

The Occurrence of Hand Prints in the San Luis Rey Style - Southern California

Steve Freers

The Native American rock art and prehistoric material culture remnants of coastal southern California are generally less lavish in comparison with that found on the Colorado Plateau. Depending on where one places the geographical dividing line for southern California, the notable exception to this statement lies in the region occupied by the Chumash culture. Placing the visual impact aside, the rock art of California's most southern coastal-inland region is no less significant. In fact, much of what we know today of the rock art tradition in terms of early *recorded* evidence, fragmented as it may be, has come from the work of ethnographers who studied the native groups of this region around the turn of the century (e.g., DuBois, 1908; Sparkman, 1908; and Waterman, 1910). A significant portion of the pictographic rock art may be linked to the toloache (*Datura meteloides*) religious cult which is thought to have spread through this area about two hundred years ago. Following an extensive recording effort within part of this region (Smith and Freers, 1994), several relationships and features emerged which may augment current assumptions on local rock art "style." The purpose of this paper will be to examine the occurrence of a rock art motif found in southern California, the ubiquitous hand print, and serve as a preliminary report for a more in-depth look at the current style definitions for this region.

Southern California rock art has two principal divisions: that executed by groups of the coastal-inland region (e.g., Luiseño) and the desert inhabitants (e.g., Chemhuevi). The focus of this discussion will be on one of the three distinct styles of rock art created by the coastal-inland groups, the San Luis Rey Style. These rock art styles have been designated in accordance with the type site nomenclature format utilized in general archaeology. The La Rumorosa Style is the most southern style geographically, extending into Baja California, and is generally associated with the Kumeyaay culture (Hedges, 1990a:81). It is principally distinguished by the prevalence of anthropomorphs, lizards, sunbursts and abstract forms executed in several colors. The second style is referred to as Rancho Bernardo and constitutes both pictograph and petroglyph forms characterized by large geometric or maze-like patterns (Hedges, 1990a:81). The third style is referred to as the San Luis Rey Style and is defined as follows by Hedges (1990a:81):

...geometric rectilinear design elements in red, including diamonds, zigzags, chevrons, straight lines, and dot patterns, often in vertical series frequently bordered at top and/or bottom; rare representational and curvilinear elements (True, 1954). Generally associated with late prehistoric and historic Luiseño populations, with extensions into neighboring territories. The type site is the major locus of the style, on the San Luis Rey River, San Diego County.

The basis of the San Luis Rey Style comes from observations performed by Delbert True (1954) in his formative investigations of the pictographs located in the San Luis Rey River drainage. His observations, largely incorporated into the current accepted style definition, resulted from an inventory of 15 pictograph locales. These sites were designated as belonging to the Luiseño culture. Later, True (1974:98) utilized the presence of pictographs as evidence supporting a late period of occupation (A.D. 1500-1870) at Luiseño village sites. It must be emphasized that this style is not limited exclusively to the Luiseño culture. Several of the coastal-inland groups' ceremonial practices, including pictograph painting, were functionally similar. There are pictograph panels located in regions ascribed to other cultures in contact with the Luiseño which are definitively San Luis Rey Style (Figure 1). General agreement exists that the majority of pictographs meeting the current San Luis Rey Style criteria *either* represent a protohistoric/historic manifestation of the toloache religious cult ceremonies for adolescent initiation (Minor, 1973), or may be deserving of interpretation within a shamanistic framework (Hedges, 1992; Freers, 1995).

Following our survey of western Riverside County pictograph locales (Smith and Freers, 1994), one significant element that was found to be omitted from the formal San Luis Rey Style description was the hand print. Since our study area is significantly north of any known La Rumorosa Style sites, only the Rancho Bernardo and San Luis Rey Styles currently apply to this sample. Part of the reason for the San Luis Rey Style omission of the hand print may be that, although its occurrence in this region has been long known and published, they are found in conjunction with several sites with element arrays which resist convenient classification into the remaining two classifications. This makes compiling meaningful statistics for the hand print as it relates to "style" difficult. However, it is probable that these "outlier" pictographs were executed by the same group or groups and reflect either a transformation of an existing ritual pictograph tradition or a product of a different practice such as shamanism. Therefore, efforts to accommodate research such as this will likely prompt a revision of the current style designations to account for these outlier sites.

Currently, the presence of the hand print at best is defined as *rare* in the formal San Luis Rey Style description. This *may* be an accurate observation if one limited their observations to the San Luis Rey River Drainage. Interestingly, although True (1954:72) reports that hand prints appear on several sites, he does not publish their frequency. Our recent sampling of 64 western Riverside County sites with pictograph panels in both the classic San Luis Rey Style and those with otherwise related characteristics, north of the type sites (Figure 2), revealed a significant presence of the hand print motif. The occurrence frequency breaks down as follows: 26% of the sites had hand prints, representing 23% of the panels. The frequency may drop as low as 18% for the same sample, depending how one defines those panels which reflect both San Luis Rey and Rancho Bernardo Style characteristics. Several sites within the region have panels clearly dominated by this element (e.g, Ca-Riv-714: Figure 3).

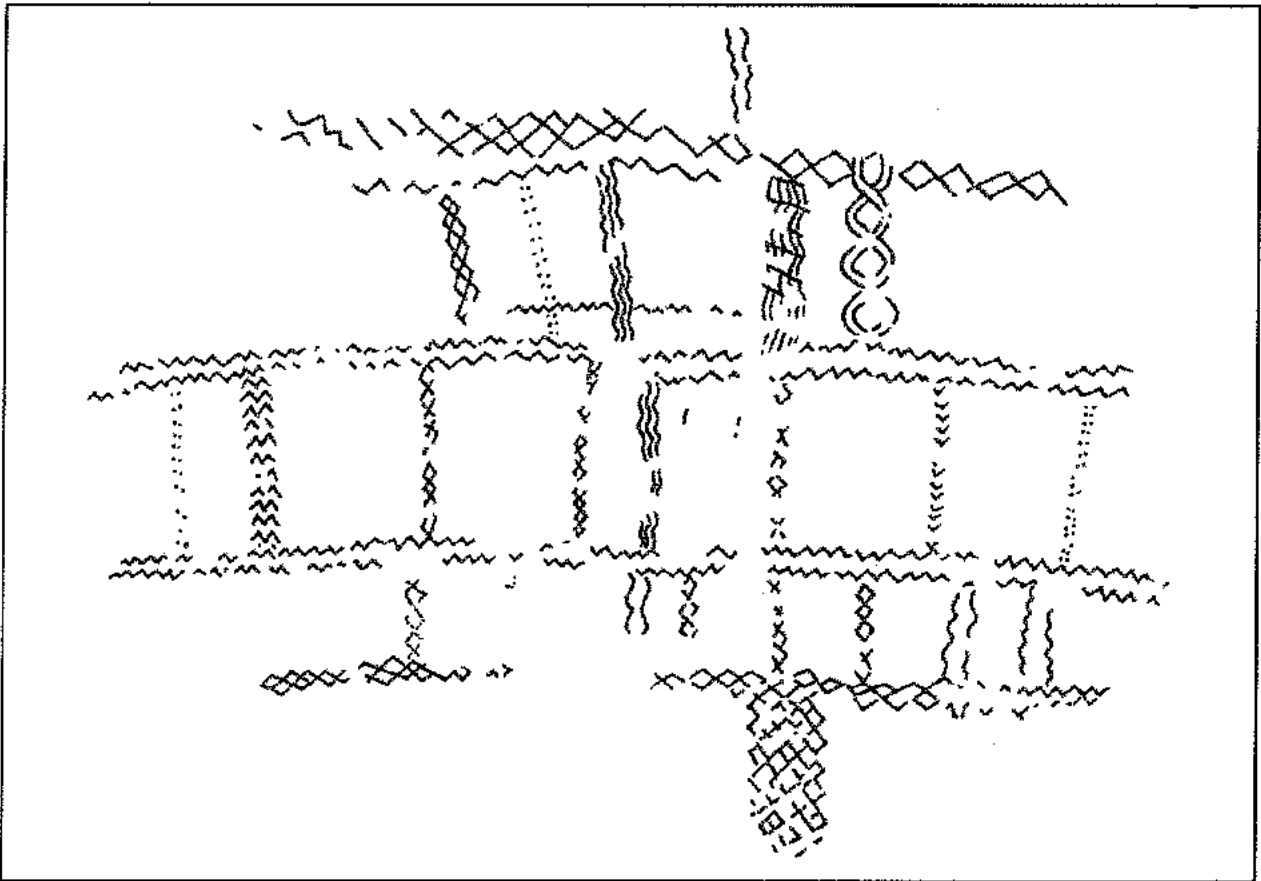


Figure 1.. CA-Riv-16 is located in the San Jacino Mountains, a region widely accepted as Mountain Cahuilla territory. Note how well the San Luis Rey Style definition describes this pictograph panel. Gaps in the design pattern are areas of exfoliation and weathering of the red pigments.

I will present a selection of panels from these sites which clearly contain elements definitive for the current San Luis Rey Style in conjunction with hand prints. In all cases, the hand prints appear to be contemporaneous with the other elements. At some multipanel sites (e.g., Ca-Riv-289: Figure 4) one panel may have a preponderance of hand print motifs while associated San Luis Rey Style panels have few or none present. There are also occurrences of panels where the hand print, executed in red or white, constitutes the sole element array (Figure 5).

Interestingly, the formal San Luis Rey Style definition refers only to rare representational elements, but a more detailed non-published version (1990b:1) does list the hand print in the representational category. Now, it is debatable whether the unmodified hand print is actually a *representational* element or not. My view is that if the pictograph maker actually used their hand to form the image, positive or negative, then it may be useful to consider such a hand print as its own category, rather than as a representational element. Essentially, a hand print *is* a hand print.

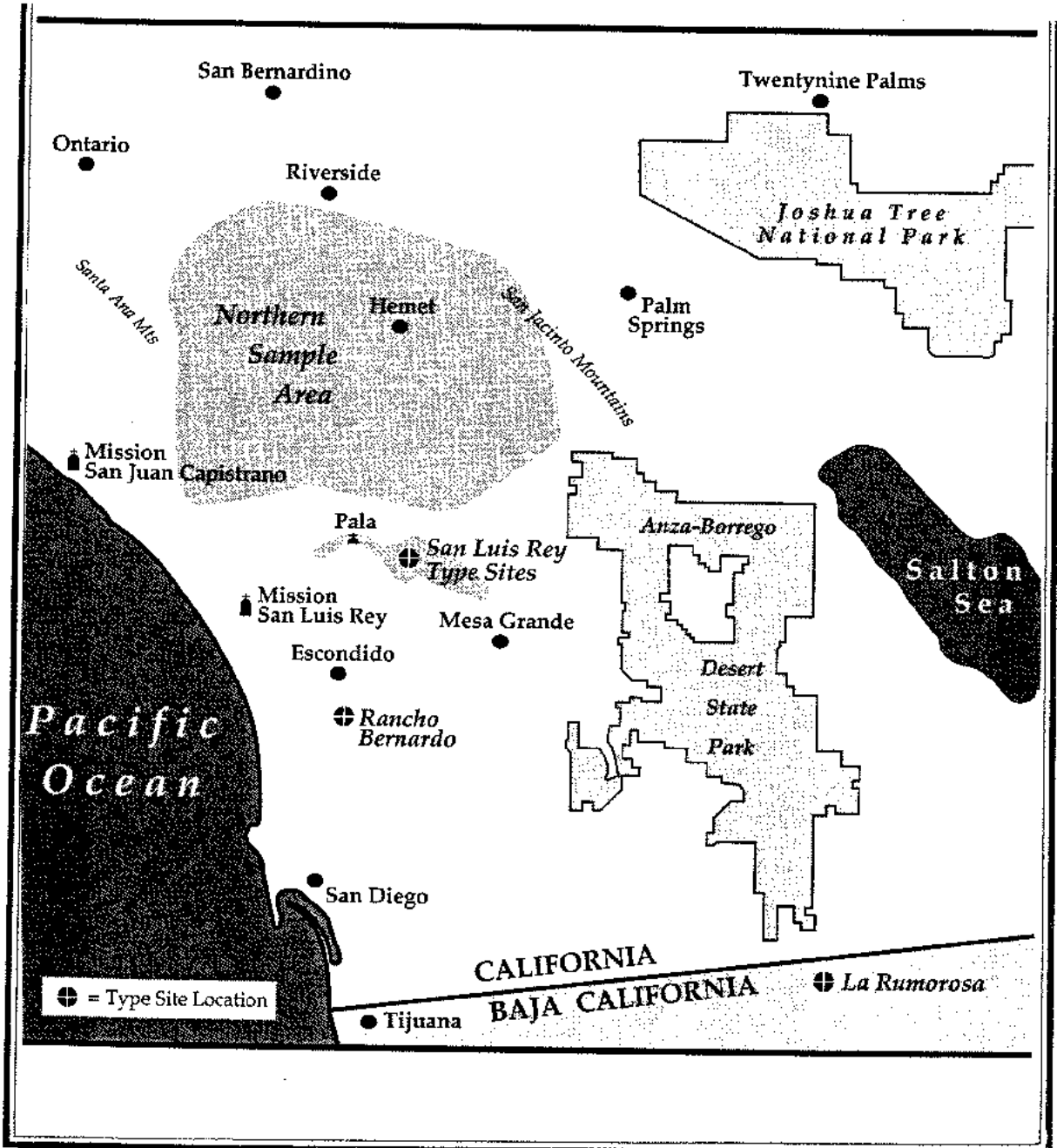


Figure 2. Map of southern California highlighting both the area sampled by True (1954) which established the type sites for the San Luis Rey Style (Hedges, 1990:81) and the region used in data collection for this report.

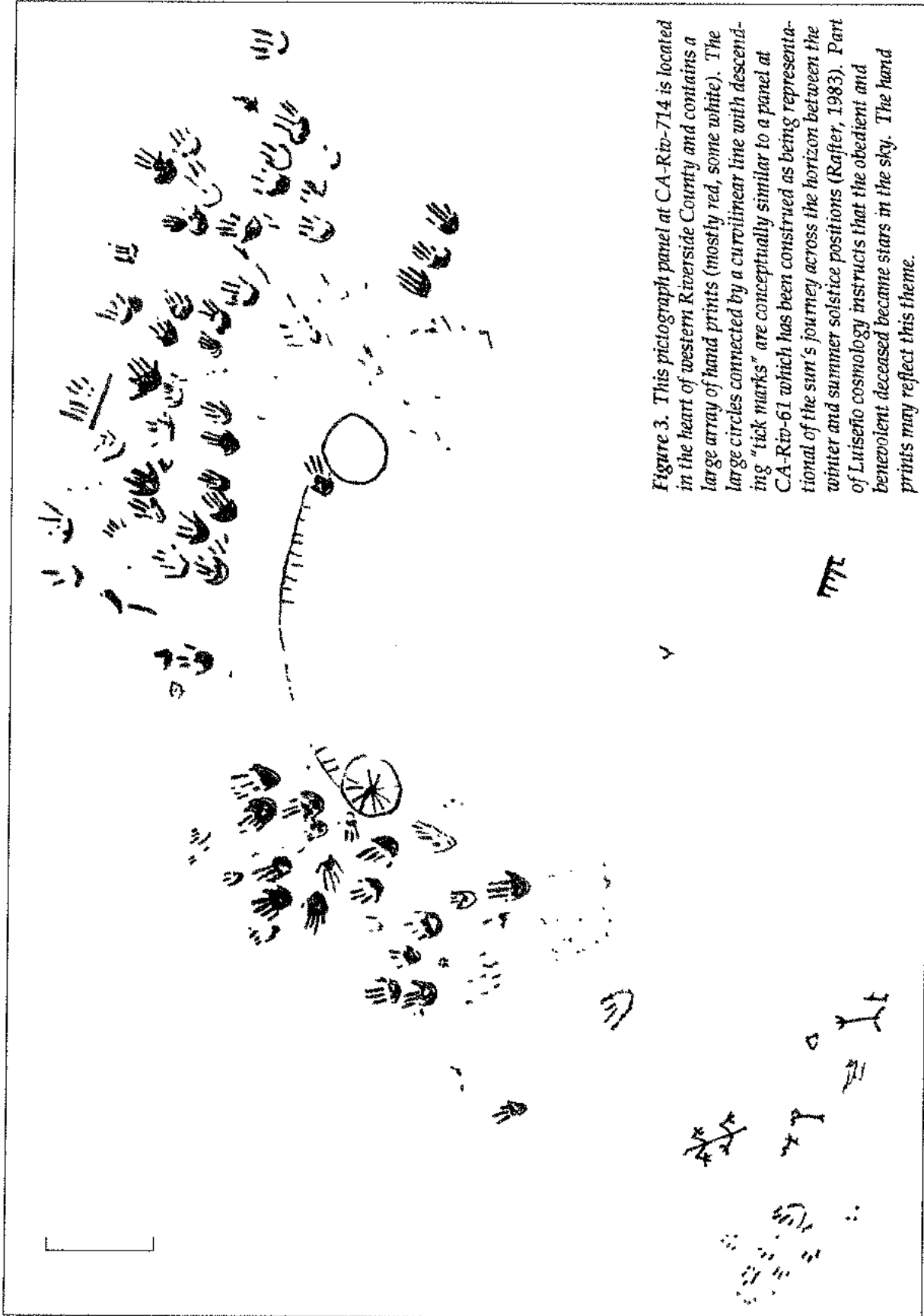
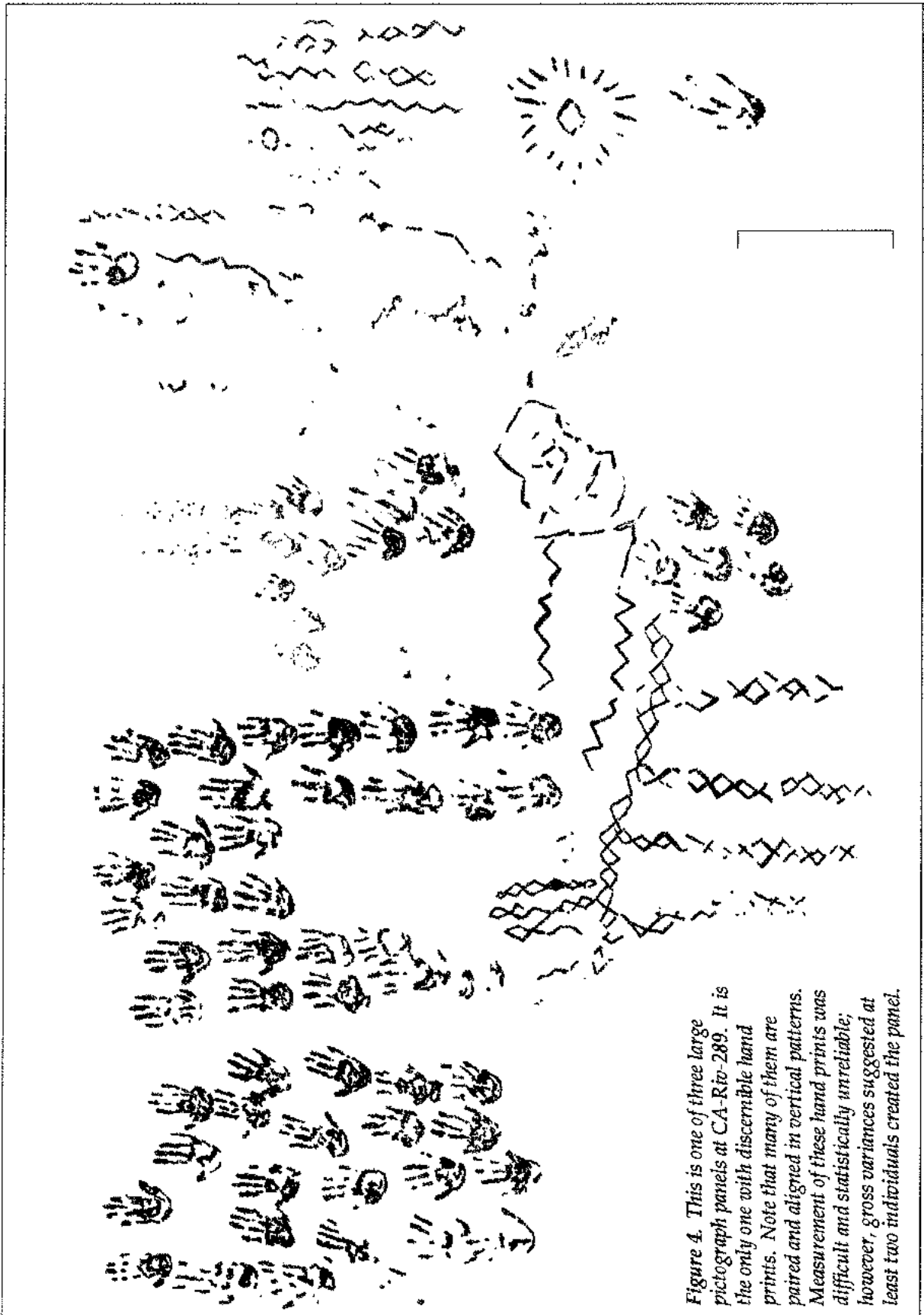


Figure 3. This pictograph panel at CA-Rio-714 is located in the heart of western Riverside County and contains a large array of hand prints (mostly red, some white). The large circles connected by a curvilinear line with descending "tick marks" are conceptually similar to a panel at CA-Rio-61 which has been construed as being representational of the sun's journey across the horizon between the winter and summer solstice positions (Rafter, 1983). Part of Luisefio cosmology instructs that the obedient and benevolent deceased became stars in the sky. The hand prints may reflect this theme.



Although it may have a myriad of connotations and may be applied in many physical and cultural contexts, therefore representing *something*, it is still the rare physical recording of an individual.

I believe that a separate category for the hand print has significant relevance to southwestern California rock art in that much of the ethnographic evidence of pictograph painting suggests that ceremonial-religious constraints came into play in terms of which images were created. These ceremonial constraints varied somewhat in terms of rigidity between groups for the girls' adolescent initiation (Strong 1929:299), but the predominate ritual theme in pictograph depictions reoccurred frequently enough to formulate the present San Luis Rey Style description. The ethnographic accounts of pictograph painting do not specifically include the practice of placing hand prints, but these motifs do occur in conjunction with classic examples of the style. Conversely, the hand print motif is found on some panels which do not conform well into any of the accepted style designations. It may be reasonable to assume that pictograph panels created from shamanistic activity would reflect significantly higher image and placement variability. Therefore, careful study of the geographical distribution of elements such as the hand print, their

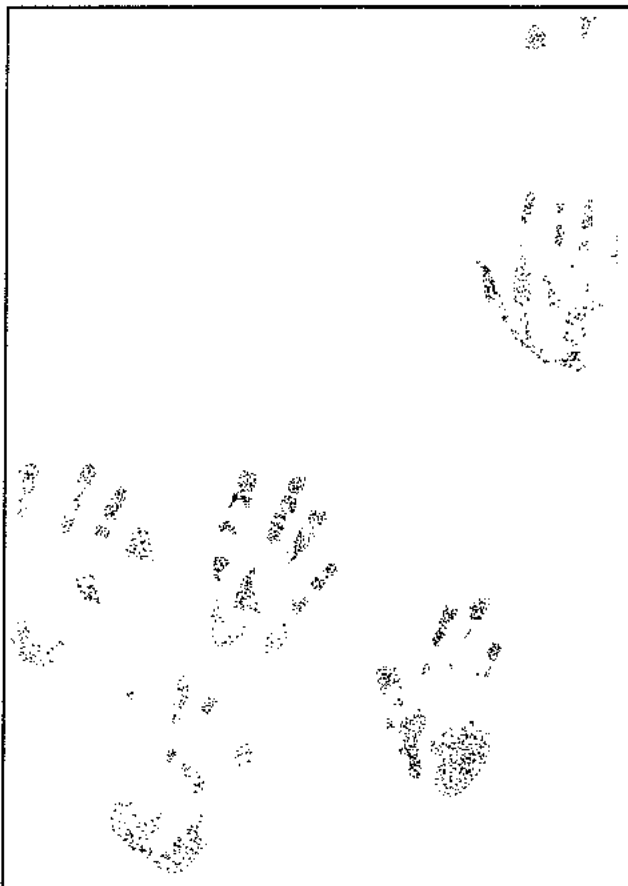


Figure 5. Faint white hand prints comprise the only elements on this panel at a site near Perris, Calif. They are in association with another panel with San Luis Rey elements.

context within the pictograph panel element array, and relationship to known settlement patterns may reveal aspects of ceremonial differentiation between groups or regions, and perhaps suggest a shamanistic versus adolescent ceremony interpretive framework. From a general interpretive perspective, universal themes emerge with hand print application (e.g., Schaafsma 1980:119), such as supplication, transference, communication or leaving one's mark as in a signature. These intrinsic interpretations need to be further investigated to see how such themes conflict or conform to the southern California rock art tradition as known.

The principal type of hand print noted in the area is the direct positive print. Nearly all are executed on some form of granitic rock, the surface texture of which varies greatly. Weather exposure and surface decomposition has obliterated to varying degrees the images. All that remains of many of the hand prints is a fragmented residual stain on the rock. Care is needed to avoid misinterpreting the design. I have recorded several panels where earlier recording efforts have missed the presence of hand prints, and I have occasionally found myself guilty of the same oversight. The level

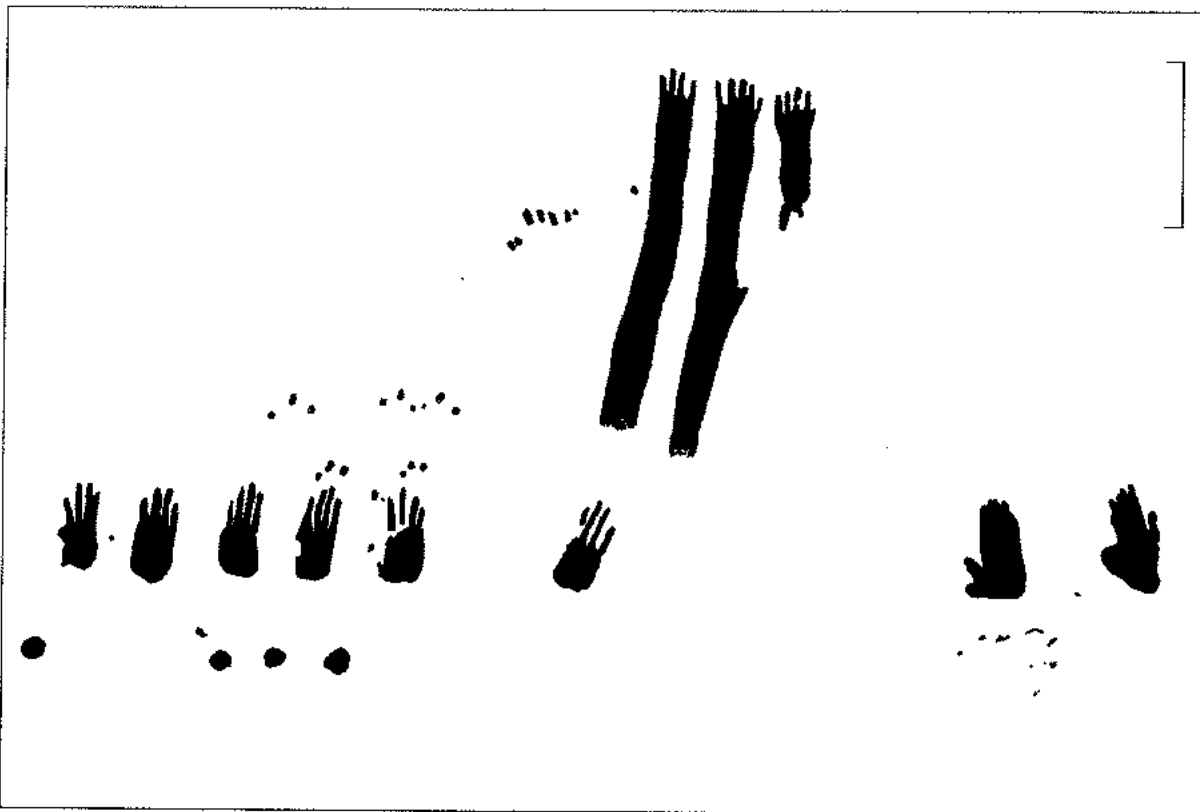


Figure 6. CA-Riv-1024 panel A. This is a partial view of a much larger panel to highlight the hand prints. The even and linear placement of these hand prints is conceptually coherent with the orientation of rectangular elements on the remainder of this panel (Smith & Freers, 1994:53).

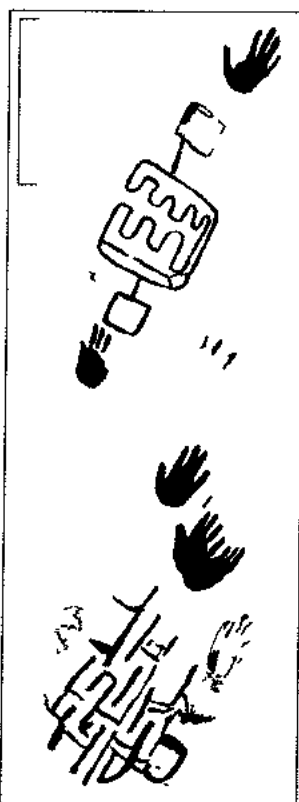


Figure 7. CA-Riv-1024 panel B. Cupules are also found at this location.

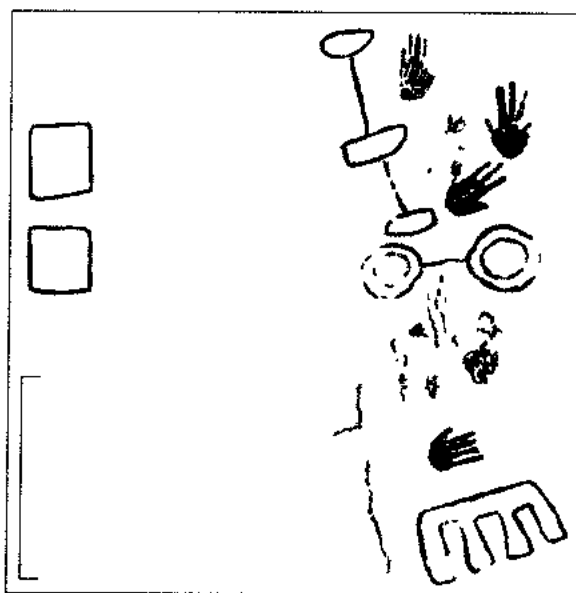


Figure 8. CA-Riv-1025, above, is located within 200 meters of CA-Riv-1024 panel B. Each panel has similar geometric design patterns which are uncommon to the San Luis Rey Style, and may in fact better reflect the Rancho Bernardo description.

of deterioration is unfortunate because it has rendered it nearly impossible to obtain a large data base of anthropometric measures of hand print dimensions. Comparisons within and between sites would be interesting. Significantly, measurements of hand size could be statistically manipulated with a reasonable degree of confidence to differentiate whether more than one individual participated in creating a panel. This type of information may not be immediately obvious in certain cases and would help augment our understanding of ceremonial pictograph practices as described by early ethnographers.

There are several regional examples of variability in the execution of the hand prints. Placement of the hand print is often without obvious pattern, at least to our contemporary eye. An exception would be found at CA-Riv-1024 (Figure 6), where the placement is evenly spaced and linear. Notice also that three of the prints have long downward streaked extensions of the palm aspect. On an associated panel on the same isolated boulder (Figure 7), and on an adjacent boulder in close proximity (CA-Riv-1025: Figure 8), hand prints are placed less organized but in conjunction with similarly styled geometric forms. At CA-Riv-289 (Figure 3), many of the hand prints occur as paired sets organized vertically. There are a few occurrences where there is streaking or swirling within the palm or finger portion of the hand print, demonstrating modification after the initial impression. Many examples of these augmented hand prints occur in the southwest, such as in the Captain Jack Shelter in southern Nevada (Monteleone, 1993). Regionally, an example of this type of hand print may be seen on the famous and much published main panel at Ca-Riv-114 (McCarthy, 1991). A far lesser known panel at Ca-Riv-202 (Figure 9), though much more deteriorated, appears to contain a few hand prints executed in this manner.

The hand print remains one of the most interesting and overtly personal expressions of Native American rock art that we have the privilege to witness today. Viewing the range of hand print panel possibilities, from a spectacular array of hundreds to the secluded solitary image, can leave one with a lasting impression. A humanistic connection is made, however scant or powerful from



Figure 9. Some of these deteriorated hand prints at CA-Riv-202 appear to have been augmented after placement (which is unfortunately easier to visualize in situ than from this illustration).

these experiences that at least intellectually validates, yes there was a *person* here! Invariably, it is almost impossible not to compare the images' size with one's own hand. For coastal-inland southern California, such comparisons often reveal a diminutive hand print, likely that of a young girl's participation in her group's version of the near universal rite of passage from childhood to maturity. Still other examples may be found where the hand print is adult sized and located on pictograph panels created quite unlike the current style definitions. Perhaps these panels are the

work of a shaman, a different group or ritual activity. In the ongoing search for meaning, style and ritual significance, the hand print may be as personal as it is enigmatic.

Conclusion

Coalescing the previous work of many individuals, in conjunction with an extensive field survey, will be required to bring the entire coastal-inland region into clearer view to develop a satisfactory database of accurate panel illustrations and site information. It is likely that a comprehensive analysis will support a modification of the San Luis Rey Style to include the hand print and perhaps suggest creation of other subset categories for the style. The occurrence frequency of the hand print from my present sample fluctuates between 18-26%, depending on how one sets up the parameters. I believe that the stated frequency here represents the high water mark for at least two reasons: The inclusion of additional sites in San Diego County will likely have less hand print motifs; and, there appears to be a particularly high density of sites with this motif in the San Jacinto River drainage - perhaps a subset category itself.

More research will be required to make some definitive statements regarding the hand print relative to the current style designations. However, the hand print *should* be considered a common element within this region; and, as has been presented in some of the panel examples, at times a dominate one.

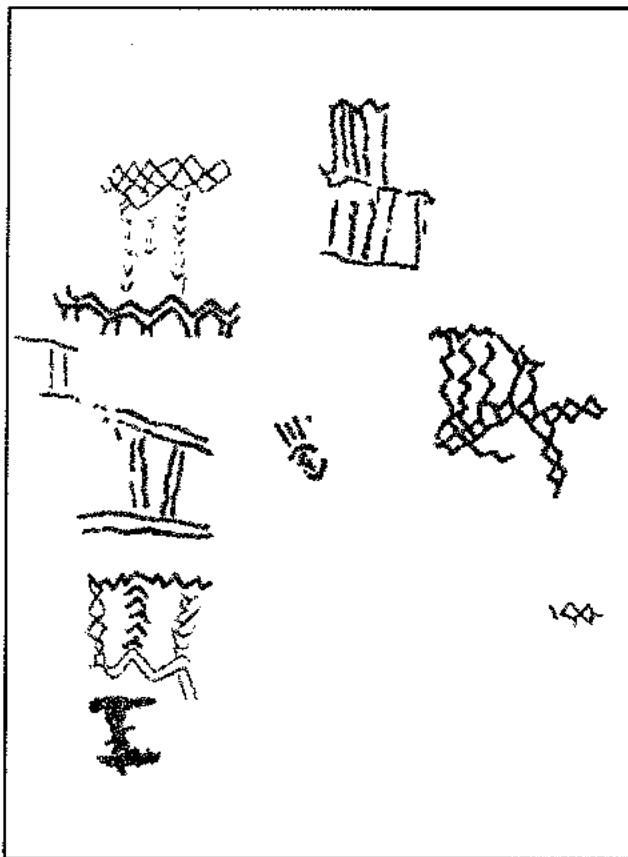


Figure 10. CA-Riv-414: Note the presence of a single hand print centralized within a panel containing classic San Luis Rey Style motifs. This panel is located on a phallic rock in close association with a ceremonial rock slide covered with cupules which leads into a relatively spacious cave shelter - known locally as the "Girls' Fertility Slide."

References

- DuBois, Constance G.
1908 *The Religion of the Luiseño Indians of Southern California.* University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 8(3):69-186.
- Freers, Steven M.
1995 "A Shamanistic Pictograph Site in Northern San Diego County." Ken Hedges, ed., *Rock Art Papers, Volume 12* (in press).
- Hedges, Ken
1990a "Petroglyphs in Menifee Valley." Ken Hedges, ed., *Rock Art Papers, Volume 7*,:75-82. San Diego Museum of Man Papers 26.
- Hedges, Ken
1990b *Rock Art Styles in Southern California.* Manuscript in the author's possession.
- Hedges, Ken
1992 "Shamanistic Aspects of California Rock Art." Lowell John Bean, ed., *California Indian Shamanism*, pp. 67-88. Menlo Park, California: Ballena Press.
- McCarthy, Daniel F.
1991 "Documentation of Two Painted Superimposed Rock Art Styles at CA-Riv-114, Motte-Rimrock Reserve, Western Riverside County, California." Ken Hedges, ed., *Rock Art Papers, Volume 8*,:75-80. San Diego Museum of Man Papers 27.
- Minor, Rick
1973 "Known Origins of Rock Paintings of Southwestern California." *Pacific Coast Archaeological Society Quarterly* 9(4):29-36.
- Monteleone, Sue Ann
1993 Paintings of the Eleana Range and Vicinity, Southern Nevada. Ken Hedges, ed., *Rock Art Papers, Vol. 10*,:37-47. San Diego Museum of Man Papers 29.
- Rafter, John
1983 "Mockingbird Canyon's Milky Way." In: Ken Hedges, ed., *Rock Art Papers, Volume 1*,:75-80. San Diego Museum of Man Papers 16.
- Schaafsma, Polly
1980 *Indian Rock Art of the Southwest.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Smith, Gerald A. and Steven M. Freers
1994 *Fading Images: Indian Pictographs of Western Riverside County.* Riverside: Riverside Museum Press.
- Sparkman, Philip Stedman
1908 "The Culture of the Luiseño Indians." *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 8(4):187-234.
- True, Delbert L.
1954 "Pictographs of the San Luis Rey Basin," California. *American Antiquity* 20(1):68- 72.
- True, Delbert L., C.W. Meighan and Harvey Crew
1974 *Archaeological Investigations at Molpa, San Diego County, California.* Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Waterman, Thomas J.
1910 "The Religious Practices of the Diegueño Indians." University of California Publications in *American Archaeology and Ethnology* 8(6):271-358.