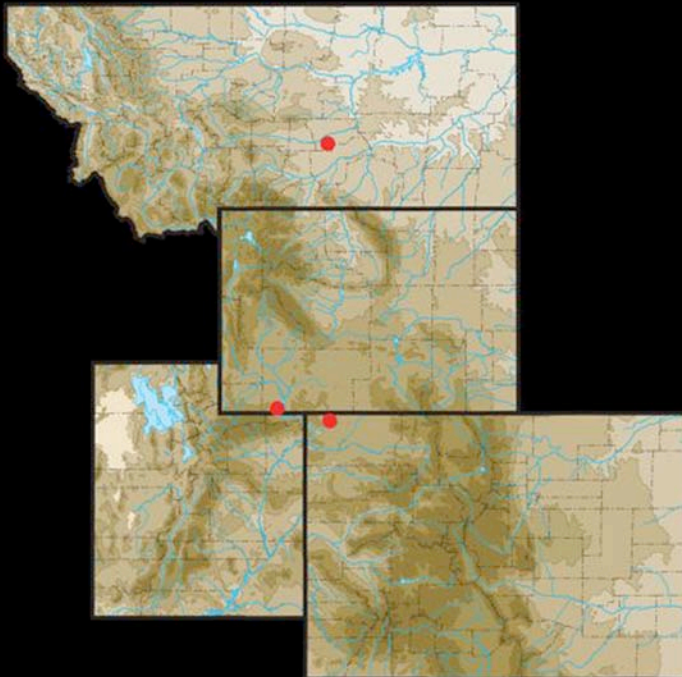


Transitional Petroglyphs in Southwestern Wyoming



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Abstract

The Lucerne (48SW83) and Henry's Fork (48SW88) petroglyphs near the southern border of western Wyoming, west of Flaming Gorge Reservoir of the Green River, display characteristics of both Fremont and Legend Rock Traditions and occupy a position between those two regions. Figures at these sites, as well as other similar sites in the region, suggest exchange of ideas and perhaps movements of people between the Great Basin and the Big Horn Basin.

Rock art sites on the southern edge of Wyoming occupy what may be considered approximately the northern edge of Fremont rock art. These sites also contain motifs and approaches reminiscent of rock art further north and may indicate an early contact zone or corridor for the sharing of ideas between different regions.

These were our thoughts when we first visited the sites, and we considered similarities and differences in terms of directional flow of ideas and approaches. After looking more at the art, considering its time depth, and thinking more about geographic and temporal ranges of the ideas and attributes, it seems that what we may be seeing here are both broad and specific patterns that persist generally through time and space, but with temporal and geographic differences, or ranges, that someday may be identified. Some

approaches are general — such as animal-human co-occurrence, use of animal tracks, interaction between animals and cracks, figures and panels connected with wavy lines, exaggerated hands and feet, and shortened arms and legs — but details of these attributes and relationships almost certainly will have different temporal occurrence and geographic extent.

This short discussion, then, will be mainly a view of figures at three sites on the Wyoming border with Utah and Colorado. The temporal range of rock art at these sites is great, certainly from Archaic to very recent, and we look mostly at probable Late Archaic through the entire range of Fremont. Likewise, most stylistic influence — or a combination of content and artistic manner — appears to be from the south, with some more widespread attributes that we see also much further north. We still feel that the region is a thoroughfare, probably like any part of the country, with a constant flow of ideas and probably people, at least on an individual basis, and with the main direction of flow in a north-south direction.

For our examples, we look at three petroglyph sites.

Two are in southwestern Wyoming, just west of the Green River [48SW83 *Lucerne Petroglyphs, to the east*; 48SW88, *Henry's Fork Petroglyphs, to the west*]. Access is easy, although some figures on upper ledges or high on the sandstone cliff require climbing, care, balance, and occasional pole ladders. Figures and their messages along the extensive face overlook and affect nearby villages and distant fields.



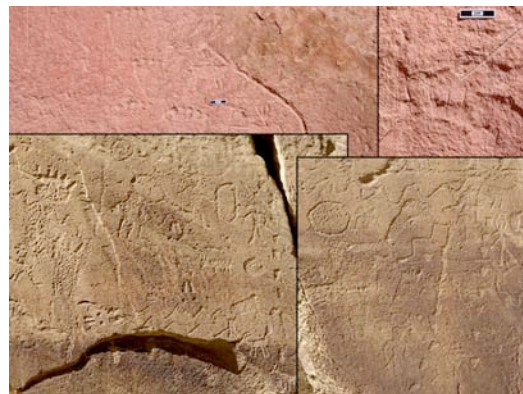
Another site [*Vermillion Canyon, Colorado*] a few miles to the east is in a narrow, deep canyon that cuts through a ridge and contains permanent water. The canyon is a few feet wide at the bottom and over a thousand feet deep, with multiple ledges and cliff faces. Figures occupy stream-side panels to ledges hundreds of feet up



the canyon walls. Most are easy to reach, once the location is attained, but some are 20 feet or more high on smooth surfaces accessible only by scaffolds or climbing poles. Some locations are reached by walking, others require moderate climbing skill and endurance, and still others require unusual ability in technical climbing and an obvious lack of basic survival instinct or intelligence. That mental or emotional approach to reaching unreachable locations and pecking figures into the rock face is a Fremont characteristic seen in other areas, including the other two sites and one in Montana.



Looking at a few selected characteristics of the art, animals are common and are represented by juvenile bighorn sheep, deer, lines of deer, elk, bison, a wolf, and a feathered snake. Antlions in the larval stage (often referred to as “doodlebugs”) are a strictly southern characteristic, with profuse mythology for both the larval stage and the subsequent dragonfly-like phase with its elaborate mating gymnastics. A grizzly bear is a style mostly present to the north, with its distinctive facial characteristics.



Animal tracks are numerous and include bear paws, some with incised claws, a few deer tracks, and human footprints, both with and without covering. Of interest are vertical trails of miniature tracks, mostly animal but some possibly human, about a centimeter or so long. Tracks are often within integrated panels, again a southern characteristic. Humans often have associated animals, but the relationship or referent is never clear. In only one case is a hunter, holding a bow and arrow, shown in what could be a hunting scene, although such are much more common further south.



Humans take a variety of forms, probably due to the long time span and cultural diversity at these sites. Some bodies of early pecked figures have been rubbed, and some figures are lightly to deeply incised. Headdresses are common, especially deer and buffalo horns. Themes include ceremonial representation, such as figures with upraised arms, birthing scenes and sexual intercourse, a male phallic figure, and various forms of portrait. An incised woman has laterally extended oversized feet, a characteristic from the north. Exaggerated hands and feet are also displayed on panels of interactive figures, although some have the typical trapezoidal torso of the south.



A small panel contains bear faces made by drilling holes for the eyes, nostrils, and mouth. Some have tear streaks, and one has teeth. Some have been modified by later incisions. Other rectangular masks are also present.

Probably more than any other attribute, Fremont is recognized by humans with necklaces, belts, head adornment, and associated attendant figures. These are represented here, as they are to the south, by large impressive figures in frontal view. One figure has only the necklace and what appear to be eyes and ears of a bat, an uncommon occurrence and strictly southern.



This brings us to a figure in southeastern Montana [24ML563, *Signal Mountain*] with a distinctive Fremont style necklace not known elsewhere on the Northern Plains. Other attributes are clearly characteristic of local Plains warriors – the hairdo, wide rectangular body, and wide breastplate of bone tubes. The projection below, perhaps genitals, and the lack of arms, legs, neck, shoulders, and weapon are unusual in local rock art but more common in the Fremont. The figure is clearly local, but the necklace of conch shell disks is clearly not local in either style or concept, and is most similar to Fremont figures. This single example suggests exchange of ideas or physical contact between the regions.

Long-distance contact is well known, although the mechanisms generally are not. Contact across North America is evidenced by almost any kind of material or object. In later times guns, horses, human slaves, furs and other products probably followed the same routes and contacts as previously. This area was used by the Ute to bring horses up from the Spanish and supply the Comanche-Shoshone, who then transported them out across the Plains. Long distance treks of thousands of miles have been recorded in early historic documents and were accompanied by profuse story telling and variable exchange of goods.

Rock art in southern Wyoming and Montana display such contact. What is needed now is to look at the finest detail possible and compare those details across time and space.