

Photographing from Dawn to Dusk in Coso's Renegade Canyon, CA

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For those of you who know a lot about photography, using a polarizer, sunshade and reflector is a must for successful rock art photographs. For those of you who are not photographers, a polarizer is a rotating filter that eliminates glare and reflections from a surface. It creates better contrast between the rock patina and the pecked design. A sunshade blocks the light, such as an umbrella used to cover a hot spot on a rock panel. A reflector redirects the light by filling in the shadows on your subject or panel. A reflector can be tin foil or a white piece of cardboard.

I used a Photoflex Litedisc reflector that can double as a sun shade too. Now I know the reflector I am showing you isn't very big. Well, the Photoflex Litediscs come in all sizes from 12" to 52" and they collapse to a third of their open size.

Let's take a walk down Renegade Canyon after meeting at the Maturango Museum to learn the do's and don'ts of the China Lake Naval Weapons Stations regulations. Some photos will be a series of the same panel with different light affecting it, or a close-up and then a wide angle showing the surrounding terrain or the panel in the shade and then in full light. The authors of rock drawings of the Coso Range claim that at the present, there is no other comparable concentration of rock drawings in North America. There is documentation for just over 14,000 drawings in only four canyons (two major and two side canyons). There are many unnamed canyons that haven't been documented. In one of the pamphlets in the Maturango Museum it give you to read on the way to the canyon, it claims that there are over 100,000 rock drawings in the area, but because of the restricted access to the area, we may never know how many there are.

The name Coso comes from the Shoshonean word for "fire" with a reference to the abundant evidence of volcanic activity in the area. When the white man got around to asking about the drawings, all the oldest Indians in the area could say was they were done by the "old ones" and they didn't know why. So it is still only speculation and will remain a mystery that on the basalt cliffs of the Coso Range and where smooth surfaced volcanic rocks occur near springs, you will find thousands of rock drawings.

Figures 1 and 2. These are some excellent example of Coso's elaborately patterned anthropomorphs.

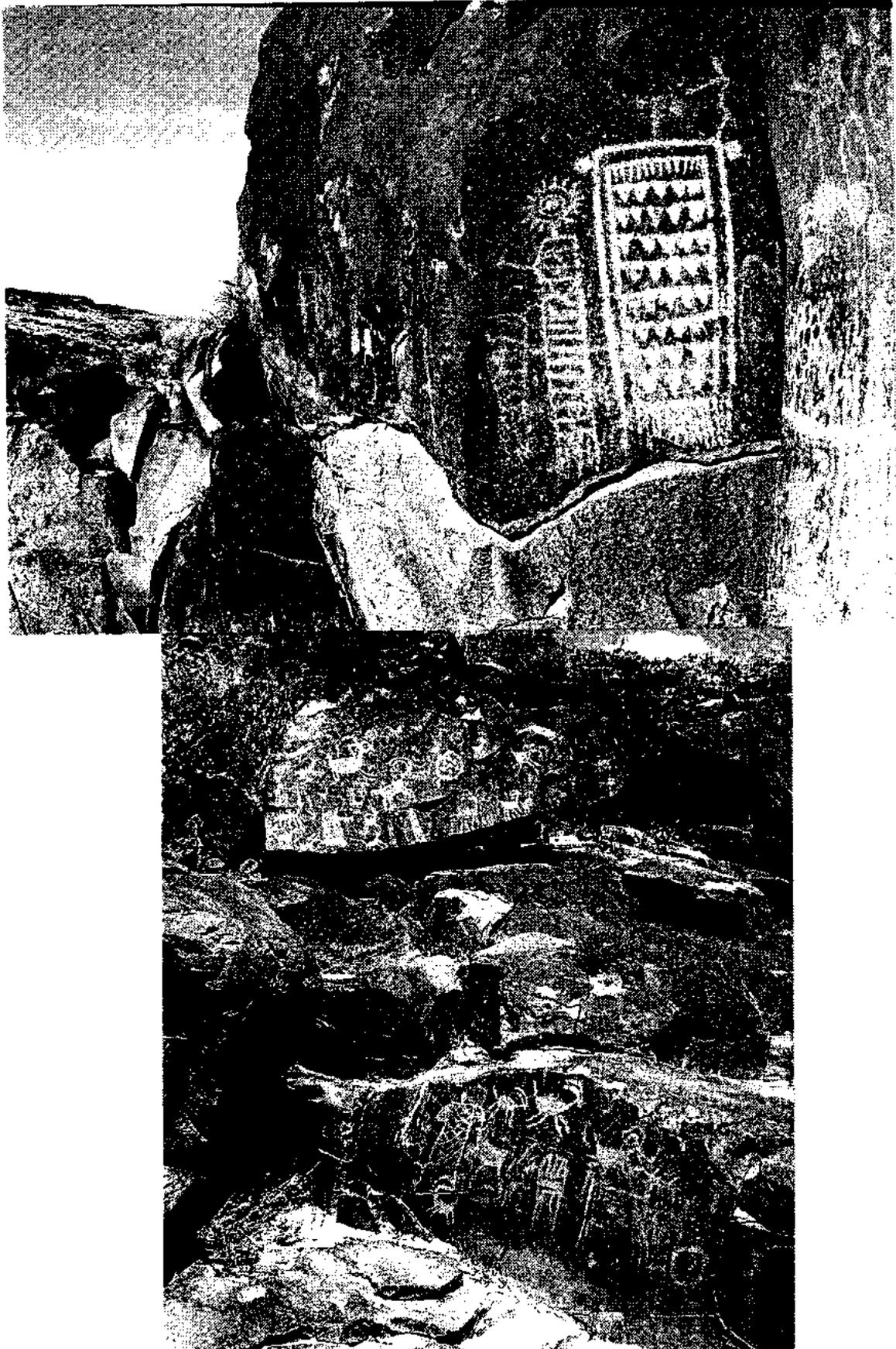




Figure 3. Selected basalt cliffs and boulders were used as drawing boards with many pecked drawings overlapping.



Figure 4. Some rock faces would contain many drawings and others only one. This Coso rock drawing example may have influenced many artists to recreate their images in a multitude of art forms.

Figure 5. Another excellent example of Coso's elaborate patterned-bodied anthropomorphs. There are 397 recorded drawings of this type in Renegade Canyon.



Figure 6. This panel is unique with its shield-like patters. There are 1473 recorded drawings of this type in Coso's, and Renegade Canyon contains 795 of them.



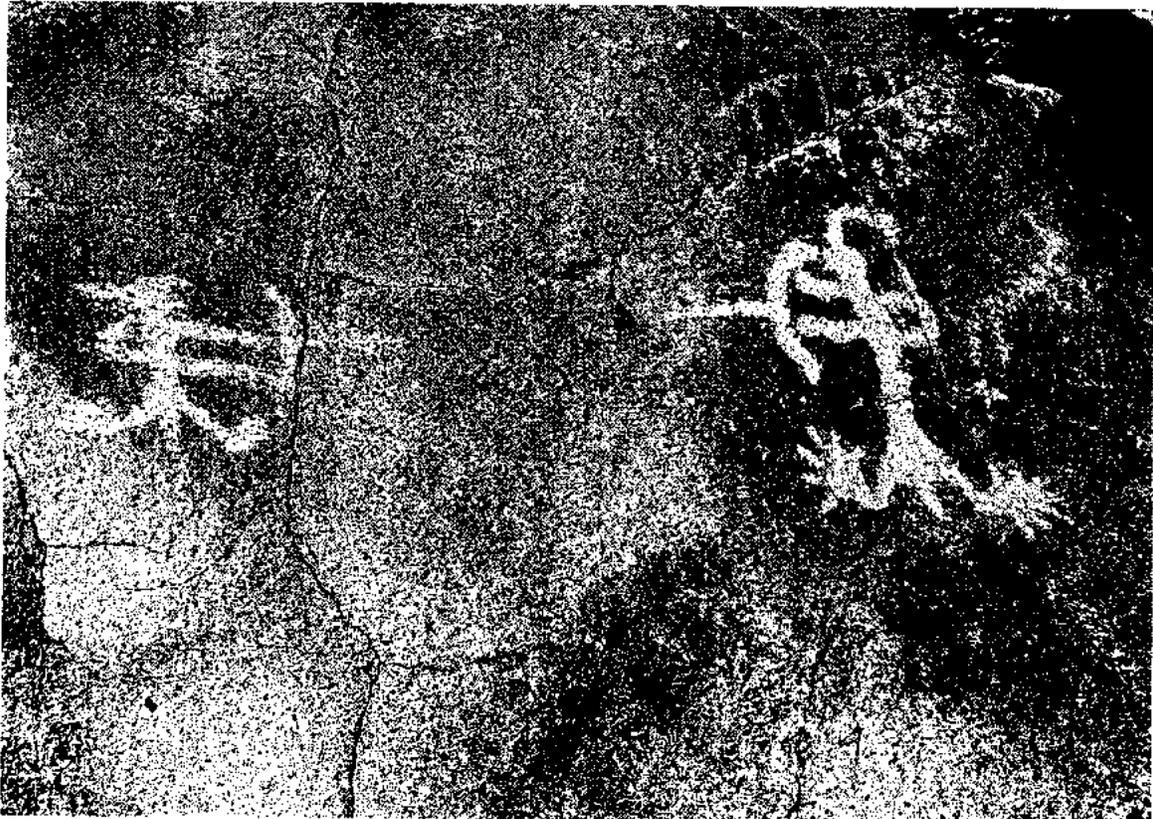
Figures 7 and 8. Examples of animated sheep in Coso. In just two canyons of the Coso Range there are over 7000 sheep drawings. Of the three areas where Bighorn sheep drawings are abundant, Coso has more than the other North American sites combined.



Figure 9. This displays many elements, but most notable is the figure with the horned headdress center right.



Figure 10. Two bowmen possibly shooting at each other.



I was asked to show you some photos of the Coso Range because I was referred to as “the only URAUA member who had been there.” Well, I thought that if I brought a lot of slides, I wouldn't have to talk much. The travel magazines show you one image of an area and it is so spectacular that want to go there. As they say, “One picture is worth a thousand words.” Well, I showed you 133 pictures. For the sake of argument (because I know researchers like to argue), say there are an average of ten rock drawings in each slide. So take ten times 133, subtract that from 100,000, and it leaves 98,670 rock drawings left for *you* to find!





Three Rivers Petroglyph Site, New Mexico. Photo by Ronald N. Spees