

“The Story of Gold Butte”

By

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Jaina Moan is the executive Director of the Friends of Gold Butte. She has held this position for about 1 ½ years.

Gold Butte is an area of about 350,000 acres located south of Mesquite Nevada. It is bounded by Arizona, the Virgin River and the Colorado River / Lake Mead. The land is managed by the BLM.

The land sits on the edge of the Colorado Plateau and is located at the intersection of two major deserts, the Mojave and the Great Basin. The land experiences large elevation changes, from 1,000 ft. to over 8,000 ft. Four faults are located in the region.

The land is geologically interesting – from a large sink hole called “Devils Throat” which is 180 ft. in diameter and 180 ft. deep, to Little Finland or Finlandia, an area of wind carved sandstone formations.



Devils Throat Image (from the Internet)



Finlandia Images by John Mangels

The ecosystem begins with creosote – bar sage scrub at 3000 to 3500 ft. to Montane scrub / Yucca from 3500 to 6000 ft. to mountain shrub land above 5000 ft.

According to the Clark County Nevada Multi Species Habitat Conservation Plan, there are 27 rare and sensitive species that call Gold Butte home.

There have been 12,000 years of continuous, human occupation of Gold Butte area. The native American groups include the Archaic people evidenced by projectile points and rock art. They were followed by the Basket maker / Puebloan peoples who contributed rock art, pottery and lived in pit houses. They were followed by the Patayan from 1250 to 1500 AD who contributed rock art and other artifacts. Finally, the Paiutes have lived in the area beginning in about 1300 AD to the present. They contributed rock art – pictographs and agave roasting pits.

There are 42 rock art sites of 377 that have been surveyed. These include 379 panels and over 3200 rock art elements. Desert Archaic rock art consists of abstract forms. The Basket Maker, Puebloan and Patayan rock art is generally representational. The Paiute rock art is generally in the form of pictographs.



Images of Gold Butte Rock Art (John Mangels)

Historically, the Southern Paiutes territory ranges from the Las Vegas region to Gold Butte and into the Arizona Strip and Southern Utah. Vivian Jake, a Southern Paiute elder is working to document the Southern Paiute history in the “Salt Song Project”. The Salt Song documents the Paiute’s journey into the afterlife. A number of elements in the Salt Song are thought to be located in Gold Butte.

Gold Butte figured prominently in early trade routes and travel through the area. These include the Ute Trail, the Old Spanish Trail, the Grand Gulch Road and the Arrowhead Highway. The Grand Gulch Road was created to bring minerals from mining out of the region to St. Thomas. This road closed once Lake Mead was flooded. This effectively cut off Gold Butte to this important transportation route.

The mining history dates to the late 1800's. In 1905 the Gibbs Camp was created where gold was mined.

The ranching history extended into the 1900's. Mud Hills corral still exists as well as the CCC dam at Whiney Pockets.

Currently the area has a number of back country roads and trails including the back country byway, Lime Kiln pass and the Grand Gulch loop.

The Friends of Gold Butte was founded in 2003 and attained non-profit status in 2009. They are currently working with local congressional members and Senator Harry Reid to create Gold Butte as a National Monument. This is possible under the Antiquities Act of 1906 where National Monuments can be established to protect antiquities and areas of scientific resources.

Go to the following sites to learn more about the Gold Butte, the Friends of Gold Butte and their activities:

"The Prehistory of Gold Butte" by Kelly McGuire, et.al. The University of Utah Press, 2014

<http://www.friendsofgoldbutte.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/GoldButte/>

<http://www.meetup.com/Friends-of-Gold-Butte/#past>

<http://goldbuttehistory.blogspot.com>

<http://lasvegassun.com/news/2015/dec/05/federal-protection-is-needed-for-gold-butte/>

<http://protectgoldbutte.org/reid-calls-on-obama-to-protect-gold-butte/>

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