The Mountain West Basketball Tournament and Zion National Park

If the reader is just interested in looking at the pictures (click here)

As you may know Diana and I are basketball fans and follow the Lobos very closely. We have been Lobo club members for a last six years and are now on our way to watch the Lobos play in the Mountain West Basketball Tournament in Las Vegas.

The Lobos men finished in 3rd place in the Mountain West this year with 7 wins in the final weeks of conference play. We have a new coach this year, Paul Weir, and he has brought the team back to life with fast play with great offense and defense and has really taught the players and brought out the best in them. So Diana and I are off to visit Las Vegas where the tournament is held each year at the Thomas & Mack arena on the UNLV campus.

As we like to use Uber as a means of transportation and the parking at the arena is $20 per day we look for the best deals available for hotels and ways to get around. Diana is the master planner for all of our trips and I just give suggestion as to what I want to see and do.

After comparing many hotels close to the arena we selected the Hyatt Place which is 3/4 of a mile from the arena.

A day or so before we left we decided to take a tour of Valley of Fire with the Pink Jeep tours. We found a tour by Pink Jeep Tours. We are to meet them at 8:45 AM on Wednesday at the Hard Rock Hotel which is about two blocks from our hotel. That seems reasonable but we do not arrive an Las Vegas until 7:30 AM from Albuquerque. Not sure why we time everything so closely but we try to pack as much as we can into our 4 days trip.

Flight from Albuquerque was smooth as glass and the views were spectacular as we headed Northwest from Albuquerque to Las Vegas. once we arrived we paged for an Uber car via our cell phone and it arrived with 10 minutes and we took it to the hotel.

There was a Subway eating place on the walk to the Hard Rock hotel so we had a nice breakfast and then walked to the Hard Rock were we found the Pink Tour Van waiting for us and it was only 8:30 AM. Nice not to have to wait.

Valley of Fire State Park is located in the Mojave Desert approximately 58 miles Northeast of the Las Vegas Strip. Valley of Fire State Park covers an area of approximately 35,000 acres. Valley of Fire was named for the magnificent red sandstone formations that were formed from great shifting sand dunes during the age of the dinosaurs more than 150 million years ago (Mesozoic Era). These brilliant sandstone formations can appear to be on fire when reflecting the sun's rays. Other

important rock formations include limestone, shale, and conglomerates.

The description below in from an article written by Chris Maser. It is placed here as it is a very good description of the history of the area we visited.

Beneath The Sea: Far to the north, in what today is northwestern Utah, are the oldest rocks in the region, more than two billion years old. At the time our story begins, however, they were near the southern edge of the North American continent, and today's Valley of Fire was part of the sea floor.

As the sea floor moved northward, islands, mountain ranges in the sea floor, and perhaps even pieces of other continents were carried along on this giant conveyor belt and crushed against the southern part of the North American continent. Then, sometime around a billion years ago, heat from deep within the Earth caused a north-south ridge to develop through the newly sutured continent. This ridge ruptured to the east of the Valley of Fire and the continent ripped apart in a northerly direction. The western fragment drifted slowly away from North America and is probably lodged, as a portion of central Siberia, in what is now Asia.

The rift between the remaining continent and the drifting western fragment filled with dark, heavy, molten rock from below the Earth's crust. The thermal swelling along the continent's edge slowly contracted as the heat began to subside. About 600 million years ago, as the continental margin gradually sank, sea waters flooded the low-lying heavy rock and a new ocean was born over the Valley.

The ocean's shimmering waters were hundreds of feet deep and extended as far as the eye could see in all directions. Myriad plants and animals thrived in the warm waters, and life evolved in complexity during the 300 million years the ocean covered the Valley, as simple jellyfish and worms gave way to clams and complex fishes.

Life evolved explosively in this fertile environment, and virtually every niche was occupied by living beings. The ocean occasionally retreated, leaving piles of shells and vast limy mud flats to dry, crack, and harden under the Summer sun. But for most of the 300 million years, the Valley was a watery world in which thick piles of lime muds and shells were deposited, layer upon layer.

Each change in the water's condition--temperature, chemistry, or depth--left its mark as a distinct limestone bed that formed as accumulations of plant and animal remains sank to the ocean floor. These accumulated deposits ultimately buried the Valley under several miles of ocean sediments.

The Land Rises: About 225 million years ago, the sea floor began rising slowly in response to thermal nudges from the large swirling currents in the molten lake deep below the Earth's crust. As these slow-moving currents pushed against the thin skin of the hard surface crust, it yielded to the gargantuan pressures. As the crust shifted, large pieces, called "plates," moved en masse. Some plates, composed of light-weight silica-rich rock, floated to the surface during the earliest days of the Earth's history. This light-colored silicate scum formed the continents and contains the oldest rocks on Earth. The plates of the sea floor, on the other hand, are dark and heavy. When the plates move toward one another, the heavy plates of the sea floor are forced under the lighter-weight continental plates. This causes the surface of the land to buckle and be forced upward, which happened when the oceanic plate to the west of North America moved obliquely against the continent. These powerful forces lifted the land west of the Valley.

As the land rose and the water became progressively shallower, fine muds were washed in from the emerging areas of land. The ocean floor, formerly blanketed by shells and deposits of lime, became more muddy and sandy. As the water became shallower, it became increasingly susceptible to rapid changes in temperature and salinity. Waves and currents often roiled the shallow bottom, which caused those plants and animals adapted to deeper water to give way to worms and clams that favored the growing sandy conditions.

Once There Was A Forest: About 150 million years ago, during the age of dinosaurs, a forest of primitive evergreen trees called "Araucarian pines" grew several miles outside the Valley along the edge of the sea. Several species of Araucaria, the best known of which are the Norfolk Island Pine and the monkey puzzle tree, can still be found growing in Australia, South America, and other places south of the equator.

Storms and floods carried branches and whole stems of these trees into the ocean. As trees became waterlogged and sank to the ocean floor, they were buried by hundreds to thousands of feet of mud and sand. Here, in secret, the woody materials were slowly altered, molecule by molecule, and replaced by silica, quartz, and other minerals until the trees had turned to stone in an almost-exact replica of their original design.

Then Came the Sand: The sea eventually retreated totally from the area and was replaced by sluggish streams that deposited veneers of coarser sand on the mud flats. Occasional torrential rains, which caused flooding in the stream channels, washed coarser gravels from distant highlands onto the mud flats.

Beginning about 140 million years ago, mud and sand took over from the sea and reigned nearly 75 million years, during which time the Valley's limestone was covered to a depth of about 4,500 feet. Carried by winds from the erosion of distant highlands, masses of lofty, shifting dunes--sometimes thousands of feet high--piled up in the Valley. Over time, the grains of sand became cemented together with iron to form "fossil" dunes (called Aztec Sandstone) almost a half-mile thick.

And The Mountains Rose: Then, about 100 million years ago, the sea-floor plate that lay beneath the Pacific Ocean to the west of the North American continent moved directly against the continent. As the heavy oceanic plate was forced below North America, it created titanic forces in its resistance to being push under the continent. Despite its resistance, the sea-floor plate moved beneath the continental plate, where it melted and injected its lighter-weight components upward into the continent.

The Sierra Nevada Mountains thus began to form as gigantic intrusions of molten rock forced their way up into the Earth's crust, shoving aside the existing continental rock. The rise of the Sierra Nevada Mountains of eastern California not only began to trap moisture on the mountains' western slopes, which caused the region east of the mountains to become increasingly dry, but also closed southern Nevada's outlet to the sea some 25 million years ago. Since then, erosion has been the dominant geological activity in the Valley.

The Rocks Of Today: The magnificent rock formations in the Valley today have been created largely by the fracturing of the Aztec Sandstone. Although some fractures are a result of movement within the Earth, others in the old, brittle sand dunes are not. Instead, the vertical faces in many of the cliffs result from the collapse of sandstone blocks along vertical cracks as that last grain of sand gave way to the pull of gravity.

Chemical erosion has altered the original materials and has created brilliant colors. The rusting of iron has created deep red sandstone, some of which became white as the iron leached out. In addition, the palette of chemical change has created bands of pink, lavender, burgundy, purple, gray, yellow, and green.

The surfaces of some rock faces are coated with a black substance called "desert varnish," which is a result of chemical action. Leached from the rock, iron and manganese are deposited on the rock's surface as water emerges and evaporates over thousands of years, and is perhaps modified by microscopic plants. These blackened surfaces were favored by the Valley's first inhabitants as ideal sites to carve picture writing.

Both groundwater and rainwater are constantly dissolving the cement from among the grains of sand that compose the Aztec Sandstone. Due to differences in permeability, the original process of cementing the grains together was discontinuous and irregular. As a consequence, some parts of the sandstone are more loosely packed and more readily eroded by water than others, which created the domes, arches, and rock chimneys, in addition to potholes and hollows in the stone that are used as refuge by birds, mice, and desert woodrats.

Because the sandstone was cemented together one grain at a time, it's not surprising that it is dissolving the same way. Today, grains of sand, released from their millennial bondage, once again blow across the desert, forming little dunes.

Water dissolves minerals and redistributes them, it freezes and thaws with its wedging effect that causes cracks in the rocks to grow. Raindrops pound the rock and soil, and the awesome power of flash floods give water more importance than wind as a force of erosion.

Nevertheless, sand, blown by the wind, changes the Valley as it polishes stones and is distributed and redistributed to form small dunes on the lee sides of vegetation and ridges. Other surfaces are swept clean of sand, leaving them covered with a coating of gravel known as "desert pavement."

The Indigenous Peoples: Lost in the eons of the past is the moment when the first humans entered the Valley during the latter part of the great ice age, some eleven thousand years ago. Although the great ice sheets did not reach the Valley, cool, moisture-laden winds from the melting glaciers blew southward into the Valley, which was a profusion of vegetation and flowing streams of cool water. Herds of deer, elk, and antelope grazed in the Valley along with horses, camels, and a close relative of the present-day mountain goat. And there were ground sloths along the streams' margins and giant beavers within their waters. One of the main predators was a large, dog-like animal call a dire wolf.
Other humans existed in the Valley four thousand years ago, during a time when the climate was cooler and wetter then today and bighorn sheep were abundant. From 4,000 years ago to 2,300 years ago, the Valley was occupied by people organized into small groups called nuclear families, each consisting of two to four men who, with their wives and children, wandered among their favorite hunting areas.

The men, using spears and atlatls, hunted bighorn sheep, the most important source of food. The women and children caught rabbits, hares, tortoises, and other reptiles and collected and prepared plants to supplement their diet of sheep. When the bighorn population declined from over-hunting or became wary of the hunters, the families

abandoned their camps only to return as the sheep once again repopulated the area. During times of good hunting and leisure, these people created elaborate artistic designs (called petroglyphs) on some of the rock faces by carefully pecking into the black desert varnish on the surface of the sandstone.

As the population of humans increased, the climate became warmer and drier, gradually forcing the culture to adapt to the changing conditions. Between 2.300 years ago and 1,300 years ago, food was too scarce in the Valley to permit long periods of occupancy, so the people settled along the Virgin and Muddy rivers outside the Valley of Fire. Even here, hunters, formerly dependent mainly on bighorn sheep, had to pursue such small game as rabbits, hares, ground squirrels, lizards, snakes, and birds to augment their kill of desert bighorn sheep and mule deer. The atlatal, still in use during the early part of this period, was eventually replaced with the bow and arrow, which was easier to carry, more accurate, and allowed repeated shots within a short time.

Gathering seeds, tubers, and berries became increasingly important in maintaining subsistence as did the peoples' reliance on the streamside areas, where the plants grew. With increasing dependence on plant food, risks of survival lessened, the population grew, and placed ever-increasing pressure on the fragile environment, which forced people to move to less productive areas.

At some point during this period, farming was brought to the area by people migrating northward from Mexico. These migrants were called the Anasazi (Ah-nah-SAH-zee), a Navajo word meaning "ancient ones." Early Anasazi people, often referred to as the Basket Makers, not only began to cultivate corn, squash, and beans near their villages along the riparian bottom lands of the Virgin and Muddy rivers but also began to store food in the event of lean times.

Around 1,700 years ago, the Anasazi learned how to use clay to make sun-dried cookware, a technique that was gradually refined into the making of pottery. The art of making pottery played an important role in transforming the growing Anasazi population into a more highly organized, ritualized society.

Somewhere around 1,300 years ago, the Anasazi discovered they were not alone; the Lower Colorado Yuman people had migrated into the area from the south, and about 1,1090 years ago, the Paiutes also migrated into the area. As economic competition grew among these diverse peoples, the climatic conditions became even hotter and drier. The Anasazi abandoned the region around 850 years ago, which left the area, including the Valley of Fire, to the Southern Paiute culture.

The Paiutes had already adapted to the desert, and unfettered by the ties of extensive farming and village life, lived in close ecological balance with their surroundings. The Paiute's population was low because small family groups lived a nomadic life of hunting and gathering by following the seasonal harvests from one place to another.

The Valley, with its wide altitudinal range, was ideally suited for the seasonal use of the Paiutes. The season of greatest use was probably in the Spring, when water would gather and remain in depressions in the rocks and edible plants would be in their greatest abundance.

The Paiutes believed that the land would supply their needs, and with their simple but effective technology and hard work, the land did indeed grant them an adequate lifestyle. They were conscious of and dependent on Nature's cycles. They didn't seek to conquer the desert, for they neither considered that they owned it or that Nature was their enemy. Their way of life was thus harmonious with their environment, and they asked from the land only that which it could supply. So in the end it was the Paiutes that the European invaders found living in the Valley when they first entered the area.

European Invaders Arrive: The first European to reach what is now southern Nevada was Francisco Garces in 1776. Few followed until half a century later when Jedediah Smith, the famous mountain man, led the first party of fur trappers along the Virgin River in 1826. During the 1830s and 1840s traders and travelers from Santa Fe, New Mexico, followed Smith's route along the Virgin River, known by then as the "Spanish Trail."

The number of travelers increased greatly in the late 1840s. The old Spanish Trail, which had been use mostly by pack trains, gave way to new immigrants coming via Salt Lake City, Utah, on their way to California. The trail from Salt Lake City became known as the "Mormon Road" and was used mostly by wagon trains. It remained the primary route through the region until the San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake Railroad replaced it in 1905.

The sudden, intrusive arrival of the European culture was traumatic to the Paiutes. Although there were occasional hostilities between the invaders and the Paiutes, often over the ownership of animals, the most devastating effect on the Paiutes was the invaders believe in private property.

Beginning in 1864, Mormons, who settled along the Muddy and Virgin rivers, simply evicted the Paiutes from their ancestral land. The Mormons took away from the Paiutes their most productive riparian environments and then diverted water from the

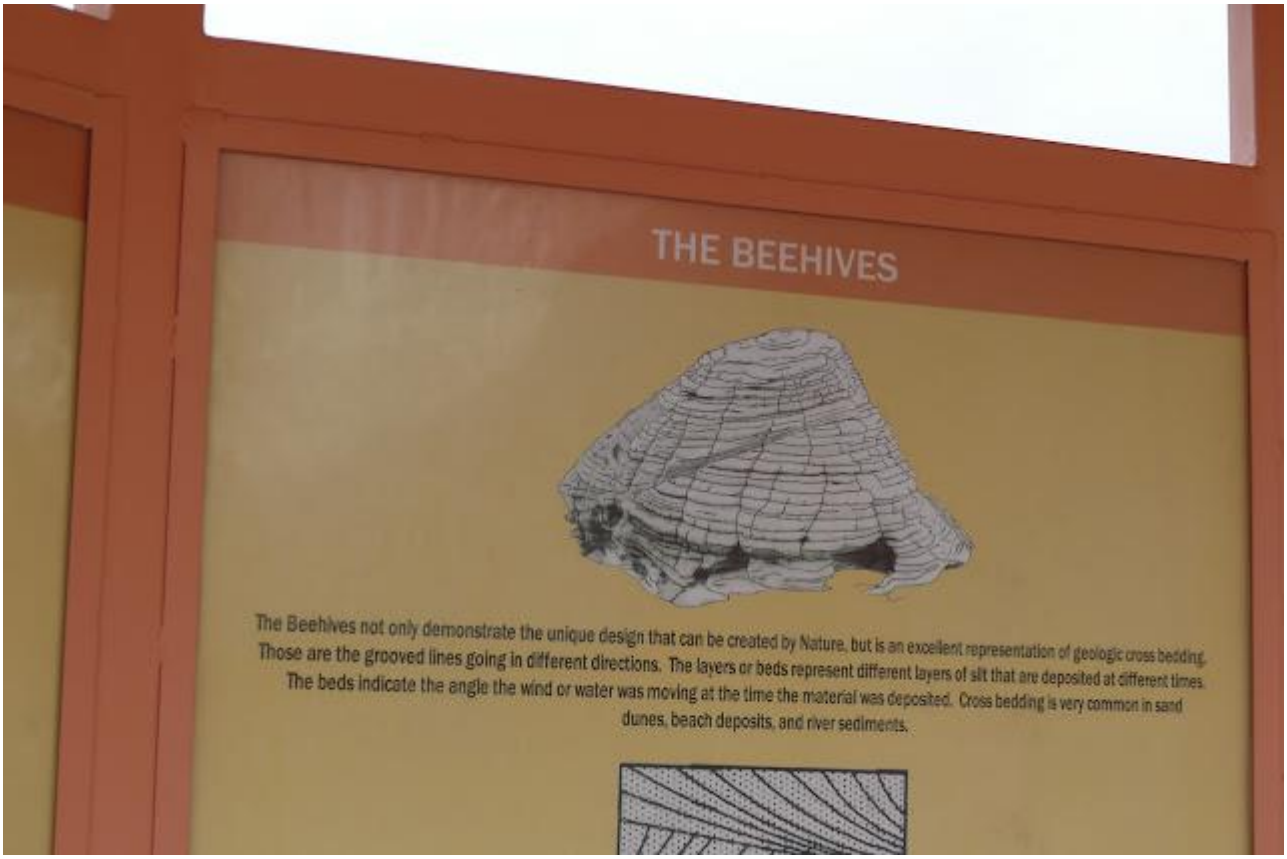
rivers and springs for intensive irrigation of agricultural crops, and in so doing, destroyed the Paiute's way of life.

In addition, the Mormons felled, for fuel and timbers for mining operations, the piñon pine forests on which the Paiutes relied for food. And the Mormons introduced vast numbers of grazing livestock and European diseases. The former destroyed the Paiute's food and medicinal plants, and the latter all but decimated the Paiutes themselves.

Once again, a resident human culture, having evolved a sense of place over many centuries, was immediately condemned and struck as valueless by an invading one, which considering itself superior. Thus, in 1872, their culture destroyed, the Paiutes were forced onto the Moapa Indian Reservation, which consists of about 72,000 acres along the Muddy River. Little of the Paiute's material culture survives, but they still take pride in their indigenous philosophies and attitudes.

** end of article **

Diana



The Beehives are sandstone formations that not only demonstrate the unique design that can be created by nature but is an excellent representation of geologic cross bedding. Those are the grooved lines going in different directions. The layers or beds represent different layers of silt that are deposited at different times. The beds indicate the angle of the wind or water was moving at the time the material was deposited. Cross bedding is very common in sand dunes, beach deposits, and river sediments.

When we arrive at the Rainbow Vista, stepped out of our tour jeep we were blown away by the landscapes to the north painted in whites, yellows, and pinks. The views get even better once we started our short hike. We were looking across 150 million years of time. The great maze of canyons, domes, towers, ridges, and valleys before us are carved from sand deposited during the time when dinosaurs walked the earth. This is wild, virtually untouched wilderness. It is truly an “Adventure in Color”.

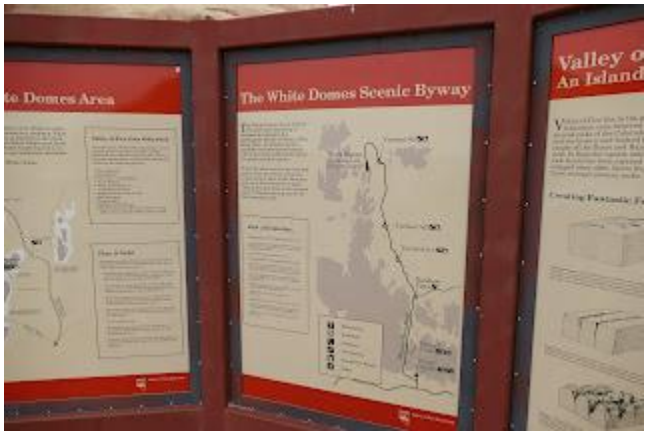
Tom & Diana

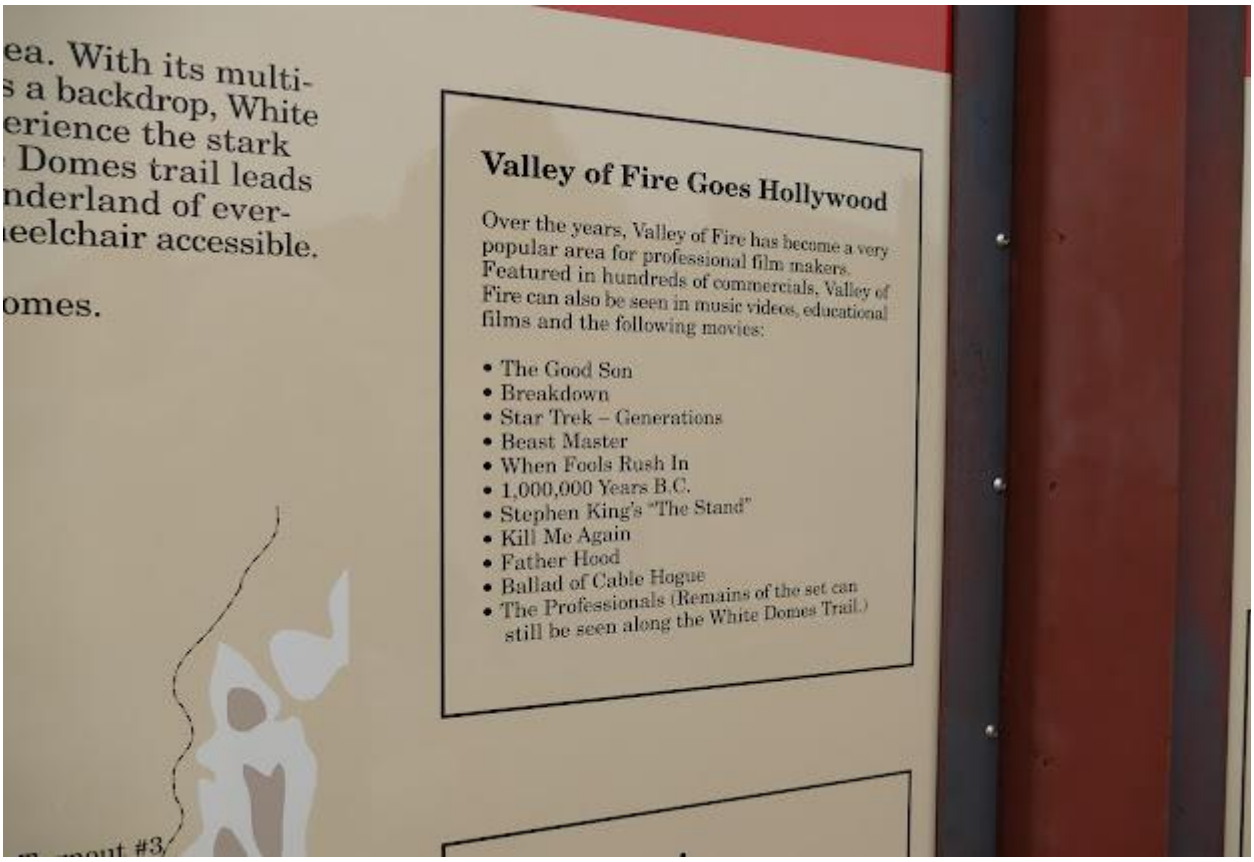
Our Tour Jeep

Our Tour Guides

Tom

Add caption





Valley of Fire Film History

Valley of Fire is a very popular location to film car commercials and other commercial photography. Here are some of the projects that have been filmed at Valley of Fire:

The Professionals with Burt Lancaster, Lee Marvin, and Claudia Cardinale was filmed in 1966. Part of the movie set is still present at White Domes

The 1984-1987 CBS TV show Airwolf used the Valley of Fire, named The Valley of the Gods in the show, as the secret hiding place of the stolen Super-helicopter Airwolf.

Cherry 2000 uses the Beehives group camping area as the Sky Ranch compound of the lead antagonist.

The outside Mars scenes from Total Recall, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, were almost totally shot in Valley of Fire.
Star Trek Generations was filmed in Valley of Fire, and it was here that Captain Kirk fell to his death.
Criss Angel filmed an extreme stunt on his show: Criss Angel Mindfreak here.

Domino. A scene in the film where the protagonists crash their RV in the Valley of Fire.

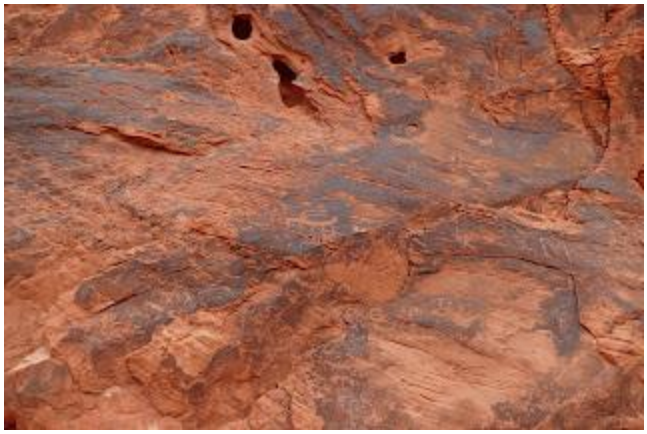
The 2007 movie Transformers filmed a scene where the Autobots are driving along the valley with other military vehicles during sunset.

Fire Canyon-Silica Dome. In this region, forces within the earth have been powerful enough to cause thousands of feet of surface rock to fold, break, and in some areas push several miles from their original location. Today, erosion has worn away the top of one great fold, exposing the sharply angles layer of rock, and creating numerous canyons. The sandstone formations that are so prominent in the Valley of Fire are made of sand grains that are almost pure silica. The change from white to red at the base of the dome occurs where small quantities of iron in the rock produces a rust-like stain.

Fire Canyon

Silica Dome

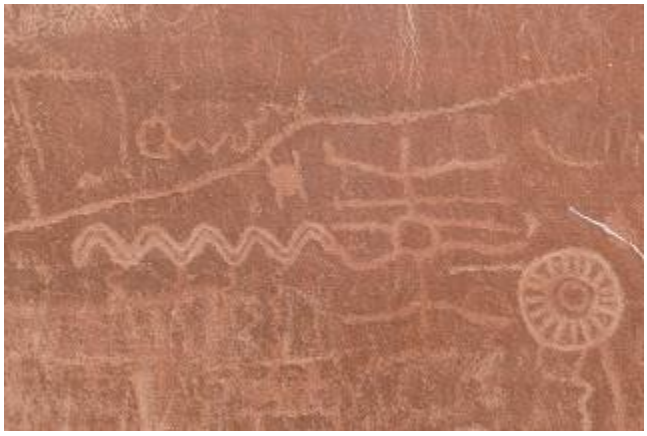
Tom & Diana



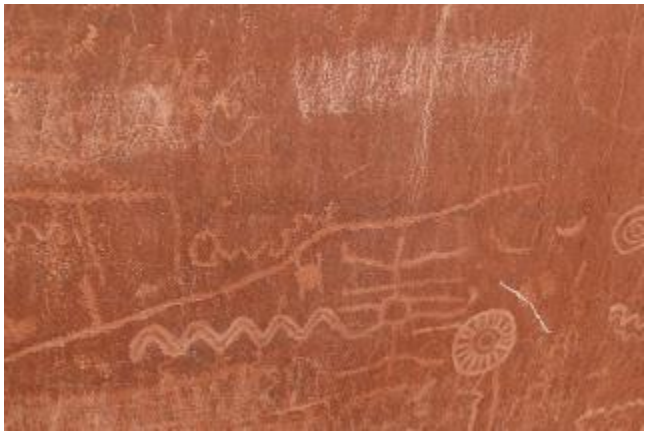
The Civilian Conservation Corps was a government agency that operated from 1933 – 1942; and was part of the New Deal. The agency was created to provide jobs for unemployed, unmarried men from relief families (unemployment compensation), between the ages of 18–25. The agency had a focus on conservation and the development of natural resources on rural land owned by federal, state and local

government. During the CCC's short existence, members planted nearly 3 billion trees, constructed more than 800 parks and upgraded most state parks, and built public roadways in remote areas.
Valley of Fire was one of the earliest locations to be enhanced by the CCC; the stone cabins were constructed in 1934 for tourist traveling through to have a place to stay. The cabins are constructed with native sandstone. Along with the cabins, the CCC constructed a dam, and a good desert road.
Although one may no longer stay in the stone cabins, you can still walk through them and admire their classic craftsmanship. A picnic area has been established nearby, keeping with the original CCC idea of making people traveling comfortable.


atlatl rock




Petroglyphs: What Do They Mean?
Respect vandalism!



Tom as we headed back to Las Vegas

Diana

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