

## *Horses: Late Aboriginal Use of the Legend Rock Site*

Mavis Greer, Ph.D. and John Greer, Ph.D.  
Cody, Wyoming  
April 2009



Paper Presented at the  
The Legend Rock Petroglyph Site in Time and Space: A Symposium  
*Annual Meeting of the Wyoming Archaeological Society*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Horses abound in the rock art of Wyoming, which makes their paucity at the large Legend Rock site intriguing. The limited presence of horse petroglyphs, their limited stylistic variation, and non-association with most panel compositions indicate that horses are late additions to overall site use, placed here by a different cultural or social group. Although horses are not integrated into other scenes, their presence shows function of Legend Rock was not uniform through time, although horses, like the other figures, confirm that all aspects of the site have ties to other rock art sites in the Big Horn Basin.*

When people think about Legend Rock petroglyphs, they don't think about horses. They certainly are not as prominent or eye-catching as the large interior lined glyphs, or even the early fine engraved figures, but they have not been forgotten in past research, including an introduction to several newly found horses by Danny Walker and Mike Bies at the last Plains Conference. However, even with over 20 horses present, horses still are not prominent here, and this has relegated them to a minor role in the overall site analysis, so today we look closer at these figures.

The overall Legend Rock Site has three named sections. At Legend Rock 1, the central bluff and visitor area, there is one panel with two finely incised horses surrounded by panels of impressive pecked glyphs. At Legend Rock 2, to the northeast, there are two finely incised horses on an isolated panel at the western end of the bluff, and near the eastern end is a fully pecked animal that some think may be a horse or mule. Most horses, and the most easily identifiable, are along Legend Rock 3, the southwestern bluff. They are created by various techniques that include painting, abrading, rubbing, and incising. Obtaining an exact count on how many horses are at Legend Rock is not easy as some are extremely abstract making identification difficult and best done by recognition of the neck, ears, or legs, and many are very lightly scratched and difficult to see even in the most optimum lighting conditions.

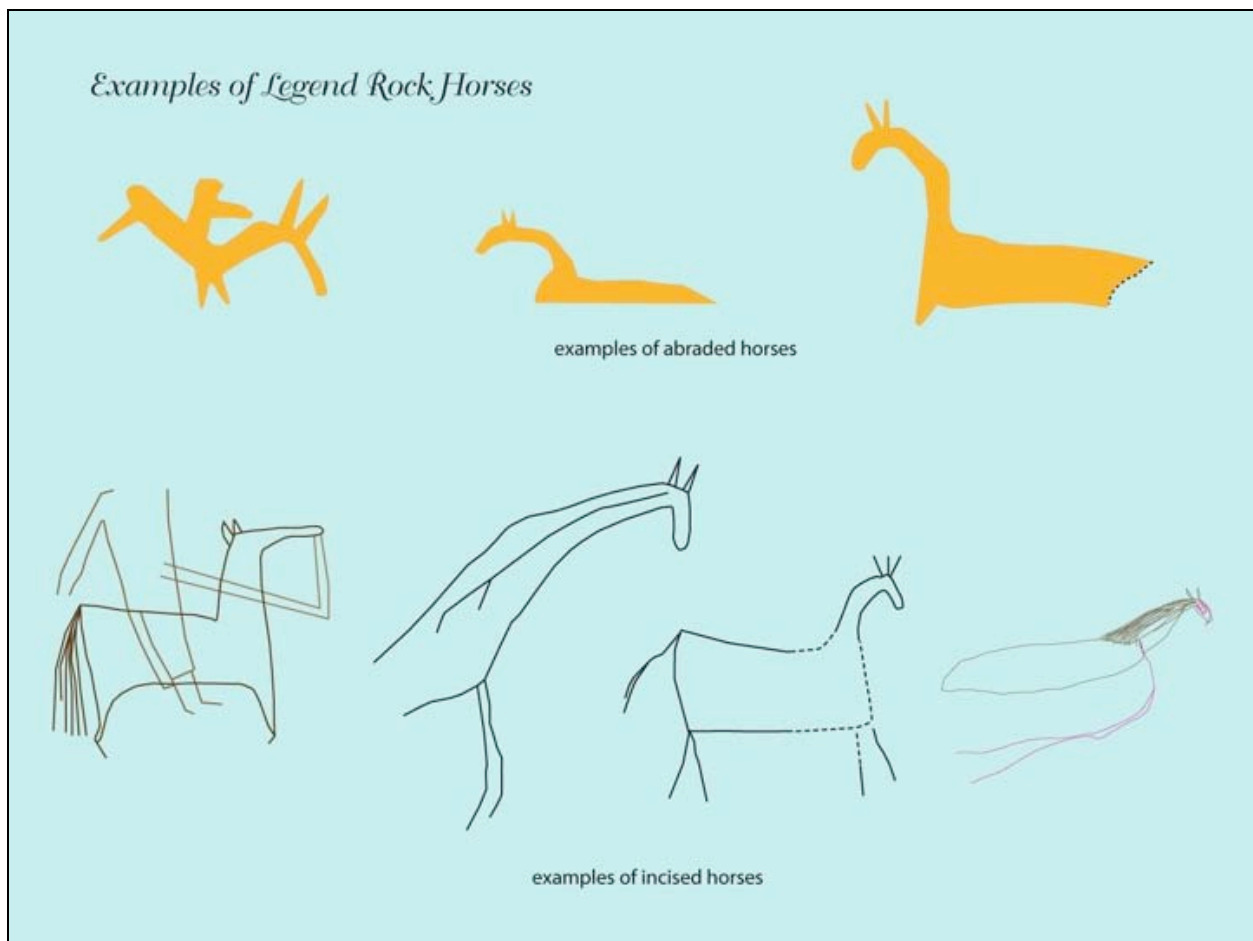


*Best known Legend Rock horses.*

Horses have been recognized at Legend Rock throughout its recording history, and in the 1973 National Register nomination two panels with the most noticeable horses, which are in the southwestern area 3, are featured (see above photo). However, some of the first site records misidentify various four-legged animals as horses, thus complicating use of previous work. Mary Helen Hendry, for instance, identified any four-legged animal as a horse and used that information to argue that all Legend Rock figures were historic. Hendry's views from the early 1980s were used in early cultural resource reports to support an age of about 1750 to 1880 for all images at Legend Rock. Jim Stewart wrote about the horses in 1988, but his data were limited to the horse herd

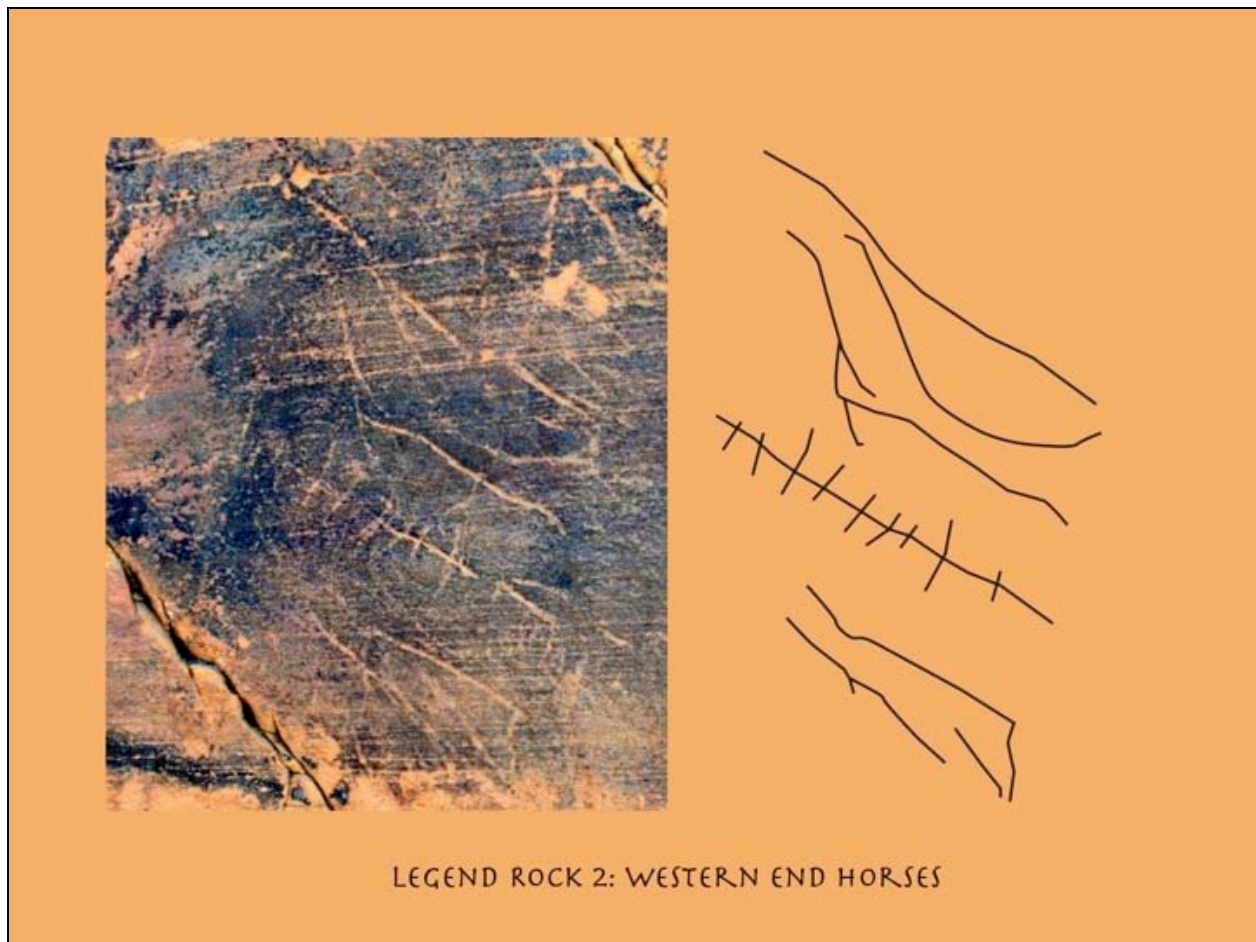


at Legend Rock 3, shown on the bottom here, and he dismissed all other horses with a belief that there are no other protohistoric or historic period petroglyphs at this overall location. By 1989, the more intensive report by Walker and Francis dispelled Hendry's dates and Stewart's limitations and established a new chronology, which included the horses at Legend Rock 1. The 2007 and 2008 field seasons with Danny Walker and Mike Bies increased the number of identifiable horses at Legend Rock and distinguished them from generic quadrupeds. Horses were shown to be similar in overall style or application, but obviously made by more than one person and during multiple episodes.



Horses are frequently shown in ascending position, most are facing right, and the majority with legs have the front folded back indicating the animal is running. There are few riders, although several horses seem to be associated with adjacent human stick figures, incised tipis, or a fish. Most are incised or lightly abraded, and one is a pictograph of liquid red paint.

Beginning on the northern end of the site at Legend Rock 2, two fine-line horses have been identified at a small heavily weathered panel (see photo below). They are recognized by their body shape and partial long, narrow necks, but with missing heads and tails. Their front legs angle backwards, with feet missing, and back legs were not drawn. This theme of missing rear legs also is represented on Legend Rock 1 and 3. There are other unidentifiable lines and figures on this panel, and content of the original scene is not known, but there were no humans and no horse accoutrements.



LEGEND ROCK 2: WESTERN END HORSES

On the eastern end of Legend Rock 2 is a fully pecked animal that has been identified as a possible horse, mule, or deer (see top photo next page). The elongated head with a squared muzzle and long ears and its position next to a pecked figure with some similarity to an early Jesuit priest suggests it may be a mule, but identification is not clear. In this area the *en toto* pecked figures, which include the possible mule and priest, are superimposed over finely incised narrow, vertical anthropomorphs. Because most protohistoric and early historic figures, such as horses and tipis, are finely incised at this site, the position of the fully pecked images on top of the earlier fine-line incised figures suggests the pecked images are not related to the earlier interior line figures and probably date to the 1800s.



A fully pecked animal that has been identified as a possible horse, mule, or deer eastern end of Legend Rock 2.

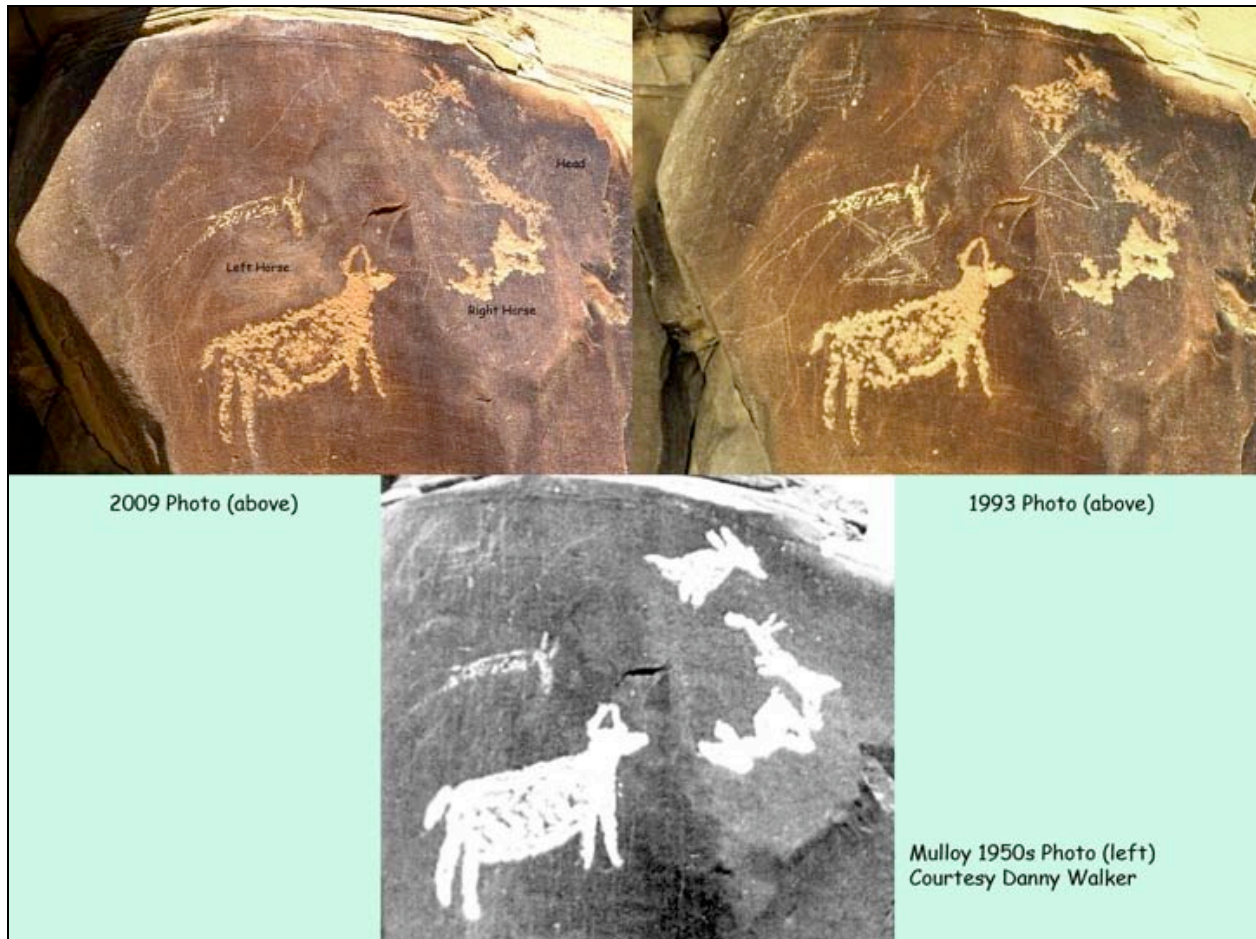
Legend Rock 1 has a small panel with two incised horses (see photos next page). The horse on the left ascends to the upper right, a recurring trait at this site. It has a long, narrow neck morphing into an elongated upper body, pointed ears, and single-line front legs that bend back at the ends. No feet are drawn. The rear part of the horse disappears into the edge of the rock. The neck, head, and ears were later pecked to fill in that portion of the figure and to create part of a heart line, which may have been incised originally. The horse is situated above what appears to be a pecked cow, which was placed on the panel when the over-pecking was done on the horse and when other later figures post-dating the horses were also pecked onto the panel.

To the right of the first horse, is an incised horse with a rectangular body, an unusual characteristic at this site. This figure stands level, not ascending, and is well done, especially the fine head and arched neck. It has a decoration of three lines coming out of the head, much like Ute horses in Colorado and Utah. There is a mane, a slightly curved full tail, and V-shaped straight legs with no feet. The lack of feet is another recurring characteristic of horses at Legend Rock. The horse on the right has very fine incised reins, but some graffiti in the corresponding area under the left-hand horse's muzzle and neck was cleaned by a conservator, as you can see in these dated photos on page 7,









now it is impossible to know if reins or bridle decorations may have been there originally. The two horses appear to have been made at the same time, though in different styles, and other lines on the panel indicate there was more to this scene than is presently visible. The right-hand horse is partially covered with a later fully-pecked crude figure that may have obscured a rider. The pecking is contemporary with that on the left-hand horse, the cow, and three other figures not readily identifiable, although the uppermost pecking may be a bird. These pecked images were present in the 1950s when Mulloy photographed the site. He chalked the pecked images but did not pay attention to the lightly incised horses underneath. Thus, like the eastern panel at Legend Rock 2, later pecking occurs on top of the fine incisions, indicating that the horses were not the last episode of rock art on this complex site.

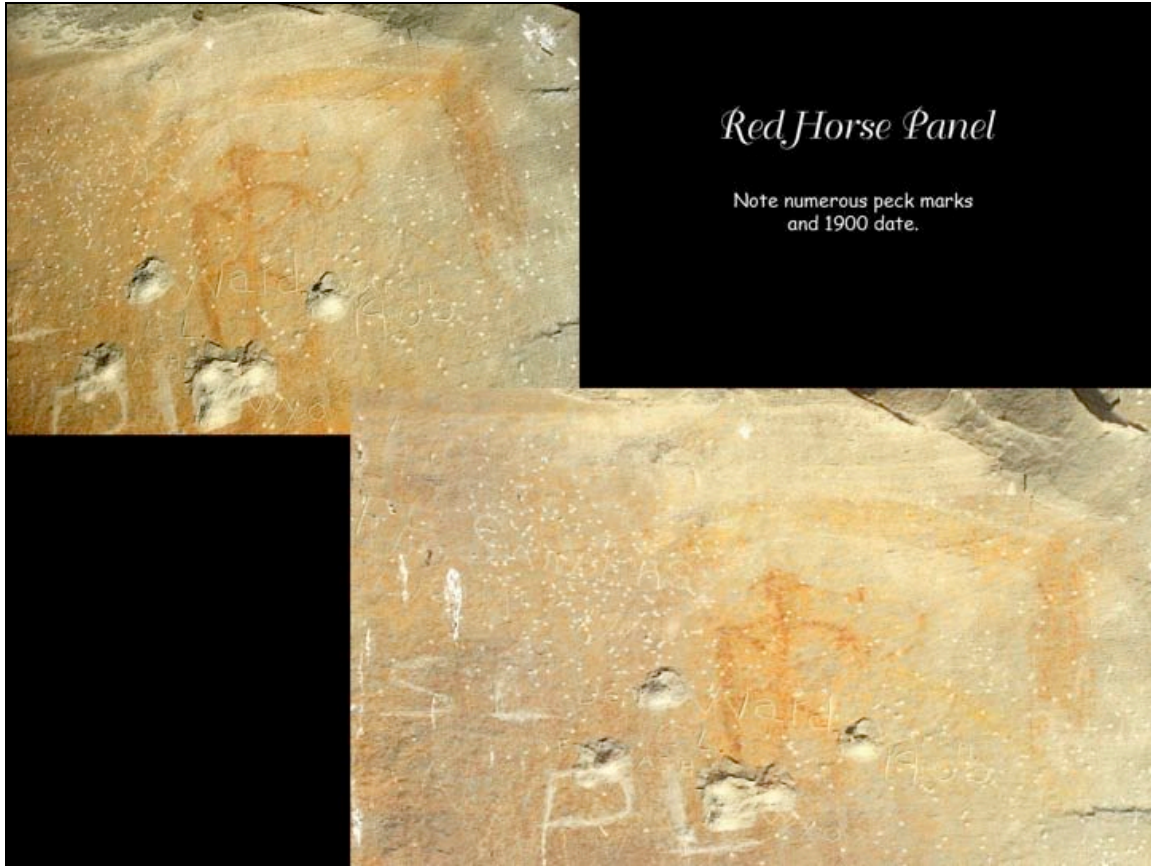
Also at Legend Rock 1 is what has been viewed as a modern image of a nude woman in side profile involved in a sex act with a horse standing on its back legs. This lightly incised figure is hard to see and photograph and has been dismissed in the past as recent. However, Linea Sundstrom suggests this should not be written off as modern graffiti without analysis. The general style of the drawing, its position high on the wall, and the kind of manufacture suggests it may be historic Indian, but the subject matter is more consistent with later shepherd art.



Turning to Legend Rock 3, there is one painted horse and 17 engraved horses scattered along a long bluff, all high above the grassy terrace. Many of the incised figures are difficult to see in most lighting conditions. The red painted horse is the earliest rock art episode on this panel. The area was subsequently entirely pecked with over a hundred small spaced marks. Just around the corner from the horse is an incised tipi and a fish, two associations found on more than one panel at Legend Rock.

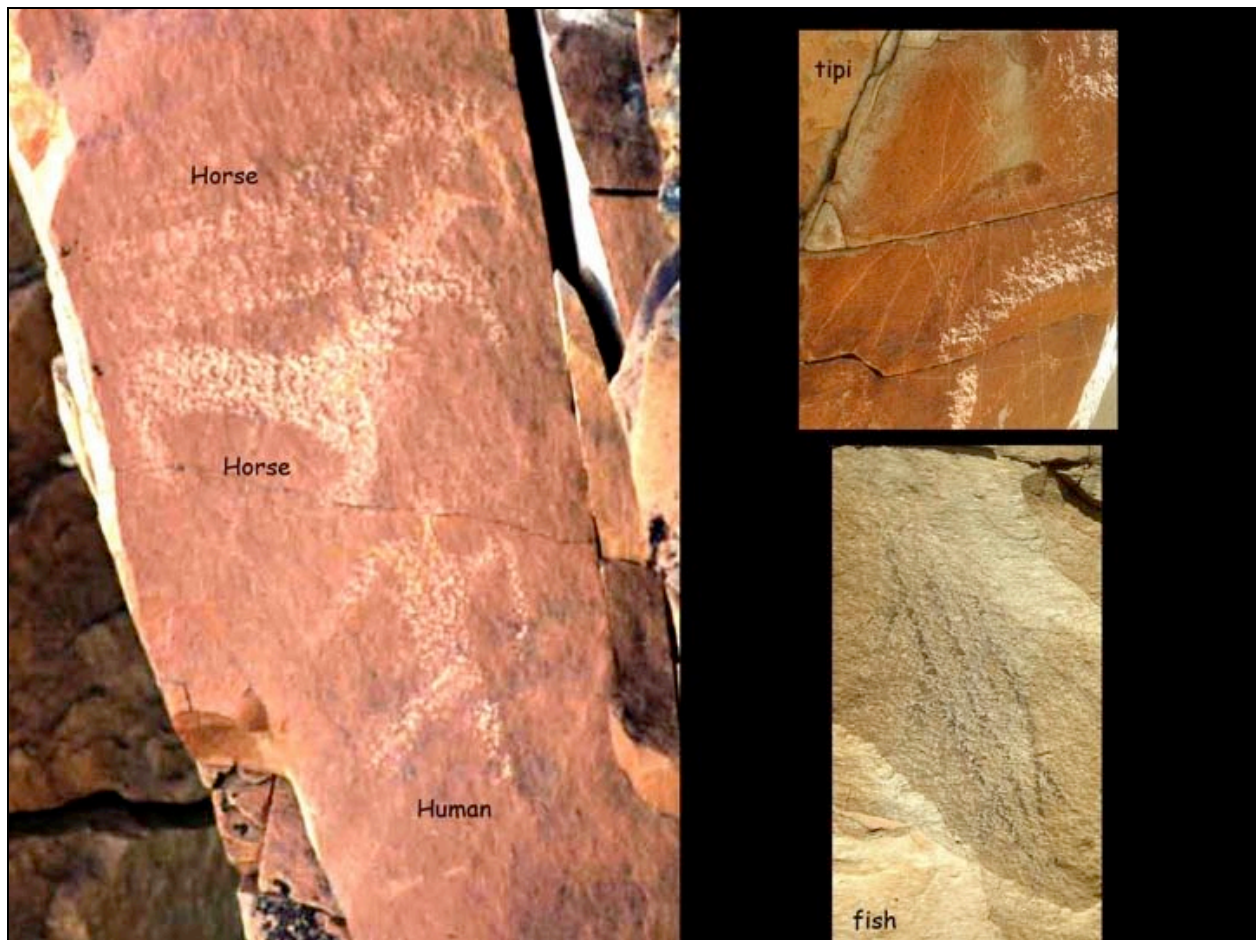
The painted horse has a down-pointing head, prominent V-shaped ears, and a long narrow neck that blends into a stained reddish area, which probably was once painted as the body (see photo on next page). A shielded warrior to the right, standing under the long neck of the horse, holds a rein connected to the horse's muzzle and has a rounded head and straight legs. The oval shield, which covers the warrior's body, has interior decorative lines. A long pipe extends from his head, and its upward pointed end and length suggest it is the eastern calumet type commonly used at the time of contact. The painted horse is large relative to other engraved horses at Legend Rock. A name and date, written across the warrior, indicate the figures predate 1900.





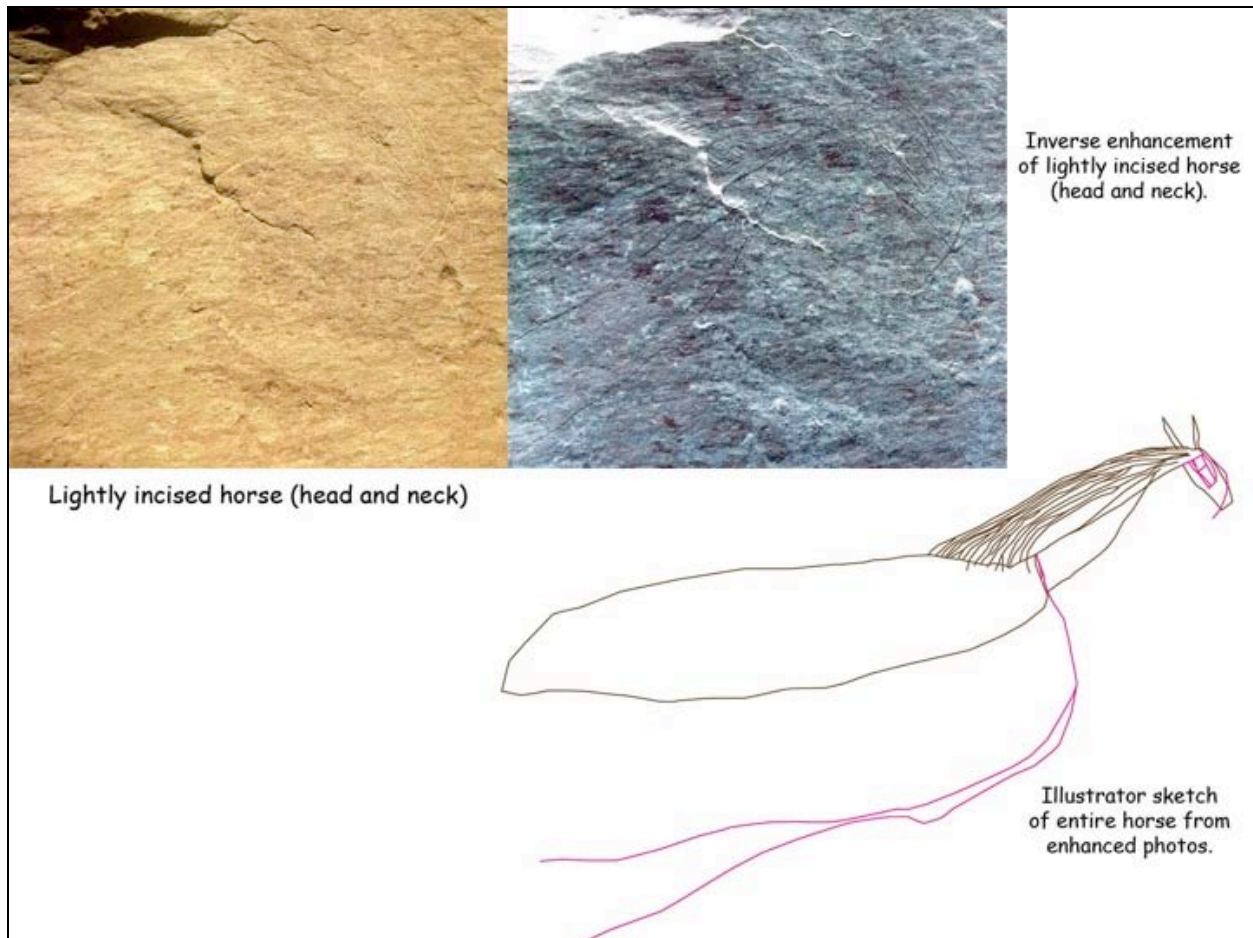
Legend Rock 3 has the only herd of horses in the area, a very high panel of difficult access (see bottom photo on page 9). The six parallel horses are all running upward to the right, with emphasis on their upper bodies with bent back front legs, long narrow curved necks, elongated heads, and V-shaped ears. There are no associated accoutrements or people. A tipi incised over the center of the abraded horse herd does not appear to be contemporary with the original drawing, but it may have been intentionally placed here later because of the horses.

The next panel is also high on the cliff and is around the corner from an incised tipi (see photo below). The lower rubbed or abraded right-facing horse has a constricted torso, a curving neck, fairly short V-shaped ears, and a long head. The legs are not well defined, but curving of the front legs indicate it is running. The horse is abraded on top of an earlier deeply pecked petroglyph, which appears to be a linear anthropomorph with a large open circular head, a triangular skirt (beneath the horse), and one leg (beneath the shoulder of the horse). A minimally abraded area just above the darker horse is another horse's body, facing right, with its head also on top of the earlier anthropomorph. Additionally, an abraded stick anthropomorph the same age as the horses is just below the lower horse. Just to the right of the horses, on the next rock face, is a large fish painted in what appears to be black clay and in good detail.





On the face of a nearby narrow upper ledge are two more incised horses. The horse on the left, and shown on this slide, has pointed ears, a long bushy mane, a squared muzzle, and what appears to be a bridle with a long blinker, like is commonly used for mules, and one short rein. From the base of the neck are two long trailing lines, perhaps reins or lead ropes. There is no obvious tail. This animal is about 90 cm long, making it one of the larger incised horses at the site.



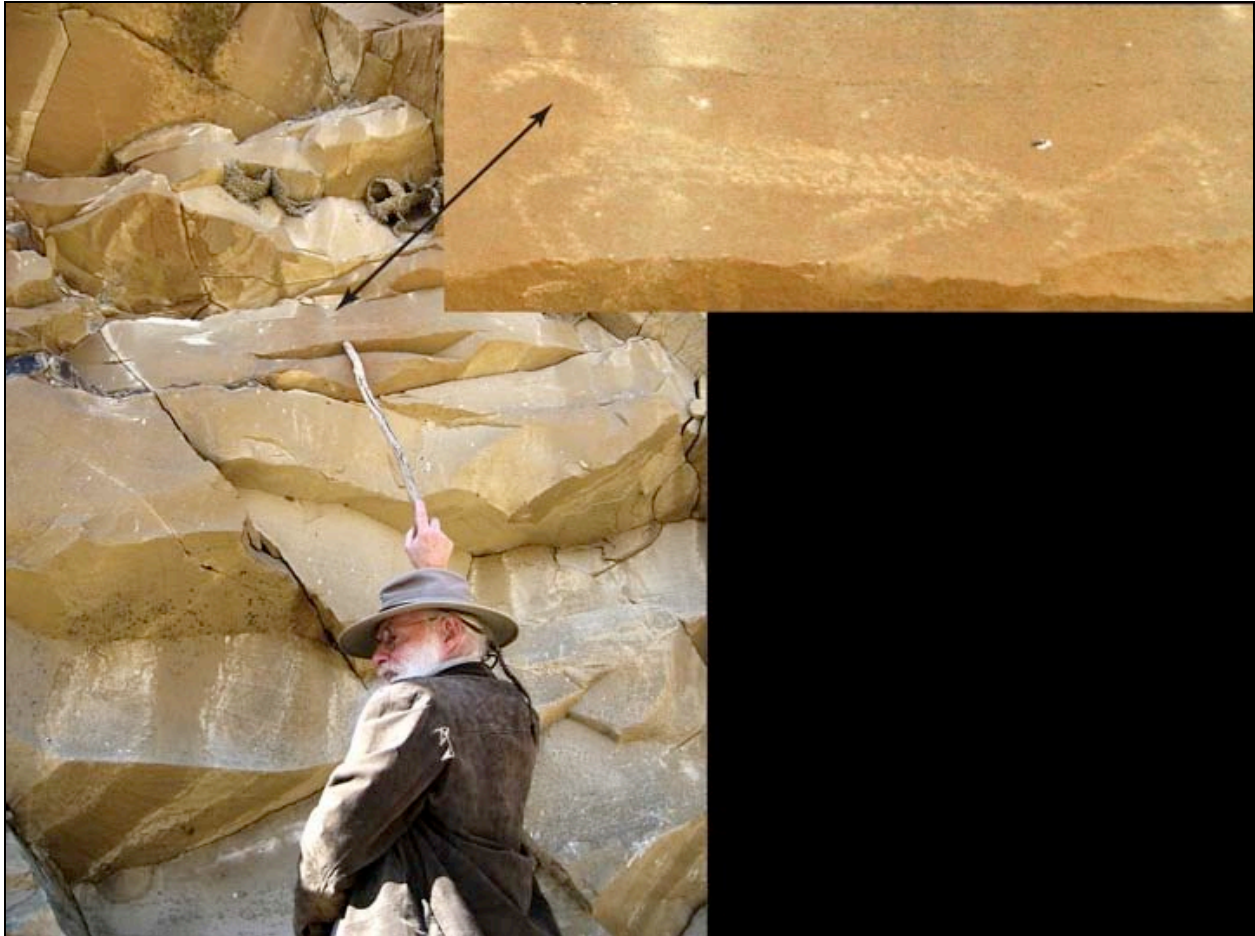
The adjacent horse, with a complex mounted shield bearing warrior, is a well known figure at this site (see photos next page). It is made by abrading and incising, and the entire horse's body and legs are scratched. It has a long curved neck, V-shaped ears, and unusually short V-shaped legs with no feet. The tail is a few incised lines, and there is no obvious mane. Six dangle lines of a decorated bit descend from the mouth, and double reins run back to the rider. The large circular shield is bordered by fringe and has a decorated center with two broad vertical lines and a diagonal banner — these lines could represent the body behind the shield, since the vertical lines continue outside to form the human's legs. The round head is crowned with radiating rays. One arm holds an inverted lance with a feathered shaft and a huge metal spear point going down onto the horse rather than upward as is universally common. An associated fully scratched large fish is just to the right of the horse.







Still at Legend Rock 3 is another abraded horse about ten feet above the present ground level (see photo below). The left-facing animal has a curved narrow neck, typical ears, and an elongated face. Leg position and raised tail indicate the horse is running. There is no rider and no accoutrements.



Slightly lower on another ledge is a fairly simple, though crude incised horse, facing right. Just above the rear end of the horse is a simple incised triangular tipi, obviously associated with the horse (see photo next page).

To summarize, two associations with Legend Rock horses stand out. Several horses are near or face tipis, and for this last figure, the tipi may represent a name glyph, based on similarities with robe and ledger art. Also at least three horses have associated or nearby fish, an unusual pairing since fish are rare in local rock art.

Four horses have riders, including the one with the elaborate shield-bearing warrior. Most horses are plain with no rider or accoutrements, and most are in running positions, which may represent wild horses, especially the unusual herd of six animals. The herd portrayal is different from ledger and robe art showing horse capturing, as can be seen in these examples, where humans are present with the plain horses.



The earliest date for an excavated horse in southwestern Wyoming is about 1680, with most horses entering with the Shoshone about 1700. The incised and abraded horses at Legend Rock are clearly later than the large interior-line figures that Francis and Loendorf dated as old as 3000 B.P. However, superpositioning shows that horses and other finely engraved or scratched figures are not the latest images and are overlaid in some cases by fully pecked figures. Styles suggest the horses here probably date from the early part of the historic period. Feet, legs, and heads are not as well defined as later rock art horses, such as at the Tolar Site east of Rock Springs, and they are much simpler than horses on robe or ledger art. Most Legend Rock horses have relatively little detail, with common traits including a long narrow neck and fairly short, similarly made V-shaped ears.

The site is also notable in what it lacks relative to horses. There are no biographic scenes, and decorative or functional accoutrements are rare. Reins are shown on only seven horses, and in one case the horse appears to have blinders attached to a formal bridle. Only one horse has a decorative bit. No horse tracks are present. The only weapon is the lance held upside-down by the elaborate shield-bearing warrior whereas horses in biographic scenes at other sites are commonly shown in the midst of bows, arrows, and guns, either carried by riders or filling out the scene. Given the long rock art use of this series of cliffs, armored horses would have been expected in the earliest



Comparative horses from other sources below.



horse portrayals. Frison remembers seeing one in the Honeycombs southeast of Worland, but no others have been reported in the Big Horn Basin, although they occur in the central, eastern, and southwestern parts of the state. The simple horse portrayals at Legend Rock suggest they were drawn during the 1700s, with the shield-bearing warrior horse being latest, probably not past the mid 1800s.

While all three sections of Legend Rock contain horses, they are by far most common in the southwestern area. They are not integrated into panels with the early pecked images, and the paucity of horses in the northeastern parts of the site may be due in part to avoidance of the more dramatic earlier shamanistic type figures and a desire for clean canvas for the new drawings.

Variation in executions of the horse and their distribution across the site suggest they were made by different people at different times, although within a relatively short archeological time range. The latest images likely were made by Shoshone, Crow, or Blackfeet, all of whom used the area during the early horse period and engaged in hunting and battles. Different tribal groups may be represented, but they were all part of a new Plains cultural change unified by the coming of the horse, which like later radio, television, and the internet worked to make the world a smaller place for people on the northwestern Plains and adjacent mountains. The horse integrated those cultures in unprecedented ways, as reflected in changing rock art style and content throughout the region. Horses, unlike the previous large interior-lined figures, were cross-cultural, and early horse portrayal in rock art began generically and evolved to incorporate tribal stylistic differentiation, such as variation in horse decoration and accoutrements. Thus, horses served as cultural identification in rock art by groups traversing the region when they became more sophisticated in their portrayal, which further argues for the Legend Rock horses being some of the first drawn in the region.

