

## A REPETITIVE SYMBOL IN THE ROCK ART OF INDIAN CREEK

For the past two years, I have conducted an intensive inventory of the archaeological resources of the Indian Creek drainage in Southeastern Utah (Manning 1983). The Indian Creek drainage is in San Juan County just east of Canyonlands National Park. This small creek drains the north facing slopes of the Abajo or Blue Mountains west of Monticello, Utah, and it flows north and west into the Colorado River. The length of Indian Creek is approximately 35 miles.

During the survey, I walked the full length of the canyon four times, i.e., twice on each side—once at the base of cliffs and once at the base of the talus below the cliffs. I found that rock art exists from the mouth of the canyon to its head. To this date, I have recorded over 400 panels of petroglyphs and pictographs within the Indian Creek drainage. During this survey, I discovered a number of unusual petroglyphs. This report concentrates on four of these figures.

On the east side of Indian Creek, below Newspaper Rock State Park, I found a panel of unusual petroglyphs. It consists of three horizontal pecked lines; below them is a U-shaped figure with the bottom of the U filled in, and below this is another short horizontal line (Figure 1). To the right, between two other short horizontal lines, is a pecked abstract element, somewhat like an infinity symbol. There were also present several deeply pecked or perhaps drilled holes.

Directly across the canyon from these figures on the west side, I found another panel of petroglyphs similar to those in Figure 1. The panel consists of almost the



Figure 1



Figure 2

identical images, i.e., three horizontal lines and a U-shaped element underneath (Figure 2). Also in the panel was a strange abstract image. To my knowledge, no other similar geographical arrangement of nearly identical

glyphs has been previously reported. Jesse Warner, Layne Miller, Owen Severance and I have spent many hours speculating on what they may mean. We wondered if they are clan symbols or boundary markers dividing the canyon. The conclusion of our discussions is that we really do not know what they represent.

Several months after locating these petroglyphs, I made the discovery of still another nearly identical figure farther down the canyon on the east side (Figure 3). Here I



Figure 3

found again three horizontal lines, the U-shaped figure underneath, then another horizontal line below them. This line, however, was abraded instead of being pecked. There are also deeply pecked or drilled holes in association with these images. An interesting thing about this panel, however, was that there were three large anthropomorphs above the image (Figure 4). Based on the style and patination, I would classify them as early Basketmaker. The patination was the same on the abstract image as on the figures in this panel, also the pecking techniques were the same. Because of this, I have tentatively classified

the other two abstract panels in Indian Creek as Basketmaker.

Of course, the question immediately arose; was there a similar figure on the other side of the canyon? The answer turned out to be yes. A quick search with binoculars found it easily. It is directly across the canyon next to two painted figures. However, it is not exactly the same as the other three. The U-shaped symbol is present, but instead of three horizontal lines, there are two vertical lines, one on each side of the U-shaped figure. There are also two short horizontal lines on the outside of the vertical lines (Figure 5). As mentioned, there are also two large painted figures in this panel.

Unfortunately, the discovery of this additional set of similar figures did not provide any additional answers to our questions. There are, however, some conclusions that can be deduced from these symbols. Their specific placement at exact locations across from each other indicates that they are not randomly placed figures. There appears to be a specific meaning attached to the three lines and the U-shaped figure, which means that for the individual(s) who made them, they had a definite and precise meaning. What that meaning was may never be completely known.

In an attempt to discover if there were more of these symbols and perhaps to find additional contexts that might suggest their use, a search for other like symbols was made through existing photographs and records of other rock art sites. I found that there are short rows of horizontal lines occurring at several well-known sites near Butler Wash, which is just south of Indian Creek on the other side of the Abajo Mountains. At this location, sets of three horizontal lines are placed over the heads of large Basketmaker anthropomorphs, another indication that the figures from Indian Creek may be of Basketmaker affiliation.

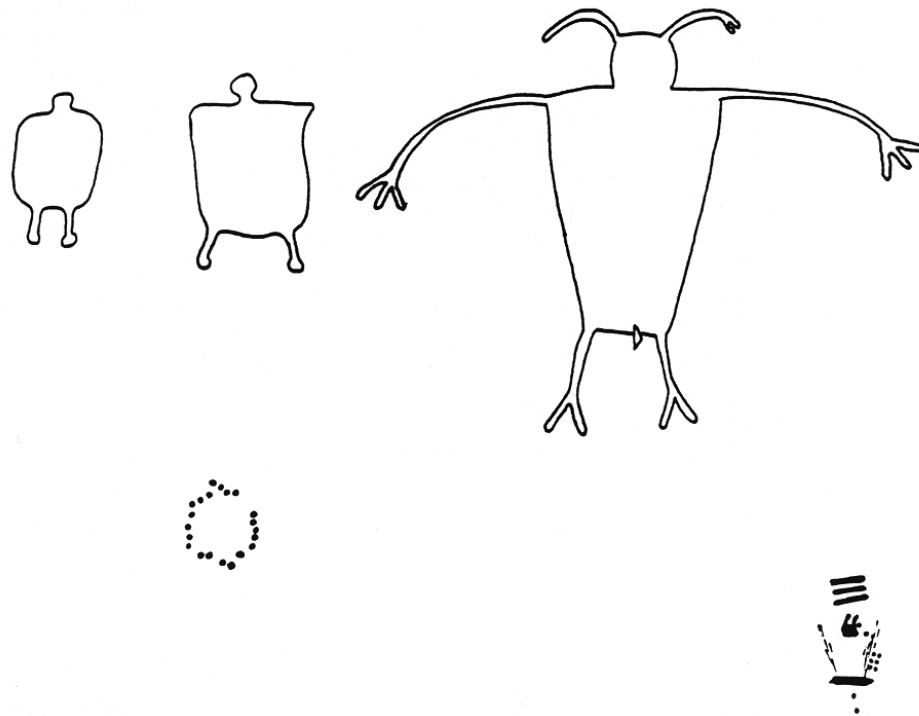


Figure 4.

There are also anthropomorphs in the panels at Butler Wash that appear to have the abstract, U-shaped element attached to or hanging about their neck. This relationship suggests that the abstract image represents a large two-stranded pendent necklace.

The large Basketmaker panel at the mouth of Butler Wash contains isolated symbols that are also found as part of the figures (anthropomorphic headdresses for example). The presence of these detached elements appears to be a characteristic of Basketmaker rock art. It would appear from these observations that the Indian Creek figures are detached Basketmaker symbols, and that they may carry the same connotation as in the Butler Wash panels—whatever that may be. Perhaps these symbols are some type of identification mark, clan symbol, or perhaps a symbol of rank or power. Whatever they represent, the figures in Indian Creek appear to have been placed in this section of the canyon for a purpose associated with the meaning of the symbol.

In my search for other like symbols, I thought perhaps the pendant might be limited to Basketmaker rock art. However, I found large two-stranded pendants on Fremont style rock art in the following locations: along the Colorado River near Moab; Buckhorn Wash site south of Price; Salina Canyon; Cub Creek near Vernal, and Ashley and Dry Fork. They also appear on the Salt Creek Faces at the Four Faces in Upper Salt Creek.

The two-stranded pendant, then, appears to occur mainly in Basketmaker and Fremont rock art, a further indication of the interac-



Figure 5.



Figure 6.

tion and similarity of these two cultures.

Just recently, I made the discovery of still another set of three lines and the two-stranded pendant (Figure 6). This image was found in Mill Creek Canyon east of Moab. This set of figures is also in association with Basketmaker rock art — note the bird-headed figure playing a flute. In this panel the three lines and pendant are superimposed by other Basketmaker figures and are slightly darker than them (Figure 7). This indicates that they were made before the rest

of the panel was added. I searched the other side of the canyon for another symbol, but I found none. The rock in this location is very broken, so possibly there may have been an image there at one time. Now, however, there is no way to know if a similar image once existed in this location. The discovery of the combination pendant and short lines petroglyph in another cliff-lined canyon containing flowing water, suggests a possible environmental context for the image. This duality suggests that this context may have been important in the placement of these images.

Further research into these petroglyphs and their geographic placement is currently in progress. Hopefully others will be found in contexts that will provide a better understanding of these unusual figures. If any of you are aware of the existence of any of these figures please contact me.

#### REFERENCES CITED

Manning, Steven J.  
1982 Rock Art in the Gibson Dome Area.  
*Utah Rock Art*, Second Printing, 2:27-33.

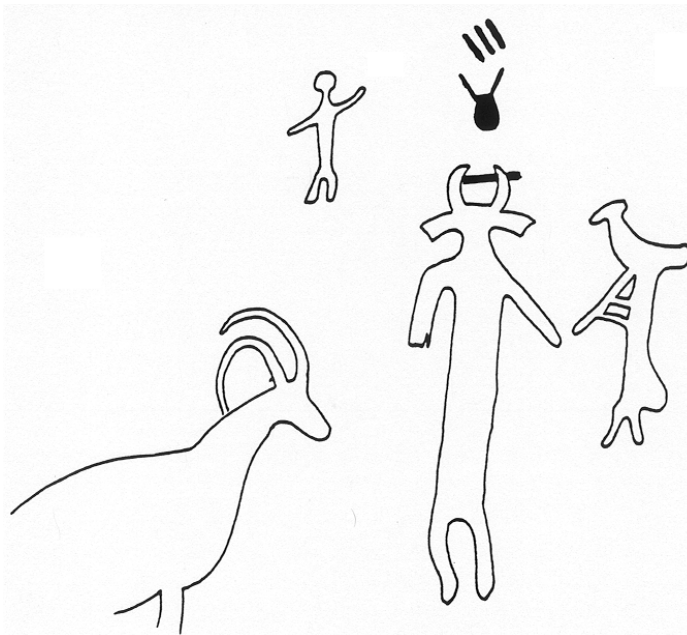


Figure 7.