



Table Rock has had a presence in valley lore since long before the first European-American settlements in the area. Thus the rock's primary facet was as an important landmark and lookout point for Native American residents. It is alleged that the site was heavily used for recreation, communication and observation, tribal meetings and burial. The site is said to be the burial ground of Sacagawea's brother and many other important Native Americans. This history, and the legends and stories that go along with it, have caused present day Native Americans can groups to regard the site with reverence.

The Native Americans

Payette Sandstone, each ranging in thickness from 50 to 100 feet. The durability of this unique type of sandstone is due to the high silica content imparted by the nearby hot springs. It can be polished to a marble-like luster and was once coveted as a choice building material throughout the West. It was used in the construction of the state capitol and many other important and magnificent public buildings in southwest Idaho.

The origins of Table Rock and Castle Rock go back to a time when the Treasure Valley looked much different than it does today. At one time, the valley was one great lakebed, with the cliffs of the Boise foothills forming its beaches. A series of silica-rich hot springs slowly converted these sandy beaches into an unusually durable sandstone. What we know as Table Rock is made up of two strata of this

Distinctive Landforms

Table Rock and Castle Rock are two of Boise's natural jewels. They are among the area's most distinctive and imposing natural landmarks, but their true significance goes far beyond their unique landforms. These sandstone cliffs contain natural resources, are symbols of ongoing political and religious controversies and are great places for recreation and contemplation. The many facets of their rich and diverse history define their value to the people of Boise and southwest Idaho.



Table Rock V by Karen Woods

This brochure is published in observance of the centennial of the Antiquities Act of 1906, which enacted the nation's first regulations aimed at preserving our past.

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Table Rock X by Karen Woods

Boise's Foothill Jewels: The Many Facets of Table Rock & Castle Rock

Natural Resources

Another facet of this site is its use as a source of valuable natural resources from the mid-19th century onward. It started with the *Tri-Weekly Idaho Statesman* helpfully suggesting that some of the stone be used to build a jail, and in 1870 their advice was taken. A “Notice” was posted in the newspaper proclaiming to everyone that the quarries surrounding the penitentiary were now property of the state. The native sandstone was used to construct the Penitentiary itself and soon convict labor was used to quarry the hillside, with private quarries being opened later further up the strata. While quarrying the hillside provided high quality building materials for Idaho, this came at the cost of dangerous working conditions for both a convict labor force and paid quarry workers.

An important benefit of the silica springs located at the base of Castle Rock was the hot water they produced. Boise’s geothermal resources were the first ever put to commercial use. A group of local investors formed Boise Water Works to prospect for hot water on a site that had long been known for its very low snow accumulation. They were trying to gain a competitive edge in a water war that had rattled Boise politics for nearly a year.

The “Boise Water War” began in the spring of 1889 when the Overland Hotel Company sank three wells in the Hull’s Gulch area. They had just received city approval to lay pipes in the



streets and were ready to offer Boise’s first city-wide running water service when a competing group, the Artesian Water and Land Improvement Company, was created. In response, the Overland incorporated its water service as the Boise Water Works. In the winter of 1890-91, Boise Water Works hot water wells were sunk at Castle Rock and by mid-March they were producing 800,000 gallons per day of 170 degree water. Their system of providing both hot and cold water to Boise residents vanquished the Artesian Water and Land Improvement Company, which was later absorbed by the Boise Water Works.

Today, this original hot-water system is one of four that provide geothermal heating to downtown Boise. The sustainability of these systems became an issue by the mid 1980s, as water levels in monitoring wells dropped 25

feet in just a few years. The issue was studied and in 1999 the City of Boise constructed a 3,200 foot injection well to recharge the hot-water aquifer. Water that was once discharged into the river after use is now recycled back to the aquifer via the injection well. With this refinement the system has stabilized.

Political and Religious Controversies

There are many controversial facets to these unique landforms. As a result of their cultural ties to the site, the Native Americans of Idaho felt it should be protected from development. In 1991 a lawsuit brought by Native Americans against developing the area with ridge-top homes forced the City to purchase the land surrounding Castle Rock. Fort Hall Shoshone-Bannock and Duck Valley Shoshone-Paiutes argued that construction on the site would desecrate the graves of their ancestors. Information provided by state archaeologists left little doubt that the slope immediately below Table Rock had been used as an Indian burial site. Among the clearest evidence was a July 21, 1870 *Tri-Weekly Idaho Statesman* article that described a number of Indian remains found on the site. The controversy continued until, in 1996, a City Council memorandum conceded that the local tribes were indeed the rightful successors of the slope’s original owners. This was largely a symbolic move, as Boise City continued to retain ownership of the site.



Another matter of controversy for the site is that of the cross that stands on Table Rock. Since it was erected in 1956 it has had a significant presence both in the landscape and in the culture of the Boise community. In 1971 it was realized that having a religious symbol on public land might invite a constitutional controversy, so the State agreed to sell a small piece of land under the cross to the Jaycees for \$100.

A constitutional challenge did come in December of 1999 when Rob Sherman, an atheist rights activist from Chicago, complained that the cross on Table Rock was a violation of the separation of church and state because the city had sold the land specifically in order to preserve the cross standing on it. He argued that such a sale was unconstitutional because it was done specifically to preserve a religious symbol and had no secular purpose. On November 27th, 1999 an estimated ten thousand people marched from the Boise Depot to the capital in support of the cross, with Governor Dirk Kempthorne declaring the day “Table Rock Cross Day”. In January of 2000 Sherman decided to postpone his court challenge to the cross after losing a similar case in California. As a result there has been no official ruling on the constitutionality of the cross.

Recreation and Contemplation

Today Table Rock and Castle Rock are a beautiful part of the Boise foothills and provide hiking trails for recreation and the opportunity to contemplate this site’s natural beauty and significance in local and regional history. Trails allow visitors to hike near some of the old quarry sites, to gain an excellent view of the Boise Valley and the sandstone buildings of the Penitentiary Historic District, and to see the still-functioning wellhouse that marks the source of Boise’s original geothermal heating district.