



Red Rock Canyon NCA Environmental Education Program

People of Red Rock Canyon

Background:

Although used by hundreds of people each day for recreational and scenic opportunities, Red Rock Canyon NCA has been home to people for thousands of years.

The key to the area's history is water. In the desert water is a scarce commodity; however, Red Rock Canyon NCA contains over 40 springs, as well as many tinajas, natural catchment basins that provide water either seasonally or year round. This provides a much greater biodiversity of plants and animals than the surrounding desert, the abundance of which continues to make Red Rock Canyon NCA very attractive to people.

As many as six different native cultures have used Red Rock Canyon NCA, perhaps for the last 10,000 years or more. More than 150 archaeological sites have been recorded here, including roasting pits, rock circles, rock shelters, camp sites, stone tools, and pottery fragments. These are the only clues we have to the earliest users of the area.

The first two groups that potentially used the area were the Tule Springs Paleo-Indians, from 11,000 to 8,000 BCE, and the San Dieguito, from 7,000 to 5,500 BCE. We have no recorded history from this time period, and there has presently been no evidence of these two cultures found at archeological sites at Red Rock Canyon NCA, however, they were present in Southern Nevada at the time and it is likely that they utilized the area as the people after them did. The oldest native group we have physical evidence of using Red Rock Canyon NCA are the Pinto-Gypsum Archaic, from approximately 3,500 BCE to 1 CE.

From roughly 1 CE to 1150 CE, Ancestral Puebloans, formerly referred to as Anasazi, hunted, gathered, and eventually grew crops in the area. Two groups, the Patayan Culture and the Southern Paiute, came to the area in approximately 900 CE.

The Patayan Culture, which was present until the 1800s, was more agricultural and settled on the upper and lower banks of the Colorado River near present Hoover Dam. They would regularly travel to Red Rock Canyon NCA, where the higher elevation lent itself to different plant and animal types than were available at their home.

The Southern Paiute, on the other hand, were primarily hunters and gatherers. They relied less on agriculture and instead made seasonal rounds as they hunted for animals and gathered the plants they used for food, medicine, fibers, and dyes. They still use the area to this day.

Starting in the 1800s, other people came through and used Red Rock Canyon NCA. One of the main attractions that brought people to the area in the late 1800s and early 1900s was the Old Spanish Trail. Most of the trail consisted of old Native trading routes, some of which had been in existence for 1,000 years or more. The trail connected Spanish settlements near Santa Fe with Los Angeles and Southern California, and went through Red Rock Canyon NCA because of the relative abundance of water.

In the late 1800s, hard, colorful sandstone, lead-bearing galena formations, and lodes of gypsum attracted the interest of miners. The old sandstone quarry can still be visited on the Scenic Loop. This sandstone was sought by builders as far away as Los Angeles and San

Francisco, where buildings made from it still stand today. More recently, the numerous springs at Red Rock also made it a favored location for stills during Prohibition in the 1920s.

Suggested Activities:

K-2 grade	3-5 grade	6-8 grade	9-12 grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How it Came to Be• Rock Art	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How it Came to Be• Nature's Super Walmart	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ancient Iron Chef• Crossing the Old Spanish Trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ancient Iron Chef• Crossing the Old Spanish Trail

All activities can be found on the Red Rock teacher resources website. While activities are designed for particular age groups, most can be adapted to fit your class age and needs. Activities can be completed on any of the four trails and include suggested locations for each.