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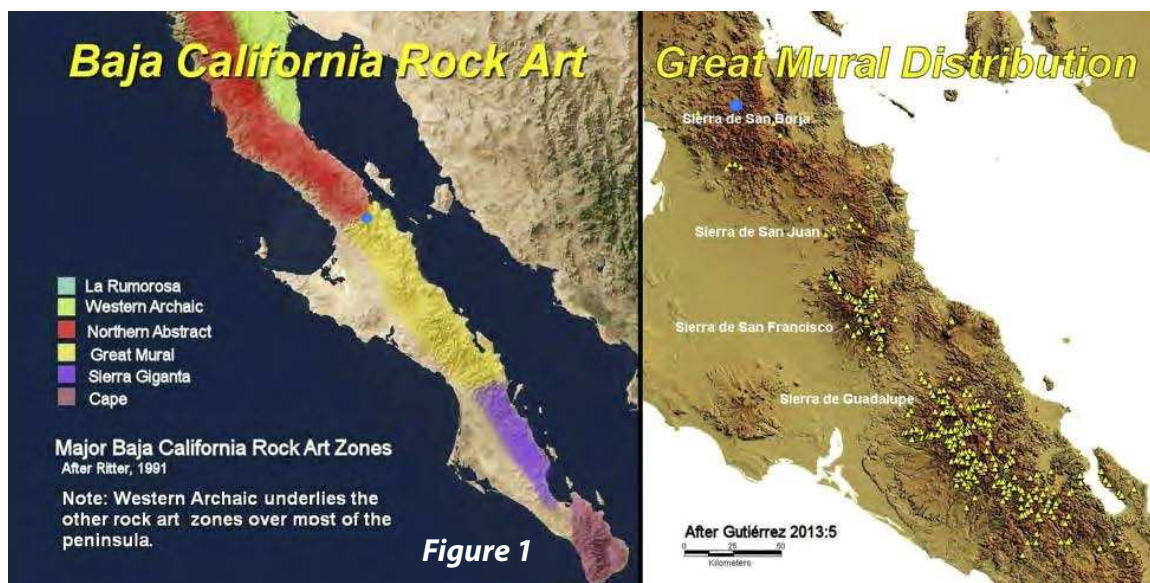
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A Tale of Two Cañadas: The Most Northerly Great Mural Site Yet Discovered

by Jon Harman

In the Sierra de San Borja in Baja California are two cañadas perched as hanging valleys at the edge of a deep and steep sided arroyo. The cañadas are separated by less than 300 meters and both have pictographs in rock shelters. In one the painting is abstract. The other is newly discovered and contains Great Mural art, the most northerly such site known. This paper will document the Great Mural site, discuss the geography of the sites and compare with nearby Great Mural sites. An intriguing possibility is that the abstract sites were established first at a preferable location, and only later the Great Mural site was occupied in a nearby, but less desirable location.



Baja California Rock Art Zones (left), Great Mural Distribution (right).

BACKGROUND

Harry Crosby explored the Sierra de San Borja (also called the Sierra la Libertad) in 1973 and 1974. He found 6 widely separated Great Mural sites, but felt "it is certain that dozens of additional sites will eventually be located." (Crosby 1997:206). To my knowledge only a few other significant Great Mural sites have been found in this Sierra that are not near ones that Crosby found. This new site is in a part of the sierra that Crosby visited, but did not find Great Mural art. The sites described here are at the northern limit of Great Mural art and may shed insight into a cultural discontinuity occurring there (Ritter, 1995:17).

Great Mural rock art is well described in Crosby's excellent book. Most of the sites (many hundreds) lie to the south of the Sierra de San Borja. Moving from south to north, most of the sites are found in the Sierra de Guadalupe, many in the Sierra de San Francisco, a few in the Sierra de San Juan and even fewer in the Sierra de San Borja. See Figure 1, right (from Gutiérrez 2013:5). To the north of Mission San Borja the character of the rock art changes. Eve Ewing named this rock art region the

Northern Abstract style and felt it predated Great Mural art (Ewing 1988).

The sites in this paper are located about 13 km southeast of Mission San Borja at the border between the Northern Abstract rock art zone and the Great Mural zone. See Figure 1, left (from Ritter 1991:24). The location of the sites is shown by a blue dot. Both zones lie within the prehistoric Cochimi linguistic

area although there is a dialect change near this area (Laylander 1997:42-43). Ritter (1995) argues that this dialect change occurs near Mission San Borja and coincides with the rock art style change. Underlying the other styles over most of the Peninsula is the presumably older Western Archaic style.

There are two large abstract sites north of Mission San Borja. One, Montevideo, is near Bahía de los Ángeles and the

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other, Las Tinajitas is close to the mission (Ritter et al. 2011:5). Both were visited by Crosby and are mentioned in his book (Crosby 1997:199,205). I have documented Las Tinajitas and one of the sites mentioned here (Buena Vista) in an unpublished presentation (Harman 2012).

The rock art sites described in this paper lie in two cañadas (a cañada is a small tributary to an arroyo) within 300 yards of each other. They both form hanging valleys above a deep arroyo with steep cliffs at the top of the arroyo sides. Figure 2 is a photo of the mouths of the Cañadas from below. For convenience I will name the cañadas using the names of the rock art sites within them. Buena Vista is on the left in Figure 2 and contains the



The two cañadas

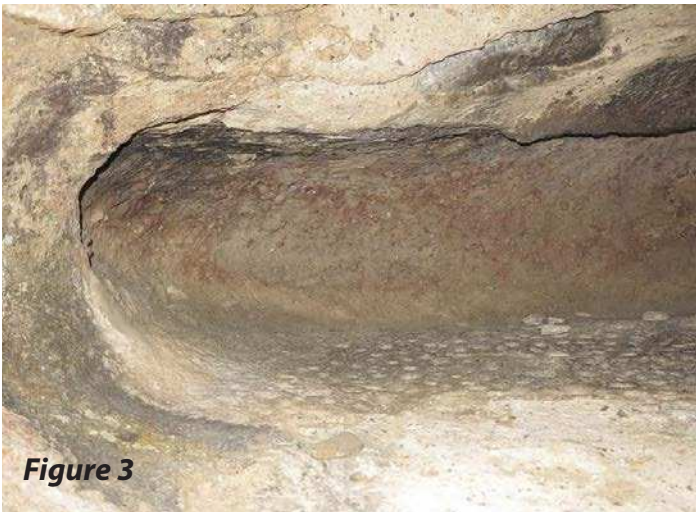
abstract sites. The new Great Mural site is in La Granja on the right.

Several of the images in this paper have been enhanced for better visibility by the DStretch rock art enhancement program. See www.DStretch.com for more information about this program.

BUENA VISTA

The Buena Vista cañada is a gentle swale with many volcanic rock shelters and tinajas (natural water tanks) that hold a significant amount of water. There is a small dam created in historic times to further enhance the water availability. The bottom of the cañada is relatively flat and slopes gently to the cliffs overlooking the arroyo. This flat area abounds in lithics including late prehistoric points and grindstones. Below the cliffs the watercourse runs down the slope of the arroyo and has many large volcanic rocks along it. Each of the several rock shelters among the rocks show evidence of occupation, mainly grinding stones. Although for the most part the cliffs at the cañada mouth are impassible there is one place that provides an easy way down. This route has all the indications of a trail, but was unknown to ranchers from the area. Amongst many rock shelters in a volcanic formation on the west side of the cañada is one with rock art, see Figure 3. This unnamed shelter is about two meters in width and one meter high. Along the back wall is abstract painting in red. The floor is covered in cupules. The shelter gives the impression of great age (but no dating has been done).

The Buena Vista rock shelter is nearby and very near the cliff. It is larger, about four meters in width by two meters height, see Figure 4. The character of the rock art is similar to the large



Small shelter near Buena Vista rock shelter



Buena Vista rock shelter



Portion of Buena Vista ceiling, DStretch YDT enhancement

Las Tinajitas site about 13 km to the north (Harman 2012). The DStretch enhancement in Figure 5 shows a portion of the ceiling demonstrating the polychrome (mainly) abstract pictographs.

LA GRANJA SETTING

The La Granja cañada is a steep sided ravine without water. The rock shelter is found in the sheer cliffs at the arroyo edge. Entering it requires a steep climb from above. There is a way down to the bottom of the arroyo from the rock shelter, but it is

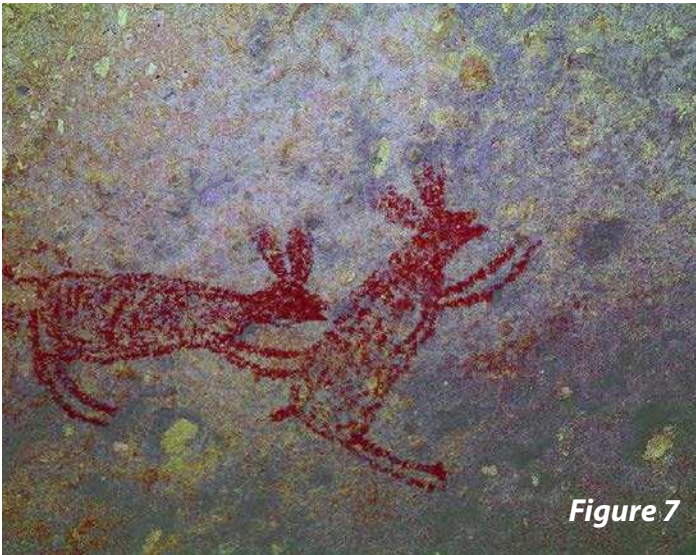
difficult. The paintings are in two chambers. One is above and consists of a low section (one meter high by three meters length) and a larger section (two - four meters high and eight meters in length). Both sections are open towards the arroyo and are about three - four meters in depth. The second chamber is several meters below the first and is reached by a steep trail. It is about two meters high and three meters in length. In Figure 6 the main chamber is at the center while the second chamber is below and to the right.



La Granja rock shelter from above

The main chamber has blackened walls and ceiling, perhaps from fires. There are a few flakes and a grindstone and hand stone on the floor. The walls of the lower chamber are not blackened. There is a grindstone and some flakes on its floor.

LA GRANJA PAINTINGS



La Granja deer, DStretch YRD enhancement

There are 23 separate figures in La Granja with indications of several more that have been eroded away. All the paintings are in red with the exception of two polychrome paintings that also include black. All the paintings are figurative, mainly deer, but also including one anthropomorph and one borrego (mountain sheep). The “dancing rabbits” panel may consist of rabbits or

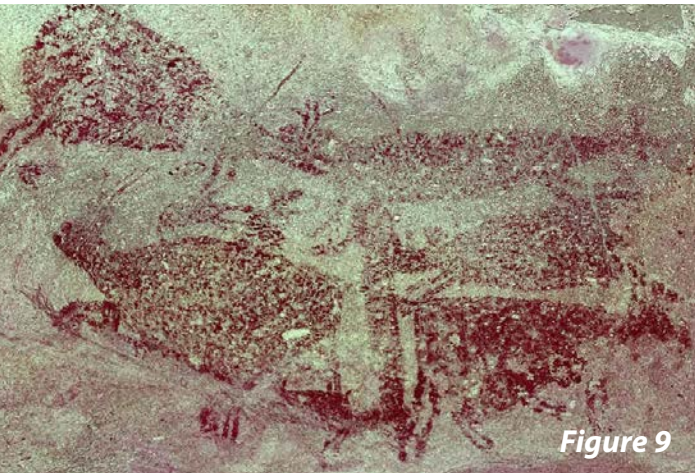
deer. Some fragmentary figures cannot be identified. Figure 7 shows two deer from the low ceiling section of the upper chamber. The deer are about 60 cm in length.

Figure 8 shows a portion of the back wall of the second section of the upper chamber. The area of the photo is about two meters in height by four meters in width. The blackened



La Granja blackened wall

surface obscures the paintings on the wall. Using DStretch (YRE enhancement) the character of the paintings is revealed (Figure 9). There are five large deer arranged around an anthropomorph (called a “mono” in Great Mural art) with arms up. The



La Granja blackened wall, DStretch YRE enhancement

anthropomorph has body divided vertically with one half painted red, the other either unpainted or painted black (it is hard to determine this due to the very poor preservation). Two male deer are on the right and three females (or at least without horns) on the left. There are also several small deer-like figures. The two upper deer have spears painted in their backs, a common occurrence in Great Mural art.

In the lower chamber are several panels the most notable of which is shown in Figure 10. The panel consists of six deer or rabbits which appear to be dancing.



Figure 10

La Granja dancing rabbits, DStretch YRD enhancement

COMPARISON WITH OTHER NEARBY GREAT MURAL SITES

Harry Crosby noted a different style in the sites he visited in the Sierra de San Borja. “The style of the paintings is conspicuously homogeneous and discernibly different from artworks elsewhere in the Great Mural area.” (Crosby 1997:207) He named the style Red-on-Granite. It is distinguished by life-sized or slightly smaller figures done in red on the sides of granite boulders. Monos have long torso’s and short limbs with arms down occasionally, rather than the arms up convention universally followed in the Sierra de San Francisco. (Crosby 1997:207) Crosby felt that “this leads to a preliminary opinion that they were created by members of a single cultural group during a relatively brief period of time.” (Crosby 1997: 207) This site fits Crosby’s description, except that the paintings are inside a rock shelter, not on the sides of boulders. There are, however, other Red-on-Granite sites that include paintings inside rock shelters. Such occur at Campo Monte and San Pedro, sites that Crosby visited, but did not describe any paintings in rock shelters (Crosby 1997:197,202). The mono is similarly proportioned as other Red-on-Granite monos. Most of the painting is in red, but there is black paint in the mono and one deer.

The closest known Great Mural site, Rincón de las Cuevas, is about 17 km east of La Granja. It was felt by Crosby to be dissimilar to the Red-on-Granite sites he had seen. (Crosby 1997:198). For more information on Rincón de las Cuevas and San Pedro, see Harman (2013a). The large site, Campo Monte, about 33 km to the south, has been described in Crosby (Crosby 1997,: 202) and Harman (2009). Campo Monte is the best known Red-on-Granite site, yet also has elements not entirely fitting within the Red-on-Granite description.

NEARBY ABSTRACT SITES

Two large Northern Abstract sites to the north of Buena Vista are Las Tinajitas (13 km) and Montevideo (30 km). A small abstract site is at San Gregorio 3 km to the north (Harman 2012). La Angostura is an abstract site located 32 km to the west (Ritter 2010). The author has visited other small abstract sites at San Ignacio 20 km to the northwest and La Florida 6 km to the northeast. This pattern of a few large sites with many smaller sites mirrors the pattern of Great Mural sites in the Sierra de Guadalupe.

The juxtaposition of these two sites is worth some

consideration. Great Mural sites are usually not hidden, for instance Crosby’s Red-on-Granite style is characterized by large figures on exposed granite boulders. They are often found near water. It is curious that this Great Mural site is found in an inaccessible location in a dry steep sided cañada with difficult access to the arroyo below. One possibility that we explore is that the Buena Vista cañada was already occupied by a different group who made the abstract paintings.

There is an abstract panel near the many Great Mural panels at Campo Monte (Crosby 1997:204). There are two Great Mural figures at the predominately abstract site La Angostura (Ritter 2010:157). Montevideo contains one Great Mural figure (Ewing 1986:88). Thus the presence of Great Mural figures at Abstract sties and vice versa is not unknown, yet there are no Great Mural panels at Buena Vista and no abstract panels at La Granja.

The gradient in density of Great Mural sites, with highest density in the south and very low density in Sierra de San Borja indicates a northern movement of people. See Figure 1, right. Near La Granja the distribution of sites between the two styles is not symmetric. The large Great Mural sites are far to the south while a large Northern Abstract site, Las Tinajitas, is nearby.

There are a large number of sub-styles recognized in the Sierra de Guadalupe, but uniformity of style holds within the Sierra de San Francisco and San Juan (Crosby 1997:175) and also Sierra de San Borja. This suggests a longer time depth for the Sierra de Guadalupe and hence probable movement from there to the other Sierras rather than vice-versa. Finally the distinctive Sierra de San Francisco style is also found in the Sierra de Guadalupe and at Cueva San Borjitas it is superimposed on paintings of other styles (Harman 2010, Gutiérrez 2013:360). The preponderance of evidence thus indicates that the Great Mural style originated in the Sierra de Guadalupe and moved north. (This hypothesis appears in Ewing [1988:43]).

The timing of this movement and the timing of Great Mural vs. Northern Abstract art is unknown. Ritter (1995:10) considered the rock art from a static perspective. He speculated that “Great Mural art and Northern Abstract art are probably at least in part late prehistoric, Comondú period.” Dating is far from certain, however. Although many researchers have postulated late prehistoric dates for the Great Murals, there have been much older dates from the Sierra de Guadalupe. See Hyland (2006:127) for a discussion. There is a date of A.D. 990 to 1160 for Montevideo (Ritter et al. 2011).

Ewing (1988:42) was the first to present evidence that the Northern Abstract is older than Great Mural. This paper adds to that evidence, but without dating or superposition it is not possible to say that the rock art at Buena Vista is necessarily older than that at La Granja. However the placement of La Granja at a poor location nearby Buena Vista indicates that people occupied the Buena Vista cañada before the Great Mural site at La Granja was established as the most northerly outpost of a different group.

Supplemental photos for this paper can be found on the web. See Harman (2013b).

Bibliographical references for this article on Page 7. This article originally appeared in *SCA Proceedings*, Volume 28 (2014)



Tilden 1, Berkeley, CA: Unique Among the Western Message Petroglyph Sites

by Leigh Marymor and Amy Leska Marymor

The Tilden 1 petroglyph site located in Claremont Canyon in Berkeley, CA is one of thirty known “Western Message Petroglyph” sites found in eight western states. There are actually three locations within and near Berkeley’s Tilden Park that are included in the WMP designation and these were among the original seven known sites that UC Berkeley Archaeologist, Al Elsasser, first published in 1958 (UC Berkeley



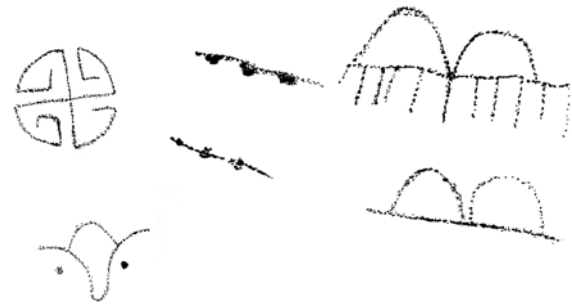
More recently, Amy Leska Marymor organized three expeditions to the Tilden #1 site in order to relocate the images described by Elsasser in his 1958 paper, and to allow us to reconsider what we know about Tilden 1 in light of what we have been learning about the corpus of the thirty known WMP sites as a whole.



In order for a petroglyph site to merit the WMP designation, it must share key features that define the tradition:

- Petroglyphs made with metal edge tools
- The images are often carved in linear fashion, sometimes in as many as four rows. The linear arrangement shows elements of syntax and grammar that imply a messaging intent
- The images draw heavily from a late historic form of Ojibway/Sioux pictographic writing
- Inserted within, and/or adjacent to the Ojibway/Sioux pictographic texts are esoteric images that draw from pan-cultural sources (Egyptian, Mayan, Chinese, fraternal, cattle brands, etc.)
- WMPs are found primarily along historic travel corridors dating from the era of Western Expansion (1846 – 1900)
- WMPs are often found in association with historic quarry and mining sites from the same period

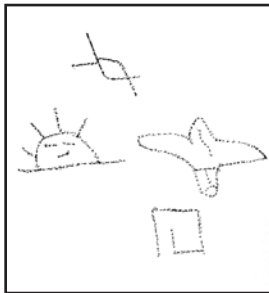
- Many WMP sites are found in association with historic Mormon settlements and routes
- WMP sites are often located on high ground, overlooking travel corridors, town sites, quarries, and mines. The locations are often of moderate to difficult access and the carved panels are remote enough to be described as “hidden in plain sight”



Tilden 1 is an interesting study within the larger body of WMP sites because it exhibits key variations from the “classic” form with enough commonalities to allow us to connect it firmly to the WMP tradition.

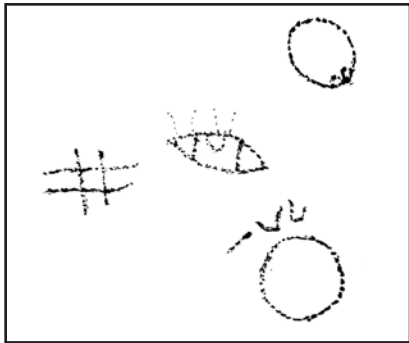
Researchers who have taken up the study of WMPs have noted the organization of the carved icons into lines that resemble written communication, and indeed the iconic repertoire

draws heavily on late historic Ojibway/Sioux pictographic writing. During the nineteenth century this form of communication was widely used by disparate Native American groups who shared a need to communicate with one another, but who lacked a common language. The pictographic form of the language was an outgrowth of Indian Hand Gesture (Sign) Language and served the purpose of communication when face to face meetings were not possible. Indian Agent, George Cop-



way, was the first to publish a few of the more than 200 known signs in 1848, and the topic was later taken up by the likes of Henry Schoolcraft and Garrick Mallery, and by the first part of the twentieth century made its way into popular Boy Scout Handbooks (Seton 1918, Thomkins 1929).

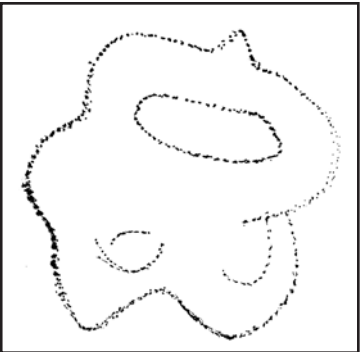
At the 2014 ARARA Conference in Rock Springs, Wyoming, Archaeologist, John Greer presented the two panels of WMPs found near Green River, Wyoming. He noted the Ojibway/Sioux pictographic writing connection and proposed that the depictions might represent a logical outgrowth of indigenous Native American rock art expressions. This proposal, intriguing, and allowing for the possibility that WMPs are indigenous in origin, falls short of fully recognizing and accounting for the “esoteric pan-cultural” content of the WMP corpus. Marymor and Marymor (in preparation) echo what earlier



researchers have observed, that a key distinguishing feature of the WMPs is the incorporation of wide ranging pan-cultural iconography (Egyptian, Mayan, Chinese, fraternal, cattle brands, etc.). We have quantified this content at an average of 25% of the total number of icons incorporated into the thirty WMP sites. We have also noted that in California, particularly in the sites that occur in the Bay Area and north at Dunsmuir, the ratio of esoteric icons is much higher overall – as much as 41% of the California imagery. It is our study of the esoteric content of the WMP tradition, along with the geographic

distribution of the sites that allows us to assert, as others have done, that the tradition is of an historic, Euro-American origin. Here then is a brief look at the key WMP features at Tilden 1, and their variations from the norm:

Tilden 1 is comprised of as many as eight carved boulders that are scattered along a steep, dense canyon slope at the head of, and overlooking, Claremont Canyon. Unlike other WMP sites where the images are presented in one, or a small number of panels on lofty rock walls and perches, each exhibiting the linear composition described above, Tilden 1 presents as few as one element, and as many as four images on each of the relatively small boulders with no evident attempt at syntax in the carving. Andy Pate (1993) used the word “precinct” to describe the location of the carved boulders. Two carved “portal” rocks located on the lower slope are positioned east and west of a natural passage to the upslope portion of the hill. The “portal” sets the stage for the remaining locations that are chosen seemingly randomly up the hillside to a point just below the ridge. The steep slope, dense chaparral, and presence of poison oak make a visit to the site a formidable task.



Specific carved images at Tilden 1 immediately connect it to other WMP sites through the repetition of those images at other sites located across the eight western states. It is the repetition of some of the most uniquely constructed esoteric icons that lead us to conclude that the creation of all of the known WMP sites are likely the work of one individual, or a very small group of individuals who were all “in the know.” We find for example a lone carving of the letter “M”, another where the “M” is



incorporated at the center of a swastika form, a “Chinese” lattice design, and a very amorphous “skull-like” shape – each of which can be found repeated at other WMP sites.

Keeping in common with other WMP sites, Tilden 1 is located adjacent to a historic trail. Its geographic setting in historic context helps us frame our proposal for the most likely period when the carvings were made. The historic “bookends” for Tilden 1 include:

- 1849-1850 Claremont Canyon is proximal to the return route of the Mormon Battalion from San Diego to the Sierra Foothill gold fields.
- 1858 The transcontinental telegraph cable connecting Orinda and Berkeley was strung through Claremont Canyon.
- 1860 - 1861 The Pony Express passed through Orinda, up Fish Ranch Road and down Claremont Canyon en route to the ferry crossing to San Francisco.
- Late 1800s - early 1900s, first development in the Canyon included a hotel and saloon rest stop.
- 1903 – Opening of the first tunnel connecting the west and east sides of the hill bypassed Claremont Canyon. As a result, the Claremont route fell into disuse, save as a cattle trail to bring stock from the east side of the hills, down Ashby Ave. to slaughter in Berkeley.
- 1929 - The road is paved for auto travel.
- 2014 - A team from BARARA recorded a large shard of “seamed” bottle glass located on the surface adjacent to one of the carved boulders - dated by Archaeologist, Jeff Fentress, to pre-1906.



We hope to present a proposal for a chronology of the thirty WMP sites at the SAA meeting in San Francisco in April 2015. Tentatively we have assigned the carving at Tilden 1 to circa 1905, at the late end of the WMP phenomena.



(continued from page 4)
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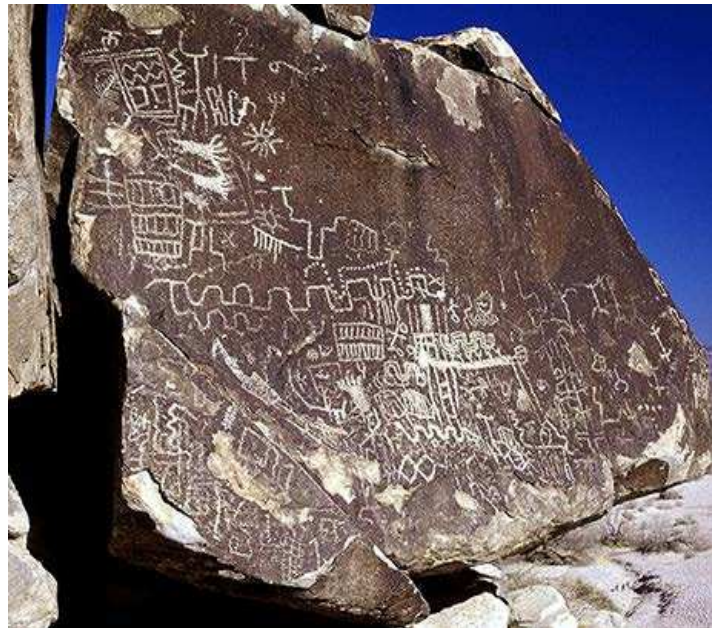
American Rock Art Research Association

Annual Conference to be held in Laughlin, Nevada, May 22-25

Mark your calendars for the 42nd Annual ARARA Conference in Laughlin, Nevada, on May 22-25! The rock art of the eastern Mojave region will draw enthusiasts from around the country over the customary Memorial Day weekend this year. The venue will be the Colorado Belle, a riverboat-themed hotel, casino and conference center which fronts the Colorado River, the focal point of many of the cultures that made their homes and their marks here. There is an abundance of public lands featuring sites to visit, both on organized field trips and independently. The rock art represents a variety of styles that may, in some instances, reflect traveling visitors' maps, as well as long-term use of the local trails that forded the river in strategic locations.

Researchers will present papers on Saturday and Sunday, May 23 - 24, highlighting work in the local area and from around the country and beyond. Exciting plans are being made for a full suite of field trips on Friday, May 22, and Monday, May 25, including visits to local intaglios (earthen art), trail art sites, and other rock art sites in the tri-states area, with a possible river boat excursion to see rock art in the Topock Gorge.

All are welcome to register for the conference, and in March details will be posted on www.arara.org.



Petroglyphs in Grapevine Canyon, near Laughlin, Nevada



Join/Renew your membership in the Bay Area Rock Art Research Association!

Founded in 1983 by Dr. Paul Freeman and Leigh Marymor, BARARA attracts like-minded individuals who are committed to exploring rock art all over the world, preserving and conserving it, providing education, and studying rock art in creative and interesting ways. Members enjoy access to field trip information and receive a newsletter that is published twice a year.

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