

# Symbolism of Petroglyphs and Pictographs

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*near Mountainair, New Mexico, the*  
Gateway to Ancient Cities

SUSAN A. HOLLAND  
photography MIKE ROONEY



Rowe Publishing

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# Dedication

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*To LaVan Martineau and his family,  
the Chiltons, Jack and Dorothy Hewett,  
and Mike Rooney.*



# Acknowledgments

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As with any research project many people were involved with and are responsible for the completion of this work. For various reasons it consumed many years and, regrettably, some of the people I am most indebted to are now deceased making it impossible for me to personally thank them.

Without the long friendship I was privileged to experience with LaVan Martineau (now deceased) and his family, I would never have been capable of recognizing and making the connections I have with this material. The Martineau family introduced me to the traditional Indian world showing me that everything in life has meaning and beauty and made me realize we must open our eyes and hearts to our surroundings. Also, we must believe. Over the years I realized this to be true thus providing me with the determination to persist in this project. It is to LaVan and his family I am most deeply indebted for without their friendship the idea for this book would not have evolved.

Mr. and Mrs. R.L. (Leslie and Nora Bell) Chilton (both deceased) shared their home with me many times since I first met them in the late 1960s. The Chiltons and their son, Lynn, came to my assistant more than once when I was in need of help due to emergencies. The family permitted me to sketch the mountain lion effigy found on their ranch and gave permission for the lion to be photographed. Their kindness and generosity is deeply appreciated, as is that of Mr. Jack Hewett and his wife Dorothy (now deceased), whom I also meant in the 1960s. I stayed at the Hewett home numerous

times and was always welcome when I appeared on their doorstep. Jack was instrumental in contacting the National Park Service (NPS) personnel on my behalf so I could visit sites located on NPS property and was kind enough to edit the first rough draft of this work making many welcomed comments and suggestions. I will never be able to repay the kindness and generosity of the Chilton and the Hewett families.

I wish to thank Glen Fulfer, the NPS superintendent at Mountainair for his assistance. Also, thanks to James Boll, Chief Ranger at Mountainair in 1989, for providing a copy of *The Abó Painted Rocks Documentation and Analysis* by Sally Cole.

Another person who has been extremely important to the completion of this work is Mr. Mike Rooney, a native of Kansas, who, after spending 35 years in the corporate world, “retired” to pursue a full-time love of photography. He very patiently accompanied me to sites and took images of the symbols and panels as my early photographs were not of publishable quality. Carrying 50 pounds of photo equipment on his back, he kept his sense of humor when my “over there” sometimes took us half an hour to reach, climbing straight up a hill. He reminded me more than once that he was a photographer not a mountain climber! Mr. Rooney spent even more hours processing the images he took for this book. He graciously volunteered to read the text making very appreciated comments and suggestions and assisted in editing. Mike also spent hours transferring my original text into a format I was able to work with on the computer and has been a tremendous help in providing computer assistance to me as my knowledge in that area is greatly lacking.

I appreciate the support and encouragement I have received from my family. My parents, Arthur and Lucille Simecka (both deceased), shared their great love and enjoyment of the outdoors with me and always supported whatever decisions I made in life. My sister, Mary Lundin, has been very encouraging and provided great moral support over the years.

I also am indebted to the prehistoric and historic inhabitants of the Mountainair area. By placing their symbols upon the rocks, they left behind clues to their culture which provide us with precious insights into their thoughts, ideas and ways of life thus exposing us to their “human” side of history. Special thanks to the Native Americans who have befriended me over the years and helped me in my efforts to understand their culture.

Last, it is important to recognize all the researchers who spent years, sometimes complete lifetimes, gathering and recording information pertaining to the all Indians in the Americas. Their books gather dust on library shelves while the years they spent doing fieldwork and collecting data is often overlooked. It is dedicated research of their kind that provides source material for books like mine.

This work was truly a labor of love.

Susan A. Holland

# Contents

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- 1**    **Preface**
  
- 5**    **Chapter 1—The Pueblo Indians**
  - Figure 1: Map of area discussed
  
- 11**   **Chapter 2—Petroglyphs and Pictographs**
  - Petroglyph 1: Large panel
  - Petroglyph 2: Large star shield figure
  - Pictograph 1: Lion
  - Pictograph 2: Katchinas
  - Pictograph 3: Negative handprint
  - Petroglyph 3: Large panel
  
- 17**   **Chapter 3—Location and Rock Incorporation**
  - Pictograph 4: Hunter with bow
  - Pictograph 5: Man with cross
  - Petroglyph 4: Prey mole
  - Petroglyph 5: Two lions in Abo Pass
  - Petroglyph 6: Face on corner of rock
  - Petroglyph 7: Face with rock incorporation
  - Pictograph 6: Palolokon

- 23**     **Chapter 4—Masks and Faces**  
Pictograph 7: Mask with down-turned mouth  
Petroglyph 8: Eyes and teeth  
Petroglyph 8: Face with horns, earrings, and necklace  
Petroglyph 9: Section of agricultural panel  
Petroglyph 10: Horned warriors with small shields  
Pictograph 9: Ceremonial figure with swallow nests  
Petroglyph 11: Small panel with katchina and turkey  
Pictograph 10: Rainbow worm and bird  
Pictograph 11: Masks  
Petroglyph 12: Lion with headdress and heartline
- 39**     **Chapter 5—Canes or Staffs; Corn**  
Petroglyph 13: Cane and mask  
Petroglyph 14: Cornstalk, cranes, and flute player  
Petroglyph 15: Mother Corn  
Figure 2: Mother Corn or Bird Woman
- 47**     **Chapter 6—Flute Player (Locust)**  
Petroglyph 16: Flute player and backpack  
Figure 3: Locust playing his flute over hills of corn  
Petroglyph 17: Flute player with blunderbuss
- 51**     **Chapter 7—Gods of the Prey**  
Image 1: Stone lion effigy  
Image 2: Train approaching Abo Pass from the west  
Figure 4: Mountain lion effigy  
Petroglyph 18: Wolf/coyote  
Petroglyph 19: Eagles  
Petroglyph 20: Snake with circle and eagle head  
Pictograph 12: Eagle with XX's on its back  
Image 3: Possible badger or bear
- 61**     **Chapter 8—The Snake or Serpent**  
Petroglyph 21: Three snakes  
Pictograph 13: Snake and ceremonial figure  
Image 4: Natural rock formation in the shape of a giant snake  
Petroglyph 22: Snake cane  
Petroglyph 23: Coiled snake and star figure

---

<b>71</b>	<b>Chapter 9—Stars and Solar Panels</b> Petroglyph 24: Star figure with headdress Petroglyph 25: Solar panel Figure 5: Solar panel Figure 6: Large star shield figure Petroglyph 26: Eight-pointed star
<b>77</b>	<b>Chapter 10—Birds</b> Petroglyph 27: Hummingbird with plant Petroglyph 28: Duck Petroglyph 29: Fluteplayer and crane
<b>85</b>	<b>Chapter 11—Shields and Weapons</b> Pictograph 14: Rectangular shield and mask Petroglyph 30: Turtle shield Petroglyph 31: Shield figures Petroglyph 32: Spiral shield standing on warrior
<b>91</b>	<b>Chapter 12—Miscellaneous</b> Petroglyph 33: Deer leg with dew claws Petroglyph 34: Large animal with heart line Petroglyph 35: Hopi maiden with hair whorls Petroglyph 36: Coiled snake on agricultural panel
<b>99</b>	<b>Chapter 13—Agricultural Panel</b> Figure 7: Agricultural panel
<b>107</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
<b>113</b>	<b>Glossary</b>
<b>119</b>	<b>References Cited</b>
<b>127</b>	<b>Quick Reference Guide of Petroglyphs of Central New Mexico</b>





## Preface

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Traveling south on Interstate 25 from the present day city of Albuquerque, New Mexico, you escape traffic congestion and summer heat by exiting east at Bernardo onto Highway 60, crossing the vast expanse of Becker Flats and beginning your ascent which takes you through the red sandstone confines of Abo Pass to the small community of Mountainair which is located at an elevation of 6500'. This area, containing evergreen trees and crisp blue skies, is situated near the Cibola National Forest and is bordered by the Manzano Mountains on the northwest, Chupedaro Mesa to the south and the Salinas Salt Beds to the east. From early prehistoric times native American peoples were attracted to this region which offered natural springs, rock shelters, various food sources, vantage points for defense, and escape from the summer heat of lower elevations. Proof of their existence is found today in the Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument and surrounding countryside.

The Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument, which includes the Abo, Quarai and Gran Quivira sites, is located at Mountainair, New Mexico, which has earned the title "gateway to ancient cities." Abo Mission ruins are shown, top right, with the Manzano Mountains in the background. Since the mid 1960s multiple visits and extended stays have allowed me to locate both petroglyph and pictograph symbols left by the Native Americans who once inhabited

the general area. I believe the region has been largely overlooked by scholars, especially petroglyph sites, and would like to increase the public's knowledge of the Mountainair area and anthropological history. To do this, I will present observations and conclusions I have reached concerning some of the symbols and their relationship to material recorded by early southwestern anthropologists. This work is meant to be informative, as well as enjoyable, especially to those interested in the life and beliefs of the Native Americans. It is my hope that through reading this book you will experience some of the fascination for the Mountainair area and its history, as I have, and can imagine the life and trials of these former inhabitants who left a part of their heritage behind for us to enjoy and reflect upon.

The people who resided in the area are called "Pueblo Indians" because they lived in small settlements called pueblos, or towns, by the Spanish when they arrived in the late 1500s. The Pueblo residents left behind more than just artifacts, they left a recorded history of their beliefs and daily lives. Having no written alphabet, these were recorded in the form of petroglyphs and pictographs.

**Petroglyphs** are symbols which have been recessed into the stone in a fashion, such as pecking, abrading or incising. **Pictographs** have been applied on the rock's surface as a painting in one or more colors. The term "rock art" is widely used today in association with petroglyphs and pictographs, but can be misleading and too general to be a functional description because of the specific meaning the symbols represent. The use of the term is like calling Monet's "Water Lilies" just a painting.

Over the years, as I located and studied sites in the Mountainair area I began to notice that specific symbols appeared to relate to documented information from early researchers and ethnologists who worked and lived among the Pueblo Indians. Where possible I prefer to use original records from people, such as Frederick W. Hodge and Frank H. Cushing instead of more recent material which, many times, has been combined and republished from earlier reports. The dates I present are relative dates from referenced material relating symbols to ceremonies, artifacts or dates of a specific item such as a weapon type.

When studying artifacts recovered from sites, such as pottery and lithics (which can be easily measured, weighed, and analyzed), you see only the material possessions of a culture. Petroglyphs and pictographs record the ideas and beliefs of people and compose an entirely different, less tangible aspect that helps explain why they lived the way they did in the past, and as they do today. To me, this is what makes various cultures most interesting, the human facet of life. It is important to respect all cultures and remember that their material remains convey messages from the past and, if destroyed or

damaged, are irreplaceable. If this happens, we not only lose pieces of history, but are cheated of the opportunity to learn. We must remember all mankind is truly connected. A dear friend of mine once wrote “the thread of life has no end.”

Production of symbols and panels consumed a great deal of time and effort. A piece of harder stone, such as quartz, was needed to peck or abrade symbols into the native sandstone.

The concoction of paint for the pictographs was no doubt very time consuming and specific materials had to be located, gathered, and processed. Because of the harshness of the land, I’m sure the early residents of the area were very busy on a day to day basis just trying to survive. They would have been involved in gathering, producing, and preserving food (including the daily grinding of corn), construction and repair of clothing, and water needed to be carried from the nearest spring. Living quarters had to be maintained, as adobe is in an almost constant state of disrepair from the elements. People would have been too busy surviving on a daily basis to have just sat around “doodling” on the rocks.

While the panels and symbols of the Mountainair area had specific reasons and meanings to the Native American inhabitants they are very artistic. In fact, more artistic than in most other areas I have visited over the years. Their renderings are much more than just expressive “art.” Substantiating this interpretation is the purpose of this book.





## CHAPTER 1

# The Pueblo Indians

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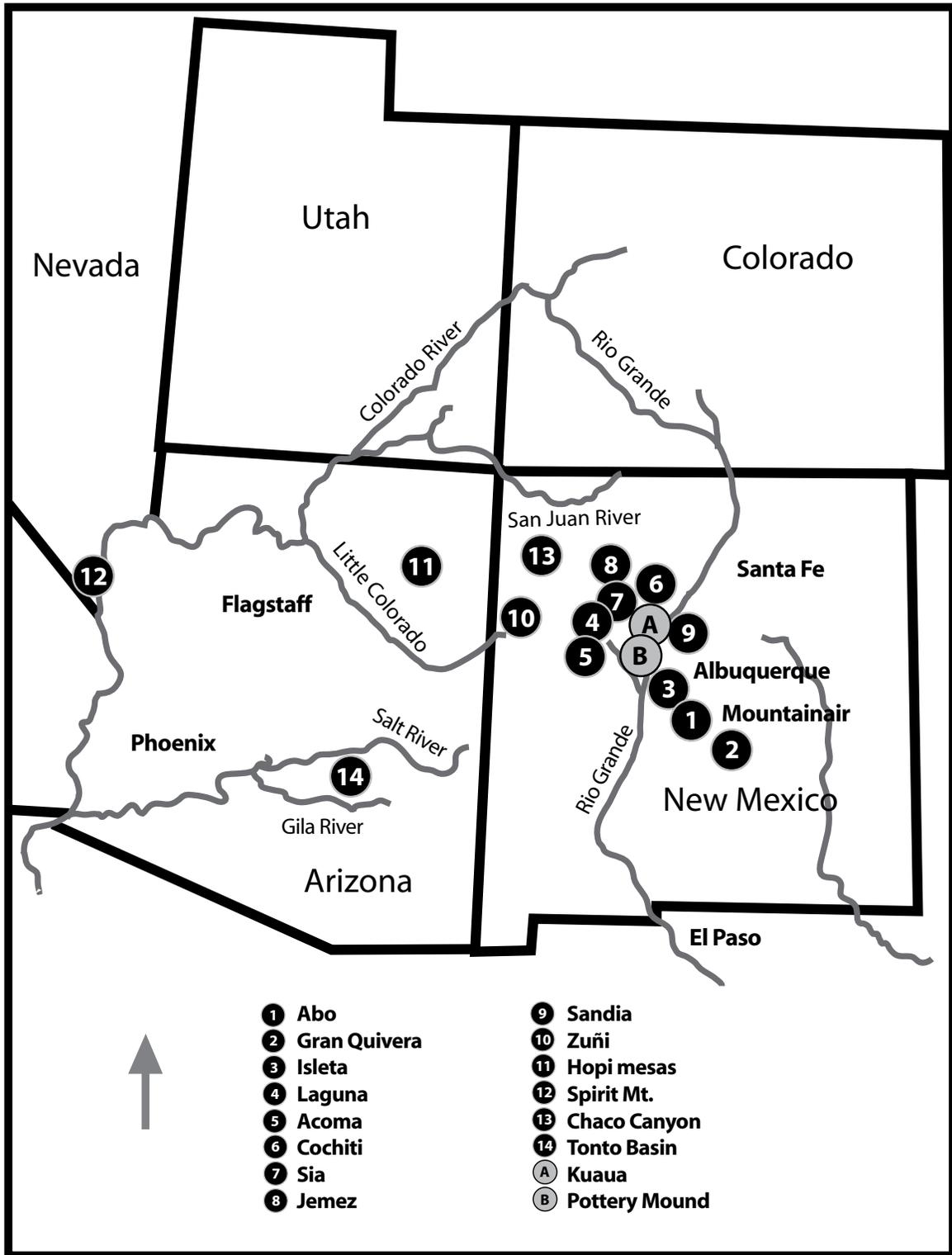
When speaking of the Pueblos of the Southwest there are two geographical areas, the Western Pueblos and the Eastern Pueblos (see map, Figure 1). The Western Pueblos include the Hopi, Zuni, Acoma, and Laguna while the Eastern Pueblos are located in the vicinity of the Rio Grande River Valley and stretch from the northern Tiwa linguistic group at Taos south to the Piro in the Socorro area. This includes the Tompiro division in the Mountainair region. Much of the early treatises discussing symbols in the Mountainair area documents that the Hopi and Zuni cultures were mutually influenced over time.

The culture of the western Pueblos was not as intensely affected by early Spanish contact as the eastern groups, and “there is good reason to believe that many Pueblo people left the Rio Grande region and moved to Acoma, Zuni, and Hopi to escape from Spanish domination and continue to practice their indigenous religion...” (C. Schaafsma 1994:122). When the Pueblo Indians revolted against the Spanish in the 1680s “many Indians fled from the Rio Grande to the Hopi...Some of these built the town of Payupki on the Middle Mesa, but were brought back and settled at Sandia in 1748” (Hodge et al 1945:299). Hopi ceremonial items discovered in a sealed room in Chaco Canyon, in northwestern New Mexico, show a mixing of “religion among the Pueblo Indians for more than 800 years, and

perhaps as much as 1000 years” (Dutton 1963:39). An early katchina artifact and painted prayersticks comparable to those seen in the Kuaua kiva paintings in New Mexico were found in a cave near Phoenix, Arizona (Dutton *ibid*: 40), while obsidian from the Jemez Mountains, north of Albuquerque, and turquoise from southern New Mexico has recently been found at Wichita sites in southeastern Kansas (Hawley 2000:244; 249). This shows the spread of material items from the Pueblo area, both to the northeast and southwest. Along with trade goods, ideas, and beliefs were possibly exchanged or absorbed between groups during friendly contact. Along with commerce, intermarriage would have aided in both material and ceremonial exchange.

The only pictograph or petroglyph site in the immediate Mountainair area that has been given a date is the Painted Rocks Site near Abo. The estimated time period for this site is A.D.1300 to 1672 (Cole 1984:41) although considering the large time span of occupation in the area, and the number of panels present, some may date earlier. Two other New Mexico sites which contain painted kiva murals that have symbols similar to those in the Mountainair region are Pottery Mound and Kuaua. Pottery Mound, the closest, is located within 45 miles of Albuquerque and Kuaua is located farther north in the Coronado State Monument at Bernallio, New Mexico. While Pottery Mound is an Anasazi site, Kuaua displays the Rio Grande pueblo traits with dates of occupation between A.D. 1300 and 1573 to 1593. This dates Kuaua earlier than Pottery Mound (Dutton 1963:23, 33, 189, 204) but within the same time period of Mountainair sites. However, Schaafsma (2000: 73) gives the dates of A.D. 1325 to 1450 for the main time frame of Pottery Mound. Using the above dates all three areas would have been occupied during the same time period. The kiva murals at both Pottery Mound and Kuaua offer a glimpse into the ceremonial life and belief of the Pueblo Indians. To help comprehend the material presented it is important to understand Pueblo religion and belief.

The ceremonial chamber of the Pueblo Indians, called a “kiva,” may be varied in shape and either above or entirely below ground. These chambers are entered by a ladder through their only opening, a hole in the roof. They contain a fire pit, usually a bench, a low platform, and may have plastered floors. The floor contains a “Sipapu,” a small hole symbolizing the place of origin and of departed spirits. Plastered walls may have applied paintings relating to Pueblo religion and ceremonies. “In most of the Pueblo kivas ceremonies are performed which no white person has ever witnessed; this is notably the case with the Rio Grande villages” (Hodge et al 1945:226). Kivas continued to be used by Pueblo Indians today.



Map of Area Discussed - FIGURE 1

All Pueblo groups have creation or origin stories. Some groups believe they originally came through a number of worlds to get where they are today. The Zuni believe they were first created in a lower dark fourth world with webbed feet and hands, tails, and genitals on their foreheads. After they emerged on the sunlit surface of the earth their bodies were transformed to look as they do today (Ferguson 1985:21).

The Hopi also believe in four worlds and going through changes before emerging into this one. They were transformed from bugs to tailed animals, like lions, and animals with shorter tails became human (Courlander 1982:3).

Ceremonies and rituals dictated life on a daily to yearly basis for the Pueblo people and strict taboos were also observed. "Around the Pueblo is the ceremonial circuit of the directions, each of which is controlled by a god, or a very powerful Spirit. All of these powers must be kept in order" (Tyler 1964:174). To the Pueblos, as well as various other American Indian groups, everything in the universe is connected and all objects have life, meaning, and a purpose for existing. This also includes the inanimate objects in nature like rocks, trees and mountains. The acts of nature we use science to explain, such as floods, droughts, solar events, and the change of seasons, the Indians attributed to their gods and spirit world. Ceremonies, such as the one examined in Chapter 8, were necessary to bring rain for crops, and for "calling back the sun" at the spring and winter solstice so it would continue its journey back across the sky and the seasons would continue. The whole universe and ones surroundings had to be kept in balance by achieving harmony; this was done, and still is, with ceremonies, fetishes, and rituals. If done incorrectly, or not at all, not only would you suffer, but also everyone else in your village or community. Just as important as the accurate rituals was the giving of thanks. Pueblo life was very involved with ceremonies and they had to be conveyed to the gods, or spirits, in the correct manner and at the right time. Chapter 7 will show that messengers, such as snakes, fetishes, and Prey, or Beast Gods could aid in making your wishes known, or help you to achieve a desired personal goal, such as a successful hunt.

The boundaries between the human and non-human world were very fluid and people, under the right conditions, were able to cross from one to the other. An example of this is the Hopi story of Locust and the Snakes in Chapter 6 about the flute player.

I believe many people are unaware that some groups of Native Americans in North, Central and South America share many common beliefs. At times I will point out similarities among different groups from outside the southwest to illustrate this fact. On the other hand a few of the symbols presented are less common and,

apparently, pertain only to the Mountainair area, and/or events that took place here. For instance, katchinas are almost non-existent outside of the Pueblo area, so other groups would not have recorded them. Katchinas, also spelled kacina and kachina, are spirits believed to be the ancestors of humans.

The Mountainair area is rich both in petroglyphs and pictographs of kachina images. Archaeologists, in an attempt to date these symbols and trace what is referred to as the “kacina cult,” have associated similarities of specific elements to other areas with comparable figures. This, along with probable dates, will be discussed in Chapter 4 on masks, faces, and katchinas.

The Mountainair area shows evidence of periods of occupation from early paleo (Clovis and Folsom) cultures until its abandonment by Pueblo people in the late 1600s (Murphy 1993:2, 60), thus covering a span of approximately 10,000 years. Much information is available from Onate’s conquest of the area in 1598-1599 and Spanish statistics which reported Abo, or Abbo (also called San Gregorio), including the two vistas of Tenabo and Tabira (possibly Gran Quivera) to have 800 inhabitants (Bancroft 1889:173). The people of Abo were of the Piro (Tompson) linguistic family which is a Tanoan language (Hodge 1912:6). Over the years the inhabitants were subjected to many hardships, primarily by the Spanish. They were forced into labor as slaves to gather salt from the Salinas (salt beds) to the east for transportation to Parral, Mexico, for the processing of ore (Murphy 1982:10). Missionaries and the Spanish Crown attempted to Christianize them while utilizing their labor to build the three nearby missions of Abo, Quarai, and Gran Quivira (Salt Missions Trails, visitor information pamphlet). They also experienced droughts and famines in the late 1600s (*ibid*) and Apache raids which destroyed six pueblos, one of which is listed as Abo (Bancroft 1889:170). The survivors of the Apache raids fled to the El Paso area where the Piros of Senecu del Sur claim to be the descendants of the Abo people (Hodge 1912:6). That Piro group ceased to exist as an organization around the first decade of the twentieth century and today descendants may still be identified within the El Paso-Juarez area (Sturtevant 1979:337).





## CHAPTER 2

# Petroglyphs and Pictographs

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The area of Mountainair contains a large number of both petroglyphs and pictographs. Petroglyphs are symbols that intrude into the surface of the rock in some manner, such as pecking, rubbing, or incising. At one petroglyph panel, I discovered a piece of quartz that had been left in a crack in the rocks. The quartz, having one end battered, just fit my hand, and apparently had been used to peck the adjacent sandstone panel.

Petroglyphs are fairly resilient to the elements and are often located at open sites exposed to the weather. Some sandstone is coated with a layer of patina, or desert varnish, a weathering process which darkens the exposed surface of the rock over the years. Removal of the rock's surface when the petroglyphs were placed on it disturbs this darkened area giving the applied symbol contrast as seen on the large panel in Petroglyph 1. Some sandstone contains lichen which may attach itself to the removed area, or, in some cases, may cover both the rock and symbols as seen in the lower left of Petroglyph 2.

Pictographs, on the other hand, have been applied to the rocks surface as painting and are located in protected areas such as overhangs and rock shelters. Colors were made by mixing a binder (a substance necessary for making the paint adhere to the rock) together with a mineral or organic substance to produce the desired



**PETROGLYPH 1 - Large panel**

color. The Moquis (Hopis) of Arizona utilized pinion pitch and oil extracted from pumpkin seeds as binders (Bourke 1884:120). Ruth Bunzel (1973:859-861) states that among the Zunis, ceremonies sometimes accompanied the procurement and manufacturing of certain pigments. She says kaolin (white) was common and readily available. Three types of black were used: one was mineral, one oxide of manganese; and the others were vegetable: one carbonized corncobs, and a fungus found in corn. Bunzel reports yellow was made from yellow ochre; bright yellow flowers (such as buttercups); and also from corn pollen mixed with boiled yucca juice.

The lion in Pictograph 1 exhibits white, yellow, and red while the katchinas in Pictograph 2 were applied mainly in red which was obtained from hematite (iron oxide). Blue was made from azurite or copper deposits. Two type of pink are mentioned: one being a clay (which is made into a sacred paint); the other was made by boiling wheat with small sunflowers. With the exception of pink, the above listed colors are found on pictographs in the Mountainair region.

Colors may also be associated with objects or certain directions. “Turquoise is associated with maleness and yellow with femaleness;