

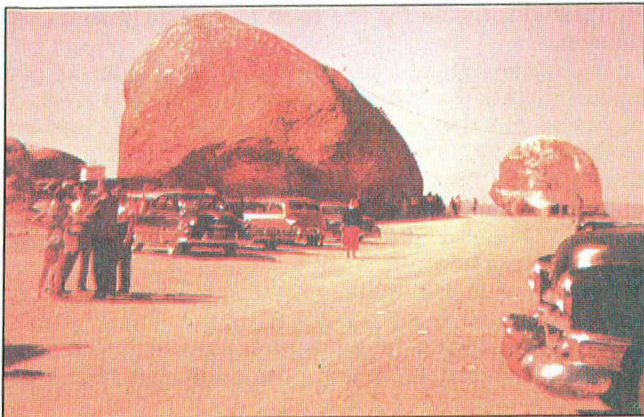
The Legend of Giant Rock

By Pat Rimmington

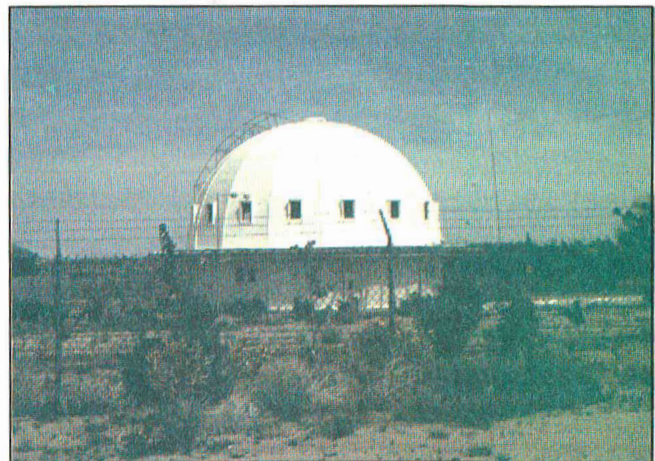
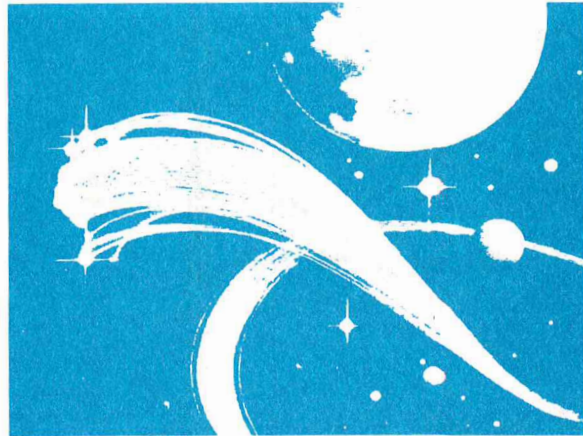
Home to the Space People (and the Indians, and a brilliant German inventor and a Howard Hughes protégée named George Van Tassel who brought thousands to his UFO conventions)

This piece of granite called Giant Rock has been called the world's largest single boulder. Technically, it is quartz monzonite formed during the cretaceous period—part of the Mesozoic era—which puts its age between 65 to 136 million years old.

Giant Rock stands seven stories high, and its estimated weight is around 100,000 tons. The Rock



Flying saucer convention at Giant Rock, 1955.



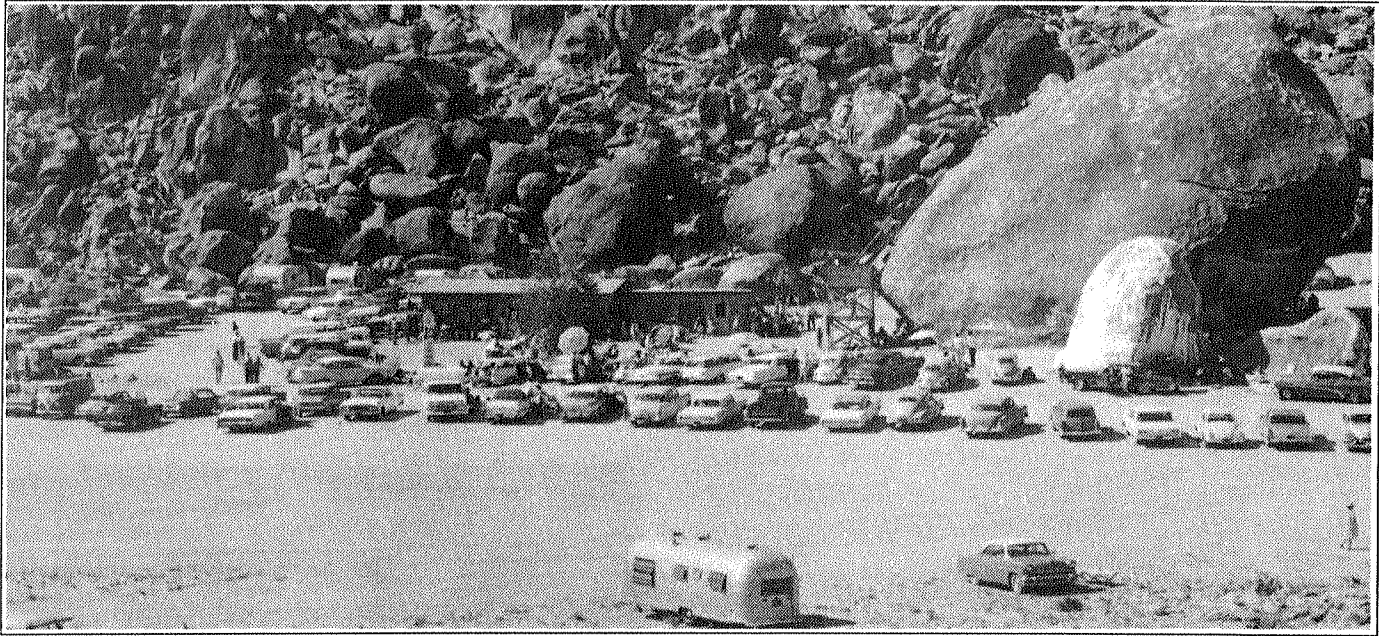
The Integratron. (Photo by Bob Stephenson)

was considered sacred to the Indians of this region who called it the Great Stone, and it was of great importance for gatherings of headmen of the various bands. On a hill a little way from the rock itself were two outcroppings of quartz shaped like thrones, unusual and unique.

In 1887 Charles Reche, who had married a daughter of homesteader Chuck Warren, filed on a homestead of his own northeast of Morongo Valley, shown on some maps as Rich's well. In 1909 he worked as foreman of the Desert Queen Mine, located within what now is the Joshua Tree National Monument. There, he learned from freighters about the manhunt for Willie Boy, the Piute Indian who had murdered the Chemehuevi chief Mike Boniface and abducted his daughter.

Being a Deputy Sheriff, Reche made his way to his father-in-law's ranch in Morongo Valley to join the posse. In the course of the manhunt, he was shot in the hip by Willie Boy. His life was saved by the handcuffs that he carried which deflected the bullet. For the rest of his life, he walked with a limp.

At the start of the Great Depression, Reche's nearest neighbor was Frank Critzer who had filed on a mining claim and lived at Giant Rock. Critzer was



Giant Rock, circa 1967. (Photo by Bob Stephenson)

born in Germany and, at age 14 during World War I, served on a submarine. After the war he emigrated to the United States. In the 1920s he was working on the fishing fleet out of Santa Monica. But the damp air affected his lungs and a doctor recommended that he move to a drier climate.

Frank Critzer decided to try his hand at prospecting. Before embarking on his new desert adventure, he took his Essex car to be readied at a Southern California garage owned by Glenn Paine, the uncle of George Van Tassel, who later would live at Giant Rock. By the time the men had parted company, Critzer had been grubstaked for his new venture with his car repaired, and loaded down with groceries by his new-found friends.

They received no communication from Critzer until a year later when he wrote saying that he had filed a claim in the desert north of what is now Landers. (It would be another 20 years before the community of Landers would exist.)

When Van Tassel and his uncle drove out to visit Critzer, they found him living in a cave he had dug under the Rock. According to Van Tassel, Critzer had several bottles filled with gold and had shown them paperwork which detailed the manufacture of a glass crankshaft stronger than steel, and the nearly completed formula for the then unknown Teflon and plastics.

Critzer helped Charlie Reche pipe water to his house, installed a kitchen and bathroom, and refused payment. He also dragged five straight roads leading to Giant Rock. The roads he made are still used in the Landers area. Then he built a runway on the nearby dry lake, complete with windsock. On seeing it, pilots began to land, and Critzer soon was servicing and repairing aircraft.

On January 9, 1940, *The Desert Trail* reported: "Last Sunday was a busy day for Frank Critzer at his Giant Rock airport. Eight planes swooped in to visit the unique desert retreat." Locals also used the area as a picnic spot.

With Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor, the United States entered World War II. Young men



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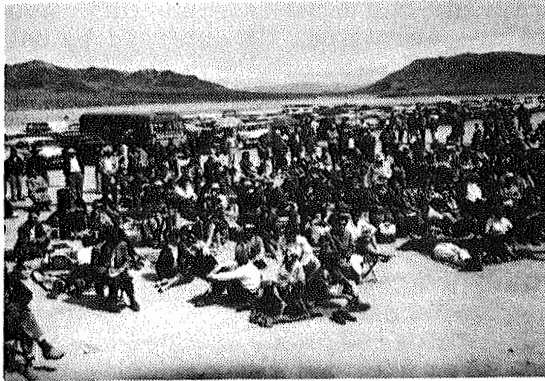
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Critzer's new inventions mentioned by Van Tassel supposedly were lost in the explosion.

The deceased had owned a radio, binoculars, a rifle and explosives, but the same could have been said for most desert dwellers when it came to the first three items. As for the dynamite—most miners owned some, and Bagley's Store in Twentynine Palms sold it.

George Van Tassel was born in 1910 in Jefferson, Ohio. At 17 he entered the aviation field, working with the airlines for three years, before moving to California to join Douglas Aircraft.

In 1941, Van Tassel left Douglas to become Howard Hughes' personal flight inspector for testing experimental aircraft. Subsequently, he was a flight safety inspector with Lockheed. In 1947 Van Tassel,

They came from across the U.S. in the Van Tassel heyday.

registered for the draft, and particularly in California, the local citizens were watching the skies for signs of enemy aircraft.

On July 1, 1942, three Riverside County deputy sheriffs visited Critzer to investigate allegations that he might be involved in a series of thefts from Garnet, Banning and Palm Springs of gasoline, dynamite and tools. Rumors also abounded that the airport was used to transport illegal aliens, that Critzer had failed to register for the draft, and that he was a German spy.

There are two stories of what transpired. One was that when the deputies told Critzer they were taking him to Banning for questioning, Critzer went to his 400-square-foot dwelling and blew himself to bits with the dynamite that he had stored there.

The second was that Critzer was angered by the manner of the deputies, told them to leave his property, and returned to his cave. One of the lawmen then threw a tear gas container into the dwelling which ignited the dynamite. Deputy McCracken who was closest to the blast received multiple cuts and bruises and a punctured eardrum. Deputies Simpson and Pratt were unhurt, barring temporary deafness from the explosion.

Critzer had 200 pounds of dynamite stored in his underground home, and later it was found that only 70 pounds had ignited. Frank Critzer was dead, and none of the allegations and rumors could be substantiated. The papers outlining

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his wife and three daughters, moved to the desert to live at Giant Rock.

Van Tassel began weekly meditation sessions with interested persons in 1953 at Giant Rock which, he claimed, led to UFO contacts. This resulted in the formation of a science/philosophy organization which in 1958 was incorporated as the Ministry of Universal Wisdom, Inc., for "the purpose of research into the unseen truths of life." Van Tassel also founded the College of Universal Wisdom which published a magazine, *Proceedings*. The magazine carried articles and photographs of UFO sightings, some of which were claimed to be taken at Giant Rock.

The Ministry claimed that another result of contacts with extra terrestrials led to the building of the Integratron, a four-story high, 55-feet in diameter, non-metallic structure. They called the Integratron "a time machine for basic research on rejuvenation, anti-gravity and time travel." Van Tassel wrote about his researches in the books that he had published: *When Stars Look Down*, *The Council of Seven Lights*, *Religion and Science Merged*, and *I Rode the Flying Saucer*.

This past year, Golden States Productions under the direction of Emile Canning offered several seminars at the Integratron on planetary healings, readings from George Van Tassel's books and journals, an Easter retreat, a UFO watch, and a psychic development session.

Canning calls the Integratron "a very powerful vortex for physical and spiritual healing," and says it

"combines sacred geometry, electromagnetics, sonics, future science and ancient wisdom." Information on tours and events can be obtained by calling 213-281-6114.

The year 1953 also saw the beginnings of annual space conventions where thousands of visitors came by car, camper and airplane for the two-day events. Speakers included scientists as well as enthusiastic observers. Booths displayed hundreds of books on space people and UFOs. An article appeared in the May 27, 1957, issue of *Life Magazine* entitled "Believers hold meeting in desert to swap interplanetary tall tales."

In 1959 11,000 people attended. By 1970 the numbers were fewer and some rowdy elements in the crowd disrupted the proceedings with fights. So George Van Tassel decided to discontinue the conventions.

Van Tassel died on February 9, 1978, in Santa Ana. The buildings on the Giant Rock property were vacated and gradually vandalized. For the sake of public safety, the Bureau of Land Management bulldozed the remains of the buildings.

In recent years, the aforementioned quartz thrones have been destroyed by those types of off roaders we all hate who consider the desert is for mutilating - because "nothing is there." They roar at high speeds, destroying the delicate desert crust, plants, and tortoises, and litter it with cans and bottles.

The Rock has been pitted by bullet holes by intrepid hunters, and spray painted by members of the

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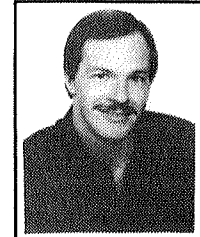
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George Van Tassel on the Rock.

intelligentsia who have difficulty spelling four letter words correctly. Rock climbers have even glued handholds to the surface.

Giant Rock is located on Bureau of Land Management property. Management personnel, too, would like to keep this area pristine but, as always, funds are lacking for cleanup and patrol. If a place is not well enough known, it is not considered high priority.

Writing to our representatives in Congress could be helpful. Or if you plan to visit the area, why not pack a trash bag and do a little cleanup? It might serve as an example to others, and then we might not need to solicit government funds.

Pat Rimmington is past president of the Twentynine Palms Historical Society and is author of The Adobes of Twentynine Palms.



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