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Nevada Division of State Parks
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

QA:N/A

Fort Churchill State Historic Park

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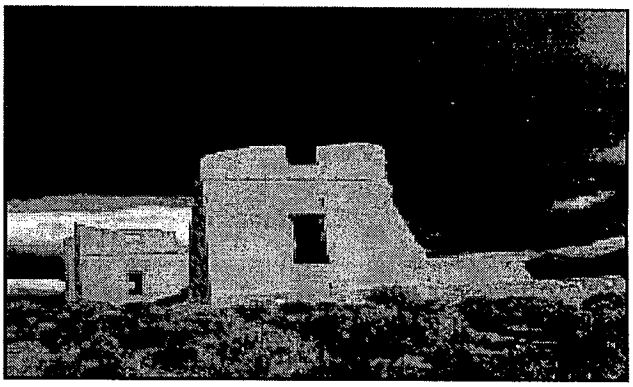
Fort Churchill was once an active U.S. Army fort. Built in 1861 to provide protection for early settlers. It was abandoned nine years later, and today the ruins are preserved in a state of arrested decay. Twice a year the Nevada Civil War Volunteers puts on a civil war encampment at Fort Churchill.

A visitor center displays information and artifacts of the fort's history. The Pony Express and the Overland Telegraph once passed through this area. Nearby is Buckland Station, a Pony Express stop, supply center, and former hotel built in 1870. Facilities at Fort Churchill State Historic Park include trails, a campground, picnic area, group-use area and access to the Carson River. Visitors can enjoy hiking, historic and environmental education, camping, picnicking, photography and canoeing. The park is located eight miles south of Silver Springs on Alternate U.S. 95



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- Park programs

Facilities & Amenities

- Camping
- Group Camping
- Dump Station
- Picnicking
- Group Picnicking
- Visitor Center
- Trails
- Historic Site
- Nature Study
- Equestrian Camping

Fort Churchill

The year was 1860, and the fear of Indian attacks was at its peak. Talk of Indian atrocities at Williams Station filtered back to Carson Valley settlers, who demanded immediate protection.

Actually, the so-called Pyramid Lake War began on May 12, 1860 when three white men living at Williams Station, on the Carson River about 30 miles east of Carson City, kidnapped and held prisoner two Indian girls. Their action and refusal to release the girls led to reprisals by the Indians who killed the three men, released the girls and burned the station.

Rumors magnified both the number of whites killed and the number of Paiutes and Bannocks thought ready to move against white settlements. Hasty and ill-conceived plans resulted in the movement of 105 volunteers to Pyramid Lake to avenge the deaths of the white men.

In the battle that ensued, the white volunteers, out-numbered and out-generaled, suffered a major defeat. They lost two-thirds of their original force. The Indians decisive victory led to immediate white retaliation. Urgent calls went out to California for regular army troops. The troops, bolstered by additional volunteers, moved against the Indian forces in early June.

In this second battle, the out-numbered Indians were forced to retreat. Casualty reports ranged from four to 160 Indians killed while only two whites died.

Captain Joseph Stewart and his Carson River Expedition were ordered to establish a post on the Carson River. Starting July 20, 1860, tens of thousands of dollars were spent to construct Fort Churchill, the desert outpost that guarded the Pony Express run and other mail routes. Hundreds of soldiers were based here between expeditions against the Indians.

The fort was named in honor of Sylvester Churchill, the Inspector General of the US Army. It was built as a permanent installation. Adobe buildings were erected on stone foundations in the form of a square, facing a central parade ground. Average strength of the post was 200.

The Civil War made the fort an important supply depot for the Nevada Military District, and a base for troops patrolling the overland routes.

The fort was abandoned in 1869, and the adobe buildings were auctioned for only $750. In 1884, the remains of solders buried in the post cemetery were moved to Carson City. The remaining graves are those of the Buckland family, pioneer ranchers who sold supplies to the fort.

Initially, Nevada declined the chance to acquire the Fort Churchill grounds in 1871. During the intervening 86 years, the fort served a variety or purposes, from a source of building materials for nearby structures, to a temporary shelter for travelers on the Carson River Trail.

A bronze plaque was dedicated at Fort Churchill, site of the ruins of the U.S. Army Fort in Lyon County, on October 22, 1967. The State of Nevada took custody of 200 acres of the original military reservation on October 6, 1932. Nevada in turn deeded the land and buildings on April 30, 1934 to the Nevada Sagebrush DAR Chapter to hold in trust. On February 16, 1961, the title of Fort Churchill was reconveyed to the State of Nevada, that it might be official proclamation to be designated a state historical monument. The National Park Service made restoration plans, and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) renovated what was left of this once proud fort. It was the CCC who build the Visitor Center.

World War II pulled America's manpower away to other ventures, and the fort was again abandoned, falling victim to vandals and weather. A renewed interest in the '50s arose, and in 1957 the fort became a part of Nevada's State Park System. Fort Churchill is an integral part of the history of Nevada and the American West.

A visit to Fort Churchill requires a bit of imagination. The buildings that remain are in ruins; others simply no longer exist, and only markers tell what structures once stood there. The Division of State Parks maintains these ruins in a state of arrested decay.

Buckland Station

Samuel S. Buckland settled the valley in 1859 and began ranching. His early establishment served as an important way station for pioneer travelers on the Overland Route. It was one of the earliest ranches in the area, supplying emigrants, ranchers, travelers and the soldiers at Fort Churchill. The Overland Stage Company kept horses at the station and the Pony Express stopped here for change of mounts.

As Fort Churchill was dismantled, Mr. Buckland salvaged materials from the fort buildings to build the two-story house seen today. The Buckland family lived in the house, and rented rooms to travelers.

Buckland Station was acquired by State Parks in 1994. The Division of State Parks plans many improvements for the building and grounds and will soon develop interpretive displays.

Buckland Station is located on the Carson River at Weeks Bridge, one-half mile south of the Fort Churchill entrance road.

Buckland Station interior restoration is scheduled to begin sometime later this year and will be open to the public in 2002.Three rooms in the Station will be set up to look like period rooms using antique furnishings. Fort Churchill is looking for antique furniture dating from 1800 - 1900 to use in the displays. We need sofas, chairs, tables, lamps, bed, dressers; items that will help represent a parlor, guest sitting room, bedroom, and dining room. If you have an antique you would like to donate to Buckland Station for display, please call Fort Churchill State Historic Park at 775-577-2345.

Carson River Ranches

The Nevada State Park System acquired 3,200 acres along the Carson River in 1994. The properties, known as the Carson River Ranches, connect Fort Churchill State Historic Park with Lahontan State Recreation Area. This river corridor, with its diverse plant and wildlife communities, is a popular area for hikers, birdwatchers, canoeists, hunters and equestrians.

While motorized travel on the ranches is not permitted, construction of public access parking areas and a scenic network of trails is ongoing.

Location & Climate:

Fort Churchill is located along the Carson River, eight miles south of Silver Springs on US 95A. The park is situated 40 miles east of Carson City, and 36 miles west of Fallon.

Caution: Visitors are advised to enter the park from US 95A, on a short, paved access road. While Fort Churchill Road along the Carson River from US 50 is scenic, it is 16 miles and unpaved. Summers at the fort are hot with daytime highs of 94°F and nighttime lows of 58°F in July. Winters are cold with occasional snow.

Facilities:

Entrance Fee: An entrance fee is charged to enter the park, with additional fees for camping. Current fees are posted at the park entrance. Click here for all individual park fees by region.

Visitor Information: The Visitor Center offers exhibits telling the colorful history of Fort Churchill. All park visitors should make this their first stop upon entering the park to better appreciate the ruins. Postcards and books are on sale at the Visitor Center. Drinking water and restroom are nearby.

Camping: The campground has 20 sites suitable for travel trailers, motor homes or tents. Campsites include a table and fire ring, and all are shaded by large cottonwood trees. Sites cannot be reserved. There are no hook-ups, but an RV dump station is nearby.

Picnicking: Tree-shaded picnic sites on the banks of the Carson River offer tables, grills and restroom.

Group Area: The group area will accommodate up to 60 persons for group camping or picnicking

on a reservation-only basis. No electricity is available. No RVs, please. For reservations, contact the park office.

Reminders: To make your visit and the visit of others more enjoyable, please observe the following:

1. **DO NOT CLIMB ON THE RUINS.** The adobe is fragile and will deteriorate rapidly. This is also for your personal safety.
2. Fires are permitted only in designated fire rings, barbecues, or approved portable stoves. Visitors should supply their own firewood.
3. The collection of plants, animals, rocks, minerals and artifacts is prohibited. Please do not disturb or remove them.
4. Motor vehicles are permitted only on designated roadways and parking areas.
5. Pets are allowed but must be on a leash.

You are responsible for knowing the park rules and regulations. Detailed copies are posted at the park and may be obtained at the park office.

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