

Rock Art of the Colorado River Valley Field Office

An Ancillary Study of the

Ute Trails Project



D A R G

Dominquez Archaeological Research Group



This was a Section 110 related project for the purpose of conducting a study of the rock art within the administrative boundary of the Colorado River Valley Field Office (CRVFO), Bureau of Land Management. It is ancillary to the Ute Trails Project, a research endeavor of Dominguez Archaeological Research Group (DARG). The purposes of the study were to revisit and digitally photograph previously recorded rock art panels and record any new panels or sites encountered during the revisits.

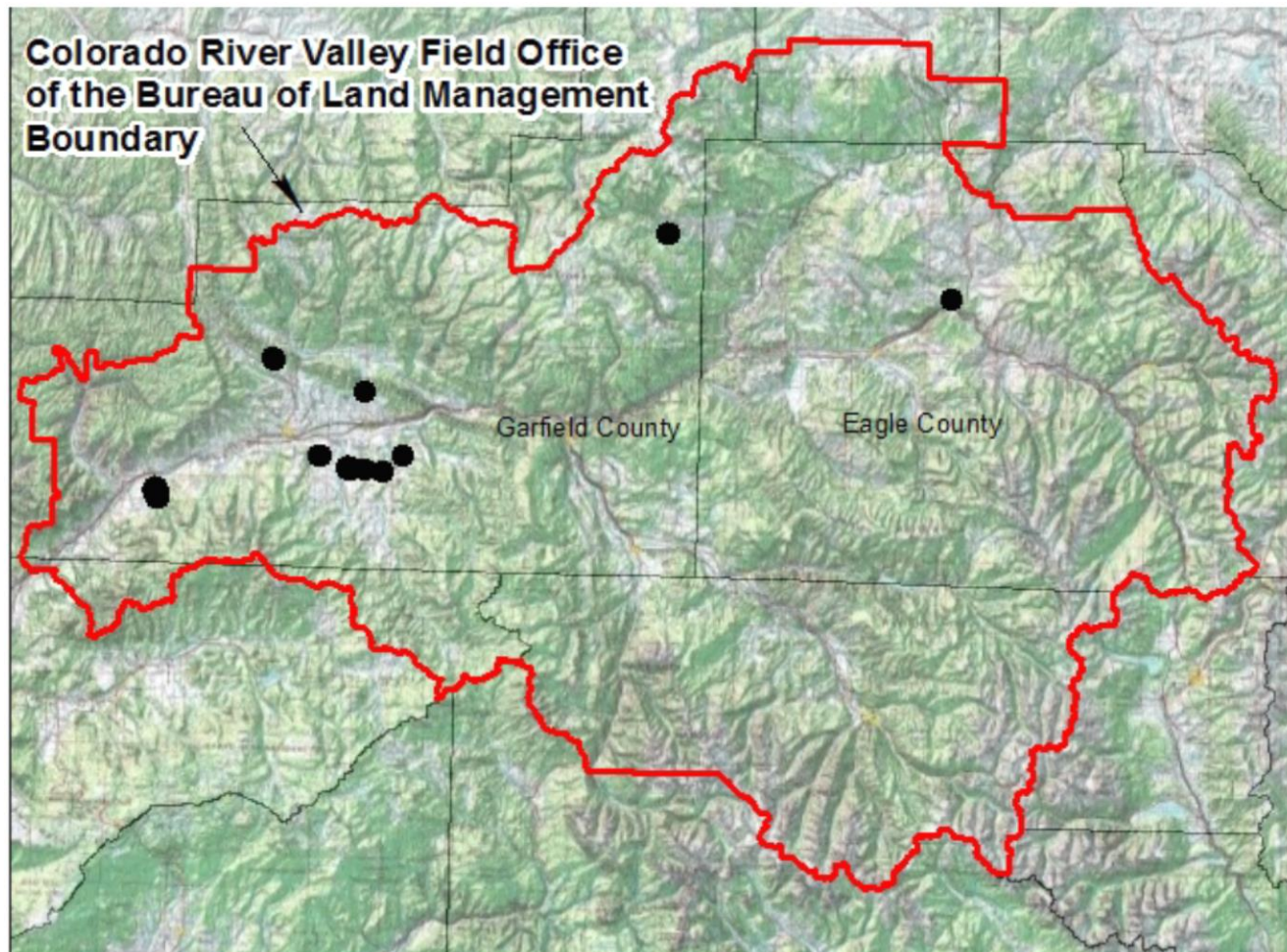
Carl E. Conner, Principal Investigator

Masha Conner, Photographer and Graphics Artist/Designer

Numerous Western science classifications of rock art panels and motifs have been published. For this and other regional studies we are using Cole (1987, 2009, 2011, 2016), Keyser (2008), and Keyser and Klassen (2001) as our main references.

Ten rock art sites were included in this project. Interestingly, they represent a broad spectrum of the types present in west-central Colorado.

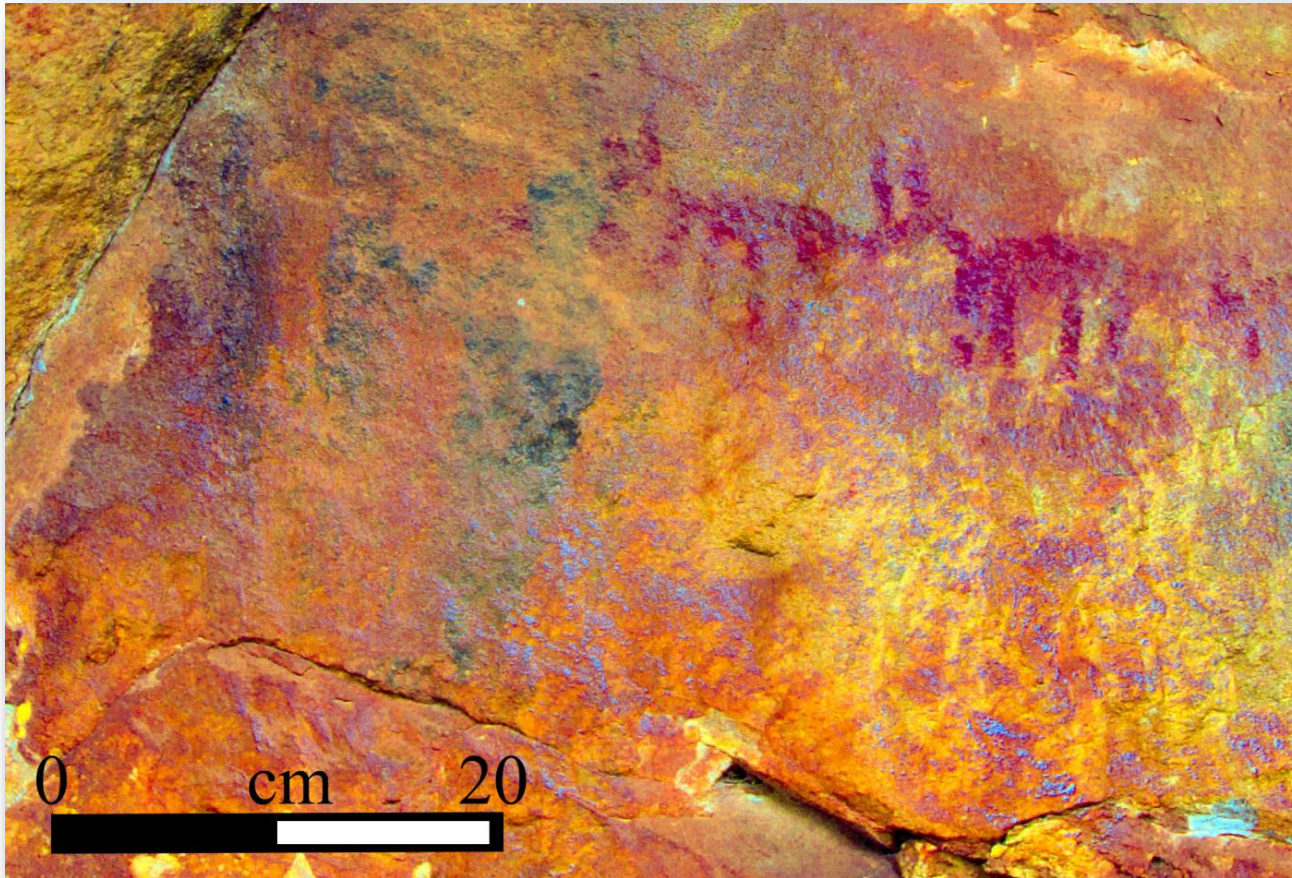
The style chronologies generally follow Sally Cole's (1990, 2009): Abstract- Geometric Tradition (~4000 BC – AD 500/1000); Barrier Canyon style (~2000 BC – AD 400); Uncompahgre style (~1000 BC or earlier – ad 1000); generalized Basketmaker II - III (~1000/400 BC – AD 600); generalized Basketmaker III - Pueblo I and Pueblo II - Pueblo III (~ AD 600–1350); generalized Fremont (~ AD 400/600 – 1300/1500); early historic Ute (~ AD 1500s – 1825/1850) and late historic Ute (~1825/1850 – 1900 and later).



Map showing the distribution of rock art sites considered by this study within the Colorado River Valley Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management.

Rock art was created by artisan shaman (men and women) who were observers of nature and the universe. They were people who wanted to relate their observations, religious beliefs and experiences, or portray images of themselves or mythological figures. They used rock art to assist in a hunt, or to make a record of the seasonal passage of the sun or a star. Shamanistic symbolism is present throughout and represents techniques of a particular elite, who were able to communicate with the supernatural through visions created by fasting or ingesting hallucinogenic plants. They were able through animal spirit helpers to transform themselves, and such helpers are commonly depicted in rock art of the Southwest. As artisan-shaman probably created the majority of the rock art, sites where it occurs likely served some manner of religious center or spiritual focal point.

Defining temporal and possible cultural boundaries through rock art images is an on-going research process. “Repeated motifs can be identified and traced through time and space, which in turn may shed light on the dynamic histories of human populations, patterns of their migrations and interactions, and even continuities to the present indigenous societies” (Zhu et al. 2009). Preservation of the images is key to the future research. Technological advances in photography and new computer programs are aiding in this effort.



Photographs of the panels during this project were made with a Canon Rebel 6D full frame camera (20.2 megapixel), then imported into Adobe Photoshop and D-Stretch programs for processing and enhancement.

Here you see possible Barrier Canyon Style rock art (black) super-imposed on Early Hunter Tradition zoomorphs (red) at 5EA1273.

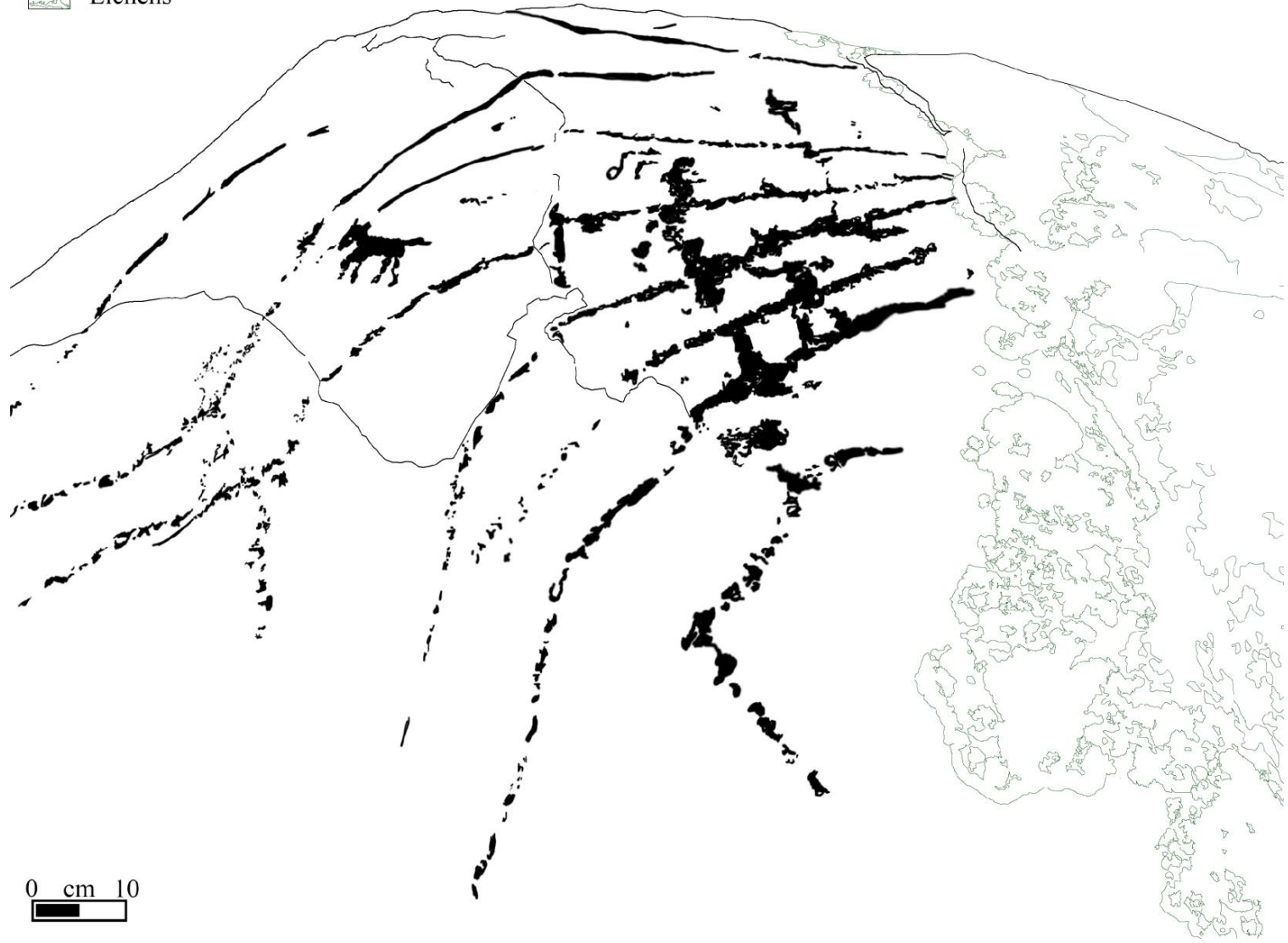
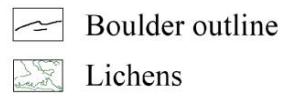
There are several distinctive, traceable motifs. The first, which Sally Cole has identified as belonging to the Abstract-Geometric style, is also a type she classifies as the oldest of two that represent the Archaic. It contains wheel-like forms with spokes, net-like forms and other linear motifs (Cole 1990, 2009).



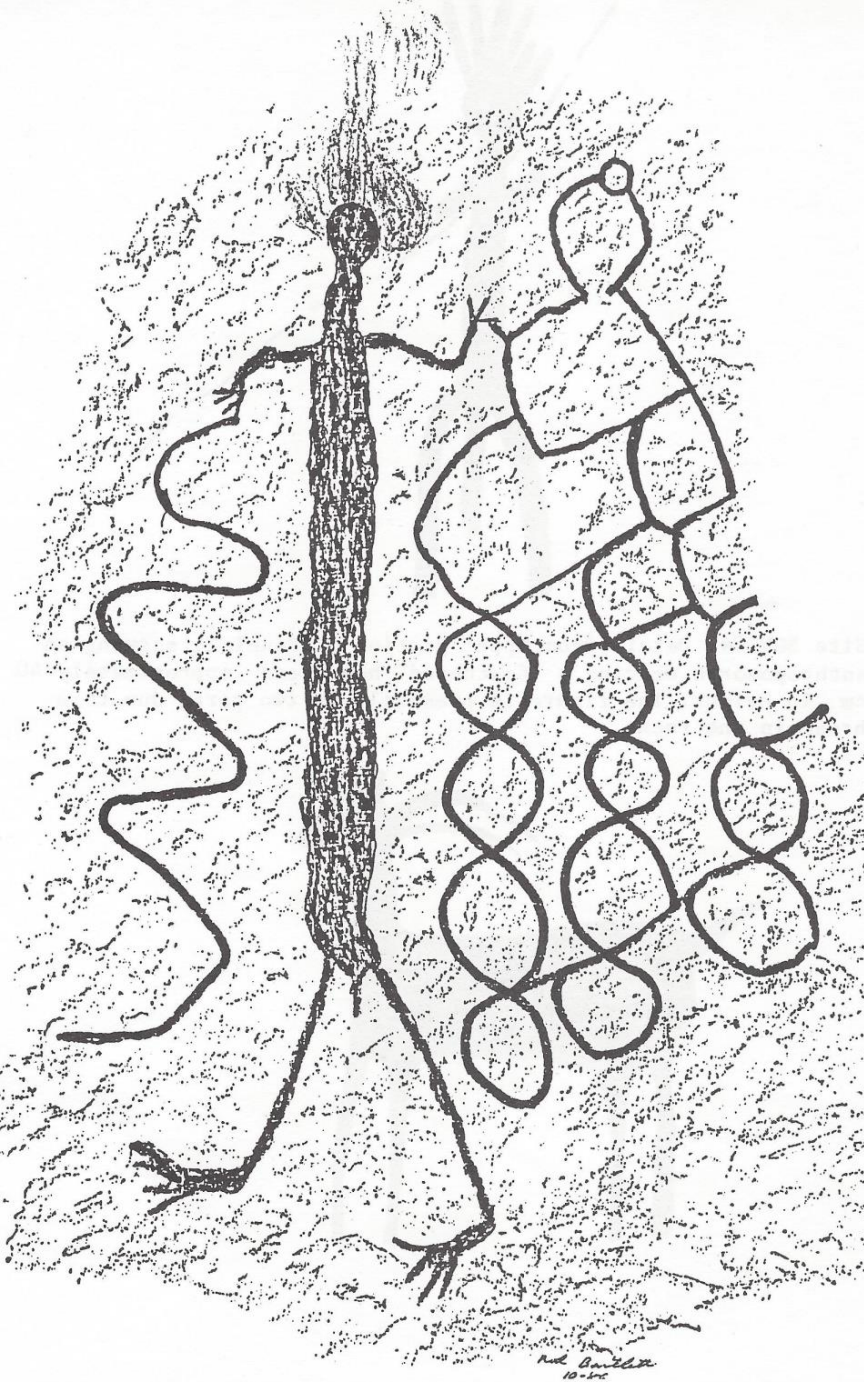
This is Panel 2 of 5GF2. It has three – distinctive elements: a large, colorful, wheel-like glyph with spokes; two anthropomorphs with apparent wings for arms; and, a phallic symbol that connects to the colored circle. The circular glyph with spokes is a prominent element in Abstract-Geometric sites in west central Colorado, and may represent a “medicine” wheel. This panel has a number of bullet holes that were digitally removed for this graphic.



The two figures with wing-like arms are characteristic of the Abajo-LaSal style rock art, pre-AD 1– AD 900 (Cole 1990:151,157). Importantly, winged anthropomorphs in rock art are interpreted as symbolism of shamanistic flight and transformation (Hedges 1985:86-89).



Basalt boulder at 5GF133 having Abstract-Geometric style pecked lines and one identifiable animal glyph.



Keyser and Klassen (2001:148-150) discuss the anti-structural nature of the similar Northwest Plains Pecked Abstract type of rock art. As anti-structured art, they note, it fits well into the transitional and transformational state of a shaman's vision quest or trance experiences. They believe that this tradition was widespread during the Archaic period, and extended across North America from northern Mexico into the Great Basin and Great Plains regions.

Ethnographic evidence by Whitley (1994) of the shamans' experience in Chumash rock art indicate these experiences were likely drug-induced -- possibly through the sacramental use of peyote.

Rock art of shamanic experience found at site 5GF305 in Panel 6. Illustration from Cole (1987:290), anthropomorph, 70cm tall, with abstract linear image (redrawn by Cole from 1986 rubbing by Rod Bartlett).

Sally Cole (in Conner et al. 2016) indicates the Uncompahgre style, which post-dates the Abstract-Geometric during the Archaic, include “representations of paw/hand-print motifs; linear motifs; bird-track forms; slender human forms with raised arms; snakes; and quadrupeds shown individually and in rows and groups as in 5ME164 (shown below). Narrative content is implied by the appearance and relationships among elements. Animals variously exhibit antlers and cloven hooves, upright horns or ears, and long tails (possible felines or canines).”

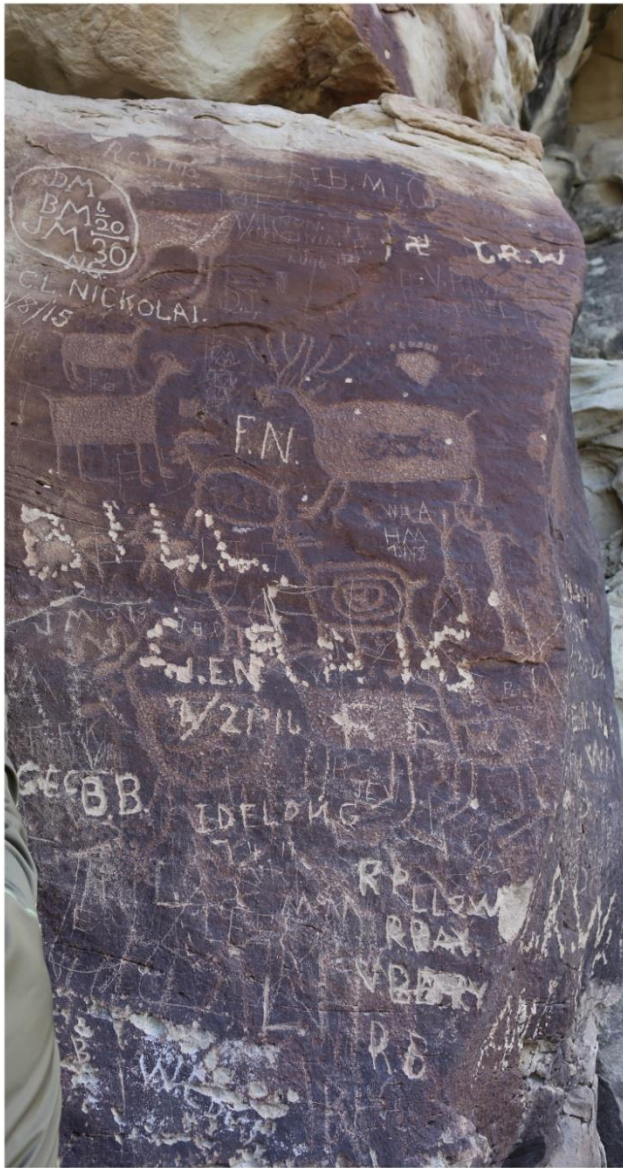


5EA1273, Panel 6: anthropomorph;
similar motifs are found in Sally
Cole's Uncompahgre Style.

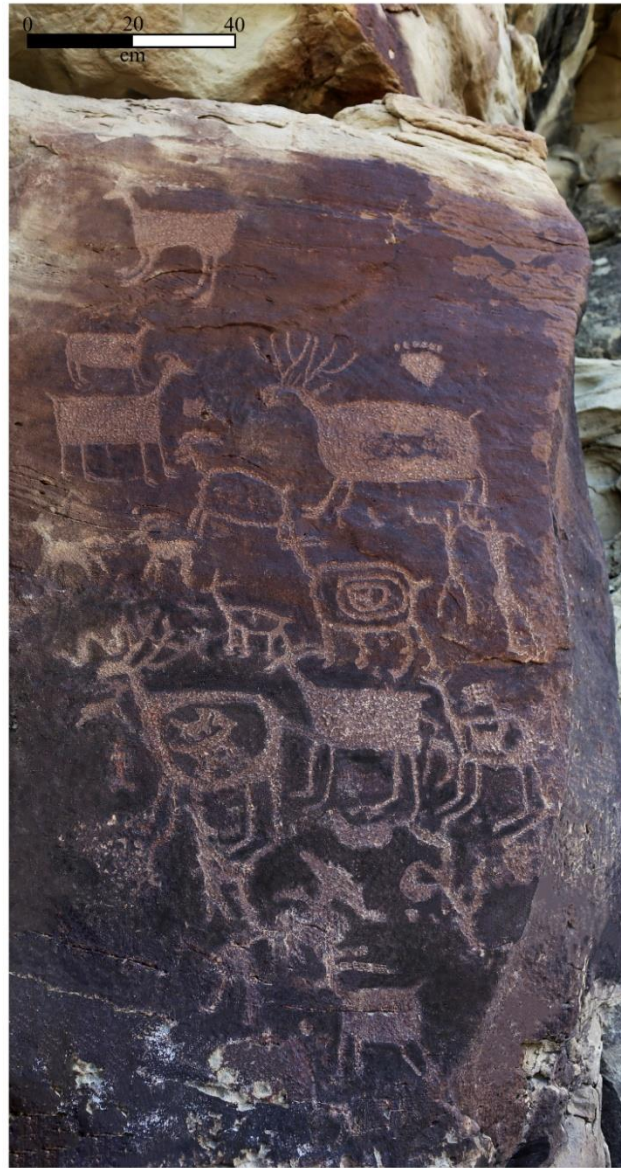
The Uncompahgre style has elements of what Keyser and Klassen (2001:57-91) would assign to the Early Hunting Tradition. The difference in the two styles is found in the numbers and types of zoomorphs, the number of anthropomorphs, and the composition of the panels. The Early Hunting Tradition panels contain primarily zoomorphs with a few anthropomorphs that are interacting in a hunting scenario. The hunters are shown using traps, atlatls, short spears, or throwing sticks; none have bows and arrows. Panels also may have hunters in animal costumes, and a shaman who is guiding a hunt or divining a hunt scene. Notably, sites with these motifs are clustered and likely represent a particular cultural phenomenon that existed during the Archaic (ibid.:82).



Distribution of the Early Hunting Tradition sites in the Western States by Keyser and Klassen (ibid.:74, Map 6.1).



Original Photo



Edited Photo

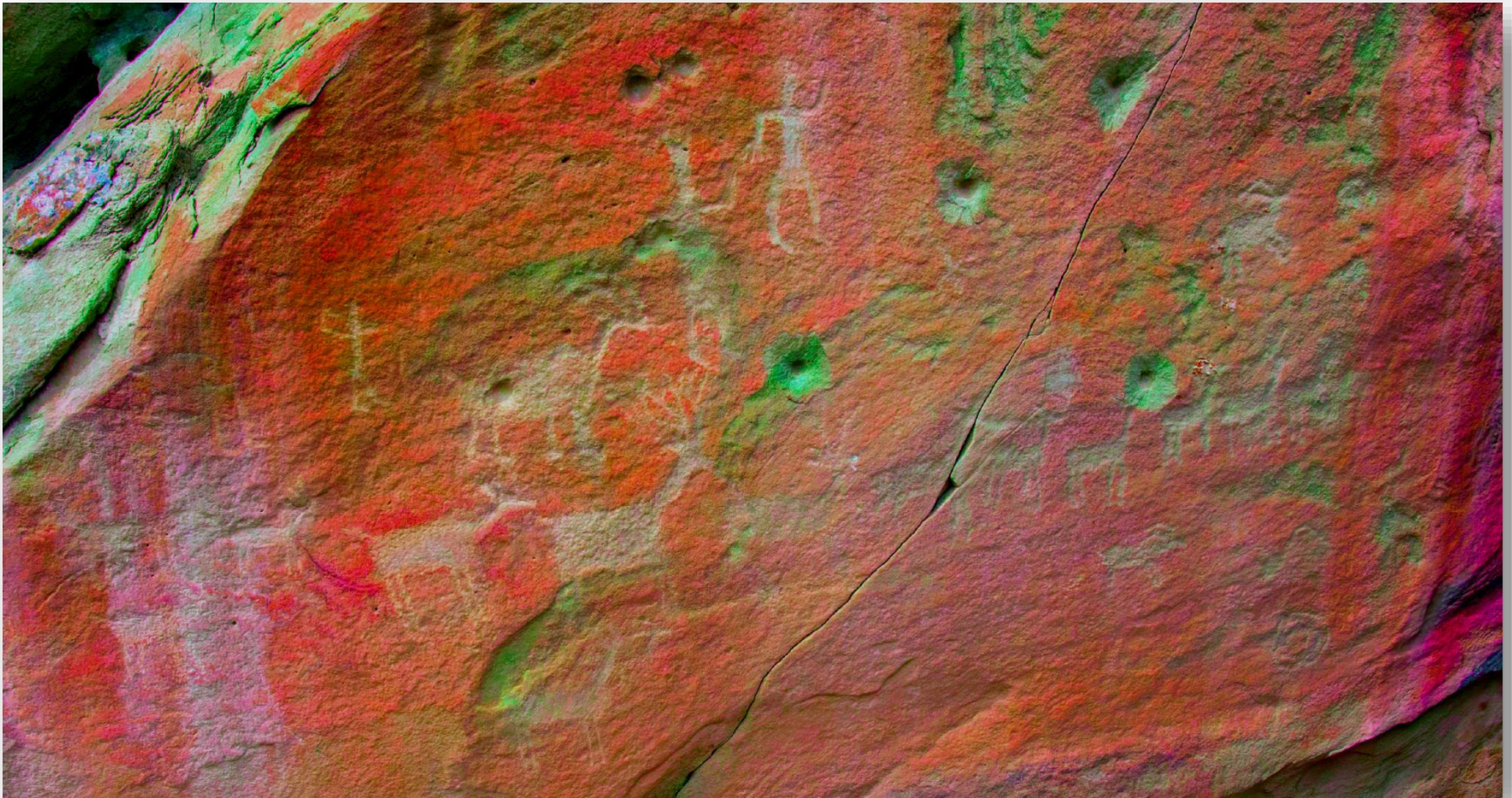
One of the largest and best executed of these Early Hunter Tradition panels is found in site 5ME81 near De Beque in the canyons of the Colorado River corridor. It has been severely vandalized as shown in the photo on the left and digitally “cleaned” and enhanced in the photo on the right.

From the previous slide of the hunting scene on the panel in 5ME81: the figure on the right appears to be a female (wearing a skirt), holding a short spear or atlatl, and in lead of the male figure, who carries a throwing stick. The zoomorph is apparently pregnant, which implies a winter hunt.

The elements shown below, found in 5GF305, are similar in composition to those in 5ME81. The spear thrower appears to be a female wearing a skirt (and possibly pregnant). [On the right, exfoliation has partially removed the figure's arm. Also, the zoomorph could represent a moose.]



Site 5GF305, Panel 1, displays the Early Hunting Tradition style as described by Keyser and Klassen (2001). Noteworthy, are elements including the possible female figure at the top center, and the concentric circle motif at the bottom right. Also, the smaller anthropomorph to the left of center appears to hold an atlatl. Vandalism in the form of use of the panel for target practice is clearly visible.



Site 5GF303 has motifs that include a bison with an atlatl arrow stuck in its hump, and two anthropomorphs (upper right of bison).



The anthropomorphic figures are eroded and difficult to make out, but appear to be a male, left, and female, right. The male apparently exhibits genitalia and a feathered headdress, and the female a skirt and a bobbed hairstyle. These are common characteristics in representations of Formative period figures of the region. Bison are occasionally illustrated with humans in Fremont rock art as exemplified at the roadside site of 5ME98 located in Unaweep Canyon.

The hooves drawn as prints suggest the potential of this site being representative of the Hoofprint Tradition defined by Keyser and Klassen, dating ca. AD 200-1500 (2001:177-189).

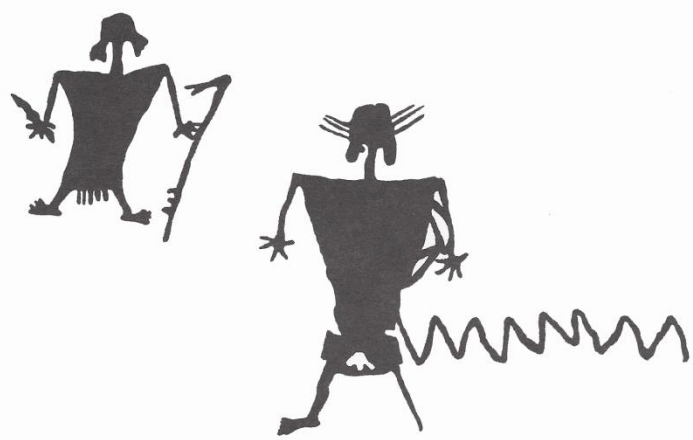
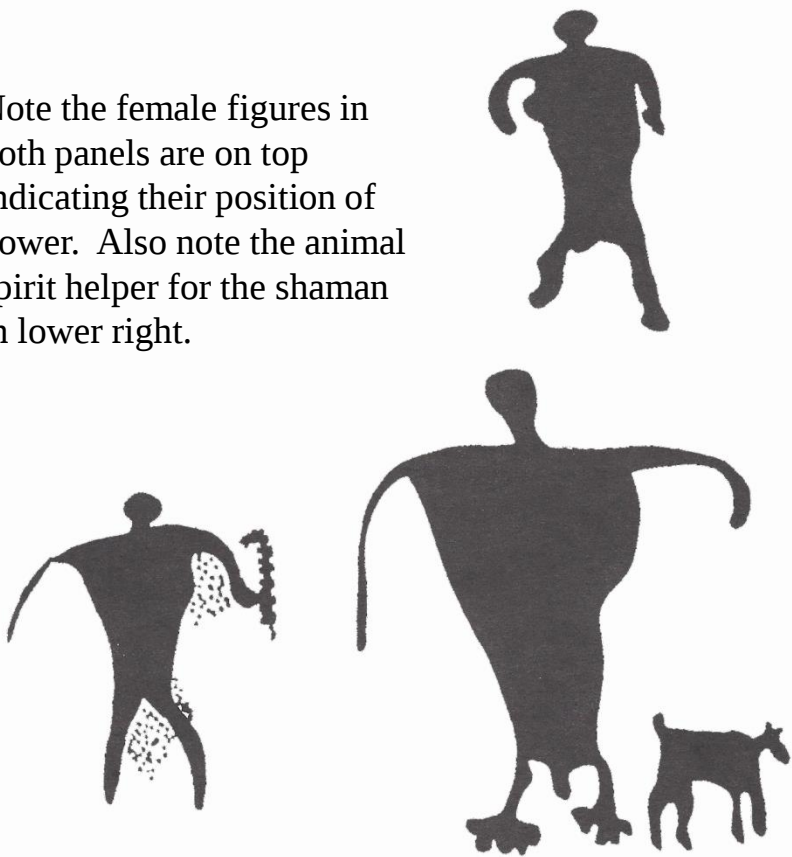
Formative period rock art is distinctive in the representations of high ratios of human to animal glyphs. Depictions of the shaman-artists themselves, their group's leadership, and mythological figures are common motifs. Such a panel is found at site 5EA1273.



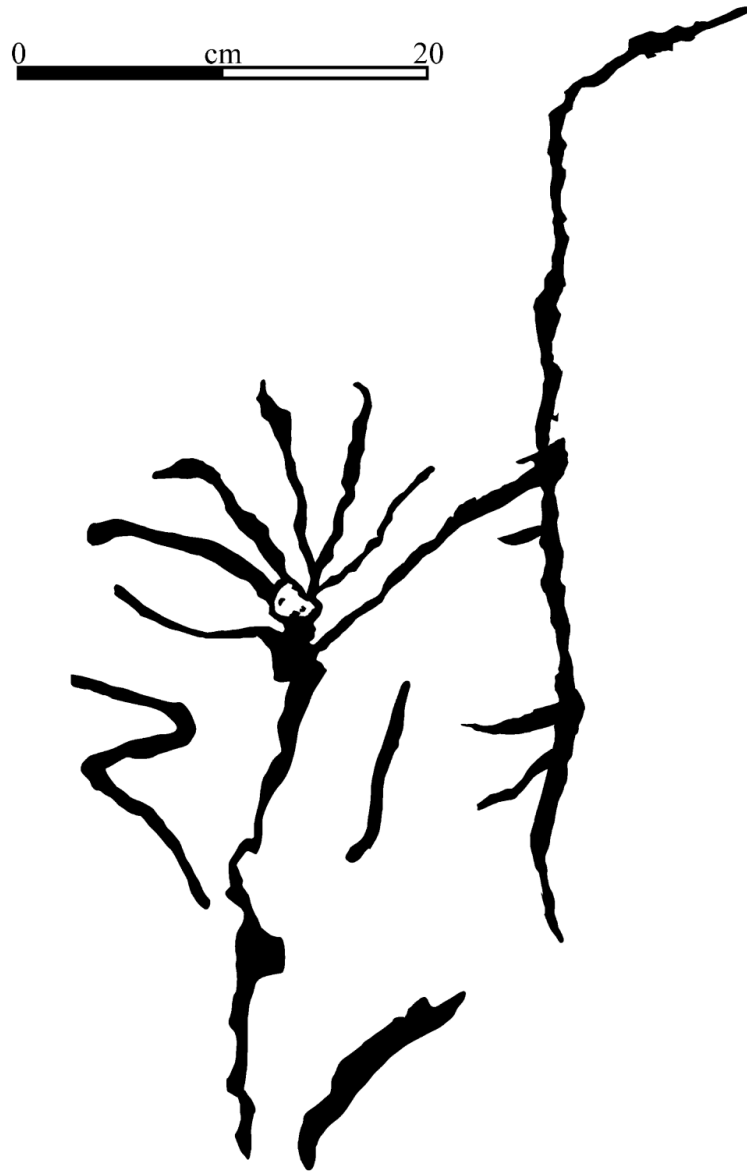
This Formative period panel has an anthropomorph with a feathered or horned headdress and is holding a wand or staff in his hand that appears to have a bird or "duck" head.

Similar bird-head staff representations are found in what Cole (1987:170,189) identifies as Basketmaker (5ME159; left) and Fremont (5ME465; right) panels in Mesa County, and may indicate the holder is a shaman with curing and/or prophesying abilities. Duck-head or bird-head rock art figures exhibiting staffs may represent shaman who claim the ability to engage in flights in which their spirit leaves the body and assumes the form of a bird (Wellmann 1979, Grant 1978).

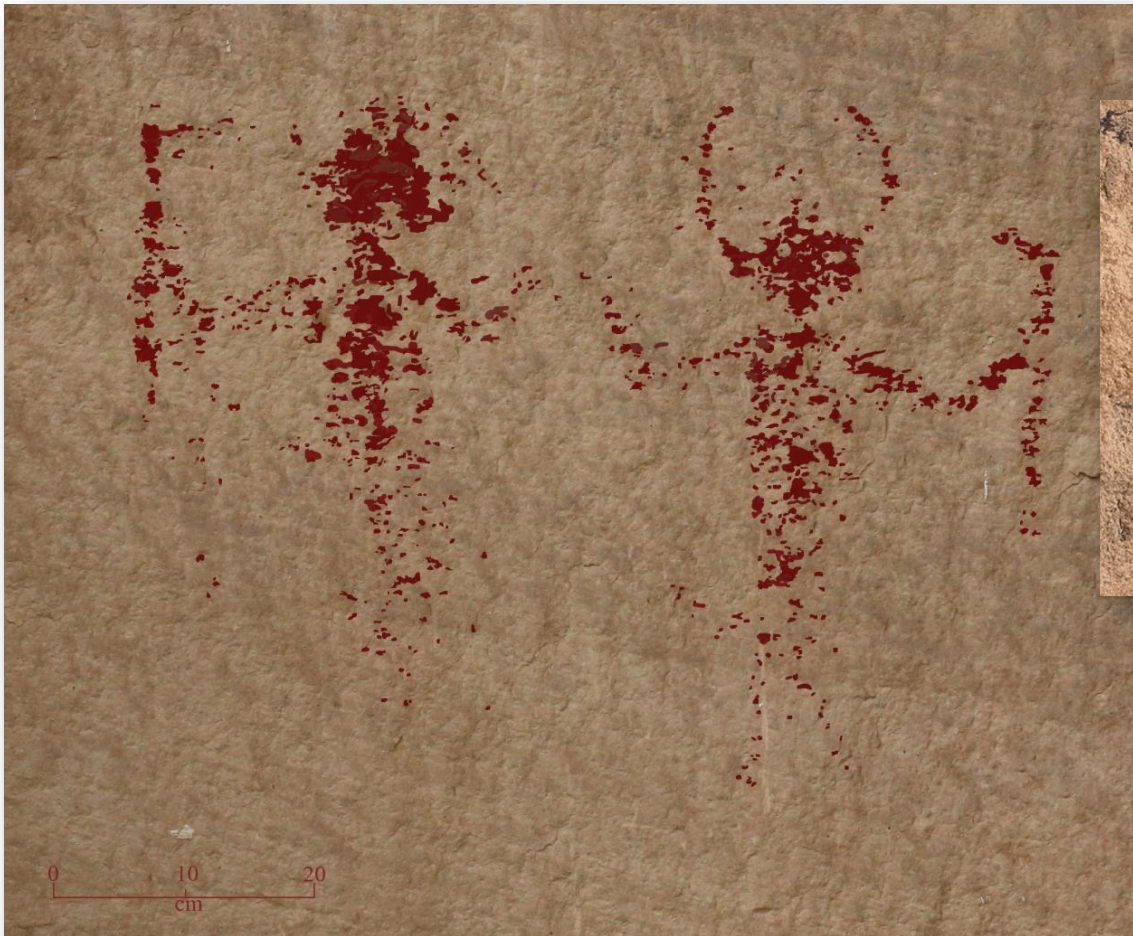
Note the female figures in both panels are on top indicating their position of power. Also note the animal spirit helper for the shaman in lower right.



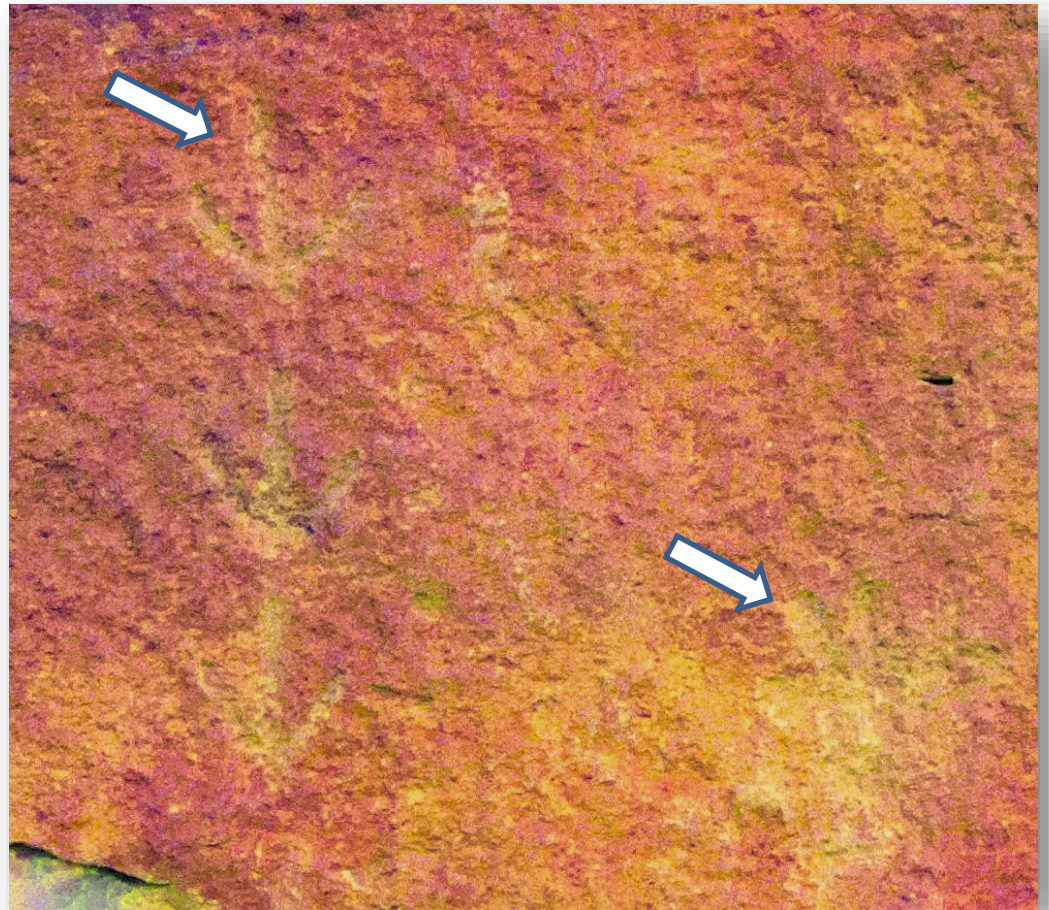
The bird-head staff is an element denoting positions of power in Formative period rock art, as shown in the previous slide. A panel at a newly recorded site (5GF5339, Panel 1) north of Rifle exhibited not only a bird head staff but also a “face” with eyes. Elements with facial characteristics are not very common but this style is known to occur in San Rafael Fremont rock art. The figure to the right is small and was executed in charcoal paint.



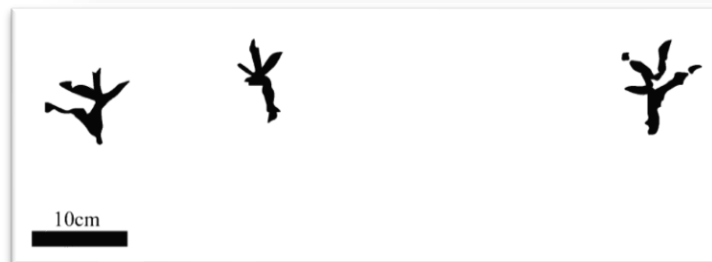
Rock art of the San Rafael Fremont occurs along the lower Colorado River and has diagnostic characteristics – one of which are faces with eyes. An example of this in the upper Colorado River area is a small panel (undocumented) found midway in De Beque Canyon (on left). That panel shows a female (left) and a male (right) anthropomorph holding bird-head staffs. (Notably, the female is shown in a dominant position.) The face of the male has an illustration of eyes that closely resemble those in the anthropomorph's face at 5GF5339 (enlargement on right).



In Panel 3, 5GF305, are three bird tracks (top arrow) and a possible bison track (bottom arrow). The three appear to be a turkey track motif, which is a common element in many rock art panels of the Southwest. The turkey was domesticated by the Anasazi by AD 700, and among the modern Pueblo, it is symbolically associated with the earth, springs, streams and mountains – homes of the mountain spirits. Thus, the turkey serves as an intermediary between the mountain water sources and the rain clouds that form on the peaks (Schaafsma 1986:27-28).

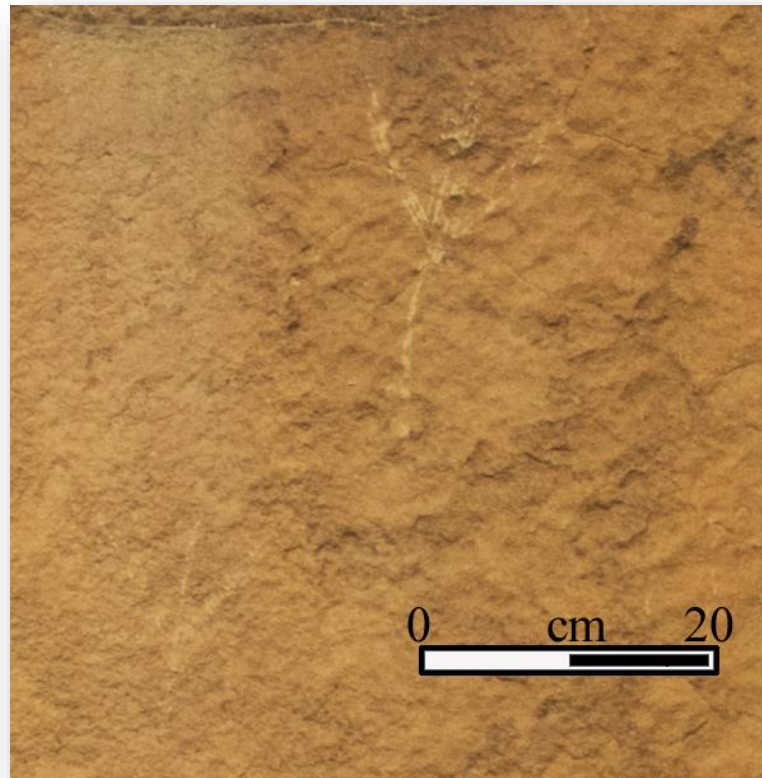


Another indication of possible Anasazi influence is a small panel of three apparent corn stalks that occur in Panel 3 of nearby site 5GF304.



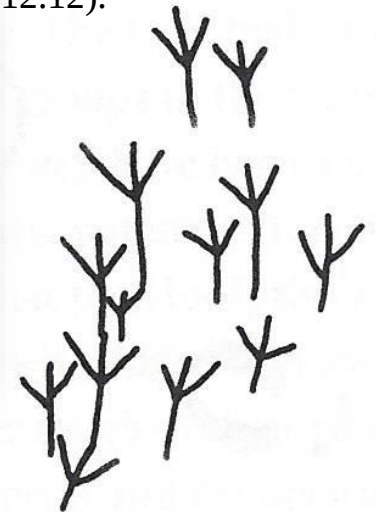
Scratch art is mainly contributable to the Eastern Shoshone occupation of the region. Several other sites with this art are recorded including notable ones in the Piceance (5RB5848) and in the Book Cliffs north of Loma (5GF1339).

At 5GF304 are two scratched bird track figures. These elements have a distinctive “tail” characteristic that is uncommon in petroglyphs of other bird tracks, such as the turkey tracks notable in Southwest panels. Keyser and Klassen place such elements in the Hoofprint Tradition, dating [ca. AD 1300-1880] (2001:177-189). The bird tracks of this Tradition are attributed to the thunderbird deity in the Siouan belief system where the thunderbird and the turtle rule the separate realms of sky and earth, respectively. In that system the “Thunderbird is an extremely powerful figure whose destructive nature is readily associated with the lightening storms and tornadoes that characterize the region’s spring and summer seasons” (ibid.:187).



Thunderbird track art in Panel 3, Locus 2, 5GF304.

Illustration of Thunderbird track rock art as depicted in Keyser and Klassen (2001:188, 12.12).



Bear Dreamers

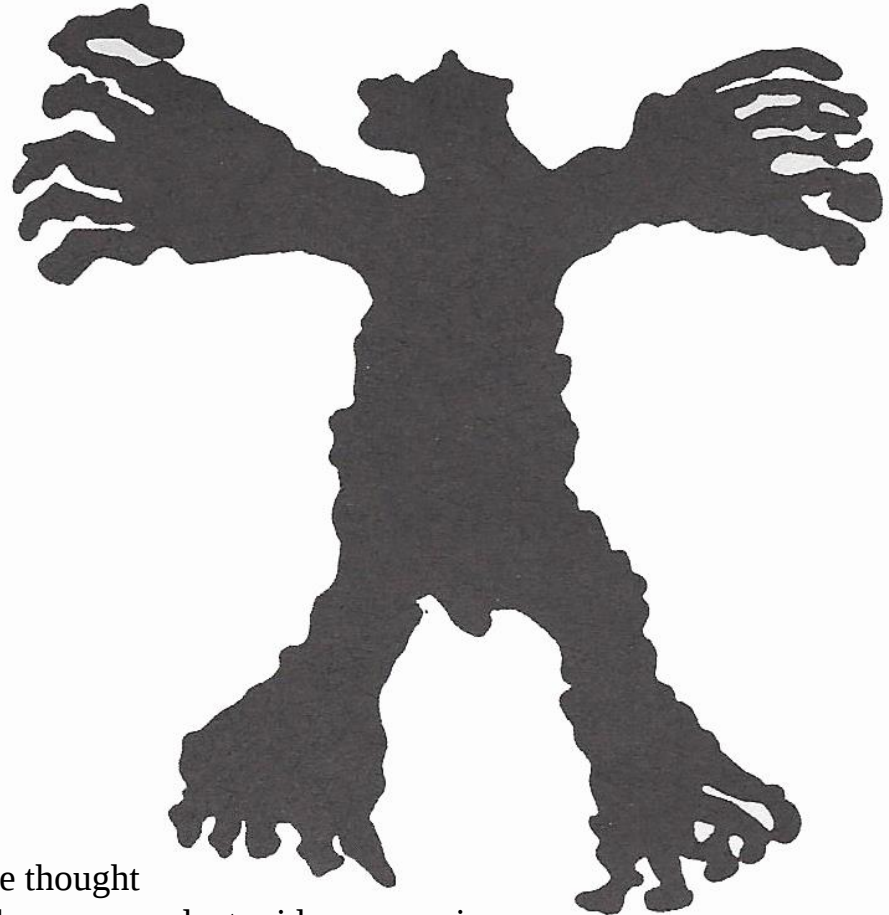


Incorporated in many of the Uncompahgre, Fremont, Late Prehistoric, and Historic style rock art panels are bear paw tracks and images of the bear. As Keyser and Klassen (2001:174) relate in their book *Plains Indian Rock Art*: “no stronger magic could be found on the Northwestern Plains than that of Grizzly Bear, whose supernatural powers embodied both the warrior’s ideal and the healer’s arts.” They describe the warrior society called Bear Dreamer: “a fraternity for those warriors brave enough to have obtained bear power in their visions.” Many tribes had a Bear Dreamers Society made up of warriors who by vision quest obtained bear power to become Grizzly Bear Warriors, and shamen who obtained bear medicine to cure disease and sickness. The Blackfeet are mentioned by Keyser and Klassen (ibid.) as conducting a two week ritual marked by strenuous ordeals prior to a transfer of a bear knife bundle.

Bear shaman glyph (45cm tall) at 5ME232, located along a Ute trail south of the Gunnison River. (Illustration is from Cole 1987:230, Fig. 67.)

Keyser and Klassen (2001:174) go on to describe the society: “Other men were bear shamans, known for their abilities to cure disease with bear medicine. ...Through visions, Bear Dreamers became the bear’s human persona. Among many groups, they were the mightiest warriors and much feared by all enemies; they took a vow to charge straight toward the enemy and never retreat. Grizzly bear warriors painted tear streaks extending down from their eyes to mimic the glandular secretions that often mark a grizzly’s face. Dressed and painted as bears, these warriors rushed directly into battle brandishing only their shield and a bear knife – the handle made from a grizzly bear’s jawbone – and snorting or growling like their supernatural helper. ...Among many groups, these shamans were thought

to transform themselves into bears to cure illness or conduct raids on enemies, and when a bear attacked or killed a person, the obvious conclusion was that the bear was, in fact, a transformed shaman from an enemy group” (ibid.).





Bear shamanism is evidenced in Fremont rock art as bear track images and even as costumed individuals. This white painted image of bear shaman at site 5ME529 stands next to a faded white image of a Fremont anthropomorph with a feather headdress and hair-bobs or ear plugs. (Photo is enhanced using D-stretch, reprinted from Cole, in Conner et al. 2016.)

This small (20cm) but exquisite painting of a bear with three vertical lines below (claw slash mark?) is found in Panel 1, site 5EA1273, located near Wolcott. The D-stretch enhanced image seems to indicate the figure overlaps an earlier, more realistically executed, version.





This small panel in site 5GF311 is located on large boulder, and is a good example of an earlier period of influence of the Bear Shaman. The petroglyph panel consists of a stylized bear paw print – comparable to Archaic-age Uncompahgre Style bear tracks and a series of abstract elements including dots, a wavy line (snake?), and two possible anthropomorphs, as defined in Cole 1987.

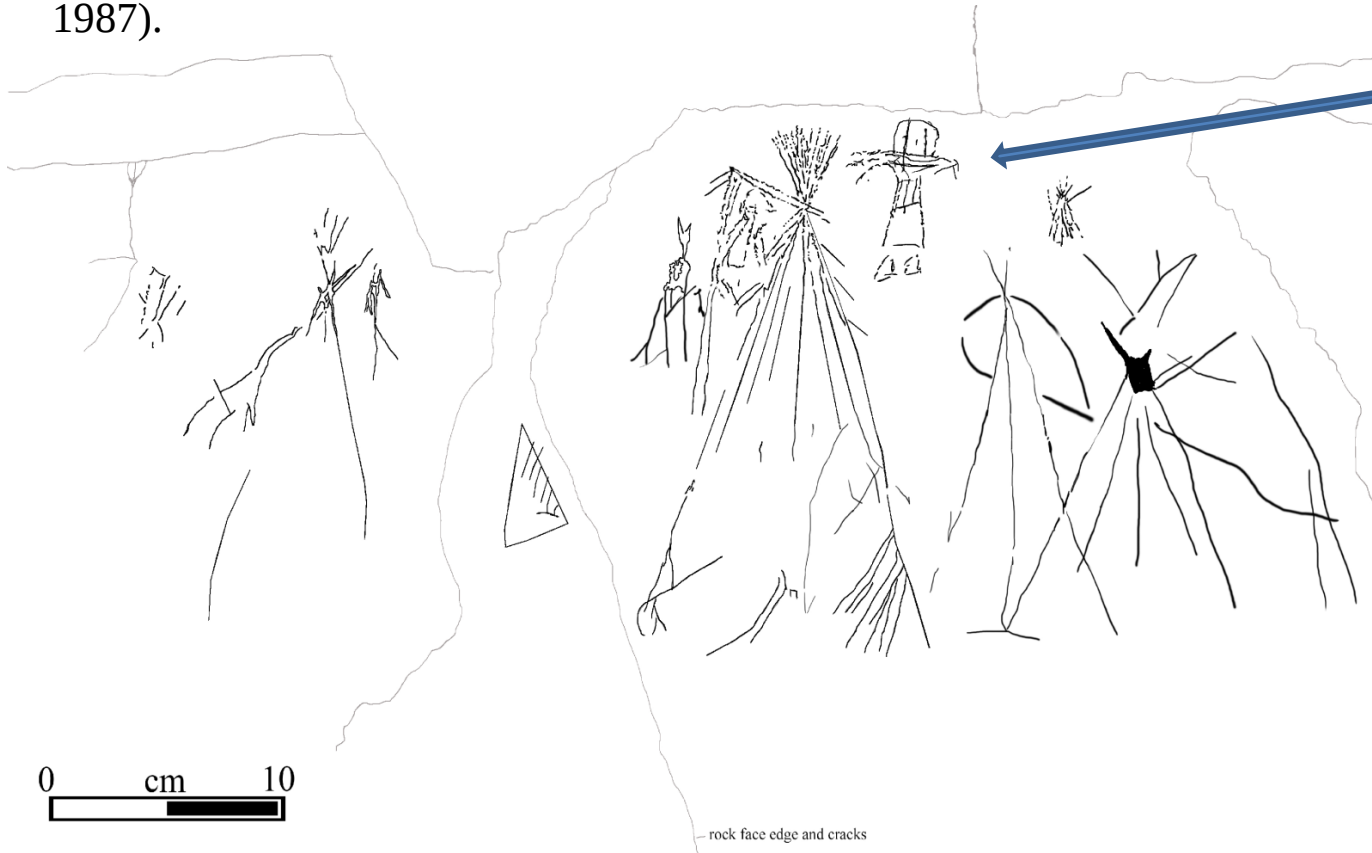
This panel, in site 5GF2792, represents a particular style in the Bear Shaman tradition. The elements of this style include a cluster of several tracks, a hash mark representing a slash by a paw (lower right), and a phallic symbol (vertical line above the tracks) identifying the maker as belonging to a male fraternity.



Bear track petroglyphs occur throughout panels in the region. Those like at 5GF2792, are groups of prints either exclusive of other images or separately clustered. A related example is found at the Moore Shelter (5MN863), located on the east side of the Uncompahgre Plateau. This site exhibits similarity of elements and intent to that of 5GF2792 in: element clustering, claw slash marks (three lines second to the right), and by the vertical line that represents male genitalia (image right) – a symbol of the virility and fertility of the Grizzly Bear Warrior. Each print may represent one of the warriors in the group's fraternity.

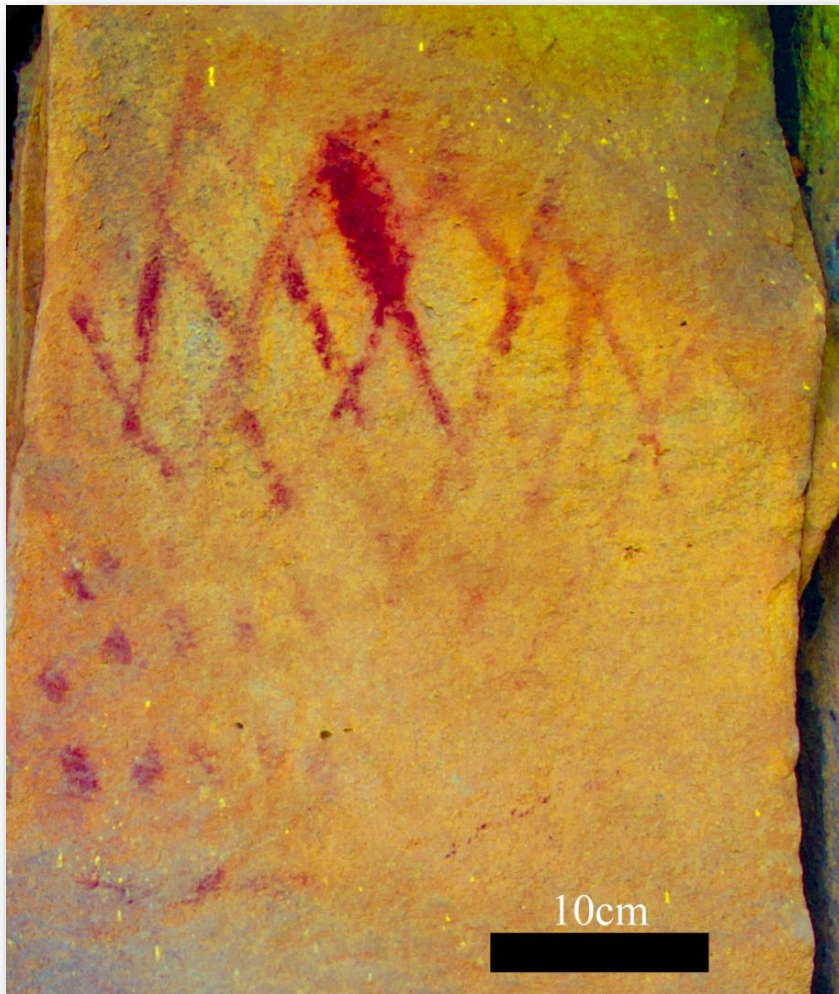


At 5RB5848 in the Piceance Basin is a panel of scratch art that depicts teepee-shaped elements, and an anthropomorph that reflects a belief in the supernatural powers of the Grizzly Bear warrior society. In this panel, the Bear Shaman and teepee motifs are typical of a Northwest Plains style. Keyser associates similar rock art with the Eastern Shoshone occupation of the region and assigns relative dates of AD 1300-1700 (Keyser 1975, 1977, 1987).



This shaman wears a bear mask and claws. The mask exhibits the tear streaks of the Grizzly Bear.

Panel 5 in 5EA1273 presents a graphic that consists of a cross-hatched element with dots below that appears to represent a thunder storm with hail or rain. A notable, strikingly similar depiction is found in Hay Canyon, Utah, where a series of three panels relate a storm and flooding. The cultural association is unclear, but its probably late Formative or Late Prehistoric (AD 900-1500).



Panel 5 also includes what was first believed to be a paint smear, but in D-stretch processing, a bear figure became visible. The smear may represent a storm cloud, as well; if so, there appears to be a mixing of the powers of the storm and that of the bear.

Site 5GF2 is one of the few that represent the Biographic rock art tradition. As described by Keyser and Klassen, the images of this tradition are largely narrative, with illustrations that range from every day activities to major historical events (2001:224). In this drawing of a part of Panel 1, we see multiple figures composed into a scene depicting a bison hunting event. Cole (1987:275- 286) describes this panel, and those in most of the site, as having been painted during the Early Historic Ute period, likely prior to AD 1830. Notable are the empty spaces in the horse paintings indicating their coloration, and the feather adornment on the horses, which probably indentifies the status of their rider.



The design of this project incorporated a landscape approach where, in this case, a particular type of site was investigated across a broad area with the objective of better defining and preserving important scientific information. Many of the sites had not been revisited for 30 or more years, so an appraisal of their condition and an upgrading of their documentation was in order. One of the notable and unfortunate observations was that sites with the greatest public visitation were the most vandalized.

“As in the case for any other artifacts of history, damages to petroglyphs are permanent and irreversible. However, unlike other artifacts that can be preserved and protected within the confines of a controlled environment in a museum, petroglyphs are mostly left in their natural settings, exposed to elements of nature that will erode them inevitably with time. There is an urgent need to identify petroglyphs and to archive them for humanity” (Zhu et al. 2009). At the present, the best means of preservation is through digital photography and its storage in a digital archive facility. To that end, this project was an important step in the preservation of this endangered resource.

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