

# Rock Art Eccentrics

Incorporation of Natural Rock Elements  
Into Rock Art Images

**Roger Cook**

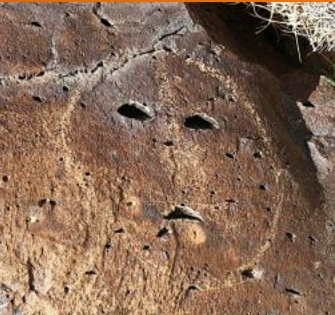
# INTRODUCTION

- **Definition of eccentric:** something that is unusual, peculiar or odd
- Fairly rare to find a rock art image that incorporates natural rock elements such as holes, cavities, cracks, edges, air bubbles, etc.
- These images grab your attention
- Highly creative; elicits an emotional connection over the centuries
- Not quite 3D but more relief than a 2D image
- Photos have been compiled over the past ~35 years
- Majority of photos are from NM, my home state, plus several from UT & AZ
- Rated R: some slides contains nudity
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# Faces, Masks, Kachinas

# Faces, Masks, Kachinas

- Are these images faces, masks or kachinas? We can probably say yes to all 3 of these.
- Even the most simple faces/masks have been documented as being kachinas (at least in some cases) in the archaeology literature (Sally J. Cole, *Katsina Iconography In Homol'ovi Rock Art*, KIVA, Vol. 54, No. 3, 1989)
- These masks are all from New Mexico and are representative of the Rio Grande style which blossomed around the late 1300's as the kachina cult was being introduced
- The Pueblo cosmology says that everything has life, including rocks and other inanimate objects
- Kachinas, in the form of rock art images, were created on prominent rock outcrops in order to, primarily, attract rain
- These images were felt to be alive, not just static images. They interacted with the cloud kachinas to bring rain
- 'Pueblo kachina masks are the most diagnostic element of the Rio Grande rock art style. Throughout they vary from simple to complex in detail, and many of them can be identified specifically, as they continue today. Masks carved under the open sky on prominent landscape locations such as hilltops, knolls and intrusive volcanic features may well have served as petitions to the spirits of rain clouds attracted by their images. In Hopi ethnographies it is clear that paintings and images were and are made in hopes that they will be pleasing to the spiritual entities they represent and thus command their presence (Stephen 1936:744; Schaafsma 2015:1). In that way rock art empowers the landscape and defines places where communication with powerful supernaturals may take place because they are attracted to their images. High points empowered with images may have been regarded as symbolic of the high mountains from which clouds emanate, those storehouses of water and homes of the kachinas.' Polly Schaafsma, *Beyond the Village: Arroyo Hondo, Rock Art, and Religious Transformations in Classic Period Pueblos*, internet publication

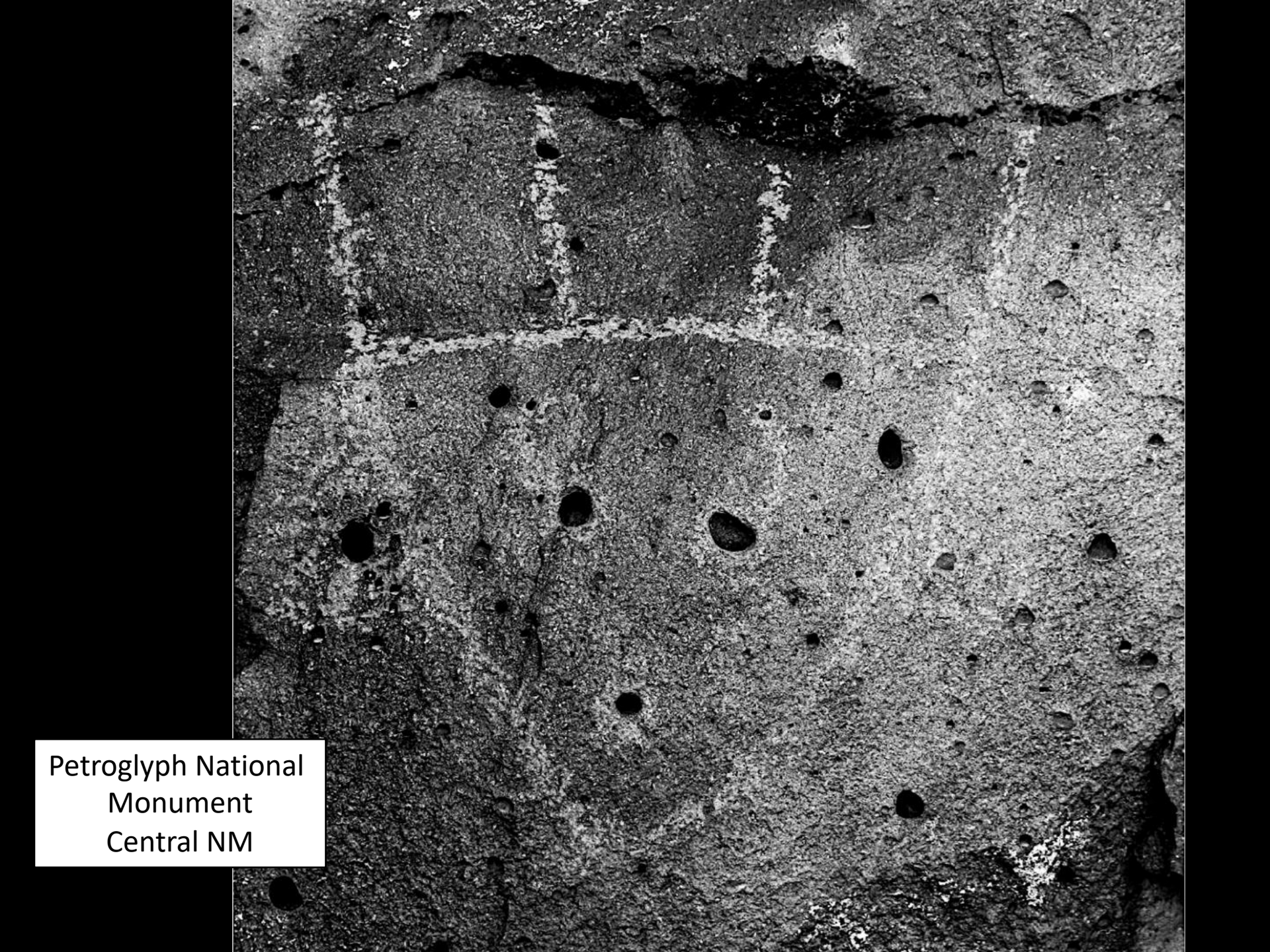






Galisteo Basin  
Central NM





Petroglyph National  
Monument  
Central NM



Petroglyph National  
Monument  
Central NM  
probably Heheha, a  
kachina with a  
diagnostic crooked  
mouth







Petroglyph National  
Monument  
Central NM



El Cerro de Los Lunas  
Central NM  
Rio Grande Style








Jemez Mountains  
Central NM  
Rio Grande Style





Petroglyph National  
Monument  
Central NM





Petroglyph National  
Monument  
Central NM





Santa Fe area  
Central NM

photo by Carol Chamberland






Private property  
Central NM





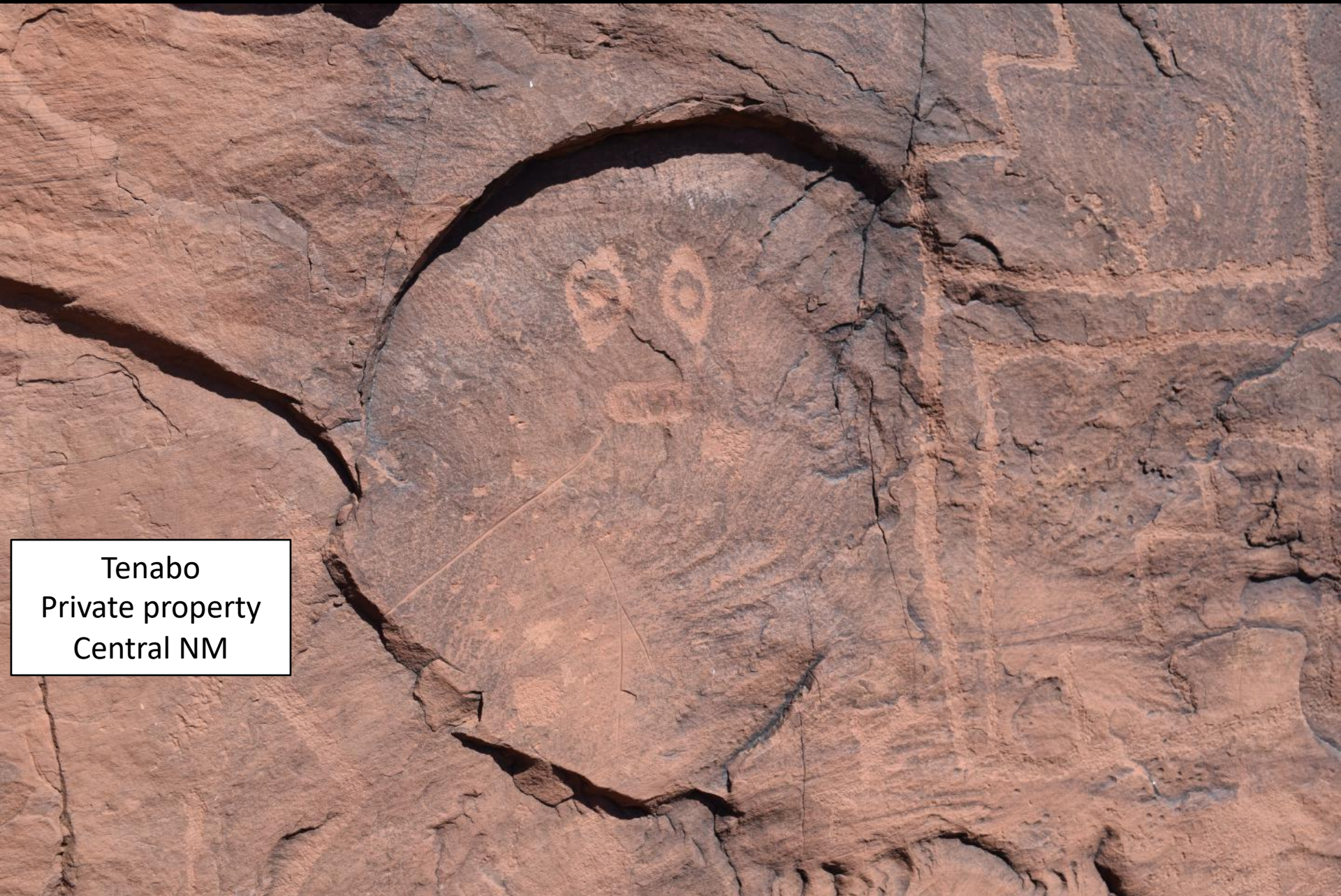
La Cieneguilla  
(BLM)  
North Central NM  
Rio Grande Style



A close-up photograph of a dark, textured rock surface, likely volcanic. The rock is covered in numerous small, light-colored mineral deposits or lichen. There are several small, dark, circular pits or indentations scattered across the surface. The overall appearance is rough and weathered. A white text box is overlaid in the bottom left corner.

Petroglyph National  
Monument  
Central NM





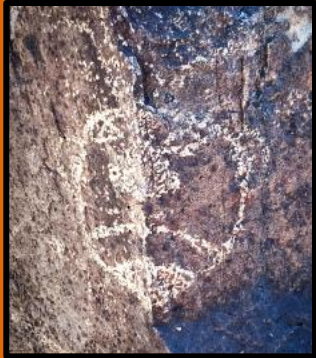
Tenabo  
Private property  
Central NM

# Corner Masks



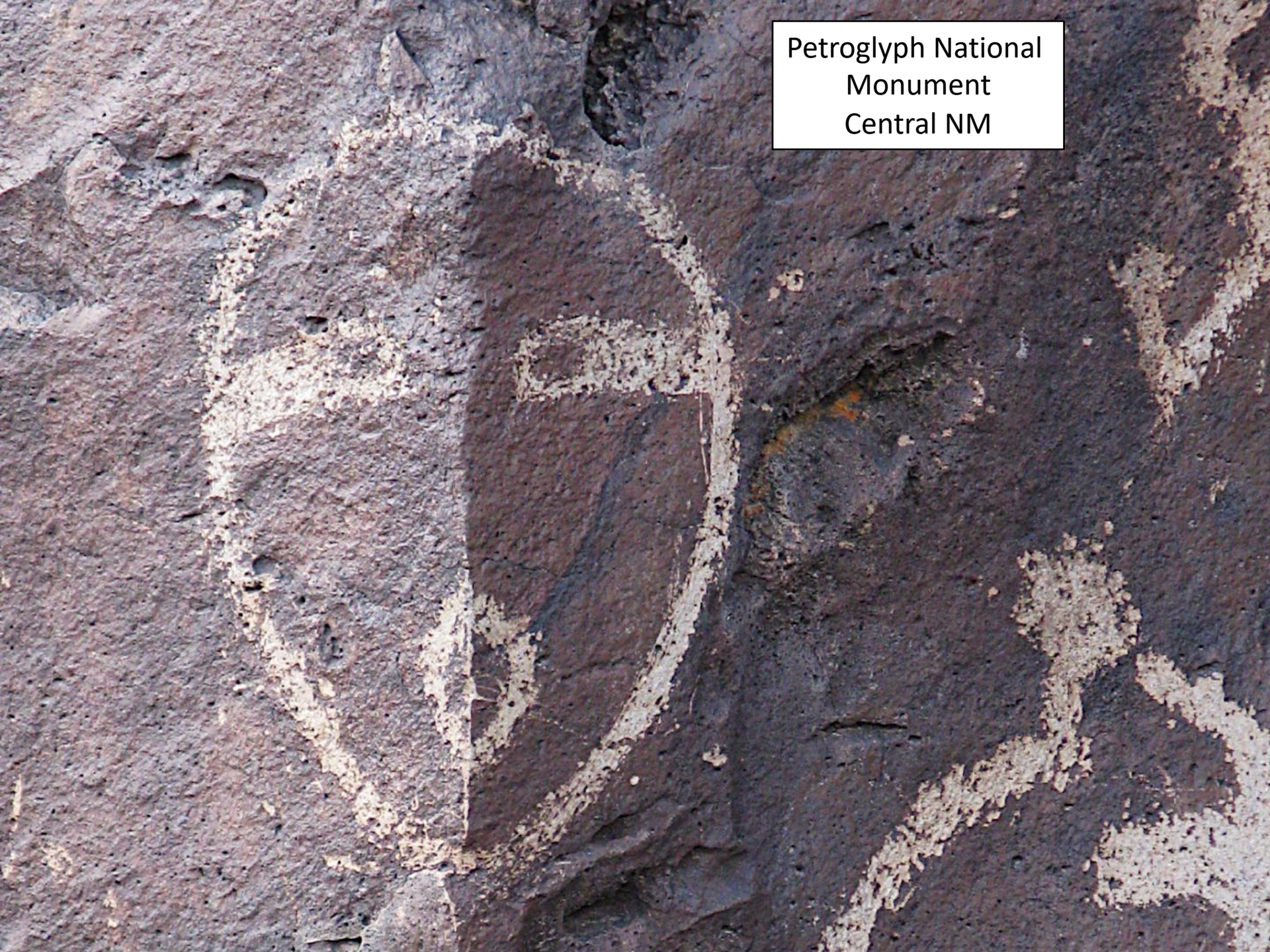
## Corner Masks

- There is a unique type of mask found in the New Mexico rock art, commonly called a corner mask
- Corner masks are very common in the Rio Grande rock art style, also in the Jornada Mogollon style further south in NM
- Many are quite simple although they can be much more detailed
- Jornada Mogollon style masks tend to be more complex with ears and noses and facial decorations
- Although mentioned in the literature, I have found no explicit explanation for the corner masks
- Based on discussions with the ex-City of Albuquerque archeologist Matt Schmader plus a Petroglyph National Monument ranger, and others, I have come up with the following explanation: Similar to the general masks, these masks are seen to be living entities. They are watching the landscape. One eye is always on each side of the corner, giving them a 180 degree view of the landscape, which often is very expansive. They are looking for anything that would be noteworthy to report back to the elders. Some of this may be related to watching for enemies and protection for the local residents. Or maybe they are also watching for something more positive such as rain clouds. At any rate, there are quite a few of them still doing their job.





Petroglyph National Monument  
Central NM





Petroglyph National Monument  
Central NM







Three Rivers  
Petroglyph Site  
(BLM)  
Southern NM





Petroglyph National  
Monument  
Central NM





Petroglyph National  
Monument  
Central NM





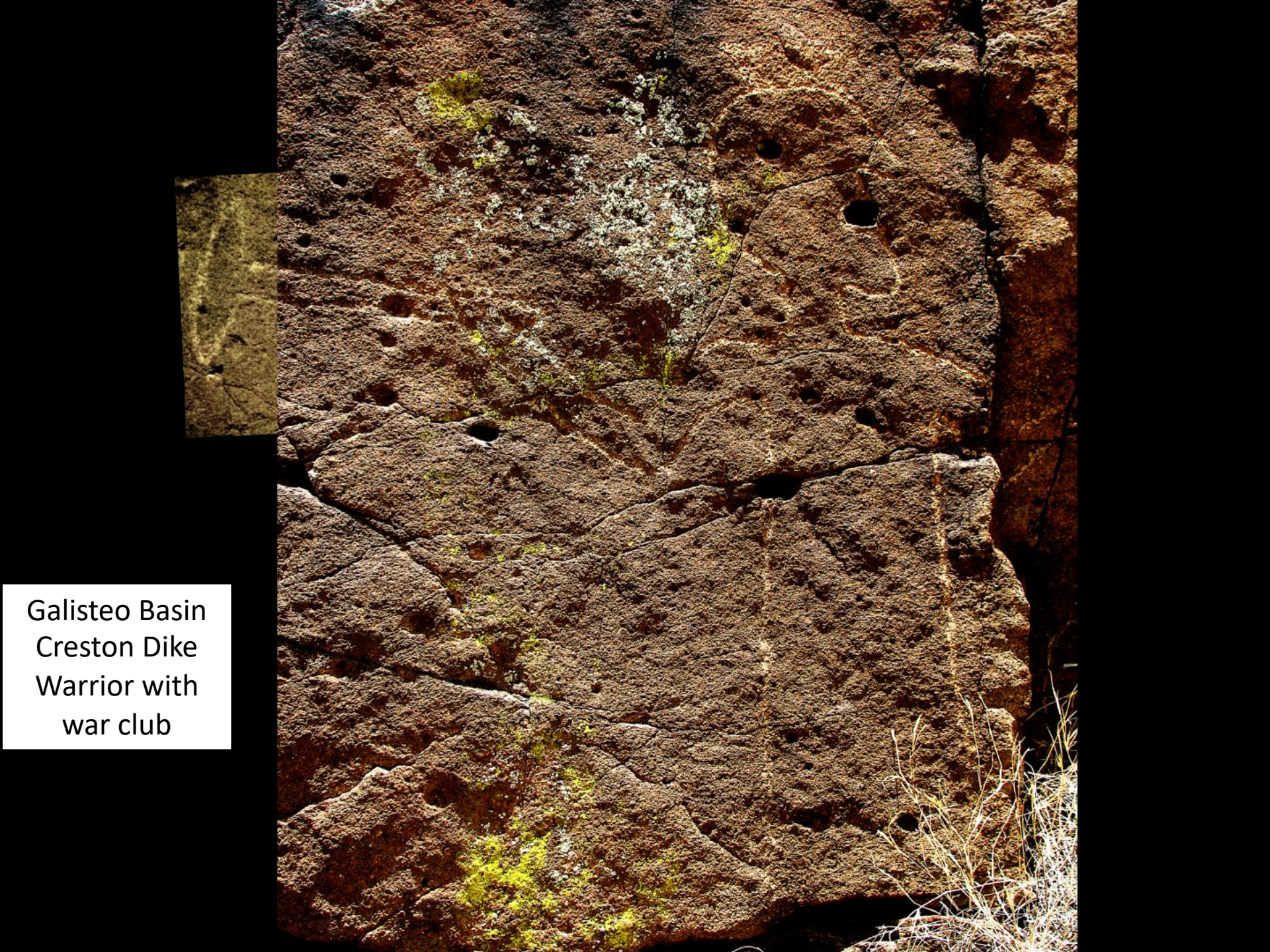


La Cieneguilla  
(BLM)  
North Central NM  
Rio Grande Style



# Full-Bodied Anthropomorphs





Galisteo Basin  
Creston Dike  
Warrior with  
war club





Galisteo Basin

Creston Dike

Close-up of

previous slide –

holes used for eye

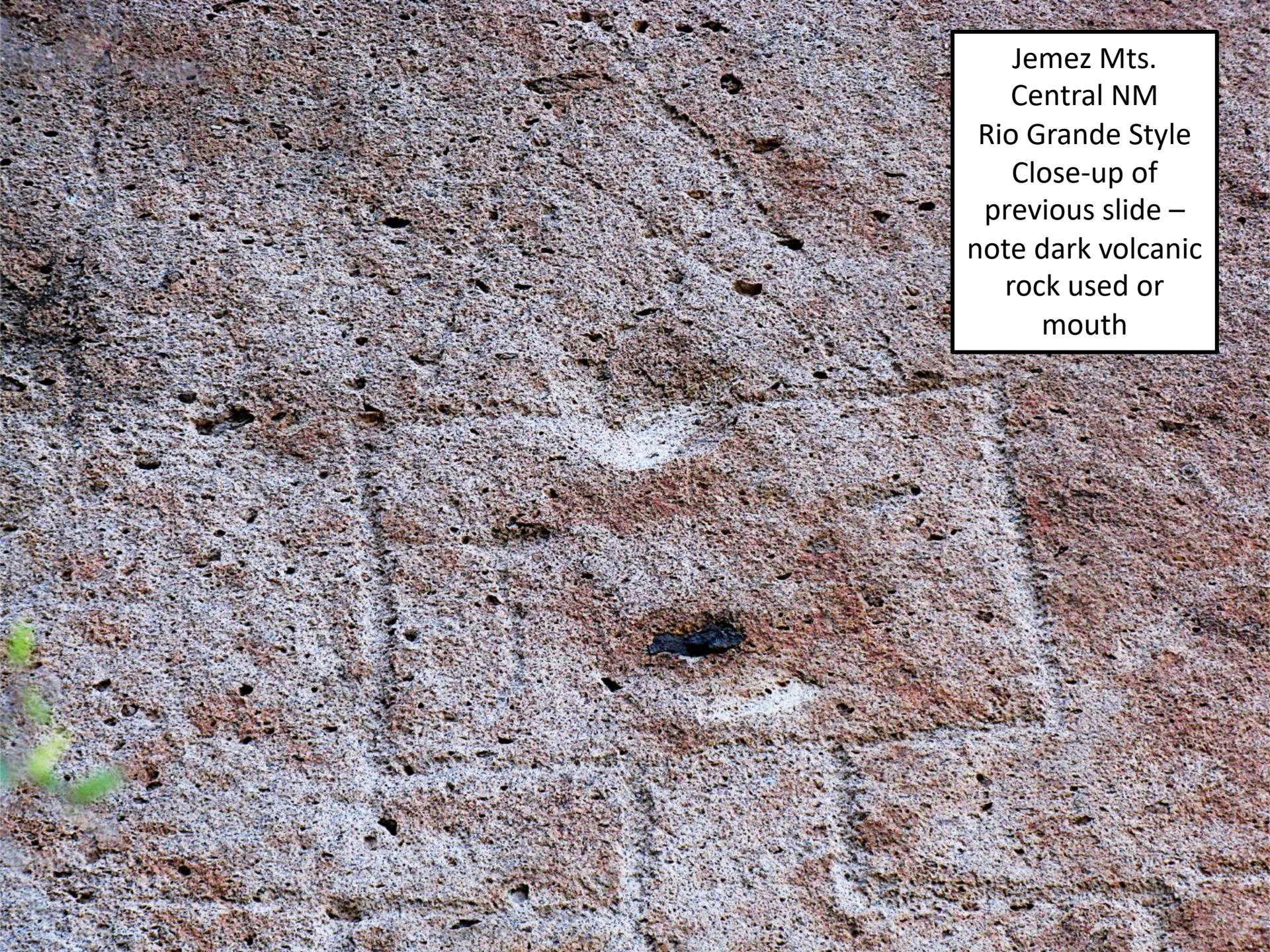
and mouth





Jemez Mts.  
Central NM  
Rio Grande Style  
Probably a warrior  
due to pointed cap



A close-up photograph of a rock surface. The rock is light-colored, possibly tan or grey, with a porous, granular texture. A prominent feature is a dark, irregularly shaped fragment of volcanic rock embedded within the lighter matrix. The fragment is dark grey to black and has a rough, jagged appearance. The surrounding rock has a mottled appearance with small dark spots and a slightly uneven surface. The overall texture is rough and weathered.

Jemez Mts.  
Central NM  
Rio Grande Style  
Close-up of  
previous slide –  
note dark volcanic  
rock used or  
mouth



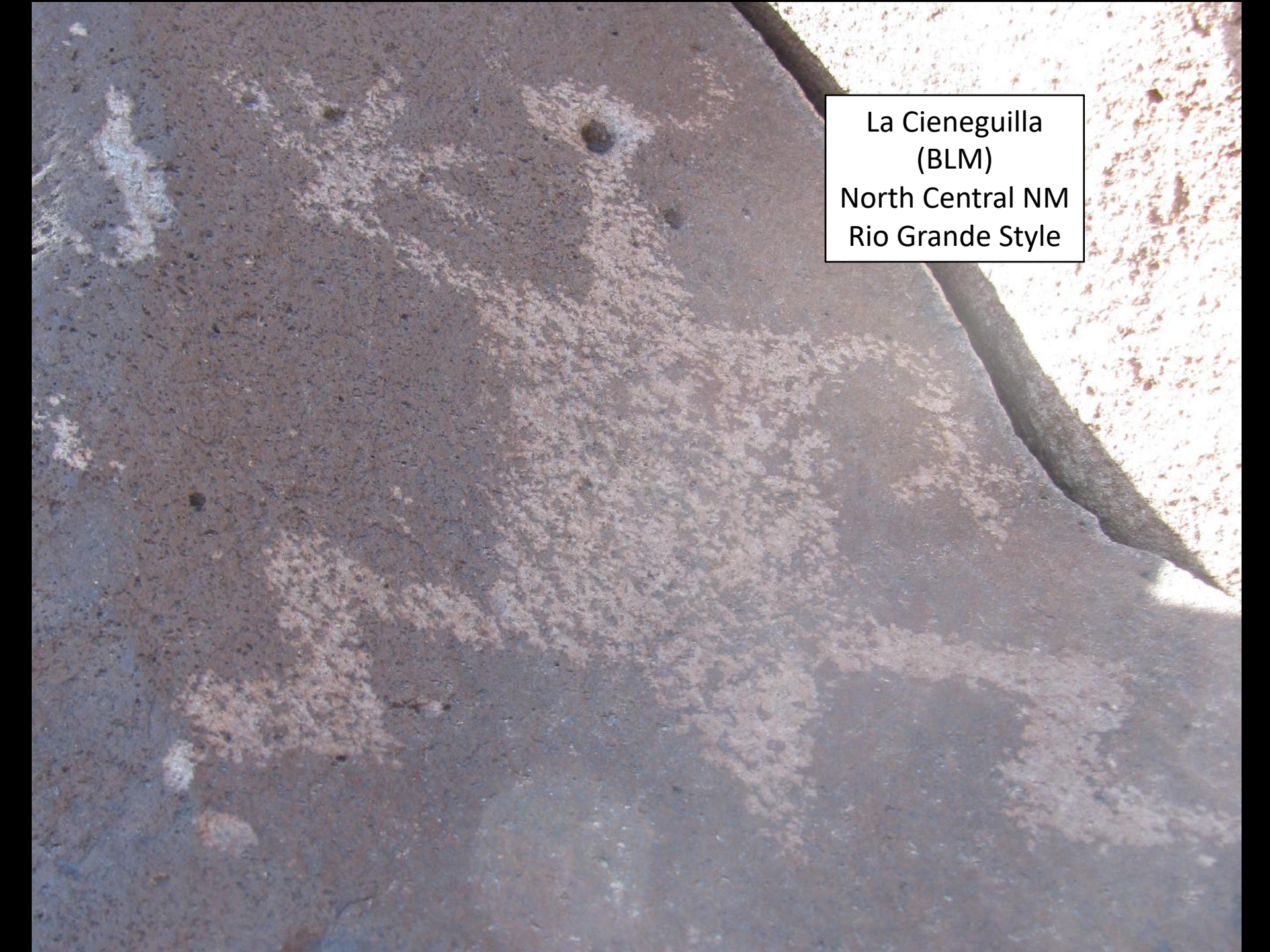


Cedar Mesa  
SE Utah



Cedar Mesa  
SE Utah





La Cieneguilla  
(BLM)  
North Central NM  
Rio Grande Style



Three Rivers  
Petroglyph Site  
(BLM)  
Southern NM  
large nodule  
used to  
enhance  
humpback  
figure








Cedar Mesa  
SE Utah





Cedar Mesa  
SE Utah






Rio Grande del Norte  
National Monument  
Big Arsenic Hot Springs  
Northern NM




# Animals





Three Rivers  
Petroglyph Site  
(BLM)  
Southern NM





Three Rivers  
Petroglyph Site  
(BLM)  
Southern NM





Near Vernal, Utah  
bird made from natural  
cracks w/feet added





Abo National Monument  
Central New Mexico



Utah  
Painted owl perched on  
limb of petrified wood





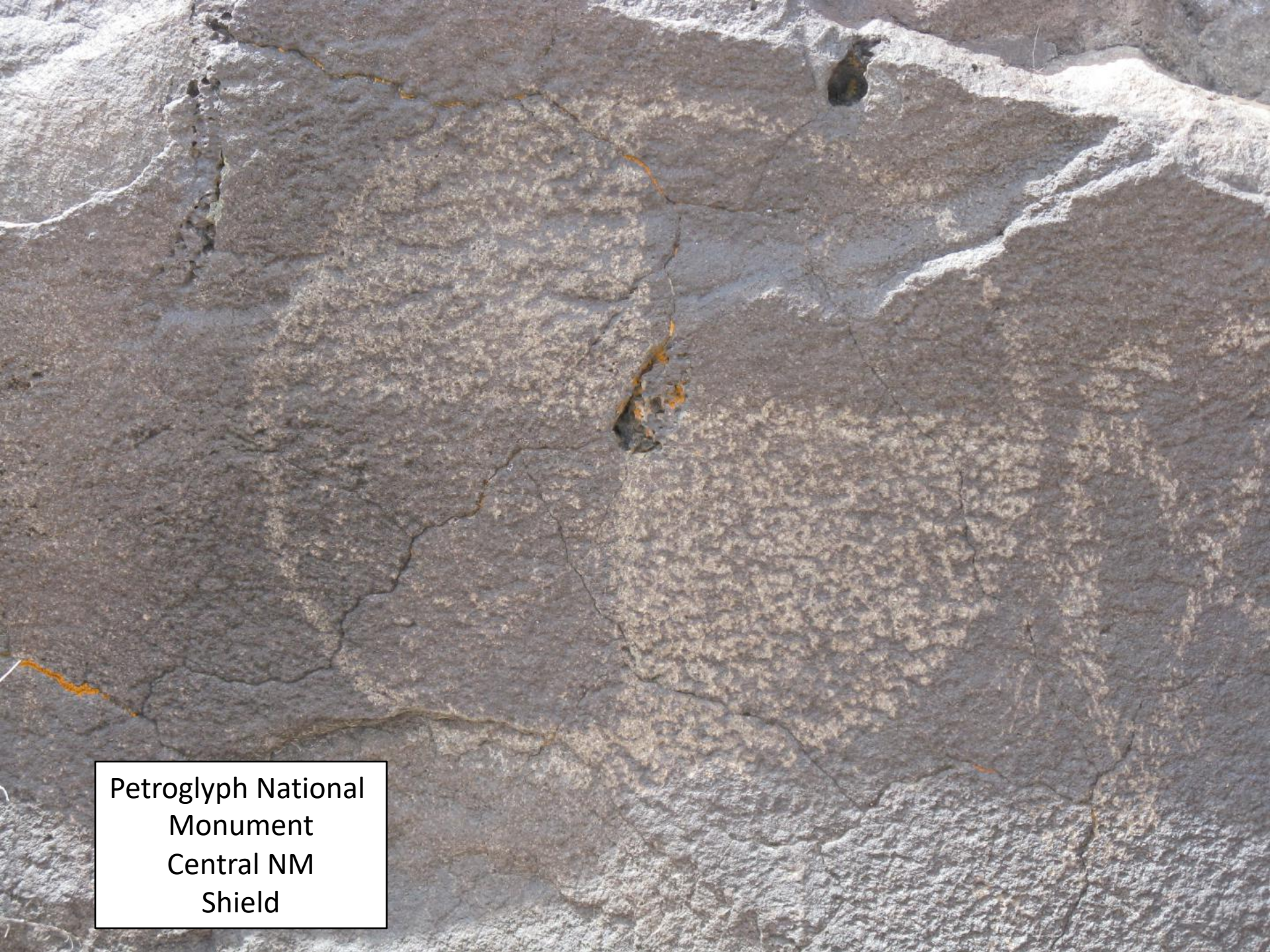
Geometrics  
&  
Other






Three Rivers  
Petroglyph Site  
(BLM)  
Southern NM





Petroglyph National  
Monument  
Central NM  
Shield



A photograph of a rock surface, likely sandstone, showing several circular pits or depressions. A shield-shaped petroglyph is visible in the lower-left quadrant. The rock surface is textured and shows signs of weathering and mineral deposits. The lighting is somewhat uneven, highlighting the different textures and colors of the rock.

Petroglyph National  
Monument  
Central NM  
Anthro w/Shield





Petroglyph National  
Monument  
Central NM  
crack bisecting spiral





Pony Hills  
Southern NM  
Mimbres Style  
crack bisecting  
coiled snake



Sutherland Wash  
Rock Art District  
Tucson, AZ area  
Hohokam flower imagery





A few favorites  
&  
Summary





Cedar Mesa  
SE Utah  
2 soaring anthros





Galisteo Basin  
Central NM  
Rio Grande Style



## Summary - why incorporation of natural rock features?

- Native Americans did not view the world around them as static. In their world view, everything had life, a spirit, including rocks. Rock art images were felt to be alive, not just static images. They interacted with the world around them, attracting rain clouds, being sentinels, attracting gods and therefore they were places of power.
- ‘Depictions of kachinas, numbering in the thousands throughout the Rio Grande valley, are a sort of permanent investment in attracting the rain spirits. These images grant power to the land. If an image is pleasing to the supernatural being represented, it will attract that being’s presence.’ Polly Schaafsma, *Human Images and Blurring Boundaries. The Pueblo Body in Cosmological Contest: Rock Art, Murals and Ceremonial Figures*, 2018
- ‘Consultants from the Pueblo of Acoma describe petroglyphs as ‘living entities.’ For ritual practitioners, rock art sites are portals to power, petition, and presence of Holy beings, ancestors, or both. Indigenous consultants often point out that incorporation of natural rock features, the flow of water, growth of lichen and other ‘natural’ interactions attest to the significance of place and setting for them.’ – Kelley Hays-Gilpin, *We are all connected: Rock Art Ontologies in the Southwestern US*, 2019
- ‘The images on rock are a connection, a pathway that links indigenous people to their ancestral past and to the supernatural world of deities, beings and other spiritual dimensions.’ Conroy Chino, *Petroglyphs of the Southwest: A Puebloan Perspective*, 2012
- If there were some way to give a rock art image more power, more connection to the spirit world, that approach would have most certainly been utilized
- Finding natural features in the rock that could be incorporated into an image seems like one obvious way to give an image more power given the way Native Americans viewed the world
- Today we can marvel at the human creativity that resulted in some amazing images that no doubt had a very special meaning for the people who made them





**THANK YOU!**

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**URARA Rocks!**

I am always looking for more of these images incorporating natural rock features. I'm sure there are many more out there. If you are willing to share your knowledge with me, I would greatly appreciate it. Please contact me and perhaps we can get out and take a hike together.