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Radiocarbon Dates from the Bird Spring Site, Clark County, Nevada

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The Bird Spring site (26Ck1) is located at an elevation of 4400 feet in the southeast portion of the Bird Spring Range, approximately 25 miles southwest of Las Vegas, Nevada (Fig. 1). The site consists of an extensive open midden deposit and associated rock shelter, which probably represent a seasonal base camp used by both Paiute and Anasazi peoples. In addition to a perennial water source, the locality provides abundant plant resources, including *Agave utahensis nevadensis*, mesquite, *Yucca brevifolia*, and cacti. Analysis of faunal material from recent excavations has yielded evidence of the exploitation of cottontail, jackrabbit, tortoise, bighorn sheep, and other animals.

First recorded in 1930 by Willis Evans of the Southwest Museum, who tested it, the site has been subject to much unsanctioned excavation and collection during the past half-century. Mapping, systematic surface collection, and test excavations were undertaken in June, 1980, to evaluate the site and recommend future management options to the

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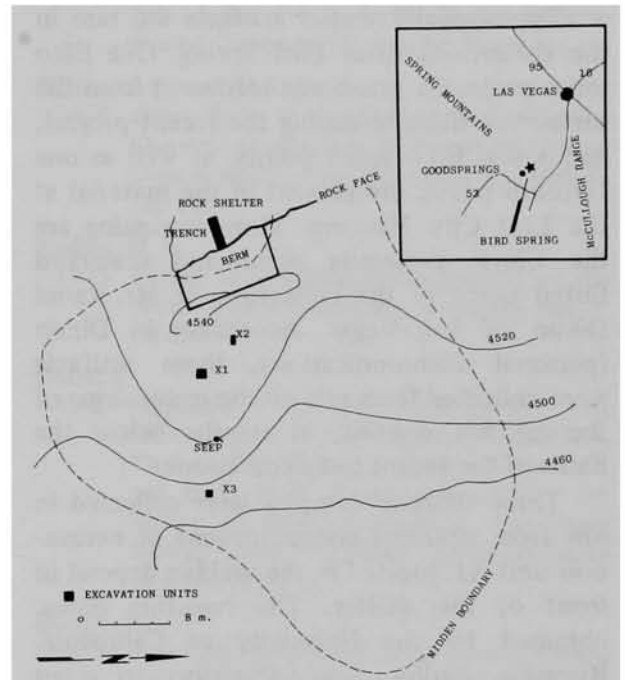


Fig. 1. Location and site map of the Bird Spring site.

Bureau of Land Management (Clewlow and Wells 1980). The site was found to contain a surprising amount of intact deposit, despite the quantity of material that had already been removed. Three strata, defined on the basis of particle size of the largest clasts, but with indistinct contacts and identical matrices, were visible in the wall profiles of units X1, X2 and X3, located in the midden deposit on the slope in front of the shelter. Some mixture of cultural material has undoubtedly occurred between strata.

The assemblage recovered is generally consistent with that described by Evans (Harrington 1930) and with another large collec-

tion from the site, which is now in the Lost City Museum, Overton, Nevada. Projectile point types are predominantly Desert Side-notched, Cottonwood, Rose Spring and East-gate series, and a variety of pottery sherds, representing Paiute, Shoshoni, Western Anasazi, Yuman, Walapai, and Yavapai wares were also recovered (Olson 1980).

Typologically earlier artifacts are rare in the collections from Bird Spring. One Elko series projectile point was recovered from the surface of the site during the recent project, and a few Elko series points, as well as one Gypsum point, are present in the material at the Lost City Museum. More intriguing are the Clovis projectile point and reworked fluted point in the collection of Mr. Raoul Dixon of Las Vegas. According to Dixon (personal communication), these artifacts were collected from pits on the lower slope of the midden deposit, at depths below the limits of the recent test excavations.

Three charcoal samples were collected *in situ* from charcoal concentrations in excavation unit X1, located in the midden deposit in front of the shelter. The resulting dates, obtained by the University of California, Riverside, Radiocarbon Laboratory are given in Table 1.

Identifiable time-sensitive artifacts recovered from this unit consist of three projectile points (one Desert Side-notched and two Rose Spring series specimens) and twelve pottery sherds. The points, all from depths above 50 cm. in Stratum A, are types which

occur throughout the Great Basin as early as A.D. 600 (Rose Spring) to A.D. 1500 (Desert Side-notched), into the historic period (Heizer and Hester 1978:9-11).

The sherds, also occurring above 50 cm., include five examples of Paiute and Shoshoni wares, which appear as early as A.D. 700-1000 in southern Nevada, where they have been found in stratigraphic association with datable Anasazi pottery at Lost City (Shutler 1961). At stratified sites in southeastern Nevada, radiocarbon dates, as well as associations with Fremont and Anasazi wares, confirm the appearance of Paiute-Shoshoni pottery by A.D. 1050 to 1250 (Madsen 1975). Anasazi wares from unit X1 include North Creek Gray, North Creek Black/Gray, Shinarump Gray, and Middleton Red, all of which occur during Pueblo II times (A.D. 900-1100). North Creek Gray appears by the Basketmaker III (A.D. 500-700) period at some sites, and the Shinarump Gray and Middleton Red continue to occur until A.D. 1130 (Olson 1980).

Although lithic artifacts and faunal remains were recovered to a depth of one meter, where the excavation stopped due to time constraints, no ceramic sherds were found below 50 cm. The accepted date for the first appearance of Pueblo pottery in southern Nevada (Shutler 1967) falls within the range of the radiocarbon dates from 57 cm. and 80 cm. respectively, while the third date is firmly within the preceramic period.

The oldest of the three recently obtained radiocarbon dates, 1625 ± 100 , is derived from a sample collected from a possible roasting pit located at the base of the unit. Comprising an amorphous concentration of large rocks, carbonized wood, and fragmentary charcoal, extending horizontally through most of the unit, this feature was first encountered at approximately 80 cm. and continued to a depth of one meter, where the excavation stopped.

Table 1

**RADIOCARBON DATES FROM THE
BIRD SPRING SITE**

Sample No.	Depth Below Datum	Stratum	Radiocarbon Years B. P.
UCR 1193	57 cm.	B	1395 ± 140
UCR 1194	80 cm.	B	1540 ± 100
UCR 1195	97 cm.	C	1625 ± 100

Relatively few radiocarbon dates, particularly in an associated series from a single excavation unit, are available from southwestern Nevada. For this reason, the three dates from 26 Ck1 should be of considerable interest to other researchers in this part of the Great Basin, where dating of sites has been based to a great extent on cross-dating of projectile points and ceramics with other regions (Brooks and Larson 1975:437; Hauck *et al.* 1979:14). The dates from Bird Spring are in accord with the accepted sequence for southern Nevada, providing a base date for the appearance of the Rose Spring and Eastgate series, as well as the pottery. Furthermore, the three dates present an internally consistent *floruit* which lends credibility to the dates themselves.

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