

# GREAT BASIN GLYPH NOTES

NEVADA ROCK ART FOUNDATION

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## Nevada Rock Art Foundation At Work: Lahontan Reservoir Petroglyph Site

During fall 2014, NRAF staff and volunteers conducted fieldwork at the Lahontan Reservoir Petroglyph Site in Lyon County. The site is located in Lahontan State Recreation Area, managed by Nevada Division of State Parks whose staff provided invaluable logistical support. The site is located above the shoreline of a reservoir constructed in 1915 as part of the Newlands Reclamation Project. Tufa deposits at the site indicate that the area would have been deeply submerged by Pleistocene Lake Lahontan, which

covered much of northwestern Nevada during the Ice Age. By 9,000 years ago, the lake had largely dried up, leaving behind playas and marshes. The earliest hunter-foragers in the region appear to have favored lakeside marshes and other wetlands for their settlement activities. However, it is more likely that the Lahontan Reservoir Petroglyph site was made and used around 4,000-1,500 years ago based on the area's general settlement and environmental history.

Early Euro-American settlers apparently knew of the site as the "Mountain of Hieroglyphics" (M. Angel, 1881, *History of Nevada*) but, until the 1950s, archaeologists had

difficulty in relocating the site, believing that the site was submerged by the waters of the reservoir. Archaeological

investigations at the site prior to NRAF's work have been preliminary enquiries that recommended more intensive fieldwork to describe its characteristics. Accordingly, NRAF's recordation project sought to intensively record the rock art and archaeology of this large, but inadequately known site.



The Lahontan Reservoir Petroglyph Site covers an area of approximately 5.5 acres, overlooking what would have been a productive marsh environment at various times over the past 4,500 years. Survey revealed the site to be one of the larger petroglyph sites in northwestern Nevada, comprising 208 rock art boulders densely distributed

in two main concentrations. Other prehistoric archaeological features are surprisingly slight; just two mortars, a grinding slick, and a few waste flakes. This suggests short-term and small-scale residential use of the site, indicating that the site was primarily visited from nearby temporary campsites. It also may suggest that the focus of site visits was the rock art. Rock art is dominated by abstract designs with a heavy emphasis on curvilinear motif types. Representational imagery is notably rare with stick-figure anthropomorphs and zoomorphs almost entirely absent.

Heavily patinated circular designs, Lahontan Reservoir Petroglyph Site



Heavily patinated circular designs, Lahontan Reservoir Petroglyph Site

*continued on p. 3*

## From the Executive Director

In any given year the Foundation's activities reflect the structure of grant and donor support received. This means that the emphasis placed on the core program areas of site recordation, public education, and research varies annually. Site recordation provides the essential basis for informing research and public education once data gathered in the field is analyzed and interpreted. This year's activities have focused on fieldwork projects and research, gathering data and carrying out analysis that will inform both research and public education programs. Each recordation project completed develops our research infrastructure as analyzed data is integrated into RADAAR. Equally important for research is disseminating our findings at professional conferences and preparing articles for publication based on the feedback received. Accordingly, a 2014 grant from NARA allowed articles to be prepared and presented at the meetings of the Society for American Archaeology and Great Basin Anthropological Conference in 2014 that will be published in the next 18 months.

Recordation highlights in 2014 include:

**Black Mountain, Mineral County**—One of the largest rock art complexes in the state not to have been intensively recorded to date. This multiyear project saw good progress in 2014 with 45 acres of the complex surveyed, and the recording of 660 rock art panels and 24 features (talus pits, blinds, cairns, house rings). Data from this project will contribute to better understanding the regional characteristics of Nevada rock art and its associated archaeological contexts.

**High Basins ACEC, Washoe County**—Started fieldwork by recording 80 panels at seven sites in an archaeological complex of habitation features and 100 rock art localities. Data from this project will contribute to better understanding rock art's associated archaeological contexts in Nevada.

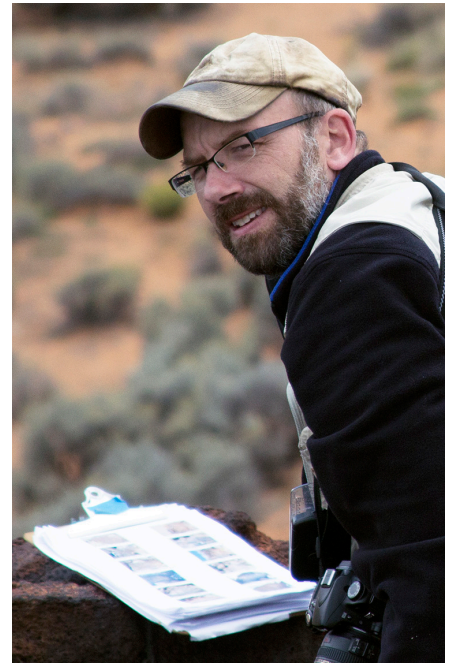
**Lahontan Reservoir**—described in this issue of *Glyph Notes*. Data gathered during this project will contribute to defining the regional characteristics of Nevada rock art.

**Kyle Canyon**—described in this issue of *Glyph Notes*. Data gathered during this project will contribute to understanding the stylistic properties, age, and associated archaeological contexts of the Pahranaagat Anthropomorph Style and provide interpreted information for a workshop for educators.

**Curtis Canyon**—described in this issue of *Glyph Notes*. Data collected during this project will contribute to understanding the regional stylistic properties of Nevada rock art as well as continuing the Foundation's interests in assisting site management.

Information gathered during recordation, in addition to serving the immediate site management needs of these projects, will be analyzed for research and integrated into RADAAR. The Foundation's research database provides the necessary infrastructure for exploring questions about Nevada's landscape and social contexts. In particular, as more data is added to RADAAR we will be better able to identify regional distribution patterns in Nevada rock art styles, chronology, and archaeological settings. To date we are beginning to appreciate stylistic and contextual differences that correlate to site size and structure, as well as patterning in the way that motif types such as bighorn sheep occur in the landscape.

For 2015 we have received grant support that will allow more work on education programs and interpreting rock art to the public. In particular, we will be developing an educators workshop on the rock art and archaeology of southeastern Nevada, and interpreting for the public rock art at three rock art districts in Lincoln County. These educational programs will draw heavily on the results of our fieldwork projects in southeastern Nevada, illustrating that recordation underpins the Foundation's activities. We will, of course, also have a full slate of fieldwork during the year, resuming projects begun this year as well as starting work on new ones. As ever, I look forward to working with you as we make progress in improving knowledge about Nevada rock art as an archaeological feature and share our findings with the archaeology community.



*Gus Quinlan*  
*Executive Director*



## Lahontan Reservoir Petroglyph Site cont'd

This pronounced emphasis on abstract designs seems to be a regional feature of the northwestern Nevada rock art record. The site's curvilinear imagery is notable for including novel and highly formal large designs. Discernible differences in the appearance of the surface patination of rock art motifs at the site suggest that there may be temporal differences the sequence of rock art production. Further analysis could contribute information that helps clarify the relative sequence of stylistic evolution in Great Basin rock art.

*Acknowledgements*—This project was made possible with the assistance of the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office through a US Department of Interior Grant. Anthony Beauregard, Park Supervisor, and the staff of Lahontan State Recreation Area provided enthusiastic support and logistical help during the project. The hard work of volunteers Wendy Antibus, Carolyn Barnes-Wolfe, Ralph Bennett, Anne Higgins, Janice Hoke, Joan Johnson, Sue Ann Monteleone, Robert Stolting, Don Wescott, and Fred & Sandy Zoerner, is gratefully acknowledged.



*Curvilinear designs predominate at the Lahontan Reservoir Petroglyph Site*

## Kyle Canyon Petroglyph Site

During the fall, NRAF assisted ASM Affiliates in recording rock art at the Kyle Canyon site in Lincoln County. Kyle Canyon is a petroglyph and temporary campsite that is part of a wider landscape of rock art and habitation sites in the Badger Valley area. Kyle Canyon contains 16 petroglyph panels, with its central panels being large, visually imposing, and notable for their dense arrangements of motifs. The site contains several Pahrnagat-style pattern-bodied anthropomorphs with solid-body variants of this style known from sites in close proximity to Kyle Canyon. Pahrnagat-style rock art is broadly dated to the period 6,000-600 years ago but this style was likely mainly made from 2,500-600 years ago. Other rock art imagery at the site includes bighorn sheep figures and abundant abstract motif types. The site is representative of the distinctive qualities of rock art in this part of southeastern Nevada and provides important information about the stylistic properties of the Pahrnagat Anthropomorph Style and its associated archaeological contexts.

*Acknowledgements*—We thank Mark Giambastiani, ASM Affiliates for the opportunity to work on this project and volunteers Cherry Baker, Ralph Bennett, Jon Garey-Sage, Joan Johnson, Doug Rorer, and Carl Wilson for their assistance in the field.



*Doug Rorer displays a new use for blue tape: protecting ears from gnats.*



*Jon Garey-Sage (left) and Carl Wilson (right) climbed high in the pursuit of duty.*



# Curtis Canyon Graffiti Mitigation

NRAF provided technical assistance for a site rehabilitation project led by Eetza Research Associates at Curtis Canyon, Lincoln County. The project was supported by a grant from the Lincoln County Archaeological Initiative and brought the specialist skills of conservator Dr Johannes Loubser to Nevada to mitigate the affects of graffiti and vandalism at the project site. Curtis Canyon is a pictograph and petroglyph site that contains possible Fremont style anthropomorphs and historic imagery (cowboy figures). Defacement of the site's rock art was first reported over 40 years ago (D. D. Fowler & F. W. Sharrock, 1973, Appendix A: Survey and Test Excavations, in D. D. Fowler, D. B. Madsen, and E. M. Hattori, *Prehistory of Southeastern Nevada*. Desert Research Institute, Reno) and seems to have been mostly done during the 1950s and 1960s. The most significant damage is extensive chalking of pictographs on the largest rock art panels at the site, which presumably was done to enhance photography.



Volunteers at Curtis Canyon working under the direction of Dr Loubser to reduce graffiti



Extensively chalked pictograph panel at the Curtis Canyon site that was prioritized for graffiti reduction

Dr Loubser explained during the project that mitigation of vandalism does not necessarily restore a site to its original condition; rather, it reduces the appearance of vandalism. NRAF thoroughly recorded the site's rock art so that an accurate and current record of its condition was in place before any conservation work was done. This baseline data provides the basis for assessing the effectiveness of possible treatment measures and identifying which rock art panels are the best candidates for mitigation. Treatment methods on selected rock art are then carefully tested, with minimal measures tried first and, if these are unsuccessful, followed by progressively more aggressive techniques. As the chalking was the most significant vandalism at the site, this was prioritized for treatment. Dr Loubser worked painstakingly to carefully remove chalk and crayon, and camouflage, where appropriate, graffiti scratches. Eetza and NRAF staff and volunteers assisted Dr Loubser, working under his tutelage to reduce the appearance of vandalism at the site. By treating the most visually intrusive vandalism at the site, the project successfully rehabilitated the site's condition so that it no longer appears heavily vandalized. This helps to discourage possible future vandalism by giving visitors to the site a positive experience of its condition and lessens the chances of copycat vandalism by reducing the visibility of inappropriate behaviors (vandalism) to imitate.

*Acknowledgments*—We thank Jim Bunch and Patti DeBunch, Eetza Research Associates for the opportunity to participate in this project. Dr Loubser provided generous and patient training for the volunteers who assisted him. Cherry Baker, Ralph Bennett, Mark Boatwright, Joan Johnson, Doug Rorer, and Carl Wilson gave essential and dedicated volunteer support.









**Correction:** The last issue of the Great Basin Glyph Notes failed to mention Signa Pendegraft as key in the early recording of the Dry Lakes sites. Our apologies to Signa, and we have corrected the text on the archived issue housed on the website.

# 2015 Membership

## Membership levels, Annual Dues, and Benefits

As a member of the NEVADA ROCK ART FOUNDATION, you will support the protection and preservation of the rock art of Nevada through programs of documentation, research, and public education. As a member, you will receive the *Great Basin Glyph Notes*, the e-newsletter of the NEVADA ROCK ART FOUNDATION and special invitations to lectures, events, and programs.

### Membership Levels

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The Nevada Rock Art Foundation's principal objectives are to document rock art sites at risk and work to conserve and ensure the integrity and future protection of all Nevada Rock Art sites.

The Foundation respects the cultural heritage and traditions of all indigenous people in all its activities.

The Past  
Deserves a Future

## Code of Ethics

*The NEVADA ROCK ART FOUNDATION subscribes to the following code of ethics and its members, as a condition of membership, agree to abide by the standards of conduct stated herein.*

1. NRAF respects the cultural and spiritual significance of rock art sites and shall not engage in any activity that adversely affects site integrity. NRAF members will be respectful at rock art sites—many are regarded as sacred by indigenous peoples and as such will be treated as a valued part of our shared cultural heritage.
2. NRAF members will strictly adhere to all local, state, and national antiquities laws. All research or educational activities taking place at rock art sites shall be subject to appropriate regulations and property access requirements.
3. All rock art recording shall be nondestructive with regard to the rock art itself and any associated archaeological remains that may be present.
4. No artifacts shall be collected unless the work is done as part of a legally constituted program of archaeological survey or excavation and with express permission of the landholder.
5. No excavation shall be conducted unless the work is done as part of a legally constituted excavation project and with the express permission of the landholder. Removal of soil shall not be undertaken at any time for the sole purpose of exposing subsurface rock art.

*Working for the Conservation of Nevada's Rock Art Heritage*

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