



Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

Summit Valley Native American Mortars

History

For thousands of years Native Americans from what is now Nevada called Summit Valley their summer home. They came to hunt, fish, gather food, and trade with Native

Americans from what is now California. We can see evidence of their presence in the dozens of bedrock mortar sites around the edges of the meadow and some in the interior.

Sierra granite is one of the hardest rocks on earth. As you discover the sites and explore the mortars, imagine the time it must have taken, only grinding during summers, to develop the mortars in the rock. Over the centuries groups of women and girls passed on one generation's wisdom to another in the same places, summer after summer, century after century. In some places there are many mortars in groups and one can imagine busy communal kitchens with many women grinding seeds. In other places there are only single mortars. Why? Were they different clans? Were the single grinding rock users outcasts?

Nearby are thousands of basalt stone chips (two lower pictures to the right) which are not native to the immediate area. We can imagine men and boys knapping rocks into useful tools, atlatl and spear points. The chips are leftovers. The basalt was carried from miles away, possibly from Devil's Peak. At the knapping sites lessons too were imparted and learned summer after summer, generation after generation, and the basalt flakes grew in number. Now they litter areas of open ground.



There are also metates (large grinding surfaces - see the bottom picture with the mano used for grinding on top), cupules (small depressions with perhaps mystical significance - see left), and a few petroglyphs.

The Martis culture (2000 B.C or earlier to 600 A.D.) lived all around the valley for thousands of years grinding seeds and hunting. The Kings Beach culture (A.D. 1000-1850) was a fishing culture and occupied only a small portion of the valley much later.

Two sites to find: mortar on top of single rock 39° 19' 28.5" N, 120° 22' 32.0" W 150 yards south from here.
Low rock with five mortars and a metate 656 yards from here SE at 39° 19.148' N, 120° 22.342' W (feel the east end of the rock for the rectangular metate).

Petroglyphs Nearby



To see Native American petroglyphs, head east on Old 40 to the turn just below the Rainbow Bridge. You will see a 20 Mile Museum sign for the petroglyphs and be able to explore that facet of Native American presence on Donner Summit.

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This 20 Mile Museum sign has been sponsored by Dr. Ernest Malamud and Olivia Diaz

