



# NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2011

## DIXIE ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY

P.O. Box 611

Washington, Utah 84780

John Mangels - President & Newsletter Editor	Dave Evans - Treasurer
Barbara Bergman - Secretary	Susannah & Mark Nilsson, Board Members
Sue Gum, Board Member	Jon Gum - Board Member
John Macumber, Board Member	

## February Meeting

**When:** February 9<sup>th</sup> @ 7 PM

**Where:** DSC  
Udvar-Hazy Bldg.  
Room 203

**Why:** Amber Van Alfen, resource manager at Pipe Springs National Monument, will talk about the “**Rock Art of Southwest Utah**”.

Her talk will discuss:

- The methods that archeologists use to record, illustrate and photograph rock art sites.
- The theory, methods and issues of dating rock art.
- Preservation techniques and strategies for rock art sites.

Rock art sites are popular places for public visitation. The archeologists or cultural resource managers of public lands are tasked with balancing visitation while providing the necessary protection to preserve these unique and special resources.

## Web Site

The Dixie Archaeology Society web site ([www.dixierockart.webs.com](http://www.dixierockart.webs.com)) is up and running. Please consider signing up as a site member. Site members should receive email updates whenever anything on the site is updated.

Please post your comments on the blog that is part of the site. This site is for you, the members. We'd like to hear what you think.

## Dues are Due

The dues for 2011 are due in January. The dues are unchanged from 2010 - \$20 per person or \$25 per family. The dues include monthly meetings and field trips, a summer party and a year end holiday party – good value for your money.

Application forms for membership can be found on the web site, along with directions for sending your money. You can also bring your dues to either the February meeting, however please have your forms filled out in advance. This will help Dave with the collection process.

Remember, you must be a member to participate on the field trips.

## Field Trip Report

There were two field trips during January.

### **Virgin River Gorge**

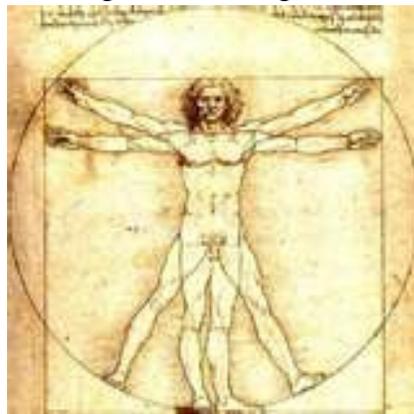
The January 8<sup>th</sup> trip was to the **Virgin River Gorge**. Eleven club members participated on a bright, but blustery day. We saw four separate panels, including the “DaVinci Man” panel and the “Flying Crane” panel. The visit was observed by a number of local inhabitants, two groups of cattle. This was a fun and easy trip to some interesting rock art panels.



The group next to the "Newspaper Rock" in the Virgin River Gorge



The DaVinci Man glyph



The DaVinci Man painting



The "Flying Crane" glyph



One group of onlookers

## Kohta's Circus

The January 15<sup>th</sup> trip was to **Kohta's Circus**, located in the Gold Butte area of Nevada. Twenty one club members participated on this trip to one of the most impressive rock art sites in the St. George area. This trip required a 2 ½ mile hike each way, so it was not for the faint of heart, although the ground was mostly level. The main panel was immense, over 90 feet long and contained a large number of different animal symbols including sheep, deer, coyote, geese, serpents, rabbits, turtles, parrots, ants, quail, eagles, water birds, bear tracks, and turkey tracks - hence the name Kohtas's **CIRCUS**.



The Group at Kohta's Circus



The "Circus" panel extends between the two arrows – over 90 ft.



Two sections from the "Circus" panel

However the most interesting panel is located high on a cliff face overlooking the valley. This panel describes the people's plight of no rain and shows the shaman playing his flute to the creator beseeching him to bring rain. It shows that the people considered their options and decided it was necessary to move on, with coyote leading the way. Powerful stuff!



The main panel at Kohta's Circus

## Falling Man Site

Some of the group decided to take a quick tour of the **Falling Man** site, which is located near Kohta's Circus. One main panel in the Falling Man site is done in the same style as

the Kohta's Circus cliff panel – same artist – unlikely because the “H” or bat clan symbol was not used on the burden baskets.



The Group in front of the “Newspaper Rock” at the Falling Man site



Falling Man glyph



Similar style to the Main Panel @ Kohta

Thanks to Sue Gum, Susie Nilsson and Dave Evans for leading the trip to the Virgin River Gorge. Thanks to Mark Nilsson for leading the trip to Kohta's Circus and the Falling Man site.

Read the detailed description of these sites and see more photos on the website under “Trip Reports”.

# Field Trip Info

The February field trip will be to two sites:

The first site is the “Bear Clan” site in Warner Valley. This is a level 1 drive up site; however the drive is an adventure. Consequently, short wheel base, high clearance 4WD vehicles are required. We will car pool. This site will provide some scenic views of the new airport.

We will then drive to “Little Black Mountain” using some back roads. Again high clearance vehicles are required. Little Black Mountain is a level 1 difficulty site. The trails are paved and level. There are rest room facilities at the site.

The field trip committee will host a pot luck lunch at Little Black Mountain, with hot dogs and hamburgers provided. Participants are asked to bring a dish to share.

**Remember, you must be a member of DAS to participate in a field trip. You must be at the meeting in order to sign up for a field trip.**

## Meeting Report

Chris Oravec discussed “**Native American Rock Art: Communication, Interpretation and Cultural Symbolism**”.



Chris argues that rock art is a means of communication. It is formal communication in either representational or abstract form. It is also functional communication in that it transmits information, forms an identity and constructs worldviews and value systems. “Rock art has two functions: to tell our history, and to teach morality.”

Rock art symbols often have many meanings. They can mean what you see (sheep are really sheep) and can be used in a story in that manner or they can be metaphors with deeper meanings (sheep represent the people).

Interpretation is a three-step process:

1. Describing (dating, determining range)
2. Categorizing (style, technique, expression)
3. Understanding (meaning, function)

The difficult part is attempting to understand and assign meaning to rock art.

“Interpretation involves making associations between rock art and past cultures and attempting to explain how the rock art functioned and what meaning it might have had to past societies.” We use our understanding of current Native American cultures and traditions together with historical records to attempt to understand the past.

Chris further argues that there are good and bad ways to interpret a rock art panel. Good Interpretation is:

- Not a guess or an opinion
- Backed up by examples including other rock art, and engaged with other ideas
- Framed as a proposition with evidence, that is, a “case” or an “argument”
- Seen as reasonable by an informed group
- Open to change when criticized

Four Current (Good?) Interpretations for rock art are:

#### 1. Semiotics: The Study of Signs

We all recognize human-made shapes as symbols however different cultures give different meanings to them, e.g. a migration, a whirlwind, a portal, a mountain, etc.

Alex Patterson, in 1992 published a dictionary of rock art symbols, [A Field Guide to Rock Art Symbols of the SW](#). His interpretations are based on previous interpreters, including N.A. peoples. He compares similar visual images such as: birth of a baby, birth of the cosmos.

#### 2. Shamanism and Ritual Practice

Shamans (“medicine men”):

- Perform vision quests, initiations, healing rites
- Visit shrines, caves, slot canyons and mountaintops
- Enter into trance by isolation, fasting, pain, drumming, singing, fluting, dreams, drugs

They must record their experiences or they will die! The surface of the rock becomes a passage between the world of spirit and the earthly world.

### 3. Ectopics and Abstract Symbols

Human trance states based on the senses  
Aural hallucinations (music)  
Somatic hallucinations (flying)  
Visual hallucinations (lines, shapes, curves)  
Dissociation (out-of-body experiences)

Ectopic: “that which is seen from within the eye”; phosphenes create abstract or partially representational images

### 4. Ethnographic/Narrative Interpretation

Communication weaves Symbols into Stories  
Storytelling constructs the culture—who are we, where are we going?  
Origin stories  
Clan history and family connections  
Migration, trade and settlement tales  
Narrative initiates and educates the young  
Native American informants know the stories

Chris concluded with “**What are the Ancient Ones saying to us?**”

We once walked the earth, searching for the Center Place

We lived in the space between two worlds, Earth and Spirit

We experienced few boundaries between ourselves, the spirits, the animals, the plants, and the earth

To our children we told stories of ceremony, family, and history so there would be no forgetting

And by doing so, we created Art

A complete outline of Chris’ talk, together with the reference list, will be placed on the website.

# Thanks

Thanks to everyone who contributed to make January a great month for DAS. Thanks to the field trip leaders, Sue, Susie, Dave and Mark and to Chris our speaker and to all who participated in the field trips and attended the January. Member participation is what makes DAS a success.

# Final Thought

The weather in St. George is beautiful at this time of the year. Use this time to get out and explore the area and enjoy the beauty that is found in Southern Utah. This is a great time to visit the many archaeological treasures we have within a short drive.

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