



BLM's National Landscape Conservation System's

Black Rock Desert / High Rock Canyon - Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area

"On both sides, the mountains showed often stupendous and curious-looking rocks, which at several places so narrowed the valley, that scarcely a pass was left for the camp. It was a singular place to travel through — shut up in the earth, a sort of chasm, the little strip of grass under our feet, the rough walls of bare rock on either hand, and the narrow strip of sky above. The grass tonight was abundant and we encamped in high spirits."

- John C. Fremont, December 30, 1843

A Land of Extremes

Canyons, badlands, mountains, playa—the Black Rock Desert and High Rock Canyon NCA include all of these. The Desert Playa, an area stretching for more than 160,000 acres, is an ancient lake bed that is one of the flattest places in the world. Visitors can still see the effects of ancient waves on the former shorelines of Lake Lahontan, which covered this area with 500 feet of water 60,000 years ago.

With flatlands dominated by sagebrush, the region provides some of the largest breeding areas for sagebrush-dependent desert songbirds. A significant population of the threatened sage grouse still thrives in the northwestern section of the conservation area. In contrast to the flat plains, deep narrow canyons support meadow complexes and other riparian vegetation. These canyons are also home to some of the largest natural potholes in North America.

Varying terrain provides habitat for many other species of wildlife including pronghorn, wild horses, golden eagles and other raptors, bighorn sheep, wild horses, and cougars. Warm springs found in the Black Rock and High Rock are critical for threatened and endangered plants and pupfish.

Rich in History

Black Rock—High Rock Emigrant Trail NCA protects a region of great historical significance for Nevada and the nation. The famous Applegate-Lassen Emigrant Trail, which runs through the heart of the region, played a pivotal roll in the western migration and the California Gold Rush. The trail and its scenery remain much the same as they were 150 years ago during the peak of the trail's use. Visitors can still see the ruts left behind by the wagons as well as historic landmarks such as the 1843-44 John Charles Fremont exploration route, the site of the death of prominent settler Peter Lassen, early military facilities, and examples of early homesteading and mining.

The area's rich history dates far beyond the Emigrant Trail. A wealth of prehistoric remains have been found throughout the region including those of sabertooth tigers and giant woolly mammoths. Numerous Native American cultural sites also exist within the NCA.

On December 21, 2000, President Clinton signed The Black Rock Desert - High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trail National Conservation Area Act of 2000, which established 797,000 acres as a NCA and about 75,000 acres as wilderness. Divided into ten different parcels, the wilderness areas include Black Rock Desert, North Jackson Mountains, South Jackson Mountains, Pahute Peak, North Black Rock Range, East Fork High Rock Canyon, High Rock Lake, Little High Rock Canyon, High Rock Canyon, and Calico Mountains Wildernesses. About 378,600 acres of wilderness are within the NCA.