Red Rock Canyon State Park
General Plan Revision, Cultural Resource Summary Report

September 2019

This is a summary of findings. A thorough analysis will be included in the Preliminary General Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Report.

Project Background

The following report presents a summary of the archaeological work completed for the Red Rock Canyon State Park General Plan revision. Archaeologists from California State Parks’ Southern Service Center (SSC) were requested to complete archaeological site condition assessment and archaeological survey and site recordation work for three areas of Red Rock Canyon State Park (RRCSP). These areas include Nightmare Gulch Trail and Road, Red Buttes Trail and Red Buttes East Trail, Black Rock Canyon Road, and El Paseo Road. Current data was needed for planning, protection, and management of these areas.

California State Parks has conducted numerous studies since 20,500 acres of BLM land was transferred via the California Desert Protection Act of 1994. The most recent studies occurred in 2018 and 2019 and included an extensive site records search, Native American consultation, and site-specific surveys. Analysis of all the data collected informed the development of the General Plan Draft Concept and the Revised Plan Concept. Numerous new cultural sites and resources were documented as described in the Summary of Findings. As Nightmare Gulch, Red Buttes, and Black Rock Canyon were found to be abundant in cultural resources, the planning team proposed cultural preserves to protect resources there.

This report summarizes the findings from the 2018-2019 archaeological survey. Additional surveys will be conducted for project-level work once the general plan is approved and the environmental impact report is certified.

Summary of Findings

In 2018, archaeologists surveyed the Nightmare Gulch Trail and Road, Red Buttes Trail and Red Buttes East Trail, and Black Rock Canyon Road within Red Rock Canyon State Park (RRCSP). There were 61 sites and isolates examined and documented within approximately 164 acres surveyed. This includes 11 previously recorded sites, 32 newly identified sites, and 18 newly identified isolates. This brings the total number of cultural resources recorded within RRCSP to 290. The recent survey identified 50 new cultural resources within 164 acres. This indicates a high probability of additional unrecorded sites being located in those areas that have not been examined by archaeologists.
The survey area along Nightmare Gulch (77.81 acres) contained eight of the previously recorded sites, 12 of the newly identified sites, and six of the isolates. The survey area in the Red Buttes area (76.79 acres) contained one previously recorded site, sixteen newly recorded sites, and nine newly recorded isolates. The survey area along Black Rock Canyon Road (9.04 acres) contained one previously recorded site, four newly recorded sites, and three newly recorded isolates. There was an additional site recorded along El Paseo Road that was not in any of the survey areas, but was noted on the drive into Nightmare Gulch. Of the 61 sites and isolates, 23 (15 sites, 8 isolates) were all or mostly historic in nature, 32 (22 sites, 10 isolates) were all or mostly Native American in nature, and six sites consisted solely of rock features with no associated artifacts to determine their time of construction.

Site Condition Assessment
Most of the previously recorded sites in the project areas were recorded in 2001. At that time, 93 percent were noted to be in good condition with minor disturbances from the roads/trails that went through some of them.

One site was noted to be in fair condition due to vehicular use of the area. The 2018 site condition assessment work focused on sites along the roads and trails within the project areas. As such, most of the sites had minor to significant damages caused by the road and trail use. Overall – across all three project areas – 19 percent of the sites were found to be in good condition, 43 percent were in good-to-fair condition, 33 percent were in fair condition, and 5

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1 Sampson, Faull and Shabel 2001; Sampson, Shabel and Jenkins 2001; Sampson, Shabel, Zepeda, Oberndorf, and Jenkins 2001; Sampson, Shabel, Zepeda, Oberndorf, Jenkins, and Faull 2001; Shabel and Faull 2001; Shabel and Oberndorf 2001; Shabel, Oberndorf, and Faull 2001; Shabel, Oberndorf, and Zepeda 2001; Shabel, Zepeda, Oberndorf, Jenkins and Faull 2001; Shabel, Zepeda, Jenkins, and Harvey 2001.
percent of the site were in fair-to-poor condition. See Figure 1 for a chart of the overall site condition.

Throughout the project area, the sites that are along trails and roads are in poor condition within and adjacent to the trail or road itself (including many that have seen the cultural deposit destroyed within the trail/road bed). However, most of these sites are in good, good to fair, and fair condition in the portions away from the road/trail route. In places where the road/trail is not well defined, the potential for damages from vehicular use can be worse, in that alternate routes are sometimes taken to get around ruts, standing water, or just to go off trail. In addition, sites with smaller areas are more heavily affected by roads and/or trails going through them. Vehicle tracks were observed going off trail in several locations within the Nightmare Gulch and Red Buttes areas. Although a single vehicle driving off trail is typically by itself not too damaging, once someone has taken an alternate route, others may not realize that it is not a trail and this leads to increased damage to the site over time.

Nightmare Gulch

Within the Nightmare Gulch area, 10 percent of the examined sites were documented to be in good condition, 45 percent in good-to-fair condition, 35 percent in fair condition, and 10 percent in fair-to-poor condition (Figure 2). In contrast, a 2002 survey of the same area identified 93 percent of the sites recorded to be in good condition and only seven percent in fair condition. Part of this difference is based on the different focus of the 2018 survey - along the roads and trails - whereas the 2002 survey recorded sites farther away from the roads and trails, and thus did not document as many road/trail-use damages. Another part of the difference is due to continued use of the area by motorized vehicles, including one incident in late January 2018, when the gate was broken and vehicles drove through the closed section of Nightmare Gulch.
Many of the large sites along Nightmare Gulch are in good condition away from roads or trails, but in fair-to-poor condition along and in roads and trails where they cut through or adjacent to sites. For example, at a large Native American habitation site, overall it is in good-to-fair condition because over 80 percent of the site is away from trails and trail use and is in good condition, but the 20 percent of the site that is traversed by or adjacent to roads and trails has suffered significant damages from vehicle use and erosion. These portions of the site are in fair-to-poor and poor condition.

Red Buttes
At Red Buttes, 24 percent of the visited sites were documented to be in good condition, 41 percent in good-to-fair condition, and 35 percent in fair condition (Figure 3). Sites were smaller and more dispersed in the Red Buttes area than in Nightmare Gulch.

Black Rock Canyon
Black Rock Canyon was included in the 2018 survey work and five sites were identified and documented during the field visit. Of these five, 40 percent were documented to be in good condition, 40 percent in good-to-fair condition, and 20 percent in fair condition (Figure 4). Most of the disturbances were from slope erosion and the road that bisected two sites and runs immediately adjacent to two other sites.

Figure 3. Red Buttes Site Condition Assessment
Figure 4. Black Rock Canyon Site Condition Assessment