



West Texas Rock Art:

November Big Bend Conference in Alpine Features Popular Rock Art Presentations

By Dorde Woodruff

The director of the Center for Big Bend Studies (CBBS), Bob Mallouf, was pleased to have a large turnout for the 9th Annual Conference on the History, Archaeology, and Culture of the Trans-Pecos, Big Bend and Northern Mexico.

Especially since the town where it was held, Alpine, Texas, population in the 6000s, is in a remote and sparsely-populated —though unique —area of the state. The CBBS is part of Sul Ross State University in Alpine.

Mallouf said that the presentations on rock art provoked a great deal of interest. No wonder Mallouf was pleased, as he is an avid rock art researcher himself. The CBBS hosted a conference entirely rock art in 1995, and Mallouf says he expects to have another rock art conference in a couple of years.

West Texas has abundant rock art of different styles, but the Archaic is the star. The Pecos River Style pictographs are some of the most picturesque and complex in the Southwest. As many URARA members are aware, these show a pan-Archaic affinity to our Barrier Canyon Style, to Grand Canyon Polychrome, and to the Cave Paintings of Baja California.

Mallouf himself presented "Cerro Chino: Ancient Petroglyphs of the Sierra Vieja Breaks". This is an area the CBBS documented in 2001 in a rugged mountain area of Presidio County, with abstract petroglyphs at least Late Archaic in age and possibly older. Petroglyphs are rare here; most rock art close to the Rio Grande is painted, and the site contains motifs not known elsewhere in the region.

Another professor at Sul Ross, Charles R. "Bob" Hext, sculptor, art historian, and rock art researcher, talked

Right: rare Archaic petroglyphs at Cerro Chino.



about the rock art of Jeff Davis County northwest of Alpine. Hext is involved in a rock art survey of the Trans-Pecos area.

Going to the other end of the archeological age spectrum, Dawn Temple talked about "San Sebastian: Probable Apache Rock Art in the Marfa Plain of the Texas Big Bend." Dawn is a geology student at Sul Ross who also studies rock art and records it.

Texas artist turned rock art researcher Reeda Peel presented three poster sessions. "An Overview of Texas Rock Art" described traditions or styles recognized in the state, as well as rock art yet to be defined, correlated with a map of the natural regions of Texas. She also presented this at the ARARA symposium in 2002.

Her poster session "Tradition or Style ... What's the Difference?" was on usage of these terms, illustrated with examples of the state's rock art. And "Rocky Dell...Chasing the Myth" was about a so-called giant serpent pictograph that really looks more like a lizard, which she related to the myth of Earth Monster.

Reeda does wonderful interpretations of ancient life with rock shelter art on the walls behind the figures, based on careful archeological research, see her Girl with Fire Drill above. Here's an artist that's really gotten into rock art: she's a charter member of the Texas Archaeological Society Rock Art Recording Task Force, a TAS board member, and a steward for the state Historical Commission.

"Unusual Rock Art of the Texas Panhandle" was the title of Teddy Lou Stickney's talk. Teddy is the head of the TAS Rock Art Recording Task Force that each year concentrates on an area in which to thoroughly document the rock art. Teddy is also the new president of ARARA. Teddy and Francis Stickney were the honorees of the 2002 annual publication of the New Mexico Archaeological Society, Looking Forward to the Past.

Solveig Turpin, a founder of the Rock Art Foundation and authority on Pecos River Style, and her son Jeff gave a paper entitled "Under Every Rock: Prehistoric Utilization of a High Desert Ecozone in West Texas" in which "rock art was incidental ... the article in this year's Journal of Big Bend Studies ["Rock Art in Isolation: The Black Mountains and Red Hills of Hudspeth County"] gave a much more in-depth description of what we found in these isolated enclaves (Turpin, email communication 2002)." The CBBS's Journal is a combination of symposium papers and other contributed papers; URARA has now set up an exchange of publications with them.

The strictest interpretation of the geographical mandate of the Center is the Big Bend country, the Trans-Pecos, and adjacent northern Mexico. Trans-Pecos is "Beyond the Pecos", west of the Pecos River. Remember Judge Roy Bean, the "Law West of the Pecos", the only judge that ever, despite his quirks,

A shaman in Rattlesnake Canyon which runs several miles then joins the Rio Grande. He is especially reminiscent of our Barrier Canyon figures.





A family group approaches Fate Bell Shelter in a scene envisioned by Reeda Peel. These people probably lived in small family groups, joining up with others on occasion.

lasted out there in the frontier wilderness of this still-remote area? However, for the conference or publications they don't limit themselves to the Trans-Pecos and northern Chihuahuan region, but rather consider the Lower Pecos River Region and other areas of West Texas (including the Texas Panhandle), southeastern New Mexico, and northern Coahuila to all be areas of interest.

The Lower Pecos region centers roughly on the lower parts of the Pecos and Devils rivers, as they flow south to join the Rio Grande, now flooded near those confluences by the Amistad reservoir. Pecos River Style pictographs extend about 90 miles north from the Rio Grande, and also about 90 miles south to the mountains of Coahuila, skipping the barren plains south of the Rio Grande. There is some Pecos River Style art west of the Pecos for a short distance, but more of it east along the lower Devil's River. East to west, it goes about from Del Rio to Langtry.

Carolyn Boyd of Texas A&M, another active rock art researcher of the area and artist-turned-archeologist, thinks these images were components of large, mural-like compositions, and compares them to her experience as a mural painter and to the myths and practices of the Huichol who still live across the Great River in northern Mexico.

Tours go to quite a few sites now, but getting to the wilder sites she says can be an ordeal, "Some of them are in really remote areas. You drive an hour down a dirt road then hike in a few miles over rugged terrain. They are in some cases up on canyon walls, and you have to rappel down to them...there's real danger in accessing some of the sites." She thinks some were deliberately placed in difficult places, "some...were for select groups."

When Jim and I drove through Texas about ten years ago, there were no handy websites for information. We stopped at the Seminole Canyon State Park in the Pecos area on a Monday but were frustrated to be told that the tour, to Fate Bell Shelter, only went Wednesday through Sunday, and only on a tour is visiting the rock art permitted.

Now two websites, especially, list all the tours, from the Rock Art Foundation at www.rockart.org/journey.html and www.rockart.org/calendar.html, and from Texas Park and Wildlife at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/news/tpwcal/s_0148.htm.

TPWD has a website for Seminole Canyon, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/seminole/, for Devil's River State Natural Area, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/devils/, and for Big Bend Ranch State Park adjacent to the Big Bend National Park, new and undeveloped, see www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/bigbend/

The Handbook of Texas Online has a number of short articles for various rock art sites, see

the archeology index at www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/browse/wt_aeol.html for subjects like Indian Rock Art; Kirkland, Olea Forrest; Trans-Pecos; Fate Bell Shelter; Lobo Valley; Panther Cave; Rattlesnake Canyon.

Texas Beyond History is an outstanding website, a joint project of the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory (TARL) at The University of Texas at Austin and the Texas Archeological Society. The section on the Lower Pecos begins at www.texasbeyondhistory.net/pecos/index.html. Lavishly illustrated, it's edited by Steve Black, a Research Associate at TARL, Lecturer in Anthropology at the University of Texas, and an experienced archeologist in Texas, Mesoamerica, and the Southwest.

What of those members who are not online? Several books cover the Lower Pecos: Kirkland, Forest and W.W. Newcomb, Jr.

1999 The Rock Art of Texas Indians. Reprint of the classic. University of Texas Press, Austin.

Amazon, \$34.95; Piedra Pintada, see www.rock-art.com/books/krkInd1.htm, \$35.

Mallouf, Robert J. and Curtis Tunnell

1977 An Archeological Reconnaissance in the Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande. Texas Historical Commission, Austin. Out of print; we've obtained this for our URARA Archives.

Shafer, Harry J. and Jim Zintgraff

1986 Ancient Texans: Rock Art and Lifeways along the Lower Pecos. Texas Monthly Press, Austin. Excellent popular book now out of press, available from amazon.com for \$225 and up!

Smith-Savage, Sheron and Robert J. Mallouf, eds

1998 Rock Art of the Chihuahuan Desert Borderlands. Occasional Paper No. 3. Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas. Proceedings of the First Trans-Pecos Rock Art Symposium, February 17-19, 1995. Piedra Pintada, \$20; we've also gotten this for the URARA Archives.

Turpin, Solveig A., ed

1994 Shamanism and Rock Art in North America. Rock Art Foundation, San Antonio. RAF or Piedra Pintada, \$20. "A superb book that expands on the further possibilities of the rock art images...."

Zintgraff, Jim and Solveig A. Turpin

1991 Pecos River Rock Art: A Photographic Essay. S. McPherson, San Antonio. Amazon, \$43.70; Piedra Pintada, \$45; Side Canyon, \$36.95, RAF \$36. Zintgraff spent decades photographing Pecos rock art, and Turpin years studying it.

And a CD-ROM:

Turpin, Solveig A. and Jim Zintgraff

2002 Rock Art of the Lower Pecos. RAF, \$40 incl S&H, see www.rockart.org/cdrom.html for description.

Source contact information is: Piedra Pintada rock art books, www.rock-art.com/books/index.htm, call 909/620-6742, or write Bob Edberg, Piedra Pintada Books, P.O. Box 1376, Claremont CA 9171; Side Canyon Southwestern books, maps, videos, <http://sidecanyon.com>, or call 866-775-8336

The official Texas travel site www.traveltex.com has lots of features including a whole section on the Big Bend country, or call 800-452-9292.

Going on to the Big Bend, Big Bend National Park has what is surely the most outstanding website of the National Parks, with dozens of pages; see the alphabetical list of topics at www.nps.gov/bibe/alpha.htm or "In depth" at www.nps.gov/bibe/home.htm. This park has the fewest visitors per mile of any in the U.S. Foreign visitors such as Germans and Japanese who always go for the most exotic, especially if it includes those weird plants, cacti, love it, and comprise a substantial part of the visitors. Summers are hot, but the average daytime maximum in January is 60 degrees!

Rock art in the park (and the adjoining Big Bend Ranch State Park) has never been well-surveyed though people have worked there for decades. The CBBS has been working on an archeological survey there since 1995, but funding is minimal, therefore progress is slow.

The park includes desert, mountain, and 118 miles of the Rio Grande in its 801,000 acres,

therefore has a great diversity of plants and animals in its Chihuahuan desert biome. No wonder it was home to Native Americans from Paleoindian times on.

In Utah we sometimes visit rock art from the rivers, especially the Green in Desolation Canyon, the San Juan, and in former times the late lamented Glen Canyon of the Colorado. Another way to see West Texas rock art is on the rivers, either on a private trip or with an outfitter. Canoeist Louis Aulbach is the author and publisher of Texas River Guides: The Devil's River, The Lower Pecos River, The Upper Canyons of the Rio Grande, The Great Unknown of the Rio Grande, and The Painted Canyons of the Rio Grande.

Also linked from his website www.hal-pc.org/~lfa/ is river flow information. Or contact Louis F. Aulbach, P. O. Box 925765, Houston TX 77292-5765.

You can access another series of river webpages from <http://canoeman.com/SWPaddler/Texas.html>, for descriptions of trips down the Pecos, Devil's, or Rio Grande. And see Big Bend National Park webpages on river runing, also many others.

However, these trips need to be done with adequate information and great care. Some stretches have rapids requiring portages, hazards fluctuate with the water level, like our rivers they are remote, and in Texas there is an additional hazard: private land. Especially on the Devil's, landowners can be hard on trespassing campers.

However, our member Ben Everitt ran the Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande some years ago, between Big Bend National Park and Amistad Reservoir, and he says it was "the trip of a lifetime...and I'd do it again." Canoeman River Guide Services will plan trips, to any degree requested, phone 214-221-1290 if you don't have email access.

For the landlocked, the huge Big Bend park has 112 miles of paved roads, and over 150 miles of unpaved roads with various hazards including the possibility of punctured tires from those yucca tips that are like spears, or other hostile desert vegetation.

Despite an estimated 10,000 archeological sites in Big Bend National Park, only two rock art sites are considered public. The Hot Springs pictograph site is easily reached by a short drive from the Rio Grande Village visitor center on the east side of the park. And on the west side, there's rock art around the bases of the Chimneys, prominent landmarks 2.4 miles from the trailhead at a primitive campsite off Maverick road, which is a gravel road that is generally passable.

Western Texas, especially along the Rio Grande at Big Bend or Seminole Canyon, is a great



Right, above: Detail, White Shaman Shelter. Below, The White Shaman. Tom Getts.

winter trip. The south side of Big Bend is about as far south as Daytona Beach, Florida! Despite its attractions, with these sites being so far away, a trip to Texas isn't to be taken lightly. Seminole Canyon is about 1200 miles from Salt Lake. Members living in other places may have lighter going – our webmaster Tom Getts has been to White Shaman half a dozen times. But then, he starts from Mancos in far southwestern Colorado.

The Pecos River Style attracts much attention these days, but the Jornada Mogollon style of Hueco Tanks is up to now more familiar to most URARA members. References to the Casas Grande influence, and Texas rock art styles other than the Archaic can be found on some of these websites, or in the many printed sources for information on these subjects.

Some other websites of interest:

Tom Gett's Pecos River Style rock art photos from White Shaman Shelter, Panther Cave, Mystic Shelter, and Cedar Springs

www.canyonwinds.com/rockart/index.html

The RAF's James Zintgraff's own page of a few high-quality Pecos pictures.

<http://members.aol.com/rockart01/Photopage.html>

Forrest Kirkland's Watercolors of Texas Rock Art, a site of the Texas Memorial Museum featuring a large number of original paintings.

www.tmm.utexas.edu/anthro/kirkland/

And some more print references:

Boyd, Caroline

1996 Medicinal and Hallucinogenic Plants Identified in the Sediments and Pictographs of the Lower Pecos, Texas Archaic. *Antiquity* 70 (268, June).

Turpin, Solveig

1990 Rock Art and Its Contribution to Hunter Gatherer Archaeology: A Case Study from the Lower Pecos River Region of Southwest Texas and Northern Mexico.

Journal of Field Archaeology 17(3):263-281.

1990 Speculations on the Age and Origin of the Pecos River Style. *American Indian Rock Art* 16:99-122.

1991 Sin Nombre and El Fortin: Pecos River Style Pictographs in Northern Mexico. *Bulletin of the Texas Archeological Society* 60:267-281 (for 1989).

1994 The Were-Cougar Theme in Pecos River Style Art and its Implications for Traditional Archeology. In *New Light on Old Art: Recent Advances in Hunter-Gatherer Rock Art Research*, edited by David S. Whitley and Lawrence L. Loendorf, pp. 75-80. Monograph 36, Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles.

Turpin, Solveig, ed.

2002 *Rock Art and Cultural Processes*. Rock Art Foundation, San Antonio. Their latest special publication, with outstanding essays by Linea Sundstrom, Polly Schaafsma, Kelley Hayes-Gilpin, Bill Hyder, and Solveig Turpin. \$15 + \$5 S&H.

Credits

Thanks to these people for the graphics, used with permission: Map of W. Texas counties, courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin. Cerro Chino, Bob Malouf and the CBBS. Girl with Fire Drill and Fate Bell Shelter, Reeda Peel and Texas Beyond History. Rattlesnake Canyon, Steve Black and Texas Beyond History. White Shaman Shelter, Tom Getts.

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