

The Groom Lake Desert Rat

"The Naked Truth from Open Sources."

AREA 51/NELLIS RANGE/TTR/NTS/S-4?/WEIRD STUFF/DESERT LORE

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Supplemental News Flash

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Notes On Upcoming Las Vegas Hearing...

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Inspection Visits

In conjunction with the Las Vegas Hearing on the Groom Lake land grab, the White Sides Defense Committee will be sponsoring two semi-organized INSPECTION VISITS to the Freedom Ridge viewpoint. The tentative dates and times are:

Saturday, Feb. 26, at 10 am, and
Thursday, March 3, at 12 noon

These will be informal hikes and get-togethers similar to the October camp-out and January field trip. The intent is to give the public the opportunity to inspect the land that has been targeted for withdrawal. The Saturday event is for the poor saps who have to work during the week, while the Thursday outing is designed for out-of-town people coming to the Las Vegas hearing who can stay an extra day.

Rumors that these events will be BEACH PARTIES are unfounded and misleading. Military land use is SERIOUS BUSINESS. To help preserve a respectful and responsible tone, the volleyball tournament HAS BEEN CANCELLED. The only lawn chairs permitted must be of the "lawn/porch/patio" type. Low slung beach chairs, beach blankets, skimpy bathing suits, beer kegs, Frisbees and inflatable pool toys are PROHIBITED.

Both visits will begin at the Freedom Ridge trailhead, about 2-1/2 hours north of Las Vegas. DIRECTIONS: Be sure to fill your gas tank in Las Vegas. From Las Vegas, take I-15 north about 20 miles to US-93 (Exit 64). Go north on US-93 about 85 miles to SR-375. Take SR-375 (not SR-318) west 15 miles until you reach the straight dirt road to Groom Lake at milepost LN 34.6. (Marked only by a stop sign.) This is a good dirt road that any car can handle. Take the dirt road west 13.6 miles until you see our cars (parked beside a "Keep Right" sign). WARNING: DO NOT CROSS THE MILITARY BORDER marked by Restricted Area signs and orange posts. (Crossing the border will result in your immediate arrest and a \$600 fine.)

Hike is approx. 50 minutes each way and could be moderately strenuous for out-of-shape sea-level sloths. However, sloths with 4WD vehicles can drive all the way to to the top on the newly discovered "Freedom Ridge Expressway" (further directions required). Visiting the viewpoints is completely legal, as this is public land until such time as the withdrawal is formally approved. Camping is permitted and encouraged. Be forewarned, however, the nighttime temperature will probably drop below freezing. Daytime highs may reach the 50s, but strong winds are also possible, so

dress warmly and in several layers. In case of moderately bad weather, the events will proceed as planned. In case of HORRIBLE weather, call for more info.

Sturdy hiking shoes are important. Binoculars and telescopes are okay. The authorities don't like cameras, however, so don't be seen with one. Press representation is expected at both events, so practice your sound bites.

More On Vegas Hearing

Again, the Las Vegas hearing on the land grab will be held Weds, March 2, 1994, at 5 pm at the Cashman Field Center (a stadium complex north of Downtown), 850 North Las Vegas Blvd., Rooms 203- 204. With the Popular Science cover story hitting the streets right now, the hearing is likely to be a zoo.

The usual format is that a BLM official moderates the event. A military officer is likely to speak first, probably very briefly. At most hearings, this is an opportunity for an Air Force "dog and pony show," but in this case the dogs and ponies can't be shown because they don't officially exist. At the Caliente hearing, this talk was an almost meaningless repetition of the evasive "public safety" and "safe and secure operation of activities" themes. The rest of the meeting will probably consist of a series of opponents saying their two bits. Due to the large turnout possible, each speaker will be limited to a big three minutes. The AF officer will sit silently through most of the proceedings and probably will not answer any meaningful questions. The BLM official will probably be more forthcoming, but he won't have any information about the base. The hearing will end either when everyone seems to have blown off steam or when the meeting room must be vacated for the cleaning staff.

That is the EXPECTED course of events. Given the volatility of the story at present, the AF could drop a bombshell, like "Yes, we have a base at Groom Lake." Don't hold your breath, however, as the military rarely reacts so quickly to current affairs.

There is rarely any instant gratification at an event like this. There will be some good arguments mixed in with some bad ones, and the AF reps will probably not respond visibly to any of it. The hearing is a matter of record, however. A stenographer will be present, and the resulting document will go into the big case file which, in theory, forms the basis for the BLM decision and for any future legal action. Las Vegas is a diverse enough place that there may even be some people speaking IN FAVOR of the withdrawal, expressing their fullest confidence in the military. The bulk of the comment will probably be critical, however, and that will count in favor of the opponents.

The most important aspect of the hearing is that it provides an EVENT. It gives the opponents a place to gather and the news media something to report on. If emotions are running high, this is a place where it can be demonstrated. Merely the number of people who show up is important. If the room is packed to twice its capacity, then that will make an impression. BLM, the agency making the decision, cannot ignore the political winds. Sure, the military has clout, but so does the rest of the population if it gets riled up. If the BLM senses that it is in the public hot seat, it will be especially careful to protect itself and do the right thing.

The principal weapon of the opponents has been graciously provided by the military itself. The vague "public safety" explanation is a godsend. It paints the military's action as capricious and an "abuse of discretion." The ultimate test of the withdrawal is whether the reasons for it make sense to the average person. If the Air Force is trying to support its action only with absurdities, then the key to winning is merely to turn the spotlight on the absurdities and make them painfully obvious to everyone.

Since each speaker is limited to three minutes, it is important for each person to limit themselves to one or two carefully thought out points. Each opponent should try to cover a different topic. If you plan to speak, it would be a good idea to coordinate with Psychospy beforehand. If you want to speak but don't have a topic, we have an exquisite line of quality merchandise to choose from. Get in touch with us as soon as you can. The night of the hearing, we will be staying in downtown Las Vegas just a few minutes from the hearing site, so perhaps we can hold an opponent's powwow there in the afternoon to get ready.

Accommodations

The night of the hearing, Psychospy will be staying at the Fitzgeralds casino in downtown Las Vegas (because it's fairly close to the hearing site). This is a high-rise hotel (tallest in Vegas) on "Glitter Gulch" Fremont Street. Room rate is \$36, phone 800-274-5825. There should be other hotels nearby at comparable rates.

For a more interesting alternative at the other end of town, try the Tropicana Hotel, \$49, 800-634-4000: If you get a room on the southeast side of "Island Tower," you can look down on the secret "JANET" airline terminal where workers depart for Groom Lake. You can peer down with binocs and see if anyone you know is among the staff. There's also supposed to be a view of the Janet terminal from rooms on the east side of the Luxor pyramid, \$69- \$79, 800-288-1000.

If you are coming to the Saturday Inspection Visit, we advise that you AVOID LAS VEGAS, at least for accommodations. On weekends, rooms are both nonexistent and expensive. Instead, try the Little A-Le-Inn in Rachel, one of the motels in Alamo or one of the casinos on I-15 near the California border. (Reservations are essential at any of these.)

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