

Petroglyph and Pictograph Site in the Finlay Mountains

Dodd N. Osburn

In the Finlay Mountains at longitude 105° 39' west, and latitude 31° 23' north, Fort Hancock Sheet, Texas, there is a former Indian campsite located on the steeper face of a cuesta fronting the east. Crude natural shelters are formed by many of the boulders which bestrew the cuesta face. They were derived from the cap rock of Cox sandstone. Many of these boulders and the face of the cliff formed by the cap rock are covered with petroglyphs.

The purpose of this paper is to describe and to classify these petroglyphs, and to compare them with those of nearby sites. The meanings of some of the petroglyphs are self-evident, but the significance of many were known probably only to the artists themselves. Accurate interpretation of others would require extensive research which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Acknowledgment must be made to Mr. A. T. Jackson for the use of his excellent system of classification, and for the use of his descriptions and interpretations as reference (*Picture Writing of Texas Indians*, University of Texas Publication, 3809, March 1, 1938). The author is also indebted to Mr. C. C. Albritton, Jr., for his helpful criticisms.

The Cox sandstone is particularly well suited for petroglyphs. A concentration of iron compounds near the surface has given the sandstone a brown desert varnish about a half inch thick. When this desert varnish is pecked through, the white sandstone is reached. This gives the effect of marking on the brown surface with white chalk, making the petroglyphs stand out very clearly. The majority of petroglyphs at this site show evidence of first having been outlined by pecking with a sharp pointed implement, probably made of flint. The lines then were widened and in some cases the interior was chipped out. The finished petroglyph, however, often shows the original pecked outline.

The petroglyphs appear both on the sides and on the tops of the boulders, and in all cases recognizable designs on the sides are oriented naturally, the long axes of the quadrupeds being horizontal, and the long axes of the bipeds vertical.

The conventionalized human figures at this site range from the simplified "stick-man" (No. 24 on plate) to elaborate designs with strange headdress and appendages (Nos. 13 and 16.) Many of the petroglyphs have their arms upraised or outstretched as if in supplication, probably representing a dance or ceremony. It has been suggested (Jackson, p. 367) that the position of the arms was used by the native artists to differentiate between Indians and Europeans. Europeans are represented with arms akimbo (No. 28); the figure at this site with arms nearest akimbo, wears a mask and a belt and is of more realistic design than the other human representations. Both horn and feather headdresses are common, indicating their ornamental and ceremonial importance.

Nine of the petroglyphs are phallic representations (Nos. 1, 3, 9, 16, 8, 10, 11, 12, 30). Jackson points out that this is not unusual (page 374); "The fact that the men wore little or no clothing in warm weather led them to accept the nude body as a matter of course. Its representation in pictures, therefore, was merely to paint themselves as they were."

At least two types of activity are depicted: dancing or ceremonial activity and hunting scenes. No. 1 apparently represents a trio dancing. Nos. 3, 14, 16, and 17 illustrate figures holding round balls or clubs in their hands indicating the use of these articles in ceremonial functions. No. 29 depicts an excellent hunting scene. The Indian with bow and arrow is attacking a mountain sheep. No. 32 possibly represents an extended hunt ending successfully with the killing of a mountain sheep. Most of the human representations are recognizable as such with the exception of Nos. 21, 22, 23, which appear to be highly conventionalized.

The only evidence of possible contact with Europeans is the presence of two equal-armed crosses (Nos. 33 and 34.) Whether these represent catholic crosses is problematical. The mission Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, one and one-half

miles west of the Rio Grande at El Paso was established in this region as early as 1659.

Only two types of weapons appear. Nos. 29 and 32 illustrate bows and arrows, while No. 3 possibly represents a man swinging a war club or throwing-club used to stun game. No. 40 is a typical projectile point many of which are depicted at this site.

Illustrations of lower life occur most frequently in the form of Rocky Mountain sheep, deer, and antelope. The mountain sheep are easily recognized by their long curving horns (Nos. 31, 37), and the deer by their antlers (No. 46). It is noteworthy that the Rocky Mountain sheep is almost extinct in this area today. No. 43 is an example of a highly conventionalized animal. No. 44 represents a grotesque, distorted animal, perhaps carnivorous.

That No. 39 is intended to be an animal pelt is somewhat problematical. Jess Walbridge, a rancher who has lived for many years in the region of this and surrounding Indian petroglyph sites, called Nos. 7 and 11 deer skins.

Two types of tracks appear at this site. No. 47 illustrates four bird tracks. No. 49 resembles the track of an animal, possibly a distorted bear track.

Serpent representations are numerous. No. 51 illustrates a triangular-headed snake, and Nos. 50, 52, and 53, more conventionalized drawings, show round heads. A lower form of life is represented by No. 48 which resembles a snail or caterpillar.

A great many of the geometric and symbolic designs cannot be interpreted. Nos. 54 and 55, however, are generally recognized as sun symbols. Many cloud and rain symbols also appear at this site (Nos. 61, 62, and 63). The zig-zag line extended to the right of No. 63 denotes lightning. Representations of water holes or springs are illustrated by Nos. 68, and 69. The abundant occurrence of sun, rain, and water hole symbols doubtless is explained by the important roles these items played in the daily life of the inhabitants of a semi-arid region.

Several interesting designs which Jackson calls "scroll and terrace elements" (Jackson, page 450), may possibly

represent pottery designs, but as far as the author knows their exact meaning is unknown (No. 85).

One pictograph was found on the southeast side of a boulder near the Wilkie house. It is a conventionalized representation of a mountain sheep, and is badly weathered. The remaining color in the painting is reddish-brown.

For comparisons with other sites the author is greatly indebted to Mr. A. T. Jackson who noted several similarities of these petroglyphs to others in West Texas and New Mexico, as follows:

1. Nos. 87 and 97 resemble very much crosshatch and maze-like elements at site No. 8, Quitman Gap, Hudspeth County. A nearby campsite contains Pueblo sherds.

2. No. 31 which shows a mountain sheep with a rider (?) mounted on the back of the animal resembles a black pictograph at Hueco Tanks, where Pueblo pottery has been found. (See Fig. 13, 8, Jackson, Pub. 3809).

3. No. 150 suggests a so-called sun-disc painted in white at Hueco Tanks. (See Plate V, 1, Pub. 3809).

4. No. 52 which shows a snake with a circle for a head, is very much like petroglyphs at old sites in Culberson County, (Site No. 172) and Ward County, (Site No. 50).

5. Projectile points like those shown by Nos. 121 and 140 are like petroglyphs pecked into boulders at site No. 11, Hudspeth County.

6. No. 24, a phallic representation, is similar to a petroglyph at Site No. 13 (Lobo), Culberson County.

7. No. 100, a design formed by dots, resembles a painted punctate design on a cave wall at Site No. 17, Culberson County. Mr. Jackson adds that sandals, basketry, matting, etc. were in the cave. (See Fig. 43, Pub. 3809).

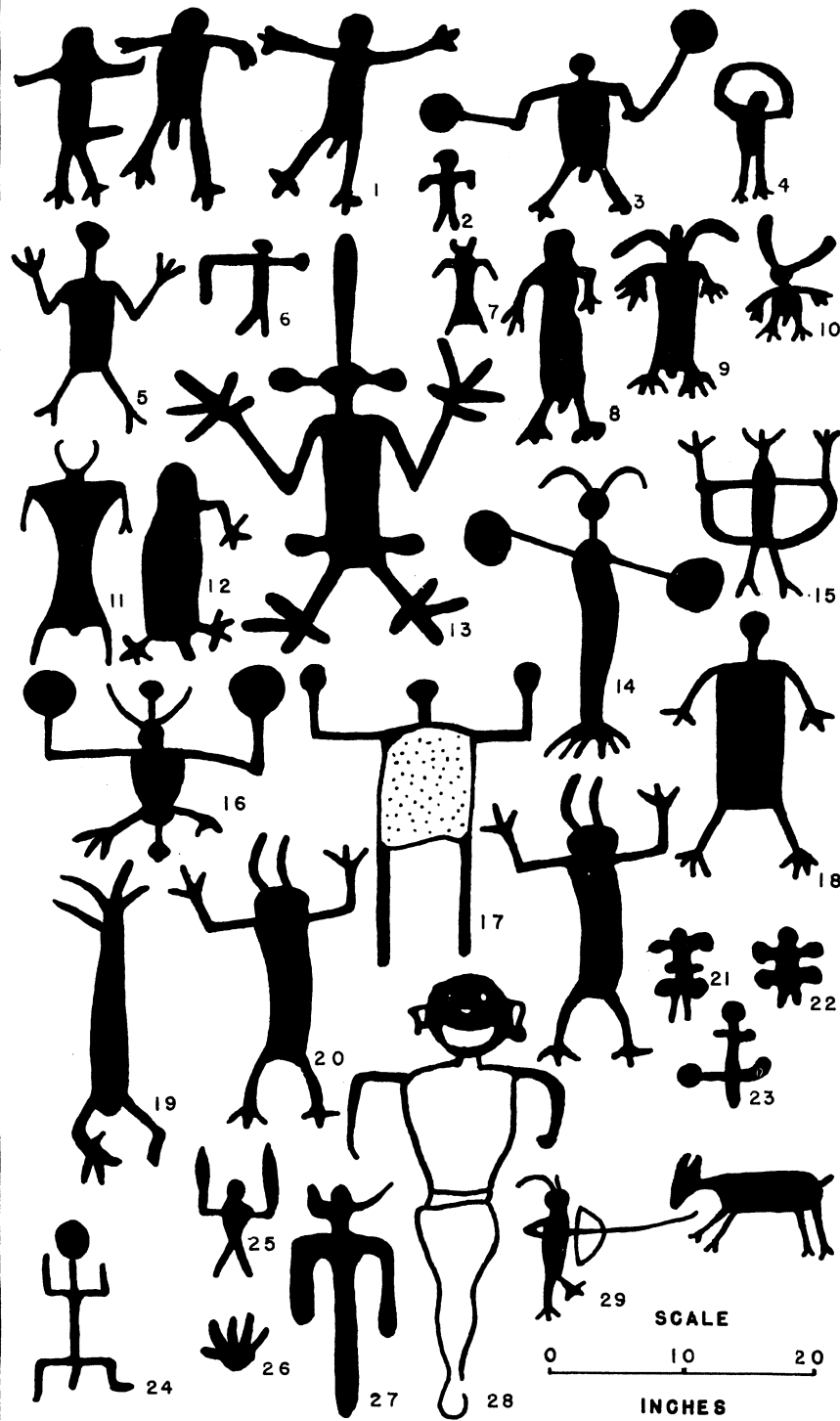
Mr. Jackson points out that in spite of the intervening distance there is a rather close similarity between many of the human figures at this site and those visited by him in Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, last summer. The ruins in Chaco Canyon which appear to be contemporaneous with their adjacent petroglyphs, range in date from the 9th to the 12th centuries.

Classification of Design Elements*

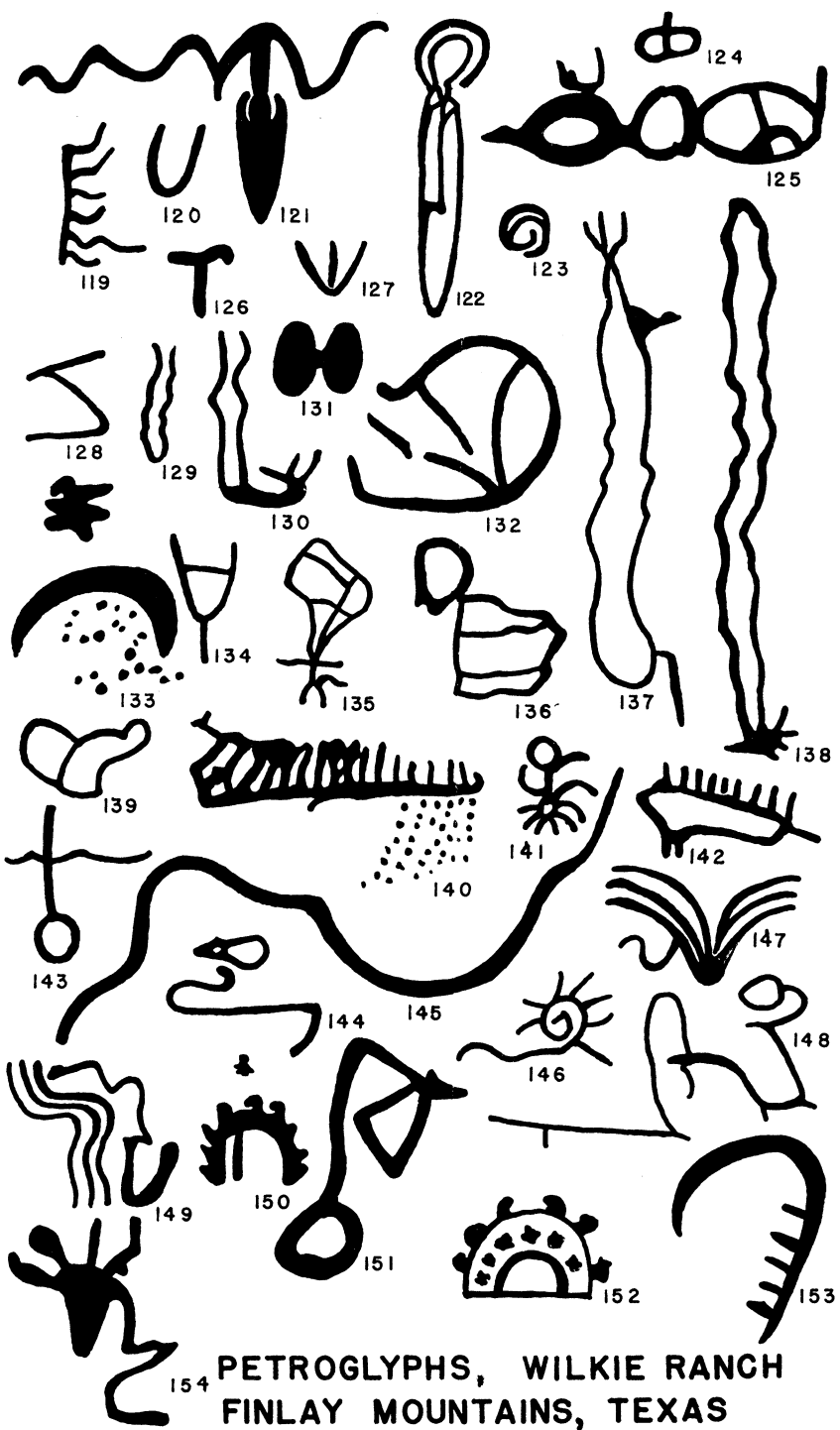
- I. Conventionalized Human Representations:
 - A. Examples of "conventionalized" human figures: 1, 13, 21, 22, 23
 - B. Human figures with limbs missings: 12, 14, 27, 19
 - C. Human figures with added or anomalous appendages: 4, 6, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25
 - D. Examples of round shouldered figures: 1, 9, 10, 14, 13, 28
 - E. Human figures with upraised arms: 4, 5, 13, 15, 16, 17, 20, 24
 - F. Human figures with outstretched arms: 1, 2, 6, 14, 30
 - G. Human figures with arms downward: 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 18, 27, 28
 - H. Human figures with arms across body: 29
 - I. Human figures with arms akimbo: 28
 - J. Masked human heads, or heads with elaborate headdress: 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 28, 29, 30
 - K. Horn headdresses: 7, 11, 16, 17
 - L. Feathered decoration: 9, 10, 14, 19, 20, 29, 30
 - M. Phallic representations: 1, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 30
 - N. Impressions of human hands: 26
- II. Evidences of Mission Influence: 33, 34
- III. Weapons
 - A. Bows and arrows: 29, 32
 - B. Projectiles and projectile points: 29, 40, 121
 - C. Possible shields: 38, 57, 59
 - D. Clubs: 3, 25, 41, 42, 112, 114
- IV. Lower Life
 - A. Mountain sheep: 29, 31, 37, 32, 36, 45
 - B. Deer and antelope: 35, 46
 - C. Conventionalized, incomplete, or distorted animals: 43, 44, 58
 - D. So-called pelts: 39, 7(?), 11(?)
 - E. Animal and bird tracks: 47, 49

*Numbers refer to copies of petroglyphs on plate.

- V. Other Forms of Life:
 - A. Serpents: 50, 51, 52, 53
 - B. Insects: 48, 102(?)
 - C. Possible trees and plants: 66, 73, 90
- VI.
 - A. Sun symbols: 54, 55, 146(?), 150
 - B. Cloud, lightening, rain, and water symbols: 61, 62, 63, 64, 68, 69, 70, 72, 75
 - C. Ladder-like elements: 74, 77, 90
 - D. Zigzags: 65, 67, 81, 95
 - E. Associated dots and dashes: 72, 100, 133, 140
 - F. Scroll and terrace elements: 79, 85, 86, 87, 88, 92, 93, 94, 96, 97, 107, 101
 - G. Connected circles, and concentric circles: 57, 59, 60, 71, 79, 106, 108, 109, 103
 - H. Problematical designs with circular elements: 71, 78, 84, 83, 82, 80, 79, 91, 102, 103, 111, 112, 113, 114, 117, 124, 125, 122, 123, 131, 132, 136, 139, 141, 143, 146, 148, 151



SCALE
0 10 20
INCHES



PETROGLYPHS, WILKIE RANCH
FINLAY MOUNTAINS, TEXAS