

Nellis North Range Trip Report

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Subject: Nellis North Range Trip Report

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From: Sasquatch

Nellis North Range Trip Report - April 10/11 1997

4/10 - Left Vegas early in AM via Lake Mead Blvd. My intention was to get up close and personal with Nellis Area 2. Alas, I was equipped only with my Nevada Gazzeteer when I really should have had 7 1/2 USGS maps! After ambling around on 4x4 powerline access roads for a while, I thru in the towel and headed back into Vegas to pick up I-15 North. Interesting sidebar here is that the De Lorme map indicates that you should be able to get through to Apex from the southeastern side of the Sunrise Mountain cluster. I found No Trespassing signs when I got to the Nevada CoGeneartion facility on the paved road a few miles north of the Lake Mead Blvd turnoff and didn't want to risk further travel. Anyone know if that road actually ties across?

Anyway, I headed north and soon found myself heading towards Coyote Summit via 375. I noticed that all the ET highway signage seems to have disappeared except in Rachel. Did the state take them down, or have they all been stolen? About 3 miles shy of the summit I pulled over to take advantage of the excellent visibility and have a good look at the Bald Mountain radar facility with my trusty Nikon 10x50's. Imagine my surprise when I noticed a black aircraft flying just behind the mountains in the emmigrant valley area, toward Groom . Yes, it really was black! I caught only short glimpses of it between the peaks, but it appeared to be executing turns and moving up and down the valley. While my visual impression was that of a B2, I can't be entirely certain, though it was most definately not a conventional boom aircraft. In any case, the sighting lasted 10 minutes or so. This would have been very close to noon. I packed up and headed in to Rachel, stopping at the Research Center for a tip o' the hat and lunching at the Inn.

Afternoon found me driving up to the Cedar gate of the range and monitoring aerial high jinks visually and via radio. The range maintenance folks seemed especially busy. I imagined that they were probably still tidying up after Green Flag. I then proceeded toward the Tonopah Test Range. While enroute, in the middle of nowhere (north Railroad Valley), I encountered a homeless fellow pushing a shopping cart full of his worldly belongings down 375! He looked like he could have been an abductee beamed off the streets of Vegas only moments before. I thought about stopping, but decided that perhaps it had only been a mirage. Anyway, he was heading toward Rachel and I didn't want to delay his journey to that earthly paradise.

Arriving and setting up on a hill overlooking the TTR, I found some exciting doings. There appears to be a MAJOR construction project going on a few miles east of the existing base. Seems to be a lot of grading and interesting structures going up. Also, there was a steady stream of construction traffic and a large volume of containerized freight going in. Does anybody know what this project is? After staring through my bino's till my eyes watered, I packed it in and headed for Tonopah, where I dined and roomed over night. I slept well, knowing that my government was spending taxes faster than it can raise them just a few miles away.

4/11 - Got out of Tonopah early and headed up past Warm Springs on Rt 6. Stopped off at Basecamp, no troll, but there was electronic maintenance taking place at the base of a communications tower about 1/3 down the runway. Two vehicles and about three folks were taking part. No other action here. Gee, they take great care of that place!

Headed up to Project Faultless site. Even though I've been up to NTS Yucca Flat's , this place struck me as kind of eerie. So quiet.

Someone is apparently doing recent soil samples here. A brand new shovel and several shiny new drums marked with codes and "not analyzed" were examined. Also some survey flags, though these appeared to be older. Picked up some cable as souveiner. They won't let you do THAT at NTS!

Proceeded on to Lunar Crater. Nice, worth spending some time there. I found no markers remaining in the original BLM monument pedestal, but someone had constructed a new bench (1996 date given) in memory of the former Tonopah distict BLM recreational administrator whom had served in 'Nam between 1968-70 (hell time in S.E. asia). The tiny plaque stated that this was a favortite place of his for quiet reflection. It occurred to me just then that I would have liked to met this man.

Taking a chance, I thrashed my rental Montero (an able steed) east on the BLM dirt track all the way down into the Railroad Valley to rejoin 375. A beautiful drive. I arrived back in Rachel at noon to grab a Deja Vu lunch and listen to Uncle Joe talk to the tourists. Apparently, they were all adamant about returning with 4x4's to hike Tikaboo, having heard that someone was shot at there recently (?) I was lurking, so I didn't ask where this bizzare report originated from. A liquor or beer bottle, I reckon.

Finally, heading back toward Ash Springs on 375, I decided to head up Groom Lake road (even though I had sworn not to) and thrash the Montero to Castle Rocks for the sheer hell of it. Inexplicably, this prompted a visit from the Pave Hawk, which hovered over me at about 200' and did a little rocking jig. I guess I am a jaded old bastard or maybe I've just lost respect - I flipped him off and he left for a perimiter survey. I made my way back out on GLR past the usual tourist traffic. Wow, that was swell.

Concluded the day with my drive back to Vegas. Looking forward to the Interceptors test site tour and Nellis air show next week.

Key Observations: TTR constuction project looks expensive...and interesting! B2 (assumed) flying in black paint (not usual haze grey) at Groom indicates that they may be doing further radar cross section work with new coatings or new weapons delivery system. This would have to be classified work, otherwise I assume they would be doing it near Palmdale (Tehachapi). I understand a new "super penetrator" nuke delivery package was being tested from the B2 platform at TTR late last fall. On the other hand, maybe it wasn't a B2 at all! (Black Triangle?) Anyway, it's good to know that they're keeping themselves occupied with something up there. All in all, just enough action to make for a worthwhile trip.

- Sasquatch

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