

Sacred Rocks

By: Ray Urbaniak

I have lived in Southern Utah for 11 ½ years, and during this period I have observed and photographed the accelerating pace of vandalism, destruction of, as well as theft of Native American Rock Art. I, like others, have started referring to the Petroglyphs & Pictographs created by the Anasazi (Ancestral Puebloans) as well as the Paiute bands of Native Americans as “Rock Art”. I started using the term because it was a simple grouping instead of having to say “petroglyphs and pictographs”. That was a mistake. If we want a shorter phrase it should at least be “Sacred Rock Art”.

In June of 2010 I photographed a petroglyph while visiting a near by panel I was studying for its archaeoastronomy alignments.



I have never seen any pottery at this site, just some stone flakes from knapping arrow heads. This, in my experience indicated that these

petroglyphs were made during the early Anasazi Basketmaker period (before the introduction of pottery). That means that these petroglyphs had been here for around 2000 years.

When I returned for additional study I was shocked and disgusted to find that the petroglyph had been ruined.



Some time during the preceding 10 month period someone or group of people had destroyed the glyph as well as a number of other petroglyphs. Petroglyphs that had survived 2000 years were now ruined!

Additional panel photos below...



They had also desecrated the rest of the rock face....



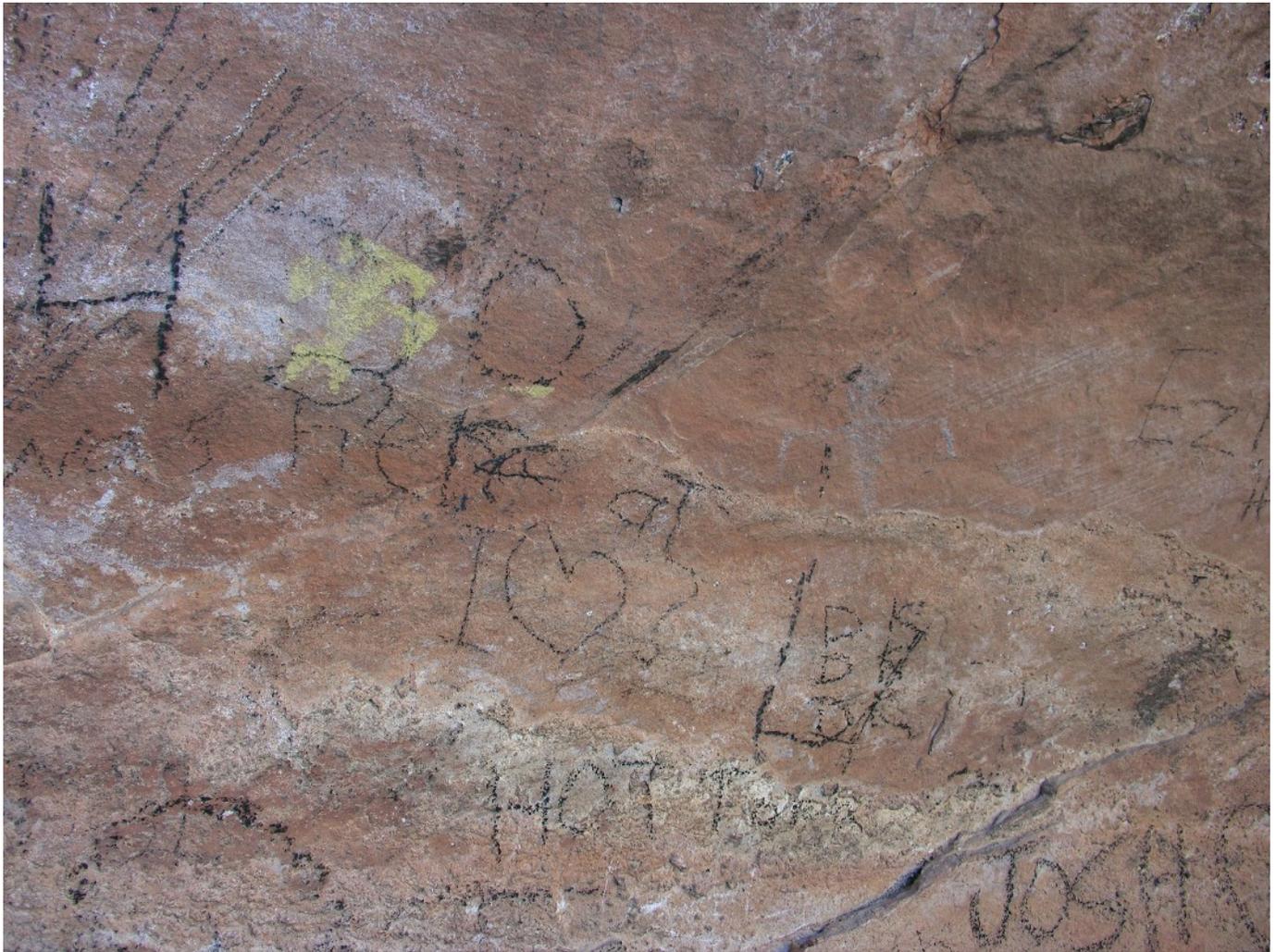
Even a lone ancient petroglyph some 600 feet up from the other sites had graffiti near it.



Jon Gum, who has started a group called CPR Art, Coalition to Preserve Rock Art(in Southern Utah), and I took two BLM(Bureau of Land Management) officers to the first site as well as a neighboring vandalized site and suggested that at least signs should be posted. Unfortunately, we never received any follow up response from the agents.

I think it is extremely important to stress how Sacred the Petroglyphs and Pictographs were to the people who created them. However, many people think Sacred Rock Art was a form of graffiti, which is common today (Graffiti is the illicit writing, drawing, scribbling, scratching or painting on the rocks).

Pictured below is a pictograph panel that is covered with names and initials, which is a modern activity....Note the golden pictograph figure on the panel with a faint gray figure to his right.(There is no sign stating that this is a protected site.)



Here are another couple of photos of desecrated sites...



I could continue showing numerous examples but I think I have made my point.

I always felt the petroglyph panels were Sacred because I could feel the energy being emanated from the pristine panels.

This understanding was amplified when I stumbled onto a large Anasazi pueblo site (a living site for many families) that had some nice rocks on the perimeter of the pueblo site. I had visited a number of sites like this and there were petroglyphs on the rocks. In anticipation, I checked every rock at the site for petroglyphs. To my amazement I didn't find any. In fact, I didn't even see a scratch on any of the boulders! This was a pueblo that certainly had numerous families with children running around and playing at the site yet not one of them scratched anything on any one of the boulders!

Photo of one of the rocks below...



The power at this site was the pristine nature of the rocks. It is obvious that the rocks were deemed so Sacred that it was made clear to even the children that they were not to be touched! This left an incredible impression on me. For the first time I understood that only certain rocks, boulders and cliff faces were deemed appropriate for the pecking, incising or painting, and most likely only by select members of the tribe. The other rocks were not to be touched. I have since noticed many beautiful rock surfaces that were not touched and in many cases lesser surfaces were covered with petroglyphs.

I do not claim to understand why or how these selections were made, I just understand that selections were made. Petroglyphs and pictographs were not applied randomly.

As with everything in life I am certain there were exceptions, but this was generally the case.

Many other panels and sites are destroyed for road widening, reservoir construction and new housing development.

Road widening destruction



The following panel was mitigated (removed) to make way for a highway. In fact, this panel was overlooked, along with another panel, when surveying for a new highway. I noticed that they were not listed when I read the survey and informed the State Archaeologist. I later took an archaeologist to the site to document both panels. Fortunately, it appears the large panel will be spared destruction or removal (mitigation).



Below is an example of horizontal petroglyphs being blasted to make room for houses.

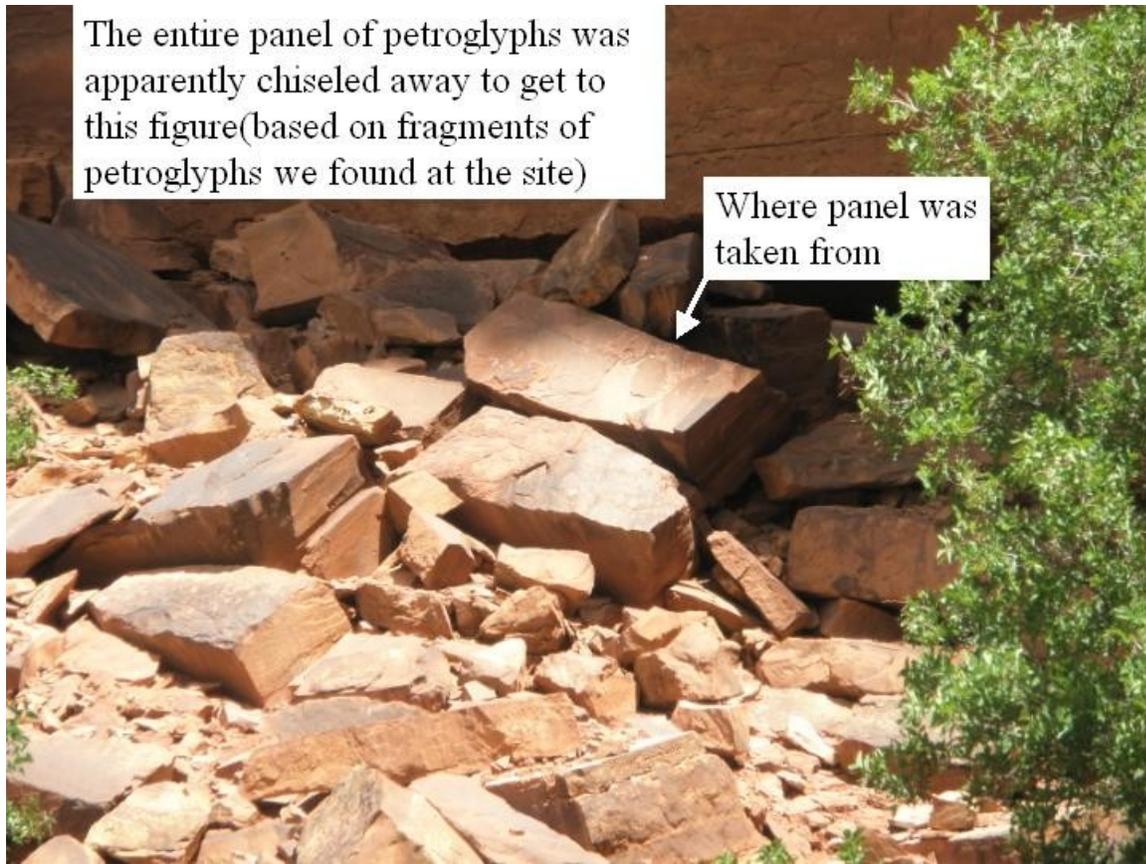


In addition to vandalizing and destruction there is actual theft. The BLM distributed a poster with a petroglyph that had been removed after being photographed with chisel marks around it (Whoever photographed it

didn't realize that they were photographing the panel while it was in the process of being removed).



A friend of mine stumbled upon the site where this panel had been removed from and we found that they had not only removed this petroglyph, they had in fact destroyed every petroglyph on this panel in order to get to this one glyph (we found pieces of petroglyphs scattered below the panel).



I later stumbled onto a pueblo site that had both petroglyphs and pictographs. This was a BLM site marked by a BLM pin. I noticed chisel marks on the rock face similar to those around the one-legged man glyph.



With much effort I got hold of the BLM and gave them the GPS coordinates. I asked them if they had a photo of what was originally there (petroglyph or pictograph), but I never received a reply.

3- Dimensional Sacred Rock Art

I've often wondered why there isn't any 3-dimensional stone carving in this area, as there is in Mexico and South America. Is it because they lacked the technical skill, or is it because the rocks were too sacred to carve? I wonder what they would think of Mt Rushmore or the Crazy Horse Memorial?

The only stone sculptures in this area are those created by Nature. There is a reclining head (probably about the size of Mt. Rushmore) in Cave Valley shown below (shown rotated 90 degrees).



In one particular cave, in the valley below this head (and not too far away), are some exquisite pictographs. Part of the reason for the pictographs at this site may be the existence of this head. One enhanced photo taken in this cave is shown below.



There is a park service sign at this pictograph site, which I feel is at least partly responsible for preventing destruction of this very important site, despite relatively high visitation.



In another location there is a large boulder that looks like a bear which has petroglyphs on it. It is not surprising that included in those petroglyphs are a bear paw glyphs.



Glyphs of bear paw prints on the boulder...



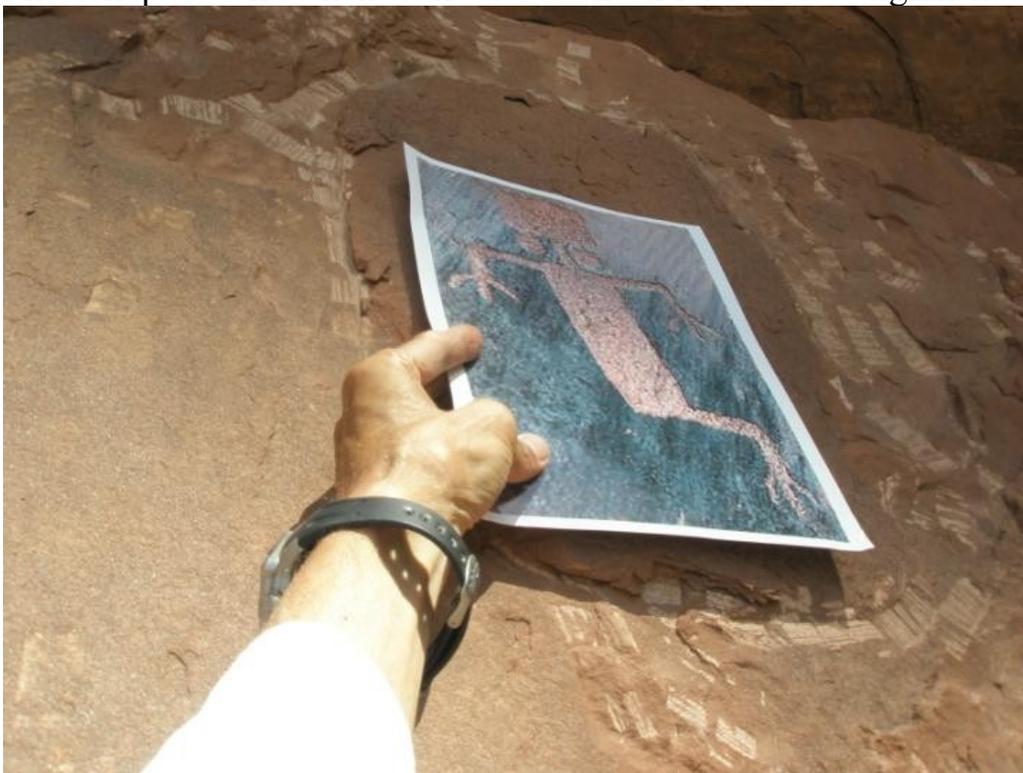
Hand shown below for scale



I have taken to using Photoshop to restore petroglyphs and pictographs, on the computer, in order to get a feel for what the damaged Sacred Rock Art would have looked like in its pristine condition.



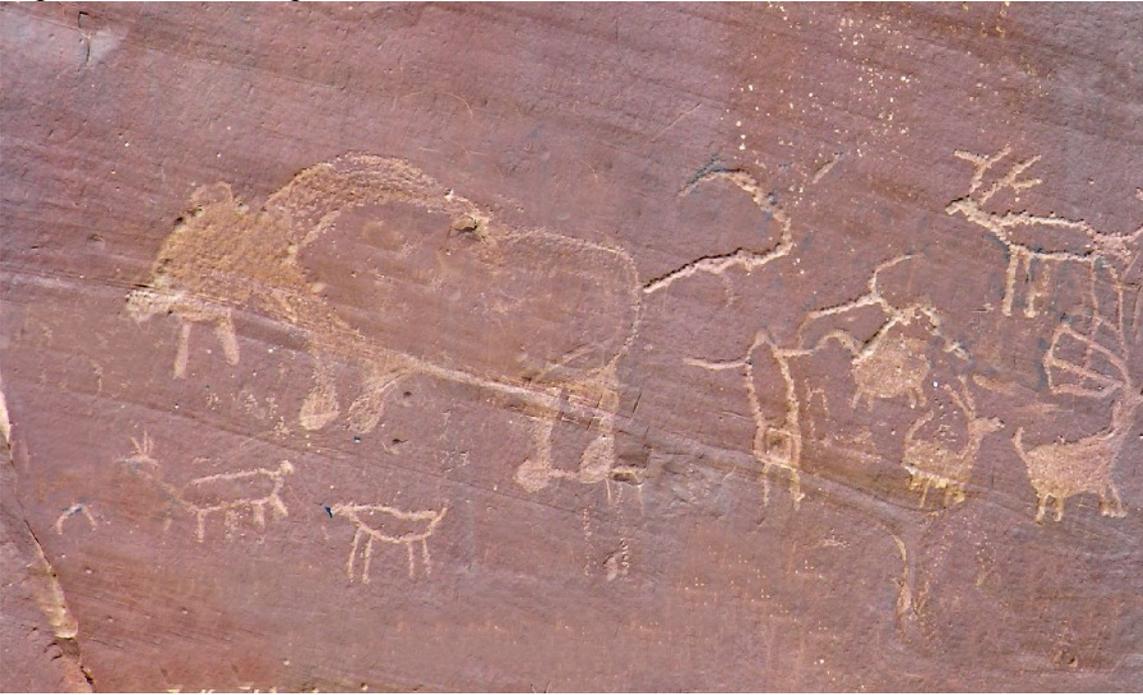
Photoshoped....and taken to the site to check for Solstice alignment.



Another ruined panel



A portion Photoshopped below



A Pictograph panel also with graffiti...



Photoshoped(I removed the names and initials)



As I mentioned in the beginning, the pace of destruction is accelerating. The only way I can see to slow down this destruction is to educate people as to the Sacred nature of petroglyphs and pictographs and unfortunately, to post more signs.

Most of my research is in the area of Archaeoastronomy. I study Sacred Solstice and Equinox Markers. Some people move rocks with petroglyphs on them and feel it is O.K. since they aren't damaging them. Even moving them destroys their alignments and in affect destroys the site!

Please help educate people as to the Sacred Nature of these Rocks, and the need to preserve this important cultural heritage.