

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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Freedom Ridge Status

The popular public viewpoints into the unacknowledged Groom Lake base remain open at present. Although the [Air Force](#) has applied to [BLM](#) to seize this land, approval is no longer a certainty. "You can't fight the government," some people may say, and we would have concurred a few months ago, but substantial political opposition has begun to materialize recently from many different quarters. Aside from the environmental, UFO and anti-secrecy groups one would expect to be involved, opponents have found unexpected support in some Nevada state agencies and the brewing "Sagebrush Rebellion," a movement of local counties to take control of public lands. At the least, the AF will be forced to overcome significant hurdles before it gets the land. At best, some people hope to rout the Federal government altogether from lands previously controlled by BLM.

From the Freedom Ridge and White Sides viewpoints you see what appears to be a large Air Force base beside a dry lake bed, with a very long runway, many large hangers and a virtual city of support facilities. Ten to twelve roundtrip 737 flights each weekday bring workers here from Las Vegas. No one seems to have any confirmable information about what is actually going on at Groom. The interesting aspect of this facility to most visitors is that the government in no way acknowledges its existence. Further satisfaction can be drawn from the intensive monitoring of nearby public lands by anonymous, heavily-armed security forces who watch all visitors closely. If you approach these dudes, they'll run away, but they always remain close enough to keep track of you.

A public hearing on the land withdrawal is scheduled for Monday, Jan. 31, in Caliente, Nevada (about 2-1/2 hours north of Las Vegas), at 7pm in the VFW hall. In spite of the remote location, this event is already becoming a hot ticket among local Nevada land use advocates. Opponents have also requested a second hearing in Las Vegas so more people can attend. Although this request has not yet been granted, a Las Vegas hearing is looking increasingly likely and would probably take place in late Feb. or early March. Sparks will fly at both events: Caliente will probably be more of an in-state protest focusing on land use issues, while Las Vegas would probably focus on the Groom Lake base itself, including the alleged environmental abuses there and the justification for its continued "nonexistence."

Even if things were to go amazingly well for the AF (which they are not), the viewpoints cannot legally be closed before the hearings take place. The land remains public until the seizure is formally approved, so anyone can come here until then to view the secret base. If you choose, you can even camp here for up to 14 days without permission from anyone. The hike to Freedom Ridge takes 50 minutes, while four wheel drive owners can push all the way to the top on the

newly marked "Freedom Ridge Expressway," a rugged cross-country track. You can park at the top with a bucket of popcorn and your special sweetie just like a drive-in movie. Nothing significant ever seems to happen at the secret base when people are watching, but if you and your sweetie are feeling cozy that shouldn't matter. (Please note, however, that making out within sight of the secret base is strictly against Federal law and is punishable by a fine of \$5,000 and up to a year in prison.) Of course, you must be careful not cross the nearby military boundary, which is well-marked with signs and orange posts. (The maximum theoretical punishment for that offense is the same as for making out, although first time offenders are usually fined only \$300 to \$600.)

Some Viewpoints Remain Untouched

The underlying reason for the proposed land withdrawal is that the AF botched its survey work for the huge Groom Range withdrawal of the 1980s. That action was also intended to hide the Groom base from public view by seizing a whole mountain range. Alas, they overlooked the more obscure hills now in question, effectively rendering the entire withdrawal useless.

Could it be possible that, even with the current proposed withdrawal, the AF has botched the job once again? Reports continue to reach us of public viewpoints into "'51" that remain untouched by the current action. We won't publicize all of them, but it is sufficient to say that the AF cannot neutralize these locations without bursting the 5000 acre limit beyond which Congressional approval would be required. (The military would rather face a dozen Saddams than tangle with Capitol Hill.)

Viewpoints we can talk about now are Badger Mountain and Tikaboo Peak. These are in the high cluster of peaks about 15 miles east of Freedom Ridge and just south of Hancock Summit. The climb is longer and more strenuous, but a recent visitor to Tikaboo Peak reports that you can see most of the Groom base from there. Distance is a problem: 25 miles vs. about 10 miles from Freedom Ridge, but having a high-quality telescope could help. The important thing proven here is that the AF is once again engaged in "government work," an incompetent, weak-kneed effort that does only half the job. If they are going to take any land at all, they should be required also to take Tikaboo and Badger peaks. This, in turn, would burst the 5000 acre limit and force the issue to be debated in Congress, where the voice of the people can be heard.

Field Trip A Success

About 25 people showed up on Freedom Ridge for the Jan. 15 aviation field trip. Given that the plans came together only about 10 days before the event, this was a strong turnout. A wide array of civilian optical devices were turned on the base, allowing participants to see "the hairs on a gnat's ass," so to speak. Sweetman, Goodall, psychospy, Dr. Brown, Agent X, Rocket Scientist, The Cops and other fanatics and riff-raff speculated wildly about what was inside each of those big hangers and factory buildings, but no consensus was reached.

The field trip coincided with the opening of the new "Freedom Ridge Expressway." In a scene reminiscent of a television commercial for Coors or Toyota, four sport-utility vehicles traversed the desert sagebrush to this remote hilltop location, where the occupants broke out their lawn chairs and would have drank beer if anyone had thought to bring any.

Also in attendance, but trying desperately not to be noticed, were at least a dozen of the anonymous, camouflage-clad security dudes lurking behind rocks and Joshua trees at various locations on public and military land at least a mile away. The word on the street now says these folks work for the government contractor EG&G, not Wackenhut as once surmised. There were plenty of distant appearances by the ubiquitous white Jeep Cherokees, sticking out like beacons against the beige-and-brown landscape. Less obvious was a big beige van partially covered with cammo netting on public land about two miles from the get- together. On top of the van was a tower of some kind, about 5 feet high. Our speculation is that it was a high powered range tracking video camera pointed our way. We waved and turned our own telescopes in that direction, and eventually the occupants packed up and slinked back across the border.

Road sensors were also a popular tourist attraction for visitors. The organizers had labeled some of the secret roadside detectors with big fluorescent orange signs that said "SENSOR" so they wouldn't be missed. We hope the heavy traffic and close inspection of these paint-can size transmitters didn't damage them any, because they have come to seem like old friends to us. They are usually found in reliable locations and are easy to disable should the need arise.

After yaking and milling about on Freedom Ridge for a few hours, the group made its way to the Little A-Le-Inn where we warmed up a big pot of Dr. Brown's famous "Fartless Chili" (scientifically designed to avoid the obvious aftereffects) which all in attendance were required to consume. From there, the caravan proceeded westward to the Tonopah Test Range (TTR) where we gave out Area 51 patches to the guards. Unlike the anonymous Groom dudes, these guys have name tags and were happy to converse with us. There sure were a lot of them, however. They said they knew we were coming because the Dept. of Energy sent them a copy of our flyer. (Gosh, that was clever of them. Maybe we should take DOE off our mailing list.)

A pleasant time was had by all, and great satisfaction was derived from our observation that no more than 25 of us law-abiding citizens resulted in canceled vacations and untold overtime for what appeared to be about 50 security dudes total. We think of it as defending the job security of our friends in beige.

Men In Black Visit Rachel

As part of the group was making its way from Freedom Ridge toward the Little A-Le-Inn, we stopped briefly at the mysterious Black Mailbox, site of many UFO tales. There, the word reached us from a departing visitor that two men in business suits were seen lurking around the Campbell residence in Rachel, still 20 miles away. This reporter nearly shat in his proverbial pants as he contemplated the implications of that intelligence. WHO WEARS BUSINESS SUITS IN THE DESERT? At best, these must be FBI agents waiting to arrest or serve a warrant on Mr. Campbell, the chief irritant to the military along the '51 border. At worst, they could be the mysterious Men In Black, perhaps employed by a shadowy government agency that knows no rules or even, if you choose to believe the stories, actual aliens disguised as humans and engaged in some sinister mind game.

Not knowing what to expect, we decided that the best option was to descend on the Campbell residence en masse. There were only two of them, our intel said, versus a dozen of us, so maybe we could stand up to them as a group. We motored as a convoy down Highway 375 to Rachel, then took up a position on the opposite side of the road from Mr. Campbell's mobile home. Peering through binoculars, we saw at first no sign of the Men In Black. There were no unidentified cars parked in the vicinity and no obvious indications that the front door had been tampered with. However, closer inspection of the door with our most powerful optical devices revealed undeniable evidence that the MIBs had indeed been there and were on the prowl for our very souls. Wedged between the doorknob and the doorframe was a rolled up copy of The Watchtower.

Jehovah's Witnesses!

Trespassers Plead Not Guilty

Seven people accused of trespassing on military land near the Groom base were arraigned in Justice Court in Alamo on Jan. 12. Three pleaded "No Contest" and accepted their fines of about \$300 each. Four pleaded Not Guilty, and their trial is scheduled for Mar. 2. The four contend that although they did cross the line, it was entirely accidental, the result of confusing signals and a misread map.

On Jan. 2, these seven traveling in three vehicles drove beyond the Keep Out signs on the well-maintained Groom Lake Road and up to the guard shack about a half mile beyond. This was their first visit to the area, and they obviously had not read this reporter's "Area 51 Viewer's Guide," which advises against crossing the line. Trying to follow a crude map to the Freedom Ridge trailhead, the group whizzed past the often photographed sign forest forbidding trespass (and

photography) and containing such memorable but evidently unread phrases as "Use of Deadly Force Authorized."

There was no place to turn around at the signs, the intruders claim, and as they passed a white Jeep Cherokee, they said a guard inside waved to them, as though saying "Come on in!" Naturally, upon arrival at the guard house, they were descended upon by a gaggle of excessively armed cammo dudes who were not prepared to give helpful directions and certainly were not versed on any of the social graces. The immediate arrest of the offenders, no matter how old, young, naive or harmless, was apparently the only option available in their very limited emotional repetoir.

This reporter and two other hikers happened to witness the incident while climbing Freedom Ridge ourselves. As soon as we understood what was happening, we aborted our ascent and broke out the telescopes to watch the festivities. The ratio of armed cammo dudes to naive intruders was easily two to one. We watched as the trespassers--four men and two woman of varying ages--stood around their cars for over an hour looking frustrated and confused while tough men with big assault weapons milled about looking equally bored and a bit embarrassed. A state trooper arrived first, followed by Sgt. Lamoreaux of the Lincoln County Sheriff's Dept. Forms were signed, and the prisoners were turned over to the Sheriff for more advanced forms of humiliation.

The intruders were thoughtfully provided with handcuffs and leg- irons (for their own safety, no doubt) and were taken in an Air Force van to the palatial, brand-spanking-new Lincoln County Detention Center in Pioche. This nearly empty, high-tech hoosegow, otherwise known as the Jail That Ate Lincoln County, was built with the intent to house other people's prisoners for profit. That was before the bottom fell out of the captive housing market, and the county now has to scrape for any prisoners it can get.

In this case it graciously accommodated Connie Ruiz, her daughter Sissy and son David, Connie's neighbor Bill Fitzgerald, his sons Kevin and Tim, and a friend Gilbert Narvaiz. Hardened criminals, all. They claim that at the Detention Center they were forced to stand facing a blank wall for over an hour and a half, even one man who had an injured ankle, and were denied the use of the bathroom for many hours after their arrest. They said they were strip searched (because, presumably, you never can know in which body cavity those devious trespassers might be hiding drugs or weapons) and were given stylish orange jumpsuits to wear (as you've seen rakishly modeled by Charlie Manson). The seven wasted away in jail for about eight hours while Bill's wife and Connie's husband three hours away in Las Vegas tried to hunt up \$4200 in cash on a Sunday night to bail out their loved ones. \$200 more to tow each of the three vehicles brought the total bar tab to \$4800 for this very engrossing weekend experience. The adventure was all the more educational for several of the participants had never before seen the inside of a jail cell.

Some hysterical activists might cry "overkill" and "law enforcement run amok." Well, maybe just a tad.

In the meantime, after witnessing the arrest but still not knowing who these people were, this reporter got on the horn to his contacts to tell them about the event. ("Seven People Arrested in Groom Lake Incident," the Las Vegas Review-Journal reported on Jan. 5.) He then headed down the highway to Pioche, arriving at the Detention Center sometime after the prisoners did. The duty officer behind a seamless expanse of bullet-proof glass refused to give any information about the prisoners, even whether they were being held at the detention center at all, so this reporter was forced to wait outside in the sub-freezing night for an uncertain release. And wait. And wait. In his delirium and creeping hypothermia, the reporter was transformed, in a metaphysical sense, from a mild-mannered Bill Bixby into a raging green Incredible Hulk. Alas, when the prisoners were finally bailed out around 4 am, the Hulk was sound asleep in the back of his car and did not get a chance to meet them. He learned who they were only when one of the seven called him a few days later, and the story they told further enraged the Hulk's already green condition.

Doctor, help me. Ever since spending the night in the parking lot of the Lincoln County Detention Center, I have been afflicted by the uncontrollable urge to do violent damage to both the anonymous cammo dudes and the Lincoln County Sheriff's Dept. I don't mean to bomb, shoot, dismember or otherwise physically harm these noble defenders of the law; I want to utterly destroy them at the very core of their being. I WANT TO CUT THEIR FUNDING. I know this is an irrational impulse. Each of these people, as individuals, are probably nice folks, but when you throw together a lot of decent people "just following orders" what you sometimes get, on the whole, is a sadistic monster with no collective conscience or critical judgment.

The case of the seven trespassers has become, for this reporter, a timely symbolic example that dovetails naturally with

the fight to save the viewpoints and expose the nonexistent base at Groom Lake. The four who pleaded Not Guilty must continue to make their own decisions, but I encourage them not to go down quietly. At the trial on Mar. 2, they will be accorded all the protections of any other defendant, including the right to subpoena witnesses. The first witness I would call, and that any good lawyer would also want to haul into court, is that cammo dude in the white Cherokee who waved at the visitors as they passed. "What was your intent?" Perry Mason would ask. "Were you giving them an implied consent to enter your area?"

If this well-armed paramilitary force patrolling public land refuses to officially exist, then this is a good opportunity to bring them out into the open. "Could you please state for the court your name and who you work for?" Mason would ask. The Las Vegas press will be present at this promising trial, and even a few in the national corps might be interested in meeting a genuine cammo dude face to face. They are, after all, so hard to pin down in the field, always running away as they do. With a bloody land seizure hearing (or two) expected in the meantime, everyone should be whipped into a glorious frenzy by the time Mar. 2 rolls along. What if the cammo dudes don't honor the subpoena? Then the case falls apart. Implied consent is a critical issue here, and if the government fails to supply this one essential witness, it would be obstructing a legitimate defense.

These four have been crudely treated and are not guilty of the charges against them. Although they did cross the line, they followed each other like lemmings, in clouds of dust and under conditions of limited warning where there was inadequate opportunity to read the signs. The only person who might be seen as having control over the situation was the driver of the first vehicle, who has already pleaded No Contest. The others either were passengers in other people's cars--and who thus had no control at all over the situation--or were drivers of following vehicles who made a legitimate error that any law-biding citizen could easily have fallen victim to. ("The guy in front must know where he is going, and that nice fellow in the Cherokee is waving us along.") The authorities, if they are smart, will drop the case to avoid their ultimate and totally publicized humiliation. If they are not smart (as is common among authorities), then they should be ready to fight a high-profile battle, not to mention the seething greenness of this reporter.

Hulk wants blood.

Late Breaking News

1/25/94: Official notice has just been received that a hearing WILL be held in Las Vegas. It will take place Weds., Mar. 2, 5- 8pm, in the Cashman Field Center, Rooms 203-204. More details will follow in Desert Rat #2, due sometime after Feb. 1.

The Las Vegas hearing is in addition to the Caliente hearing scheduled for Jan. 31. The Caliente hearing is already shaping up to be a big event for land use advocates. For those who plan to attend, you may like to know that opponents will be gathering for dinner at the Knotty Pine Restaurant at about 5 or 5:30, just before the 7pm hearing.

Final wisdom: If it says, "Restricted Area," "No Trespassing," "Keep Out," and "Use of Deadly Force Authorized," then keep going, don't worry about it, God will protect you.

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