

AGUA FRIA NATIONAL MONUMENT

Badger Springs Wash Trail

Natural Resources

Even when the channel appears dry, water is never far from the surface in the canyon of Badger Springs Wash, which leads to the Agua Fria River in its own deep spectacular canyon. The wash supports a riparian plant community that includes cottonwood, willow trees and other plants that create a relatively lush oasis in the surrounding desert. This area attracts wildlife, so watch out for animal tracks, birds, frogs and snakes.

Archeology

Native American people have lived in this area for at least 2,000 years. The largest population, known as the Perry Mesa Tradition, occupied the mesas and canyons between about A.D. 1250 and 1450. They grew corn and other crops in rock-lined terraces, and where there was enough space, in canyons; cultivated agave plants in rock piles; gathered wild plants; and hunted deer, rabbits and other game. Most of their larger villages, which consisted of pueblos with rock walls, were located on the mesa tops at the edges of canyons. Prehistoric pottery and stone tools are scattered throughout the Badger Springs area, and may have been left by people during hunting, plant gathering, or camping activities. The Yavapai Indians later inhabited this area, but they lived in smaller camps and moved more frequently, over a wider area, than the people of the Perry Mesa Tradition.

Badger Springs Rock Art Site: Prehistoric rock art can be viewed on rock faces, above the area where Badger Springs Wash flows into the Agua Fria River. There are at least 86 individual petroglyphs, which are symbols that were pecked into the rock surfaces with hammer stones. Of the 86 recorded symbols, almost half represent deer or other animals. Some of the designs are more abstract and difficult to interpret. Several of the designs appear to have been “re-pecked”, or touched up, years after they were first created. We will never know exactly who created and refreshed these symbols, and why. Some have speculated that this place, with its towering rock pillars, was a gateway to the river and may have been seen as a place of special power and significance. It may have been a stop on a major travel route between villages. Volunteers from the Arizona Archeological Society completed a detailed recording of this site in 2003. The rock art has sustained some minor damage from vandalism. Fortunately, most of the rock art sites in the Agua Fria NM are in good condition, but some rock art has been damaged by graffiti, attempted theft, and application of such materials as chalk. *Please look but don't touch!*

Other archeological features, near the rock art, include a huge, broken boulder that contains surfaces used for food grinding. “Metate” is the term for shaped stone implements, or modified surfaces on bedrock or boulders, that were used for grinding corn, seeds, and other foods with hand-held stones, or “manos.” Look for the rectangular and oval depressions and smoothed surfaces on the boulder. Feel free to touch these surfaces. When the immense boulder broke in half, some of the bedrock metates were also split in half. This attests to the power of the floods that have swept through the canyons throughout their existence.



Badger Springs Wash Area: History

In 1878, William Perry and his family came to the Badger Springs area to establish a camp. Perry Mesa, across the Agua Fria River, was named after him. Perry also did some gold mining in the area. He hauled ore to the mouth of Badger Springs Wash, at the Agua Fria River, where he built a water-powered arrastra. After the ore was crushed in the arrastra, he recovered the gold using mercury. The arrastra was also used by other miners in the area. Perry later established a homestead further north along the river.

The remnants of an arrastra are still visible near the prehistoric rock art. So what is an arrastra? The word comes from the Spanish word meaning “to drag.” An arrastra is basically a stone-lined circular pit, with an upright post in the middle. A large drag stone is attached to a chain hanging from a crossbar atop the central post. The bar could be hitched to a mule or a person (or could be water-driven) and rotated around and around, to drag the stone and crush the ore dumped into the arrastra pit. This process creates a distinctive pattern of grooves on the flat stone slabs of the arrastra. At Badger Springs, look for slabs that show this wear pattern. We can't tell for sure if they were part of Perry's original arrastra, but that is a possibility.



Rock Art site at the Badger Springs Wash and Agua Fria River junction