If you were a cowboy like John Whipple working on the Arizona Strip, you probably would have oriented yourself on the land in relation to Diamond Butte. The anvil-shaped peak to your northeast functioned as an important landmark. It was named by Frederick Dellenbaugh during the second Powell Expedition from 1871-1872. This is how the story goes:

Three members of John Wesley Powell's survey team trek into the heart of the Arizona Strip in 1871 aiming for the Uinkaret Mountains. The going is slow because they haul scientific instruments, heavy photography equipment, food and supplies. They've been staring at a formidable wall of gray limestone on the horizon, the Hurricane Cliffs, for hours now. To the west of the cliffs, a geologic curiosity rises from the acres of dusty green sage.

Amidst the surrounding grasslands and sage, the nearly-1,200 foot tall peak serves as an excellent point of reference. Tall and dark against the clouds, its long, blade-like peak slices across the blue sky. Frederick Dellenbaugh, Powell's artist and assistant topographer, analyzes the butte. It seems to be capped in basalt and shot through with streaks of red sandstone from the Moenkopi formation. The basalt tells him that this area was once subject to seeping volcanic flows. He looks around, trying to gauge the extent of the ancient basalt pool.

Later, geologists will piece together the story of the butte. In the late Pliocene Epoch, 2.6 million years ago, a lava flow covered the Moenkopi sandstone. It built up a basalt crust ranging from thirty to one hundred feet thick! This was before the Hurricane Cliffs existed. The land was flat, broad, and blanketed by a giant lake of lava. When detachment faulting occurred, everything to the west of the Hurricane Fault dropped down thousands of feet. This powerful faulting created a huge plateau. Everything surrounding Diamond Butte slowly eroded away, leaving it to stand like a sentinel across from the Hurricane Cliffs.

When the men finally arrive at the butte's swooping flanks, they decide to set up camp. They discover a large ant hill that shimmers in the sun. Small quartz crystals cloak the hill, making it sparkle as if covered by diamonds. Dellenbaugh writes that, "I recorded it temporarily as 'Diamond Butte.' The name became fixed, which shows how unintentionally names are sometimes bestowed." Since that moment at the ant hill, Diamond Butte has retained its chance name for one-hundred-fifty years.

To the Southern Paiute and their ancestors, Diamond Butte has always been a place that commands attention and respect. The mountain has stories of power and creation to share with the people. As a high point in the topography, the butte can call down power and disperse it across the land. Beneath its cloak of basalt magma, the mountain buzzes with molten energy, hinting at the fiery processes by which the earth is reborn and renewed.

Don’t open until you arrive

7. Diamond in the Sky

Take a picture!

N 36° 32’ 54.9”
W 113° 23’ 23.2”

Eyes up, look around, there are jewels to be found.

Pull over as far as possible and park along County Rd. 5 away from any blind corners or hills.

Difficulty: ♦ - - -

#FindItAtParashant