

# Puha Path to Black Mountain

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# Black Mountain Region





# Introduction



- ❖ The findings presented in this presentation represent the efforts of a multi-year Native American study funded by the U.S. Air Force on the Nevada Test and Training Range (Nellis AFB).

- ❖ This study was designed to understand the cultural significance of the Black Mountain volcanic landscape to the Western Shoshone, Southern Paiute, Owens Valley Paiute and Mojave people.

- ❖ During three field sessions (November 2004 to November 2005) 201 interviews were collected using three survey instruments: Site Specific, Rock Art, and Landscape.

- ❖ Each instrument was designed in conjunction with Native Americans to elicit specific information about a site, use, and connection to other locations in the regional landscape.

- ❖ Ongoing archaeological research by Statistical Research Inc, URS Corporation, and Geo Marine Inc have complemented this study.



# The following people participated in this study:

## Southern Paiute

- Kenny Anderson, Las Vegas Paiute Indian tribe
- Tanya Black, Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah
- Betty L. Cornelius, Colorado River Indian Tribes
- Glendora Homer, Kaibab Paiute Tribe
- Clifford Jake, Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah
- Clara Belle Jim, Pahrump Paiute Tribe
- Lalovi Miller, Official Tribal Representative-Moapa Band of Paiutes
- Tracey Miller, Moapa Band of Paiutes
- Tim Rogers, Kaibab Paiute Tribe
- Le Ann Jake Shearer, Kaibab Paiute Tribe

## Fort Mojave:

- Angie Alvarado, Fort Mojave Indian Tribe
- Bernice Benn, Fort Mojave Indian Tribe
- Felton Bricker, Fort Mojave Indian Tribe
- Linda Otero, Fort Mojave Indian Tribe

## Western Shoshone

- Jerry Charles, Ely Shoshone Tribe
- Darlene Dewy, Yomba Shoshone Tribe
- Maurice G. Frank-Churchill, Duckwater (and Yomba) Shoshone Tribe
- Mattie Frank, Duckwater Shoshone Tribe
- Grace Goad, Timbisha Shoshone Tribe
- Joe Kennedy, Timbisha Shoshone Tribe
- Johnny Kennedy, Timbisha Shoshone Tribe
- Dela Patterson, Duckwater Shoshone Tribe
- Daisy Smith, Yomba Shoshone Tribe

## Owens Valley Paiute

- Leslie Button, Lone Pine Paiute Shoshone tribe
- Gerald O. Kane, Bishop Paiute Indian tribe
- Gaylene Moose, Bishop Paiute Indian Tribe
- Rosanne Moose, Big Pine Paiute Tribe of the Owens Valley
- Richard Wilder, Fort Independence Paiute Tribe



# Puha

- ❖ Volcanoes in Numic and Yuman culture are viewed as sources of power or *Puha* in the Numic languages, and are places where the Earth is renewed and reborn. The concept of *Puha* is critical for understanding Numic and Yuman epistemologies as demonstrated by their interpretation of the ceremonial trail to Black Mountain.
- ❖ *Puha* derives from Creation. It exists on three levels and can move between the three levels of the universe: upper (where powerful anthropomorphic beings live), middle (where people now live), and lower (where extraordinary beings with reptilian or distorted humanoid appearance live).
- ❖ *Puha* continuously flows back and forth from center to the periphery—both concentrically and radially. Therefore it connects, disconnects, and reconnects every element of the universe.

# Puha...cont.

- ❖ Puha exists throughout the universe but, like differences in human strength, Puha will vary in intensity from element to element, object to object, place to place. It varies in what it can be used for and it determines what different elements can do.
- ❖ Humans seek power through the identification and ceremonial use of places where Puha is concentrated.
- ❖ The physical and the spiritual effects of Puha are palpable and experienced every time people interact with the landscape. Therefore, Puha is rationalized and permeates social memory.





# Puha in Objects



# Bow and Arrow Partnership





# Puha in Places: Springs



Crystal  
Springs

# Puha and Topography

- ❖ Normally puha moves from the highest mountain tops where it, much like snow, occurs because the mountains call down moisture from the sky. Like water, puha flows downhill, but it concentrates; and where that occurs, other elements of the world are attracted.
- ❖ Volcanoes are a special variety of mountains because they represent a rebirth of the earth. The creation of a volcanic mountain or lava flow thus constitutes a special event when puha moves up into this world. Volcanoes and all they produce are viewed as having strong concentrations of special kinds of puha.



*Creation place*



*Volcano*



*A Product of Volcanic Activity*





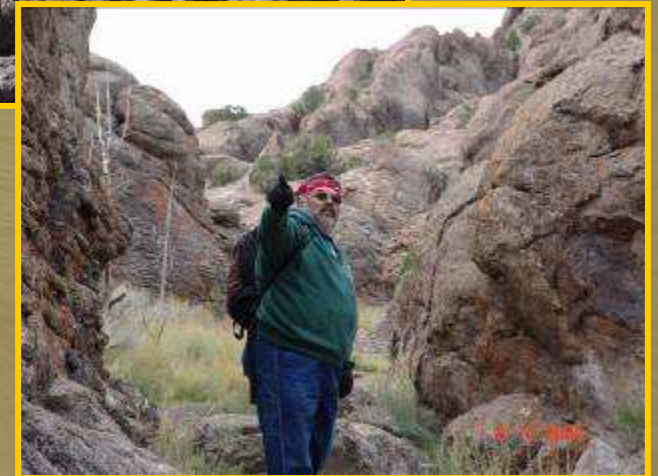
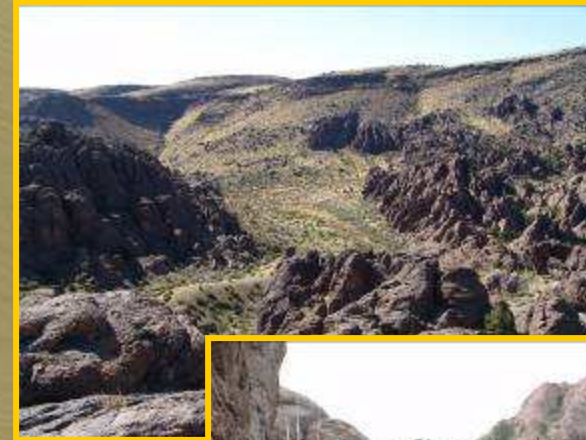
# Puha Paths to Black Mountain

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# Puha Paths and Pilgrimage Trails

- ❖ Ceremonies are conducted at places with high concentrations of Puha.
- ❖ Pilgrimages to ceremonial destinations are neither random nor focused on efficiencies of movement. Rather, pilgrims follow traditionally established Puha Paths. The journey is a part of the ceremony.
- ❖ In Numic and Yuman views, Puha Paths are places that are interconnected and linked together by this power to make a functionally holistic landscape.
- ❖ Because Black Mountain is a central ceremonial area, the pilgrims traveled along extensive trail networks that connected Indian communities and ceremonial places from all over California, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona.





# Puha Paths to Black Mountain

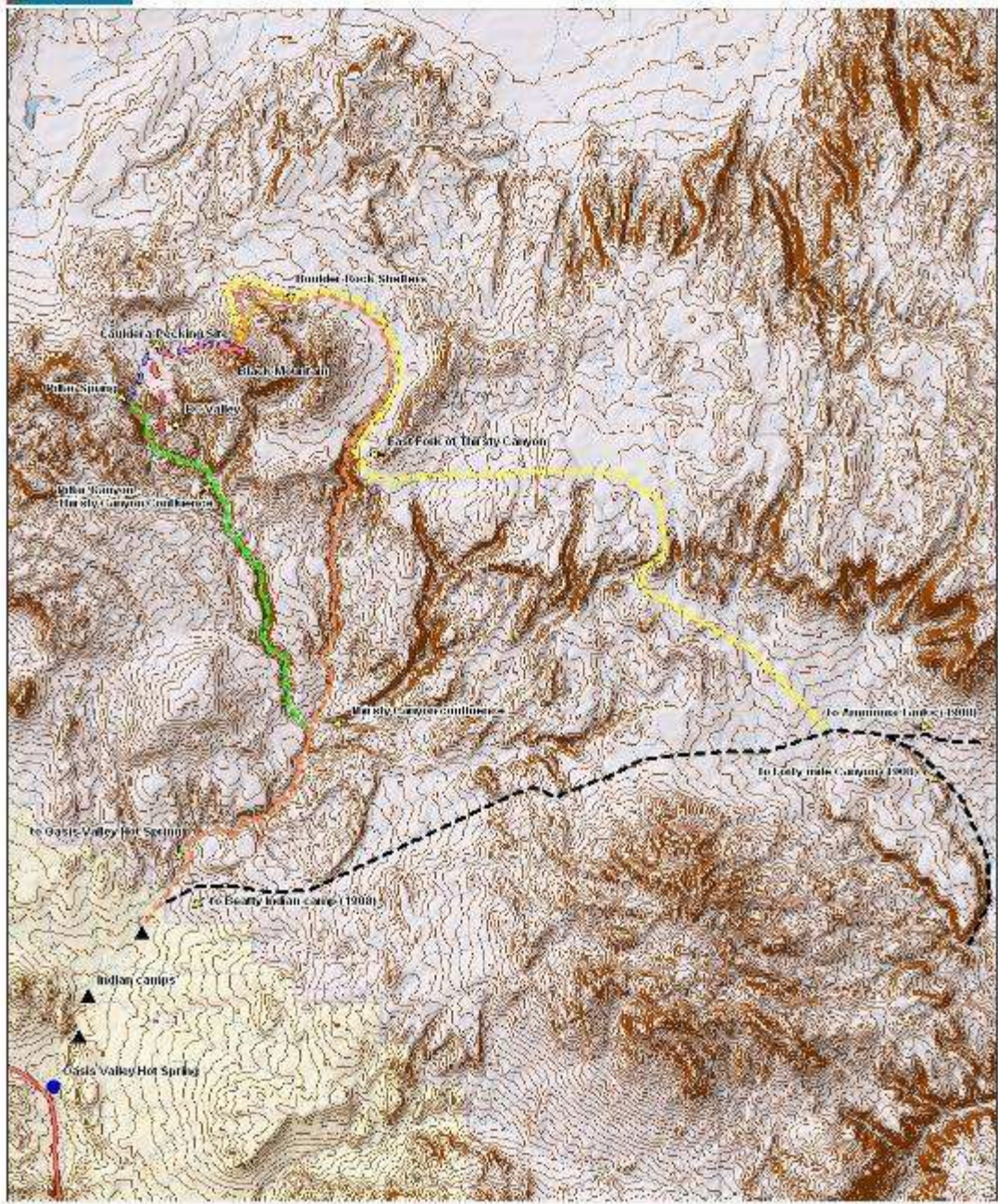
- ❖ Puha Paths are components of a larger cultural landscape.
- ❖ Puha Path is a term that can be used to describe Numic and Yuman pilgrimage trails to powerful places.
- ❖ Traveling along Puha Paths require participants to stop at selected places along the trail to prepare themselves for their destination. The journey to the destination is just as important as the destination itself.
- ❖ The following section highlights the Oasis Valley Puha Path to Black Mountain.



# Pilgrimage Trails to Black Mountain

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# Pilgrimage Trail to Black Mountain

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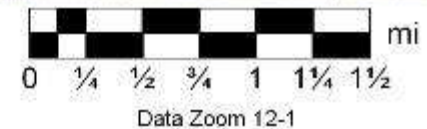
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# Starting Out- Oasis Valley

❖ The home communities were important agricultural centers like Ash Meadows and Oasis Valley. They were known for having irrigated agricultural fields and large populations. At these villages, the pilgrims began their initial preparation for their journey. They cleansed themselves of impurities and ill thoughts through prayer, sweats, and bathing in hot springs.



❖ According to Rosie Arnold, a Southern Paiute elder, the original hot spring in Oasis Valley was protected and used exclusively by the local Indian people to purify themselves for ceremonial and doctoring uses during the 1920s and 1930s.



# Thirsty Canyon

- ❖ After leaving the hot springs in Oasis Valley, the pilgrims would travel through Thirsty Canyon.
- ❖ While walking through the canyon, the pilgrims would leave offerings and pray.



# On the Trail...

- ❖ Once the pilgrims left their home communities they would not be in contact with a water source until they reached Pillar Springs, which has three permanent springs with drinkable water.



- ❖ Water would be collected and used by the pilgrims as part of their journey to the top of Black Mountain. The water was used as an offering at other stopping points along the trail, as aid in medicine preparation, and as a ceremonial element.



# Pillar Springs- Support Camp

- ❖ At the springs, a support camp would be set up for the person who is making the trek to the top of the mountain. The support camp would be near to where the vision seeking would occur, but would be sufficiently removed from Black Mountain to give the vision seeker privacy.
- ❖ The vision quest support people advised the seeker, helped to interpret what was happening, and were responsible to assure that the vision seeker did not become ill.





# First View of Prayer Shrine Site



BC Valley

West of Survey  
Unit Four



- ❖ When the pilgrims arrived at a place from where they could clearly see Black Mountain for the first time, they would introduce themselves and explain the purpose of their journey.
- ❖ A ceremony might be conducted or songs might be sung to send prayers to the mountain. Offerings such as obsidian, quartz, other stones, and pottery were left at these sites. Medicinal plants might have been gathered to use as offering at later points along the trail or during ceremonies conducted at the top of Black Mountain.



# BC Valley- Offerings





# Site West of Survey Unit Four- Offerings





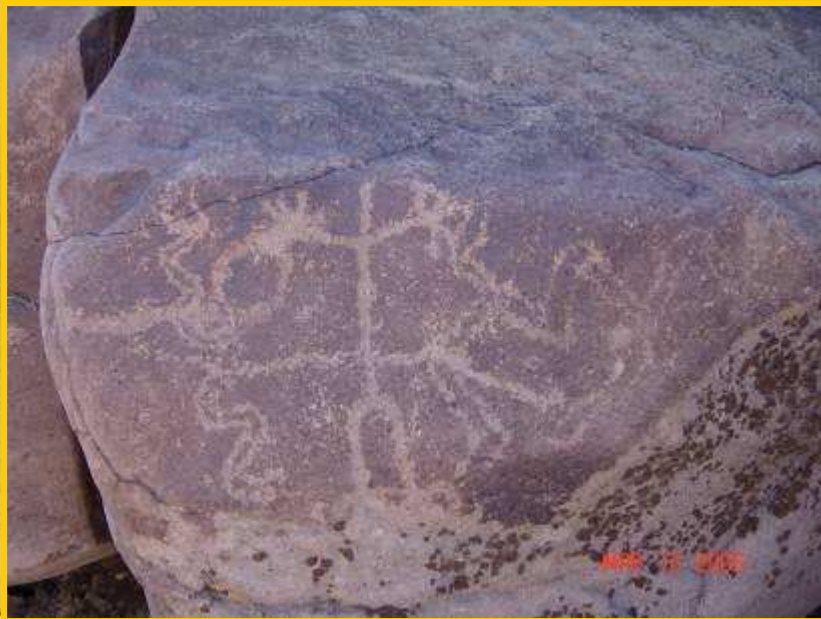
# Prayers and Petroglyphs

From the first view prayer shrines, the pilgrims would travel to the Caldera Pecking Site. It would be visited before ascending to the top of Black Mountain. The trail traverses through this narrow basalt canyon, where the pilgrims would interact with the petroglyphs by saying prayers, leaving offerings, and singing songs. The pilgrims could acquire Puha in the form of a spirit helper.





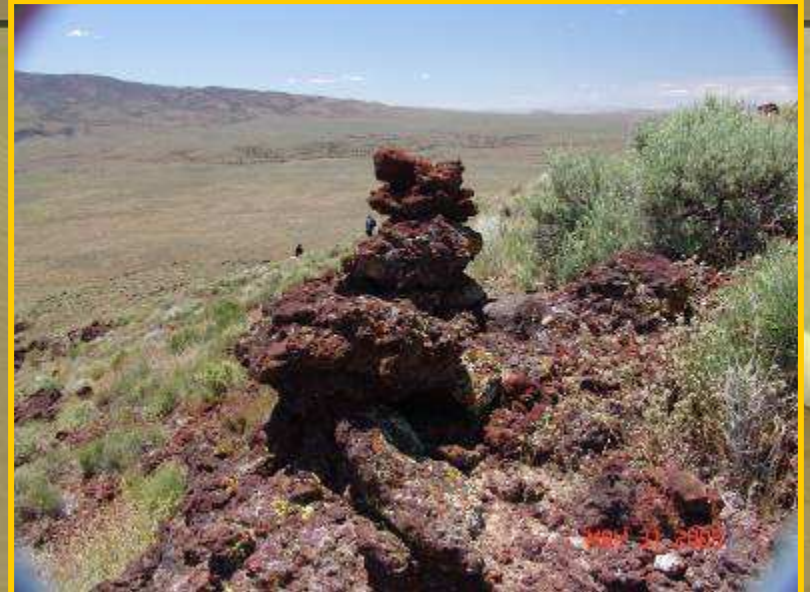
# Caldera Pecking Site





# Rock Cairns on the Top

- ❖ After passing through the Caldera Pecking canyon, pilgrims would follow the trail to the top of Black Mountain.
- ❖ Although development has removed any evidence of the trail and the top of Black Mountain, we believe there would have been rock cairns similar to those found on Scrugham Peak, a ceremonial volcano located on the Nevada Test Site.



# Vision Questing on Black Mountain

- ❖ The vision was sought over a period of days. An important part of the vision quest was the viewscape.
- ❖ From the top of Black Mountain, the vision seeker could see other regional ceremonial centers such as Scrugham Peak, Timber Mountain, Mount Charleston, Mount Helen and Stonewall Mountain.
- ❖ The vision seeker would spiritually interact with the surrounding peaks.



# From the top of Black Mountain...



*Pillar Springs*



*East of the Black Mountain Caldera*



*Thirsty Canyon and Oasis Valley*



*Timber Mountain Caldera,  
a Neighboring Volcanic Ceremonial Area*

# Vision Questing on Black Mountain ...cont.



Native American Representatives discussing the Puha Path to Black Mountain

- ❖ When the vision was achieved, or at such time that the support person suggested the time to leave had come, they would leave the Black Mountain area.
- ❖ The pilgrims could not return directly to their home communities because they had acquired Puha during their journey.
- ❖ They would reverse their journey, returning to the shrines visited and saying exit prayers of thanks.



# Conclusions

- ❖ Puha Paths connect Black Mountain to numerous ceremonial places located within the Black Mountain Caldera and beyond.
- ❖ Black Mountain is a regional ceremonial center that can be understood from its location, its geology, the places that surround it, and the paths that connect these places.