

SACRED LANDSCAPE AND NATIVE AMERICAN ROCK ART - PART II

For Native American tribes of North America, all lands are sacred and certain places have powerful spiritual forces associated with them. The sacredness of impressive petroglyphs along Ashley Creek, near Vernal in Utah, is enhanced by a Summer Solstice Sunset observation point. Water sources are also sacred, and the Three Finger Canyon petroglyph site has a sequence of bedrock water tanks. Destinations for pilgrimages have sacred meaning, as is the case with the Holy Ghost Group and the Great Gallery in Horseshoe Canyon. Other sacred sites in Southeastern Utah, and in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas are presented, along with efforts to protect Native American sacred places.

The struggle to safeguard Native American sacred sites is continuous across the United States. Each site must be defended, purchased if threatened, monitored, and litigated. It is an on-going battle, and each fight needs to be won, for losing is too often final and irreparable. "Saving Sacred Places" was the caption on the cover of *Native Peoples* magazine for May/June 2007. The Table of Contents announced "Sacred Ground: Landscapes as Living Spirit," with the commentary: "American Indians consider the land a living entity and believe certain places have powerful spiritual forces associated with them. Many sacred places are threatened by inappropriate development today, while some have been permanently protected." In the article on "Sacred Ground," Jake Page notes that there is a long history of heedless despoliation of sacred Native Lands. Indeed, for most Native Peoples of this continent all land is sacred... Tens of thousands of such holy places are gone, but thousands no doubt remain...hidden in canyons, sitting atop high mountains and fronting our oceans." Page (2007:3, 26) surveys such sacred places and the efforts to recover and protect the sacred.

This paper on Sacred Landscape begins with the Ashley Creek site, located northwest of Vernal, Utah. It is privately owned by Doug Murphy, who deserves credit for his efforts to protect and preserve the rock art on his property. The extensive site begins with petroglyphs along the base of the cliffs, and climaxes high on upper cliffs. Of particular note are solar sites. Most impressive are panels associated with a summer solstice sunset site. When viewed from in front of the panel shown in Figure 1, the point of the overhanging surface marks the solstice sunset (Figure 2). In addition to the imposing cliffs and magnificent rock art, solar interactions are often indicators of sacred places.



Figure 1. Panel at Ashley Creek.



Figure 2. Summer solstice pointer.



Figure 3. *Three Finger Canyon panel.*



Figure 4. *Holy Ghost pictographs.*

Springs and water sources for desert peoples were regarded as sacred, and the series of tanks at Three Finger Canyon southeast of Green River are marks of such a sacred place. Another water tank is at the canyon entrance with petroglyphs to the right. The main panel appears to have rain symbols and at the top is what appears to be a water rattle with gourd disks on a wooden stick (Figure 3), such as described and pictured in *Tapamveni*, by McCreery and Malotki (McCreery and Malotki 1994:148). Water sources and rock art suggesting rain-making ceremonies, in such spectacular settings, are marks of landscape deemed sacred.

Sacred sites were also the destination for pilgrimages, and the Great Gallery and Holy Ghost panel (Figure 4) in Horseshoe Canyon,



Figure 5. *Red Barrier Canyon style pictographs at Thompson Wash.*

located in Canyonlands National Park south of Green River, provide a dramatic example. Up around to the left of the Holy Ghost panel is a long line of processional figures to indicate the site was the destination for pilgrimages. It still is, for I was privileged to go there with a group led by David Sucec, and we met a stream of other hikers going and coming. As we approached we saw the Holy Ghost panel through an opening in the cottonwood trees. Then the full glory of the 300 foot long arched, overhanging cliff walls with some 50 painted figures, including the Great Gallery as well as the Holy Ghost panel, filled us with awe. Truly they are *Sacred Images*, as the title of the splendid book with text by Kelen and Sucec suggests (Kellen and Sucec 1996:11, 23–24). Later I saw pictures presented by Dr. James Farmer (2008), taken of this sacred setting during a rainstorm with waterfalls coming down from the surrounding cliffs, making the whole scene magical. Certainly this sacred place inspired the processional figures and subsequent pilgrimages through the centuries.

The same Barrier Canyon style of rock art that is found in Horseshoe Canyon is repeated in the Book Cliffs east of Green River, in Thompson Wash near the junction with Segó Canyon. The large panel of red Barrier Canyon style pictographs (Figure 5) faces east above a shelf on the canyon wall. Nineteen figures with large eyes and tapered bodies, some six to seven feet tall or

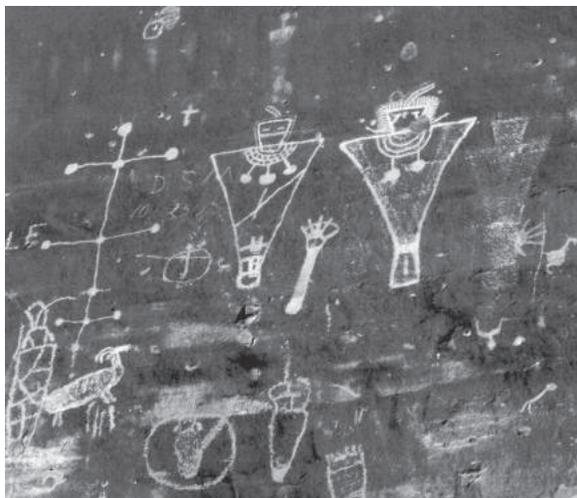


Figure 6. Fremont style petroglyphs superimposed on faint earlier red Barrier Canyon figures.

more, with snakes, birds, and other shamanic helpers, make an impressive panel. Though previously vandalized, BLM restoration efforts have recovered much of the original splendor. Around the corner to the left, superimposed on faint earlier red Barrier Canyon style figures, are Fremont style petroglyphs, with broad shouldered tapered bodies (Figure 6). Necklace designs dominate the panel. On the west cliff wall still farther back is a Ute panel with horses from the historic era, and across the canyon near the corral are other designs of mixed style, some of which have bullet holes and other damage. This long-visited site, with successive styles of rock art, has the aura of sacred place.

The Moab area has a wealth of rock art with rain motifs, birthing scenes, dancing ritual themes, and the famous Moab Man with elbow medicine pouch, but I am particularly impressed with the awesome Lower Courthouse Wash panel. Not far from where the wash empties into the Colorado River, the panel is located high on a sandstone cliff overlook. Prior to vandalism to the panel, Castleton (1984:Vol I,180) described the two large white circles, one with a vertical blue line through it and appearing to be held by a stylized figure with U-shaped head and tapered body. Pictures of the panel, the first before vandalism, the second when vandalized with steel brushes and chemical



Figure 7. Newspaper Rock petroglyphs.

solvents, and the third after partially successful restoration efforts, are placed in succession in a delightful book for young readers, entitled *Native American Rock Art: Messages from the Past* (La Pierre 1994:44). La Pierre, in his book, states that “the paintings will never be the same.” Such vandalism illustrates the vulnerability of sacred places, and the need for site monitors, protection and, as needed, skilled repair. The white discs are no longer so prominent after restoration, but the complex panel with the many spirit figures with decorated torsos, towering so high up the canyon walls, make the site truly sacred.

Located on the road to the Needles District of Canyonlands National Park, Newspaper Rock is near the head of Indian Creek, and features hundreds of petroglyphs on a dark patinated surface (Figure 7). Several styles of well-fashioned petroglyphs, covering centuries from Anasazi to historic Ute horse and rider figures, and with superimposition of later symbols over earlier ones, attest to visitation over a long period of time. The spoked circle, abstracts, big horn designs, six-toed footprints, and hunters with deer, with successive travelers leaving their marks, gives the panel the feel of being a trail shrine for passers-by.

Shay Canyon empties into Indian Creek from the south side, about two miles downstream from



Figure 8. Shay Canyon petroglyphs.

Newspaper Rock. A long sequence of panels makes the canyon special, with lines entirely across a large panel inviting research (Figure 8). Other sites along Indian Creek, especially across the canyon to the south, make visiting each site in succession a sacred journey. Moving south from Indian Creek into Cottonwood Canyon, there are several rock art sites. The most imposing has cliff structures and pictographs, with rock art to the north culminating with a high boulder covered with petroglyphs.

The Cottonwood Canyon jeep trail continues south to Natural Bridges National Monument, where there are five rock art sites. The hike down to Katchina Bridge is rewarded with pictographs and petroglyphs, with figures on the east side and the west side. High above Katchina Bridge is the Rock Ruin site, with crooks among the petroglyphs suggesting that the area is a place of shamanic power.

Another sacred site, this one with a pilgrimage theme, is the Procession Panel, located in southeastern Utah high on Comb Ridge. It is generally approached by a scenic hike from lower Butler Wash to the towering Comb Ridge overlook, though there are footholes in the steep cliffs leading up from the Comb Wash side. Because of shamanic figures holding crooks and the prostrate figure appearing to be carried, the many figures in a row may represent a funeral procession (Figure 9), in the context of a religious understanding which makes this towering site

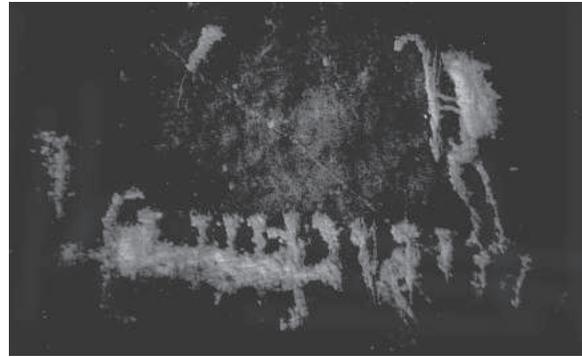


Figure 9. Procession Panel figure.

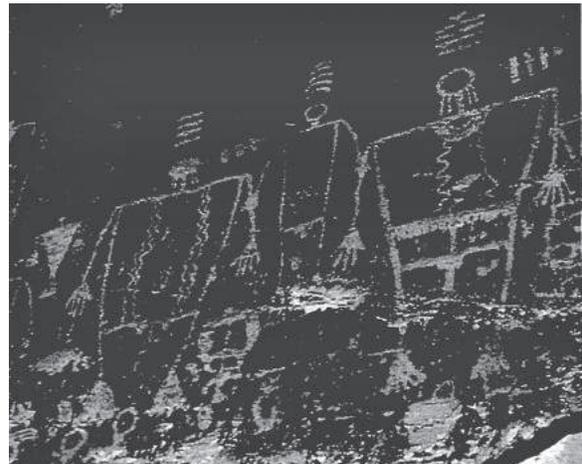


Figure 10. Imposing anthropomorphs along the San Juan River.

a sacred place. Following Butler Wash down to the confluence with the San Juan River, there are spectacular petroglyph panels to the west for half a mile, and along the cliffs to the east all the way to Sand Island. Many hundreds of petroglyphs, ranging from big horn sheep to large, imposing anthropomorphs, with power symbols (Figure 10), line the cliffs by the river.

Moving now to special sacred sites in Arizona, the water sources at Warm Springs, located in the Black Mountains about 21 miles northeast of Topock on the Colorado River, create an oasis of foliage and attract big horn sheep and other wildlife. Down the major wash from the springs, on cliffs and boulders on each side, are hundreds of petroglyphs. The presence of the warm springs in a landscape otherwise mountainous and desolate must have inspired the exultation



Figure 11. Warm Springs "exultation."



Figure 13. Shaman holding a wicket



Figure 12. More Warm Springs petroglyphs.



Figure 14. Rain fringe and big horn.

evident in a splendid small panel (Figure 11). Possible crook, sun and rain symbols, and other powerful motifs, with varying degrees of repetition (Figure 12), bear witness that the petroglyph makers regarded Warm Springs as a sacred place.

The Dripping Spring site is located about 12 miles east southeast of Quartzsite, and the availability of water again made the area sacred for native peoples. Two intersecting cliff walls come together at an angle, and water seeps down at the juncture. Petroglyphs on boulders and the cliffs radiate out in both directions from the spring. A shamanic figure holding a wicket or reversed U bracket, perhaps a healing instrument, is on one boulder (Figure 13). An anthropomorph with prominent digits, along with apparent water lines, is also characteristic of the Dripping Spring petroglyphs.

Farther to the east, and south of Interstate 10, are the New Water Mountains. The window or eye, high on the mountain ridge, is an identifying feature. Several miles east of the window, along the base of the mountains, is the New Water petroglyph site. A large drainage area converges just under a slope where petroglyphs by the hundreds were fashioned on dark basaltic boulders. While there are deer, big horn sheep, possible sun symbols, anthropomorphs, and abstract designs in the Western Archaic Tradition, the most frequent design of all is the apparent rain fringe, attesting to the crucial need for water to sustain all living creatures, hunter and hunted alike (Figure 14).

The Sears Point site is located along the Gila River to the south, near Exit 78 on Interstate 8. A



Figure 15. *Sears Point boulder panel.*



Figure 16. *Hohokam rock art panel at Sears Point.*

major portion of the Sears Point site is on an isolated lava mesa, with a majority of the petroglyphs on sides facing the river. Along the cliffs and on boulders below are prehistoric Patayan style petroglyphs. One panel on a boulder includes a zoomorph with an elongated tail (Figure 15). Trails lead up to the top of the mesa, where there is a summer solstice marker and small clusters of petroglyphs and cupules. Behind the mesa are the remains of rock alignments, and to the east on the point of a lava flow are excellent examples of Hohokam rock art (Figure 16).

The Painted Rocks site is about 10 miles north of Exit 102 on Interstate 8. The site involves a



Figure 17. *Winter solstice interaction at Painted Rocks: left, dagger intersects head of anthropomorph; right, dagger moves on toward the sun symbol.*

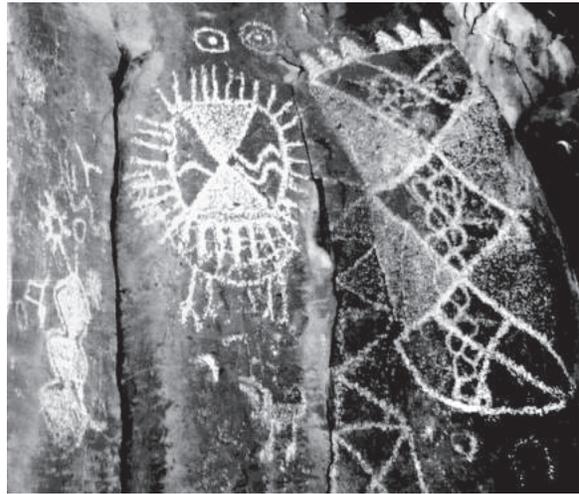


Figure 18. *Gillespie Dam "visionary" images.*

concentration of petroglyphs on a low rocky hill, with a number of the glyphs having solar and lunar symbolism. Of special interest is a grotto on the left side of the hill where, in early afternoon on the Winter Solstice, a dagger of light comes through a window on the left or south side. At 1:20 p.m. the point of the light dagger touches the center of the head of a petroglyph anthropomorph (Figure 17, left). Then the dagger point moves toward the possible sun symbol (Figure 17, right), which it intersects at 1:43 p.m. Solar and lunar interactions are again a characteristic of sacred places.

The Gillespie Dam sites on the Gila River are about 22 miles north of Gila Bend. After crossing the bridge, the first major petroglyph sequence is on the cliffs to the north, facing east above the Gila River. Several prominent possi-



Figure 19. South Mountain dancers.

ble sun symbols mark the eastern exposure, along with lizards, zoomorphs, and geometric patterns. But the most famous panels have “visionary” images (Figure 18). Then for one and a half miles south of the bridge there are thousands of petroglyphs on the edge of the lava flow, overlooking the river. Various styles suggest that the diverse petroglyphs were created over centuries, but Hohokam elements are by far the most numerous.

Approaching the Phoenix area, the White Tank Mountains are located north of Interstate 10 and west of Glendale. A large number of petroglyphs are along the Waterfall Trail, with a concentration at Petroglyph Plaza. One of the unique features of the Celestial Site at Mesquite Canyon in the White Tank Mountains is a possible double sun, which a Ranger Interpreter felt was similar to depictions found in many places representing the supernova witnessed in A.D. 1054.

In South Mountain Park, at the southern border of Phoenix, there are over 14,000 petroglyphs on the mountain range that rises 1,500 feet above the desert valley floor. The desert dwellers who farmed the valley are called Hohokam, a Pima word for “those who have gone” as translated by ethnographer Frank Russell in 1975 and referred



Figure 20. Pima Canyon dancers.



Figure 21. Hieroglyphic pipettes.

to by Todd Bostwick, Phoenix City Archaeologist (2002:16), in his *Landscape of the Spirits*. His book is the definitive work on the South Mountain petroglyphs, with a map showing the location of major sites and trails, and detailed analysis of the life forms and geometric images depicted by the petroglyphs of South Mountain. His description (Bostwick 1994) of the dancing human figure holding a crook and connected to other dancers (Figure 19) in Box Canyon, along with the bird glyphs there, inspired me to visit South Mountain. The dancers in upper Pima Canyon (Figure 20) are famous among South Mountain petroglyphs, and a recent hike into Hieroglyphic Canyon enabled me to photograph the impressive pipettes (Figure 21). Certainly the rock art of South Mountain presents the powerful images characteristic of sacred landscape.



Figure 22. *Cave of Life sun dagger in Petrified National Forest. Painting by Janet Edwards, commissioned and owned by author.*

The Chevelon Steps site is located on the Rock Art Ranch about 15 miles south of Holbrook. In a canyon formed by Chevelon Creek, there are hundreds of petroglyphs, with powerful shamanic figures. A birthing scene, numerous zoomorphic creatures, and many animals, including the deer with accompanying unique human figures, are characteristic of this site. But it is the many majestic anthropomorphs with exotic headgear and ornaments, high on the canyon cliffs in almost inaccessible places, which suggest supernatural or shamanic power, and mark Chevelon Steps as being a sacred place.

In the Petrified Forest National Park many rock art sites have been surveyed, having both human and animal images. Directly accessible years ago, Newspaper Rock is now protected and can be seen from the overlook. The Cave of Life is now completely off-limits, for fear that the surfaces creating the solar light dagger might be compromised. Robert Preston found and photographed many solar interactions in the Petrified Forest, including the Cave of Life

example. Because his pictures in *Arizona Highways* (Dedera 1983:24) did not include the total petroglyph design, I commissioned an artist, Janet Edwards, to paint the interaction based on Preston's photos and a sketch of the total petroglyph design by Hans Bertsch (1982:30). The result (Figure 22) is an awesome vision of the light dagger passing through the shaman's powerful wand and on through Kokopelli's fertile seed-bearing hump to the center of the enclosed cross, releasing the germinative elements to descend on the copulating couple to make possible the miracle of conception, birth, and new life. The Puerco Ruin site also has a solar interaction involving a spiral, along with a great number of petroglyphs, with seemingly supernatural beings with headdresses (Figure 23).

Near the entrance to Canyon de Chelly there is a shelter with rock art on the back wall and both sides. Many other rock shelters and ruins, including White House ruin, are present in the canyon, giving evidence of occupation over long periods of time. Many handprints in the canyon,



Figure 23. "Supernatural beings" at Puerco Ruin site.



Figure 24. Canyon de Chelly handprint types.

including negative and striated designs (Figure 24), also illustrate a repeated type of rock art design through the centuries. In addition to the spectacular beauty of Canyon de Chelly, the Ceremonial Cave and the healing ritual at the Shaman site would also indicate a sacred place. At the latter site, there is a figure holding a wicket-shaped object, and to the right, a shaman with a headfeather holds a wicket over the pelvis of a reclining woman, suggesting a healing ritual or perhaps a ritual to enable the woman to have a child (Grant 1978:185). Certainly ceremony and ritual are characteristic of the sacred.

Moving into New Mexico to the Zuni Village of the Three Kivas, the star and crescent moon

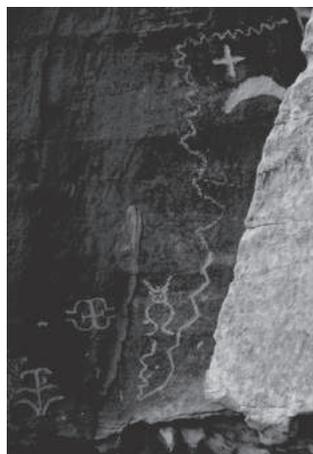


Figure 25. Zuni star and crescent.



Figure 26. Rock art behind ruins at Chaco Canyon.

symbols high above the other glyphs (Figure 25) reveal an interest in astronomical phenomena, similar to features in Chaco Canyon and other sites, which some believe represent the Supernova of A.D. 1054. Another panel nearby has anthropomorphs, serpents, hand prints, and spirals. Our Zuni guide to the site made an offering, expressing his regard for the sacredness of the site. Also, around the corner, there were twentieth-century masks painted with multiple colors, which our guide felt were made by shepherders.

A thousand years ago Chaco Canyon had become the flourishing center of Anasazi culture, with a network of roads, irrigation ditches, and masonry pueblos, the most famous being Pueblo Bonito. Rock art is found on the cliffs behind many of the ruins (Figure 26), as well as along trails and



Figure 27. Bird with a human head in Rinconada Canyon.

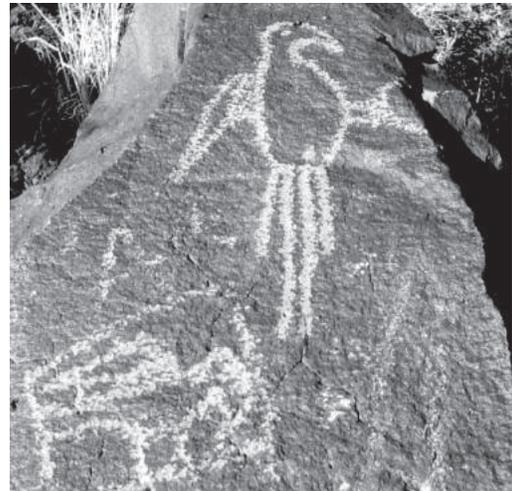


Figure 29. Macaw in Boca Negra Unit.



Figure 28. Bird and abstract design in Rinconada Canyon.



Figure 30. Star-being with claws on West Mesa.

isolated boulders. Unfortunately, the solar alignment on Fajada Butte has been compromised, due to excessive visitation, but the star, crescent and handprint features on an overhang below Penasco Blanco are a most famous archaeoastronomy panel, thought by many to represent the Supernova of A.D. 1054.

The Petroglyph National Monument to the West of Albuquerque, across the Rio Grande along the 17 mile West Mesa escarpment, has over 15,000 petroglyphs. The designs depict human and animal forms, as well as snakes, horned ser-

pents, birds, and many other representational and abstract designs. Kachina figures, star faced beings, flute players, mask, and shields are also featured. Rinconada Canyon to the south, and Piedras Marcadas to the north, each have over 3,000 petroglyphs. A petroglyph of a bird with a human face in Rinconada Canyon seems to have a ceremonial purpose (Figure 27), and also at the western end of the canyon there is an attractive abstract design with a bird figure (Figure 28). A cove in Piedras Marcadas Canyon has several flute players.

The macaw is especially found in Boca Negra Canyon, formerly Indian Petroglyph State Park



Figure 31. Plumed serpent design at White Rock Canyon.



Figure 32. One-eyed horned serpent.

(Figure 29). These brilliantly colored birds were brought from Mexico in trade, and were sometimes called Sacred Rain Birds (Slifer 1998:229). Numerous depictions of star-beings are found on the West Mesa (Figure 30). Ceremonial figures are associated with sacred places along the escarpment, and some shrines and sacred sites are still used by Pueblo people today.

One of the spectacular petroglyph hikes in New Mexico is down from the White Rock Overlook to the Rio Grande. The descent into White Rock Canyon has side trails to water seeps and springs, with serpent designs being common (Figure 31), and a horned serpent with one eye and a shield



Figure 33. La Cieneguilla rock art.

(Figure 32) is especially unique. Serpent figures by water sources along the trail seem to be guardians of the springs. Over 2,000 petroglyphs have been recorded, and a large “Bird Rock” with several styles of bird glyphs is located near the river.

The La Cieneguilla site is located southwest of Santa Fe, and has over 4,000 petroglyphs. It is on the west side of the Santa Fe River, along the escarpment and up side canyons. One of the panels along the escarpment is of particular interest, because a figure on the left side is holding a possible medicine bag (Figure 33). Another figure overlaps two rock surfaces, with the juncture of the surfaces dividing the figure. Locals call the La Cieneguilla site Petroglyphs “Por Los Ninos,” perhaps because of the fertility symbolism on several panels along the escarpment.

The Galisteo Basin, about 20 miles south of Santa Fe, has many excellent sites. On a volcanic ridge which is immediately north of the little village of Galisteo, there is a half mile of petroglyphs. It is located on private property, but the owner, given proof of insurance coverage and documents explaining our purpose, gave my caravan permission to photograph the petroglyphs along the ridge. A large ogre mask, similar to others at the San Cristobal site in the Galisteo Basin, was located on top of the ridge. Many hundreds of



Figure 34. Galisteo Ridge panel.

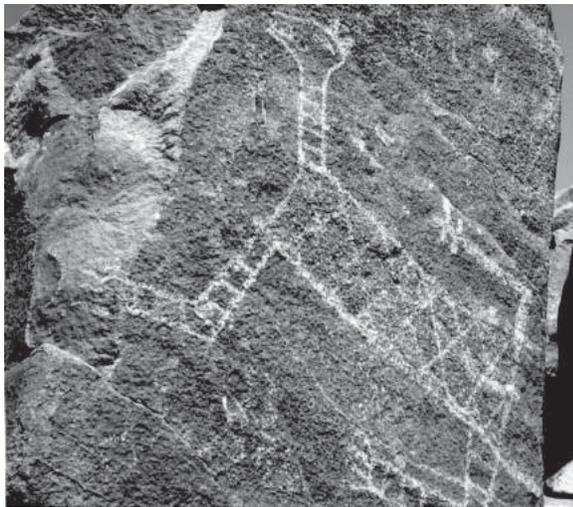


Figure 35. Stylized mountain lion at Three Rivers.

petroglyphs, with masks, birds, animals, shields, and ceremonial figures continue for a half mile. A panel on the ridge, right above the owner's house, has a human figure, quadrupeds, a horned creature, and many bird symbols (Figure 34), certainly signs of the diversity of life.

Farther to the south, the Three Rivers site is on a ridge extending to the west from a partially excavated village. A trail 1,400 yards long links many of the thousands of Jornada Style petroglyphs. Stylized animals, birds, faces, masks, and abstract designs predominate. An unusual mountain lion on a tall standing boulder (Figure 35) was featured on the cover of the February 2007 *New Mexico* magazine. Another



Figure 36. White horned dancer.

patterned body animal illustrates the astonishing variety of highly creative and stylized life forms. More abstract designs suggest the power and mystery of this profoundly sacred site.

In Texas, Hueco Tanks State Historical Park is located about 30 miles east of El Paso. Over 3,000 rock paintings are in caves and overhangs in the huge granite outcrops. A white pictograph of a horned dancer, which our guide called a White Buffalo Kachina dancer (Figure 36), is in a shelter where there are deep bedrock mortars. A large number of painted masks (Figure 37) adorn shelters and crevices, with some near cisterns and tanks. The many water tanks at Hueco Tanks attracted Native Americans in pre-historic times, and provided water for stagecoach and wagon trains in the historic era.

The Big Bend National Park, at the extreme western border, has an extensive rock art site, named after the Indian Head monolith passed on the way to the park boundary. Huge boulders, which fell from the cliffs above, form rock shelters, with metates and mortars showing occupation for long periods of time. Handprint and shield pictographs are on the shelter ceilings. Petroglyphs are also on the exterior walls of shelters, and hundreds of petroglyphs on the cliffs above make the site truly awesome.



Figure 37. Hueco Tanks painted mask.



Figure 39. Pictographs in Fate Bell Shelter.

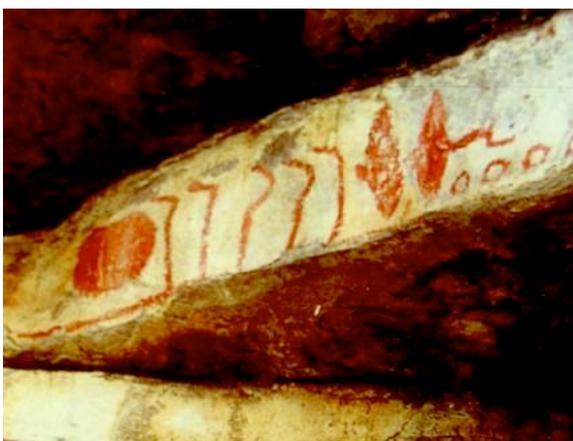


Figure 38. Paint Rock pictographs.



Figure 40. White Shaman pictograph.

A mile northwest of Paint Rock, Texas, there are hundreds of pictographs on cliffs, just north of the Concho River. Most of the pictographs are red (Figure 38), though a few are black, white, and orange. A winter solstice interaction draws annual visitors, and adds to the sacredness of the site.

Many rock sites are located throughout the Lower Pecos River area, and it is appropriate to conclude this survey of sacred sites with a tribute to Jim Zintgraff, who did so much to protect the sacred places. While hunting in Seminole Canyon, Jim came across Fate Bell Shelter and the pictographs there (Figure 39). He put his gun away and got out his camera to start capturing the ancient paintings on film. It became the passion of his

life, and he was utterly devoted to photographing, recording, and protecting the Lower Pecos rock art. The Rock Art Foundation he established purchased the White Shaman's Shelter (Figure 40) to protect it. He passed away on March 5, 2006, but will ever be remembered for his dedication to saving sacred sites (see Turpin and Zintgraff 1991).

Acknowledgements. Appreciation is certainly due for the labors of Diane Orr and David Sucec for their efforts and guidance as Abstract Coordinators and Symposium Chair. Ann Fulton encouraged me to press on to finish this paper, and by phone and letter Anne McConnell helped

me with my aged computer and limited skills, wondering, I am sure, what faced her when I sent in the completed paper, with such a long survey of sacred sites. Doug Murphy, owner of the Ashley Creek property, provided the picture of the summer solstice interaction.

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