

ROCK ART THROUGH THE AGES:
A MULTI-COMPONENT ROCK ART SITE IN
WESTWATER CANYON, GRAND COUNTY, UTAH

BY

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The Westwater Canyon Site contains over twenty-five separate rock art panels within a one mile stretch. These panels exhibit styles ranging from Desert Archaic, Barrier Canyon, Fremont, Ute, and fur traders, to recent graffiti. The rock art found here shows that the area has been in use from before 500 B.C until the present.

The Westwater Canyon Site is in Grand County, Utah on the Dry Canyon, Utah quadrangle. The site is mainly in section 5 of Township 18 South, Range 24 East. A few panels are in the lower part of section 32 of Township 17 South, Range 24 East. The site contains over twenty-five panels, which can be grouped into four major areas (Fig. 1). Two of these areas are along the west wall, one is along the east wall, and one is in the mouth of East Canyon (Fig 1). Portions of this site have been reported by Wormington (1955:82-85), Schaafsma (1970:27), Castleton (1978:173-177), and Schindler (1979:2-5). However, no complete site report has been found for this area nor has one been prepared by the author.

The Westwater Canyon Site contains both pictographs and petroglyphs and has rock art styles assignable to the Desert Archaic (7,000 B.C.? to 500 B.C.), Barrier Canyon (500 B.C. to 0), Fremont (A.D. 500 to A.D. 1225), and Ute (A.D. 1500 to A.D. 1900). The dates shown for these different rock art styles have been taken from Smith and Long (1980:105). In addition to the Indian rock art, the site contains two panels done in French. One is dated November 13, 1837 and is related to the early fur trade industry (Schindler 1979; Quinn 1982). The other is not dated and may be of recent origin, rather than being related to the fur traders. The site also contains numerous recent petroglyphic and pictographic graffiti. Each of the rock art styles mentioned above will be discussed individually.

Desert Archaic Style

There are three panels at this site that appear to belong to the Desert Archaic Style. All three are petroglyphs and all are located in area 3 (Fig. 1). Placement into the Desert Archaic Style is based on comparison to other areas and on their lack of elements assignable to the later Fremont Style, as well as the increased re-patination and higher degree of weathering they show over panels assignable to the Fremont Style.

Two of these panels consist of only single concentric circle elements (Fig. 2). Both of these panels are located in protected areas and both are highly weathered and exhibit a strong degree of re-patination in spots. One of these could have some astronomical significance, as it is located back in a narrow opening.

The third panel (Fig. 3) is located out in the open. At least two separate times of usage are indicated, based on the re-patination character of the elements. Both sets of elements appear to represent Desert Archaic Style. This panel contains geomorphic, zoomorphic, and anthropomorphic design elements, including a concentric circle element very similar to the earlier two mentioned panels.

Barrier Canyon Style

Two panels contain pictographs that exhibit traits of the Barrier Canyon Style. One of these is located in area 1 and the other in area 3 (Fig. 1). Both of these panels are done in a dark, but not vivid, red paint, but are not the same in color.

The first panel (Fig. 4) in area 1 (Fig. 1) contains a "bug-eyed" figure with large hands typical of the Barrier Canyon Style (Wormington 1955). This panel is surrounded by Ute Style pictographs, some of which are bichrome. These figures may be younger than the Barrier Canyon Style, but do have some Barrier Canyon characteristics.

The second panel (Fig. 5) is located in area 3 (Fig. 1) and consists of five (?) ghost figures, three of which are still in relatively good shape. This panel is located behind and to the right of the large Desert Archaic Style panel. It has been defaced by a "rider on horseback - antlered quadruped hunting scene" petroglyph and by people trying to hammer and/or pry this panel off the wall. This panel exhibits the most vandalism of any panel found at this site.

Fremont Style

Fremont Style rock art is present here on three panels, all are petroglyphs. One of these is located in area 1, one in area 3, and the other in area 4 (Fig. 1). The panel in area 1 (Fig. 1) is the southern-most petroglyph in the area and consists of a broad shouldered, trapezoidal anthropomorph, a large quadruped, and some dots. It is well up out of the canyon and not visible for any distance.

One "typical" Fremont Hunting Scene (Fig. 6) is present at area 4 (Fig. 1). This petroglyph exhibits both antlered and horned quadrupeds, as well as normal and shamanistic anthropomorphs. The anthropomorphs are done in the broad shouldered trapezoidal body shape considered typical of the Fremont Style.

Another petroglyph panel (Fig. 7) is located in area 3 (Fig. 1) behind and to the left of the large Desert Archaic Style panel and to the left of the Barrier Canyon Style panel. This panel contains mainly broad-shouldered trapezoidal anthropomorphic elements with some zoomorphic figures.

There is a set of pictographic elements that might be of Fremont origin. It consists of four quadrupeds, an anthropomorph holding a staff, and an arch-shaped design (pen?). Above this are two footprints done in the same shade of red paint. The footprint on the left has seven toes and the one on the right five toes. These are surrounded by elements that I attribute to the Ute Style and which are done in a different color of paint.

Ute Style

There are at least twelve panels that show Ute style characteristics. The Ute style rock art is represented by both petroglyphs and pictographs, with the petroglyphs being the subordinate type. These panels are characterized by mounted horsemen, stick figure anthropomorphs, zoomorphs, and shield-bearing anthropomorphs. There are some bichrome Ute style designs, which are outlined in red and partly to fully filled in with orange.

Area 1 (Fig. 1) contains two pictograph panels originally assigned to Fremont Style (Wormington 1955:82, Schaafsma 1970:27, Quinn 1980). Both of these panels are partially shown by Wormington (1955:82) and Schaafsma (1970:27-28). The first of these (Fig. 8) is located under a large overhang to the right of a number of later Ute stick figure paintings. The panel contains a large bichrome horned shield-bearing anthropomorph, a large bichrome legless broad shouldered anthropomorph, a large bichrome belt-like design composed of circular elements connected by straight lines, and a large bichrome quadruped. A large monochrome belt-like design very similar to one present here can be found in a Barrier Canyon Style panel in Thompson Canyon. Harrigan (1968:31), shows the bichrome horned shield-bearing anthropomorphic figure found here to be a Ute symbol representative of their war god.

The second panel (Fig. 9) is to the right of the first group and out in the open. Portions of it are shown by Wormington (1955:82), Schaafsma (1970:28), and Castleton (1978:175). This panel was also considered to be of Fremont Style (Wormington, 1955, Schaafsma, 1970, Quinn, 1980). The mounted figure in the panel is done with the same bichrome colors as the rest of the panel. Based on this mounted figure, this panel and the one to the right (Fig. 8) are classified as Ute style panels. This panel has some superimposed Ute style spear-carrying mounted horsemen done in white.

The third panel (Fig. 10) in area 1 (Fig. 1) depicts a number of stick-figure mounted horsemen carrying feathered coup sticks or lances. Since most hunting parties used the bow and arrow, this panel probably depicts a war party scene.

The fourth panel (Fig. 11), this one a very elaborate one, is located under a sandstone overhang in area 3 (Fig. 1). This panel contains designs in red, white, orange, and bichrome. Design elements here include mounted horsemen, hand prints, shields, stick figures, geomorphic designs, and zoomorphic figures. Portions of this panel are shown by Castleton (1978:174-175).

Unknown Style

There are three pictograph panels in area 1 (Fig. 1) that contain only geometric design elements. These are all faded and none of the design elements are directly comparable to any of the identified panels found elsewhere at this site.

Fur Trade Style

There are two panels at this site which are done in French, one of which is known to be related to the early fur trade industry. The first of these (Fig. 12) is located in area 2 (Fig. 1) and is commonly called the Robidoux Inscription. It was made by Antoine Robidoux (or one of his party) on November 13, 1837 when he camped here on his way to build his first trading post near

the intersection of the Green and Uinta Rivers (Schindler 1979:2-5, Quinn 1982:1-3). This trading post became known as Fort Uinta (Schindler 1979:2-5, Quinn 1982:1-3).

The other panel (Fig. 13) is located in area 3 (Fig. 1). This panel is done in a similar manner to that of the Robidoux inscription, but it consists of a Biblical quotation with no date. This panel may be a recent copy of the Robidoux inscription-type French panel across the canyon.

Recent Style

The area contains a large amount of Recent Style "petroglyphic" and "pictographic" graffiti. This consists mainly of names, initials, and dates but does include some zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, and geometric designs.

Conclusions

The Westwater Canyon Site has been frequented by a number of people over a long period of time. The rock art present here indicates usage of the area from before 500 B.C. up to the present. The importance of the area may be due to the presence of a good fresh-water spring here which still supplies an abundant supply of water on a year-round basis. It is apparent from the nearby abandoned homestead that this spring may not only have attracted earlier people to the area, but later whites as well. This impressive rock art site may show the perpetual importance of fresh water, a luxury that is taken for granted by most people today.

This site contains some very impressive rock art, and although most of it is located on private ground, some effort should be undertaken to better preserve it. I have been told that the site has suffered some heavy damage since the last time I was there.

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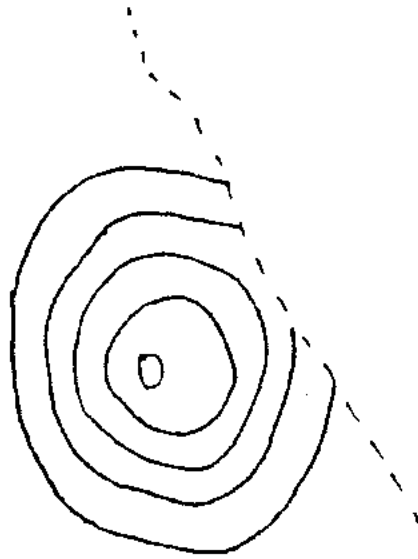


Figure 2. One of the concentric circle elements belonging to the Desert Archaic Style, located in area 3.



Figure 3. The large panel of Desert Archaic Style elements from area 3.

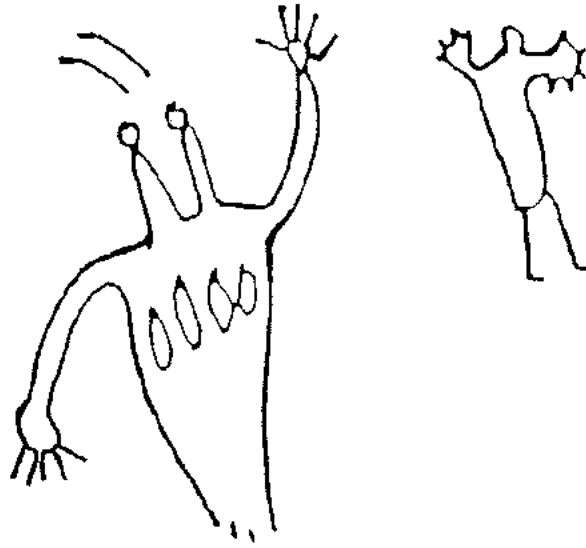


Figure 4. The "Bug-eyed" panel of Barrier Canyon Style from area 1.

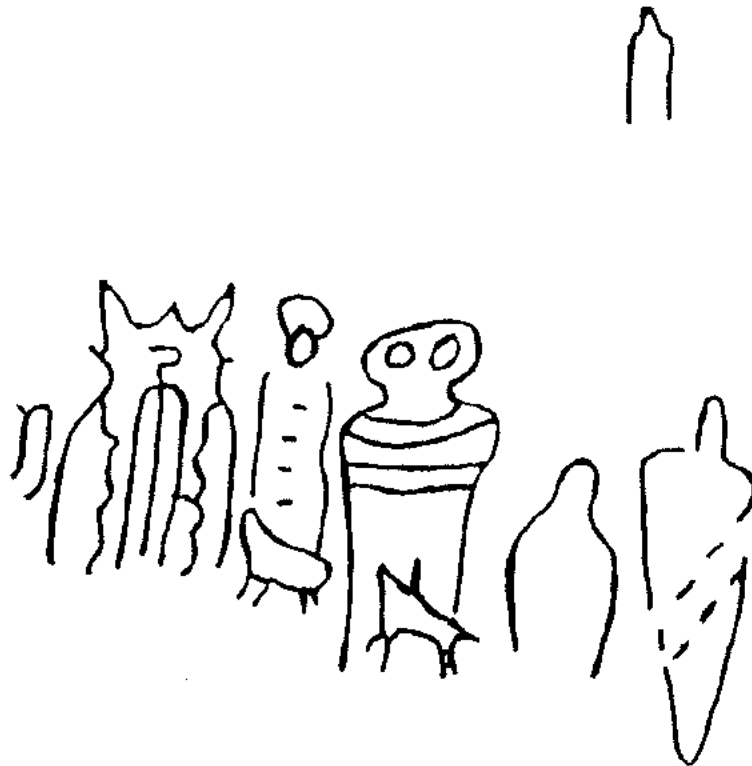


Figure 5. The ghost-like figure panel of Barrier Canyon Style from area 3.

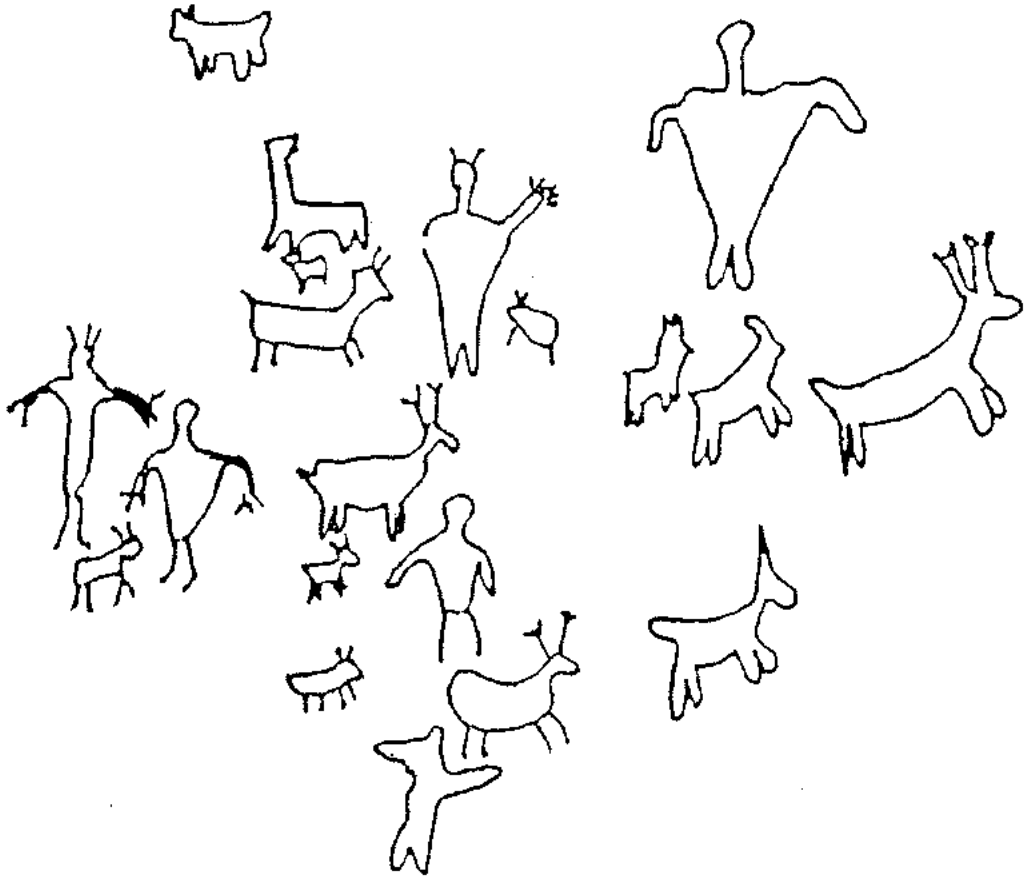


Figure 6. The hunting scene of Fremont Style from area 4.

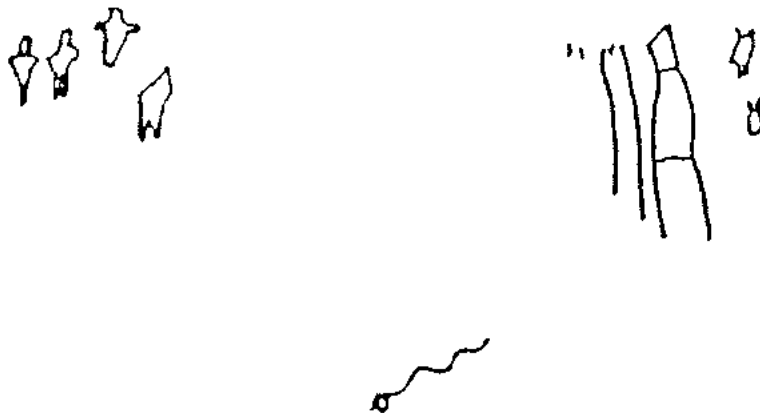


Figure 7. Some broad-shouldered trapezoidal anthropomorphic Figures of Fremont Style from area 3.



Figure 8. The horned, shield-bearing anthropomorphic panel of Ute Style from area 1.



Figure 9. The shield-bearing anthropomorphic and geometric panel of Ute Style from area 1.

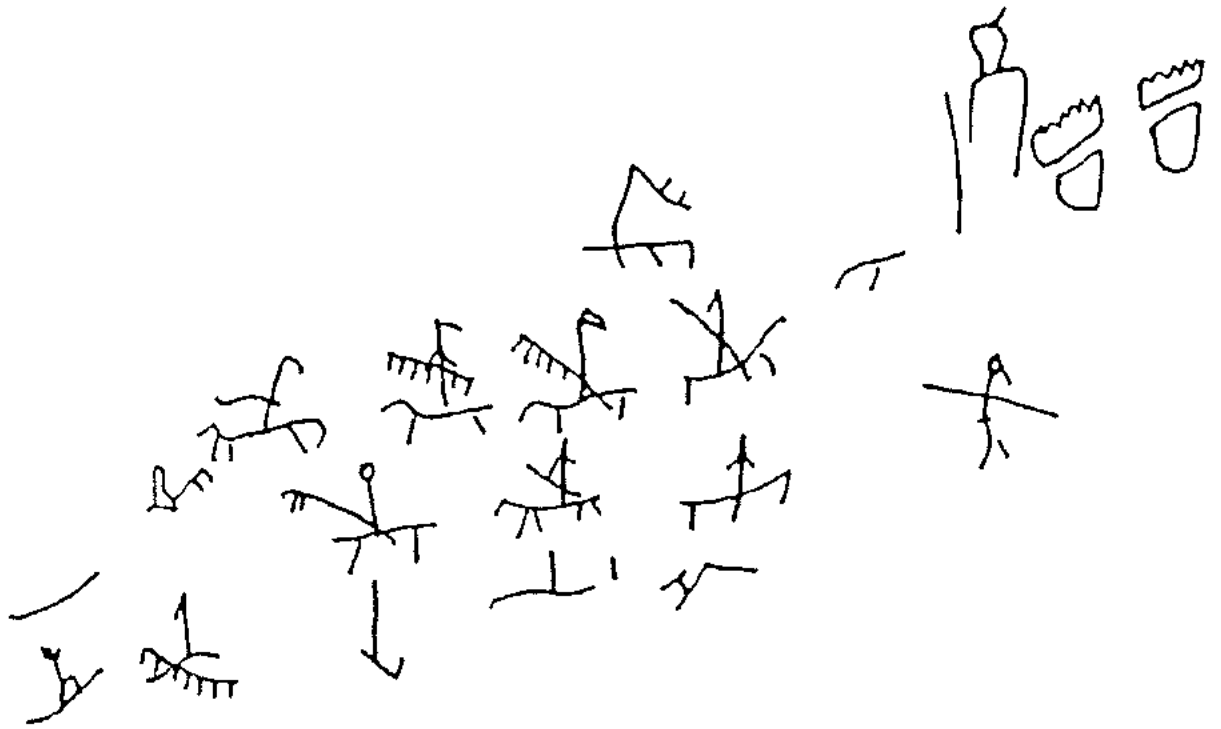


Figure 10. The mounted horseman panel of Ute Style from area 1.



Figure 11. The elaborated panel of Ute Style from area 3.

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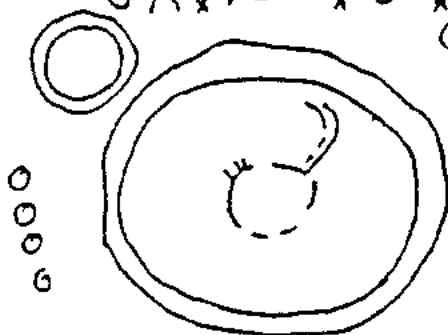


Figure 12. The Robidoux inscription of French Fur Trading Style from area 2.

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Figure 13. A Biblical quotation of French Fur Trading Style from area 3.