

Bears, when portrayed as the entire animal, are impressive rock art figures, with many over a meter long. They are frequently shown with exaggerated claws to ensure they are not mistaken for another four-legged animal. Bear paw tracks also often have extended claws, although the rest of the paw is usually realistic in size. In this presentation we discuss bear representations in Wyoming, show variation in their portrayals, and compare them with bear imagery in Montana, where we have examined bears in a similar manner. This paper is oriented toward providing information on what is available for comparative studies

regarding bear imagery on the Northwestern Plains and adjacent Rocky Mountains.



Counts of bears in the rock art of Wyoming and Montana are based on fieldwork and file and literature searches. In seeking hard data we found State site files and professional publications usually are not specific enough on numbers and

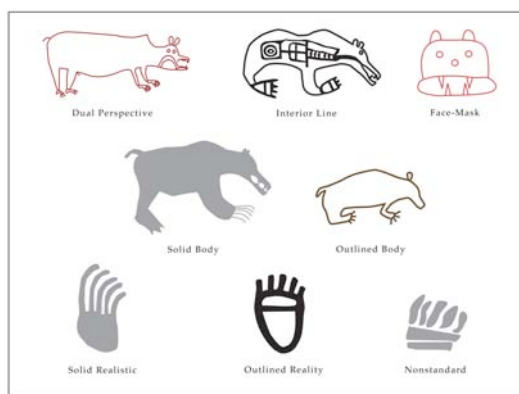
kinds of figures for a detailed regional study. One striking fact is that the majority of the rock art site forms contain no descriptive information beyond pictographs or petroglyphs.

However, we closely examined all state record files, publications that contained data identifiable to a specific site, our site leads and unchecked information, and our thousands of photos from years of fieldwork.

Of the 377 rock art sites recorded statewide in Wyoming, bear imagery is reported from only 31 sites, or about 8%. This is surprisingly similar to Montana, where bear images are in 10% of the recorded rock art sites. In Wyoming, the number of individual bear figures shows the dominance of paw depictions, of which there are 85, over complete bodies, of which there are 25. This is in contrast to Montana where there are about an equal number of paws and bodies portrayed. Only six sites in Wyoming have both paws and bodies.



Bear imagery occurs on both sides of the Continental Divide in Wyoming, whereas in Montana there are no recognizable bear figures recorded west of the divide in the Rocky Mountains even though animals in general are common motifs in the western part of the state, and many bears live there today. Instead, it was found that bears are most numerous in central Montana where animal figures are infrequently portrayed in the island mountain environments. In Wyoming bears are in both plains and foothills landscapes and are often on panels with other figures, including animals that do not appear to be directly related, unlike panels in much of Montana.

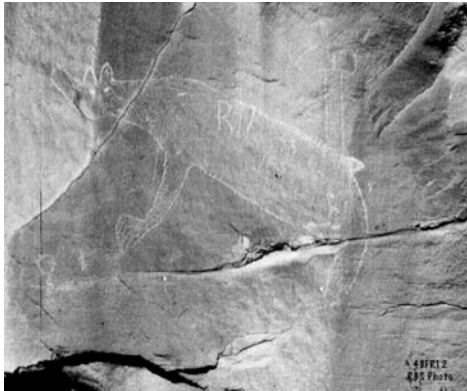


Previously for organization and comparison of Montana bear motifs, we separated bodies and paws into a number of categories pertaining to appearance of the figure based primarily on perspective, morphological variation, and method of application. Paint kind and color were shown to be time sensitive, and that relative chronology was applied to petroglyphs of the same forms. The categories were preliminary and specific to the initial Montana analysis, and thus they are

refined here with the larger database.

Body and paw categories are mutually exclusive. Body forms are divided into *Dual Perspective*, *Interior Line*, *Solid Body* and *Outlined Body*. Paw forms are separated into *Solid*

*Realistic, Outlined Realistic, and Nonstandard.* In Montana we also had a *Face Mask* category not observed in Wyoming.



The *Dual Perspective* category includes bears with their body and head drawn in profile, but both eyes face the viewer, thus producing a dual perspective for the animal. The profile often emphasizes the snout, mouth, and teeth, while usually both ears are also present. Of the 25 complete bears in the Wyoming records, seven are shown in dual perspective. Montana has the same number of bears in dual perspective, which makes the Wyoming percentage of this category much higher at 28% of the total bears than the 12% for Montana. The Wyoming dual perspective bears occur in the Powder River and Big Horn Basins as well as central and southwestern Wyoming. Thus, the distribution suggests this kind of bear portrayal, although distinctive, does not have specific cultural ties. However, it might have specific functional ties, but these are not currently identifiable.

Most dual perspective bears in Wyoming and Montana are petroglyphs. Although some are solid pecked or abraded, most are outlined, making it easy to show the eyes. Only one of the dual perspective bears also contains interior lines.

*Interior Line* bears are portrayed in profile and contain lines inside the torso that range from a single heart line to complex interior designs. In most cases of interior line bears, the face is detailed in single perspective only (if at all), but there are usually two ears if the head is shown. The one



shown in the photo above is typical with good feet detail but little attention to the head.



*Solid Bears* have a completely painted or pecked body shown in profile. Again, like the interior lined bears, the face is detailed in single perspective only (if detailed at all), and there are often two ears. However, there are no interior lines or other features. Solid bears in Wyoming

are represented by 14 figures at ten sites, and these are some of the most well executed bear images. They range from small to large in size, such as these two, which are both at the same site in the Big Horn Basin. Although different styles, both are easily recognizable as bears, particularly by their feet.



*Outlined Bears* have a body boundary shown in profile, with no interior lines or other features. Like the solid body category, the face, if detailed, is done so in single perspective only, although there are often two ears. No outlined painted bears have been reported from Wyoming, and only three are known in Montana, which indicates how uncommon this method is for portraying these animals in these regions. However, outlined

petroglyph bears are a different story. Eleven are known in Wyoming rock art, and all the bears in the state with weapons inserted into their bodies are outlined portrayals. The only other weapon-associated bear in Wyoming is one made of solid black paint, and it has a spear coming toward it, which has not yet entered the body. It is just as easy to show a weapon protruding from a solid bear as protruding from an outlined bear, so the lack of penetrating weapons into painted bears may have been a cultural preference.

In Montana we had a category for bear mask. Although an example of this has not been identified in Wyoming yet, we decided to show you this one from Montana so that you might be on the look out for similar figures. In this case, the rock art incorporates the cave into the figure by placing a bear face above the cave mouth, which also serves as the mouth of the bear, and the cave and



surrounding outcropping represent the body of the bear.

Of the 25 bear bodies in Wyoming only five have distinctive humps on their backs indicating they are grizzlies. The others have flat backs, which are made with such precision, it is likely



they were intentionally showing a black bear. However, some researchers have suggested that extra long claws were drawn on bear feet to represent a grizzly. If so, there are several flat-backed bears that could be grizzly representations, but it seems that the hump would have been added if they wanted to communicate that species.

Bear paws are assigned to descriptive categories that pertain to method of production. *Solid Realistic Paws* are either drawn in liquid paint or fully pecked. They can be triangular, rectangular, or square pads with rounded corners. If dots representing toes are included, they are placed a short distance from the distal end of the pad. If claws are shown, they are drawn as curved or straight lines either a short distance from the distal end of the pad or attached to the pad. Claws can range from short to very long.

*Outlined Realistic Paws* are triangular or rectangular pad boundary designations with slightly rounded corners. In some cases one or two lines are placed across the paw about one-third distance from the distal end as shown in the on the right in the photo to the right. Claws are usually attached to the pad and are slightly to dramatically curved, but they may be short straight lines.



*Nonstandard Paws* have either the pad or the claws distorted or abnormally shaped. Pads may be compressed or just partially present, and claws may be somewhat stylized to not at all realistic. The figures are either solid or outlined. In some cases paws in this category are hard to distinguish from human hands or feet. This ambiguity appears intentional since it occurs in widely scattered geographic areas and fits well with the bear/human shamanism beliefs of several cultures.

Only one bear paw in Wyoming is made of paint. It is red and a realistic outline. There are no solidly painted bear paws. Although painted bear paws are rare, pecked paws are abundant, and there are 84 examples in the state.

Castle Gardens west of Casper is the site with the most bear paws. Ten of the paws are on two shields as part of their designs. Both are shown in the upper photo on page 6. These shields show two typical styles of paws, one with short straight claws and the other with long curved claws. The white blotches on the lower shield are remnants of a molding someone attempted years ago and are a vivid example of why that practice has been discontinued.

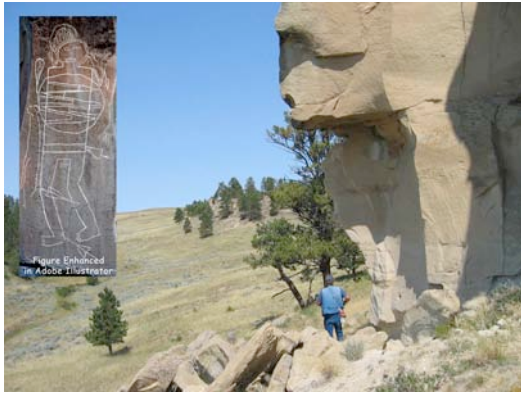
Castle Gardens also has the only bear paw dress known in the regional rock art; it is shown on the right in the photo to the right. Eight paw prints decorate the garment. These paws are less detailed than most, but they are still easily recognizable as bear tracks.

The lower photo to the right shows a variety of paw prints from across Wyoming. Whether fully pecked or simply outlined, these are all clearly the feet of bears. Two vertical series of bear paws at a site in the southwestern part of the state are unusual, one set is shown on the left in the photo to the right. These small prints are about a centimeter each, and they appear to be walking up the wall. Although we debated about whether or not these were bear paws or small human feet or even other kinds of animal tracks, when viewed closely through enlargement, they look most similar to bear. Occasionally bear paws are made in deliberate detail to distinguish the front and back feet. When this is done the front foot is made more rounded on the end and the back foot is more triangular shaped.



The large number and wide variety of bear paws suggests that some may represent clan symbols. This function has been observed for motifs in the southwest, and it seems likely for this region. A detailed study of not only the paws of these two states but the surrounding areas will be necessary to determine which styles cluster within a particular geographic area that could be considered clan territory.

Bears were associated with the supernatural and recognized as a part of ritual by most prehistoric cultures throughout the northern hemisphere. For many Northern Plains groups the bear was viewed as an animal of power and was often associated with medicine bundles and curing. Bears and shamanism were closely connected, and several photos and drawings of shamans in full bear costumes were made by early European visitors to the area. Rock art depictions of a combination bear-shaman usually have a human body with attached bear attributes such as feet, claws, and/or teeth, and these images have long been reported from the southwest.



In Wyoming bear-human combinations have been recorded at two sites in the Powder River Basin. In both cases, the humans have what appear to be bear feet. A large life-sized figure with a shield in northeastern Wyoming (shown in the upper left photo) probably is wearing moccasin shaped bear feet that provide him with power. The other figure is in the southwestern

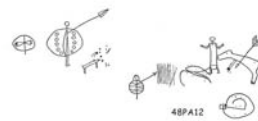
part of the Basin, northeast of Casper. It has bear shaped feet and is standing on a bear (shown in the photo to the right). This figure has no associated weapons and is near several other humans that seem to be part of a related story. The contents suggest a scene of ritual for the group rather than individual power.



Farther north in southern Montana, but still within the Powder River Basin, a combination of bear-human appears to represent the bear-shaman belief based on the associated headdress and power line staff coming off the arm on the left of the photo to the left.

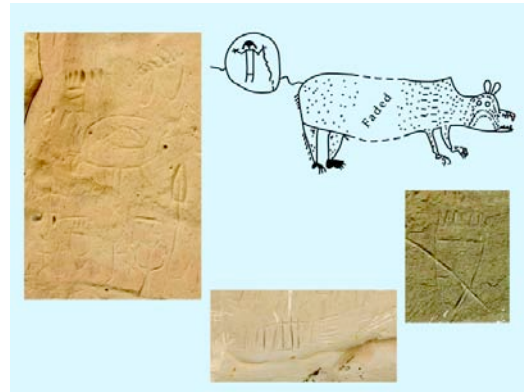


Most bears in Wyoming, like those in the mountains of central Montana, appear to be associated with supernatural functions that do not include hunting or killing the animals. Rarely are bears in this region drawn with hunting paraphernalia (such as spears or arrows) or other indicators of killing.

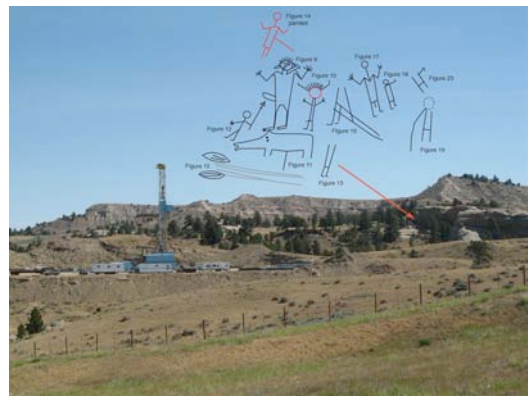


Less than two dozen bears in Wyoming and Montana combined are portrayed with spears or arrows piercing the body. Bear imagery in Wyoming, however, is more likely to occur on panels with a variety of other figures and be on or near shields than it is to the north. The power of the bear is well documented, and its presence with the other figures may have been part of the overall power of the message on the rocks rather than commemorating an individual event or ceremony. Bears were placed on shields for the

protection they afforded people by virtue of their power. No Wyoming scene with bears is comparable to those of central Montana where panels that include bears are usually associated with powerlines or shamans such as the one in the upper right and placed in settings of difficult access. Thus, it seems more likely that bear imagery on panels with a variety of figures acted as ritualistic offerings by their placement on the wall rather than as a recording of a vision by a seeker of a spirit helper. None of the bears in Wyoming rock art appear to be specifically portraying the bear dance as Lynda McNeil has discussed for the Ute of western Colorado and Francis and Loendorf have discussed for bear-human figures at Pictograph Cave in southern Montana.



The only absolute date for a bear in the region was obtained by Loendorf from a *Dual Perspective* petroglyph at the Bear Shield Site near the Montana/Wyoming state line. The cation-ratio date suggests an age of less than 1000 years, or after A.D. 950, during the Late Prehistoric period. Superposition and seriation of central Montana pictographs indicate that paint kinds and colors are temporally the most consistent and sensitive attributes for chronological change. The resulting chronology of bear motifs suggested that *Outlined* paws were earliest, followed by *Solid* paws and small bears, and then large *Dual Perspective* and *Interior Line* bears. The lack of painted bear paws in Wyoming makes placement of them into this chronology problematical, and based on the occurrences of



paws with figures of a variety of styles statewide, it appears that paws were made throughout rock art history in the area. However, that being said, we suggest that paws were most frequently made about the same time the large bears were being drawn, during the last part of the Late Prehistoric Period because they are usually not seen near or



around horses suggesting that they were declining in the rock art by the early 1700s. As we have discussed elsewhere in our examination of weapons in Wyoming and Montana rock art, as the Protohistoric Period approached, rock art scenes increasingly contain more weapons and acts of violence and fewer scenes associated with ritual, ceremony, and shamanism. Weapon evidence therefore supports a pre-contact date for bear rock art in Wyoming with bears not being important during the later Biographic tradition.

Although bears are presently known in only a small percent of the rock art sites recorded in Wyoming, continued survey for new sites and collection of missing information on known sites will change the details presented here. However, this focus on bears in a limited geographical area shows that there is a variety of bear symbolism within the state and that it has similarities and differences when compared with data to the north, which indicate a complex history of movement throughout the area and changes through time of the character of rock art subject matter. Expanding our knowledge of basic data on motifs for small regions provides researchers with the opportunity to find and analyze patterns that cannot be detected without absolute numbers and distributions.