

“Archaeology with Altitude”

Dr. Eva Jensen

Chief Archaeologist at Great Basin National Park

Presented to

Dixie Archaeology Society

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Dr. Eva Jensen is the chief archaeologist with Great Basin National Park.

Dr. Jensen began her talk with a brief description of Great Basin National Park. The park, located on the border of Nevada and Utah, was founded in 1986 and consists of 77,000 acres. Prior to gaining National Park status, the park was Lehman Caves National Monument that was founded in 1923. The goal of the park is to “Preserve the Scenic Values”. The park is unique in that it has a large range of elevations from 5300 ft. above sea level at the visitor center and up to 13063 ft. at Wheeler Peak.

The park land has been occupied since Paleo - Archaic times. Arrowheads have been found in the park dating to 12000 years ago. Likewise, arrowheads from the archaic period dating to 8500 years ago have also been found. Pictographs, sandals and pottery from the Fremont period (BC 1600 to AD 350) have been found. Arrowheads from post 1350 AD have been associated with the Shoshone people.

Archaeologists have been researching the park area since 1924 and up to the early 2000's. The archaeology in the park consists of rock art, rock shelters and caves, lithic and ceramic scatter including obsidian from as far away as Milford or Browns Bench.

Dr. Jensen showed examples of rock art from a variety of locations within the park:

Upper Pictograph Cave – Elevation 6800 ft.

(<https://www.nps.gov/grba/learn/historyculture/upper-pictograph-cave.htm> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0oIfud8yPc>)

Great Basin curvilinear abstract in red and yellow

Fremont style anthros in red – the pair are holding hands

Historic graffiti from 1906

Lower Pictograph Cave – Elevation 6780 ft.

Abstract figures and hand prints

Corn from the cave has been dated to 200 AD

Snake Creek Shelter – Elevation 7400 ft.

Lexington Arch Pictographs – Elevation 8420 ft.

Very faint pictographs

Snake Creek Outcrops – Elevation 6800 ft.

Pictograph – spiral with sun burst

Mill Creek Petroglyphs – 7800 ft.

Turkey tracks and others

This site has not been recorded

Isolated boulders – Elevation 7480 and 8520 ft.

Boulder Creek

Strawberry Creek – 8800 ft.

Recently found – not recorded

Hub basin Petroglyph Boulder – 7200 ft.

Dutch Oven Petroglyph

Curvilinear

Rock Ring and Petroglyph

Wheeler Peak View Petroglyph

Very faint

Historic Rock Art

“Frank Blood Safe” – he was a sheep herder

She also discussed images called “Arborglyphs” – writing on aspen trees. Shepherders from Peru who worked in the region created these glyphs. Some show abstract images while one shows that someone was practicing writing mathematical equations.

Some historic archaeology is related to early mining of tungsten and other metals:

Johnson Lake Mine Historic District – Elevation 10,000 ft.

Stabilization of cabins

Osceola Ditch – 8200 ft.

Carried water 26 miles around the mountain including a 300 ft long tunnel

This was built in 1890 at the cost of \$100,000

Wheeler Peak Triangulation Station built in 1882

Tilford Spring Stone Cabin built in 1914

Tungsten mine

The most interesting piece of archaeology was Dr. Jensen finding of a Winchester Model 1873 repeating rifle imbedded in the trunk of a juniper tree. She found the rifle in the fall of 2014. Research showed the rifle was manufactured in 1882. The rifle was not loaded but there was a cartridge in the butt of the rifle that dated to between 1887 and 1912. The rifle was found at Strawberry creek at an elevation between 7800 and 8000 ft. The rifle was examined in detail by the Cody museum in Wyoming.

The news of the find was posted on the internet and was an immediate success. Dr. Jensen said she received calls from all over the world. Her story appeared on "Good Morning America" and on CNN. Her co-worker said she "broke the internet" with the find.

The following are some internet references detailing the "Winchester Rifle Story:

<http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/rifle-found-great-basin-park-worldwide-sensation>

<https://centerofthewest.org/2015/07/02/forgotten-winchester-now-on-display-in-center-of-the-west-cody-firearms-museum/>

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/15/us/nevada-century-old-rifle-park/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yA7AamP0Clw>

Archaeology, Rock Art and Guns certainly makes for Archaeology with BOTH Altitude and Attitude.

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John Mangels