

SOLAR OBSERVATIONS AND SYMBOLISM AT

AT

DRY WASH, UTAH 1986

BY

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During an investigation of figures that have sun symbols for heads (Fig. 1), it was discovered that several not only mark locations for horizontal observations but also interact with light and shadow on Equinox and Solstitial dates as well. Because of that it was decided that all possible candidates for interaction should be investigated. On a field trip after the 1986 Symposium of the Utah Rock Art Research Association where those concepts were presented, the authors visited the Dry Wash site in Emery Co, Utah. On one panel, there is a figure with a concentric circle incorporated into its body (Fig. 2). Initially, this figure seemed to be conceptually related to Sunheaded figures, but the fact that it was "Sunbodied" or "Sunbellied" was puzzling. It was also determined to be a prime candidate for marking Winter Solstice.

On Dec. 22, 1986, the authors, in the company of Mary Ellen Whelling and Clifford Rayl, observed some very interesting and precise interactions that began about 9:30 A.M.D.S.T. and continued until about 12:30 P.M.. Panels like this, that have continuous and sequential points of contact, some of which seem as symbolic as calendric, indicate that these ancient people did more than simply observe and mark sunrises and sunsets on the horizon. These individuals not only marked sequential points of interaction, but seemed to enjoy stretching the interactions out as long as possible. From many observations, those interactions do not always occur at first light or end with the last light. This panel has its initial interaction long after sunrise and first light on the panel and ends before the last light leaves the panel and sunset.

Before 9:30 A.M. a pointed shadow began to descend diagonally down toward the center of the concentric circle. At 10:00 A.M. the 90 degree angle of shadow touched the exact top center of the smallest inner ring of the concentric circle. This is a precise point of contact (Fig. 3 line 4).

At 10:05 (Fig. 3 line 5), the point of the shadow moved over to the outside edge of the concentric circle at the precise point where an angular line is attached (Fig. 3A). The upper angle of shadow also touches the other end of this line at the same time (Fig. 3B). The pecked line is a reversed, mirrored image of the edge of the shadow. The deliberateness of that conjunction is difficult to determine. It does, however, create a precise form and relationship that may help us understand that part of the element's form and position.

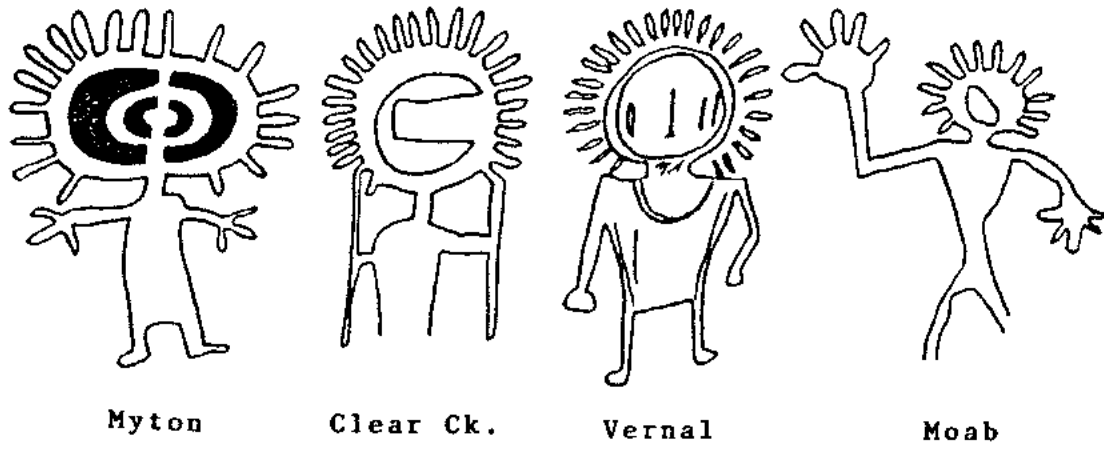


FIGURE 1.

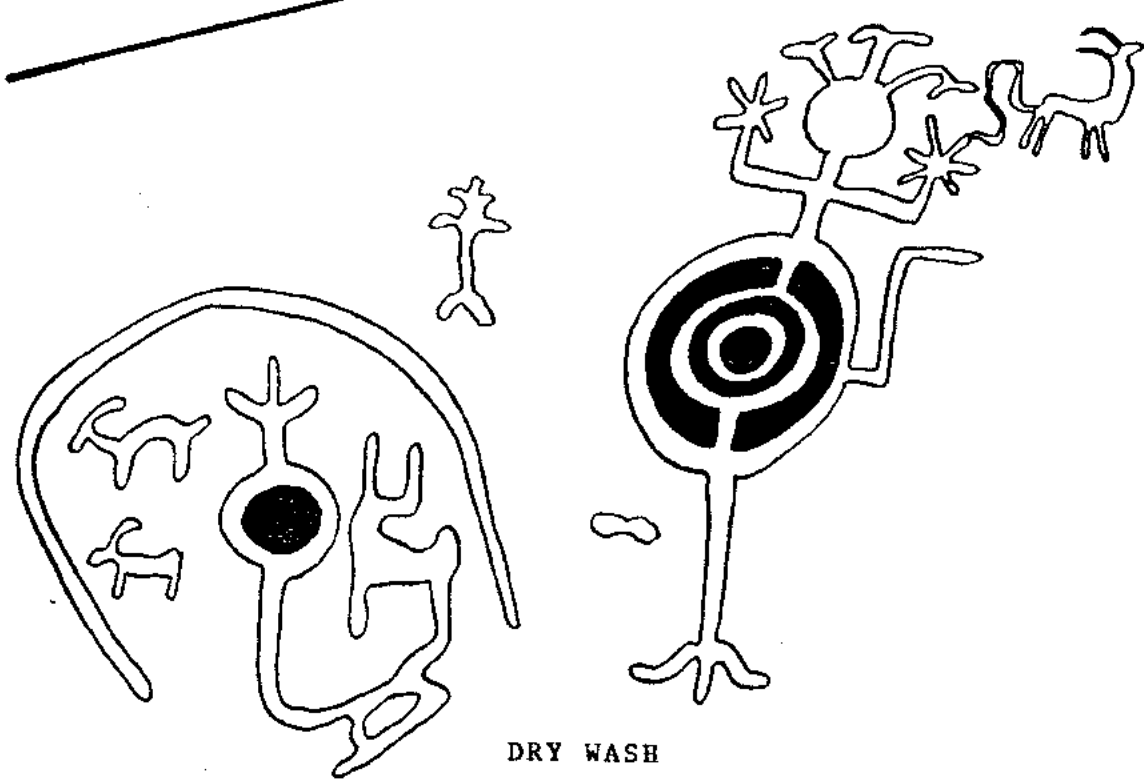


FIGURE 2.

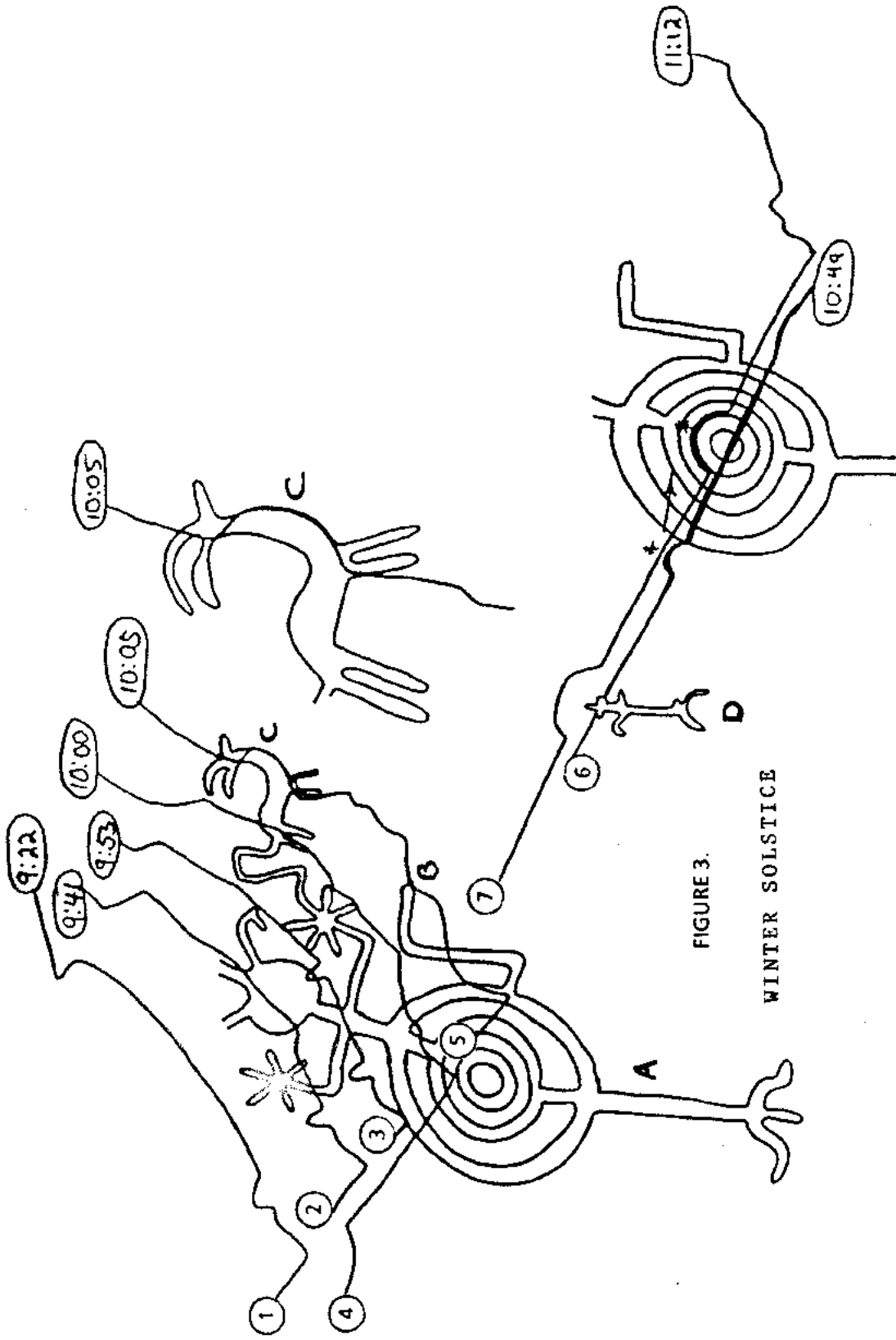


FIGURE 3.
WINTER SOLSTICE

To the upper right is a sheep with an exaggerated tail, that is connected to one of six fingers of the upraised hand on the right. Polydactylism does have some shamic associations (Wellman 1972). The sheep's neck is slightly elongated, bowed and fits a corresponding bulge of the same size and shape in the shadow (Fig. 3C). That also seems intentional but its intent at present isn't understandable. This completes three points of contact at 10:05. At 10:49, the diagonal edge of the shadow lowers to cross the face of Figure D at the same time it bisects the center of the concentric circle. This seems to provide what may be a line of sight (Fig. 3 line 6). This situation occurs often enough, so it may be considered as an intentional interaction (Fig. 4).

At 11:12, another interesting occurrence takes place. As the point of shadow continues to move to the right, a notch in the shadow perfectly cups the central patented ring as a similar cup-like notch centers above Figure D (Fig. 3 line 7). With all the different types of conjunctions with this one figure at different times, it seems it had some special considerations prior to its placement on the panel. If that is the case, even though it is small, it must also represent a personage of some importance.

At 12:01 PM, an angle of light descends so that it centers over the head of Figure D, and aligns with the diagonal placement of feature F (Fig. 5 line 1). From there, it continues to move to the bottom edge of the central patented dot, making an extremely impressive reversed contact that mirrors the earlier interaction. First, an angle of shadow goes up from the inside ring, then an angle of light goes out of the bottom of the inside dot (Fig. 5 line 2). At 12:21, the shadow moves on to touch Figures E and F (Fig. 5 line 3). The final interaction occurs at 12:22 when the upper angle of light touches Figure 5F (Fig. 5 line 4).

Four months after those observations, at the 1987 ARARA Symposium, one of the authors presented an introduction to "Double Entities" or various forms of human figures that have been combined. In that presentation, it was demonstrated that there are several different categories of these figures (Figs. 6,7). After that presentation it was discovered that this Sunbodied figure was also a Double Entity. First of all, we believe this Sunheaded figure has a concentric circle face (Fig. 6A-E). This face is very similar to the Sunheaded anthropomorph in Figure 1A. In light of this new perspective, there are several possibilities for its construction. One is that this is an armless Sunheaded figure with another figure emerging from the top of its head like those in Figures 6G and 7.

The existence and precise placement of the small pecked lines breaking both the top and bottom of the outside patinated ring has always been perplexing (Fig. 6A). It is probable that the bottom one represents the neck of the smaller solar face within the outside pecked ring. The lower portion of the outside ring could then be the arms of the lower figure raised to encircle the head, like Figure 6F. This then would be a Category Nr.5 Double Entity, a figure whose arms encircle and incorporate the head of the lower figure within the body of an upper figure (Fig. 6D,F), (Warner 1987). If this is the case then it is also possible that the break in the upper ring (Fig. 6A) could be the phallus of the upper figure if the upper portion of the outside ring could be considered as its legs as well (Fig. 6E). The

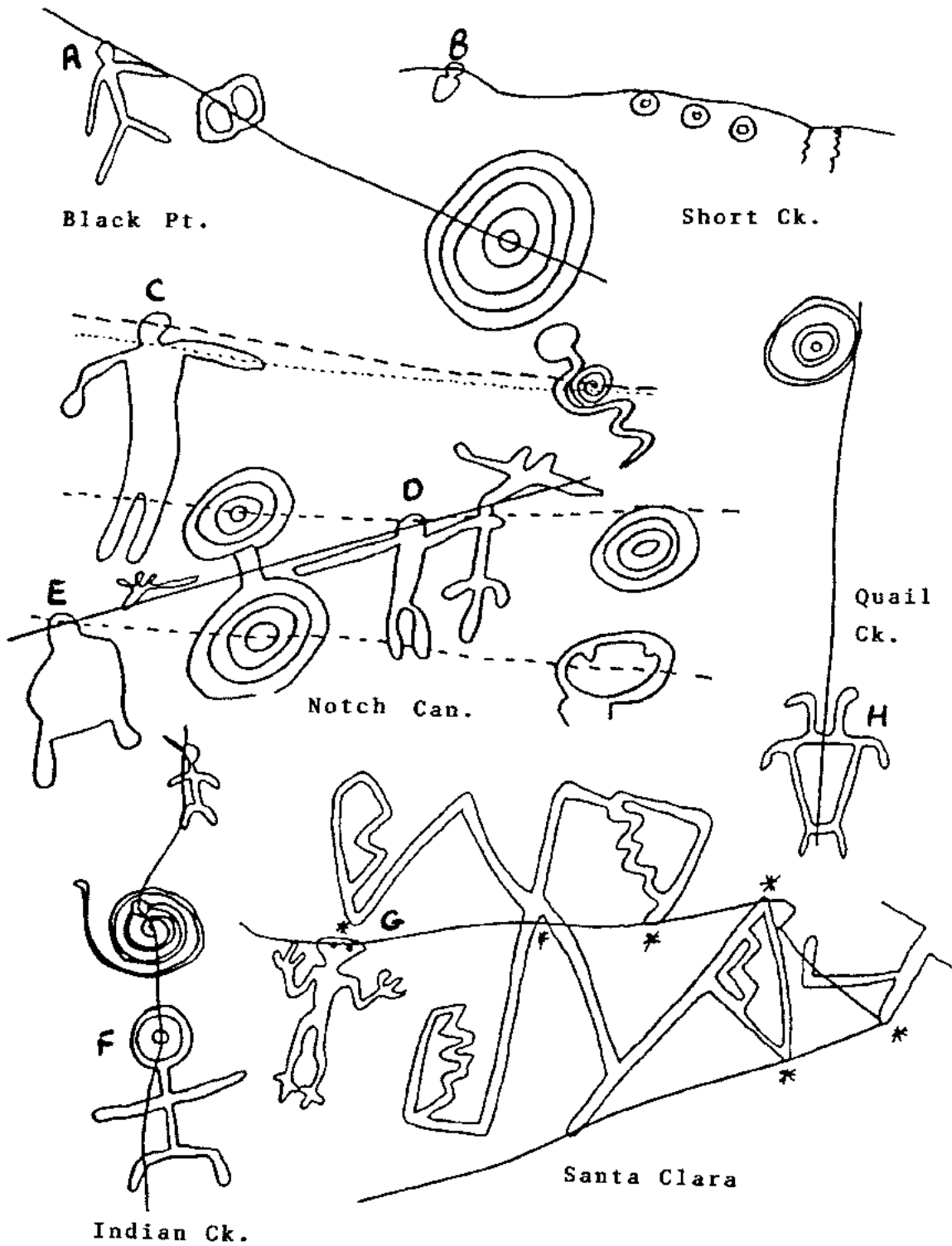


FIGURE 4.

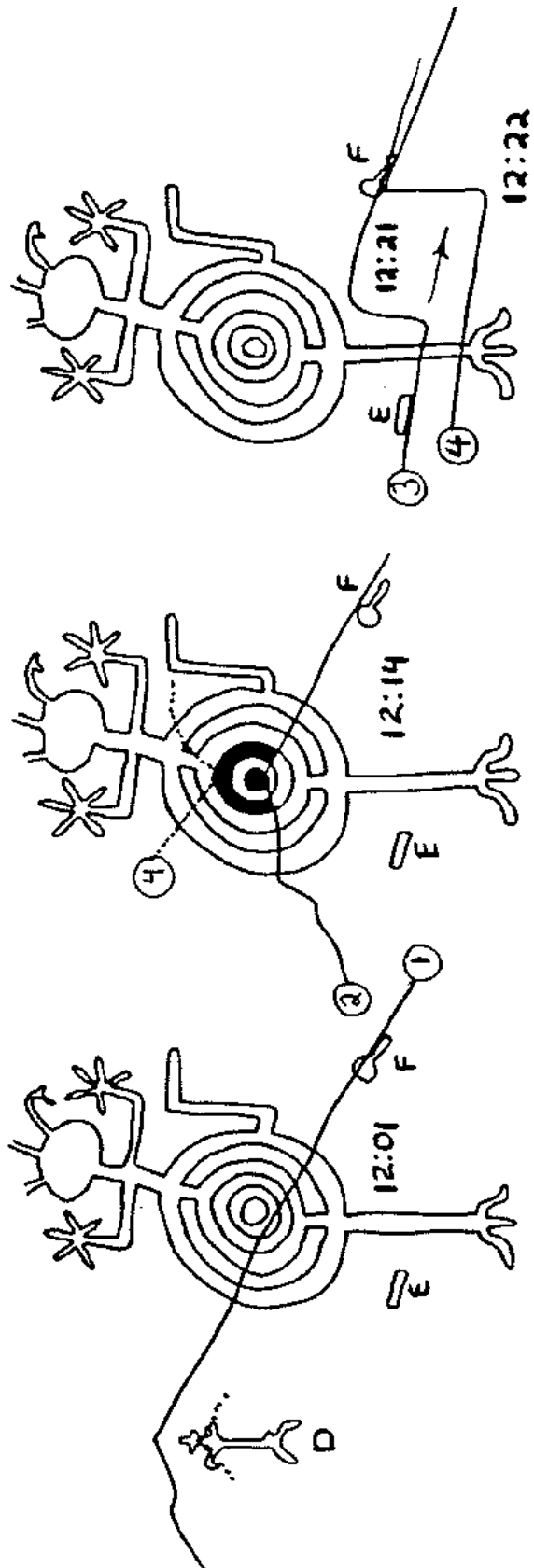


FIGURE 5.

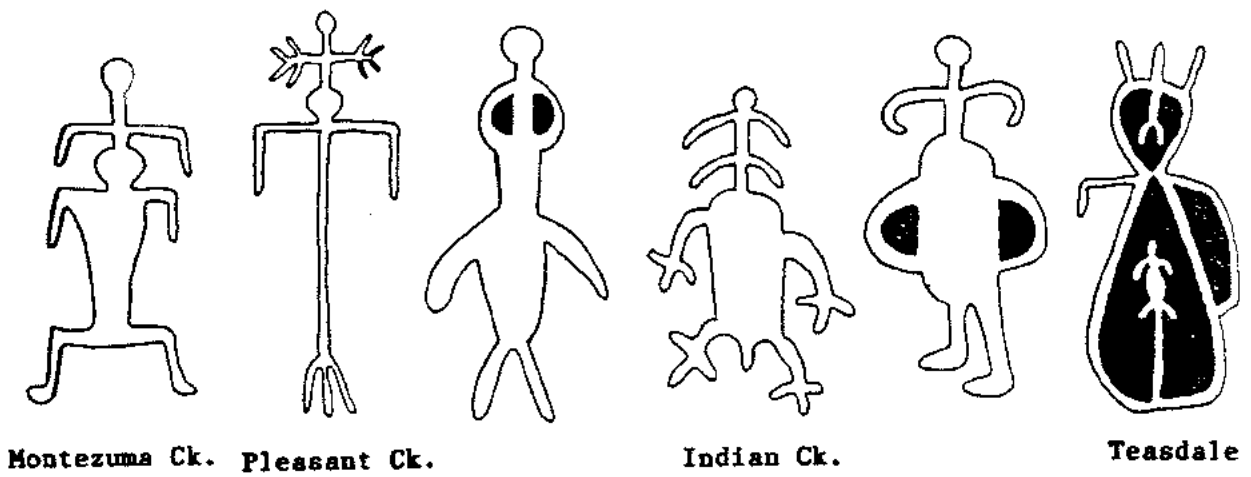
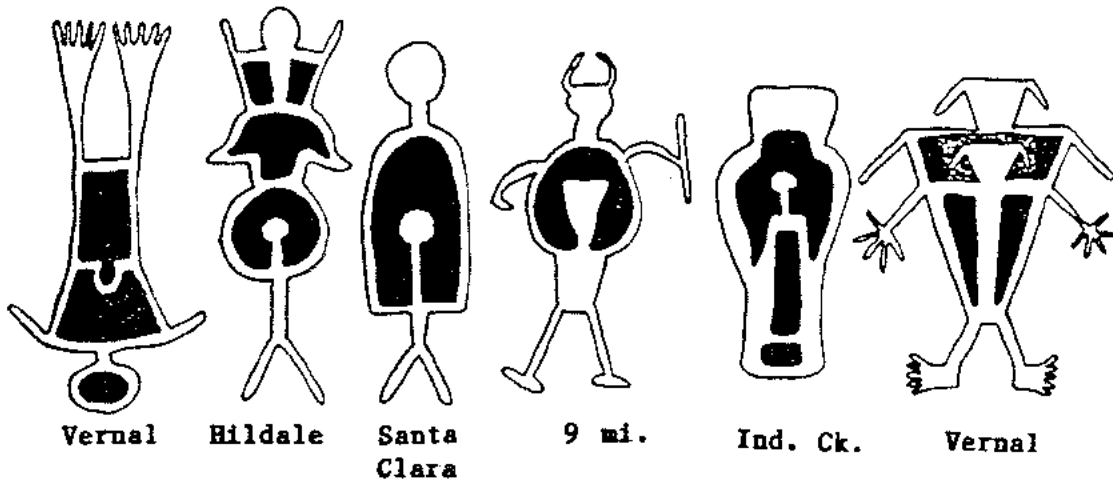
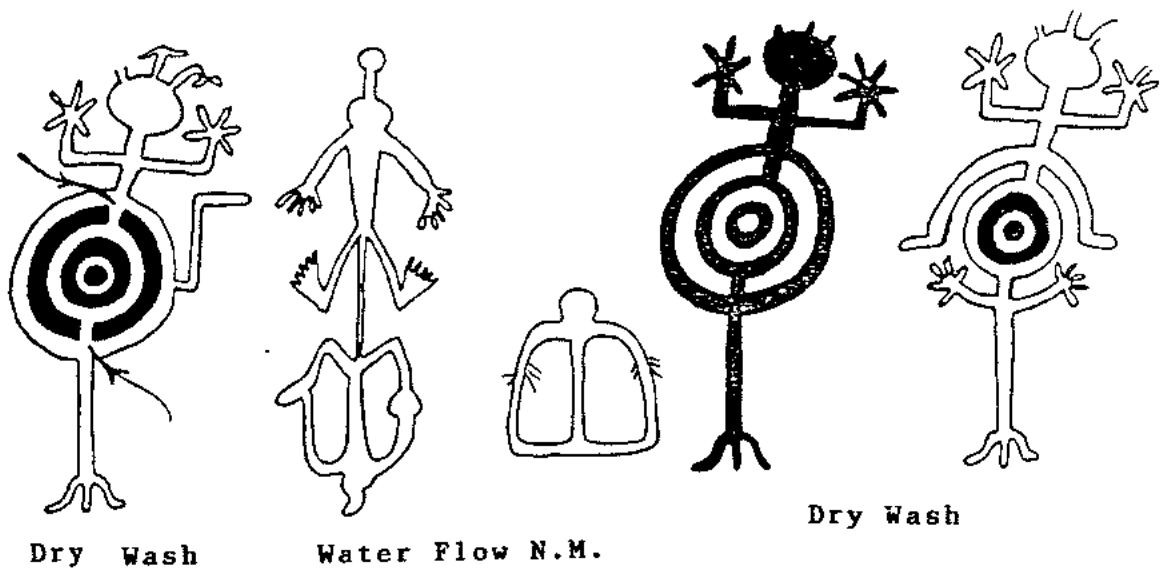


FIGURE 6.

attachment of hands and feet to form a bisected circle that incorporates the body of the upper figure is similar to examples in Figures 6B and C from Waterflow, New Mexico. If these are possible then we have a very complicated and complex Double Entity. It has a figure emerging from the Sunhead (Fig. 6A), the Sunhead incorporated within the combined arms and legs of two individuals forming the body of the composite figure (Fig. 6A,E), and Sunheaded figure emerging from the phallus of the upper incorporated figure (Figs. 6A,E, 7A-D).

This motif and its interactions combine both calendrical markers and symbolic interactions. The position of the diagonal descent of the points of the shadow on Winter Solstice marks the place on the panel where the shadow descends at its absolute highest and furthest right position during the year. Before that time, as the sun moves south, the shadow descends on an angle below and to the left of the point of its highest limit. Also after Dec. 22nd the shadow lowers as the sun again begins to move higher in the sky, on its journey back north. This creates the situation that marks the calendrical period and proves that the symbolic interactions will occur only on Winter Solstice. These symbolic interactions, if understood correctly, consist of several facets: the Sunhead is touched by a triangle of shadow and light that interacts on an individual with an emerging figure (out of the head), it includes symbolism of possible shamanic rebirth (attachments to the phallus of the upper figure), and it also speaks with light.

As the sun moves farther north after Winter Solstice and is higher in the sky, it is obvious the shadow will descend down the cliff so that Figure D will be touched by the triangle of light that is above it at 12:01 PM on Winter Solstice (Fig. 5D dotted line). It could not only cross its face (out of mouth) on a period after Winter Solstice but equally before. This figure may then be a predeterminer of a specific period before the shortest day of the year.

It is also obvious there is far more symbolism in this panel than we will ever know. Without attempting any in depth interpretations we may simply deduce part of the intent. This combination of elements may be depicting a Sunheaded figure, a possible sunpriest-shaman, after a period of ceremonial preparation, having come here to have an ecstatic experience. Being under the influence of those circumstances and while observing these interactions, he could have reached that moment of power which triggered his possible out-of-body experience, emergence or vision. Then with the experiences he had, or the knowledge he gained, he was able to then speak with whatever the angle of light may have represented. In other words, after his return to an ordinary state of reality, what came from his mouth may have involved or symbolized his emergence and rebirth. This is a good illustration of the serious problems associated with interpretations. It may also be that at the moment the "words the light symbolize" were spoken he had his ecstatic release. There may also be other alternative possibilities just as likely. With the amount of repetition of similar situations (Fig. 7D for instance), we can infer that something is going on involving the symbolism related to Double Entities, rebirth, Sunheaded figures, solar observation and speaking with light.

This site then may also be considered as a commemorative shrine, and one

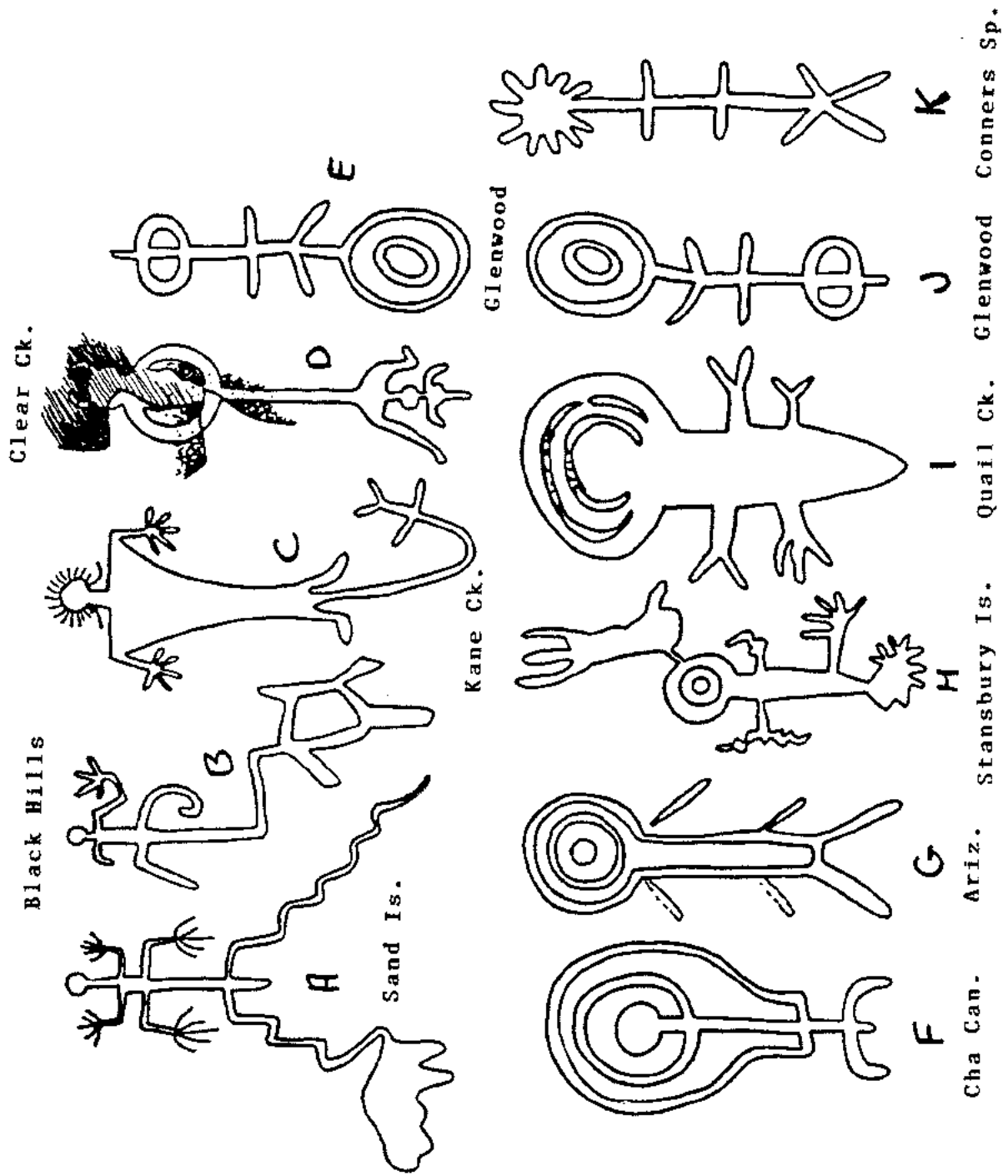


FIGURE 7.

that would enable him to eternally re-enact those events, as long as the sun shines. It would also be a witness of his experience. As Steinbring and Granzeberg state (1986:209), some are "compelled...to commemorate the event by making a mark on the rocks. Among other things this identifies the permanence of the achievement... The act of commemorating it can only be understood from such an empathetic perspective. The act of producing the mark is...a supernatural experience. The marking is supernatural and the mark remains so, perhaps externally exuding power for those correctly treating it." This panel may also become an invitation to listen to him about his experience.

During the Winter Solstice observations it became obvious that the figures to the left would interact with the two prominent features of rock on Equinox. On September 23rd we returned to observe the point of shadow descend toward the reversed enclosure. At 8:58 AM it reached the outside edge of the enclosure (Fig. 8A line 1). Between 10:25 and 10:27 the point of the shadow centered on the central prongs that were originally thought to be the forked tongue of a snake-like figure (Fig. 8A line 2) vs (Fig. 9A), but the possibility that this is an abstracted figure with upraised arms like those in Figure 9B should not be overlooked. At 10:40 the point of shadow touched the outside edge of the circle or head of the snake at the same time it closed off the open mouth of the sheep to the right (Fig. 8A line 3). At 12:48 P.M. the triangle of light began its movement down onto the panel. At 1:01 it centered on top of the circle in an impressive, almost identical repetition of the interaction of the circle within the figure to the right at Winter Solstice (Fig. 8B).

This panel is a very effective and accurate marker for both Equinox and Winter Solstice. It was previously felt that these two sections of this panel were separate entities produced at different times. It has still not been determined if both figures were produced by the same group. Both sections do, however, mark different solar periods with both a distance and accurate calendrical marker and symbolic interaction. Because this interaction takes place within an enclosure that has several sheep inside, it is probable that this may have been time for a special or ritual hunt of a possible group of migrating animals through this canyon. This spot occurs in front of an alcove along the cliffs where it narrows before entering a narrow canyon. At this point it would be possible to block or corral the animals entering this area from either side of the canyon, in an effective drive situation. With the additional, possible symbolism of (shamanic) transformation placed with in an entrapment symbol with sheep may represent an association of the concept of hunting with shamanism or Double Entities. With out more evidence this is still somewhat conjectural.

Like Wiedler (1986:226), We believe that these ancient figures provide many visual clues to their meaning. It has only been by collecting many different examples of many repeated motifs that we have been able to determine the possibilities of what both these complex and complicated figures may represent.

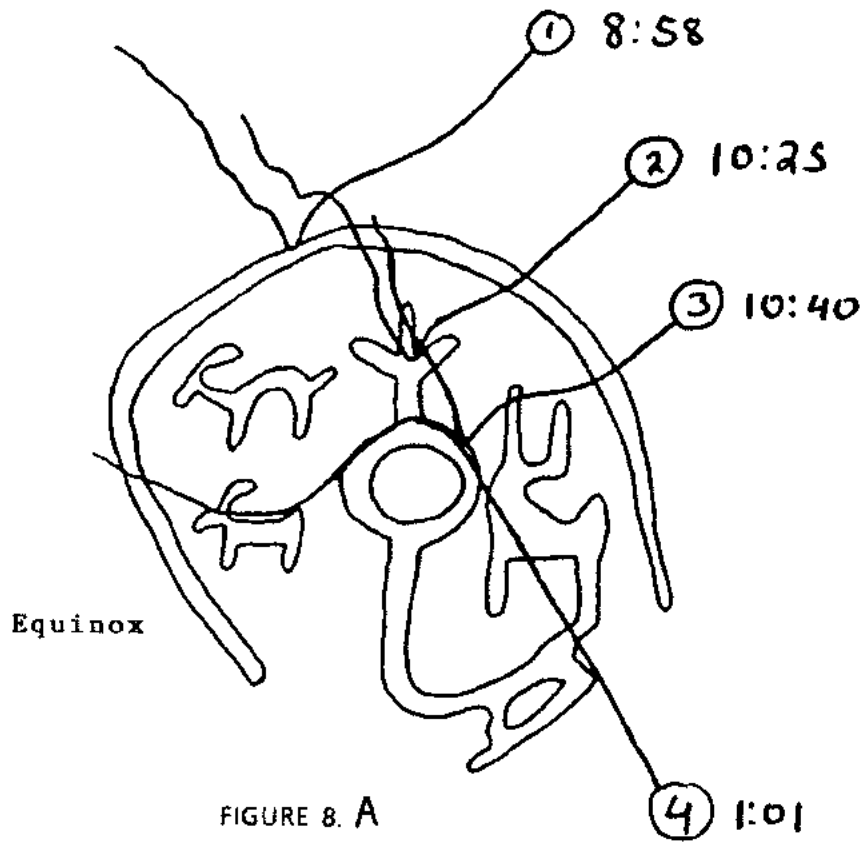


FIGURE 8. A

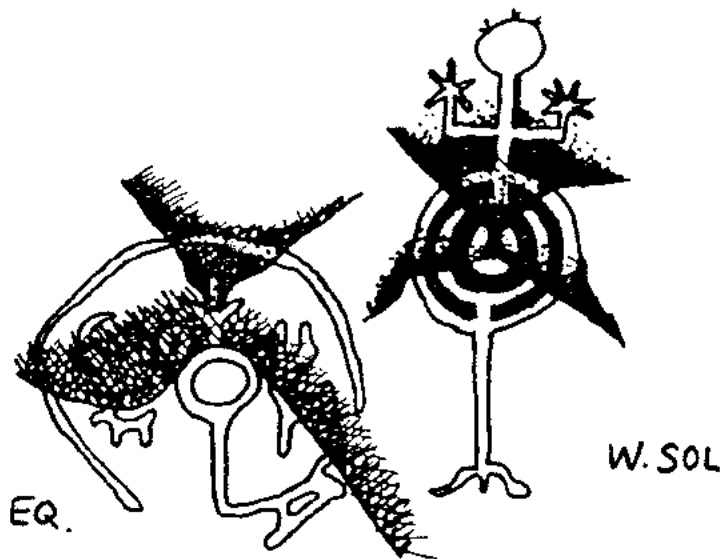
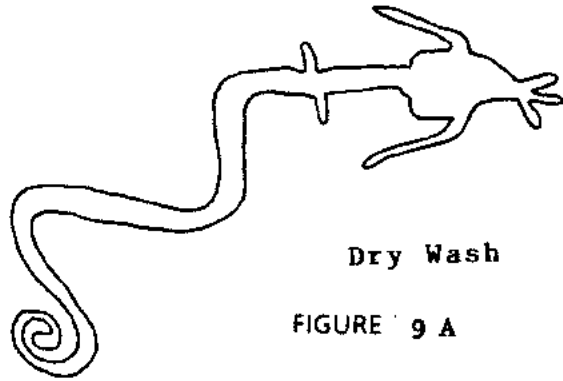


FIGURE 8. B



Dry Wash

FIGURE 9 A

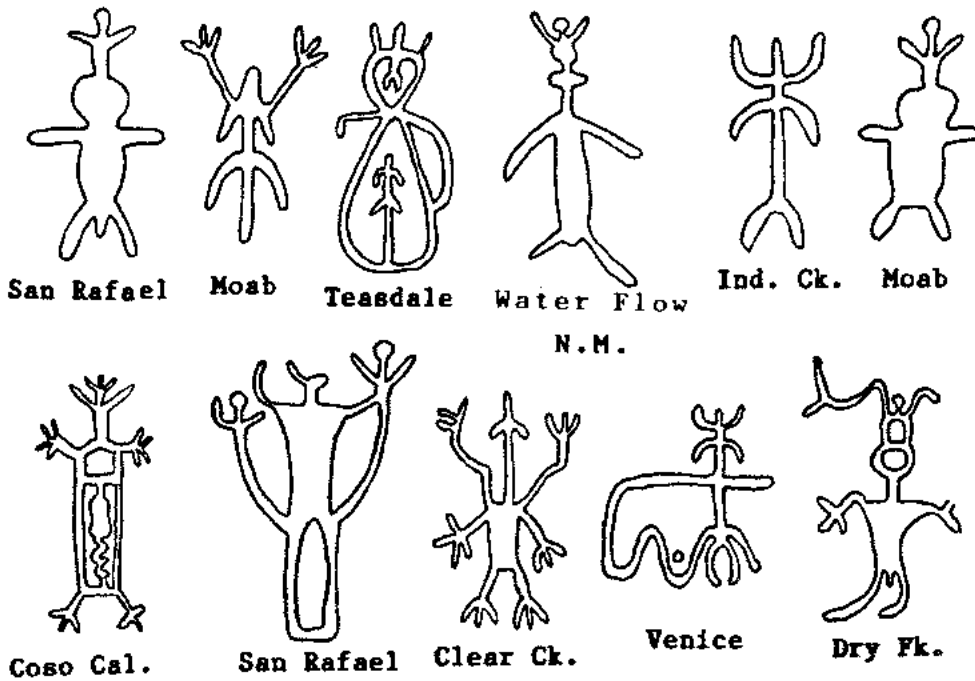


FIGURE
9 B

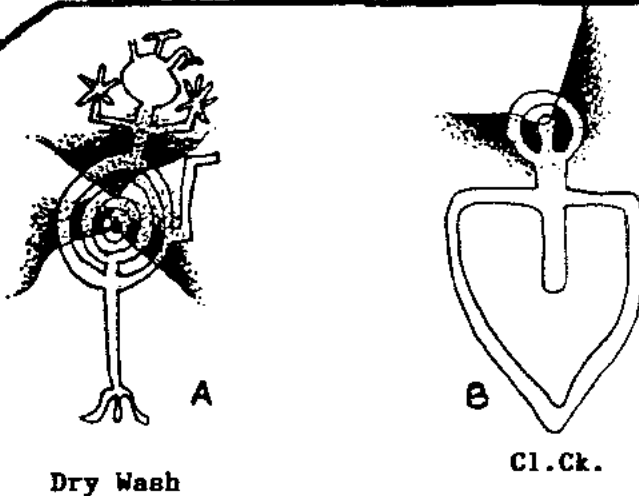


FIGURE 10

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