

# “Ute Rock Art of the Uncompahgre Plateau”

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November 2010

The Uncompahgre Plateau is in Western Colorado and runs north – south with Grand junction being at the northern edge. The rock art in this area runs from the archaic period (3000 BCE) to historic time.

The archaic (3000 BC – 400 AD) rock art has animals with large bodies and long legs. Deer will have long, branching antlers. The anthropomorphs are thin. Single pole ladders (tree of life) are common.

The rock art style changed during the formative period (200 – 1300 AD). The animals and people become smaller, with gestures. Images with bow and arrow begin to appear.

The plateau during the later period (13300 – present) was populated by the Numic peoples (Shoshoni, Ute and Paiute). The rock art style changes again. The people become more stick figure with large hands and feet and spread fingers and toes. The animals have exaggerated paws. Horses begin to appear (~1700?).

The rock art begins to take on a conceptual realism form, with panels being read from left to right. The gestures of the stick figures begin to take on meaning.

There were also abstract designs which at first appeared to be scribbles. Carol along with here mentor, Clifford Duncan, a Ute elder, have proposed that some of these abstract design are maps. Clifford provided the clue that the Utes considered south the major direction (the source of light from the sun) rather than north as we see things.

Carol and her team then began to look at the abstract designs more closely in comparison with topographical maps of the area surrounding the various rock art panels. They found that by inverting the designs and adjusting the scale, that they could be overlaid onto topographical maps almost perfectly. The scale of the petroglyphs was correct. She found that animal tracks with the design indicated animals trails that could be used for hunting, circles were location (mountain tops etc), lines were trails, wavy lines were streams, and terraced lines were canyons.

Carol and her team have shown that the abstract designs at the following sites were indeed maps:

Shavano Valley

Smith Fork of the Gunnison Gorge

Lindsey Canyon

Dry Creek Digging Site

Newspaper Rock in Dominguez Creek

The Gateway at Bull Hill

She is currently working on additional sites.

Conclusion: If it looks like a map it probably is one. So get you photos and your “topo” maps and prove it.