

Prehistoric Sites -- Black Canyon Rock Shelter

CONTRIBUTOR: Ben Mixon (Agave House Chapter) Site description and background
Jim Britton (Phoenix Chapter) Stabilization

LOCATION: The Black Canyon Rock shelter is located within the boundaries of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests at an elevation of 6750 feet. It is located 4.75 miles from the intersection of State Route 260 and Black Canyon Lane on Forest Service Road 86. The rock shelter is located across the Black Canyon 100 yards from the road. The trail to the rock face is easy; however, the trail to the rock shelter is short by moderately steep. The shelter can be seen from the creek level.

PUBLIC VISITATION: This site is part of a self-guided tour developed by the Apache-Sitgreaves Forest Service. Walking trails have been built and the site is open to the public year round.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND: The area of the site is approximately 28 meters long and 10 meters wide. It includes evidence of several structures, the overhanging shelter roof, and a small cave. The evidence recovered through excavation indicates that this shelter had been in use by at least four different groups of native peoples. These included Yavapai, Mogollon, Basket Maker II and III, and San Pedro (associated with the Desert Culture). These occupations cover a time period from 3000 BC to 1750 AD.

PRESERVATION ISSUES AT BLACK CANYON: Vandalism is the main problem at this site. The structure walls are generally protected from rain and snow fall by the rock shelter overhang. The original wall mortar was sandy silt with little clay. This made a weak mortar, but it apparently was good enough due to the protection provided by the overhang. No good clay-soil source was found in the immediate area.

STABILIZATION HISTORY AT BLACK CANYON: After excavation was completed, the stone walls of the Mogollon period were restored and stabilized for the benefit of public viewing and understanding. In October 1998, Heather Tamietti (USFS), Ben Mixon, Norm and Betty Viether (Agave House Chapter) and Jim Britton (Phoenix Chapter) relayed and stabilized the foundation stones of the walls within the rock shelter. The 6.5 meter long west wall was heavily vandalized with stones misaligned and at various angles. Loose soil between the stones was removed and the vertical interior wall face stones were reset. A few stones were added to complete the desired three courses of wall height. The south wall ran from the NW room corner 2.5 meters to a doorway. At the NW corner, a wing wall or wind break extended to the south. This 2 meter wall was reconstructed 1 course high.

The north wall which ran 5 meters from the west wall to the back wall of the rock shelter, had no evidence of a stone foundation and is assumed to have been some sort of jacal construction. The entire east wall consisted of the natural back wall of the rock shelter.

RECENT STABILIZATION ACTIVITY AT BLACK CANYON: This site will continue to be monitored and maintenance performed as needed.