

**MNS Wind Farm Project on the Nevada Test Site  
American Indian Rapid Cultural Assessment  
Of Proposed Gravel Road Improvements  
Trip Report, March 2001**

Prepared for

U.S. Department of Energy  
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Photo 1: The north face of Shoshone Mountain on the Nevada Test Site

This report presents the findings of a two-day Rapid Cultural Assessment (RCA) to assess potential impacts to resources important to American Indians from gravel road improvements associated with the Shoshone Mountain phase of the MNS Wind Farm Project on the Nevada Test Site (NTS).

The study was conducted by the American Indian Writers Subgroup (AIWS), an official committee of the Consolidated Group of Tribes and Organizations (CGTO). The CGTO is composed of 16 tribes and 3 Indian organizations that have historic or cultural ties to the NTS. The work was facilitated by Dr. Stoffle from the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology at the University of Arizona (UofA). Funding was provided by DOE/NV.

Field work occurred on March 19-20, 2001. Assessment team members were: Richard Arnold of the Pahrump Paiute Tribe, Jerry Charles of the Ely Shoshone Tribe, Betty Cornelius of the Colorado River Indian Tribes, Maurice Frank-Churchill of the Yomba Shoshone Tribe, Vernon Miller of the Fort Independence Tribe and Dr. Stoffle from the UofA. Tape recorders, site and landscape assessment forms, notebooks, landscape Geographic Information System maps, and photography were used to record cultural data. The assessment team is confident in their findings and recommendations, but would like to make two important qualifications. First, this is only a brief field assessment by a committee of the CGTO. The CGTO maintains that normal American Indian cultural studies should involve the active participation of at least two elders from each of the CGTO consulting tribes. This study, like all committee reports, is not official until it has been reviewed by all tribes composing the CGTO.

It's important to note that this assessment was focused on what have been termed in the Wind Farm Environmental Assessment (EA) as gravel roads. This term, however, only accurately applies to the old Buckboard Mesa Road, which has been previously graded. In contrast, the Shoshone Mountain Jeep trails show no signs of ever having been graded. This is evident by the fact that they are simple jeep tracks with large boulders and bushes sticking up between where vehicle wheels have passed. The east Shoshone Jeep trail could not be traveled very far by means of the study team's four-wheel drive vehicle, so it was walked to its current end at the junction with the proposed Ridge Access Road. Despite extensive efforts to follow the east jeep trail beyond this point, no evidence of the road was found. The west Shoshone Jeep trail travels across the major wash from Shoshone Mountain and then goes up the steep hill the Back 40 portion of the Shoshone Mountain phase of the project. This trail could only be followed by the study team's four-wheel drive vehicle up to the vision quest site. Members of the study team did climb to the top of the ridge.



Photo 2: Existing Roads – Old Buckboard Mesa road looking west

### **The Wind Farm Project**

The draft EA describes the Wind Farm project proposal and study area as follows:

*The proponents of the Alternative Energy Generation Facility have proposed the use of three locations on the NTS to build wind farms: the Shoshone Mountains in portions of Areas 16, 29, and 30; Skull Mountain in portions of Areas 25, 26, and 27; and Pahute Mesa in portions of Areas 12 and 19. In all three areas, wind turbines would be installed on the relatively flat mountain tops or mesas. The boundaries of the proposed wind farm sites follow approximately the contours of the mesa's edge, where the slope becomes suddenly steeper.*

The draft EA should be consulted for more details regarding this proposed project. Map A provides an overview of the project area.

This RCA of the proposed gravel road improvements is focused on four roads that have been assigned names by this project in order to have a more specific set of references to places in the study area. These roads are as follows:

- (1) Old Buckboard Mesa road from Paiute Mesa road in the east to the turn off to Shoshone Mountain on the Jeep trail,

- (2) Shoshone Mountain Jeep trail from the Old Buckboard Mesa road south until the split between the east and west Shoshone Jeep trails,
- (3) East Shoshone Jeep trail from the road split until it ends at Old Trail Ridge, and
- (4) West Shoshone Jeep trail from the road split until it ends at the proposed beginning of the Ridge Access Road.

Map B provides a detailed view of the study area.

The gravel roads improvement proposal was chosen as a first step in the cultural assessment of potential impacts because weather precluded leaving existing roads to follow the proposed roads cross-country. In addition, these gravel roads are most likely to be chosen first for upgrades to meet the specifications of moving materials to the top of Shoshone Mountain.

### Sites

A total of nine cultural sites were identified along the roads proposed to be improved. The boundaries of each site are perceived by the Indian assessment team to extend to the road, including those road edges that would be upgraded. Some sites are literally bisected by the road, while others are only tangentially cut by it.

These sites were identified from the road by assessment team members and were then confirmed by directly walking over the sites and making firsthand observations. Once a site was identified, the group talked over the observations to determine whether or not there was consensus in the evaluation of the place. Only places where complete consensus occurred are incorporated into this report.

#### Site #1: Tippipah Village and Spring

- Description

This is a permanent village site identified by the name Tupipa (tupi = rock, pa = water) during the 1936 ethnographic studies of Julian Steward (1938: 95). The site was occupied in the late 1800s by Kipitasuguputsi, his wife (who was Mutsitsuguuts's sister), their two sons and one daughter, and his unmarried brother. This site contains a good spring, which was apparently the central reason for it being occupied year around. The region around this site is noted for ceremonial activities, as well as being bountiful.

- Observed Cultural Resources

The site contains evidence of Indian occupation and use. This evidence includes flakes and various artifacts including: metal items believed to have been used by the Indian people while living at the site and an abrader that is nearby the road and was cached near a sagebrush.

A Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act site is located in the vicinity of this village. The location and details of this site have been withheld at the request of

the assessment team. The site is connected with the village and reflects the importance of the village and the area.

- Interpretation

According to a Paiute man,

*the area was used for ceremonial and a living area. When you listen to the surrounding area, you can hear the wind talk and the mountains sing. The wind will travel through this area on its journey to Pintwater Cave to the south and to Shoshone Mountain near the proposed project area. The area is considered so important that the CGTO has brought Indian youth to the area to perpetuate the culture. The Tippihah Springs area is the opening or beginning to a much broader landscape that is directly connected to Shoshone Mountain. A long time ago, special ceremonies, prayers, and songs were sung when the sun came up to hear and answer the messages of the songs and prayers. If these were not done properly, the water would dry up and the wind will get angry and cause great harm to the area.*

## **Site #2: Laydown Area One**

- Description

This area has been defined in the EA as being at the junction of west and east Shoshone Jeep trails. It is defined by the project as the main construction camp with roads and borrow pit.

A large area has been defined as the “laydown area withdrawal area”, however, the area has not been staked at this time, so exact boundaries are not known. Nonetheless, the area was walked over and a cultural assessment was made. (See Photo 6)

- Observed Cultural Resources

Lithics were found over the entire surface of the area visited. Also present are medicine and food plants.

- Interpretation

The area is part of a much larger site and related to a very important quarry that was used to produce items for ceremonies and hunting activities.

### **Site #3: Obsidian Flake Site**

- Description

The site was identified as being composed of rocky areas on a knoll. The area is just to the south of the entrance of a major canyon that connects this flank of Shoshone Mountain with Forty-Mile Canyon. (See Photos 3 and 4).

- Observed Cultural Resources

The site has a wide assortment of large obsidian flakes and cores. Most flakes are quite large and there are few small final chipping flakes. Most flakes are so large that the question was raised as to why they were left in this location.

- Interpretation

This area is probably an entrance place where Indian people (who had come for a vision, to conduct ceremonies, or to collect obsidian) would stop. The area was likely used to give an offering of thanks and to let the place know they were entering or leaving. The offering would be of high value, such as the large pieces of obsidian found on the site.

There is one very large flat area that was interpreted as a dance area. This area would have been used when group of individuals used the area and collectively gave thanks as part of ceremonies.

The site is not visually in contact with Scrugham Peak or Buckboard Mesa and so there was no interpretation of it being a vision quest site. Also, there were no noticeable cairns that would have marked such a site.

### **Site #4: Vision Quest - Shrines**

- Description

This site is located about one mile up the west Shoshone Jeep trail from Site #3. The current Jeep trail cuts across the site. The site runs from the edge of the mesa above, downslope and below the spot where the road turns across the site, and it is about 75 meters in diameter. The dominant physical feature of the site is a deep deposit of Apache tears. In fact, it is the deepest and widest deposit of these small round pieces of obsidian ever seen by any member of the study team. In some places, there is no other type of stone showing on the surface. Additionally, in some places the Apache tears are up to two inches deep. Periodically, there are large cobbles of obsidian ranging from the size of a fist (four inches in diameter) to a small loaf of baguette bread (four inches across and ten inches long). (See Photos 5 to 8)



Photos 3 and 4: Site # 3 above Jerry Charles with obsidian flake; below, Vernon Miller and Maurice Frank-Churchill with obsidian flakes



In the center of the site is a high round ridge. This place afforded a good view of the area to the north of Shoshone Mountain, as well as a view of the Shoshone Mountain's peaks to the south.

- Observed Cultural Resources

Apache Tears, which are viewed as gifts from the volcano called Scrugham Peak, dominate the site. Throughout the site are signs of Indian people collecting obsidian nodules and chipping them into large pieces. There is little obvious evidence of tool refinement.

On the top front of the high round ridge are a dozen cairn piles and one large rock wall. The wall is about eight feet long and about 3 feet high. Around the wall is evidence of rock fall suggesting it was once higher than it is now.

- Interpretation

The site is interpreted as having at least three functions. First, and perhaps foremost, it was a vision questing location. The vistas were seen as culturally appropriate for vision questing, especially because of the view of Scrugham Peak and Buckboard Mesa. The power of the site was seen as greatly enhanced because of the abundance of Apache tears that so cover the land they cause the ground to appear shiny and black. These types of rocks are viewed as very spiritual and are used for healing by Indian doctors. Today, these small rocks are still used by traditional medicine people and they are highly desired for continuing ceremonies. Only certain locations produce or yield this highly prized resource. According to a Paiute man, the small rocks are further considered powerful because of their proximity to the vision quest area and to Shoshone Mountain, Calico Hills, Scrugham Peak, and Buckboard Mesa. The rock cairns were seen as direct evidence of shrines or markers that are used ceremonially to prepare for vision questing. According to a Paiute man, the cairns and/or markers were used to leave offerings or mark the boundaries of an area previously used to seek vision.

According to another Paiute person, medicine people who can transform stone to doctoring tools use obsidian. The power of obsidian is known to come from deep inside of the earth where power originates. A long time ago, Indian doctors would dig a hole in the dirt or use a hole in a rock to insert a special stick for healing. These techniques use the power of the rock or create a vacuum to take away sickness or bad things. Indian people use obsidian for doctoring tools, such as awls and other implements, for bloodletting ceremonies. Medicine people use obsidian to see through to the "other side", through its darkness, or deep within the earth to help people.



Photos 5 and 6: above, Site # 4 view of rock wall looking south to Shoshone Mountain and below, view to north of the volcano Scrugham Peak and Buckboard Mesa



Photo 6: Rock cairns in foreground on Site 4, East Shoshone Jeep Trail, and Laydown Area One in upper center of photograph

#### **Site #5: Unusual Rock Area**

- Description

The site is located above Tippipah Springs and near a number of cultural resource areas. This site is situated within a drainage with sloping sides that rise to an elevation of approximately 6,000 feet. Throughout this drainage are unusual rock formations and several rockshelters. At the higher elevations, tribal representatives observed small patches of snow, making it difficult to examine what lies beneath. A large stand of piñon pine trees was located along with juniper, bitter brush, Indian tea, and scrub oak.

- Observed Cultural Resources

Several resources were observed at this location. Tribal representatives identified several rockshelters at the higher locations; one has a large branch of bitter brush that was intentionally left and was used for healing ceremonies. Several obsidian flakes were identified near the road, throughout the wash area, and nearby the unusual rock formations.



Photo 8, Betty Cornelius with large obsidian boulders at the vision quest site (Site 4) with Scrugham Peak in the background

The unusual rock formations were seen as sleeping spirits that are the homes of the *Little People* or mountain spirits. According to a Paiute man, the *Tu-Tu-Go-Ov* (Little People/mountain spirits) are the keepers of the area and protect it from danger. If they are not treated with respect or reverence, they will get angry and bad things will happen to the people or resources in the area, including the wind. Both Western Shoshone and Southern Paiute tribal representatives commented that they had observed a *Tu-Tu-Go-Ov* in the area.

- Interpretation

According to a Paiute man, this area was seen as being connected to Tippipah Springs and the surrounding areas including Scrugham Peak, Buckboard Mesa, and the Shoshone Mountain area. If this area is disturbed, it will cause disharmony among the elements of nature and change the resources that are needed to sustain the balance in the area.



Photo 9: Richard Arnold at Site 5 near unusual rocks



Photo 10: Volcanic mountain to the south of Site 5

### **Site #6: Apache Tears – Lithic Scatter**

- Description

This site is located along the east Shoshone Jeep Trail from the junction with the west Shoshone Jeep Trail to the place where the proposed Ridge Access Road would be constructed. The west Shoshone Jeep Trail appears never to have been graded. There is no evidence that the east trail continues at all beyond this point, so this area was the limit of the analysis and the focus of this assessment. (No Photo)

- Observed Cultural Resources

The area is covered with a fairly even distribution of Apache tears. In addition, it contains large lithic flakes that are evenly distributed along the area.

- Interpretation

The area was interpreted as a use area, but there was insufficient time to determine its exact function.

## **Site #7: Trail Canyon to Forty-Mile Canyon**

- Description

This place is located along the west Shoshone Jeep trail near where the trail crosses the major wash coming down from Shoshone Mountain. It is near or in the General Access Areas (#12), which is planned for storage and /or road-curve construction. The area begins at the head of the large but unnamed canyon that connects with Forty- Mile Canyon to the west. (See Photos 11 and 12)

- Observed Cultural Resources

The area has a number of rockshelters in the canyon walls. One rockshelter contains a large white arrowhead, and most rockshelters have lithics in them.

- Interpretation

The entrance to this big canyon is the apparent access from Shoshone Mountain to Forty-Mile Canyon. The white arrowhead was interpreted as an offering to the canyon. Such offerings could also be reflected in the obsidian chips in the rockshelters. Such offerings are considered to be a part of an ongoing ceremony and thus qualify under NAGPRA as a ceremonial object.

## **Site #8: Ceremonial Support Camp**

- Description

This area is located just south of the junction between old Buckboard Mesa road and the Shoshone Jeep Trail. While the former has been graded in the past, the latter shows no evidence of ever being graded. (See Photos 13 and 14)

The site is generally defined by a series of cliffs located to the west of the Shoshone Jeep Trail. The cliffs have eroded so as to produce hundreds of large rockshelters.



Photos 11 and 12 of Site # 7: above are Vernon Miller and Richard Arnold in Canyon; below is a ceremonially deposited white arrow point



- Observed Cultural Resources

The area contains artifacts in the soft earth above and below the rockshelters. Some shelters contain very few artifacts, but others contain a wide array of artifacts. Observed were arrowheads, scrapers, pottery, grinding stones and slabs, and thousands of lithics. The area has an impressive view of both Shoshone Mountain and Scrugham Peak.

- Interpretation

The area has clearly been occupied, but the question arose as to why people would live in a place without water when there was a permanent village a few miles to the east at Tippipah Spring. The study team concluded that this is an area where men and boys go to prepare themselves for vision quests and other ceremonies on Shoshone Mountain or Scrugham Peak and Buckboard Mesa. Men and boys had to leave their regular communities when they engaged in various kinds of ceremonies. Ceremonies involved three stages: (1) preparing for the ceremony, (2) conducting the ceremony, and (3) transitioning back into normal life after the ceremony. The first and third activities could have involved the same kind of place – as long it was physically removed from the main Indian community. Shorter ceremonies and vision quests did not require extensive food or housing, but longer ceremonies did require place to eat and sleep that was removed from the ceremonial grounds. The name “ceremonial support camp” was suggested to reflect this important function.



Photo 13 of Site # 8: Cliffs with caves looking south towards Shoshone Mountain



Photo 14: Vernon Miller in one of the rock caves at Site # 8

### **Site # 9: Animal Trail Narrows**

- Description

This is an area along the old Buckboard Mesa road where the road passes through a natural narrows produced by high hills on either side. It is about a mile in length. (See Photos 15 and 16)

- Observed Cultural Resources

The area is dominated by animal trails. Three times the study team stopped the car and looked at the animal tracts. The area has plants including cedar, Indian rice grass, Indian tea, and sage. It has animals including deer, coyote, horses, rabbits, and mountain lions – all have recently left tracks along the trail next to the road.

- Interpretation

According to a Paiute woman, the animals using this area are horses, coyote, deer, mountain lions, and rabbits. Indian people would have used this place for hunting and gathering food. This place is vital to trails running north and south and east and west along the road. These areas are connected and everything is in harmony and healthy looking.



Photo 15: narrows along Old Buckboard Mesa Road, animal trails to right and left of road



Photos 16 of Site # 9: animal trails along road viewed by Maurice Frank and Vernon Miller

## General Observations

The following are some general observations. These are divided into those made by the Indian members of the assessment team and those made by the UofA ethnographer. Overall, the study area contains a number of sites considered to be culturally significant to Indian people. The sites are perceived as being interconnected among themselves and connected to places around them. Shoshone Mountain is mostly a roadless area. Except for occasional foot traffic, the plants, artifacts, vision quest shrines, and animals are largely undisturbed by human intrusion. The visual condition of the place is pristine. This state contributes to continuity in the meaning of the place and to the potential for the place serving in the cultural continuity of culturally affiliated Indian people.

There is a significant site on the lower flank of Shoshone Mountain near Tippipah Spring that is being protected by DOE/NV. This site is occasionally visited by Indian youth as a part of language and cultural transmission programs. Now that this study has identified nearby culturally related places, it has been recommended that these places be protected by the DOE/NV and made available to be used by Indian youth and elders as part of an expanded language and cultural transmission program.

## Indian Observations

A Paiute man summarized his experiences with these sites as follows:

*In conclusion, I am not a person to stand in the way of progress, or improvement for the benefit of mankind and other living elements, but I cannot support any further damage to our environment and all aspects of our existence within this mother earth. I would not like to see damage to animals, plants, minerals or other aspects of our living earth – our planet.*

*Utilization for progress must always be contingent upon the adverse conditions by which progress or development is achieved.*

A Paiute woman summarized her experiences with these sites as follows:

*What a great place. Only Nevada could have a place such as this, where everywhere your eyes gaze seems like someone's well-planned backyard or patio. It's equivalent to the Yosemite Valley, where as you enter and gaze inward toward the massive structures of rock reaching majestically upward, yet all fitting in a small valley. Nothing detracts from the other. Each feature is equal to the other. Their majesty depending on each other. Wherever you go is breathtaking.*

*The area of Tippipah Springs, Shoshone Mountain, Laydown areas, Obsidian site, Ceremonial support camp all mesh together in a significant way. It felt good to see a lot of what it offered. What we did see was enough. I came away with deep concerns for the area. Proper preservation and management for an area such as this need to be carefully adhered to.*

*Seeing Shoshone Mountain with the huge ridges and flanks was inspiring. There are lithic scatters, rock walls, obsidian beds, abundant vegetation, and they are all pretty healthy with animals and birds flying overhead. There is communication of this Kingdom with the heart, body, mind, and soul.*

*This is a precious environment with landscapes with significant places.*

## **UofA Ethnographer Observations**

The cultural meaning of places and the perceptions of how they are connected are unevenly distributed across ages and gender. Certain types of information are generally shared, while other types of information are esoteric and restricted to certain types of people. For example, a recent analysis of how plant information is distributed among Southern Paiute people suggests that elderly women know more information than men or young people in general (see “Puchuxwavaats Uapi :To Know About Plants” by Stoffle, Halmo, and Evans 1999). This analysis documents that as many as sixteen ethnobotany interviews on the same plant are necessary in order to fully understand its cultural significance. Many types of ceremonies were restricted to members of one gender, thus it is important to have a balance of men and women when doing cultural studies. Ethnic groups by definition have different cultures. It is generally accepted by social scientists that at least four members of each ethnic group involved in the study should be interviewed on a topic.

These qualifications are important because a subcommittee of the CGTO conducted the current assessment. The purpose of the study was to gather data regarding potential impacts to resources to American Indian along roads that would be upgraded for the Wind Farm Project EA. While the participants of this study feel comfortable with their interpretations of these sites, the committee is simply too small to provide the range of ethnic, gender, and age perspectives needed to have a full assessment.

Having qualified the findings of this short study, it is interesting that nine cultural sites were identified in a fairly small study area. All of these sites have obvious physical and less obvious cultural characteristics. The study team agreed to the meaning of each place identified. Because of the dense concentration of cultural sites along these roads, the study team recommends that further studies be conducted before any ground-disturbing activity occurs. In fact, the sites are so culturally sensitive; the study team requests that Indian monitors be present during both the survey staking and environmental studies of these sites. Proceeding with no further input from Indian elders and cultural experts could produce irreparable adverse impacts to sites along the west Shoshone Jeep trail. The study team thus recommends that no further activity be considered for this area before more information is gathered.

The study team is recommending that the vision quest site, and the area around it identified by concentrations of Apache Tears on the west Shoshone Jeep trail, be declared a Sacred Site under Executive Order 13007, Indian Sacred Sites. Further analysis by tribal elders is needed to determine its size, content, and boundaries, to determine whether or not any vehicle travel across this site is appropriate, and to discuss possible alternatives for site preservation. It is important to emphasize that both the vista from this site and the Apache Tears are considered essential to the composition and integrity of the site

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