

## EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBERS:

BLM Rangers (24-hour emergency only)	(714) 351-6374
San Bernardino County Sheriff — Needles	(619) 326-4515
San Bernardino County Sheriff — Baker	(619) 733-4448
California Highway Patrol	Ask Operator for Zenith 1-2000
Needles Desert Community Hospital	(619) 326-4531
Lake Havasu Hospital	(602) 855-8185
San Bernardino County Fire Department	(619) 326-2211

## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

The vast open spaces of the California Desert are uniquely situated within a few hours' drive of over 12 million people. In recognition of the special challenges created by this situation, Congress established the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) in 1976. Approximately half of the desert's 25 million acres are public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Congress directed the BLM to provide for the administration of public lands in the CDCA in a way that would protect its unusual natural and cultural values while providing for the wise use of its resources. The administrative headquarters for the CDCA are located at the BLM's California Desert District Office in Riverside. Public lands are managed for a variety of uses, including minerals, livestock grazing, wildlife, watershed, wilderness, and recreation.

Needles Resource Area Office  
614 Front Street, Suite B  
Needles, CA 92363  
(619) 326-3896

California Desert District  
1695 Spruce Street  
Riverside, CA 92507  
(714) 351-6394



# Fort Piute



## FORT PIUTE ACCESS GUIDE

Listen for the whisper of groaning wooden wheels as early pioneers' wagons approached Fort Piute, carving deep ruts into segments of the well-used Mojave Road. The road was rough here, and crossing Piute Hill had the reputation of being one of the worst ordeals on western trails.

Imagine the excitement of the pioneers as they glimpsed the first patch of green stream-side vegetation since leaving the Colorado River days earlier. Reconstruct the now-crumbling stone walls of Fort Piute which greeted travelers along the Mojave Road, offering them assistance and protection. From 1866-67 the U.S. Army manned this way station, the first stop along the Mojave Road for travelers heading west from the Colorado River.



Watch along the stream for shadows of Indians as they followed their well-worn footpath from the dry slopes above Piute Creek down into the cool cottonwoods, willows, and cattails which mark this mile-long oasis. Piute Creek's life-giving waters surface for only this brief mile before sinking again into the gravel floor of Piute Valley. But this dwarf desert treasure beckoned many life forms to converge at its year-round haven.

Today the visible clues of these bygone activities can be seen from the Indian trails and petroglyphs along hillsides, wagon tracks tracing the route of the old Mojave or Government Road, and the ruins of the way station known as Fort Piute.

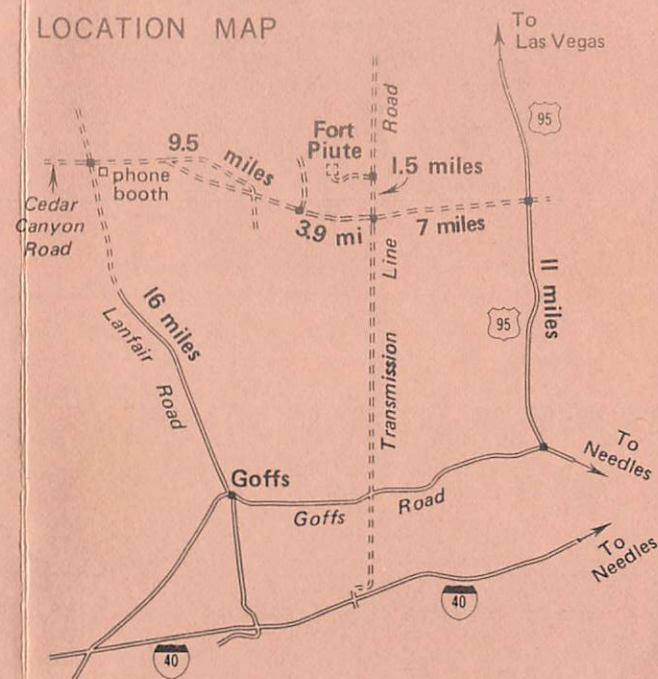
## GETTING THERE

Today, roads to the Piute area are somewhat better than those that challenged the pioneers, but the old road over Piute Hill is now impassable to all but foot traffic.

If you want to see the ruins and creek area with a minimum of hiking, enter the Piutes from the east. Because of rough roads at the end, this route is recommended for four-wheel drive (4x4) vehicles, or those having high clearance. From US-95, drive west along the utility road for about seven miles. At the intersection with a well-graded transmission line road, turn right (north) and continue driving for 1 1/2 miles. On the left, two rock cairns (landmark piles of stones) mark the beginning of the extremely rocky two-mile road into Fort Piute.

If you enjoy hiking and your interest is in the Piute Gorge/Piute Canyon area, or the wagon route over Piute Hill, enter from the west. The road leading to the edge of Piute Gorge is much better than the route from US-95, but it crosses a wash which at times can be negotiated only by a 4x4 because of soft sandy conditions. From the junction of Lanfair and Cedar Canyon Roads (just north of the telephone booth), drive east on the utility road for 9 1/2 miles. Before you cross the Piute Range, turn left (north) onto the small dirt road heading toward a corral. The two trailheads are marked by large rock cairns, the first about 1/2 mile north of the cattleguard, and the second 3/4 mile further. Remember that the fort ruins are still a two-hour walk from either trailhead.

## LOCATION MAP



## HIKING

Rock cairns mark two hiking trails that allow you to explore the distinctive natural and historical features of the Piute area. A round-trip hike using both routes will take four to five hours. The trails are very rocky and steep in places, so sturdy footwear is essential. Two or three quarts of water per person is recommended, depending on the season. Summer highs are commonly over 100°F; winter highs vary from 40° to 70° and can change very quickly. There are rattlesnakes — never place your hands or feet in places you cannot see. Carry a snakebite kit and know how to use it.

The trails are described from the view of a hiker beginning at the fort ruins:

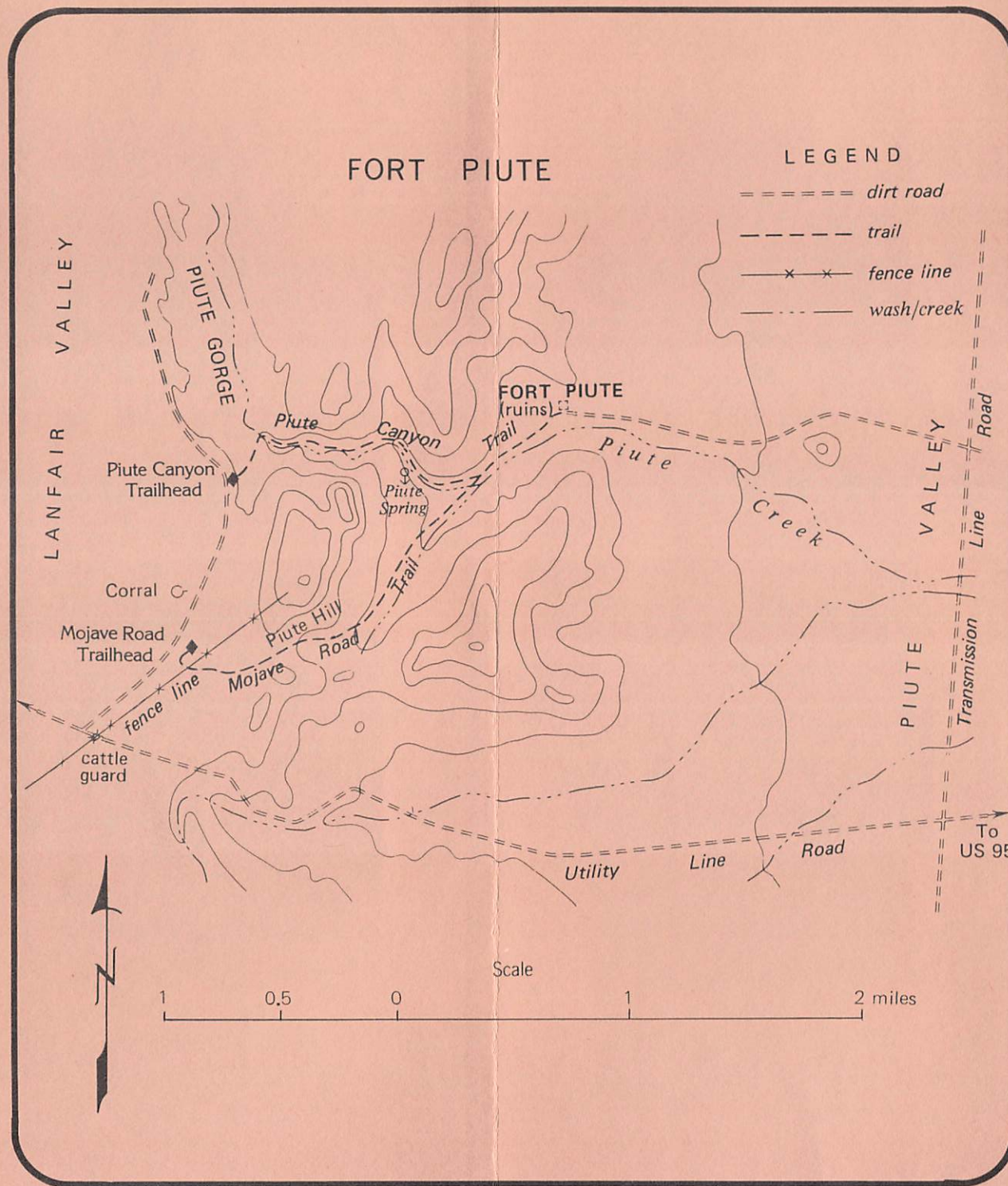
**Piute Canyon Trail** — This trail runs along the hillside above and north of Piute Creek for ¾ mile following an old Indian trail. Where it drops down into the creek, you may choose the road used by the wagons (see trail description) or continue to the right and follow the route through Piute Canyon that was used by travelers on foot or horseback. A thick stand of willows makes hiking difficult for a few hundred feet, but the remaining ¾-mile walk through the canyon into Piute Gorge is clear. When the trail enters Piute Gorge, it turns left, climbing out of the gorge along a hillside to the parking area. Total distance is approximately 1 ¾ miles. The Mojave Road Trailhead is ¾ mile to the south, near a corral.

**Mojave Road Trail** — After leaving Fort Piute, wagons had to go along the creek and over Piute Hill to get into Lanfair Valley. The creek has eroded its channel downward several feet since the days of the wagons, making vehicle travel on this segment impossible. No trail has been marked along the creek. In places, the vegetation is thick enough to make walking difficult. About ¾ mile from the fort ruins, the wagons climbed out of the main creek drainage that leads down from Piute Hill. You can still see the wagon wheel ruts etched into the rock at this spot. From here, the trail proceeds another mile over Piute Hill and into Lanfair Valley. Wagon ruts and the loose, jagged volcanic rock make walking slow and difficult in places. The trail ends near a corral, about ¾ mile south of the Piute Canyon Trailhead.

## FOR THE FUTURE

Visitors familiar with the area will notice some changes taking place. Tamarisk, a gray-green bush or tree, introduced into this country from Asia, is being removed to improve the habitat for native vegetation along the creek. In the place of tamarisk, Fremont cottonwoods are being planted to provide more variety to wildlife habitat.

The fort ruins will soon be stabilized to prevent further deterioration, and some walls will be restored.



## SOME TIPS FOR YOUR VISIT

Hunting and shooting are popular sports in this area. During hunting season, especially, use caution when hiking through the area. If you are using a gun, do not shoot where visibility is poor or your target is in doubt.

Camping is allowed in the area near the fort ruins. To preserve the fort, please do not camp inside or next to the ruins.

Woodcutting is not allowed in order to preserve the habitat. If you want a campfire, please bring your own wood. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recommends the use of camp stoves or barbecues with charcoal.

