

# **“Archaeological Survey in Valley of Fire: Training Students and Deducing a Settlement Pattern Model for Valley of Fire in Southern Nevada”**

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Valley of Fire State Park is located northeast of Las Vegas, Nevada. The typical environment is Mojave desert containing vegetation suited to the arid southwest and few distinguishing geological features except for the sandstone redrock that gives it its name. Humans have inhabited the southern areas of the park continually from the Lake Mojave period (ca. 10,000-7500 B.P.) to 20th century. The archaeological program at the College of Southern Nevada (CSN) has been conducting archaeological survey and site recording in Valley of Fire State park since 2003. This has resulted in the inventory of over 5 square miles of the southern portion and the recording, or re-recording, of nearly 100 archaeological sites in the park.

Seven survey blocks have been excavated over this period of time. The 2003 season focused on the St. Thomas Wash site on the east side of the park and yielded 14 out of 16 sites (some previously recorded by Shutler and Shutler, 1962). Three of these sites were discussed. They typically consisted of overhangs and rock shelters with accompanying lithics including arrow points, and a series of petroglyph panels in or around the shelters.

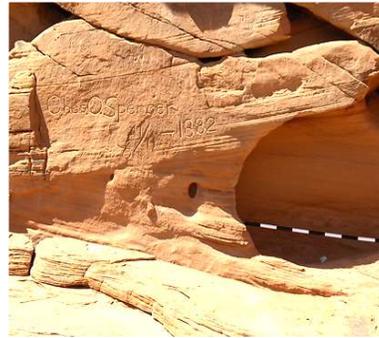


Petroglyphs near a rock shelter

Field schools post-2003 concentrated on areas immediately around and east of the Atlatl Rock outcrop, which is the scene of literally dozens of archaeological sites: rock shelters, campsites, petroglyph and pictograph panels, and historic and modern (20<sup>th</sup> century) sites. The areas included those labeled today as Atlatl Rock, Mouse's Tank and the Cabins. Many of the petroglyphs in this area are within walking distance of these areas. Some display historic carvings by early settlers. Modern archaeological traces such as roads also remain.



Classic Atlatl Rock



Historic Markings



Dr. Rafferty made some generalizations concerning possible settlement patterns:

Paleoindian/Lake Mojave Periods- Ca.13, 000-7500 B.P.

- Little can be said, due to paucity of material: One possible preform blank and one site with a Great Basin Stemmed point on it.

Archaic Period- Ca. 7500-2000 B.P.

- Larger Valley of Fire-wide settlement and subsistence pattern, heavily focused on Atlatl Rock.
- Several large *Residential Bases* where the majority of subsistence and food processing took place, tool manufacturing and maintenance, and daily living. Mainly in the Atlatl Rock area, and 26CK9579 south of Mouse's Tank. One site, 26CK6881, in St. Thomas Wash area.
- Several locations where resources were extracted, including sacred knowledge (rock art localities). Increase in rock art production in Middle Archaic (ca. 5000 B.P.)
- Heavy *artiodactyl* (desert bighorn sheep) hunting, rabbits, desert tortoise, chuckwalla, heavy use of seeds and plant foods.

Virgin Anasazi Period- Ca. 2000-850 B.P.

- Heavy use of Valley of Fire area, based on lithic artifacts, rock art, ceramics.
- Horticultural activities practiced along Muddy-Virgin River basin area-corn/beans/squash; planting in spring, wild resources exploited fall and winter.
- Supplemented by hunting and gathering in the Valley of Fire and Gold Butte regions.
- Diminished but continuing *artiodactyl* hunting, limited seed processing, desert tortoise exploitation.

Patayan Period- Ca.2000-850 B.P.

- Presence extremely limited based on a few sherds at several sites, some minimal rock art presence.

Paiute Period- Ca. 850-1000 B.P.

- Regular use of Valley of Fire.
- Evidence consisting of projectile points, Intermountain Brownware, Great Basin Scratched and Painted rock art style.
- Seasonal subsistence activities, including *artiodactyl* hunting, tortoise, rabbit, and seed processing.

Historic Period- Ca. 150 B.P.-Present

- Used as corridor of transportation and communication (Arrowhead Trail), some rock quarrying (sandstone drilling), recreation and preservation.

To conclude, Dr. Rafferty stated that during the course of the survey over 60 students were exposed to the best practices in inventory and recording techniques. He hopes that the model of prehistoric settlement and subsistence yielded by the study that will be tested by future researchers in the area. Likely future excavation locations include the Escarpment, north of the Atlatl Rock area.

The presentation ended with follow-up discussion and numerous questions from the audience.