

# UTAH ROCK ART

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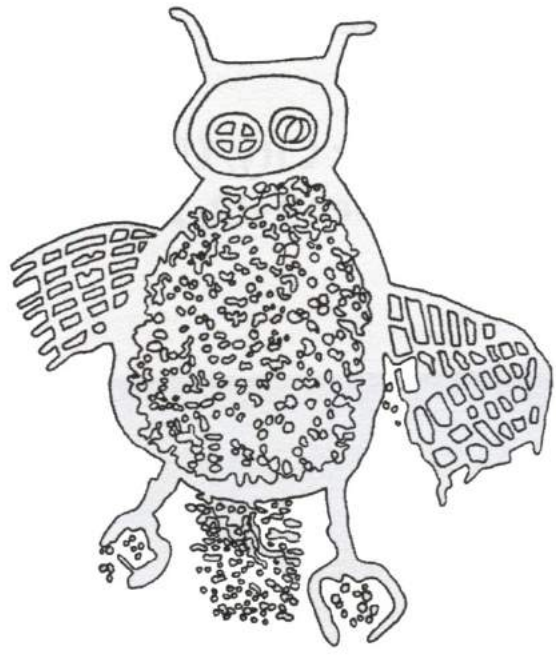
**September 22–26, 2011**

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## UTAH'S EARLIEST EUROPEAN INSCRIPTIONS

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Rock Arters don't usually think about historic inscriptions by Europeans, but they're part of a continuum, just like Native American inscriptions began to take on European-derived subjects: horses — guns — men in hats.

### PASO POR AQUI 1776

The study of European inscriptions is livelier than you might think, since the oldest one, in the Lake Powell area, was only reported in September of 2006 (Page 2010). Glen Canyon exploring parties, before the lake, failed to find it.

It began to be seen just a few years before it was reported. Or, more accurately, it was not seen; not recognized, as during the period when Lake Powell was at its highest people could easily access the little canyon it's in and they wrote graffiti all over it.

Ordinarily, there would be no reason to visit this obscure place on Gunsight Butte. Before the lake, it would have been well above the valley floor. But when the lake was high, a nearby bay offered a nice houseboat anchorage. At Lake Powell during busy times a houseboat occupies every suitable cove. So people stayed there repeatedly during the high water years, and walked around. You could even take a small boat most of the way up to the little canyon with the inscription. The park service thinks that's why there's so much graffiti there, the easy access over a period of time.

Then the lake went down, and houseboats no longer landed in the area. But a crew from the

GRIT team just happened to visit. Two crew ladies walked up into the little canyon and were astute enough to see what the boaters had not, the faint inscription:

Paso por Aqui

Año 1776

now under graffiti (Figure 1) as well as eroded (Ostapuk 2007; Page 2010).



**Figure 1.** 1776 inscription, enhanced. GCNRA photo.

The Graffiti Intervention Team, GRIT, is the Lake Powell volunteer graffiti removal program. The guy who donated the first houseboat that the group used was a John Wayne fan, thus the name, as in the John Wayne movie True Grit. Actually, they use wire brushes, not sandpaper.

“Paso por aqui”, roughly “I was here”, or “I came this way”, is what the early Spanish would write on the rocks. A 1605 “Paso por

Aqui” inscription by Don Juan Oñate at El Morro rock in New Mexico is one of the must-see sights of the Southwest.

Our Gunsight Butte “Paso por Aqui” is the only known inscription left by the Dominguez-Escalante party.

The expedition’s journal tells why it’s there. Having given up on getting to California before winter, they were trying to find the way home. They had native guides from time to time, and knew there was a ford across the Colorado in what we call Glen Canyon, but not exactly where. They had come north, overland, from part way down the Paria Canyon, and were having a bad time in this rugged country, resorting to killing a horse for food, and frustrated by failed attempts to find the ford (Page 2010, McDonald 2010).

By the 6th of November they had gotten close. It was stormy the 5th and 6th; the journal entry for November 6th says:

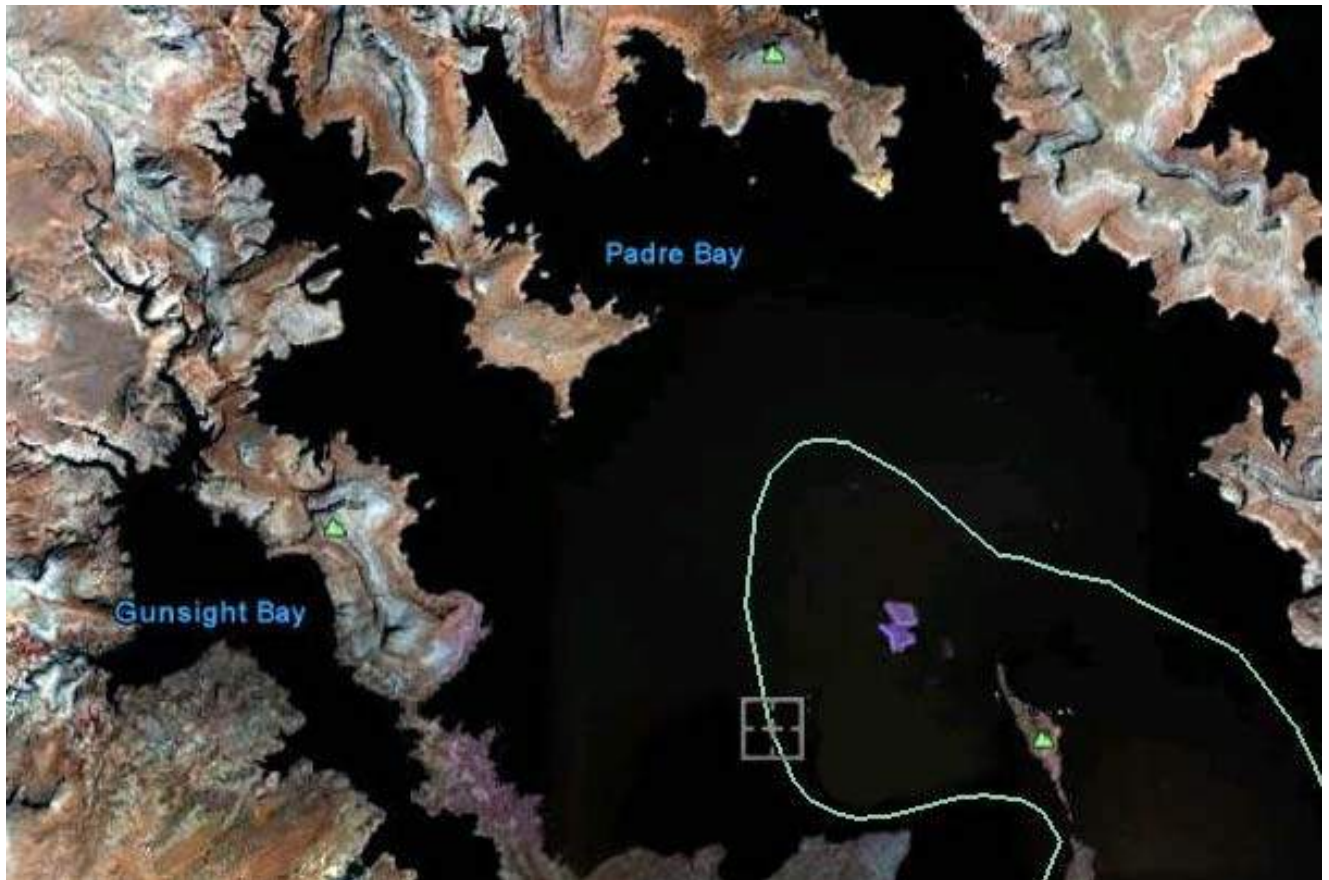
...stopped for a long time by a strong blizzard and tempest, heavy storm and a torrent of rain and large hail, with horrible thunder and lightning. We chanted the Litany of the Virgin in order that She might ask some relief for us, and God was pleased that the storm should cease. (McDonald, Diario y Derretero)

The terrible storm was over, but it did keep on raining, and when they found a sheltered place, they stopped for the night. This little canyon would have been a perfect place to wait it out, with time on their hands to make a record of their passing through. An alcove near the inscription could have been used to sleep in, out of the rain.

The next day they went down towards the river and found the ford, not far away, carving steps into the rock to get their animals down to the river. The ford was used through the years until Lee’s Ferry opened near the mouth of the Paria in 1873.

Through the years the exact location of the ford was forgotten, until 1937, when it was then relocated from the carved Spanish steps, which could be seen until the lake covered them up (Heath 2004), as seen in Figure 2

When we ran the river in the years before the lake, because the dam was under construction, we couldn’t run all the way to Lees Ferry. Our take-out was referred to as the Crossing of the Fathers, but was actually a bit upstream, at the end of a long straight stretch. A dirt road from here led out to Wahweap. Presumably the take-out was here, instead of at the ford, because we had no need for a ford, and it was more accessible. The landscape in that area would have been truly formidable for early travelers.



**Figure 2.** Location of “The Crossing of the Fathers”. Google Earth photo.

There was some excitement in this empty landscape in October of 1962 when a huge crew came, sets were built, and scenes were shot for the movie *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. John the Baptist did his thing right at our take-out.

After the discovery the inscription had to be authenticated. In addition to superposition of graffiti and severe weathering of the inscription, in cooperation between the Park Service and the Page chapter of the Old Spanish Trail Association (OSTA), the inscription was laser-scanned. Studies of the lichens, calligraphy in “New World Spanish Cursive”, contamination of the rock varnish from 20th century atmospheric lead, and microlaminations of the rock varnish, added evidence to validate the date. They did not ask

our Farrell Lytle to use his x-ray fluorescence analysis, which I think was a mistake, but one of the leading people in Page doesn’t believe in it. They tried a metal detector at the alcove, and got some hits, so it is planned that a crew would go in there and excavate (Page 2010; King, pers. comm. 2011; Baker, pers comm 2012).

After the discovery, the site was visited by people from the Park Service, some members of OSTA, and some GRIT team volunteers, including my husband Jim Olive, and others who managed to find out where it is. The Park Service is very protective of the exact location of this precious site, and does not give it out.

I was planning to meet Jim in Page after a GRIT trip this August and visit the site, but just

this summer, the Park Service totally closed it. This is temporary while they're deciding how to handle limited access (King, pers comm 2011; Baker, pers. comm. 2012).

OSTA is working on an application to the National Register of Historic Places.

After the Dominguez-Escalante Expedition, the ford in Glen Canyon wasn't used by Europeans until 1829, by the caravan of Antonio Armijo, a Mexican merchant (Bowen 2005).

After this, travelers between New Mexico and Los Angeles began to use the northern route, which though longer was easier, had better grass for the animals, and easier access to water holes. They weren't going straight through Arizona because of hostile tribes.

### **WOLFSKILL/YOUNT 1831**

Our next two inscriptions are both from 1831, the first from when the first Anglo caravan from New Mexico to California followed the trail, leaving inscriptions at the mouth of Braffet Canyon.

After winding through the central Utah mountains, the trail came out near Parowan, and went south through the corridor of Parowan and Cedar Valleys, before turning west through the southern edge of the Escalante Desert (BLM 2006).

Braffet Canyon is between Summit and Enoch. Braffet is one of those names that never did settle down into a consistent spelling. It's also spelled with an "it" ending instead of "et", as in Braffits Creek, nearby Braffit Ridge, and Braffit Point. In rock art the "et" spelling has stuck.

A local and older name for the East Fork of Braffit's Creek is Winn's/Wynn's Creek, with either an i or a y, with the West Fork being Braffit's Creek proper — both named after local farmers (Matheson, pers. comm. 2010).

Petroglyphs there have long been known. It was one of the sites visited by URARA when I first joined, not long after the group was formed. Both Schaafsma and Castleton list Braffet Canyon, but not the historic inscriptions (Castleton 1979; Schaafsma 1994). The prehistoric glyphs are related to those at Parowan Gap (Schaafsma 1994:106).

Two men who were well-known Utah historians and rock art enthusiasts wrote about and photographed the historic inscriptions in Braffet Canyon: William R. Palmer and Charles Kelly (Palmer 1941; Kelly 1943, 1950).

More recently, Al Matheson of Cedar City wrote about it in *Spanish Traces*, the journal of the Old Spanish Trail Association (Matheson 2006). And James Knipmeyer, a Missouri schoolteacher who is obsessed by the Southwest and its historic inscriptions, has written about them (Knipmeyer 2002:18-19). George Thompson in his book on ghost towns and lost mines, *Some Dreams Die*, gives a speculative, fanciful account of happenings leading to the historical inscriptions (Thompson 1982:131).

Both of the two historic rocks had the date 1831 (Figure 3). One had the word GOLD but with the G and the L reversed. The other had a cross, usually referred to as a Spanish cross, which it commonly is. But the date, 1831, indicates these inscriptions were done by members of the Wolfskill/Yount party, the first caravan from New Mexico to travel the entire



northern variant of the Old Spanish Trail, which from then until 1853 or 1854 became very busy.

Both rocks also have initials. The rock with the cross has been interpreted as having the initials AW and LD, or AW and UJ, or AW and LB, with a dot or a dash between them (Palmer 1941; Kelly 1950:12; Knipmeyer 2002; Utah State Hist. Soc. Res. Center 2009). And the GOLD rock as TD and TW, with a backwards F below.

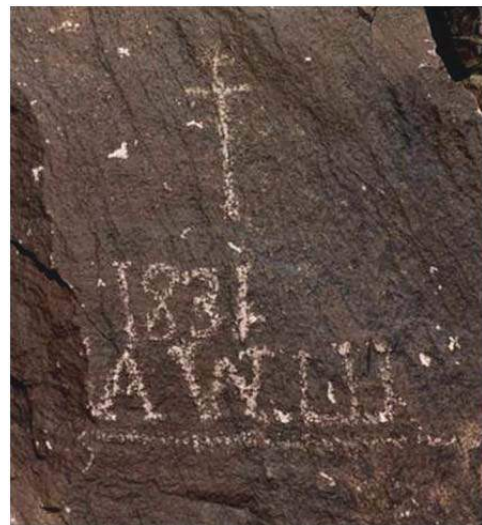
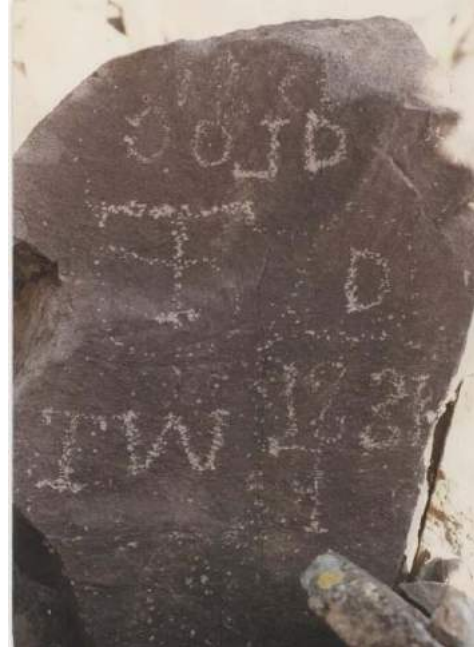
Except for LB — one party member was named Lewis Burton — none of the initials match men known to be in the group, which is curious. But no official journal was kept, and information about the expedition has come from Wolfskill's ledger of money transactions — which would not involve everyone as not all were his employees — and from reminiscences in later years. The names of all are not known with certainty (Engstrand 1965:66).

In spite of this, according to archeologist Dave Madsen no one seriously doubts the authenticity of these inscriptions (Madsen, pers. comm. Oct 2010).

As it turned, out the word GOLD was the cause of serious disruption not only to these two historic rocks, but to prehistoric petroglyphs. Charles Kelly states, "The whole canyon, we learned later, had been dug in a search for the gold supposed to have been buried there." (Kelly 1850:12)

The most serious disruption was that someone blasted the immediate area of the historic rocks with dynamite, still searching for gold. After he came back from the Navy, Al Matheson, who has his father's photos from the 20s of the

site, as well as his own from the 60s, saw that this had happened; it was in the '70s.



**Figure 3.** Al Matheson photos.

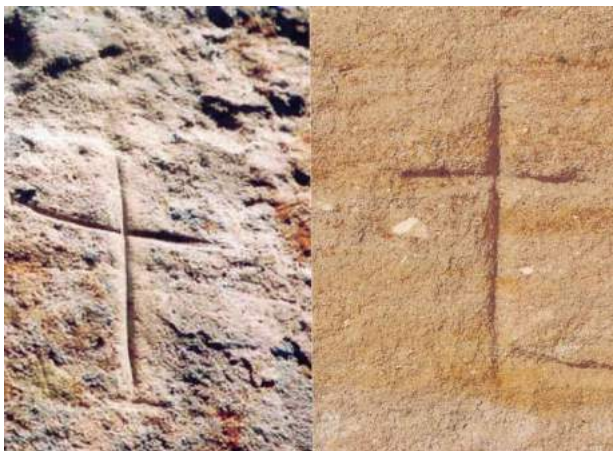
Rocks were moved, turned upside down, and smashed (Figure 4). Also rocks have been stolen through the years. And the two historic rocks can no longer be found (Matheson, pers. comm 2011).



**Figure 4.** Al Matheson photo.

The Braffet Canyon area is a couple of miles east of the main Old Spanish Trail route, but Indians, trappers, and travelers found it a good place for water, grazing, and camping (Kelly 1950:21).

Crosses on the rocks (Figure 5) were a common theme after the arrival of the Spanish. Al Matheson (Matheson, pers. comm. 2011) photographed rocks with just “Spanish crosses” on the Armijo trail and on the Old Spanish Trail. One on the Armijo trail would most likely be from his expedition of 1828; since there are no dates, we don’t know.



**Figure 5.** Al Matheson photos

## DENIS JULIEN 1831

Denis Julian inscriptions on the Green and the Colorado are well known sights on river trips, exploited as something to see by river outfitters. A bewildering array of websites mention the river sites. But the 1831 inscription in the Uintah Basin is not well known.

The history of the first trading post in Utah, known as Fort Uintah, Fort Winty, Fort Twinty, or Fort Robidoux, has been obscure, but was clarified by James Knipmeyer in a 1996 paper on the Julien inscriptions in the *Utah Historical Quarterly* (Knipmeyer 1996).

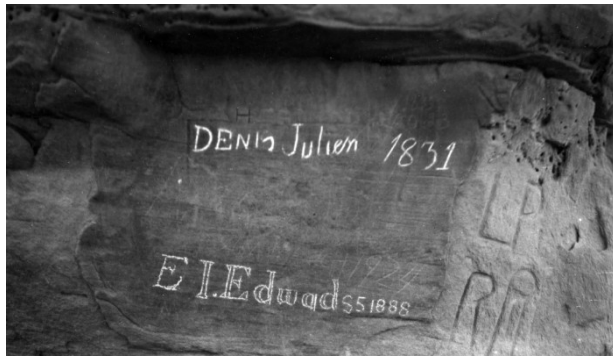
First William and James Reed along with Denis Julien pioneered a small trading post near Whiterocks in 1828, which was in business four years, being called Reed’s Fort or Reed Trading Post. In 1832 it was bought by the well-known fur trader Antoine Robidoux, who rebuilt it much larger, farther from the flood plain, and brought in more trappers (Barton 1996:54; Barton 1994). It then became an important outpost of white civilization, visited by many well-known early Western characters. Knowledge of even the smaller Reed version of the trading post survived in oral history of the Utes and other area residents (Barton 1996).

The location of the historical monument for the fort, which is on some maps, is not at the actual site just north of the confluence of the Whiterocks and Uinta Rivers.

An 1838 visitor to the fort wrote that its trapping and trade was on the Green and Colorado and their tributaries, which is exactly where most of the Julien inscriptions are found (Knipmeyer 1996:68). During this period

Julien left his first inscription on a bluff near a branch of the Uinta River about 10 miles south of the town of Whiterocks. The rock (Figures 6 and 7) bears other inscriptions. It was first reported a hundred years later by University of Utah archeologist Julian Steward who was examining the area while waiting to see a Ute Sun Dance at Whiterocks (Kelly 1933:84).

Unfortunately the site is on private land and behind a locked gate. The owner is John Edward Fausett. He does not like visitors (Allison, pers. comm. 2010).



**Figure 6.** Charles Kelly photo, 1933. Names are chalked. Used by permission, Utah State Historical Society, all rights reserved.



**Figure 7.** James R. Allison photo, 2010. Julien inscription is hard to see. These two photos are taken from slightly different viewpoints.

“Of the 10 known inscriptions accepted by at least some writers and historians” (Knipmeyer 1996:65), the one in the Basin is the earliest, and an 1844 one discovered by Jim Stiles in 1977 when he was an Arches ranger is the last (Stiles 2004).

Calligraphy in the various inscriptions varies, but Julien did change his style of writing somewhat at the different sites. Knipmeyer thinks it probable all are authentic, though some are more obscure than others. The cursive writing in the Arches inscription matches Julien’s two known signatures on documents (Knipmeyer 1996:66). The exact location for this inscription is on the National Register document.

For years our trapper was commonly known as “the enigmatic Denis Julien”, because of lack of data on him. But Knipmeyer has found out a lot more, reported in his 2001 paper in the *Missouri Historical Review*, “Denis Julien: Midwestern Fur Trader”. Julien first turns up in the historical record in St. Louis, and he had a whole career in the Midwest (Knipmeyer 2001) before moving to Taos in 1827, his base for further fur-trapping and trading ventures into Utah. Here in Utah he had a whole second career as a trapper and trader.

The Julien inscription at the mouth of Hell Roaring Canyon in Labyrinth Canyon with his two drawings is the most famous, discovered in 1893.

Because most of Julien’s inscriptions are on the river and from 1836, and at that time no later ones were known, with no particular evidence Charles Kelly speculated that Julien had died in the rapids (Kelly 1933: 87. But Jim Stiles discovered the later inscription in Arches, plus there is an ambiguous later reference to him in



California — and Knipmeyer thinks that, like one of the Robidoux, his friends and associates, he may have settled in California in his last years (Knipmeyer 1996:67,69).

Behind these important examples of rocks with names — or at least initials — and dates — and a reason to be where they are, is a whole larger group of names without dates — dates without names — and Spanish crosses without names or dates — that look old or have reason to be there, or both, that don't offer enough information — and possibly are hoaxes — or possibly not (Dorn et al 2011).

As for the Julien inscription that Stiles found in Arches in 1977, and the faint 1776 inscription the two women on the GRIT trip were astute enough to recognize where others had not, anyone who wanders around in the backcountry could turn up an historic inscription not seen by people for these many years.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The search for Indian rock art and Anglo or Spanish inscriptions overlaps. Often the people who wrote about these historic inscriptions, like Kelly and Beckwith, were the same ones that roamed Utah in search of petroglyphs.

Interestingly, all three of these inscriptions were written by people who started their journey in Santa Fe, or from Taos up the Rio Grande Valley. This area was the center of European civilization in Southwest for decades in the early years.

From Santa Fe travelers would head north (Figure 8) to the Rio Grande valley, then go northwest on the Main Route, or through Taos for the Northern Route. From the hills above Santa Fe, you can see up the highway a long ways, cars still following the same valley north as these explorers and trappers did starting in 1776.



**Figure 8.** The old trails followed the route of least resistance. The Old Spanish Trail went through the hills north of Santa Fe, and the modern highway can be seen in the upper center going up the valley, as they did

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