

THE FIRST PEOPLE

Human beings began to migrate in waves to the Western Hemisphere from Asia during the drought period of 12-13,000 years ago. People lived and hunted in this area as Lake Lahontan shrank.



BLM, sdesign photos

Human tool use in the last 10,000 years reflects climate change in the area. When the climate supported large animal populations, hunting tools predominate in the archaeological record. About 7,500 years ago, habitat was severely altered when the climate reached its hottest and driest. Archaeology shows that grinding stones were used intensely during that time which indicates that people survived more on plants and seeds than on meat.



P. Barry photo

Northern Paiute camp with tule mat houses. Circa 1890

The Northern Paiutes have occupied this area for centuries. These hunter gatherers traveled in small bands as the desert could not support large, concentrated populations. Each band was named after the principal food source of their area. In the northern part of the NCA were the Fish Eaters (*Aga'ipañinadökadö*) (Summit Lake) and the Wild Onion Eaters (*Moadökadö*) and in the south were the Jackrabbit Eaters (*Kamodökadö*).

SETTLERS AND RANCHES

Settlers in the area found the high desert environment too harsh for traditional farming. Instead, they have ranched and grazed livestock on the surrounding ranges for over 100 years.

Centered in the Black Rock country, the Miller and Lux Ranch built a fabulous empire around 1900. In the 1930's, the Miller and Lux ranch was divided and sold. Local ranching families continue to graze cattle and sheep within the NCA.

A sheep-herder's wagon at Black Rock Hot Springs may have been left behind during early ranching or by failed attempts to homestead in the 1920's and '30's.



Steward photo



E. Merin photo



P. Barry photo

A sheep camp above the Black Rock Playa, in the late 1930's.



PC, Bundy, NPS Special Collection photo

Mustangs were chased onto the playa and gathered by area ranchers.

THE PLANTS OF THE BLACK ROCK DESERT

The plants near the playa have adapted to the harsh conditions of the high desert. Summers are hot. Winters are cold. Most precipitation falls in the winter when plants are dormant.

Small leaves with protective surfaces prevent loss of moisture in desert plants. Some plants protect themselves by dropping their leaves during the driest part of the year. Many high desert plants have thorns to protect them from browsers.

Salt grass and alkali grass have adapted to the highly alkaline and salty soil around springs. The little mounds near the playa are bush seep weed.



B. Wicke photo

To survive the hot, dry summers, greasewood, shadscale, and 4-wing saltbush have extremely deep roots to make use of moisture deep in the ground. Windblown soil particles are caught by these plants, causing dunes to build up around them. The dunes around the playa provide vital habitat for many species, including the elusive kit fox.

VEHICLES DESTROY FRAGILE DUNE HABITAT.

DO NOT DRIVE ON DUNES OR OTHER PROHIBITED AREAS.

AND THE ANIMALS



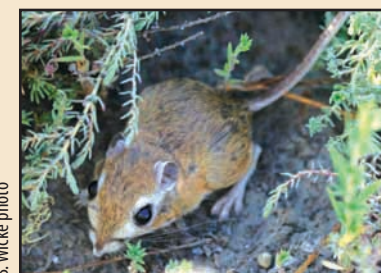
CA Herps photo

You will not see them on the playa, but always be aware that a rattlesnake may be hiding from the heat under a rock or brush. Rattlesnakes shed their skins as they grow - if they find a lot to eat they shed more often. They shed the skin over their eyes, too, which makes them almost blind. That is when they are most vulnerable and will feel most threatened by your presence.

Kit foxes live in the dunes around the edge of the playa. Big ears help this smallest of the canine species hunt at night and also help dissipate heat. Key-hole shaped entrances lead into their dens where they spend their days underground. They eat jackrabbits, kangaroo rats, and reptiles. Because they are so elusive, you are more apt to see a coyote than a kit fox.



Forestry Images photo



Forestry Images photo

Kangaroo rats are nocturnal also, and spend the day in their cool burrows. They do not drink water but get the moisture they need from the plants they eat.



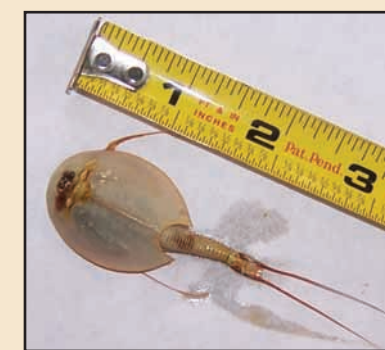
CA Herps photo

Horned lizards are slow but their spiny exterior protects them. If a predator gets too close they can squirt blood out of their eyes. The blood is mixed with noxious tasting and smelling substances that makes a predator leave them alone.



Forestry Images photo

The high pitched buzzing that surrounds you in the late summer is the song of the male cicada. When cicada eggs hatch, the nymphs burrow into the ground where they remain for up to 17 years. That makes cicadas one of the longest living insects on earth. Hundreds of cicadas may emerge from the ground on the same day and shed their nymphal skin to become winged adults.



BLM photo

The playa looks lifeless, but when it gets wet, tadpole shrimp and fairy shrimp cysts (eggs) hatch. The shrimp are an important food source for migratory birds in the spring. As summer dries the playa, the shrimp lay their cysts only a few millimeters deep in the playa mud. There they can lie dormant for many years until rains awaken them again.

HISTORIC AND MODERN PLAYA EVENTS

Filmed on the Black Rock playa in 1926, *The Winning of Barbara Worth* began Gary Cooper's film career. Vilma Banky co-starred with Ronald Colman in Harold Bell Wright's story about Imperial Valley water. Since then, the flat, empty playa has served as a background for many interesting events.



BLM, Humboldt County Museum, L. Nardella, M. Elbert, D. Ranger photos