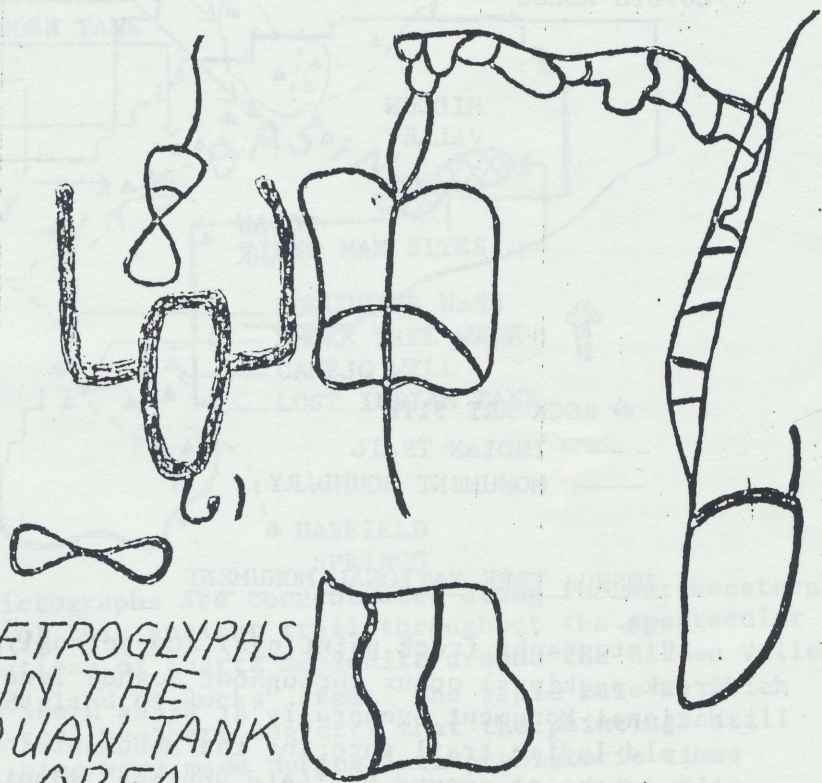


PREHISTORIC
INDIAN ROCK ART 15¢

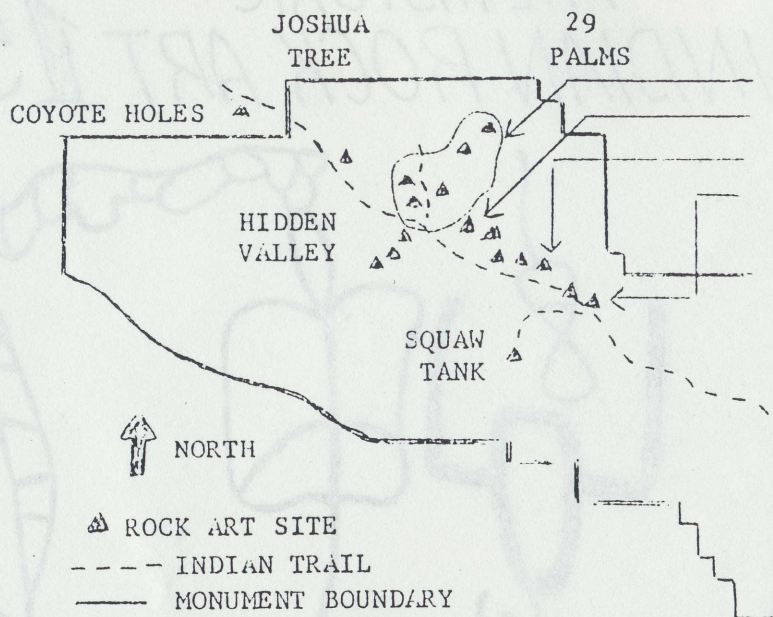


PETROGLYPHS
IN THE
SQUAW TANK
AREA

JOSHUA TREE
NATIONAL MONUMENT
by Ike Eastvold
1969

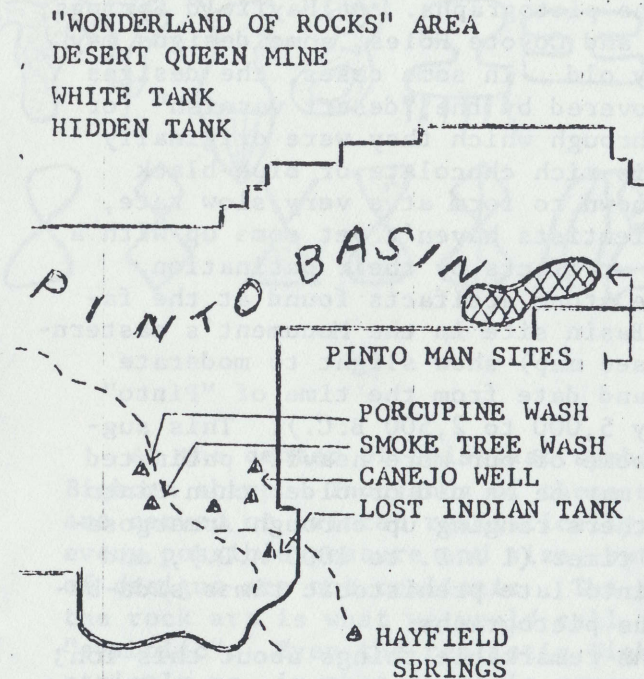
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PICTOGRAPHS & Petroglyphs



JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL MONUMENT

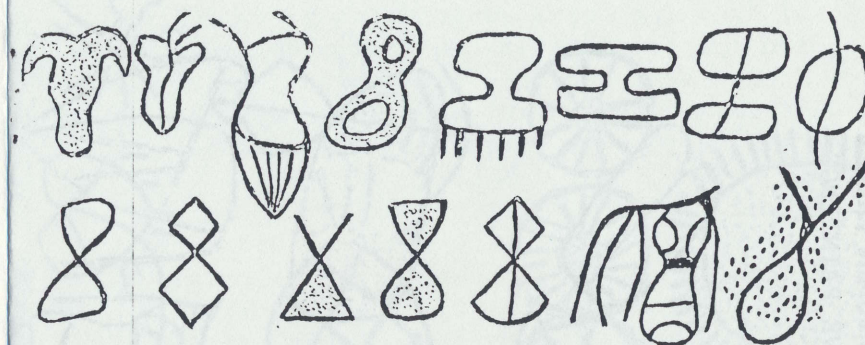
Pictographs (rock paintings) and petroglyphs (rock peckings) occur throughout Joshua Tree National Monument, generally at sites along an old Indian trail entering the Monument in the southeast around Hayfield Springs, running diagonally through the sites shown on the map, and then passing out of the Monument at Coyote Holes in the northwest. The small groups of petroglyphs at Smoke Tree Wash, Porcupine Wash, Squaw Tank, and the Desert Queen Mine are easily accessible by road and provide good examples of the art. More concentrated sites lie just outside the Monument at Hayfield Springs and Coyote Holes.



Pictographs are concentrated along the northwestern part of this ancient trail throughout the spectacular formations of quartz monzonite around the Hidden Valley "Wonderland of Rocks" area. The rapid rate at which this rock weathers suggests that the paintings still surviving were made during late prehistoric times (1000 A.D. to 1900 A.D.) by the Serrano, Cahuilla, and probably Chemehuevi Indians, all members of the Shoshonean branch of the great Uto-Aztecan family. Original settlers remember these Indians coming each year to hunt the Bighorn, make jerky, and gather quantities of acorns, pinyon nuts, and other plant foods for the winter. They were peoples noted for being deeply religious, industrious, and friendly. When questioned by the settlers as to the "meaning" of their rock art, however, the Indians were consistently tight-lipped.

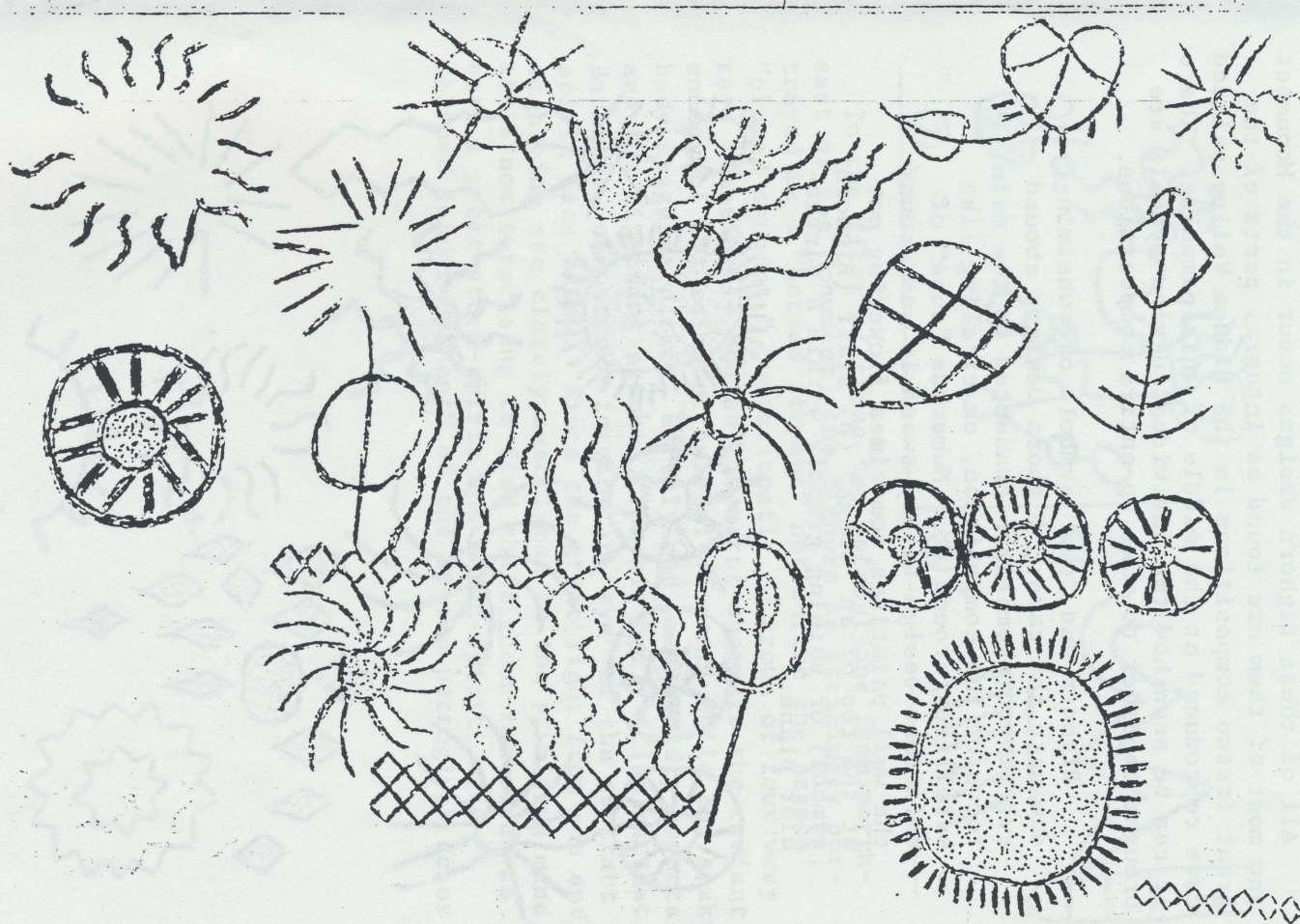
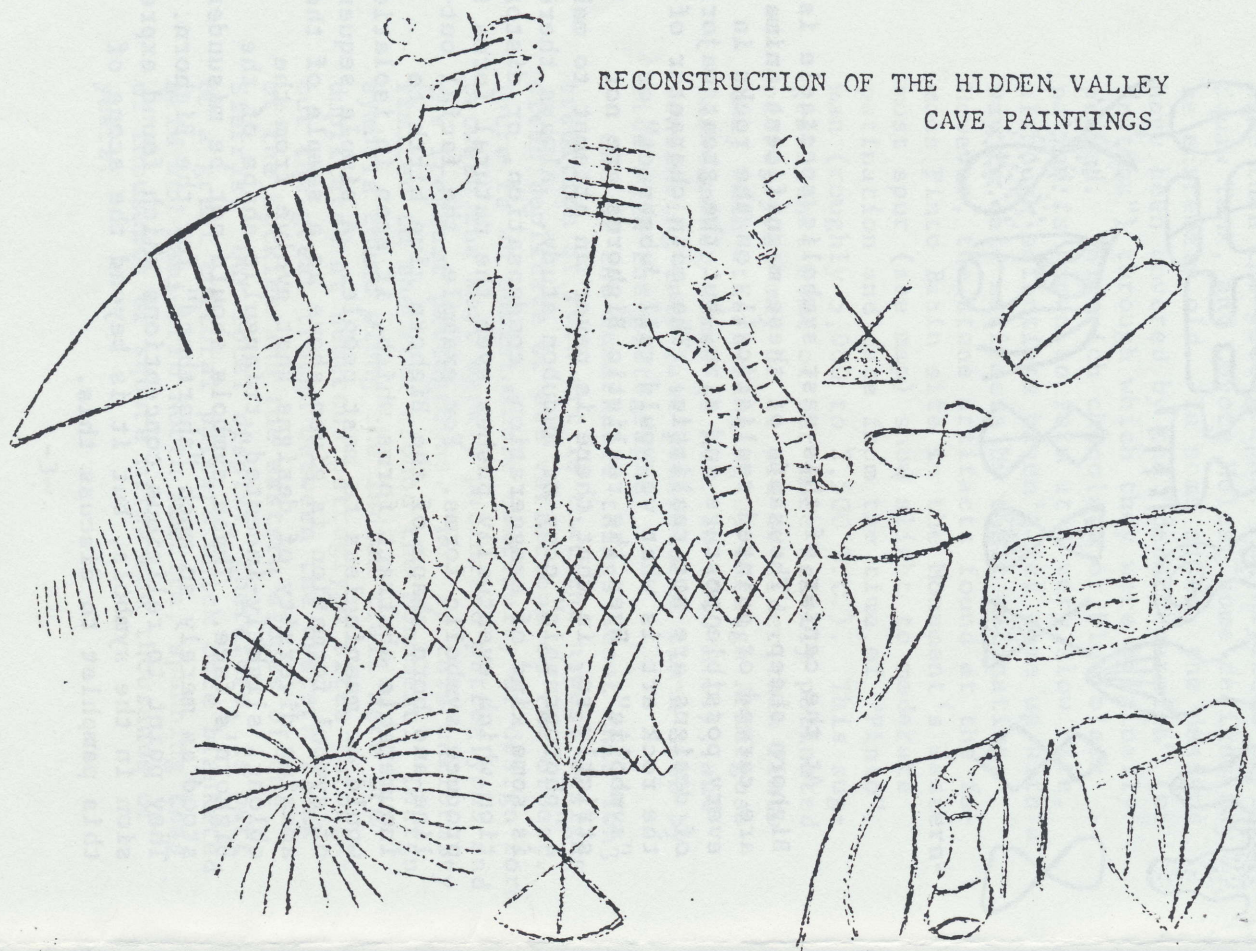
Petroglyph sites occur all along the ancient trail and represent a much broader spectrum of time than the pictographs. At Hayfield Springs, Squaw Tank, and Coyote Holes, some designs may be extremely old. In some cases, the designs have been covered by the "desert varnish" (or "patina") through which they were originally pecked. This rich chocolate or blue-black patina is known to form at a very slow rate, although scientists haven't yet come up with a way to date artifacts by their patination. However, the stone artifacts found at the famous Pinto Basin site in the Monument's easternmost spur (see map) show slight to moderate patination and date from the time of "Pinto" man (roughly 5,000 to 2,500 B.C.). This suggests that some of our more heavily patinated petroglyphs may be as old or older than Pinto man, with others ranging up through Armargosa-Basketmaker times (1 A.D. to 1000 A.D.), and continuing into late prehistoric times side-by-side with the pictographs.

One of the remarkable things about this long tradition of rock art is that the newest designs often duplicate or are variations of the oldest. There is an unmistakable continuity of design form between the most darkly patinated petroglyphs and the freshest pictographs. Nor is this uniformity limited to the area around the Monument. Design symbols found along the Indian trail here are duplicated at numerous petroglyph sites throughout the great trough between the western flank of the Rockies and the eastern slopes of the Sierras. Our local display, therefore, is part of a great cultural pattern which once blanketed arid and semi-arid North America, spanning tens of thousands of square miles and thousands of years.



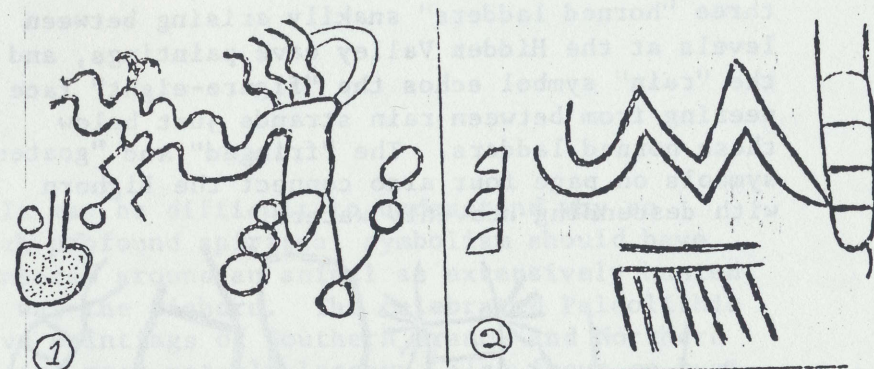
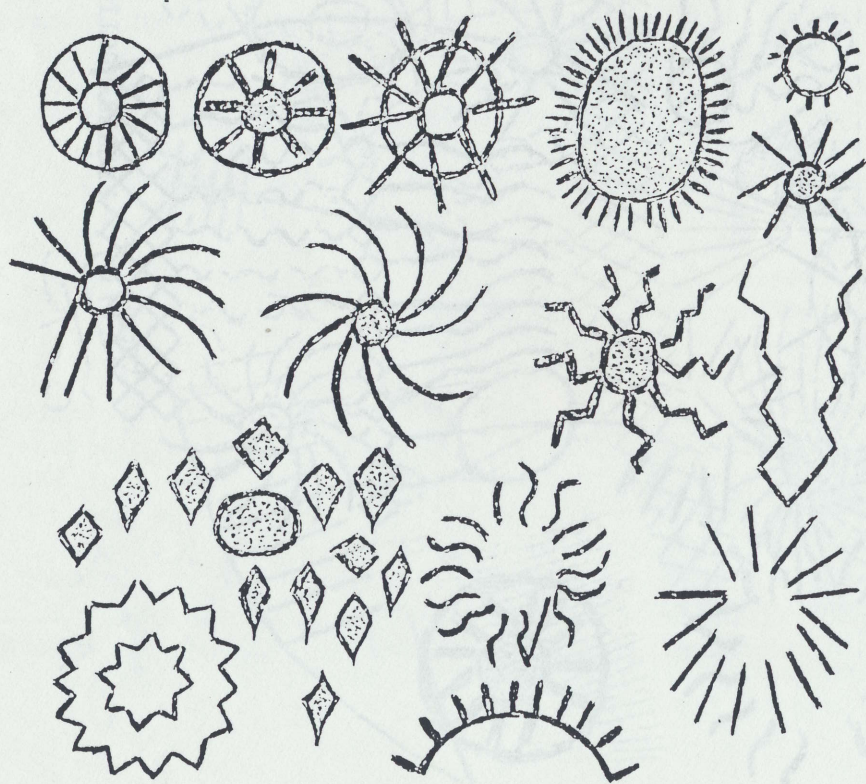
At the center of this vast symbolic spectacle is the Bighorn sheep. Thousands of these magnificent animals are carved or painted realistically on the rocks in every possible posture and size, but the great majority of designs are not realistic. The main character of the rock art is what we would call "abstract" or "symbolic". Even the realistic Bighorns are not strictly so, in that there is never an attempt to make a "photographic" copy or Audubon study. Always there is some kind of exaggeration, condensation, or distortion which eventually pushes even the natural forms to produce symbolic forms. For example, the facial outline and horn shape of the Bighorn give birth to innumerable abstract forms which, if seen in isolation, would be meaningless to most people. A simple sequence of symbol formation is given above as a sample of the amazing diversity of designs that evolve from the oblong, slightly-indented, triangular shape of the Bighorn's face. These symbols should not be misunderstood as merely so much "shorthand" for the Bighorn. They point to religious conceptions which found expression in the symbols, but it is beyond the scope of this pamphlet to discuss this.

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE HIDDEN VALLEY
CAVE PAINTINGS



All of these Bighorn designs occur in the Monument and most of them are found as integral parts of the great fresco compositions in the Hidden Valley painted cave reproduced at the middle of this pamphlet. There it can be seen how the individual design symbols are brought together to make up entire compositions.

Bighorn and "sun" symbols overwhelmingly dominate the cave. Bighorn designs abound everywhere, sometimes connected to the main focus of the composition, or circling like satellites around it. Numerous "suns" of different design fairly swarm in and around the wall paintings, sometimes flowering out at the top of an "omega" ($\emptyset$) staff (Bighorn symbol) or shining grandly within a particular plane.



In the first of these two petroglyphs from north-east of the Monument, the Bighorn is strikingly portrayed as a "horned serpent" not unlike the Aztecs' "plumed serpent," Quetzalcoatl. A crown of four wavy rays immediately behind his horns suggests the radiant energy of his solar or heavenly aspect, while the snake body suggests darker, earthly and underworldly aspects, and the lightning strokes from his belly illumine that darkness, one stroke forming an "eye" of the abstract spirit face below. Since the great light from sun and lightning are closely associated in the primitive mind, it is not surprising to find the Bighorn conceived as both a great storm-spirit and a sun-spirit. The "horned ladder serpent" of the second petroglyph echos the

three "horned ladders" snakily arising between levels at the Hidden Valley cave paintings, and the "rain" symbol echos the "figure-eight" face peering from between rain strands just below those horned ladders. The "fringed" and "goatee" symbols on page four also connect the Bighorn with descending heavenly waters.



It is possible that the "spirit sticks" found so abundantly in rockshelter caves of this area may also be connected with the cult of the Bighorn. These forked sticks are found propped at the base with rocks, fork wedged against the ceiling. Sometimes bundles of eagle feathers were tied to the fork, and smooth, water-worn pebbles were buried under the base. These forked sticks strongly suggest the forked horn shape of the Bighorn found in our local rock art, and the eagle (sun-bird) and water stones correspond exactly with the sun and water symbolism constantly associated with the Bighorn. These "spirit sticks" might have been conceived as "horned ladders" similar to the ones found in our rock art. Also, the great annual ceremony of mourning for the dead is held by the Western Cahuilla of San Geronio Pass when the Bighorn constellation (Orion) has reached its zenith in the winter sky. Finally, there is marked similarity between the pottery designs and certain elements such as the diamond chains, crosses, and grids are conspicuously repeated.

It may be difficult to understand why so much profound spiritual symbolism should have centered around an animal as extensively hunted as was the Bighorn. The celebrated Paleolithic cave paintings of Southern France and Northern Spain, most notably Lascaux, also focus on hunted animals (Bison, horse, deer, etc.) and similarly combine abstract and realistic design elements. Among prehistoric hunting peoples there existed a sense of solidarity between man and animal, the hunter and the hunted, which was so strong that the two were often thought to be linked by a common ancestor or totem animal. The division into animal clans among American Indian tribes today illustrates a survival of this ancient way of thinking, and the Snake priests and Antelope priests of the Hopi show how this strong empathy with the animals even structures their religious societies and, therefore, the very content of their spiritual life.

It is beyond the scope of this pamphlet to discuss the question of "why" the pictographs and petroglyphs were made. Although this is a very difficult problem, it is known that the shamans (religious leaders) were often the ones who created the rock art, and we can therefore expect that many of them were made for a religious or ceremonial purpose. They are an ancient and widespread system of religious symbolism.

The pictographs and petroglyphs are irreplaceable. They are a treasurehouse of primitive art which we here in Western America are very fortunate to have. Preserve this heritage for future generations.

SUGGESTED READING

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