

LINCOLN COUNTY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL INITIATIVE PROJECT

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Rock Art



Mt. Irish Archaeological District



Mt. Irish Archaeological District



The Mt. Irish Archaeological District, located on the eastern flank of the Mt. Irish Range, is one of the most important archaeological areas in eastern Nevada. The District covers 640 acres and provides a vista of prehistoric rock art and habitation sites, set in a dramatic landscape of tuff (volcanic ash) knolls and outcrops, alluvial fans, and washes. The District is best known for spectacular rock art that portrays the cultural lives of the Native American peoples who used the area some 4,000 years ago through the nineteenth century. The three largest rock art sites in the District (Mt. Irish IV, V, and VI) have interpretive trails and a trail guide that is available at visitors' register boxes at these sites.

Eastern Nevada, until the coming of Euro-American settlers in the nineteenth century, was settled by hunter-gatherer cultures who skillfully harvested the wild resources of this arid region for several thousand years. Aided by deep knowledge of the environment's animal and plant resources, hunter-gatherers used efficient technology and lived in small, mobile family groups to gather seasonally available plants, animals, and other resources across the landscape. The Mt. Irish area was used for short-term stays to hunt animals, gather plants, and make rock art. These repeated visits stretch back as far as 4,000 years ago but became more intensive and frequent during the period 2,000-500 years ago.

Rock art, settlement, and economic activities are intertwined in the Mt. Irish area. Many rock art sites are accompanied by the remains of campsites and foraging activities. Rock-shelters, middens, stone tools, and fragments of tools show that animals and plants were often processed in the vicinity of rock art. Were people drawn to the area by seasonally by available resources, or did the area have a special social and cultural significance, marked by rock art, that explains why hunter-gatherers visited the area? The exact meanings and cultural significance of Mt. Irish's rock art and its landscape may be unknowable, but these cultural marks indicate the area was important to the peoples who used these galleries of ancient art. The rock art and the Mt.





Mt. Irish Archaeological District: Introduction cont'd

Irish area continue today to be important to Native American peoples living in the region.

The Mt. Irish area has two main rock art styles, one (Pahranagat Style) whose cultural affiliation is uncertain and



one generally associated with hunter-gatherers (Basin and Range tradition). The Pahranagat Style is an enigmatic portrayal of people that is found mostly at sites in Pahranagat Valley and is unique to Lincoln County. In this style people were portrayed in two very different ways. One form has oval or rectangular solid-pecked bodies, large eyes, a short line protruding from the head, and hands that have long fingers. The other form has a rectangular body that has geometric designs or straight lines inside and stick-figure arms and legs. Sometimes these are portrayed holding objects that resemble atlatls (dart throwers), suggesting this style was made before the bow-and-arrow was widely adopted in the region some 1,500 years ago.

Basin and Range tradition rock art comprises finely made abstract designs, portrayals of people as stick-figures, and a wide range of animal species, most commonly bighorn sheep. The Mt. Irish area has one of the largest concentrations of bighorn sheep images in eastern Nevada, almost half of these are found at just one site, Mt. Irish VI. §



Mt. Irish I: Eastern Locus



One of three rock art areas that make up the eastern locus of the Mt. Irish Archaeological District, Mt. Irish I is located south of the access road on a low tuff cliff and boulders that line the sides of a northwest-southeast trending wash. The



site's 36 petroglyph panels in Basin and Range tradition style are notable for an unusual arrangement of human footprints that appear to climb up the cliff.

Abstract design types predominate, including rakes, zigzags, wavy lines, circles, possible portrayals of atlatls (dart throwers), and rectilinear and curvilinear meanders. More naturalistic forms include a large number of bighorn sheep figures (approximately 19), several stick-figure anthropomorphs (6), and the concentration of human footprints. Based on the visual appearance of surface repatination (the fading of the petroglyphs as the rock surface darkens), the petroglyphs are probably the same age. §





Mt. Irish II: Eastern Locus

North of the access road and visible from Mt. Irish I, Mt. Irish II comprises 26 petroglyph panels concentrated on two tuff outcrops that are approximately 150 m apart but connected by continuity in design elements and style. Evidence



of past tool-use and tool making is scattered around the general vicinity of this rock art site.

The rock art is representative of Basin and Range tradition types. Abstract designs include fields of dots, circles, rectangles



with internal decoration, grids, ladder-like designs, straight lines, rake-like designs, and long meanders. Zoomorphs are common, represented by schematic bighorn sheep figures (18) and other quadrupeds (11).

One stick-figure anthropomorph and one possible Pahrnagat style figure are also represented. The latter could indicate a period of 2,300-1,500 before present (BP) for some of the site's rock art and usage. The site includes large, densely packed panels, particularly at the northern outcrop, showing that people were repeatedly drawn to the same place to leave cultural marks in the landscape. §



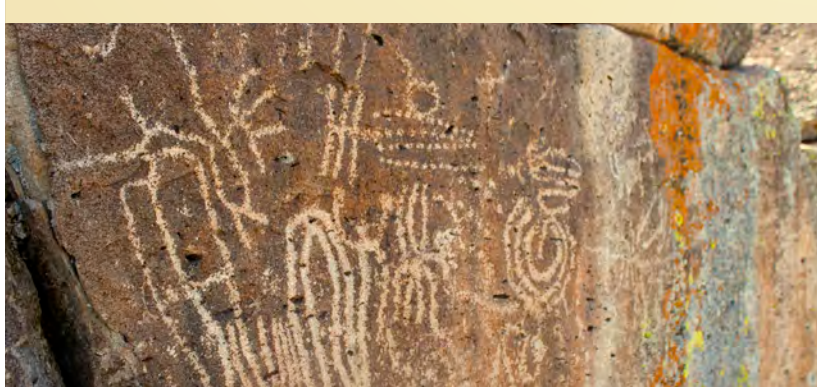
Mt. Irish III: Eastern Locus

Mt. Irish III consists of 16 rock art panels that are all on the north-facing side of a tuff monolith. In places, the rock art forms large panels of complex designs that have had some elements superimposed, meaning newer images were



pecked on top of older ones.

The site has both Basin and Range tradition abstract motifs and bighorn sheep imagery, as well as two examples of Pahrnagat style portrayals of people (both are rectangular in form with internal decoration). Motifs unique to this location include a possible wading bird and an anthropomorph with short lines extending from its head, perhaps indicating headgear. This style of anthropomorph is often regarded as an attribute of Fremont or Ancestral Puebloan style rock art. These ancient farmers were based in Utah and the Southwest during the period 2,000 to 850 years ago. This design shows that eastern Nevada hunter-gatherers had cultural contact with Fremont and Puebloan groups, something also shown by pottery belonging to these cultures being found at sites in the region. §





Mt. Irish IV: Western Locus

Mt. Irish IV, V, and VI are all located at the western end of the District, making up the western locus. Mt. Irish IV has a trail guide that is available from the visitors' register box. The site is one of the largest rock art sites in the District



and contains 80 rock art panels, all representative of Basin and Range tradition motif types. Abstract designs include rows of dots, circles, spirals, ladder-like designs, rectangles with internal decoration, rake-like designs, meanders, arcs, and lines. Several



circles are bisected by a vertical line, possibly a schematic portrayal of atlatls (dart throwers) that would indicate an age of 4,000-1,500 years ago for some of the rock art. Representational designs include large numbers of bighorn sheep, deer, other quadrupeds, and stick-figure anthropomorphs. §



Mt. Irish V: Western Locus



Mt. Irish V and VI together comprise the densest concentration of rock art in the District and are only separated by a short distance. Both sites are among the most significant rock art sites in eastern Nevada and are well known



for their excellent examples of the Pahrnagat style. Because these two sites are very similar in styles and images portrayed, they probably belong to the same period. Trail guides for Mt. Irish V and VI are available from the visitors' register box.

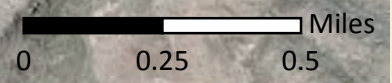
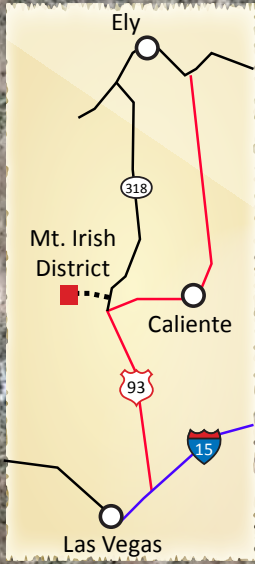
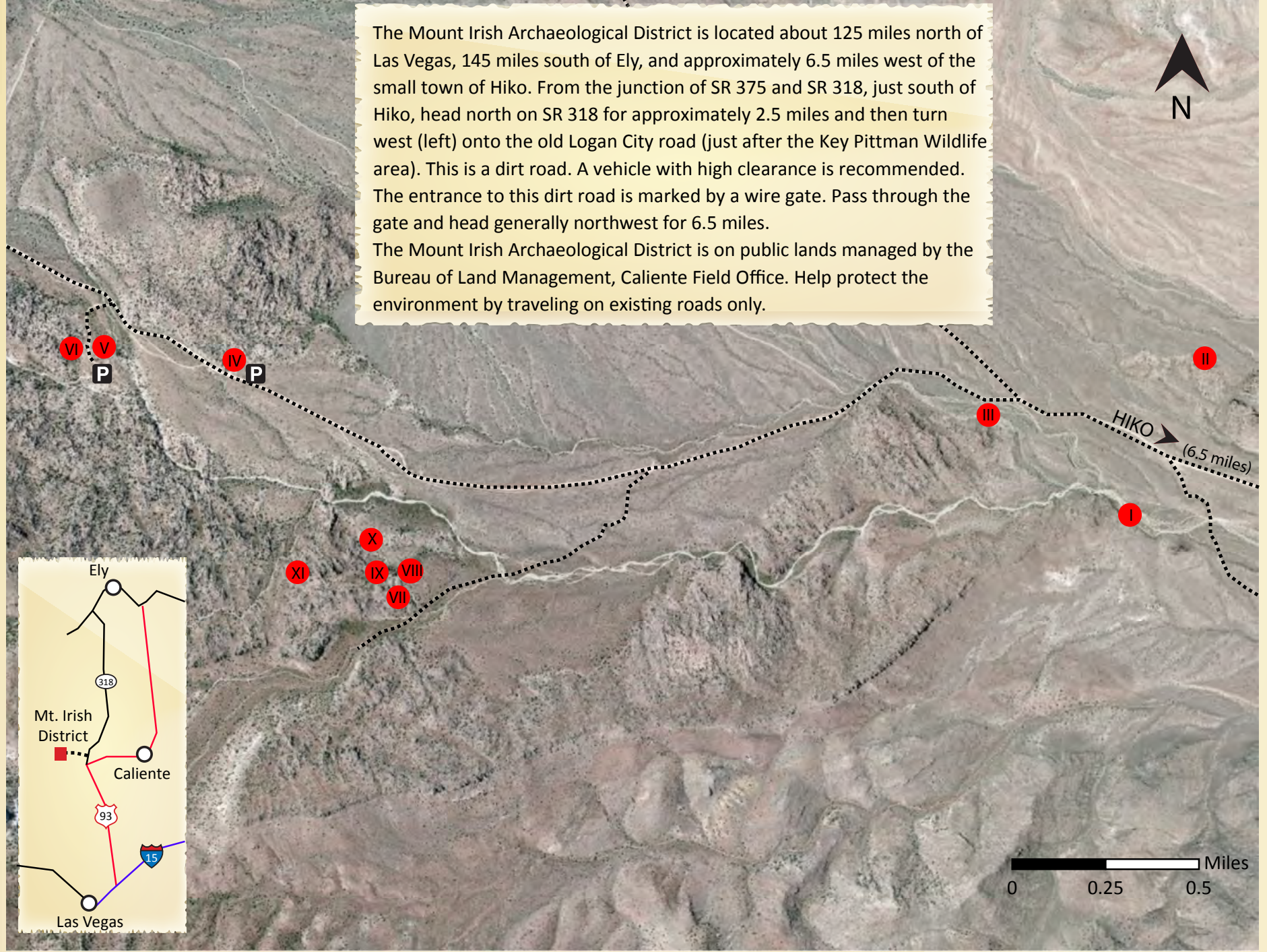
Mt. Irish V's 68 rock art panels are tightly distributed around a well-defined tuff outcrop, ranging from the foot of the outcrop to its top. The site's abstract motifs include circles bisected by a vertical line, possibly intended to portray atlatls or dart throwers, which could mean some of the site's rock art was made during the period 4,000-1,500 years ago. Evidence of ancient campsites in the vicinity show that the site was used most intensively during the period 1,500-400 years ago. This provides clues to the age of the Pahrnagat style in eastern Nevada. Pahrnagat style figures at the site include both the solid-pecked and rectangular body types. These are situated prominently in the outcrop, accompanied by bighorn sheep figures as well as abstract designs. §





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The Mount Irish Archaeological District is located about 125 miles north of Las Vegas, 145 miles south of Ely, and approximately 6.5 miles west of the small town of Hiko. From the junction of SR 375 and SR 318, just south of Hiko, head north on SR 318 for approximately 2.5 miles and then turn west (left) onto the old Logan City road (just after the Key Pittman Wildlife area). This is a dirt road. A vehicle with high clearance is recommended. The entrance to this dirt road is marked by a wire gate. Pass through the gate and head generally northwest for 6.5 miles. The Mount Irish Archaeological District is on public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Caliente Field Office. Help protect the environment by traveling on existing roads only.



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Mt. Irish VI: Western Locus

Mt. Irish VI is the single largest rock art site in the District (129 panels) and is 50 m to the west of Mt. Irish V, with which it is similar in rock art styles and themes, and most likely both were used during the same period.



Mt. Irish VI is concentrated on the south and eastern side of a large tuff outcrop and is very extensive. The site is distinguished by both its Pahrnagat style figures and its quantity of bighorn sheep designs. Over 100 portrayals of bighorn sheep are known from the site, one of the largest concentrations in eastern Nevada. The bighorn sheep are frequently portrayed in lines or groups, as if to depict small herds. Pahrnagat style figures at the site include both the solid-pecked and rectangular body types. The solid-pecked types include at least one that is dramatically posed and visually prominent. A number of the rectangular body types are portrayed holding atlatls or dart throwers, suggesting that the Pahrnagat style started to be made before the introduction of bow and arrow technology in the area some 1,500 years ago. §



Mt. Irish VII: Southern Locus

The southern locus comprises scattered rock art panels and dense concentrations of rock art on tuff knolls flanked to the north by Logan Creek. Mt. Irish VII is the southernmost of these concentrations, situated on top of a low hill. Rock art was



made on horizontal as well as vertical surfaces, so some rock art is not visible from a distance. Facing mostly south, the site has large, densely arranged panels of representational and abstract images. At the foot of the hill is a particularly lively bighorn sheep image and farther upslope is a coyote. Like other sites in the District, prehistoric artists at Mt. Irish VII took advantage of the natural topography to define viewing areas and display the rock art imagery to best effect. §





Mt. Irish VIII and IX Southern Locus

Mt. Irish VIII is in a large alcove and has a large square-bodied sheep high on the outcrop, easily visible from a distance, and a few other scattered motifs. This alcove is west of Mt. Irish VII and faces east. Farther to the west is a single,



large petroglyph boulder, Mt. Irish IX, situated at the foot of the northwest face of a small tuff knoll. This petroglyph boulder contains one very large bighorn sheep design (almost life-size) and three smaller bighorn sheep figures (one of which superimposes the other) and a dumbbell-like design (a pair of open circles connected by a horizontal line).

This is one of the largest portrayals of a bighorn sheep known in the District. Most figurative rock art images are much smaller than the real objects being portrayed. If Mt. Irish X has the biggest sheep petroglyph in the region, then Narrows IV in the White River Narrows National Register District (about 25 miles to the north) may have the smallest. The cultural significance of differences in the size of animal imagery in rock art is not well understood. §



Mt. Irish X Southern Locus



Mt. Irish X is located in the lower south-central portion of the District on a tuff knoll and cliff-face. The site is approximately 150 m northwest of Mt. Irish IX and X.

The site comprises 22 petroglyph panels (86 motifs) and



evidence of tool-making and use, illustrating that everyday activities took place against a backdrop of pecked stone images. The site's rock art is largely abstract designs and animal imagery that are representative of Basin and Range tradition motifs. Abstract designs include rows of dots, circles and clusters of circles, wavy lines, zigzags, curvilinear meanders, rakes, and chevrons. Animal figures include 15 bighorn sheep and 4 other quadrupeds. No portrayals of people appear to be present at this site, which is unusual for sites larger than a few panels in the Great Basin. §



Mt. Irish XI Southern Locus

Mt. Irish XI is located in the lower south-central portion of the District, approximately 140 m southwest of Mt. Irish XI. The site comprises 38 petroglyph panels on a north-south trending tuff outcrop and boulders and is flanked at the



south end by a wash. Rock art is scattered along a 150 m stretch of this outcrop, accompanied by occasional evidence of past resource gathering and processing activities (such as milling slicks and stone tool fragments). The association between symbolic culture and daily economic routines, seen elsewhere in the District, continues here.

Abstract designs and animal imagery in Basin and Range tradition style are predominant here. These include bisected circles, circle clusters, concentric circles, rows of dots, curvilinear and rectilinear motifs, rakes, and asterisk-like figures. Portrayals of animals are dominated by bighorn sheep (19) and a small number of deer figures (3). People are portrayed by four stick-figures. §

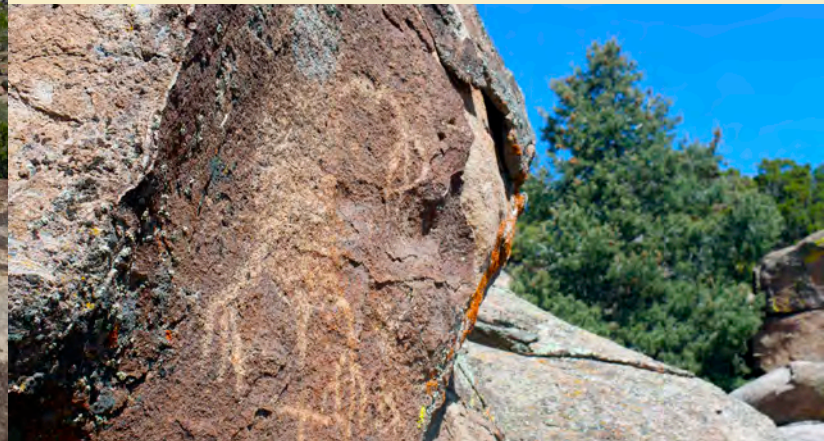


The Archaeological District



The Mt. Irish Archaeological District covers an area of 640 acres and recognizes the heritage significance of the rock art and other archaeological features in the District. These sites represent major patterns in the prehistory of eastern Nevada and are worthy of preservation. The District provides a record of unique rock art styles and the daily routines of hunter-gatherer groups that stretches back as much as 4,000 years.

The District is on public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, Caliente Field Office. The Caliente Field Office's mission is, in partnership with the public, to provide stewardship of the lands and resources entrusted to it for present and future generations. §





Preserving the Past

Some of the oldest petroglyphs in the Great Basin date to 10,000 years ago; in the Mt. Irish Archaeological District, some petroglyphs are 4,000 years old. Despite this antiquity, rock art, like other archaeological monuments, is a fragile part of Nevada's cultural heritage.

Natural erosional processes, such as weathering from water and wind, are slowly wearing away these ancient markings. Time itself works against the images as the surface of the petroglyph slowly darkens, a process known as repatination, which ultimately erases the glyphs.

Other threats include intentional defacement like graffiti or other vandalism. This damage cannot be removed or even camouflaged easily and is expensive to treat.

Federal and state laws protect archaeological sites from vandalism and theft, and many sites are monitored by concerned local citizens volunteering in the State of Nevada's site stewardship program. Because the past deserves a future, visitors at archaeological sites can help by following a few simple guidelines.

- Take only pictures, leave only footprints
- Be a steward—volunteer to monitor the condition of archaeological sites

For more information on how you can help preserve Nevada's past, visit these websites

www.blm.gov/nv

www.nvshpo.org/stewards.html

www.nvrockart.org

