

Southeastern Nevada and Southwestern Utah (N17A)

This short trip was intended to pick off a handful of sites that I came across in 2016's Nevada trip but skipped at the time in favor of more distant sites. Each of the sites covered on this trip could actually be covered on reasonable day trips out of Las Vegas. But getting away for a few days helped me escape some 110+ degree temperature days back in Vegas.

I had four primary goals for the trip: to check out the newer Basin and Range National Monument, visit the out of the way Beaver Dam State Park, explore Snow Canyon State Park near St. George, Utah on a sunny day, and to pick up a few more area sites along the way. Mission accomplished.



The route to Basin and Range passes the south end of the Extraterrestrial Highway, famous for space aliens and passing near secret U.S. military installations including Area 51. You can stop at the Alien Research Center, pictured here, on your way to or from Basin and Range for snacks, beverages and any essential UFO and alien-related merchandise.



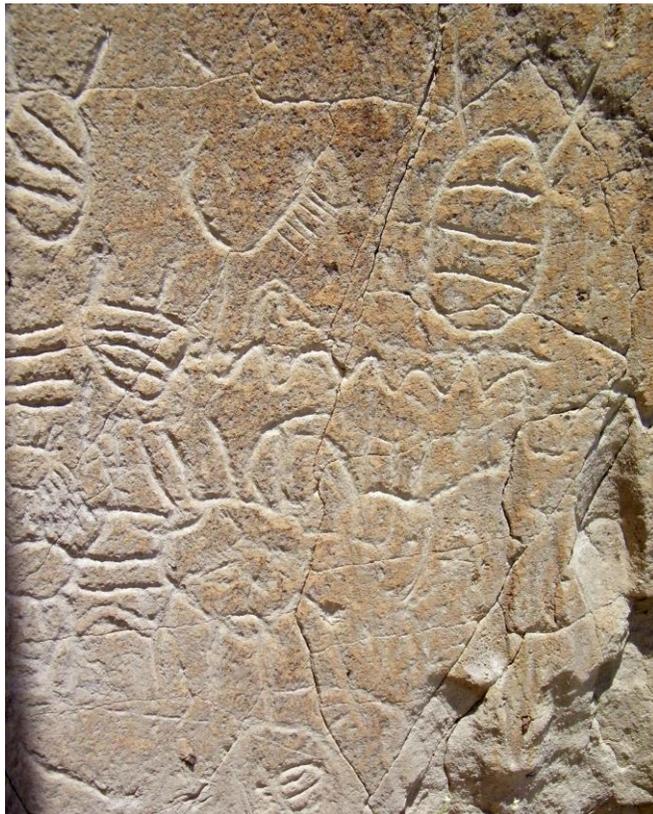
The White River Narrows Archaeological District at Basin and Range features a number of petroglyph panels, including this one at my first stop. I was about halfway from my car to the panel when I realized that there was a coyote at the panel watching me approach. I stopped and considered my next action. I didn't want a confrontation with a coyote, but I didn't want to give up on the panel.

So I took a gamble and guessed that the coyote might have been shot at before at some point. I raised my arms as if I were pointing a rifle at it. That caught the coyote's attention. When I then made my best gunshot sound imitation the coyote ran off for a bit. It then stopped to watch me, so I repeated my actions, taking another "shot" at it. It ran off, and that was the last I saw of it.

I'm glad it decided to run off rather than run towards me. My imitation of the sound someone makes when being attacked by a coyote isn't as good as my imitation of a gunshot.



Another petroglyphs panel. The sequence of vertical lines may be a calendar of some sort. At a different panel, a shadow cast by the summer solstice sun hits a specific point on the lines.



This panel features the sun (circle, lower center left), a possible mountain range (the squiggle across the middle), and strange creatures with antennae. Given the location and direction of the panel, one possible interpretation is that there are strange creatures with antennae beyond the mountains to the west.

Although it might be tempting to explore the land beyond the mountains to find out what these creatures are, it's not possible. That's where Area 51 is, and Area 51 is off limits to the general public.



The approaching footprints. The humanoids, a couple of which are enclosed in what look to be abstract peace signs. One possible interpretation: "We come in peace."



Or maybe "We come in threes".

There's still a lot more art than science behind interpreting the meanings of petroglyphs.



I then explored part of the Mt. Irish area of Basin and Range. There were more petroglyph panels there as well as some classic basin and range scenery.



There are also a handful of abandoned towns and mining camps in the area, including what was once Logan City.



As I was planning my trip, I found out that there are actually a number of petroglyph sites in the area. I visited a handful of these, including Crystal Wash.



Pretty desert scenery at Crystal Wash.



As I was heading east to the town of Caliente I saw a sign for a trilobite quarry on public land, so I took the short hike there to check out the quarry. Anyone can try their luck at quarrying for trilobite fossils and keep what they find (within reason, and no selling what you find). That black spot on this rock looked like a partial fossilized trilobite based on some pictures on display, but I don't know for sure.



I planned on spending two nights in Caliente, Nevada, a faded but once thriving major railroad town. This is Caliente's Union Station.



I made a return visit to Cathedral Gorge State Park so that I could hike its gorge trail. The park features an eroded mix of volcanic ash and lake bottom sediments, and includes some short slot canyon-like cuts into this mix.



Beaver Dam State Park is one of the more remote Nevada State Parks. Regardless of its name, the park doesn't actually have a manmade dam. A dam was built in 1961 to create a reservoir, but it was washed out in 2005 and was never replaced. It's mostly volcanic canyon landscape with hiking trails, camping and fishing. I spent some time here hiking before heading back to Caliente.



I checked out these old charcoal ovens on my drive from Caliente to Utah's Snow Canyon. I had to guess which dirt road leaving the highway to take, and then guessed left when I hit an unexpected fork in the dirt road. Your cell phone's GPS can't get a signal out here, but as I showed, Who needs maps or directions?



Snow Canyon caught my eye from highway overlooks on a past trip because of its mix of Utah's red rock landscape and the result of geologically recent lava flows. Camping, hiking, sand dunes – all features of the park. I finally had a sunny day for exploring it.



Sandstone arch along the Pioneer Names trail.



Jenny's Canyon is a short slot canyon in Snow Canyon State Park.



I then made what amounted to a photo stop at Utah's Sand Hollow State Park, where water levels were higher than I expected.



Photo stop at another nearby state park, Utah's Quail Creek State Park, with the White Cliffs of Zion National Park in the distance.



I geo-geeked out a bit at Quail Creek State Park when I saw the curve of the rock layers at the north end of the reservoir and realized I was seeing evidence of an anticline. Turns out that it's the Virgin Anticline, named for the nearby Virgin River.



The road past the Quail Creek Reservoir leads to the east end of Red Cliffs National Conservation Area (Snow Canyon State Park is included in the west end of Red Cliffs). I finished off the day with a couple short hikes here, including along the Red Reef Trail, pictured.



A short hike along the Silver Reef Trail leads to a small patch of dinosaur tracks, including these two 3-toed tracks atop one another going in opposite directions. Perhaps it was from a pushmipullyuasauros.



I spent the night in St. George, Utah, and then took a route through the backroads of SW Utah's Beaver Dam Wash National Conservation Area, including its Joshua Tree National Natural Landmark.



Back in Nevada, I stopped in Overton to see the Lost City Museum. When I first heard of the museum I thought that "Lost City" was a reference to the nearby ghost town of St. Thomas, which has reemerged from the waters of Lake Mead after years of drought. But the Lost City was really the Pueblo Grande de Nevada, the westernmost known Ancestral Puebloan complex – a surprise to me as most general maps of the range of the Ancestral Pueblos I've seen don't include Nevada. Much of the Lost City ended up under water with the construction of Hoover Dam and creation of Lake Mead, but before that happened there was an effort to collect and preserve many artifacts from the sites. The museum was created at that time to exhibit some of them. The museum includes actual pueblo ruins and a restored pit house.

For the rest of the drive home, I once again took Lake Mead National Recreation Area's Northshore Road, making a few stops as I finished off the memory card.



Outcropping of Navajo sandstone along a short hiking trail at the Redstone Picnic Area.



The Bowl of Fire, another outcropping.