

“Rock Art of Southwest Utah”

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Abstract

Her talk discussed:

- 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.

Archaeologists classify “rock art” to include petroglyphs and pictographs and also sharpening grooves, moqui steps, historic inscriptions and inscriptions on trees. Historic images must be documented to be made prior to 1950.

Amber then described the process where archaeologists classify a rock art site. She noted that rock art sites require more documentation than other archaeology sites.

First it must be noted if the rock art panel is a “stand alone” site or associated with other artifacts. Then each panel must be identified. The number of separate elements must be noted along with identifying characteristics. Then the panel must be “recorded” with any of a number of methods. However the methods must be “non-contact” methods, generally some sort of photography. Contact processes such as “rubbings” will cause erosion of the rock art. The photos are then pieced together and then fed into computer graphics programs to come up with a “scale” illustration of the panel. Finally the area is surveyed for possible causes of future damage to the panel. This could mean erosion from the elements (rain, wind, and exfoliation) or from fire.

Amber described methods of dating rock art. These include:

- Repatination – the relative amount of patina that has reformed over the rock art image
- AMS testing of pigments – applies to pictographs where an actual sample of the image is subjected to laboratory testing

- Bioluminescence – study of the lichens that may have grown over the rock art image
- Superposition – relative age of one image to another if images are overlaid over each other
- Historical Knowledge – for example a bow and arrow vs an atlatl or an image of a horse
- Stylistic Analysis – comparing images to other images with known dates

Amber then described methods that are employed by NPS personnel to preserve rock art. She stressed that the NPS wants rock art sites to be both open from viewing but also to be protected. She said that rock art sites are viewed by people for a number of reasons including: education, culture, research, artistic and entertainment. She said that the NPS uses a number of means to monitor rock art sites including: registration boxes, trail counters, cameras and site visits.

She then described the steps need to create and implement a protection plan for any archaeological site. The first steps are to define what needs to be protected and then create a plan for the protection. The plan must then be reviewed by various agencies to obtain funding. Here, documentation of the number of site visits and the danger must be presented. Key to any plan approval and implementation is consultation with and approval by Native Americans. In Utah, Amber has worked with 23 tribes, 13 of them closely.

The major problem affecting rock art is graffiti. This can be removed in some cases from petroglyphs but generally not with pictographs. Many of the protection plans involve the area around the rock art sites:

- Create signage to explain the rock art and its significance.
- Care for the ground around the rock art site especially if there are archaeological sites adjacent to the rock art.
- Create access trails that lead to the rock art, but spare the surround area.
- Create barriers around the rock art. This is a physical obstruction that allows viewing of the rock art but generally discourages people from going around the barriers to do harm to the rock art of the archaeological site.

I believe the key points from Amber's presentation are:

- The various government agencies wants to keep rock art sites open to the public, but with protections in place.

- The roll of DAS is one of education, explaining the cultural significance of rock art and its importance to both Native Americans but to the population in general.
- DAS members can be help by participating in the various site steward programs sponsored by the various land management organizations in the area.

John Mangels
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