage in masculine activities that required physical exertion. Such efforts, elites believed, could restore self-confidence and vigor. Thus, following the Thoreauvian desire “to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life,” those with the financial ability to do so traded the noise and clamber of the city for the great outdoors.<sup>10</sup> Individuals such as Theodore Roosevelt temporarily chucked their urban lifestyles for stints in rural regions, and the opportunity to get back to their roots.<sup>11</sup> They asserted that toil and effort would mold individuals into better beings, and thus the nation into a stronger state. To this end, elites

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<sup>9</sup> Historian David Wrobel’s *The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993) discusses the impacts of frontier anxiety, pointing not just to how the end of the frontier resulted in a yearning for the pioneer experience on the part of intellectuals and writers but also how such anxiety influenced policy related to immigration, industrialization, and expansion.

<sup>10</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, 1910), 118.

<sup>11</sup> Roosevelt’s thoughts on the necessity of strife and physical activity can be found in Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Company, 1902) and *Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail* (New York: The Century Company, 1888). Examination of Roosevelt’s politics in terms of manhood, nation, and civilization can be found in Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

formed organizations such as the Boone and Crockett Club to encourage other Americans to embrace the out-of-doors as a venue for such activities.

One activity that offered both communion with nature as well as physical exertion was mountain climbing. Though in previous centuries necessity required individuals to trek through alpine regions, some Europeans turned the practice into sport in the mid-nineteenth century. Several European nations had individual “golden ages” of climbing at different times due to regional variations in social and economic conditions. In the first half of the twentieth century, climbers in England and Italy arguably made the most significant contributions to the sport of climbing, though their French, German, and Swiss counterparts also made unique offerings.<sup>12</sup> In the United States, climbing got off to a slower start than in Europe, with many climbers being introduced to the sport in the late 1800s via excursions hosted by mountaineering organizations devoted to particular ranges and regions.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the best known such group is the Sierra Club, which John Muir and Warren Olney founded in 1892 to further exploration of the Sierra Nevada. Similarly, the Mazamas, a mountaineering association based in Portland, Oregon, formed in 1894 to promote hiking and mountaineering in the Cascades; the Mountaineers organized in 1906 to trek the peaks in the Pacific Northwest; the Rocky Mountain Climbers Club chartered in 1898 to explore the Flatirons; and the notable Colorado

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<sup>12</sup> Doug Scott, *Big Wall Climbing* (London: Kaye and Ward, 1974; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), x-68.

<sup>13</sup> One of the earliest such organizations was the Appalachian Mountain Club. MIT professor Edward Pickering founded it in Boston in 1876. He encouraged fellow MIT and Harvard professors, as well as other elite Bostonians, to join his efforts to explore and map the White Mountains of New Hampshire. For more information, see Fred Stott, *On and Off the Trail: Seventy Years with the Appalachian Mountain Club* (Boston: Appalachian Mountain Club, 2004).

Mountain Club developed in 1912 to promote such activities in the Rockies.<sup>14</sup> These organizations often published guidebooks or other printed material and conducted group hikes in their respective areas.<sup>15</sup> Though roped climbing, which had been popular in Europe for decades, did not become common in America until the 1920s and 1930s, among climbers “[t]here was, from the start, a healthy spirit of competition that was not tempered by tradition, and so...rock climbing standards progressed rapidly.”<sup>16</sup>

Though significant events dot climbing’s history as a sport prior to 1930, the activity began its meteoric rise in the United States around that time with the ascents of the North and East Ridges of Grand Teton in 1929. A few years later, the Sierra Club developed Rock Climbing Sections (RCS) for its members devoted to ascending mountain heights. Together, these climbers developed improved belaying methods and devised better rope-handling skills that enabled safe ascents up vertical walls. A small cadre of climbers—including Richard Leonard, Bestor Robinson, and David Brower—made headlines throughout the decade as they scaled iconic peaks throughout the West, notably Washington Column and Cathedral Spire in Yosemite as well as Shiprock in New

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<sup>14</sup> The Mazamas association was the successor to the Oregon Alpine Club, which began organizing in 1887. For more information on the Mazamas, see Erik Weiselberg, *Ascendancy of the Mazamas: Environment, Identity, and Mountain Climbing in Oregon, 1870-1930* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon, 1999) and John D. Scott, *We Climb High: A Thumbnail Chronology of the Mazamas, 1894-1964* (Portland: Mazamas, 1969). For histories of other organizations mentioned here, see Michael P. Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club, 1892-1970* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1988); Hugh E. Kingery, *The Colorado Mountain Club: The First Seventy-Five Years of a Highly Individual Corporation, 1912-1987* (Evergreen, Colo.: Cordillera Press, 1988); and Jim Kjeldsen, *The Mountaineers: A History* (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Guidebooks were largely the provenance of the Appalachian Mountain Club, while western organizations tended more toward transmitting knowledge of mountaineering through peer or group hikes. Notable among the early printed materials is the Colorado Mountain Club’s *Trail and Timberline*. It should also be noted that national societies, notably the American Alpine Club in 1902, formed at the turn of the century. However, these organizations tended to focus on climber education and advocacy, not excursions.

<sup>16</sup> Scott, *Big Wall Climbing*, 140.

Mexico.

The sport of climbing received an important technological boost thanks to the U.S. Army. Even before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, several American skiers noted the effectiveness of Finnish ski troops against the Russian Army and encouraged the U.S. Army to organize a unit devoted exclusively to fighting in mountains and harsh weather conditions. Several individuals with mountaineering experience, including Richard Leonard, helped the Army outfit its meager remnants of a World War I alpine division, which sorely lacked supplies. Immediately after the United States entered World War II in December 1941, the Army activated the 87th Mountain Infantry Battalion; it added another alpine unit, the 10th Light Division (Alpine), in 1943. Armed with a great deal of mountaineering experience, climbing pioneers Leonard, Brower, and others joined these units and fought against the Axis Powers.<sup>17</sup> To support these troops, Army funds aided in the development of sturdier nylon ropes and aluminum carabiners, and also furthered research undertaken to develop reusable pitons of better vanadium-infused carbon steel that was less prone to buckling.<sup>18</sup> After the war, the military surplused much of its

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<sup>17</sup> The 10th Light Infantry Battalion was redesignated the 10th Mountain Division in 1944. The division remains active today, and there are a number of sources detailing its history. See John J. McGrath, *The Brigade: A History: Its Organization and Employment in the U.S. Army* (Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004); Peter Sheldon, *Climb to Conquer: The Untold Story of World War II's 10th Mountain Division Ski Troops* (New York: Scribner, 2003); A.B. Feuer, ed., *Packs On!: Memoirs of the 10th Mountain Division in World War II* (Mechanicsburg, Penn.: Stackpole Books, 2006); Charles J. Sanders, *The Boys of Winter: Life and Death in the U.S. Ski Troops during the Second World War* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2005); McKay Jenkins, *The Last Ridge: The Epic Story of America's First Mountain Soldiers and the Assault on Hitler's Europe* (New York: Random House, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Leonard recounts working with scholars from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and National Bureau of Standards to test more than a dozen types of fibers suited for ropes. For more information on Leonard's involvement in World War II, see Richard M. Leonard, *Richard M. Leonard: Mountaineer, Lawyer, Environmentalist: Oral History Transcript*, Interview Conducted by Susan R. Schrepfer, Sierra Club History Series, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley. Recorded 12 November 1972, 9-10, 36-45. See also Joseph E. Taylor III, "On Climber, Granite, Sky," *Environmental History* 11, no. 1 (January 2006): 132; David Louter, "Camp 4 National Register Nomination," National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, Department of

mountaineering equipment, making it easy and affordable for climbers to purchase new technologies.<sup>19</sup> These technologies—forms of direct aid—enabled climbers such as John Salathé and Warren Harding to scale some of Yosemite’s iconic faces, feats that brought the sport of climbing popular attention.

In the wake of World War II, a more homogenous popular culture emerged, aided by federal monies subsidizing postwar growth. Americans had more disposable income than ever before thanks to a booming economy, and shorter work weeks meant that they began searching for new ways to spend their spare time and improve their quality of life.<sup>20</sup> Many defined their place in society based on mass-produced material possessions such as appliances, automobiles, and homes. As regional differences declined and a national culture of postwar triumphalism emerged, some younger citizens began to feel discontented with American society, which idealized washing machines but continued to allow racial segregation, sexist hiring practices, and destructive domestic witch hunts in search of Communists. Filled with disdain for a society in search of a comfortable, middle-class existence (in which they grew up), these individuals—often labeled Beats, bohemians, or counterculturalists—began to seek out “authentic” experiences.<sup>21</sup> And no place could offer a more “authentic” experience than nature.

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the Interior, Section 8, 6-8; Andrew Kirk and Charles Palmer, “When Nature Becomes Culture: The National Register and Yosemite’s Camp 4, A Case Study,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 37 (Winter 2006): 497-506.

<sup>19</sup> Steve Roper, *Camp 4: Recollections of a Yosemite Rock Climber* (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1994), 34; Scott, *Big Wall Climbing*, 143.

<sup>20</sup> Hal Rothman, *Saving the Planet: The American Response to the Environment in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 109.

<sup>21</sup> For an articulate overview of the genesis and dehistoricization of the term “counterculture,” see the introduction to Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ’70s* (New York: Routledge, 2002).



In the 1950s and 1960s, a group of societal dropouts filtered in and out of Yosemite National Park, and during their time in the park, they not only scaled some of the Valley's most daunting granite cliffs but also made a campsite known as Camp 4 a center of climbing innovation. In the 1960s, as Yosemite's best climbers conquered the park's few remaining sizable faces, a debate emerged about how much aid (particularly, permanent anchors) was necessary to safely ascend a route. The climbing of Royal Robbins and Warren Harding best epitomized the debate. Robbins had honed many of his climbing skills in Britain and the European Alps. In these regions, climbers at the time relied as much as possible on nuts.<sup>22</sup> British climbers, whose home nation offered a limited amount of rock for climbing, began seeing pitons' destructive effects early on and thus developed these passive aids. In Yosemite, Robbins noticed similar damage at the hands of piton-wielding American climbers. He recalled, "More climbers were placing and removing pegs on the popular routes than ever before and it was obviously only a matter of time before all the cracks would have giant pot-marks every two or three feet and eventually they would connect and be utterly changed."<sup>23</sup> To avoid the problem, climbers would either have to disperse or alter the ways in which they climbed. Thus, with a handful of imported metal wedges, Robbins began Yosemite's clean climbing revolution.

Climbers constantly tinkered with equipment to create durable, well-designed products that differed from European goods. What began as a personal quest to craft

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<sup>22</sup> Nuts are removable, artificial anchors whose placement does not necessitate pounding permanent, metal pitons into the rock wall, a practice that often resulted in breaking off portions of rock. Nuts are also known as chocks.

<sup>23</sup> Scott, *Big Walls Climbing*, 165.

better pitons soon led to Yvon Chouinard founding two businesses—Chouinard Equipment Company and Patagonia—whose bottom line merged with its owners’ social philosophies.<sup>24</sup> Having seen first-hand the destruction caused by climbers’ pounding of metal bolts and pitons into Yosemite’s granite walls, Chouinard and partner Tom Frost began advocating, like Robbins, “the idea that rock climbing and other outdoor activities had to take care of the resources they used and do as little damage to the rock as possible.”<sup>25</sup> They developed products such as Hexcentrics, a type of chock that came in a variety of sizes and could be wedged into rock cracks and other formations to provide protection for climbers. This clean climbing revolution changed climbing forever. Not only did it call for environmental responsibility, it also advocated rescinding technology’s mediation of the human experience with nature. In the 1972 *Chouinard Equipment Company Catalog*, climber Doug Robinson outlined this new sensibility:

Climbing with only nuts and runners for protection is clean climbing. Clean because the rock is left unaltered by the passing climber. Clean because nothing is hammered into the rock and then hammered back out, leaving the rock scarred and the next climber’s experience less natural. Clean because the climber’s protection leaves little track of his ascension. Clean is climbing the rock without changing it; a step closer to organic climbing for the natural man...As climbers it is our responsibility to protect the vertical wilderness from human erosion...The most important corollary of clean climbing is boldness...Personal qualities—judgment, concentration, boldness, the ordeal by fire—take precedence, as they should, over mere hardware.<sup>26</sup>

To market their wares, Chouinard and Frost crafted catalogs that blended the selling of goods with philosophical teaching. The pair not only found a niche market for their climbing equipment, but also for their clothing line, which appealed to an increasingly

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<sup>24</sup> Andrew Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 198-205.

<sup>25</sup> Kirk, *Counterculture Green*, 201.

<sup>26</sup> Doug Robinson, “The Whole Natural Art of Protection,” *Chouinard Equipment Catalog*, 1972, 12.



**Figure 5.** Wired nuts, or chocks.



**Figure 6.** Wired Hexcentrics.



**Figure 7.** Cams, or friends.



**Figure 8.** Bolt and bolt hanger.

**Figures 5, 6, 7.** Nuts, hexes, and cams are all forms of passive aid. Climbers place them into cracks and other natural features in the rock (and, sometimes unnatural features such as holes left from pitons).

**Figure 8.** Bolts are inserted directly into the rock after a hole is drilled with a hand or mechanical drill. The hangers give climbers a hole into which to clip a carabiner or quickdraw (two carabiners connected by a loop of webbing). Because bolts permanently alter the rock face, the BLM (and other land management agencies) consider them violations of the 1964 Wilderness Act.

large body of recreational consumers and further popularized the sport of climbing.

But some bucked the clean climbing trend, notably Warren Harding. In late October 1970, Harding and climbing partner Dean Caldwell decided to scale Yosemite's Wall of the Early Morning Light (also known as the Dawn Wall) in a single push. Their climb required 27 days and some 300 pounds of food and gear. Along the way, the duo placed more than 300 bolts. Undoubtedly a feat of endurance, some climbers and environmentalists also felt the climb was a feat of engineering and recoiled at the thought of such an immense amount of rock-altering aid.<sup>27</sup> Climbers had proven that they could conquer the big walls, but the game had become one of style. The challenge was no longer in using technology to conquer nature, it was in improving oneself and one's abilities in order to work *with* nature.<sup>28</sup>

Not all climbing was done in Yosemite. Elsewhere in the West, a contingent of climbers devoted time to exploring other ranges, walls, and features. In the Northwest, Fred Beckey began tackling peaks in the Bugaboo Range in British Columbia as early as the 1940s. He, Layton Kor, and Ed Cooper put up many present-day routes in the range between 1959 and 1961. Not long after, Kor began "a very comprehensive two-year climbing stint from the desert areas in the South West to the Canadian Rockies in the North."<sup>29</sup> At a time when many were flocking to Yosemite's granite faces, Kor pioneered

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<sup>27</sup> Among those responding to Harding's achievement were TM Herbert (in the *American Alpine Journal*, 1971), Ansel Adams and Chris Jones (in *Mountain*, no. 16), and Robbins (in *Summit*, December 1970).

<sup>28</sup> Yosemite was not the only site of controversy over the use of technology. For example, the climbing community recoiled in shock when Italian Cesare Maestri used a gas-powered compressed air drill to bolt his way to the "top" of Cerro Torre in 1970. Critics not only lambasted his use of the drill but asserted that many of the bolts he placed were "superfluous" and could have been avoided by use of passive aid. See Scott, *Big Wall Climbing*, 195.

<sup>29</sup> Scott, *Big Wall Climbing*, 169.

many first ascents in the early 1960s on sandstone walls in Eldorado Canyon, Colorado as well as prominent sandstone formations such as the Titan (one of the three fin-like protrusions making up Fisher Towers near Moab, Utah) and Castleton Tower (also in Utah). Together with climbing partners Huntley Ingalls and George Hurley, Kor proved that desert climbing could be just as challenging as granite climbing and watched as desert climbing venues rose in popularity over the next 30 years.<sup>30</sup>

Climbers also had a long tradition of documenting ascents in both literary and visual form, and the increase in number of such products also contributed to the sport's rise in America.<sup>31</sup> Though individual climbing and mountaineering organizations had been in the practice of sending their own publications to members and subscribers, publicity also came to climbing through new publications with larger audiences. In 1967, the Sierra Club revisited its mountaineering roots with the publication of the first issue of *Ascent*. Whereas earlier photographers had focused on mountains as subjects, *Ascent* ushered in a new era. Historian Jay Taylor notes that with *Ascent*, "The viewfinder zoomed in, framing grew more dynamic, and action suffused everything. The individual became as important as the scene, and selling adventure became the *raison d'être*. The cover of the 1968 *Ascent* was not just emblematic of such changes; [i]t was a moment of change."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Indeed, some of Kor's most famous first ascents, such as the Finger of Fate route on the Titan and the Kor-Ingalls route on Castleton Tower, are listed in Steve Roper and Allen Steck, *Fifty Classic Climbs of North America* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1979). For more information on Layton Kor's climbing career, including a concluding essay about why he quit serious climbing (until recent need for a kidney transplant forced him to cease nearly all physical activity, he continued to climb (and use pitons!)), see Layton Kor, *Beyond the Vertical* (Boulder, Colo.: Alpine House, 1983).

<sup>31</sup> Though climbing journals floated about in the 1950s and 1960s, many young climbers nourished themselves on books chronicling European ascents, such as Lionel Terray, *Conquistadors of the Useless: From the Alps to Annapurna* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963) and Heinrich Harrer, trans. Hugh Merrick, *The White Spider* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959).

<sup>32</sup> Taylor, "On Climber, Granite, Sky," 130.

*Ascent* came hot on the heels of the release of *Americans on Everest*, a one-hour documentary released in 1967 that described the 1963 journey of a team of Americans to the top of Mount Everest. Featuring harrowing stories of icy bivouacs and frostbitten extremities, the documentary (one of National Geographic's earliest) captured national attention. Film continued to play an important role in popularizing climbing to a wider audience. In 1972, amateur filmmaker and respected climber Mike Hoover released a wordless, 15-minute documentary entitled *Solo*. The film portrayed the ecstasy of ascending a mountain and earned an Academy Award nomination for Best Documentary Short.<sup>33</sup> Though *Solo* brought climbing to a larger audience, its reach paled in comparison to print publicity. Larger publications with broader audiences also put the sport in the headlines. In 1974, *National Geographic* published Galen Rowell's "Climbing Half Dome the Hard Way," and brought climbing again to national attention. Accounts of Mt. Everest and K2 expeditions, such as Chris Bonington's 1976 *Everest the Hard Way* and Rowell's 1977 *In the Throne Room of the Mountain Gods* also captured attention.

Spectacle and the mass media also propelled climbing to new popularity. In 1970, when Warren Harding and Dean Caldwell topped the Dawn Wall in Yosemite after a 27-day push, they were met by a cadre of camera crews. Over the next few months, they pair enjoyed wide publicity, including an article in *Life* magazine, an interview with Howard Cosell on ABC's "Wide World of Sports," and a multi-month tour on the national talk show and lecture circuit. A climbing spectacle merited the attention of the nation again in

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<sup>33</sup> Hoover worked on many films. In the filming of Clint Eastwood's *The Eiger Sanction* (1975), he served as technical advisor and served as Eastwood's stunt double in climbing scenes. He was also on the camera crews of films such as *Crimson Tide*, *Arctic Flight* (for Busch Gardens), and *The River Wild*. See Trip Gabriel, "Survivor," *Outside*, February 1996. For an account of Hoover's work with Clint Eastwood, see Patrick McGilligan, *Clint: The Life and Legend* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 244.

1978. But this time, instead of the granite walls of Yosemite, it was spectacular desert sandstone that took center stage as ABC broadcasted George Willig and Steve Matous making a first ascent in Zion National Park. Willig, who had made national headlines in May 1977 after climbing the World Trade Center's South Tower, struck a deal with the network to televise the pair ascending Angel's Landing. The climb was a tremendous logistical effort for the network, necessitating pack mules to haul television equipment to the cliff and a half dozen microwave links to transmit the coverage out of Zion and to the world.<sup>34</sup> Willig and Matous began their climb more than five hours before sunrise and moved quickly in an attempt to reach the summit at a time synchronous with the show's conclusion. Though they finished an hour behind schedule, ABC extended its coverage, preempting other programming so that viewers could watch as the pair topped the cliff and stood against the background of a sunny Utah sky. The network's willingness to bump other programs was a sure sign that ABC felt the audience was interested in the program. With these television accounts, western landscapes were mythologized and made accessible to viewers.

The story of climbing's rise in America reveals not only the growth of recreation in the postwar years but also the conversion of play into a profitable enterprise. Climbers who had become disenchanted with materialism of postwar society and flocked to nature as an escape were soon devoting nearly every waking moment to the sport they loved and fostering its modernization and commodification. By crafting better equipment to aid their own climbing efforts, they not only made climbing more accessible to the masses

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<sup>34</sup> Sam Moses, "ABC Has Reached New Heights," *Sports Illustrated* 48, no. 20, 8 May 1978, 54. Willig had also brought the media to El Dorado Canyon near Boulder, Colorado in 1977 to televise his ascent of The Bastille. See Jeff Achey, Dudley Chelton, and Bob Godfrey, *Climb!: The History of Rock Climbing in Colorado*, 2nd ed. (Seattle: The Mountaineers Books, 2002), 147.

but also facilitated an economic boom in the outdoor recreation market. Soon, they were also influencing the national dialogue on environmentalism and recreation, re-conceptualizing how Americans perceived themselves both in nature and the marketplace. The conversation no longer consisted solely of debates about climbers' place in nature but also their place in American culture. Much of the ongoing national and regional dialogue on these issues also played out in southern Nevada's own Red Rock Canyon.

### Climbing in Red Rock Canyon

Though archaeological evidence indicates that humans have been tramping near the peaks in Red Rock Canyon for millennia, exploration of the canyon's escarpment likely did not begin until the twentieth century. Early mapping by local geologist Chester Longwell might have necessitated a few arduous hikes and scrambles, but Longwell lacked the technical skills to reach the tops of prominences such as Mount Wilson, Bridge Mountain, and Rainbow Mountain.<sup>35</sup> Post-war exploration of Red Rock came largely thanks to hikes by members of the Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club. Howard Booth, Jeff Lansing, and Vern Bostich spent weekends, holidays, and off hours in the canyons, navigating ledge systems and paths to reach summits. Booth described their efforts as "hiking...pretty tough,"<sup>36</sup> and by modern standards, their efforts were Class 4,

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<sup>35</sup> Documentation of Longwell's geologic efforts in Red Rock Canyon can be found in the Chester Longwell Collection (MS 17), UNLV Special Collections. Longwell, whose doctoral dissertation for Yale University examined the geology of the Muddy Mountains, also did extensive fieldwork throughout the Las Vegas Valley—including Red Rock Canyon—through his career, notably from 1921 to 1928.

<sup>36</sup> Booth interview, 18 September 2009; DeAngelo and Thiry, *Red Rock Odyssey*, 18-19.



as they nearly always required scrambling.<sup>37</sup>

Climbers attribute the first technical climbs in Red Rock to John Williamson and a slew of his high school pals in late 1960s and early 1970s. Despite the fact that Williamson made many first ascents, he recorded only a few of them and moved from Las Vegas in the early 1970s to attend college.<sup>38</sup> Most local climbers consider Joe Herbst the individual most responsible for the sport's rise in the canyon. A Las Vegas native, he grew up scrambling among the sandstone at Red Rocks in the 1950s and 1960s with the likes of Howard Booth. In the summer of 1970, he headed off to the Palisades School of Mountaineering, located in the High Sierra of California, where he worked as a helper for veteran climbers such as Doug Robinson and Don Jensen.<sup>39</sup> By the time Herbst returned to Las Vegas that fall, he'd honed his skills and was determined to better explore the sandstone in his city's backyard.

Herbst quickly realized his home rocks were great for climbing. As others soon discovered, the character of the canyon's Jurassic-era Aztec sandstone is so dense that it can support the weight of climbers. Much of the rock is coated with an iron-manganese compound (known as desert varnish) that ensures it doesn't crumble when climbers attach passive aid devices such as "friends" to it. Sandstone also lured climbers because

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<sup>37</sup> Class 4 refers to the Yosemite Decimal System (YDS) of classifying the difficulty of hiking and climbing routes. Class 4 routes are one step below technical climbing and often involve using a rope, though not any form of aid. Hiker-climbers are often exposed to ledges and danger so great that falling almost certainly means death. Furthermore, on Class 4 routes, climbers must use their hands to make the ascent.

<sup>38</sup> Though Williamson failed to record many of his ascents, Herbst did not. Herbst recorded some of his most notable ascents in a small log that became known as "Joe's Notebook." Joanne Urioste used this notebook when writing *The Red Rocks of Southern Nevada*. Today, no one knows the location of Joe's Notebook. Or, to quote Larry DeAngelo, "If they do, they aren't telling." See DeAngelo and Thiry, *Red Rock Odyssey*, 21.

<sup>39</sup> DeAngelo and Thiry, *Red Rock Odyssey*, 19.

its composite, sedimentary nature proved easy on hands, which can be sliced and rubbed raw on climbing surfaces such as granite. Furthermore, Red Rock contains a variety of rock formations that can challenge climbers of any skill level. Almost all the routes are easily accessible by vehicle or a short hike. But perhaps Red Rock Canyon's biggest draw is its mild weather, which allows for year-round climbing. In November, when snow begins to pummel the Sierras, the Rockies, the Northeast seaboard, and the peaks of the Pacific Northwest, Red Rock can sport high temperatures near 80°F and low temperatures of only 50°F.

After a season of technical climbs in Red Rock, Joe Herbst set his sights on the canyons' largest walls. Though he tackled several of them by himself (notably the eastern face of Mount Wilson), he knew he'd need partners for others, and finding partners proved difficult.<sup>40</sup> At the time, Las Vegas's population was only about 125,000, and few individuals were interested in climbing; fewer had skills commensurate with Herbst's. So, he began trying to lure some of his climbing friends from Yosemite. Luckily, he was aided by the publication of Chuck Pratt's "A View from Deadhorse Point" in the 1970 *Ascent*. In the article, Pratt described the scenery of the Southwest and noted that the Four Corners had attracted a "subculture of desert-loving rock climbers whose attraction to the alien beauty and legend-filled history of the area border[ed] on the obsessive;" he went

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<sup>40</sup> Though Herbst climbed frequently with his wife and had a steady stream of friends, like Tom Kaufman, who journeyed to Las Vegas for climbs, he had no local climbing partner of significant caliber until the mid 1970s. Local teen Randal Grandstaff had been introduced to climbing around 1970 while at Philmont Boy Scout Camp in New Mexico. Though Grandstaff learned quickly and later became one of Herbst's most frequent and trusted partners, he was still in secondary school in the early '70s and thus unable to climb most days. Also in the early '70s, Grandstaff was diagnosed with a brain tumor that required risky surgery and a lengthy recovery. It was not until 1974 that he and several high school friends began climbing with Herbst semi-regularly; upon his 1976 graduation from Bishop Gorman High School, he devoted even more time to the sport. See Sheridan Anderson, "Climbing in the Vegas Alps," *Las Vegas*, May 1981, 35; DeAngelo and Thiry, *Red Rock Odyssey*, 80.

on to glorify the challenges of climbing on the area's sandstone.<sup>41</sup> Herbst knew that the sandstone in his backyard provided climbs of difficulty and length comparable to many in Yosemite. Between Pratt's article and Herbst's prodding, it didn't take much for Larry Hamilton to come to Las Vegas.<sup>42</sup>

Hamilton, a Coloradan and the partner with whom Herbst had climbed the Nose route of Yosemite's El Capitan in 1971, visited Las Vegas in April 1972. After successfully traversing the Triassic Sands route on Windy Peak, the pair attempted to scale Rainbow Wall, a 5.12a, 13-pitch climb that Herbst nicknamed "the Sandstone Half Dome."<sup>43</sup> They failed—and nearly lost their lives in the process—and scampered off to Yosemite to climb the less-demanding Salathé Wall. The next year, their skills improved, they returned to Red Rock and successfully summited Rainbow Wall. But the elation of ascending one of Red Rock's biggest walls came with a caveat. The duo had seen what publicity of difficult climbs had done in Yosemite; Red Rock remained unspoiled, virgin climbing terrain, and neither wanted it to suffer a similar fate. Still, they knew word of the canyon's climbing potential would spread and, as Hamilton noted, their "exploratory golden age could not last... To postpone its end we published no writeup or route

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<sup>41</sup> Chuck Pratt, "A View from Deadhorse Point," *Ascent*, 1970; reprinted in *The Games Climbers Play*, Ken Wilson, ed. (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1981; reprint, Birmingham, Ala.: Menasha Ridge Press, 1996): 151.

<sup>42</sup> Hamilton acknowledges the impact of Pratt's article in his first attempt at desert climbing in Utah, near Moab, on his Personal Climbing history page: <http://pubpages.unh.edu/~lch/climbing.htm>. Additionally, Hamilton, being from out of state, was clearly a minority at Red Rock in the early '70s. A 1975 survey of Red Rock visitors conducted by the State of Nevada found that 85 percent of Red Rock's users hailed from Clark County. See the "Existing Use" section, Royston, Hanamoto, Beck, and Abey, *Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Background Report*.

<sup>43</sup> The length of a pitch can vary between routes, but as a general rule, a pitch is considered to be one rope length (roughly 150 feet).

description after the Rainbow's first ascent."<sup>44</sup> For the time being, Rainbow's Original Route would remain known only to Herbst and Hamilton, and thus the canyon would for a while longer avoid the publicity and spectacle that had come to characterize Yosemite.

Hamilton wasn't the only Yosemite pal that Herbst lured to Red Rock Canyon. Tom Kaufman came frequently and also helped establish a number of early routes.<sup>45</sup> John Long (a climber known for the first one-day ascent of the Nose route in Yosemite and numerous first free ascents) also climbed with Herbst in Red Rock on multiple occasions, completing several first ascents and many other second and third ascents. Long had been one of the original Stonemasters, a group of three Southern California teenagers climbing in the San Gabriel Mountains and Joshua Tree National Park, and had climbed extensively with Jim Bridwell, who reigned over Yosemite's climbing scene in the 1970s and tirelessly encouraged free climbing.<sup>46</sup>

Having been tutored in the ways of Doug Robinson and other Yosemite proponents of clean climbing, the Herbst-led crews utilized as few pitons and bolts as possible and relied almost wholly on passive aid. To boot, Herbst sought out the longest, most difficult paths up faces. "His style was 'fast and light', epitomizing the aesthetic prescription of the age," remembers Joanne Urioste. "The big routes were done in one push...and the goal was to minimize piton use or drilling in order to preserve the natural state of the

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<sup>44</sup> Larry Hamilton, "The Rainbow Wall" in Handren, *Red Rocks*, 153.

<sup>45</sup> Among the routes Kaufman established with Herbst and other climbers were Velvet Wall (1973), Solar Slab (1975), Community Pillar (1976), Orange Clonus (1977), The Friar (1977), and Burlesque (1979). See Swain, *Rock Climbing Red Rocks*, 204, 226, 252, 286, and 291.

<sup>46</sup> Though Long, Richard Harrison, and Ricky Accomazzo were the three original Stonemasters, the group's ranks swelled to include much of Camp 4 by 1974. The group's logo, a lightning bolt, was chalked under the Camp 4 bouldering problem known as Midnight Lightning. See John Long, "A Short History of the Stonemasters," [http://stonemastergear.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=33](http://stonemastergear.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=33) (8 September 2009).

route. Hammerless protection was passive.”<sup>47</sup> But less clean climbers soon followed.

The outside climbers Herbst brought in were slowly letting word out of untrammelled Red Rock. After the Herbst-Kaufman climb on Black Velvet Wall in 1973, John Long remembered that “[w]ord quickly got out to Yosemite climbers of this wondrous adventure climb, and several made the long trip to Red Rocks to repeat the Velvet Wall masterpiece, a sort of desert Steck/Salathé.”<sup>48</sup> In March 1975, Hamilton and Herbst bagged the Aeolian Wall, a 2,000-foot route that lead to the peak of Mount Wilson (7,070 feet) and remains one of the longest climbs in Red Rock. Hamilton described the journey in a piece for *Ascent*. In it, he recounts how he and Herbst found a lost hiker near the peak of Mount Wilson and took the adrift soul with them on their return to the valley floor. The wayward hiker, impressed by the pair’s abilities, professed of a climbing friend in Yosemite who “assured him that this sandstone stuff was worthless.” Though this assertion pointed to the fact that Red Rock was still relatively unknown, Hamilton recounted, “[W]e knew what had happened to the good stuff in the [Yosemite] Valley and what was already encroaching here (we had brought it ourselves).” Indeed, the pair had brought it; they convinced some of their Yosemite pals to come to Vegas’s backyard, only to see that their friends were not without fault. Two weeks earlier, “one of America’s foremost first ascensionists” had used siege tactics and pitons to craft a route that Herbst, Hamilton, and Kaufman had blazed with passive protection a few months earlier. “We felt a hopeless and silly outrage at this intrusion of insensitive outsiders into

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<sup>47</sup> Urioste, “Early Days,” in Handren, *Red Rocks*, 55.

<sup>48</sup> John Long, *Close Calls: Climbing Mishaps & Near-Death Experiences* (Helena, Mont.: Falcon Books, 1999), 140.

‘our’ area,” Hamilton wrote. “The Golden Age of the Red Rocks had surely passed.”<sup>49</sup> Such use of enabling technologies would divide the Red Rocks climbing community in coming years, much as it had previously divided Yosemite climbers.

In 1974, Jorge Urioste moved to Las Vegas, bringing his climbing partner and wife, Joanne, and a taste for outdoor experiences. The couple’s first forays into Red Rock were hardly positive; blistering heat overwhelmed them, and they did little more than scramble over brush. Soon, however, the heat waned and they began to cultivate a life-long affinity for the area. By the late ’70s, the Uriostes began putting up some of Red Rock’s classic climbing routes, many of which required, they thought, the placement of large numbers of bolts, a tactic largely at odds with much of the canyon’s climbing old guard. The couple felt they “were in a less elite category than Joe [Herbst] and his serious partners,” and while they admired the Yosemite contingent’s alpine-style pushes with gutsy uses of passive aid, they had an altogether different style and philosophy. Rather than using passive aid devices to follow lengthy cracks, they aimed to create long routes with clean lines—shots straight to the top—by “linking discontinuous crack systems with bolts rather than bravado.” Although they acknowledged this was “a method at odds with the prescribed style of the day,” Joanne remembered that their goal “was evolving into the philosophy that we’d create routes that would be fun to repeat, not simply ones that we’d ascended ‘by the skin of our teeth’.”<sup>50</sup> But this practice of hyperactive bolting quickly earned them reputations as rebels unconcerned with the natural integrity of the canyons.

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<sup>49</sup> Larry Hamilton, “The Aeolian Wall,” *Ascent*, 1975; reprinted in Allen Steck, ed., *Ascent: The Mountaineering Experience in Word and Image* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1976), 91. Details of their Aeolian Wall climb can also be found in Joe Herbst and Larry Hamilton, “The Wall of the Winds,” *Alpinist* 28 (Autumn 2009), 32-33.

<sup>50</sup> Urioste, “Early Days,” in Handren, *Red Rocks*, 55.

They focused more on *creating* routes rather than ascending walls. To do so, they fixed ropes on walls and pioneered new routes over the course of days, often returning to a campsite at night instead of completing a route in one big push that involved multiple days on walls without retreat.

Democratization of climbing and routes was key for the husband-wife team. “Our intent was that [our routes] be long, continuous and free. And fun to repeat!” Joanne Urioste remembered. “Our routes tended to be of continuous difficulty, with solid rock and lots of exposure, which attracted elite climbers. Additionally, we made sure our routes were well-protected, which made them appealing to weekend warriors, as well.”<sup>51</sup> But it was just this sort of democratization that irritated some of the sport’s veterans. In the 1967 issue of *Ascent*, Yvon Chouinard railed against bolts because they allowed “average Joes to do climbs that are normally over his head and they allow the experts to do incredibly hard climbs without having to stick their necks out.” Standing on what he believed to be the moral high ground of clean climbing, Chouinard further argued that “the common man is bringing the Art down to his own level of values and competence” that “render[ed] the mountains to a low, though democratic, mean.”<sup>52</sup> In 1972, Robinson added, “Every climb is not for every climber; the ultimate climbs are not democratic. Fortunate climbs protect themselves by being unprotectable and remain a challenge that can be solved only by boldness and commitment backed solidly by technique.”<sup>53</sup> In crafting routes for future climbers, the Uriostes undoubtedly were consumption-oriented;

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Yvon Chouinard, “Coonyard Mouths Off,” *Ascent* 1 (1967); reprinted in Wilson, ed., *The Games Climbers Play*, 303-309.

<sup>53</sup> Robinson, *Chouinard Equipment Catalog*, 25.

bolts were simply a means to an end, which was a bevy of routes for climbers of all calibers.

Though the Uriostes' philosophy and style differed with that of the era, the couple still remained on good terms with their Red Rock compatriots. Despite their different climbing styles and points of view on climbing ethics, the Uriostes and Joe Herbst enjoyed an amicable friendship, epitomized in the creation of Epinephrine route in Black Velvet Canyon. Though Herbst and Kaufman had devised the Black Velvet Wall's Original Route, a "highly adventurous, committed, sometimes unprotected, single push climb from ground to summit" in 1973, the Uriostes revisited the route in 1978, and noted the potential for a safe, first-rate climb if only they fixed ropes and took the time to add bolts. On the wall one day, they spotted Herbst in the canyon and invited him to join them. He did, and "[a]lthough the tactics used were none that [Herbst] would ever embrace, he agreed with their appraisal of the route as a potential classic. His opinion was high enough that he even agreed to the placement of two additional protection bolts on the headwall and a few more in the chimneys...in order to make the route a little more accessible."<sup>54</sup> Herbst went on to loan Joanne Urioste his personal climbing notebook, complete with routes and descriptions, when she began research for her 1984 guidebook.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, John Long and Lynn Hill also got on well with the Uriostes despite stylistic differences. After the Uriostes established the Levitation 29 route in April 1981, Long and Hill joined them the next month for the route's first free climb. Long described the route to *Climbing* magazine as "one of the finest free climbs I've ever

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<sup>54</sup> Larry DeAngelo, "Epinephrine," in Barnes, *Red Rocks Climbing*, 62.

<sup>55</sup> Urioste, *The Red Rocks of Southern Nevada*, 4.



done” and later helped Joanne Urioste compile route information for her guidebook.<sup>56</sup> Hill echoed his feelings, remembering, “I’d never done anything like it. Sure, my peer group would scorn it, but...I found the bolts liberating...The route felt like a gift.”<sup>57</sup>

Stylistic tensions came to a head, however, when Richard Harrison (who, like John Long, was one of the original Stonemasters) moved to Las Vegas from southern California. If route-making was about future consumption to the Uriostes, it was about present production for Harrison. He viewed ascending a wall as a test of mettle, critical thinking skills, and chutzpah. The routes he produced were strikingly clean and exploited the natural features of the canyon’s Aztec sandstone. He quickly gained a small following that he trained in his purist ways. Harrison instructed teenagers Paul Van Betten, Nick Nordblum, and Sal Mamusia not only on climbing physics but also on climbing style. They quickly absorbed his teachings and began leading hammerless, alpine-style pushes utilizing only passive protection—and not much of it. Nordblom likened the use of enabling technologies to “rap[ing] the mountain. If there’s a piton that hasn’t been properly placed, it’s gross. It degrades the climb. Instead of bringing the climb down to your level, you should wait until you excel to its level.”<sup>58</sup> The quartet, which would often climb to punk anthems of defiance spewing from a transistor radio, called themselves the Adventure Punks.<sup>59</sup> Harrison and his team of climbers charted dozens of new routes in Red Rocks in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and even free climbed many of the long-

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<sup>56</sup> Joanne Urioste, “Levitation 29 and the Red Rocks,” *Climbing* no. 74 (September-October 1982), 20.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Joanne Urioste, “Red Rock: Voices in the Desert,” *Alpinist* 28 (Autumn 2009), 42.

<sup>58</sup> Brad Peterson, “Nick’s 10 favorite Red Rock climbs,” *The Nevadan*, 13 July 1980, 30J.

<sup>59</sup> The Adventure Punks were often joined by, though not characteristically associated with, climbers Wendell Broussard, Bob Findlay, and Randal Grandstaff. See Urioste, “Red Rock: Voices in the Desert,” 42.

established routes of the Herbst climbing contingent.

The difference between the style of the Adventure Punks and the Uriostes was best epitomized in the creation of routes along Black Velvet Wall. The unspoken debate that took place between route-making parties wasn't so much about preserving the wall's integrity as it was a contest for space and attempts at personal status preservation. On this wall in Black Velvet Canyon, the two groups and their styles parried for supremacy. The climbing conversation began in 1980, when the Uriostes put up Dream of Wild Turkeys, so named because the pair had been feeling the effects of ostracization from the Harrison crew but continued in their quest to construct classic routes. Always seeking a challenging climb and on a quest to assert their notions of how a route on Black Velvet Wall should be constructed, Harrison and friends crafted Rock Warrior in 1983. "Spying out a line of subtle features and drilling a few bolts to fill in the blanks," the team developed the route to test other climbers.<sup>60</sup> The next year, only a few feet to the right of Rock Warrior, the Uriostes, along with Mike Ward and Bill Bradley, bolted a route up the smoothest part of Black Velvet Wall. Once again, they paved the way for climbers of a variety of skill levels to experience a big wall, though they created "one of the most heavily bolted long routes in the country at the time."<sup>61</sup> They named their new route Prince of Darkness, as a reference to "the satanic level of evil such bolting was supposed to represent."<sup>62</sup> Van Betten and Nordblom countered in 1988 with Sandstone Samurai, also near the previous routes. Utilizing only a couple of bolts and anchors, they devised a

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<sup>60</sup> Handren, *Red Rocks*, 50.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>62</sup> Larry DeAngelo, "Prince of Darkness," in Barnes, *Red Rocks Climbing*, 54.

route far more difficult than those of their predecessors. “The stark contrast [between the routes,” remembered Joanne Urioste, “appeared like protest art.”<sup>63</sup> On the face of a natural rock wall on public lands, each individual outlined personal values and ethics, thus creating a historical geography in bolts (or lack thereof).

In 1985, before seething tensions boiled over into an all-out war, the Uriostes stepped back from climbing in order to raise children.<sup>64</sup> But the conflict didn’t disappear entirely. Native Las Vegas Mike Tupper, who had cut his climbing teeth at Red Rocks and honed his skills in France and Australia, returned to his home rock at about the same time the Uriostes were exiting the scene. Tupper brought with him changing styles from his time on the world climbing scene, including practices such as top roping and bolting on rappel.<sup>65</sup> In the process, he reignited a firestorm of controversy over the use of aid and became a target for the Adventure Punks. In 1985, Tupper and pal Greg Mayer began work on a route they named Risky Business in Pine Creek Canyon. To place it, they had fixed ropes and bolted by aid; the use of such tactics so angered the Punks that, as Tupper and Mayer worked on the routes, someone yanked their fixed ropes and left them in a pile some 250 feet off the ground.<sup>66</sup> Three years later, after topping out on Running Man (a Van Betten-Ward-Mamusia route), Tupper and Mike Ward proceeded to rap bolt another route nearby (later known as Graveyard Waltz). Details are fuzzy, but Tupper nearly

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<sup>63</sup> Urioste, “Red Rock: Voices in the Desert,” 43.

<sup>64</sup> Joanne Urioste continued to climb during her first pregnancy. She participated in the development of Prince of Darkness when she was well into her second trimester and suffering from intense morning sickness. For details, see Urioste, “Red Rock: Voices in the Desert,” 43 and DeAngelo, “Prince of Darkness” in Barnes, *Red Rocks Climbing*, 54.

<sup>65</sup> Handren, *Red Rocks*, 14.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.; Urioste, “Red Rock: Voices in the Desert,” 43.

came to blows with several of the Punk contingent. The Punks later chopped out the bolts Tupper and Ward had placed on Running Man.<sup>67</sup> What followed over the next few years were “numerous confrontations, incidents, and accusations.”<sup>68</sup>

Eventually, the bolt wars in Red Rock died down. Even the most hard-core of the Adventure Punks began to make compromises. In the early 1990s, the Punks set their sights on Buffalo Wall, a giant bowl-like recess in Icebox Canyon that forms one of the most intimidating walls in Red Rocks.<sup>69</sup> But conquering it meant using aids such as pitons and hooks—hardly the clean climbing methods the group espoused throughout the 1980s. It also meant the group now had little room to point fingers. In the process of the decade-and-a-half-long battle over the use of aid in Red Rock, a sort of Hegelian dialectic had emerged. The Urioste thesis had been met by the Punk antithesis and eventually formed a synthesis in the creation of “philosophically diverse” classics that used both bolts and passive aid devices.<sup>70</sup>

The stories of controversies over bolting in Red Rock Canyon reveal how a strikingly natural area was an active social space. The canyon walls were the backdrop for intense discussions on the proper role of humans and technology in nature. Some, such as the Uriostes, argued for using technologies to make nature accessible to a greater number of recreationalists (even if such use came at the expense of altering nature). Others, such as the Adventure Punks of the 1980s, were less democratic. They felt that a climber’s

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<sup>67</sup> Urioste, “Red Rock: Voices in the Desert,” 43.

<sup>68</sup> Handren, *Red Rocks*, 14.

<sup>69</sup> Buffalo Wall’s steepness and few natural lines proved so difficult to negotiate that Handren, writing in 2007, notes that it “remains the only major formation that has yet to be free climbed.” See Handren, *Red Rocks*, 227.

<sup>70</sup> Urioste, “Red Rock: Voices in the Desert,” 43.

challenge was not to conquer a wall with available technologies but to rise to a skill level that allowed access to nature's most remote parts. Though these discussions occurred on a local level, they are representative of a larger dialogue in the American environmental movement about man's place in nature.

Debate over technology in Red Rock Canyon coincided with debate about guidebooks. More than just directions for scaling cliffs, guidebooks are historical records of first ascents, can function as “platforms for debating values, reputations, and trends,” and can “[shape]...evolving athletic and aesthetic norms.”<sup>71</sup> Authors must walk a fine line between giving sufficient directions to keep climbers from getting lost and not revealing so much as to ruin a climb's adventure. The idea of putting together a guidebook for Red Rock Canyon had been kicked around in the late '70s and early '80s. Local climber Randal Grandstaff was among the first to consider assembling one. Believing his home canyons to be a “cherry area,” he predicted in 1980 that Red Rock would be “a very big thing” for serious climbers. Though he “considered compiling a ‘definitive guidebook’ from collected notes to help acquaint [incoming climbers] with local routes,” he shirked the task for fear of publicizing the canyon. Such promotion proved a touchy subject with the climbing community, many members of which enjoyed the wilderness aspects of the sport and the lack of spectators (as were often had in Yosemite). Publicity increased the chances of routes being “ruined through overuse, activities...[and] hampered with excessive government regulations.”<sup>72</sup>

Unsurprisingly, it was Joanne Urioste who penned the first Red Rock Canyon

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<sup>71</sup> Joseph E. Taylor III, “Mapping Adventure: A Historical Geography of Yosemite Valley Climbing Landscapes,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 32, 191.

<sup>72</sup> Rick Healy, “Hanging out with an expert climber,” *The Nevadan*, 13 July 1980, 4J.

guidebook for climbers. Urioste announced her publishing intentions in an article about the Levitation 29 route in *Climbing*.<sup>73</sup> The Red Rocks climbing community, for the most part, supported her. Herbst loaned her his personal climbing notebook, and John Long helped her write route descriptions. Harrison, however, wanted nothing to do with Urioste's pro-access, consumer-friendly approach. In fact, he didn't want a guidebook published at all, much less one written by one of the climbers he viewed as the most ecologically and stylistically offensive. Harrison felt that a Urioste guidebook would not only publicize Red Rock to the masses, but the conversion of routes to text would mean little opportunity to inculcate new climbers with his personal beliefs about ascension style. As Urioste approached each of the Adventure Punks at a climbers' party in 1983 and asked each if he wanted to contribute information to her book, she was, sometimes harshly, rebuffed.<sup>74</sup> The Punks blatantly refused to share any information with her.

Even without the Adventure Punks' help, Joanne Urioste published *The Red Rocks of Southern Nevada* in 1984. The book featured descriptions and history of more than 120 routes. Until that point, individual climbers had learned of routes either through conversations with previous ascenders or by exchanging notes and drawings. Though Red Rock was growing in notoriety, it was still a far cry from popular. A faint harbinger of the climbing traffic to come, Urioste noted that the Red Rocks "promise to become one of the foremost rock climbing areas in the world" due to complex formations, the variety of climbing, and the virgin character of many routes.<sup>75</sup> Her goal in developing the

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<sup>73</sup> Urioste, "Levitation 29 and the Red Rocks," 21.

<sup>74</sup> Urioste, "Red Rock: Voices in the Desert," 43.

<sup>75</sup> Urioste, *The Red Rocks of Southern Nevada*, 19.

guidebook was twofold. One, to the climbers unfamiliar with Red Rock, she offered a guide filled with detailed descriptions and photographs, without which, RRC neophytes might be unable to locate routes. Second, she wanted “to indicate areas that are worthy of development,” and even called for future first ascenders to send her information on the vertical trails they blazed.<sup>76</sup>

Though climbing guidebooks have been used to “acculturate outsiders to local mores” (particularly with respect to style),<sup>77</sup> Urioste seemed less interested in asserting one style over another than simply justifying her own. “The vastness of the Red Rocks leaves considerable room for freedom in choosing a climbing style,” she wrote. “Its exquisite crack systems are perfectly protected with nuts. However, there are crackless faces that must remain unsavored until bolts are placed. On the vertical faces, it is necessary to stand on aid in order to drill. On the longer faces, the first-ascent party must sometimes employ siege tactics.” Even though Urioste didn’t champion her way as right, she made it clear that she didn’t want her defiance of norms to come at the high price of having her work destroyed. She continued, “The style in which a route is done is determined by the first-ascent party, based on safety and aesthetic interpretations. Please respect this and do not change the number of bolts or pitons on existing routes; this would offend not only the first-ascent party but also other climbers who wish to find the route in its original form.”<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, although she was aiding the evolution of climbing as a mainstream activity, Urioste also did her best to also introduce Red Rock neophytes to some common

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>77</sup> Taylor, “Mapping Adventure,” 196.

<sup>78</sup> Urioste, *The Red Rocks of Southern Nevada*, 25-26.

climbing cultural norms. She admonished climbers to pack out what they packed in, to appropriately dispose of human waste, and to avoid climbing near Red Rock's valuable cultural resources such as ancient petroglyphs. Nonetheless, she was introducing Red Rock Canyon to the recreational market as a climbing destination; though climbers had visited Red Rock Canyon for years, many were part of a larger network that assisted in site orientation and route selection. But with the guidebook in hand, outside climbers needed little knowledge of place to tackle the canyon's walls.

The controversy over the book's production spilled out of Red Rock and became known to other climbers, including Randy Vogel, whose review in *Climbing* magazine noted the internecine tiff going on in southern Nevada. Vogel particularly harped on the book's omission of several routes and slammed the work as a whole, calling it "inadequately researched."<sup>79</sup> But fault for the omissions wasn't Urioste's alone, he said, and went on to admonish climbers for withholding information from her and asserted that they shared the blame for the book's flaws. He asserted, "A guidebook editor must rely heavily on the generosity of climbers to obtain route information." Such deprivation of information was little more than "petty selfishness."<sup>80</sup> Despite Vogel's poor review, Urioste's book proved popular and for nearly a decade was the sole climbing guide for Red Rock Canyon.<sup>81</sup>

But guidebooks weren't the only ways locals were introducing Red Rock to a larger audience and facilitating its transition to world-renowned climbing destination. Randal

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<sup>79</sup> Randy Vogel, review of *The Red Rocks of Southern Nevada*, by Joanne Urioste, *Climbing* no. 88 (February-March 1985), 60.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> It wasn't until 1992 that a second guide, Randy Faulk's *A Climber's Guide to Red Rocks of Nevada* was published.



Grandstaff had backed off of authoring the first climbing guidebook, but he didn't shirk other opportunities to eek a living from his avocation. Small-scale climbing gigs came his way early on. In 1980, at 22, he led an expedition to Canada financed entirely by The North Face. The company had recruited him to test a new line of gear. But he knew that he could also run his own business. He was particularly certain that he could parlay his climbing skills into a guiding business and even establish a full-time climbing school. "There's no way I'm going to make a million," the young Grandstaff asserted in 1980, "but it's something I'd like to do."<sup>82</sup> By 1981, he had sporadic requests to lead individuals and small groups through Red Rock's canyons. His clients were mostly professionals whose hectic schedules left them with limited time to devote to climbing, but when they did climb, they wanted an action-packed experience. He noted, "I provide instant access to a first-rate climb, set the whole thing up, transportation, equipment, everything. And when they're ready, I take them out, and they get a red-letter experience out of it every time. Like it's a *guaranteed adventure*...I try to find routes that will allow my clients to really extend themselves, to grow, and learn about climbing as well as learn about themselves."<sup>83</sup> Grandstaff had entered the adventure travel market, a unique niche whose rise began when with that of the yuppies of the 1980s, who longed for high-intensity adventure vacations that challenged both body and mind.

Business was so good that, upon returning from the 1985 American Everest expedition, Grandstaff incorporated a guiding service named Sky's the Limit.<sup>84</sup> By 1989,

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<sup>82</sup> Healy, "Hanging out with an expert climber," *The Nevadan*, 13 July 1980, 4J.

<sup>83</sup> Anderson, "Climbing in the Vegas Alps," 36.

<sup>84</sup> Scott Dickensheets, "The rocky rise of Randall Grandstaff," *The Nevadan*, 5 March 1989, 5CC.

he was leading several hundred customers a year, at an average of \$80 to \$100 a head. The workload became so high that he had to begin taking on other guides to help. He also began crafting long trips for “travelers disdaining the usual generic tourist experience” and offering 36 different itineraries. He even talked of trademarking his technique for teaching climbing. He also “helped film an Omnimax movie...feature[ing] extensive climbing footage.”<sup>85</sup> By 1994, he was also providing “color commentary for a climbing competition on ESPN2.”<sup>86</sup>

The man who had been pictured in a 1980 *Review-Journal* feature sporting long hair, tube socks, and a t-shirt had evolved into a businessman whose 1994 feature in the same paper showed him with clean-cut hair, dressed in pressed khakis and a collared pullover, and climbing with a laptop not far away. Climbing was no longer just a sport for Grandstaff—it was a business venture. He admitted to loving marketing, strategizing, and customer interaction, and his speech blended his business orientation with his youthful '60s roots. One reporter asserted, “He speaks in a verbal flood that carries along odd bits of business-speak (‘solution-oriented’ is a favorite term)...and leftover '60s buzzwordage (‘trippy’).”<sup>87</sup> Admittedly, not all climbers approved of Grandstaff making money off of climbing. “Some people think I’m the great whore of the mountain because I’m ‘selling climbing’,” he noted.<sup>88</sup>

Meanwhile, Red Rock’s reputation increased by word of mouth and due to the publication of Urioste’s guidebook. Thus, the proliferation of guiding services and the

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Scott Dickensheets, “Job on the rocks,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 21 June 1994, 1D-2D.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

number of climbers coming to the canyon increased markedly. In 1988, BLM ranger Chuck Ward noted that the number of climbers coming to RRC was “growing at a rate greater than 25 percent a year...[climbers had begun logging] a couple hundred user hours a weekend.”<sup>89</sup> Much of that growth, he added, was due to out-of-state and foreign visitors. Indeed, a 1991 BLM survey at Red Rock noted that more than 68 percent of climbers came to the park from out of state. Roughly the same percentage cited Red Rock as their primary destination, and nearly 32 percent had travelled more than 500 miles to climb there. Forty percent surveyed had never before been to Red Rock.<sup>90</sup> A wider variety of individuals was also coming to the canyon; Grandstaff noted that his clients included Boy Scouts, the Las Vegas Ski Club, and professionals.

In 1997, Grandstaff cited a 17 percent increase annually in the number of individuals Sky’s the Limit guides led in the NCA.<sup>91</sup> The increase in the number of guide services also demonstrated that there was enough business for more than just Grandstaff, and on many occasions, guiding sessions were no longer just one or two people with a guide. Instead, guides led parties of several individuals. Through their services, guiding companies promoted consumption of the American West via climbing. Much as tourists ticked off visits to national parks, climbers checked off destinations such as Red Rock. These consumer climbing journeys became a means for individuals to get closer to nature.

The cases of guidebooks and guide services provide examples of how individual

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<sup>89</sup> “Climbers find the Red Rock,” *The Nevadan*, 12 June 1988, 8.

<sup>90</sup> Customer survey results included in BLM memo from District Recreation/Wilderness Coordinator, Las Vegas to Assistant District Manager-Resources, 13 April 1992, Box 1, Folder 6, Red Rock Canyon Collection.

<sup>91</sup> Joan Patterson, “A Rock and a Hard Place,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 20 June 1997, 43J.

climbers facilitated the marketing of climbing as a sport and of Red Rock as a prime place to take part in that sport. Joanne Urioste effectively offered climbers a road map to the canyons' most well-known climbs, while Randal Grandstaff gave visiting professionals with too little time to research a Red Rock adventure for themselves and less outdoorsy types with too few skills to attempt climbs on their own a packaged experience that offered adventure and the opportunity to personally test themselves against nature. Together the pair opened the doors to Red Rock Canyon to an entirely new group of visitors.

In the process, the number of climbers at Red Rock increased dramatically. Whereas members of the small climbing community of the 1970s and early '80s had often had the canyons to themselves, by the late '80s, they frequently found climbers standing in line waiting to tackle popular routes and various popular camping sites littered with trash. Climbers' impact on the land became increasingly noticeable, prompting the BLM to step in and begin to regulate Red Rock climbing.

#### Legislating Morality for Climbers

For nearly two decades, the BLM provided little oversight of climbers in Red Rock Canyon. Climbers were few in number (especially when compared to their sightseeing, hiking, and picnicking counterparts) and less visible to BLM authorities. Furthermore, development of recreation in RRC focused largely on picnicking and hiking. While the 1976 *Master Plan* acknowledged climbing as an existing use of Red Rock Canyon, it offered no guidance for the sport's management. Understaffed and overworked, the Red Rock BLM office for many years ignored the park's vertical trails and focused on

problems such as apprehending target shooters practicing their marksmanship skills on petroglyphs, graffiti artists “tagging” various rocks and signs in the canyon, and keeping partying teenagers out of the park at night.<sup>92</sup> At most, the BLM wrote citations to climbers for illegal campfires in the canyons or for camping violations in the overcrowded Oak Creek camp site. Early BLM law enforcement reports show no climbing-related violations.<sup>93</sup>

By the late 1980s, climbers had expanded in number and could no longer fly under the BLM’s radar. Trails to routes became braided and littering increased, as did the amount of human waste on the cliffs. Chalk marks streaked canyon walls, and the Oak Creek Canyon campsite—the lone campsite authorized for visitor use in RRC—was trashed each winter as climbers descended on it. In FY 1982, camping violations totaled 10; campfire violations numbered 27. In FY 1983, camping violations doubled; campfire violations more than tripled. In the next fiscal year, camping violations totaled 25; campfire violations totaled 142. The next year, camping violations doubled.<sup>94</sup> Search and rescue operations in the canyon also increased during this time.<sup>95</sup> Such increases occurred not just because of climbing’s growing popularity, but also because Las Vegas was growing as well. In 1967, when the BLM christened the area as Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands, Las Vegas’s population was around 100,000; by 1985, the city was home to approximately 200,000, not including rapidly growing bedroom communities

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<sup>92</sup> BLM Memorandum, Law Enforcement Statistics for FY 1982-1985 in Box 1, Folder 4, Red Rock Canyon Collection, UNLV Special Collections.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> See Natalie Patton, “Rescue team busy bailing out climbers,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 16 May 1993, 1B and 6B.

such as Henderson and Green Valley. To accommodate these new residents, Las Vegas expanded in all directions. Though the initial push was to the south (toward Henderson and Green Valley) a westward push began in the late 1980s.

Soon, subdivisions began sprawling westward from the city's employment base, The Strip.<sup>96</sup> Though the Lakes, Desert Shores, and Peccole Ranch were all part of this development, Summerlin, the master-planned community built on land owned by Hughes Corporation, proved the greatest threat to the isolation and rural character of Red Rock Canyon. The company proved to be a good corporate steward by patiently waiting for the BLM to secure purchase of a buffer zone that blocked urban development from infringing on the canyon; however, its presence nonetheless unnerved those who enjoyed the canyon's seclusion. Following a push from a coalition of southern Nevadans, the majority of the Nevada congressional delegation shepherded the passage a bill that transformed Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands into Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area in 1990.<sup>97</sup> According to the wording of the legislation, the area had been designated an NCA "in order to conserve, protect, and enhance for the benefit and enhancement for present and future generations...the unique...resources" of Red Rock Canyon.<sup>98</sup>

The new designation meant the BLM had to draft a new management plan, which was badly needed anyway in light of Las Vegas's expansion and climbing's increased popularity. Red Rock's original governing document (the *Master Plan*) had been in effect since 1976, and as it had been written during climbing's infancy in southern Nevada, it

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<sup>96</sup> Eugene P. Moehring and Michael S. Green, *Las Vegas: A Centennial History* (Reno: University Press of Nevada, 2007), 232-233.

<sup>97</sup> The exception to this support of the bill was Representative Barbara Vucanovic (R-NV).

<sup>98</sup> *Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area Establishment Act*, Public Law 101-62, 101st Cong., 2d sess., (16 November 1990).

gave the BLM no guidance for managing climbers. Accordingly, the Bureau decided to make climbing one of eight key issues on which the new plan would focus. Thus, the 1994 *Proposed General Management Plan (PGMP)* articulated the preservation-versus-use problem facing the BLM with respect to climbing: “The primary purpose of designating RRC as an NCA is conservation of the resources. Therefore, the first determination to be made is the amount of alteration to natural rock surfaces when rock bolts are used. The use of wedge type anchors can reduce impacts to rock surfaces, but there is still the concern of aesthetics. Bolts left on certain rock faces may be an intrusion to scenic viewing.”<sup>99</sup> The *PGMP* went on to devote three pages solely to climbing and stated the Bureau’s desire to work with climbers to preserve the canyon’s resources while minimizing restrictions on climbers.<sup>100</sup>

The Bureau’s primary concerns were aesthetic and ecological. Whereas climbers had been self-policing and debating amongst themselves the use of bolts and permanent aids, their conversations usually centered around the role of technology and mediation of the human experience with nature. But various individuals within government and the private sector had begun to question whether bolts in wilderness areas violated the 1964 Wilderness Act.<sup>101</sup> The language of the Wilderness Act—the legislation that governs use of the nation’s designated wilderness areas—defines wilderness as a place with no

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<sup>99</sup> *Proposed General Management Plan for Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area*, 12.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

<sup>101</sup> Considered the most damaging of climbing equipment, bolts come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Their purpose is to provide climbers with an anchor system, which, depending on the preference and ability of the climber, is used either to aid ascent or to prevent falling. In either case, a bolt is considered a permanent alteration to the rock face. A drill (often mechanical) is required to bore an initial hole into the rock; a bolt is then placed in the hole. Bolts fall into two general categories: mechanical and adhesive. Mechanical bolts are either screwed or tapped in, and as the tapered end of the bolt contacts the surrounding rock wall, it creates friction and “grips” the wall. Adhesive bolts require glue that chemically bonds with the rock.

“permanent improvements.” Adherents of this definition of wilderness said bolts constituted such improvements. Two areas (Pine Creek Canyon and the La Madre Mountains) within the Red Rock Canyon NCA had been designated wilderness study areas in 1982, and thus BLM management seriously examined the bolting issue.<sup>102</sup> It proposed several actions, including establishing a climbing advisory council of three to four climbers that would work with the BLM to improve agency-climber communication and notably to propose bolt replacement in wilderness areas. To further manage climbing, the agency mandated “[n]o alteration of the rock surfaces by gluing, chipping or chiseling” as well as no climbing within 50 feet of petroglyphs or other cultural resources. Furthermore, the BLM banned fixed ropes. Most notable, however, were the bolting restrictions, which forbade “placement of new bolts utilizing electric battery powered drills” in Wilderness Areas (WAs) and Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Additionally, “[r]eplacement of existing bolts in the aforementioned locations should be presented to the Advisory Council for review and on to the BLM to request a permit.”<sup>103</sup>

The Bureau also expressed concern about the visibility of climbers’ chalk and hardware. At public meetings, the BLM discussed using non-white chalk designed to blend with canyon walls, so as to be less noticeable by visitors. But climbers who had tried the colored chalk said it didn’t enhance grip like the white variety and also caused permanent staining of the rock face. The two groups agreed simply for climbers to use less chalk.<sup>104</sup> In the *Proposed GMP*, the BLM addressed the point again by encouraging

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<sup>102</sup> Other issues were also of greater concern nationally but more limited concern at Red Rock. Both manufactured and human waste have also proven problematic at climbing sites. The NPS, BLM, and USFS have all devised public awareness schemes and campaigns to combat the problem.

<sup>103</sup> *Proposed General Management Plan for Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area*, 47.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.



the use of “Bison Balls,” tinted hangers that blended with the rock, and neutral-colored web gear.

Among the chief ecological concerns were removal of cliff vegetation and possible disruption of avian nesting locations. For grip, climbers often tugged at anything, including vegetation in rock cracks; this practice had removed many native plants from the recesses in canyon walls. Furthermore, climbers sometimes perched on ledges where wildlife nested or rested. Recent scientific studies noted that desert cliffs often “provide vertical and horizontal heterogeneity,” making them home to a more diverse number of species of birds and plants than noncliff sites; rock climbing can edge out species whose tolerance to humans is low, thereby reducing biological diversity.<sup>105</sup> Thus, in the *Proposed GMP*, one of the BLM’s climbing-related goals was to “devise a program that will lessen impacts on vegetation, cultural resources, rock surfaces and sensitive wildlife species inhabiting the areas desirable for rock climbing.”<sup>106</sup>

Climbers had expressed concern over guiding parties crowding climbing sites with groups of trainees. The BLM responded by not only keeping commercial permits limited to six (and only five guest permits good for one-time visit of up to three days) but also limiting commercial group size to 10 students and forbidding multiple commercial groups in popular climbing areas. Though it acknowledged that these actions would have “some impact,” the BLM advocated being proactive rather than reactive and “resolving problem situations through drastic measures having major impacts on climbing.”<sup>107</sup> The

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<sup>105</sup> Richard J. Camp and Richard L. Knight, “Cliff Bird and Plant Communities in Joshua Tree National Park, California, USA,” *Natural Areas Journal* 17, no. 2 (1997): 110.

<sup>106</sup> *Proposed General Management Plan for Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area*, 13.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

*Interim General Management Plan*, the revised version of the *Proposed GMP* that had taken into account public concerns and became the NCA's new management plan in 1995, added to the commercial-climbing section with direction on how the BLM would issue future commercial climbing permits when one became available. Guest permits would be assigned by drawing, while year-round permit applications would be evaluated based upon the business's accreditation, its position as a local or non-local business, stability, references, history of operation, and provision of services (to the general public or specific clientele).<sup>108</sup>

Meanwhile, the number of climbers at Red Rock continued to increase. A team from the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension distributed surveys to more than 650 individuals in the park over a two-week period in 1997, targeting two groups: rock climbers and general visitors. The survey found that “[f]ewer than 15% of the visitors came from southern Nevada, and 38 (11.5%) rock climbers came from outside the United States...Approximately 86% of rock climbers and 28% of general recreators said that the primary reason they visited southern Nevada was to come to [Red Rock].” The study went on to note that though the BLM does not keep statistics on climbers, the entity “estimates that roughly 10% of all annual [Red Rock] visits are made by rock climbers.”<sup>109</sup>

Red Rock's controversial bolting ban went into place in 1998 following a string of national events. In 1997, the director of Sawtooth Wilderness Area in Idaho developed a

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<sup>108</sup> *Interim General Management Plan for Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area*, 53.

<sup>109</sup> Jay Espey, Jon Longhurst, Jim Lopez, and W. Douglass Shaw, “Rock Climbing Access and the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area,” University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Fact Sheet 98-50, (1997), 3.

management plan that banned pitons, bolts, and slings on all new climbing routes in the area. The director's rationale was that, according to the Wilderness Act, such implements constituted forbidden "permanent improvements." Six months later, the Forest Service made Sawtooth's policy their institutional policy, and a year later added a new restriction—no replacement of existing bolts. Climbers followed the issue closely, but now became severely agitated. The USFS policy would surely be implemented in wilderness areas by other federal land management organizations, including the BLM and NPS, effectively placing some of the most beloved climbs in the nation off limits.

On June 1, 1998, the USFS's ban extended to Mount Charleston, just northwest of Las Vegas. Some climbers reacted with alarm. Climber Michael Clifford espoused his view in the Letters to the Editor section of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* by boldly opening his letter with the declaration, "People are going to die." He bemoaned the fact that the USFS ban would surely be extended to other federal public lands containing wilderness areas. But he posited an interesting question: "Who benefits by having a group essentially in love with the out-of-doors barred from using wilderness in a way which has almost no impact, and which has in the past led to strong, broad based support for wilderness issues?...If the designated wilderness is not for climbing, just what is it for?"<sup>110</sup>

Though the BLM enacted a bolting ban in Red Rock, many climbers ignored it and continued placing permanent hardware as they felt necessary. As its presence was less than ubiquitous, the BLM could do little to catch the erring parties—but it could watch the Internet and guidebooks for new route descriptions. By 2000, it began threatening

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<sup>110</sup> Michael Clifford, "Letter to the Editor," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 21 June 1998, 3D.

climbers placing bolts with prosecution. The BLM confronted both Roxanna Brock and Gary Fike in 2001 for their role in using bolts to craft a route known as Somewhere Over the Rainbow; shortly thereafter, organization officials also took Mark Limage and Chris Burton to task for creating Birdland, a route that has only one bolt. In each case, government officials threatened fines of \$300 per bolt and a loss of guiding licenses if climbers didn't keep bolting in check.<sup>111</sup> To add to the Bureau's firepower, the Clark County Conservation of Public Land and Natural Resources Act finally designated Pine Creek Canyon and La Madre Mountain Wilderness Study Areas—which included much of Red Rock's soaring sandstone cliffs and some of its most popular limestone climbs—as Wilderness Areas in 2002.<sup>112</sup> Ironically, the BLM had cited Pine Creek (later renamed Rainbow) WSA as providing “outstanding opportunities for solitude,” but on weekends, climbers could (and still can) often be seen there waiting in line to ascend some of Red Rock's most popular routes.<sup>113</sup>

Climbing in Red Rock Canyon is likely to be increasingly regulated in the future. The 2005 Record of Decision for the *Interim General Management Plan* called for the BLM to create a wholly separate Climbing Management Plan to provide direction specifically for managing climbers. Meanwhile, the Climbing Liason Council—a coalition of climbers organized as a result of the 1994 *Proposed General Management Plan*—has begun actively working with the Bureau to craft policy that addresses the needs of both parties. Both the Record of Decision and the Council evidence how nature has become

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<sup>111</sup> Handren, *Red Rocks*, 17; Urioste, “Red Rock: Voices in the Desert,” 45.

<sup>112</sup> *Clark County Conservation of Public Land and Natural Resources Act*. Public Law 107-282. 107th Cong., 2d sess., (6 November 2002).

<sup>113</sup> “Pine Creek Wilderness Study Area,” in *Nevada Wilderness Study Area Notebook*, 2.

increasingly politicized—a cultural construction indeed.

While the story of climbing in Red Rock Canyon illustrates how a natural landscape became a cultural one, only a fraction of Red Rock’s visitors ever attempt to scale the park’s sandstone. The majority of visitors come to the area for a leisurely stroll, a weekend picnic, or a multi-mile hike. For most, their time in the park begins at the Visitor Center. Before they explore the area, they park their cars and journey inside to learn more about the place to which they’ve come. Some stop at the information desk to ask questions or get recommendations on where they might see petroglyphs or desert bighorn sheep. Others listen to a brief presentation by a BLM ranger. Still others head straight for the Center’s exhibits. The interpretive messages they receive—whether from a panel of text or trained personnel—help explain the science of the landscape and why such a place is valuable. So, whether visitors realize it or not, they’re key players in an ongoing dialogue about nature and culture.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE NATURE OF INTERPRETATION, THE INTERPRETATION OF NATURE:

#### TELLING STORIES AT RED ROCK

“...[W]hose stories we preserve, what interpretations we present, and our mandate to convey those decisions to millions gives [interpreters] power. The power to determine who and what has value...The power to shape memory. And the power to help determine what is historically meaningful and culturally significant.”<sup>1</sup>

William Yeingst and Lonnie G. Bunch

“The world exists for the education of each man. There is no age, or state of society, or mode of action in history, to which there is not something corresponding in his life.”<sup>2</sup>

Ralph Waldo Emerson

When Sam and Jean Ford moved to Las Vegas in August 1962, they entered an environment like none they had ever known. Jean, a native of Missouri who had also lived in Oklahoma, northeastern Texas, and Hawaii, had grown up with and accustomed to “forests of maple and oak trees and heavy humidity and lots of water and rivers.”<sup>3</sup> She found the arid, open desertscape surrounding Las Vegas to be “really strange...It wasn’t

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<sup>1</sup> William Yeingst and Lonnie G. Bunch, “Curating the Recent Past: The Woolworth Lunch Counter, Greensboro, North Carolina,” in Amy Henderson and Adrienne L. Kaepler, *Exhibiting Dilemmas: Issues of Representation at the Smithsonian* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 153.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Young American,” in *The Complete Prose Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Ward, Lock, & Company, 1891), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ford, *Jean Ford: A Nevada Woman Leads the Way*, 75. Almost immediately after arriving in Las Vegas, Ford became very active in the community. She helped found the Clark County Library and was among the key players that got the Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Red Rock Archaeological Association off to solid starts. Her activism with the League of Women Voters on behalf of Red Rock Canyon in the mid-1960s led Governor Paul Laxalt to appoint her to the State Parks Commission, on which she served from 1967 to 1972. Nevadans elected her to the state legislature in 1972 and to the state senate in 1978. During her time in public office, she championed the Equal Rights Amendment and desegregation of Clark County schools. Following the end of her political career, Ford promoted state tourism and helped establish the Nevada Women’s Archive.

unfriendly, but just was unknown.”<sup>4</sup> Only a few weeks after unpacking and settling in to a small ranch house in Sin City, the Ford family set out to explore its new hometown and its surroundings. The banded cliffs of Red Rock, visible in the distance west of the city, beckoned. Jean recalled,

Red Rock Canyon was a place we had read about and you could see it, and it just looked beautiful. So we took the kids, we went out in the car, and we got to the top of this hill, and we stopped. We got out of the car, and we looked, and we turned around and went home. We really did not know what was there, and so we didn’t feel comfortable exploring.<sup>5</sup>

Thousands visited Red Rock Canyon before the Fords.<sup>6</sup> Though the soaring sandstone escarpment and isolated slot canyons didn’t intimidate veteran desert outdoorsmen, other desert neophytes, knowing little about the area’s foreign flora and fauna and unique geology, feared venturing off alone and uneducated to explore such a stark scene. Perhaps if there had been a welcoming sign, a guided tour, or a small space dedicated to explaining the scientific and human history of the area, visitors might have stayed and become more intimately acquainted Red Rock’s canyons and springs. Indeed, the creation of an interpretive program for RRC has lured millions, probably curious just like the Fords, to explore an area they might otherwise have observed only from a distance.

But what, exactly, is interpretation? Freeman Tilden, a shrewd observer and analyst of tours and museums in America’s national parks, defined interpretation as “[a]n educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Lynn Rogers, “Nevada Badlands Flourish as Great National Play Area,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 January 1940, F1; Lynn Rogers, “Southern Nevada Land of Contrasts,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 February 1949, E7; Lynn Rogers, “Desert Playland Thrills Motorists,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 January 1958, A14; Lynn Rogers, “Historic Region Viewed on Tour,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 February 1958, A17-18.

original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.”<sup>7</sup> Yorke Edwards characterized it as “an information service...a guiding service...an educational service...an entertainment service...a propaganda service...and inspirational service.”<sup>8</sup> And the National Association for Interpretation describes interpretation as “a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource.”<sup>9</sup> In short, interpretation is the presentation of information to individuals visiting a cultural or historical location, but doing so in a manner that engages their interests rather than assaults them with thousands of facts. It encompasses interpersonal interaction such as guided hikes and lectures, and less personal (though nonetheless effective) interaction such as exhibits and audiovisual displays.

Interpretation on federal lands has changed considerably since its beginnings in the West’s oldest national parks around 1900. Though scholars have examined this transformation within the National Park Service, they have devoted comparatively little attention to BLM interpretive efforts.<sup>10</sup> But the BLM’s labors are also significant; unlike the NPS, the agency manages lands that are often not considered “crown jewels,” so it

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<sup>7</sup> Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 4th ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 33.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Grant W. Sharpe, *Interpreting the Environment* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1976), 4.

<sup>9</sup> National Association for Interpretation, <http://www.interpnet.com/> (19 February 2010).

<sup>10</sup> This is likely due to the BLM’s inexperience in interpretation compared to the NPS. Whereas the NPS has been involved in interpretation for more than a century, the BLM didn’t seriously begin interpretive efforts until it had some semblance of a recreational mandate. Though a temporary such mandate came in 1964 with the passage of the Classification and Multiple Use Act, it was not finalized until the passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. See *Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, Public Law 94-579, 94th Cong., 2d sess., (21 October 1976).



arguably works harder to help the public understand why such lands are important. Stephen Weil points out that interpretive efforts are “shaped from [their] very outset by the values, attitudes, and assumptions of those who choose and arrange the objects that [they contain].”<sup>11</sup> Thus, because the interpretive plans, exhibits, and programs at Red Rock Canyon are the products of the individual eras of their creation and of interpreters who chose what stories to tell and how to tell them, they are forms of cultural discourse. Accordingly, they reveal a great deal about American culture and American perceptions of nature. An analysis of the interpretive efforts at Red Rock highlights shifts in the field of public history; chronicles changes in the human relationship with nature; and showcases how practitioners have devised new interpretive strategies in response to changes in politics and technology.

### Interpretation in the National Park Service

Born in 1946 of a marriage of the U.S. Grazing Service and the General Land Office, the BLM had no mandate to manage lands for anything other than grazing, mining, or timber harvesting until the passage of the Classification and Multiple Use Act in 1964. Thus, before that year—in which it also became Red Rock’s primary managing agency—the BLM had no interpretive precedent.<sup>12</sup> So, when the time came to develop interpretive programs, it frequently turned for guidance the National Park Service, which had a rich history not only of interpreting the environment in live programs led by ranger-naturalists but also in designing physical spaces specifically devoted to interpretation. Therefore, to

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<sup>11</sup> Stephen Weil, *Rethinking the Museum* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 60.

<sup>12</sup> I say “primary” because it shared responsibilities of management with the Nevada Division of State Parks.

understand the BLM's interpretive efforts at Red Rock, it is essential to review the history of interpretation in the NPS.

Entrepreneurs seeking to capitalize on the flow of visitors coming to fledgling Yellowstone and Yosemite National Parks in the late 1800s led guided tours to the parks' most impressive features. Soon, each park began to replace this informal interpretation with small displays as well as hikes and lectures led by seasonal park staff whose interpretive abilities varied widely. However, since the Department of the Interior managed parks individually, it wasn't until after the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916 that thought was given to coordinating educational efforts. By 1920, comprehensive interpretive programs began at flagship parks. Ranger-naturalists crafted small museums from each park's store of natural specimens. Such museums varied drastically in size and scope, ranging from wildflower displays (at Rocky Mountain National Park) and small museums housed in tents (at Sequoia National Park) to "information rooms" housing reference libraries, natural history exhibits, and photos (at Grand Canyon National Park) and entire buildings constructed explicitly as museums thanks to private donations and generous grants (at Yosemite National Park).

In 1925, the NPS expanded its interpretive focus to include personal communication with park visitors. Initially, the Service limited interpretation to guided field trips and lectures at large parks such as Yosemite, Yellowstone, Rocky Mountain, and Mount Rainer. To support such efforts, in 1925, it established the Yosemite School of Field Natural History, which trained many interpretive and seasonal staff over the next three decades. Furthermore, the NPS funded a Chief Naturalist, increased the number of seasonal ranger-naturalists, and even hired a handful of permanent naturalists at the larger

parks. That same year, it devoted its national parks conference almost wholly to interpretation.

Interpretation continued to gain a toe-hold in the NPS throughout the Great Depression. Many national parks benefitted from work completed by emergency employment organizations such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, Works Progress Administration, Public Works Administration, and National Youth Association; the labor of the young men put to work in such programs aided in the construction of museums, roads, and campsites. Additionally, in 1935, the NPS established within its ranks a Museum Division and designated two locations (one on the East Coast, another on the West Coast) with staff dedicated to developing museum exhibitions.<sup>13</sup> Thus, by 1945, “interpretation had been institutionalized in the park system.”<sup>14</sup>

The most dramatic changes to interpretation came after World War II. A decade after the war ended, Americans had begun to visit national parks in droves. Ill-prepared to handle the influx of tourists, the NPS received scathing criticism from a number of influential authors and social commentators who proffered a variety of solutions to the problem of overcrowding, including closing the parks altogether.<sup>15</sup> To prepare for the NPS’s fiftieth anniversary and improve the national park system’s ability to better handle the flood of postwar visitors, NPS director Conrad Wirth proposed in the mid 1950s an initiative to upgrade and expand the parks’ physical infrastructure. He dubbed the program Mission 66, and by the time it concluded, it funneled more than \$1 billion into

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<sup>13</sup> C. Frank Brockman, “Park Naturalists and the Evolution of National Park Service Interpretation through World War II,” *Journal of Forest History* 22, no.1 (January 1978): 19-29.

<sup>14</sup> Rothman, *The New Urban Park*, 150.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Bernard De Voto, “Let’s close the national parks,” *Harper’s Magazine* (October 1953): 49-52.

the national parks. Though much of the money went to construction of new roads and the improvement of existing ones, a great deal also went to the creation of a new type of facility—the visitor center.

Visitor centers forever altered interpretation in the national parks. Prior to Mission 66, the NPS separated park museums, comfort stations, and administrative offices in detached, often distant, buildings. Its interpreters considered park museums to be supplemental to the visitor experience, and so with no main structure to capture guests at a park's entrance, many visitors simply roamed about the park, taking a scattershot approach to learning about and visiting main attractions. NPS architects and historians remedied this disjointed approach to visitor orientation and education by borrowing ideas from the newly-created shopping centers of suburbia. Thus, they envisioned and built structures to serve as one-stop shops that served as “control point[s] and...center[s] for arrival, orientation, and park interpretation.”<sup>16</sup> Now, instead of museums and other facilities being ancillary to the visitor experience, they were integral to it. Thus, in the final draft of the Mission 66 plan, NPS planners cited the visitor center as “one of the most pressing needs for each area.”<sup>17</sup> By 1960, more than 50 visitor centers had been constructed in the national parks. Fifteen years later, that number had increased more than five-fold.<sup>18</sup>

Because visitor centers now attracted a sizeable audience and were a cornerstone of

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<sup>16</sup> Carr, *Mission 66*, 144.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Carr, *Mission 66*, 144.

<sup>18</sup> This mirrored the national and international rise in the number of post-war museums. The number of museums escalated dramatically, while the types of museums founded and constructed broadened to include more than spaces devoted solely to art, history, and science. Kenneth Hudson estimates that roughly 75 percent of museums in operation today were not around in 1945. See Kenneth Hudson, “The Museum Refuses to Stand Still,” *Museum International* 50, no. 1 (January-March 1998), 43.

the visitor experience, interpreters altered each center's contents to best suit a wide audience. As the exhibition designers for park museums had previously considered the museums to be "explanatory labels for [the] parks," they often adopted a "narrative approach in exhibit design."<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, they told detailed, chronological tales of events in sequential panels laden with text. But in 1964, NPS Director George B. Harzog ordered an end to this "book on the wall" method and dictated that such narratives be shifted to audiovisual media. Exhibits would be introductory in nature, he asserted, and largely devoted to themes designed to "engage the entering visitor's interest with intrinsically visual materials like artifacts, artwork, and photographs in discrete displays."<sup>20</sup> The NPS interpretation office in Washington, D.C. further proposed to put only the best objects on display, thereby not producing a cluttered, visually overwhelming, clunky exhibit. Too many objects, it argued, "discourages [visitors], it looks like work, it's heavy."<sup>21</sup> To capture visitor interest, visitor centers also used new technologies to "supplement traditional dioramas and displays with more innovative 'hands on' exhibits."<sup>22</sup> Such technologies allowed the NPS to reach more visitors with fewer staff in shorter amounts of time and to have a consistent presentation quality that was impossible to achieve otherwise. By orienting and informing visitors, interpretive centers empowered them to enjoy the portions of the park that suited their interests. Soon,

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<sup>19</sup> Barry Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service: A Historical Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1986), 48.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Memorandum to Regional Director, Southwest Region, Aug. 19, 1964, Southwest Regional Office file K1815, Washington National Records Center. Quoted in Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service*, 49.

<sup>22</sup> Sarah Allaback, *Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2000), 30.

“[v]isitor centers, interpretive walks, audio-visual presentations, roadside exhibits, publications, park museums and collections all were described as coordinated and essential parts of the new national park experience.”<sup>23</sup>

Shifts in NPS interpretation also echoed changes in American culture. In the late 1950s, as notions of ecology became increasingly prominent in the scientific community, NPS ranger-naturalists shifted environmental interpretation from detailing each park’s individual natural resources to explaining how geology and biology in concert affected a park’s ecology and even ecological systems in distant areas. A decade later, the environmental movement had gathered steam and brought to popular attention ways in which human actions affected the environment. Accordingly, NPS interpreters worked to integrate environmental awareness and conservation messages into agency exhibits. The whole-systems thinking that had peppered NPS interpretation in the 1950s now increased, not only in the major parks of the West but also in urban locations. Some individuals within the NPS felt that “[o]nly through an environmental approach to interpretation can an organization like ours, which has both Yosemite and the Statue of Liberty, achieve its purpose of making the park visitor’s experience fully significant.”<sup>24</sup> Interpretation continued to center on scientific explanation, but the NPS increasingly strove to include “resource preservation themes,” offer “energy conservation message[s],” and incorporate “environmental education concepts and techniques.”<sup>25</sup>

Another dramatic post-war change in the NPS was the professionalization of

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<sup>23</sup> Carr, *Mission 66*, 111.

<sup>24</sup> “NPS Interpreters’ Newsletter,” 15 December 1967. Quoted in Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service*, 79.

<sup>25</sup> Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service*, 80.

interpretation. First, the NPS opened “a Service school covering a range of field operations, including interpretation” following the 1953 closing of the Yosemite School of Field Natural History. Around the same time, it developed four publications devoted to instructing interpreters on technique. But perhaps most importantly, in late 1954, the NPS received monies to fund a review of its interpretive efforts. The Service asked writer cum NPS public relations official Freeman Tilden to “get beneath the surface of method and procedure to the underlying principles—to the art and philosophy that should guide efforts to interpret the great scenic and historical heritage of America to her citizens.”<sup>26</sup> What Tilden produced in 1957—a short but monumental work entitled *Interpreting Our Heritage*—describes the philosophy of interpretation and outlines its six tenets.<sup>27</sup> Six years later, the Park Service again proved its dedication to interpretation by opening the new Stephen T. Mather Training Center, a complex devoted to training new interpreters and housing the NPS’s exhibit development team. These schools and professionals devoted to teaching new interpreters and crafting new interpretive mores, combined with the rise of academic programs and professional associations devoted to interpretation, did much to professionalize the field.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in R. Bruce Craig, introduction to *Interpreting Our Heritage*, by Freeman Tilden, 9. Tilden had been a prolific journalist at the *Boston Globe*, *Boston Herald*, *New York Evening Post*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Ladies Home Journal*. He later turned his writing talents to fiction before, in his 70s, accepting a post as an NPS public relations official offered as a result of his long love, yet objective assessments, of the national parks.

<sup>27</sup> Tilden’s work has become a Bible for interpreters throughout the NPS, U.S. Forest Service, BLM, and beyond. It has long been mandatory reading for new NPS and BLM interpreters.

<sup>28</sup> Notably, the Association of Interpretive Naturalists formed in 1954 and the Western Interpreters Association formed in 1965. These organizations merged in 1988 to form the National Association for Interpretation.

## Interpretation at Red Rock Canyon

Karma (K.K.) Miller always knew Red Rock Canyon was special. A resident of Calico Basin, he devoted his spare time to exploring the area, helping others do the same, and even raising vegetables in the sandy soils. (See Figures 8 and 9.) But what captivated Miller most were the archaeological ruins scattered throughout the canyons. He knew the locations of petroglyphs, pictographs, and mescal pits like few others. He even coordinated a dig in the Willow Spring area in the '50s—only the second such project done in Red Rock to that point.<sup>29</sup> So, when the push to protect Red Rock began in the early 1960s, Miller (in his capacity as secretary of the Red Rock Archaeological Association (RRAA)) was in the thick of the action, and was particularly emphatic about encouraging state officials to protect the area's cultural resources. Yet Miller felt



**Figures 9 and 10.** Karma Miller showing off petroglyphs in Red Rock Canyon as well as some of the squashes he grew near his home in Calico Basin.

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<sup>29</sup> The first had been done at Willow Springs in 1939 by Mark Harrington, director of the CCC excavations at Boulder Dam. See *Proposed General Management Plan for Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area and Final Environmental Impact Statement for Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area*, A-102.



protection was not enough; what he really wanted was a museum to serve as “a learning center for Clark County residents and its tourists, [and] the hub for field trips by school children to study geology, anthropology and biology.”<sup>30</sup>

Miller began writing letters to the administrators of the Nevada State Park System (NSPS), encouraging the immediate establishment of an interpretive center at Red Rock.<sup>31</sup> In October 1965, the RRAA presented a 19-page report—complete with a conceptualization of the museum drawn by architect Hugh Taylor—recommending construction of the center to the State Parks Advisory Committee and asking the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to make it “a high priority in the lists of projects under consideration.”<sup>32</sup> (See Figure 10.) NSPS Planning Coordinator Eric Cronkhite subsequently organized the Ad Hoc Committee for the Development of the Red Rock Interpretive Center, which drafted four recommendations designed to ensure the State of Nevada acquired Red Rock as a state park and funded archaeological and interpretive efforts.<sup>33</sup> The Nevada State Park Advisory Commission unanimously approved the recommendations on December 17, 1965 and quickly began a feasibility

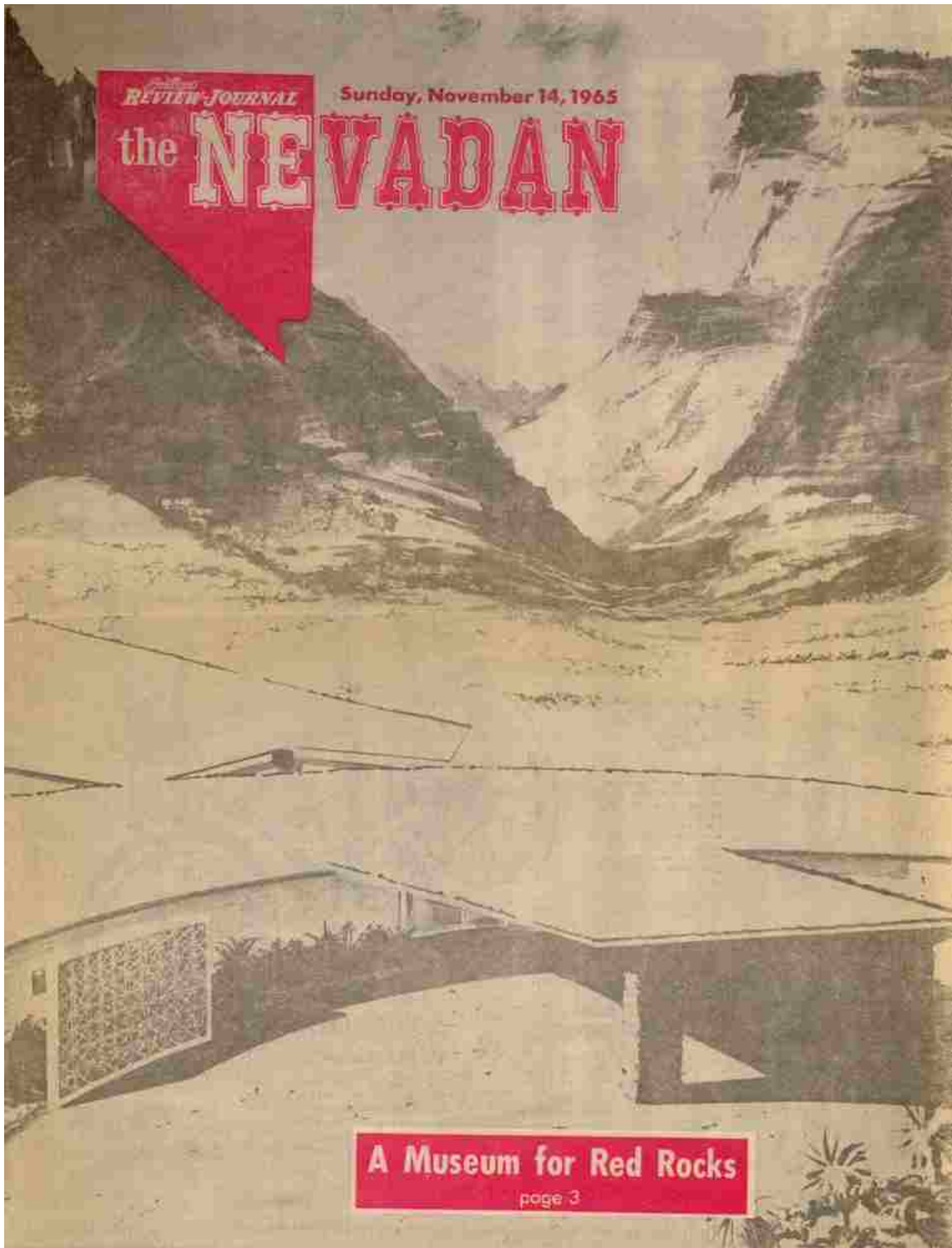
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<sup>30</sup> The idea for a museum is largely attributed to Miller, though Dr. Richard Shutler, Jr. was also instrumental in early plans. See Bill Vincent, “The Treasure of Red Rocks Park,” *The Nevadan*, 3 April 1966, 5; “Red Rocks project proposed,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 21 November 1965, 42. For quote, see Bill Vincent, “Red Rocks Museum Plan,” *The Nevadan*, 14 November 1965, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Nevada State Park System, *Role of the Nevada State Park System in the Development of Interpretive Facilities at the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Complex, Clark County, Nevada*, 6. (Hereinafter, I will refer to this study as *A Feasibility Study on Red Rock Canyon Recreation Complex*.) Jean Ford also wrote letters to state officials supporting the creation of the park, though many of hers were directed to the Legislative Counsel Bureau. See Jean Ford Collection, Box 19, Folder 4.

<sup>32</sup> “Red Rocks project proposed,” 42.

<sup>33</sup> Ad Hoc Committee for the Development of the Red Rock Interpretive Center, “A Report of the Committee for the Development of a Red Rock Interpretive Center” (Las Vegas: n.p., 1965). The creators of this report went so far as to suggest text for each of five main exhibits.



**Figure 10.** Architect Hugh Taylor's conceptualization of the future Red Rock Museum/Visitor Center for the Red Rock Archaeological Association's report to the state. The report began a long push for interpretation at Red Rock Canyon.

study on the NSPS's role in developing interpretive facilities at Red Rock.<sup>34</sup> The study pointed out that "[s]ome of the best examples of interpretive facilities in the nation have been developed and administered by the park service," and specifically urged that the centers at Death Valley, Yosemite, and the Grand Canyon be considered as examples of what should be constructed at Red Rock.<sup>35</sup> In assessing the abilities of other federal agencies to undertake interpretation, the study praised the Forest Service's inchoate interpretive program but noted that the BLM's "recreation staff in the state office believes that in the future, recreation will become a permanent and important function of the Bureau and that interpretation will follow along as a significant segment of the program. The interpretive program is unlikely to develop in the near future."<sup>36</sup>

Despite a strain in BLM-NSPS relations that developed over the BLM's decision to "go it alone" with respect to the development of Red Rock, the NSPS's early insistence on interpretive facilities at the park was not in vain.<sup>37</sup> From the beginning, the BLM planned for such facilities. At the dedication of the Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands on October 29, 1967, the BLM state director for Nevada, Nolan Keil, asserted that "particular attention would be given to the interpretation" of the park.<sup>38</sup> Because Red Rock was the first area to be classified for multiple use under the Classification and Multiple Use Act and the first for which the BLM developed a master plan, citizens and bureaucrats watched closely to see whether the BLM's forays into public recreation

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<sup>34</sup> Nevada State Park System, *A Feasibility Study on Red Rock Canyon Recreation Complex*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>37</sup> For more on this riff, see Box 19, Folder 7, Jean Ford Collection.

<sup>38</sup> "Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands," *Our Public Lands* (Winter 1968), 13.

would soar or flop.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the agency hewed closely to the NPS's formula for recreational and interpretive success. With respect to interpretation, this meant a visitor center would be constructed. Thus, in the 1968 *Recreation Management Plan*, the BLM noted that the proposed center was to be a "keystone in [Red Rock's] information program" and conceived it as "a multi-purpose building with space for a lobby, information desk, toilets, exhibits, small auditorium, administrative offices, and storage"—much akin to the visitor centers of Mission 66.<sup>40</sup>

### The 1969 *Interpretive Plan*

For the Red Rock Visitor Center to become a reality, planners needed a guiding document that specifically detailed its exhibits. So, the BLM's Denver Service Center assigned two staff members to craft Red Rock's first interpretive plan: Lloyd Pierson (an archaeologist) and Norman E. Waagen (a landscape architect).<sup>41</sup> The pair delivered in 1969 with *An Interpretive Plan for Red Rock Canyon*, which called for a central building as well as a variety of outdoor interpretive implements, including roadside stops and a pair of guided trails. Plans for the interpretive center called for a 48x28 (1,344 ft<sup>2</sup>) room

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<sup>39</sup> Evidence of this scrutiny can be seen in the minutes for the Special Meeting of the Nevada State Park Advisory Commission, 29 March 1968, as well as correspondence between NSPS officials in Box 19, Folder 7, Jean Ford Collection.

<sup>40</sup> *A Recreation Management Plan for Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands*, 1-B and 2-B.

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Denver Service Center, *An Interpretive Plan for Red Rock Canyon* (Denver: U.S. Bureau of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 1969), unnumbered pages. Apparently, Waagen and Pierson spent a period of 1968 at Red Rock learning about the area in order to craft their plan. See Short Note Transmittal from Denny Hess to Jean Ford, 25 May 1968 in Box 19, Folder 4, Jean Ford Collection. Additionally, only two interpretive facilities existed at state parks or historic sites prior to 1966 (one at Mormon State Historic State Monument in Genoa and another not yet installed at Fort Churchill Historic State Monument). The Nevada State Museum administered the Lost City Museum. No federal interpretation other than the visitor center at Lehman Caves National Monument existed in the state—not even at Lake Mead National Recreation Area. For more on Lehman Caves, see Orlynn J. Halladay and Var Lynn Peacock, *The Lehman Caves Story* (Baker, Nev.: Lehman Caves Natural History Association, 1972).

with 13 displays and focused on orienting visitors to Red Rock and introducing them to the park's geology, biology, and cultural history.<sup>42</sup> Pierson and Waagen neatly divided displays among these three topics but also stressed how each was part of a larger ecological web of relationships among organisms.<sup>43</sup>

The decision to describe Red Rock's ecology to visitors was not epiphanic, but rather the product of decades of scientific thought and recent popular awareness of environmental issues. Notions of ecology had been floating around the scientific community for years, yet many Americans remained blind to ways in which technology altered nearby and distant environments in the early 1960s.<sup>44</sup> For them, nature was a distant abstraction venerated as "wilderness," not a nearby vacant field or a local stream. For example, many such individuals lauded how earth-moving equipment made possible the clearing of vacant fields for suburban homes but failed to see how the relocation of massive amounts of dirt also contributed to the silting of streams; similarly, they marveled at how chemical fertilizers resulted in higher agricultural yields yet failed to see how runoff contaminated rivers, groundwater, and soil. The publication of works such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Barry Commoner's *The Closing Circle* helped bring environmental awareness and ecological ideas to a popular audience.<sup>45</sup>

An acknowledgment of this popular acceptance of ecology, the 1969 *Plan* is an

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<sup>42</sup> *An Interpretive Plan for Red Rock Canyon*, "Tentative Layout for Interpretive Exhibit Room," unnumbered pages.

<sup>43</sup> Indeed, ecology had been one of the four themes selected for the interpretive program in the 1968 *RMP*. See *A Recreation Management Plan for Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands*, 2-B.

<sup>44</sup> For more on the evolution of ecology in scientific thought, see Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>45</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1962); Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (New York: Knopf, 1971).

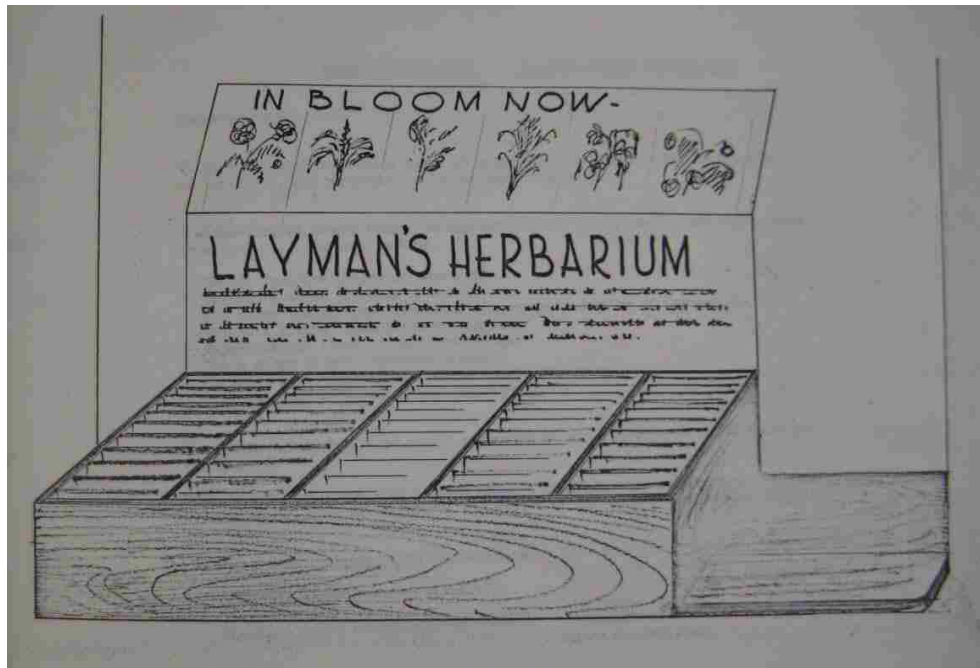
example of the transition in interpretation from a “‘cataloging’ approach” that “stress[ed] names of and facts about a park’s natural features” to an ecological approach that emphasized interrelationships between species.<sup>46</sup> For example, the *Plan*’s proposed flora and fauna displays contained structurally rigid taxonomic nomenclature but also stressed ecology. Take, for example, the “Layman’s Herbarium” exhibit.<sup>47</sup> (See Figure 12.) Here, planners proposed that a variety of pressed flowers, leaves, seeds, and stems be mounted to pieces of cardboard, covered in acetate, and labeled with the plant’s common and binomial name. However, also to be included on each board was a “[b]urb on plant use by humans and animals.” *Plan* developers offered this interpretive example: “GAMBEL OAK (*Quercus gambeli*) A shrubby tree. Its acorns are relished by deer and are an important item in Indian diets. Smaller animals and birds each them also.” Though brief, the label clearly indicates the gambel oak’s role in interactions between flora and fauna, as well as humans.

Other displays similarly explained the interconnections of man and the environment. One, entitled “The Desert Will Supply Those Who Know It”, illustrated how the Southern Paiute had derived sustenance from the Red Rock’s lands in previous centuries. It noted that Native Americans gathered pine nuts, grasshoppers, juniper berries, acorns, agave, and other natural products for food and also grew corn, sunflowers, squash, and beans in the area. Accompanying Paiute clay pots and photos of Paiute basketweavers

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<sup>46</sup> Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service*, 67. The former had roots in the early natural history collections that utilized Linnaean taxonomy (most notably the collections of Charles Willson Peale). See Gary Kulik, “Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present,” in Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

<sup>47</sup> *An Interpretive Plan for Red Rock Canyon*, “Exhibit 8,” unnumbered pages.



**Figure 12.** Drawing of proposed Layman’s Herbarium exhibit, 1969 *Interpretive Plan*.

further demonstrated how natural elements provided for early Americans.<sup>48</sup> Such displays explained the ways in which nature was an important part of Native American culture.

Pierson and Waagen’s emphasis on ecology also served political purposes. Though the BLM had facilitated unchecked industrial development of the lands it managed for years, its recent (albeit temporary) multiple-use mandate and the increasing political power of the environmental movement forced it to adopt a more systems-oriented approach to management. And though the BLM was “poorly prepared—legally and politically—for the kind of systems-oriented administration that environmentalists demanded” and the quick timeframe in which they expected it, interpretation afforded the agency a venue in which it could quickly and publically echo the cultural and scientific shift toward ecology and “attempt to erase or at least weaken the historical identity that

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<sup>48</sup> *An Interpretive Plan for Red Rock Canyon*, “Exhibit 11,” unnumbered pages.

ranchers, miners, loggers, and homesteaders had given to the public lands.”<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, because Red Rock was the BLM’s first foray into recreation management and interpretation, the agency felt a strong need to brand the space as BLM land in interpretive spaces. Indeed, the 1968 *RMP* had noted that one of the interpretive center’s focuses should be public relations—that is, enhancing the image of the park’s managing agency.<sup>50</sup> To do so, the 1969 *Interpretive Plan* devoted one of two proposed audiovisual displays to “tell[ing] the visitor about the BLM in Nevada generally, and specifically in the Las Vegas District.”<sup>51</sup> Although the other proposed audiovisual recording was about two minutes in length, the BLM-related recording required 12 minutes of the visitor’s time and pitched visitors on the necessity and role of the agency in the area. The proposed script was to include “the general facts, figures, and multiple uses of the public domain in Nevada. Then focus on the Las Vegas district, its part in the whole and the types of jobs it does and how it affects the local economy. Emphasis should be on general public uses like recreation and open space...with a plug for the various ways land can be used.”<sup>52</sup> The exhibit also called for the use of Johnny Horizon, a character that served as the BLM’s “symbolic outdoorsman” from 1968 to 1982.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> For first quote, see Skillen, *The Nation’s Largest Landlord*, 51. This attempted shift in identity can be most readily seen in the BLM’s logo. Prior to 1964, it portrayed a surveyor, logger, and miner; however, the logo released in 1964 portrayed a landscape. For second quote, see Skillen, *The Nation’s Largest Landlord*, 89.

<sup>50</sup> *A Recreation Management Plan for Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands*, 2-B.

<sup>51</sup> *An Interpretive Plan for Red Rock Canyon*, “Exhibit 4,” unnumbered pages.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> “Johnny Horizon,” *Our Public Lands* (Summer 1969), 23. The BLM introduced Horizon in 1968 and used him largely throughout the 1970s, particularly for events surrounding the nation’s bicentennial. Horizon’s message was anti-littering; he reminded Americans that “This land is your land” and thus, every American should “keep it clean.” He was one of several such characters—like Smokey Bear and Woodsy Owl—created by agencies of the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to market conservation-



Interpretation in the 1969 *Plan* was clearly more than just an explanation of nature to visitors. It was the outcome of recent popular acceptance of scientific notions of ecology and the BLM's desire to re-brand itself as an organization interested in scientific and recreational land management and not one devoted solely to wholesaling the nation's natural wealth. In choosing to explain Red Rock's natural elements as an ecosystem, the BLM inserted an agency agenda into the interpretive dialogue, thereby infusing a natural landscape with cultural elements—just as climbers, developers, and environmentalists had done, were doing, and would later do.

But the BLM never put the 1969 *Interpretive Plan* into action. The agency certainly intended to do so, as it assigned Bureau architects to draft plans for the center.<sup>54</sup> But the Nevada Open Spaces Council's 1972 call for an environmental impact statement on the 1968 *Recreation Management Plan* brought a halt to any proposed federal development or construction. Following an extensive review, the BLM determined in 1974 that the *RMP* represented a pre-Earth Day mentality with regard to development in parks and other recreational lands. Thus, the agency scrapped the *RMP* and the accompanying *Interpretive Plan*.

#### The 1977 Red Rock Canyon Interpretive Plan and 1982 Visitor Center

The Bureau remained determined to transform Red Rock into a prime recreational area. After the fall of the *RMP* and the conclusion of the EIS, the BLM contracted

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oriented messages to the American public. His caricature and message appeared not only on litter collection bags, but also on posters distributed to schools, on billboards scattered throughout the nation, and even on 18-wheeler trucks. His use waned in the late 1970s, and protection of his use was relinquished by federal law in 1982. For more information on Johnny Horizon, see also Ed Parker, "Meet Johnny Horizon," *Our Public Lands* (Summer 1968), 5; "Hard-Working Johnny Horizon," *Our Public Lands* (Fall 1968), n.p.

<sup>54</sup> Architectural drawings attached to *An Interpretive Plan for Red Rock Canyon* in Box 1, Folder 1, Red Rock Canyon Collection.

California-based architecture firm Royston, Hanamoto, Beck, and Abey to develop a new master plan. The firm delivered *Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Master Plan* in 1976. Though much of the development called for in the *RMP* disappeared from the new *Master Plan*, plans for a visitor center and some outdoor interpretation remained.<sup>55</sup> To address this required interpretation, the BLM asked Barry Howard and Associates, a small museum consulting and design firm, to develop a new interpretive plan. The firm completed the task in early 1977 when it presented *Red Rock Canyon: Interpretive Plan (RRCIP)* to the BLM.<sup>56</sup> The Bureau soon released the interpretive plan to the public, approved architectural plans for the new center, and awarded the construction contract to Blanchard Construction Company.<sup>57</sup>

The Red Rock Visitor Center was a first for the BLM, which heralded it as a marker of change after it received a permanent multiple-use mandate with the passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA).<sup>58</sup> By the time of the center's completion in 1982, it was one of only three BLM facilities that could be considered a visitor or interpretive center and was the only such facility with a full-time staff.<sup>59</sup> The effort to build this modest center reflected the BLM's desire to shed its image as a broker of the government's natural resources and assure the public of its commitment to

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<sup>55</sup> Royston, Hanamoto, Beck, and Abey, *Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Master Plan*, 32.

<sup>56</sup> Barry Howard and Associates, Inc., *Red Rock Canyon: Interpretive Plan*, prepared for the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management by Barry Howard and Associates, Inc. (n.p.: Barry Howard and Associates, Inc., n.d).

<sup>57</sup> "Red Rock Master Plan Completed," BLM Press Release, 15 April 1977, Personal Papers of Howard Booth.

<sup>58</sup> *Federal Land Policy and Management Act*, Public Law 94-579, 94th Cong., 2d sess., (21 October 1976).

<sup>59</sup> Charles H. Callison, "Red Rock Canyon—BLM Showcase Visitor Center," *Public Lands Institute Newsletter* 7, no. 4 (April 1984), 2.

multiple-use management. But the interpretive narratives proposed in the 1977 *RRCIP* and told at the 1982 Visitor Center, like those of the 1969 *Interpretive Plan*, were more than explanations of nature; they reflected BLM responses to political events and changes in museological and American culture.

The *RRCIP* proposed correcting a fault of the 1969 *Plan*. Whereas the '69 *Plan* told visitors how humans had historically played a role in Red Rock's ecosystem, it offered no examples of how they presently remained a part of such ecosystems.<sup>60</sup> The primary exhibit in which the *RRCIP* proposed to address present ecology was the "Tower of Power." After the United States' reliance on foreign oil became painfully clear during the 1973 oil crisis, environmental concerns grew, and the nation and corporations began to investigate alternative energies with renewed vigor.<sup>61</sup> The Carter administration attempted to renew interest in the fossil fuel alternatives by not only making energy one of its top domestic priorities but also installing solar panels on the roof of the White House.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Barry Howard and Associates sought to bring renewable energies to the fore of the visitor experience at Red Rock in the *RRCIP*. Plan authors noted, "[Red Rock] is an excellent laboratory in which energy sources derived from nature can be effectively harnessed and demonstrated." An entire room, dubbed the "Tower of Power," would explain nature's potential as a direct source of energy. (See Figure 13.) Not only would the tower showcase animation and sound produced by photovoltaic cells,

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<sup>60</sup> Royston, Hanamoto, Beck, and Abey, *Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands: Master Plan*, 32 (emphasis added).

<sup>61</sup> Research on alternative energy and technologies had been underway for years but, in the consumer excess of the post-war years, had yet to capture popular attention until the oil crisis. For more on the history of alternative technologies and their creators, see Kirk, *Counterculture Green*.

<sup>62</sup> For more on the decline of solar technologies after the war, see the Chapter 2 of Rome, *Bulldozer in the Countryside*.



**Figure 13.** A sketch of the proposed “Tower of Power” from the 1977 *Red Rock Canyon: Interpretive Plan*.

flywheel energy derived from wind power, and direct and in-direct cooling and heating methods, it would link the idea of solar energy with Red Rock’s plants and wildlife by describing and illustrating “how these energy forms are at work in the *on-going business of life in the resource*.”<sup>63</sup>

However, as Blanchard crews lagged behind schedule and ran over budget, the BLM took a massive chunk out of the exhibits’ budget to compensate for extra construction costs. After contractors completed the structure, there wasn’t enough money to “really do the exhibits right. All there was money for was photos on big foamboard.”<sup>64</sup> So, the BLM scrapped the proposed “Tower of Power.”<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, the “Tower” represented an important shift from the first interpretive plan by offering visitors a way to understand

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<sup>63</sup> Barry Howard and Associates, *Red Rock Canyon: Interpretive Plan*, 12 (emphasis added).

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Chris Miller, 29 January 2010.

<sup>65</sup> Schmitt interview, 8 February 2010.

how they, as consumers of electrical power, served as a link the present ecosystems. Though the exhibit never materialized, it signaled an interpretive transition devoted to explaining Red Rock's past *and* present.

With construction underway, the BLM directed its efforts to finding staff to oversee the park and future Visitor Center. Since its dedication, Red Rock had been managed by the BLM Las Vegas District office, but with the Center on the fast track, the agency knew the park needed its own staff. So, in the late 1970s, the Bureau set aside funding for a park manager and ten park ranger and interpretive specialist positions.<sup>66</sup> In March 1980, the agency hired Rodger Schmitt, formerly a senior ranger and assistant manager at a Corps of Engineers lake in California, to serve as Red Rock's first manager. Schmitt subsequently hired a staff of five, with three devoted specifically to interpretive projects.

Schmitt arrived at Red Rock during a politically volatile time for the park, Nevada, and the West. Only four years earlier, Congress had passed FLPMA.<sup>67</sup> The Carter administration chose to implement FLPMA by enacting a bundle of environmental regulations, an act that strained relations with western states. Many of the West's political leaders responded by organizing the anti-regulatory Sagebrush Rebellion, a collective call for the federal government to return to the states many of the public lands it managed. Nevada politicians, representing a state in which the federal government held more than

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<sup>66</sup> Rodger Schmitt notes that though these ten positions were authorized, he was never allowed to fill all of them. Schmitt interview, 8 February 2010.

<sup>67</sup> The 1964 Classification and Multiple Use Act had given the agency a temporary multiple-use mandate, but had expired in 1970. See *Classification and Multiple Use Act*, Public Law 88-607, 88th Cong., 2d sess., (19 September 1964).

85 percent of the land, led the charge.<sup>68</sup> Among the lands proposed for return to state control was Red Rock Canyon.<sup>69</sup> Schmitt spent a great deal of time during his tenure as Red Rock's manager helping to reiterate the BLM's commitment to properly managing Red Rock Canyon. Interpretation played a key role in those efforts.

Because construction of the Visitor Center was incomplete when interpretive personnel came on board and because the BLM needed to establish a presence almost immediately, the new staff began planning live interpretative programs. At this juncture, the BLM remained very inexperienced with interpretation. It had no guidelines for interpretation, lacked an interpretative division at its national office, and offered no interpretive training. Schmitt remembered, "Interpretation was so rare in the BLM that for us to develop an interpretive program in the early 1980s was like pushing a ball uphill. There was no BLM precedent for the project, so we built the Red Rock interpretive program from our individual experiences in jobs with other agencies."<sup>70</sup>

Those experiences included stints as interpreters at Corps of Engineers sites and National Park Service locations across the western United States. Armed with this knowledge, the small staff began to create guided hikes designed not only to introduce the public to Red Rock Canyon and its biological, geological, and archaeological aspects but also to introduce the BLM as Red Rock's managing agency—just as the 1969 *Plan* had

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<sup>68</sup> For more on the Sagebrush Rebellion, see Chapter 5 of Skillen, *The Nation's Largest Landlord* and R. McGreggor Cawley, *Federal Land, Western Anger: The Sagebrush Rebellion and Environmental Politics* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993).

<sup>69</sup> Nevada Senator Alan Bible began this charge in late 1972, and it continued well into the 1980s. See, for example, "Bible spearheads bill to permit purchasing," clipping in Box 19, Folder 12, Jean Ford Collection; "Scenic Red Rock haunts Vegans, government men," clipping in Box 19, Folder 12, Jean Ford Collection; "Legislator seeks 'Red Rock state park'," clipping in Box 19, Folder 12, Jean Ford Collection.

<sup>70</sup> Schmitt interview, 8 February 2010.

proposed. Staff “not only wanted the public to know about and enjoy Red Rock Canyon, but...also wanted them to know that the BLM managed it.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, “attitude improvement” with regard to the Bureau had been among the *RRCIP*’s top priorities.<sup>72</sup> Branding the land as being federally managed—by placing the BLM logo on all brochures and having staff wear BLM regalia—not only helped squelch the idea of Red Rock being transferred to state control but made small steps toward changing the perception of the BLM and slowly decreasing vandalism.

To help get the interpretive program off the ground, Joel Mur, Red Rock’s first interpretive specialist, gave his newly-hired ranger-naturalists free reign to develop programs that explained Red Rock’s unique features and history. The team largely stuck to resource-based interpretation.<sup>73</sup> By April 1981, rangers had begun hosting hikes and geology walks in popular areas such as Sandstone Quarry, Pine Creek, Calico Hills, and Willow Spring.<sup>74</sup> Soon, they created topical outings such as “wildflower walks” and “history hikes,” led groups on lunchtime hikes, bird walks, and “moon walks,” and offered fall plant tours to “explore the large variety of desert plants.”<sup>75</sup> They publicized

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<sup>71</sup> Mur interview, 25 January 2010.

<sup>72</sup> Barry Howard and Associates, *Red Rock Canyon: Interpretive Plan*, 5.

<sup>73</sup> By resource-based interpretation, I mean they conducted interpretation largely devoted to explaining Red Rock’s singular elements. There was little connection to the fact that Red Rock was part of the Mojave Desert, as would be seen in later interpretation.

<sup>74</sup> “Red Rock hikes slated,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 12 April 1981, 25; “Ranger naturalists offer varied hiking programs,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 8 July 1981; “Leisure Calendar,” *The Nevadan*, 19 July 1981; “Places to go,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 24 April 1981, 2B; “BLM rangers to begin nature events for public,” *Henderson and Boulder City News*, 2 April 1981.

<sup>75</sup> “Outdoors Calendar,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 15 April 1982, 15A; “BLM to lead historical hike of Sandstone Quarry area,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 11 April 1982, 3D; “Outdoors Calendar,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 11 March 1982, 2B; “Outdoors Calendar,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 8 April 1982; “Red Rock Canyon’s a cool place to be,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 27 May 1982, 2A; “Outdoors Calendar,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 28 October 1982, 48; “BLM posts fall activities at Red Rock Canyon,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 21 October 1982. These activities continued for several years; see also Margo Bartlett Pesek, “Winter busy season in Red Rock,” *Las Vegas*

the tours in local events listings in both the *Las Vegas Sun* and the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. Local participation was instant, yet inconsistent. Because Red Rock had not yet developed a city- or region-wide reputation as a recreation spot, BLM interpreters often were unable to estimate how many people to expect at guided hikes. The numbers fluctuated wildly; some walks had no participants, others only a handful, and still others had dozens or even hundreds.<sup>76</sup>

Participation in live interpretive events increased steadily over the next few years. The BLM began its immensely popular and long-running “Star Trek” program, which featured guided night-time sky-viewing expeditions, in 1982.<sup>77</sup> Programs expanded to include fossil hunting, bird watching, rock scrambling, and desert survival.<sup>78</sup> In 1986, when Halley’s Comet approached Earth, the BLM sponsored two comet watches, which attracted a total of 1,700 visitors.<sup>79</sup> Red Rock rangers also devised a slew of programs just for children (notably teaching “indoor projects which will deal with the relationship between man and animals”), including story-telling sessions, puppet shows, and short hikes.<sup>80</sup>

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*Review-Journal*, 3 December 1985, F4; “Variety of activities offered for nature lovers,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 24 January 1986.

<sup>76</sup> Mur interview, 25 January 2010.

<sup>77</sup> “Star Trek beams up from Red Rock Canyon,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 8 July 1982; Tobin, “Red Rock Canyon Star Trek program proves a shining desert recreation,” 15.

<sup>78</sup> Jim Coleman, “Fossil Hunt: The original LV oldtimers,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 4 February 1982, 1A, 5A; “Various Red Rock hikes set,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 23 April 1983; “Night hikes and desert survival,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 10 July 1983, Metro 15; “BLM offers rock scrambling trips,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 7 November 1987.

<sup>79</sup> Sergio Lalli, “Star-struck Vegans see comet,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 8 December 1985; “1,200 attend comet watch,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 18 March 1986; Susan Condon, “Red Rock Canyon a great escape,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 4 April 1986, 1D, 16D; see also “Night of star watching in Red Rock Canyon area,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 26 December 1985.

<sup>80</sup> “Variety of activities offered for nature lovers”; Pesek, “Winter busy season in Red Rock.”



As the live interpretive programs gathered steam, the Red Rock Visitor Center opened on May 22, 1982 to much self-congratulation from the BLM, accolades from outside organizations, and cheers from the Las Vegas community.<sup>81</sup> In its first fiscal year, the center welcomed 20,234 guests; the following year, visits more than doubled to 44,089, and the two subsequent years, visitation increased 18 and 13 percent, respectively.<sup>82</sup> Aside from the Tower of Power, most of the exhibits suggested in the *RRCIP* survived the transition from page to reality. Displays detailed Red Rock's exceptional geologic features, showcased its most notable flora and fauna, and explained the reasons Native Americans and westward travelers chose to stop in the area.

The delivery of Red Rock's story in the Visitor Center illustrated as much about American culture as the content. In designing the Center, Barry Howard and Associates had aimed to bring the outdoors in. To do so, the company crafted plans for an entry area that "provide[d] a reduction of light level" and "screen[ed] the view and reduce[d] the scale of the visitor's environment."<sup>83</sup> Inside, designers aimed to "recreate the look and feeling of a dry desert wash with occasional groups of desert flora punctuating the landscape."<sup>84</sup> In several locations, this visual reproduction was an exhibit of itself; for example, one section of faux "rock" helped visitors understand Red Rock's prominent geological features and their origins. But why would exhibit designers re-create the natural elements of Red Rock when actual sandstone and desert fauna existed only a short

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<sup>81</sup> Oddly enough, the Red Rock Canyon Visitor Center opened on the day of this thesis author's birth.

<sup>82</sup> Memorandum to RRCRL Manager from Supervisory Interpretive Specialist, RRCRL, 21 October 1982, Box 1, Folder 4, Red Rock Collection.

<sup>83</sup> Barry Howard and Associates, *Red Rock Canyon: Interpretive Plan*, 15.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

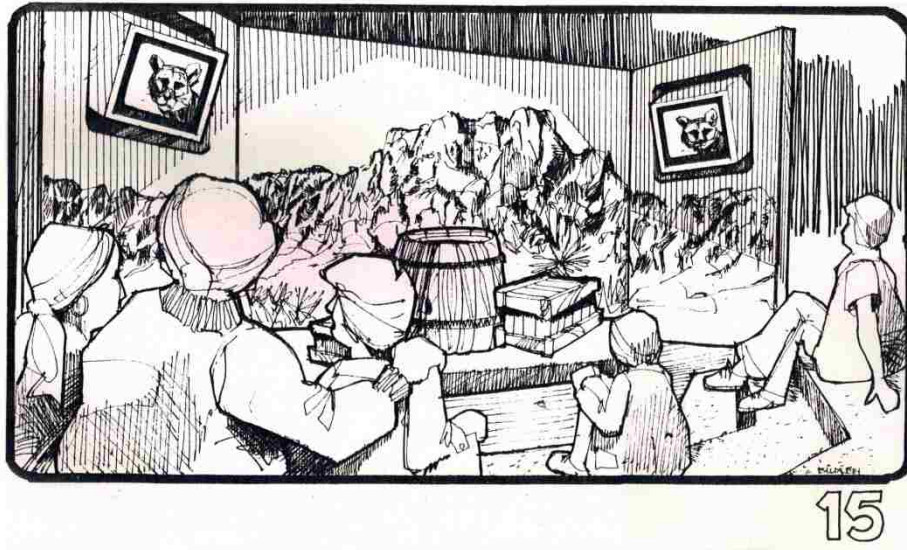
distance beyond the Center's walls? The re-creation was the most recent in a long line of instances in which Americans separated the human (artificial) world from the non-human (natural) one. The Visitor Center, with its carpeted floors, fluorescent lighting, and air conditioning was a distinctly human space. The re-creation of the outdoors posited that nature was a Place Apart, wholly separate from the everyday lives of visitors. By offering guests this mediated encounter with nature, the Visitor Center therefore said less about sandstone and desert bighorns than about American culture and its reverence for distant stands of "wilderness."<sup>85</sup>

For the most part, the re-creations of nature served as proscenia against which small arrangements of objects described biologic and historic human life in Red Rock Canyon. This use of objects gave the 1982 Visitor Center a museum-like feel.<sup>86</sup> One such exhibit, entitled "Passing Through," described the various groups that had used Red Rock as a waypoint on their journeys, including travelers on the Mormon and Old Spanish Trails, as well as Native Americans. To tell the story, the exhibit relied on large photos mounted on foamboard; objects such as a tattered hat, an early copy of the *Book of Mormon*, a saddle, a sword and scabbard, and a pair of pistols provided visual support. A small text panel in front of the exhibit offered information on past use of the Red Rock area, and hand-held wands that played an audio script wove the exhibit into a larger narrative about human history in Red Rock. An exhibit specifically devoted to Native Americans featured spear points, a variety of woven baskets, and a stone mortar and

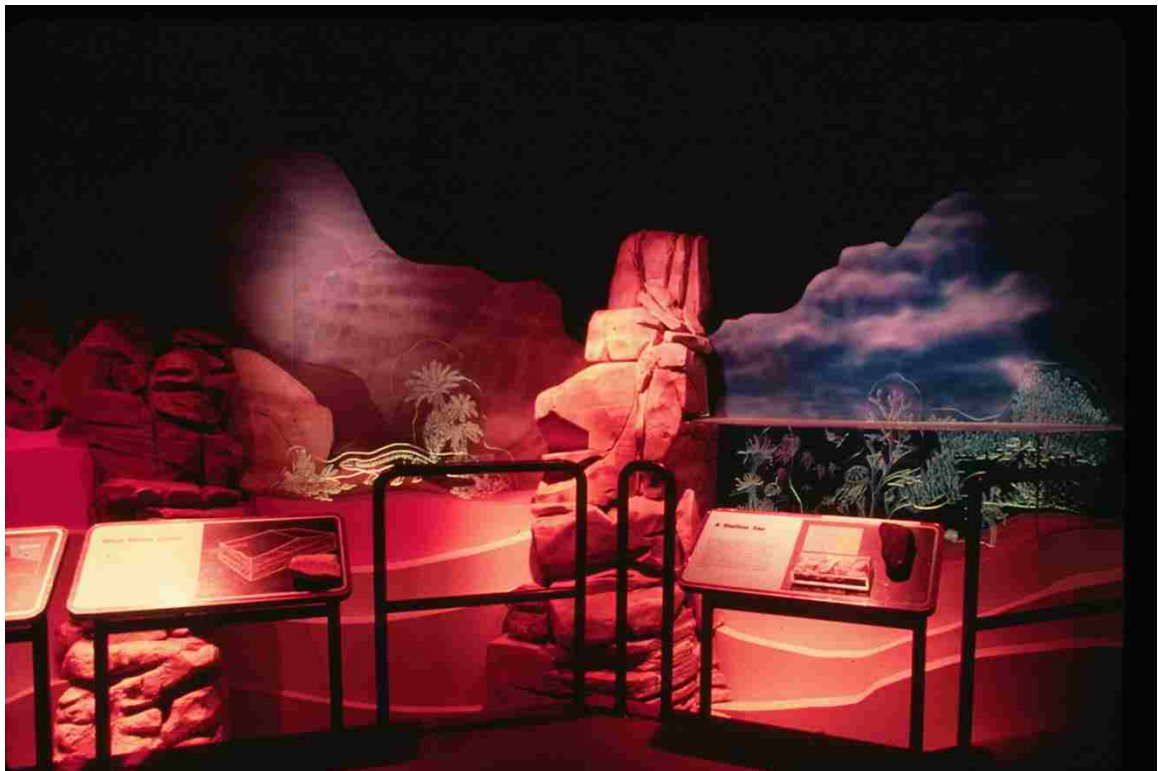
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<sup>85</sup> The notion of nature as a Place Apart is deftly explored and explained in Jenny Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

<sup>86</sup> I say "museum-like" largely because though the Visitor Center featured exhibits with various objects, the BLM did not actively collect objects for display and did not have museological staff.



**Figure 14.** Sketch of the interior of the proposed Visitor Center, 1977 *Red Rock Canyon: Interpretive Plan*. Notice the faux rock background.



**Figure 15.** Exhibits explaining geology of Red Rock in the original Visitor Center. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

pestle used to grind nuts and seeds. It, too, featured an assortment of mounted photos and a brief text panel. No object had an associated label, but instead each was a secondary element to audio interpretation delivered via the hand-held listening devices.<sup>87</sup>

Even in exhibits that might have been used to engage visitors in discussions of the present human place in Red Rock, the BLM presented nature as a remote construct instead of an actuality just beyond the building's walls. The Center's display devoted to rock climbing was a prime example. Red Rock staff had gathered several climbing-related items, including a pitch of rope, an assortment of carabiners, climbing shoes, a harness, and several wired Hexcentrics and arranged them near climbing- and camping-related items. As previously noted, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Red Rock climbing community had been engaged in a heated debate about the proper place of humans and technology in the sport of climbing. Such discussion might have taken up the mantle put forward by the ill-fated "Tower of Power" exhibit and provided fodder for examination of the ways in which contemporary individuals were, like earlier Native Americans, part of Red Rock's ecosystem. But instead, it simply posited that climbing was a recreational pursuit available to visitors.

With the bulk of interpreting having taken place inside the Center, little interpretation existed outside.<sup>88</sup> Upon exiting the interpretive display room, guests had the option of leaving the building, exploring "a confined area of desert floor" populated with native

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<sup>87</sup> These exhibit descriptions are crafted from BLM photos of the Red Rock Visitor Center. Copies of these photos are in the author's possession. Details of exhibits were confirmed in Miller interview, 29 January 2010.

<sup>88</sup> That is, until the mid-1990s, with the introduction of the desert tortoise habitat. Miller interview, 29 January 2010.

plants, and following a short, self-guided interpretive trail comprised of signs.<sup>89</sup>

Interpretation along the trail consisted of small signs detailing desert flora; the plants were merely objects in the out-of-doors. The distinct indoor and outdoor zones of interpretation further represent the notion of nature as a Place Apart. Inside the Visitor Center, nature a series of abstractions—faux rock, a faux waterfall, or outlines of plants etched into glass. Outdoors, “real” nature could be had in the form of plants in an enclosed, maintained perimeter. Though some exhibits in the Center described natural elements and detailed ways in which man was a part of nature, the story of Red Rock remained hampered by the Center’s own walls.

Updating the Visitor Center exhibits on a significant scale proved difficult due to a lack of funds. Because Red Rock did not have a line in the federal budget until it became a national conservation area in 1990, the amount of funding it received was never certain from year to year and could change at the whim of Reagan-era legislators and bureaucrats. Furthermore, interpretation still did not rank high on the BLM’s priority list in the 1980s. The agency, though it had had a multiple-use mandate since 1976, still did not place interpretation as its primary concern and did not even assign an individual to spearhead agency-wide interpretive efforts until 1993.<sup>90</sup> Soliciting the BLM national office and the Department of the Interior for funds to improve interpretive exhibits and programs was often unsuccessful.<sup>91</sup> With little financial assistance coming from the

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<sup>89</sup> This was the only outdoor interpretation that existed until 1983 or 1984, when the interpretive team cobbled funds together for small signs placed at strategic trailheads at locations such as Calico I and II, White Rock, and Willow Springs. No one remembers the exact date these signs were added. Mur interview, 25 January 2010; Schmitt interview, 8 February 2010; Miller interview, 29 January 2010.

<sup>90</sup> Red Rock BLM staff thus attended NPS interpretive training and NAI workshops. Miller interview, 29 January 2010.

<sup>91</sup> Miller interview, 29 January 2010; Interview with Elsie Sellars, 2 March 2010.

Bureau, and limited staff to execute projects, BLM's Red Rock interpreters had to piecemeal exhibit updates together as funds and time allowed throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>92</sup>

Red Rock's vibrant environmental education program provided a transition between the 1982 Visitor Center's approach of interpreting nature as a Place Apart and the approach of its successor (to be described later). Environmental education (EE) is a form of interpretation most often directed at youth and schoolteachers. It not only aims to provide factual information about natural functions but about the ways in which human actions impact the environment.<sup>93</sup> Environmental educators trace EE's roots back to the early twentieth century. EE programs gained momentum following the publication of *Silent Spring*, *The Population Bomb*, and *Small is Beautiful*, and earned a permanent place in the curricula of many schools following the 1979 nuclear accident at Three Mile Island, the 1986 failure of a nuclear power plant at Chernobyl, the publicity given to the Long Island garbage barge named *Mobro*, and the 1989 running aground of the *Exxon Valdez* in Alaska.<sup>94</sup> As these environmental incidents grabbed international headlines, educators around the nation and the world mobilized to discuss how they might integrate natural sciences into curricula in more interdisciplinary ways and foster conversations among children about the proper place of man on Earth. For its part, the BLM made its first attempt at developing an environmental education curriculum in the early 1970s,

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<sup>92</sup> What money the BLM did receive to update exhibits came from its two cooperating associations, the Friends of Red Rock Canyon and the Red Rock Canyon Interpretive Association.

<sup>93</sup> The BLM considered environmental education, along with natural resource education projects such as the Junior Ranger program, to be part of the interpretive program. See *Interim General Management Plan*, 58.

<sup>94</sup> Joy Palmer and Philip Neal, eds., *The Handbook of Environmental Education* (London: Routledge, 1994), 11.

though it was directed at Pennsylvania public schools.<sup>95</sup>

Red Rock's environmental education program had gotten off to a strong start in the early 1980s, but hit its stride in the early and mid 1990s and helped the interpretive program transition into the twenty-first century.<sup>96</sup> Whereas updating interpretive exhibits in the Visitor Center required significant amounts of time and money (neither of which were often available), Red Rock interpretive staff could often secure grants or supplemental funds for environmental education programs from local and regional government agencies (such as the Clark County School District, the Nevada Department of Wildlife, and the Fish and Wildlife Service). Additionally, the rise of national environmental education programs such as Project WILD afforded BLM interpreters access to pre-developed curriculum and materials that could be tailored to the Red Rock's resources. For example, in 1991, Red Rock NCA became a participant in Project WET (Water Education for Teachers). Through this University of Nevada Cooperative Extension program, teachers came to Red Rock for workshops that presented different ways to teach students about the science of water (its physical and chemical composition, the water cycle, the ways in which water is essential to biological life, etc.). But Project WET also stretched disciplinary boundaries by devising ways for educators to teach how water resources existed within social constructs and how water was managed.<sup>97</sup> For

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<sup>95</sup> On the national level, the BLM developed an environmental education curriculum in 1971. See U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *All Around You: An Environmental Study Guide* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972). On the local level, the BLM began teacher environmental education programs in 1982.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example BLM News Release, "The Desert: A Living Classroom," April 1982 in Box 1, Folder 14, Red Rock Canyon Collection; "Red Rock's a big classroom," *Las Vegas Sun*, 11 March 1982, 12B; and contents of Box 1, Folders 7 and 14, Red Rock Canyon Collection.

<sup>97</sup> *Correlation of Project WET Curriculum and Activity Guide with Nevada State Standards* (Carson City, Nev.: Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, 2007).

hands-on instruction, teachers went into the field at locations such as Lost Creek, where Red Rock interpreters demonstrated activities teachers could use both in the classroom and on-site to hammer concepts home to students.<sup>98</sup> Such activities moved learning beyond the life sciences and helped facilitate broader discussions in schools about how each individual's water use affected environments such as Red Rock. Thus, educational and interpretative efforts such as Project WET moved beyond being resource-based; they considered Red Rock in the larger context of regional ecosystems. Furthermore, because environmental education programs such as Project WET were often field-based and experiential, they helped break down (though not completely) the idea of nature as a Place Apart that was presented in the Visitor Center.

A similar example of the shift from resource-based interpretation came with the creation of *Mojave Desert Discovery*, an activity guide for schoolteachers.<sup>99</sup> While technical literature on deserts existed, teachers had almost no educational resources for helping students understand the Mojave.<sup>100</sup> So, supported by grants from the National Park Service and the National Park Foundation, interpreters from Mojave Desert Preserve, Death Valley National Park, Joshua Tree National Park, Lake Mead National Recreation Area, and Red Rock NCA authored a 50-page manual that offered succinct explanations of the elements of desert ecosystems and, specifically, the Mojave Desert. Instead of explaining each park's singular features, the guide focused on the elements, opportunities, and concerns the parks had in common due to their location within the

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<sup>98</sup> Sellars interview, 2 March 2010. See also, "Children's Discovery Trail Guide: Lost Creek" in Box 1, Folder 8, Red Rock Canyon Collection.

<sup>99</sup> *Mojave Desert Discovery: An Educator's Guide to the Cultural and Natural History of Death Valley National Park, Mojave National Preserve, Joshua Tree National Park, Lake Mead National Recreation Area, and Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area* (n.p.: n.p, 1994; n.p.: n.p, 2004), vi.

<sup>100</sup> Sellars interview, 2 March 2010.



Mojave Desert. Rather than simply doling out information, authors used the guide as an opportunity to bolster appreciation for deserts and encourage students to discuss their roles in and impact on the Mojave's ecosystem. By encouraging educators to use *Mojave Desert Discovery*, Red Rock interpreters not only relayed information from Visitor Center exhibits to students in classrooms but also facilitated interpretation that, though it explained natural elements of Red Rock, also explained how the park was part of a larger environment.

In 1994, an opportunity arose at Red Rock to mesh environmental education and interpretation. Following the movement of the desert tortoise's conservation status to "threatened" in 1990, the federal government required corporations whose construction projects damaged tortoise habitats to mitigate the loss financially. Some companies financed the purchase of other lands to atone for their damage to tortoise homes, but when Kerr-McGee routed a natural gas pipeline through southern Nevada to its Henderson-based plant in the early 1990s, it chose to fund a tortoise conservation exhibit instead. The result was three mobile carts that not only offered information on the desert tortoise's diet, reproduction, habitat, and predators but also detailed how humans and urban growth threatened the tortoise's existence. Though the exhibit carts were mobile and were occasionally transported to different locations (schools, public areas) to reach as many people as possible, they mostly resided at Red Rock for more than a decade. They were the first new interpretive exhibits to open at the Visitor Center since 1982.<sup>101</sup> Additionally, funds arrived in 1995 for the creation of a desert tortoise habitat at the rear of the Visitor Center. As part of a collaborative environmental education effort, the Clark

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<sup>101</sup> Sellars interview, 2 March 2010; Miller interview, 29 January 2010.

County Public Information and Education (PIE) Committee decided to make a desert tortoise the spokes-animal for the Clark County Desert Conservation Program. Though the county crafted a cartoon image of a tortoise and named it Mojave Max, the committee felt that a “real” Mojave Max should live in a place where the public could visit him often and be reminded of the pro-conservation message he represented. Committee members selected Red Rock as Max’s home, and together with the Master Gardeners Club and a tortoise conservation group, Red Rock BLM interpreters supervised the construction of a tortoise habitat and interpretive signs at the rear of the Visitor Center.<sup>102</sup> The desert tortoise exhibits represented a new phase in interpretation at Red Rock—one that moved interpretative exhibits outdoors to allow visitors to examine nature more directly and one that simultaneously sought to empower visitors to engage in discussions about environmental issues.

#### Post-2000 Interpretation and the 2010 Visitor Center

Though much of Red Rock’s programming and many of its exhibits had undergone subtle shifts during their second decade of existence, the new millennium ushered in a period of significant change. The westward expansion of Las Vegas, dramatic increase in tourism to the Strip, and surge in recreational tourists flocking to the canyons to climb, hike, and bike combined to push the park’s annual number of visitors past one million in the late 1990s.<sup>103</sup> This rising number of visitors strained the park’s physical resources and personnel. The original Visitor Center had been designed to comfortably accommodate

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<sup>102</sup> Sellars interview, 2 March 2010.

<sup>103</sup> Rogers, “Happy birthday, dear Red Rock,” 5B.

projected visitor loads of 75 to 100 people per hour.<sup>104</sup> But by 2000, Red Rock received an average of 1.1 million visitors per year, which meant the Visitor Center routinely hosted 300 visitors per hour and was inundated with large school groups and bus tours more frequently. With three times as many people visiting Red Rock in 2000 as in 1982, the lack of space at the Center quickly became a problem. To accommodate this increased visitor load, the BLM had a staff of five full-time interpreters—only a 25 percent increase in staff from the center’s initial opening.<sup>105</sup>

The BLM knew it needed a new Visitor Center—and not just a bigger center, but one that responded to the needs of a new audience. As opposed to their 1982 counterparts, post-2000 visitors inhabited an intensely visual world in which they had grown accustomed to instant information (available via television, the Internet, and even cellular phones) and entertainment-based enterprises (such as Major League Baseball and even Starbucks). Across the U.S., museums, historic sites, and national parks grappled with how to design spaces that fit into a new generation’s lifestyles, captured their attention, and blended education and entertainment.<sup>106</sup> So, when the BLM reviewed the exhibits in the Red Rock Visitor Center in 2000 it was no surprise that it noted, “[Exhibits] show wear and tear, are thematically inconsistent...and [s]pace is poorly utilized.”<sup>107</sup> Perhaps

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<sup>104</sup> Barry Howard and Associates, *Red Rock Canyon: Interpretive Plan*, 3.

<sup>105</sup> Thus, increasingly over the years, many interpretive duties fell to RRCIA employees and FORRC volunteers. By 1998, RRCIA folks gave 187 formal programs, 144 informal talks—all in all, interacting with 5,455 people, up 28 percent from 1997. See *Proposed General Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement for Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area*, 63.

<sup>106</sup> See, for example, Leah Arroyo, “The George We Forgot: History and Entertainment at the New Mount Vernon,” *Museum News* (September/October 2007), 46-53 and Peter Samis, “Visual Velcro: Hooking the Visitor,” *Museum News* (November/December 2007), 57-70.

<sup>107</sup> *Proposed General Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement for Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area*, A-150, 156.

more importantly, it remarked that “[i]nterpretive messages are dated...and [exhibits] are in need of major rehab work or total replacement.”<sup>108</sup> Though the idea had been bandied about since 1996, serious talk of creating a new Visitor Center began in 2000, and the Red Rock Canyon Interpretive Association (RRCIA) took the lead on the project.<sup>109</sup> The association had come a long way since its 1988 inception; it had become a significant resource for the BLM at Red Rock, contributing not only thousands of hours of volunteer and interpretive services annually, but also infusing millions of dollars into the park. Much of the money came from the organization’s contract as the collector of park entrance fees. But other enterprises added to the organization’s kitty, including the gift store.<sup>110</sup> Though RRCIA contributed some monies to the development of a new Visitor Center, the project received its largest boost thanks to a \$23 million grant from the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act funds.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., A-156, 150. Then-RRCIA Executive Director Jackson Ramsey made similar comments in 2006, observing the displays that dated to the Center’s inception and noting “the ‘80s is not what cuts it today.” See Lawrence Mower, “Ancient area, new exhibits,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 8 March 2006, 1B. The RRCIA is a cooperating association formed in 1989 whose mission is to “enhance the recreational, educational, and interpretive programs of the Bureau of Land Management, and other governmental agencies, by providing materials and services to the public which promote an understanding and appreciation of the natural history, cultural history, and sciences of Southern Nevada and specifically, Red Rock Canyon.” RRCIA was the BLM’s second experience with cooperating associations. The first had been in 1980 with when the BLM Moab District signed an agreement with Canyonlands Natural History Association. See U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, H-8362-1 “Working with Cooperating Associations” (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 2003), II-1. Additionally, there is disagreement over when the BLM signed with SNCHA. The national office says the agreement began in 1982, while employees at Red Rock say it was 1983 or 1984.

<sup>109</sup> See *Proposed General Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement for Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area* for the 1996 study referenced here. Elsie Sellars also noted that a team from the BLM’s Denver office came on a “scoping” visit in the mid-1990s and interviewed Red Rock employees about the possibility of building a new center and crafting new exhibits. Sellars interview, 2 March 2010.

<sup>110</sup> For example, the gift store earned more than \$1 million in 2009. Interview with Athena Sparks, 12 January 2010.

<sup>111</sup> The act, passed in 1998, allows the BLM to sell tracts of federal land surrounding the Las Vegas Valley and deposit 85 percent of the proceedings into a fund available conservation initiatives, capital improvements, acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands, and improvement of parks, trails, and natural

But a new interpretive strategy demanded that Red Rock’s purveyors of interpretation (the BLM, RRCIA, and Friends of Red Rock Canyon (FORRC)) critically rethink the messages being presented to the public. What stories would they tell about Red Rock, and how would they tell them?<sup>112</sup> The answers they crafted reflected a recent model of museum and museum-like institutions in which workers and leaders envisioned “a transformed and redirected institution that can, through its public-service orientation... improve the quality of individual human lives and...enhance the well being of human communities.”<sup>113</sup> This new model acknowledged that visitors were partners in the museum enterprise. Whereas two decades ago museums and museum-like institutions offered solely information, they now offered information, education, and empowerment. The post-2000 interpretive exhibits and tours at Red Rock reflected this shift in emphasis from museum-like institutions being “about something” to being “for someone.”<sup>114</sup> Indeed, the post-2000 interpretation at Red Rock offered individuals chances at self-expression and self-recognition. Such interpretive strategies not only empowered visitors to positively alter their own lives but, in giving them an identity tied to place, also served as an entrée to negotiations about the future of Red Rock. In fact, institutions such as the new Red Rock Visitor Center are reflective of new types of public history institutions whose end result is measured not in the number of artifacts amassed but instead in terms of impact and results.

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areas. See *Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act*, Public Law 105-263, 105th Cong., 2d sess., (19 October 1998).

<sup>112</sup> FORRC was formed in 1983 to aid the understaffed Red Rock BLM office in manning the Visitor Center. Along with RRCIA, it provided tours and guided hikes to Red Rock visitors.

<sup>113</sup> Weil, *Making Museums Matter*, 29.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

Since a new Visitor Center would take years to plan and build, the BLM, FORRC, and RRCIA began focusing in the early 2000s on improving their live interpretive programming, which could be altered quickly and, in many cases, cheaply. The overarching goal became not only to offer information but to offer *experiences* that encouraged a sense of connection with place, or what philosopher Edward S. Casey calls place memory (which he defines as the “stabilizing persistence of place as a container of experiences.”)<sup>115</sup> Such memory, notes Dolores Hayden, “is the key to the power of historic places to help citizens define their public pasts: places trigger memories for insiders, who have shared a common past, and at the same time places often can represent shared pasts to outsiders who might be interested in knowing about them in the present.”<sup>116</sup>

Earlier live interpretive programming at Red Rock focused on the topics of geological, biological, and human history, but after the hiring of key new staff members around 2000, programs became more interdisciplinary, experiential, and responsive to visitor expectations. For visitors desiring to enjoy Red Rock as a recreational landscape, the BLM, RRCIA, and FORRC developed a beginner mountain biking program; others wishing to explore the area with their canine companions took part in “Woof Walks.” Similarly, yoga classes offered experiential recreation that encouraged visitors to identify with Red Rock.<sup>117</sup> Nature-based art classes entitled “Art...Naturally” and “Earth Tones”

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<sup>115</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987), 186-187. See also Gerald A. Danzer, *Public Places: Exploring Their History* (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1987), xi.

<sup>116</sup> Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), 46. See also David Glassberg, “Interpreting Landscapes,” in Martin V. Melosi and Philip Scarpino, eds., *Public History and the Environment* (Malabar, Fla.: Krieger Publishing Company, 2004).

<sup>117</sup> Sparks interview, 12 January 2010.

allowed participants to encounter Red Rock as an aesthetic landscape and leave with a self-made piece of art. Programs such as “Let’s Go Green Together” and “Canyon Clean-Up” taught participants to understand the human impact on the local and global ecosystems and how to mitigate that impact. Geology and biology remained staple topics for programs as well. In addition to offering outings that gave overviews of the canyons’ flora and fauna (such as “Monday at the Rock,” “Intro to Red Rock,” “Blooming Desert,” and “Red Rock Canyon Animals”), RRCIA also presented programs devoted to specific species (such as “Totally Tarantulas,” “Tort Talks,” “Jumping Jackrabbits,” “Bats in Our Belfry”). The association also hosted an entire slew of presentations just for children.<sup>118</sup>

With changes made to live programs, the BLM and RRCIA turned their attention to the Visitor Center.<sup>119</sup> After consultations with architects and fabricators, they decided to convert the original center to administrative offices and construct an entirely new interpretive space. Final plans called for an 8,000-square-foot building to house an orientation exhibit, gift shop, classroom, and rotating exhibit space; the main interpretive space would occupy more than 15,000 square feet outdoors. Staff decided that, much as live programming was no longer wholly topical (as the first two interpretive plans and the original Visitor Center had also been), the 2010 Center’s exhibits would be thematic so as to best offer a systems-oriented explanation of the landscape. They built their interpretive program around the classical elements of Earth, Fire, Air, and Water (elements common to ancient Greek, Hindu, Buddhist, Japanese, Chinese, and Tibetan thought) to weave together pieces of geology, biology, and human history; doing so not

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<sup>118</sup> See, for example, *Trail Source*, January-March 2010.

<sup>119</sup> To provide a temporary solution to the outdated displays, the BLM and RRCIA spent more than \$500,000 to craft more high-tech displays in 2006. See Mower, “Ancient area, new exhibits,” 1B.

only explained the past and present but challenged visitors to think about how the interactions of these elements would affect the future at Red Rock, in the Mojave, and around the world.

Designers intended interpretation to begin even before visitors entered the new center. They devised a quintet of signs to intercept guests on the walkway and introduce them to the Mojave Desert as well as the four themes, each of which was represented by a color.<sup>120</sup> Color-coded bands beginning along the cement walkway ran into the building and then to the outdoor exhibits. Once inside the Visitor Center, guests would encounter the Calico Hills through a 30-foot plate glass window. Natural light from the window would illuminate the room, which provided exhibits that oriented the visitor to the geography of the Mojave Desert and Red Rock Canyon. Overhead, painted metal runners—one for each of the corresponding themes—helped guests trace the themes through each display; painted bands of concrete on the floor provided similar visual cues. These bands of color then led guests outside to the exterior interpretive exhibits, which were divided into four pavilions (one for each main theme), as well as three additional areas (called Habitats, West End, and Desert Explorer) that reinforced the ways in which the four themes intersect throughout the exhibits and the park. The aim of the approach was to “make the interpretation engulf the visitor,” shift away from interpretation in terms of park resources, and emphasize the interrelationship of the main topics.<sup>121</sup> For example, instead of having a single display devoted to the geological details of the desert floor, another devoted to individual flora, another to local reptiles that lounge on sun-

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<sup>120</sup> The color brown represented Earth, orange represented Fire, blue represented Air, and a blue-green represented Water.

<sup>121</sup> Sparks interview, 12 January 2010.



drenched to absorb heat, another to mesquite pits, and still another to shelter used by Native Americans in the area, a single pavilion at the 2010 Visitor Center united these elements under the theme of “Fire.”

The most notable decision in the creation of the exhibit space was to avoid the use of objects. Instead of funneling visitors into an enclosed area in which they encountered only representations of nature (such as the original Visitor Center’s faux rock wall, pseudo-waterfall, and scale models and commissioned painting of the escarpment), interpretive designers wanted guests to encounter a handful of objects indoors and funneled them outdoors, where the *land* would be the primary object on display. They hoped that doing so would force visitors—many of whom often stop to explore the Visitor Center, then hop in their cars, drive around the Scenic Loop, and leave—to actually meet what Freeman Tilden called the “Thing Itself.” For example, one panel in the Earth pavilion describes how some of the rocks present in the NCA are made of mud, silt, and pebbles deposited when ancient seas that once covered Red Rock Canyon began to drain. The larger, pebbly grains formed a rock known as conglomerate, while the smaller grains cemented into rocks known as siltstone and shale. A panel explains this procedure to visitors, but then rather than place a sample of each rock on display (as a display in earlier exhibits did), it directs visitors to the Thing Itself. The exhibit reads, “Can you see brown rock ledges low on the Sandstone Bluffs? That is Shinarump Conglomerate.”<sup>122</sup> For those visitors desiring a close-up of the rock, a photo is provided.

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<sup>122</sup> “Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area Visitor Center Label Copy,” Earth section, 5. Copy in possession of the author. Hereinafter, I will refer to this document as “RRCNCA Visitor Center Label Copy.”

Since “[o]bjects...embody or represent time-specific attitudes toward nature,”<sup>123</sup> these new outdoor exhibits represent—to a degree not seen in previous exhibits or interpretive plans—a new idea that shows how past, present, *and* future humans are part of an ecosystem.

Because the land is the primary object in each of the outdoor pavilions, designers worked hard to layer images, text panels, and interactives in the foreground of the landscape so that when visitors walk about, it’s as though they are peeling back layers of a onion to discover a core. Nearly every concept explained with words and images on a panel can be seen in the landscape. In attempting to link the interpretive elements and the landscape, designers made a step toward deconstructing the man-nature dichotomy that has made nature a Place Apart from the everyday life of the average visitor.<sup>124</sup> Replacing the original Visitor Center’s faux rock and pseudo waterfall exhibits, which mediated humans and nature, with the “Thing Itself,” the 2010 Center subtly encourages guests to understand how their choices impact the natural world. For example, after a series of displays illustrate how desert animals have adapted to survive in a place with little water, a panel in the Water Pavilion reads, “Towns and big cities with lots of people can place a strain on limited desert water supplies...You’d be surprised how much water you can save each day by changing how you wash dishes or brush your teeth...We can all help to preserve our deserts by making wise choices.”<sup>125</sup> These new attempts at helping guests understand their place in Red Rock are part of a new interpretive dialogue that shows

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<sup>123</sup> Christopher Clarke, “Museums, the Environment, and Public History,” in Melosi and Scarpino, eds., *Public History and the Environment*, 127.

<sup>124</sup> Price, *Flight Maps*.

<sup>125</sup> “RRCNCA Visitor Center Label Copy,” Water section, 36.

that—in ways that the original Visitor Center and early interpretive plans never did—the 2010 Center can have an impact on real-world conversations about the human place in nature. Its public service role extends beyond informing visitors; it engages them and encourages them to examine Red Rock’s past and present and think about how their place in the local ecology will determine Red Rock’s future—biologically, socially, and culturally.

In February 2008, the Nevada congressional delegation and Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne broke ground on the new Visitor Center.<sup>126</sup> Gerald Danzer reminds us that “[w]ithout public places, there can be...no way of telling who we are, where we have been, or where we are going.”<sup>127</sup> Indeed, examination of the changes in the stories the BLM has chosen to tell about Red Rock reveals a great deal about the past, present, and future. Such inspection has exposed how the stories are laden with more meaning than conveyed by the words on a display board. The 1969 *Interpretive Plan* revealed how, through an emphasis on ecology, the BLM sought to use the proposed interpretive center to change its image from that of a broker of the nation’s mineral, timber, and grazing resources to a select few to one devoted to scientific and recreational management of lands for the public. Politics also infused the 1977 *Red Rock Canyon: An Interpretive Plan*. One of the main exhibits it proposed, the “Tower of Power”, not only echoed rising popular concerns about the availability of finite energy resources, but also proffered to help visitors understand how they, as consumers of electrical power, were part of ecosystems of the present. Though the exhibit never materialized, it was important

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<sup>126</sup> Keith Rogers, “A natural cure at Red Rock,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 21 February 2008, B1.

<sup>127</sup> Danzer, *Public Places*, xii.

because it signaled a transition to ensuring that explanations of the human use of and impact on Red Rock's ecology would no longer be offered solely in terms of the Native American past.

The ways in which the completed 1982 Visitor Center explained Red Rock's natural elements also said a great deal about prevailing perceptions of nature. By re-creating elements of Red Rock (such as a faux waterfall) inside, exhibit designers gave the impression that nature was a Place Apart rather than as a place in which the Center itself had a part. Few funds existed to update exhibits as years wore on, and so the way in which the BLM advanced interpretation was through its environmental education programs, which were often funded by outside sources. Through programs such as Project WET, the creation of materials such as *Mojave Desert Discovery*, and an increase in interdisciplinary live interpretive presentations, interpreters began to improve the ways in which they helped individuals understand their place in ecology by centering interpretation less on Red Rock itself and more on thematic elements or regional geographies. Finally, with the creation of the 2010 Visitor Center, the BLM pushed interpretation into the outdoors, eliminating to some degree the mediated experience with nature that visitors received in the 1982 Center. In forcing visitors outdoors for exhibits and live programs, the 2010 Center offers both information and experiences. This conversion of Red Rock from a distant stand of wilderness to an area with which visitors identify and hopefully to which they ascribe value continues the long history begun by climbers, developers, and environmentalists, of space becoming place.

## CONCLUSION

“All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts... That man is, in fact, only a member of a biotic team is shown by an ecological interpretation of history. Many historical events, hitherto explained solely in terms of human enterprise, were actually biotic interactions between people and land... Is history taught in this spirit? It will be, once the concept of land as a community really penetrates our intellectual life.”<sup>1</sup>

Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

In their proposal for Red Rock to be adopted by the Park Service as a national monument, members of the Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club wrote,

A person will visit a National Park once a year, perhaps once in ten years or maybe once in a lifetime. Such visits maybe the supreme outdoor experiences in a person's life... Where can a person find such an experience in a day or in a weekend? City parks can offer a touch of nature, but only in an artificial way. They offer physical recreation of a planned type, but nothing of the sense of contact with the outdoors, with wildness of nature, that we increasingly urban Americans still think of as our heritage.

Chapter members adopted language here that was reminiscent of the 1964 Wilderness Act, which juxtaposed “earth and its community of life” with “man” and his “permanent improvements.”<sup>2</sup> And while the members acknowledged that Native Americans had altered Red Rock, it described such individuals as “unusually cooperative,” walking with “a careful tread, leaving [the area's] integrity intact.” Yet there was no mention of the other humans that had altered the area: squatters hoarding water rights near Red Springs in the 1920s, farmers building dikes to flood farmed acres, cattlemen grazing herds near Cottonwood Pass, CCC crews carving Rocky Gap Road into the mountains, or residents constructing edifices at Sandstone Ranch, the mouth of Pine Creek Canyon, and in Calico

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<sup>1</sup> Leopold, “The Land Ethic: The Community Concept,” in Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 239-243.

<sup>2</sup> *Wilderness Act*, Public Law 88-577, 88th Cong., 2d sess., (3 September 1964).

Basin. Indeed, the exceedingly “wild” area devoid of touches of humanity was hardly a reality.

Red Rock is a beautiful place and every bit worthy of the protection the Sierra Club sought in its 1964 pitch to the Park Service. Its unique thrust fault and dramatic elevation changes have made it home to a host of interconnected, biotic communities. Hawks float aloft on high, invisible currents of air. Bighorn sheep make hairy descents to unlikely watering holes. Wild burros bray in the evenings as the sun disappears behind the Spring Mountains. Creosote bushes, prickly pear cactuses, Joshua trees, and Ponderosa pines can be found within only a few miles of each other. Yet, the rapturous beauty of Red Rock conceals tensions in the human construction of place there. As long as the idea of Red Rock as a park has existed, individuals have disagreed over what the area should be and how it should be used.

Arguments over the extent of development that should be allowed in and near the park began such disagreements. The BLM, having adopted Red Rock as its first recreational management project, took a page from the National Park Service and set forth a plan for significant development in 1968. The Bureau proposed several dozen miles of roads and trails on the valley floor and in the backcountry, a hotel-lodge, an interpretive center, an archery range, and hundreds of picnicking and camping sites. Environmentalists and concerned citizens put a halt to such plans and forced the agency to reconsider how it approached development. Developmental disagreements continued with the 1978 proposal for oil and gas leasing, and subsequent requests in the 1990s to place a hydroelectric power plant on a park inholding. A few years later, residential developers vied to capitalize on Red Rock’s scenic views.

Each of these fights to shape the physical layout of Red Rock was part of larger discussions on both the character of the park and of American open spaces in general. As the postwar population boomed, strip malls and ranch-style homes increasingly expanded into what had once been vacant fields and expanses of undeveloped land. The individuals who championed the 1967 designation of Red Rock as a recreation land did so not only to protect natural elements from bulldozers but also to provide for a stand of open space available to improve the physical and mental health of Las Vegas. They couldn't have foreseen that the city would one day be home to two million residents and would stretch all the way to the park's doorstep, making it prime real estate. As developers and environmentalists duked it out over the nuances of what could be built where, each brought a different view of Red Rock's landscape. For the former, Red Rock was Wealth; for the latter, it was Nature and Habitat. The bantering between the two provides insight to the ways in which Americans have ascribed value to nature over the last 50 years.

Examination of the debates among rock climbers at Red Rock likewise reveals a great deal about how the park has become a culturally constructed place. The earliest debates between Red Rock's climbers centered on clean climbing. Native Las Vegan Joe Herbst honed his skills in Yosemite and thus brought clean climbing to Red Rock when he returned to Sin City in the early 1970s. Devotees of clean climbing ascribed to the notion that climbers should do as little damage to the rock as possible during their ascents, which mean trading pitons for passive aids such as nuts and Hexcentrics. Doing so, they maintained, ensured that a climb was an organic, less mediated interaction of man and nature. Clean climbing reigned over Red Rock until the arrival of Jorge and Joanne Urioste, who set about creating routes by linking discontinuous crack systems with bolts.

Their aim was to create democratic routes whose difficulty attracted veteran climbers but whose protection appealed to their less-seasoned counterparts. Joanne Urioste further aided consumption of Red Rock's routes by creating the park's first climbing guide in 1984, an act that irked climbers like Richard Harrison, who believed that routes should only be accessible to those with the skills to climb them passively. The commodification of the sport in Red Rock continued when Randal Grandstaff opened a guiding service that offered "guaranteed adventure" to customers. By the 1990s, such actions had resulted in an influx of climbers, whose impact became more noticeable and forced the BLM to legislate the sport. Hewing to the man-versus-nature approach of the 1964 Wilderness Act, the Bureau banned bolting.

In their discussions of the how best to participate in the sport, climbers transformed Red Rock's cliffs from natural spaces into political, social, and cultural ones. As members of a social cohort, climbers engaged in locally-specific deliberations about bolts, guidebooks, and guiding services. But their conversations pointed to larger questions about the use of technology in nature, and the boundaries of nature and consumerism. Though these discussions occurred on a local level, they represented a larger dialogue in the American environmental movement about man's place in nature.

The task of how to explain Red Rock's natural elements and man's place in the park fell to BLM interpreters. The job was hardly cut and dry; in deciding what stories to tell about Red Rock's geologic, biologic, and human past, interpreters made choices and could hardly escape the politics of the day. The 1969 *Interpretive Plan*'s use of ecology reflected BLM desires to discard its reputation as broker of the nation's land, minerals, and timber and refashion itself as a land manager in light of a new multiple-use mandate.



Though it largely explained man's role in ecosystems of the past, the 1977 interpretive plan attempted to move the discussion into the present with an exhibit devoted to renewable energy. This proposed "Tower of Power" never materialized but nonetheless represented a BLM response to political issues surrounding the oil crisis. Politics continued to infuse interpretation at Red Rock as the Visitor Center neared completion. Armed with a permanent mandate less than five years old, the BLM wanted its first interpretive center to project its ability to successfully execute its new multiple-use management philosophy. So, live interpretive programs began, with interpreters taking care to brand Red Rock as a BLM space. The Visitor Center emphasized geology, biology, and ecology via photographs, objects, and re-creations of natural elements. The juxtaposition of re-creations inside with "real" nature outside lent itself to the notion of nature as a Place Apart, a realm separate from the everyday lives of visitors. Little interpretation existed outside, and indoor exhibits remained relatively unchanged for years due to lack of funds. This remained the case until the 1990s. At that time, Red Rock's environmental education program, with its emphasis on field-based, interdisciplinary activities, facilitated a transition to outdoor interpretation that encouraged visitors to contemplate their place in nature. The post-2000 revitalization of live interpretation and the 2010 Visitor Center both placed a significant portion of interpretive activities outside, again forcing guests to confront nature with less mediation but also to identify with Red Rock as a place and to help foster a land ethic.

Nature, as William Cronon asserts, is not a diametric opposite of civilization denoted by a lack of humans. Rather, it is a space in which humans work and play, one dramatically molded by culture and actions. The nature-culture interactions described in

these pages have chronicled how previous generations have shaped Red Rock as well as how they perceived it and gave it meaning. “Landscape,” as J.B. Jackson argues, “is history made visible.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, just as geological and biological forces are writ large in the escarpment, slot canyons, and desert floor of Red Rock, so too is evidence of cultural forces. The fact that Summerlin sits at the edge of the canyons, that there are pieces of metal bolts pounded into the sandstone walls, and that there is a Visitor Center testifies as to how culture has shaped Red Rock’s physical and spiritual nature. Furthermore, the fact that we consider Red Rock a *place* signals that it is more than just a distant stand of mountains, trees, and animals. Within its boundaries—linear, abstract bounds not respective of biota or elevation or terrain—is a record of contemporary human interaction with nature.

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<sup>3</sup> J.B. Jackson quoted in Helen Horowitz, “J.B. Jackson and the Discovery of the American Landscape” in John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, ed. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997), x.

## APPENDIX

### TIMELINE OF EVENTS RELATED TO RED ROCK CANYON

1876	James Wilson founds Wilson Ranch (presently known as Spring Mountain Ranch) near springs on the eastern edge of present-day RRCNCA.
1905	Camping, picnicking documented at Wilson Ranch.
1905-1912	Lifespan of the Sandstone Quarry operations
1936	Red Rock area becomes part of Desert Game Range (presently known as Desert National Wildlife Refuge). Before this time, Red Rock had been part of the public domain.
1952	Howard Hughes purchases large tract of land west of city, including acreage leading up to the future border of RRCRL.
1964	Congress passes Classification and Multiple Use Act.
March 1964	BLM withdraws 10,000 acres of Red Rock Canyon for protection.
April 1964	Sierra Club and Nevada Survey present proposal for Red Rock Canyon to be managed as a National Monument.
June 1964	BLM asks all interested persons and organizations to meet and discuss future of Red Rock Canyon. The group appoints a sub-committee to further study the area and make recommendations.
September 1964	League of Women Voters, at the behest of the BLM, conducts public survey to analyze knowledge of Red Rock and desired developments there. Of 6,400 questionnaires distributed, 3,500 are returned.
March 1965	Sub-Committee releases proposal for Red Rock Canyon-Spring Mountain Recreation Complex, including 30 recommendations and a report on the findings of the League's survey.
1966	BLM proposes that Red Rock be a National Recreation Area and that, as an alternate plan, the BLM and Nevada State Parks Division manage it jointly.
July 1967	Secretary of the Interior Steward Udall vetoes idea of Red Rock being a National Recreation Area; Red Rock to be jointly managed by NDSP and BLM.

October 1967	Senator Alan Bible dedicates Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands.
March 1968	BLM's Washington office receives initial <i>Recreation Management Plan</i> , makes Red Rock its first and top recreation project.
1970	National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) goes into effect. This legislation gives environmental organizations the ability to demand environmental impact statements and environmental assessments for government work on public lands.
1971	BLM secures federal funds for paving of Segment A of Scenic Loop, lets out contracts for the work.
May 1972	Crews complete construction of Segment A of Scenic Loop.
June 1, 1972	Nevada Open Spaces Council calls for an EIS to be conducted on 1968 <i>RMP</i> .
June 22, 1972	BLM holds public meeting to address uproar over Segment A. The 1968 <i>RMP</i> is "severely mauled."
1974	BLM releases <i>Draft Environmental Impact Statement on Recreational Management Plan for Red Rock Canyon</i> to the public.
April 16, 1974	BLM holds public hearings on <i>Draft EIS</i> .
1975	BLM files <i>Final EIS</i> .
1976	Congress passes the Federal Land Policy Management Act.
1976	Architectural firm hired by BLM (Royston, Hanamoto, Beck, and Abey) to develop a new master plan presents <i>Background Report</i> and <i>Master Plan for Red Rock Canyon Recreation Lands</i> . The plan becomes the governing document for Red Rock Canyon.
April 1977	BLM releases <i>Master Plan</i> to the public.
1977	Wildcatters file applications to lease lands in Red Rock for oil and gas drilling.
November 4, 1979	BLM releases <i>Draft Environmental Assessment on Oil and Gas Leasing in the RRCRL</i> . A flood of public comment ensues.
1978	Crews complete Segment B of Scenic Loop; BLM opens completed Loop to the public.

November 1, 1979	BLM releases <i>Draft Environmental Assessment on Oil and Gas Leasing in Red Rock Canyon</i> .
March 1980	BLM hires Rodger Schmitt to serve as Red Rock's first manager.
1981	BLM and State of Nevada sign a second agreement to manage Red Rock Canyon cooperatively. (The State managed recreation in a 17,000-acre southern part of the area and the BLM managed the remaining acreage.)
May 22, 1982	BLM opens Visitor Center to the public.
1982	Congress designates Pine Creek and La Madre Mountain Wilderness Study Areas.
1984	Hughes Corporation subsidiary Summa Corp begins gathering permits to extend municipal sewer lines west into the future Summerlin development, which extends into the RRCRL. BLM and environmentalists begin movement to secure a buffer zone between development and the canyons.
1986	Summa agrees to sell 5,000-acre parcel of buffer zone to BLM.
Fall 1988	Summa and BLM exchange lands.
April 1990	U.S. Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) and Representative James Bilbray (D-NV) introduce legislation to Congress to make Red Rock Canyon a National Conservation Area.
November 16, 1990	President George H.W. Bush signs Public Law 101-621, officially designating Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area.
September 1991	Blue Diamond South Pumped Storage Power announces plans to build hydroelectric plant just outside the NCA boundary.
1994	BLM releases <i>Proposed General Management Plan and Environmental Assessment for Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area (PGMP)</i> to update planning decisions in the 1976 <i>Master Plan</i> .
November 2, 1994	President Bill Clinton signs Public Law 103-450, which more than doubles the size of RRCNCA to 196,000 acres.

June 1995	Because RRC increased in size so much, the <i>PGMP</i> developed in 1994 was no longer applicable, and the BLM develops the <i>Interim General Management Plan</i> .
November 12, 1997	BLM institutes fees for admission to RRCNCA.
1998	Congress passes the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act, adding a final 1,002 acres to Red Rock Canyon NCA.
2000	BLM completes Proposed General Management Plan.
2001	Home builder John Laing Homes announces it has acquired the option to purchase 2,000 acres inside RRCNCA owned by James Hardie Gypsum Company. In November, the company releases plans for the construction of a 7,600-home community called Cielo Encantado on Blue Diamond Hill.
September 30, 2002	John Laing Homes, after considerable opposition from Blue Diamond and Las Vegas residents, withdraws plans for Cielo Encantado.
2002	Pine Creek and La Madre Mountain WSAs become Wilderness Areas. (Pine Creek WA is renamed Rainbow WA.)
March 26, 2003	Developer Jim Rhodes purchases the James Hardie Gypsum Mine.
April 7, 2010	BLM opens 15,000 ft <sup>2</sup> outdoor portion of new Visitor Center to public.

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