



REVIEW ARTICLE

MODERN ERA GALISTEO BASIN PETROGLYPH LOOTING AND GOVERNMENT CONTROLS, 1977-2023

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ABSTRACT

New Mexico, USA, indigenous people's petroglyphs have endured more than 400 years of post-contact exposure. Only in the 2nd half of the 20th century did preservation and conservation efforts commence. Beginning then, public laws, regulations and enforcement have sought to protect petroglyphs in the Galisteo Basin. Cattle and sheep herders, farmers, and tourists all infringed upon these panels, often composites of multiple images, situated on both private and public lands. Unpublished government surveys reported on destruction and vandalism with photos and risk analyses upon which future strategies were mapped. Photos illustrate both incising in situ and looting of rock pieces, which provided impetus for preservation across multiple political spheres of influence. Archaeologists contributed literature reviews and style analysis, in the process of recording the petroglyphs. Federal and state laws and regulations and administrative efforts in preservation between 1977 and 2023 are tracked, together with whether they were successful.

KEYWORDS

Indigenous People, Galisteo Basin, Petroglyphs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pre-contact indigenous people's petroglyphs surrounding the urban center of Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA, struck awe among archaeologists beginning with their noticing in 1898. Later, in addition to design, vandalism was noted in a 1977 archaeological survey, albeit minimal. Subsequent government commissioned archaeology surveys recorded increasing vandalism and theft of petroglyphs and provided impetus for federal government protective legislation in 2004. It became obvious that prior to 2004, deterrence and enforcement encountered impediments due to an expansive landscape, established roads, sheep and cattle grazing, and architectural ruins attracting looters. This legislation, together with county ownership led to protective actions such as closing lands to public access. Photos from these reports presented the petroglyph destruction. Evidencing mechanized sawing and chiseling, as well as pecking, this vandalism exhibited both a chilling warning as well as impetus for government preservation efforts. Through these preservation efforts, collateral endeavors such as iconography and petroglyph styles dating added to the knowledge base and allowed for comparison and analysis.

2. SETTING

The Galisteo Basin encompasses tributaries to the Rio Grande about 30 miles south of present-day Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA. This city was established by Spanish colonialists between 1610-1680 and 1692-1821 C.E. The interim represented expulsion of Spanish settlers by the Pueblo revolt. In 1821, Mexico gained independence from Spain. In 1848, the Galisteo Basin became USA territory under the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Culture phase chronologies for pre-contact consist of: archaic 4800 B.C.E. – 700 C.E. and Puebloan 850 -1541 C.E. Notwithstanding these broad dates, petroglyphs' beginning was attributed to the middle archaic, 3200 B.C.E. (Lang, 1977). However, Munson (2005) progressed beyond pre-contact petroglyphs and ventured into the historic and present. Here, she included one proclaiming a 1916 date, as well as several with modern

iconography/subjects. Initial recorded observations by archaeologists began in 1898, with a major survey in 1924.

This study is limited to those ancient petroglyphs which suffered vandalism in the historic period. According to archaeologists' evaluations, metal implements, as well as images such as windmills, horses, and alphabetic writing, represent historic graffiti superimposed on and among the pre-contact petroglyphs. Incidents of sawing and chiseling, resulting in the theft and destruction of entire rocks, took place. In other words, vandalism escalated to looting.

3. GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

All the photos and resources cited here consist of public information. Archaeological site reports in New Mexico are deposited in the state historic preservation division of the department of cultural affairs archaeological records management section (ARMS), NMCA §4.10.19 (2016). Access to this data is restricted by state statute to protect the geographical locations from destruction. Those not qualifying for access to ARMS may request records via the inspection of public records act, NMRA 1978 §14-2-1 et seq. as amended. For such requests, staff perform searches and redact geographical locations. Consistent with these regulations, those with ARMS access are not permitted to publish location data.

As the results of state archaeological surveys, digs, and reports are deposited into ARMS, this database provides one level of government recognition of and action to protect archaeological resources. Petroglyphs and pictographs fall into this category, although they may not result from excavation. Therefore, the bureaucratic infrastructure for data compilation to facilitate research and protection was up and running when Galisteo Basin pre-history came into significance in the modern era, as outlined below.

Likewise committed to protecting resources, the state historic

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preservation office (SHPO) defined, administered, and facilitated application of the sites such as LA 14895 for acceptance to the national historic register. Summarizing studies and surveys, the application reported 2,000 petroglyphs, among which historic types comprised 40%. Furthermore, the overall site condition was evaluated at 85% intact, while asserting it was at risk of future damage due to erosion and visitors. Somewhat ambiguously, SHPO also claimed it consisted of a “well preserved condition”, citing (Munson, 2008). The theft and looting as shown in Figures below were also cited (NM SHPO, 2015). It subsequently was awarded national historic register status (US NPS, 2023).

Prior to the historic status designation application, SHPO commissioned an archaeology survey evaluating a privately owned ranch for historic preservation status. Recognizing the Galisteo Basin as containing 24 sites of prehistoric indigenous and Spanish colonial historical value, Congress passed the 2004 Galisteo Basin Archaeological Sites Protection Act, 16 U.S.C. 470aa note (Galisteo Basin Act) (Lang, 1977). Thereafter, to facilitate state historic preservation status, Santa Fe County, as owner of Petroglyph Hill, contracted for another survey focused on petroglyph dating. This motive was consistent with the Galisteo Basin Act, and involved financial support from non-profit organizations (Munson, 2005).

Other petroglyphs within the Galisteo Basin are on federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land. Therefore, by default 43 CFR Sec. 8366, 9212 which allows gunshots as a permitted recreational use, applies. Fortunately, with the directive of the Galisteo Basin act, the Taos district office invoked its discretion to ban firearms. It also incorporated the legislation into its management plan (US BLM, 2012). This federal designation prompted Museum of New Mexico involvement, via a site assessment (Toll et al., 2008). Santa Fe county, as well, confirmed

preservation goals in its management plan. Some mandates included closing the petroglyphs to access (except for docent lead tours), banning dogs and livestock grazing, monitoring the web for unauthorized images, and making random monthly inspections for petroglyph damage. Herein, it also incorporated the BLM report by reference. (Santa Fe County, 2017).

Under the aegis of historic preservation, this government encouragement of conservation contributed to petroglyph and pictograph scholarship. The report includes a literature review, commencing in 1898 (Munson, 2005). Furthermore, Lang (1977) drew on international iconography as well as established southwest USA styles to classify and categorize four phases. These were named San Cristobal, from the archaic through Spanish contact. San Cristobal 2 and 3 represented the archaic, consisting of primarily geometric forms. These he compared to “early Mogollon or Cochise Mogollon”. San Cristobal 1 had no temporal relationship established, and was distinguished by human forms, male human sexual anatomy, and simulated the desert abstract style found at Hueco Mountain, Texas, and desert Mogollon. Moving forward in time, San Cristobal 4 and 5 conveyed early Pueblo era pictographs and petroglyphs, with human, animal, and hunting forms (pp. 282, 364-85).

4. VANDALISM AND ICONOGRAPHY

To begin with the Munson report (2005, Figure 6, p. 4, 19), Figure 1 evidences the ability of field archaeologists to distinguish between metal and stone implements gouging the rock surface. Fortunately for posterity, the historic bird does not intersect with the ancient figure. The interloping vandal imitates the ancient bird form found throughout the site and the southwest at large.



Figure 6: Comparison of chisel-like marks made with a metal tool (upper portion, bird) and those done with a typical pecking technique of stone-on-stone (lower portion, human). Locale 47, Panel E.

Figure 1: Galisteo Basin ancient petroglyph with bird vandalism chiseled on top (Munson 2005, Figure 6, p. 4, 19)

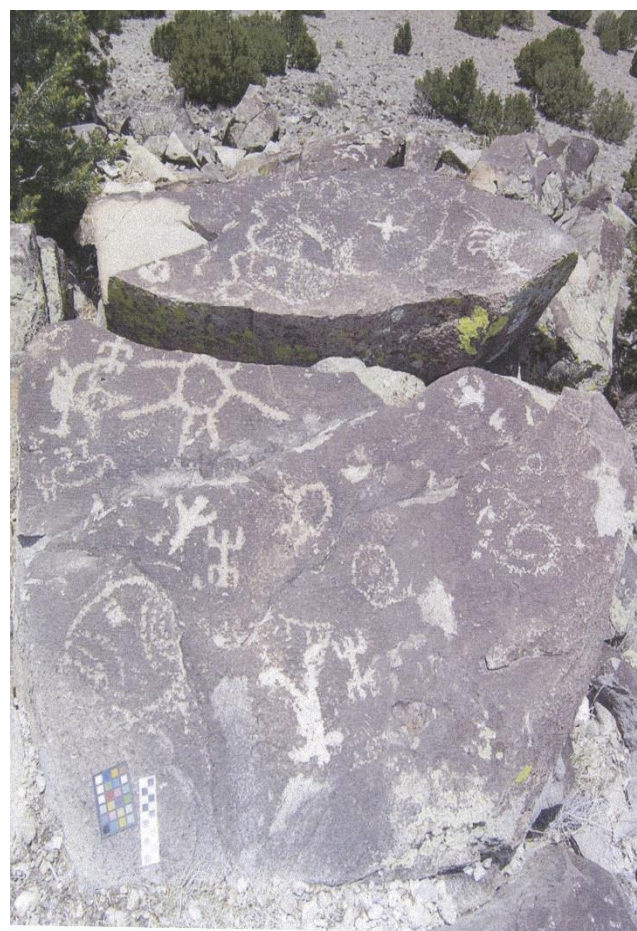


Figure 10: Superpositioning on a complex panel, particularly at center left and in the background. Locale 19, Panel A.

Figure 2: Galisteo Basin ancient petroglyph panel with modern graffiti interspersed (3 lighter colored images) (Munson 2005, Figure 10, p. 4, 23)



Figure 14: Historic inscriptions in block letters with serifs. The various names include 'Felix Chaves Mayo 6 0 1916,' Alfredo Her[rera?], and Elias. Locale 6, Panel A (detail).

Figure 3 : Galisteo Basin ancient petroglyphs with modern graffiti (Munson 2005, Figure 14, p. 6,27)

With a more complex arrangement, in Figure 2 three intrusive images interrupt a packed panel. Spirals, ducks, quadrupeds, masks, shields, zig zags, and rayed circles all riot in San Cristobal 4 or 5 styles. Although there are some geometrics, no thick patina distinguishes them as archaic. Based on the light to non-existent patina and incongruous designs, the graffiti can be identified as the upside down humanoid, the jet airplane, and cross form, as indicated by the caption. Again, the graffiti here attempts to emulate native designs, see Figure 7 below. Luckily, they mostly avoid overlap, and instead insert themselves into background space (Munson, 2005).

Presumably Figure 3's three broad pecked designs are ancient, while historic defacement consists of letters, names, and cross hatched lines. The



Figure 23: A boulder that has been split by vandals wielding a chisel or other metal tool; it was lying in several pieces when initially found. Locale 13, Panel D.

Figure 5: Galisteo Basin ancient petroglyph cracked by vandals (Munson 2005, Figure 23, p. 4, 10)

Opposite from socio-political order inherent in fences, Figure 5 tracks anti-social behavior. Confronted with their shattered target, thieves abandoned boulder fragments in an attempted theft. This interrupted delinquency manifests crude tools, as well as imprecise skills of the robbers. (Munson, 2005). Apparently, no cordless saws were available at the time. This may provide a pre-lithium battery date, 1961 for the vandalism (NASA, 2009).

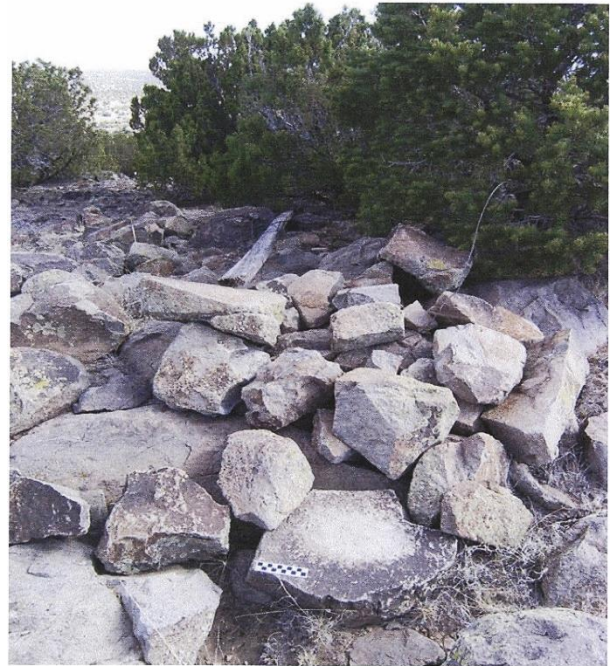


Figure 16: A historic rock pile feature, with wood post and wire; note the grinding slick in the foreground. Feature 3-1.

Figure 4: Galisteo Basin ancient *metate* on historic rock pile (Munson 2005, Figure 16, p. 8, 29)

bird with monster clawed feet at least is familiar as a southwestern motif. Here, a date of 1916 accompanies the graffiti names. Historic writing dates to an era when education was lacking, shown by the misspelled name (Munson, 2005).

Given impenetrable adobe soil, Figure 4 suggests either a rock pile supporting the fencepost, a boundary or corral marker, or both. This corresponds with the ranching economy of the region. The affected artifact is the grinding stone, as noted by archaeologists. Lying singly and face up, facilitating our observation, it evidences a human tool, which value escaped the fence builders. (Munson, 2005). The milled lumber and wire represent an investment, as well as geopolitics inherent in fences.



Figure 26: A large panel split in two by attempted theft. The light scar in the upper left is the former position of the large slab in the foreground. Locale 149, Panel B.

Figure 6: Galisteo Basin ancient petroglyphs chiseled and removed by vandals (Munson 2005, Figure 26, p. 10, 35)

As regards to the designs, the wildlife form ends in a scorpion headdress, but it contains only 6 legs. As well, the fat body precludes the vicious dexterity of this fearsome desert arachnid. Naturalism does not apply. Given the Pueblo era, San Cristobal 4,5 iconography, this replicates scorpion symbolism identified at other sites. Dated after 700 C.E., the pinchers become a headdress (Rothrock, 1994).

Another rejected petroglyph was left behind in Figure 6. The rock was spit, detaching a section, which now rests nearby. Possibly the vandals found no value in the amorphous image which resembles a 6-toed foot (Munson, 2005). However, another sawn edge is visible in the upper left of the



Figure 27: An empty hole (center right) attests to the theft of a small boulder; note the petroglyphs on rocks nearby and the trampling of the surrounding ground surface. Locale 13.

Figure 7: Galisteo Basin ancient petroglyphs stolen and disturbed by vandals (Munson 2005, Fig. 27, p. 10,36)

Other longitudinal time markers can be seen in Figure 7, where a beaten footpath winds among the petroglyphs. Evidenced by naked adobe dirt, one in situ rock disappeared. The remaining corn stalk, 4-pointed star, and zoomorph represent San Cristobal 4 or 5 (Pueblo). Other nondescript petroglyphs present similar patinas (Munson, 2005). The vandals in Figure 2 above attempt to copy this 4-pointed star.

Towards the southern edge of Galisteo Basin, less drastic vandalism among petroglyphs outcrops at Creston Dike. This volcanic rock pyramid shape extends for 3.5 miles, with one end abutting a Pueblo IV ruin, Pueblo Blanco. Located on state trust land leased to ranchers, it was surveyed for vandalism in 1989. At this time, graffiti was not extreme, and pothunting comprised the highest on the detestable scale. However, the archaeologists prescribed barriers to access and monitoring to counteract burgeoning public interest as, e.g., petroglyph tours. Evidence of vehicles circumnavigating locked ranch gates, and advertisements by tour guides provided impetus for these efforts. (Garcia and Gomolak, 1989).

In this location, post-contact vandalism by and large avoids superimposing over the indigenous petroglyphs. Many historic images and autographs appear within the dike on separate rocks. However, some impose on the background of multiple image compositions. For example, Figure 8 carves a Christian cross between two abstract curves, and a date is chiseled below. Such differentiation was noted by the rock art recorders based on patina on the pre-historic images, with none on the graffiti (NM DCA, 1997a).

The historic petroglyphs interspersed here allow a degree of dating of the vandalism. These indicate a wide time span when the Galisteo Basin provided economy, and a thoroughfare, as humans crossed the landscape for various occupations. Crude tools as well as language date interactions involving the pre-contact petroglyphs. These resources allow looting. County monitoring is promised in its management plan. However, an inspection of public records act request resulted in zero records of this category of monitoring (Santa Fe County, 2023). As the request dated from 2017, state record retention time frame (10 years) does not apply to explain lack of records.

image, indicating wholesale removal. If the edges were examined for evidence of metal or diamond cuts, then the earliest looting date could be established based on cordless technology beginning in 1961 (NASA, 2009).

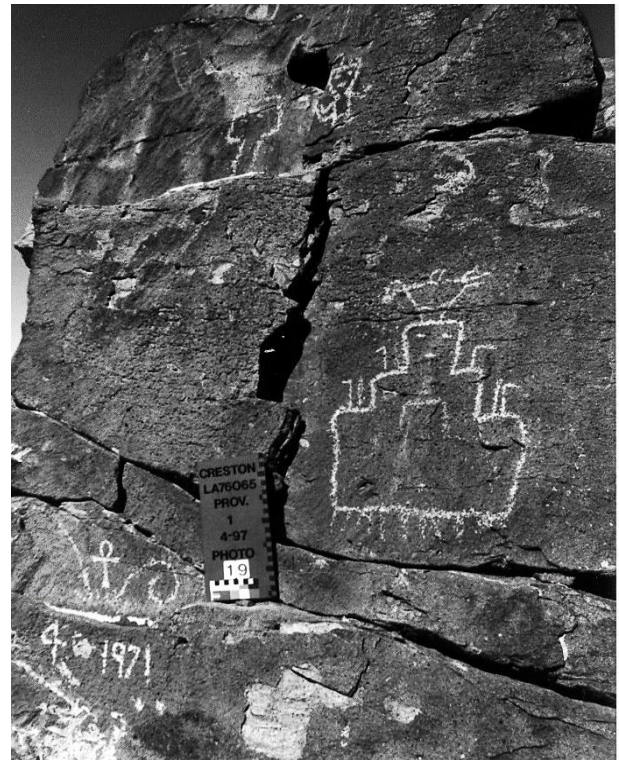


Figure 8: Galisteo Basin ancient petroglyph panel interspersed with historic graffiti (NM DCA, 1997b).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Across wind swept arroyos, basalt, and sandstone, ancient petroglyphs continue to broadcast their messages and images, however obscured by time. Sheer vast expanses obviate policing. Technology such as battery powered tools and GPS threaten the remoteness and boundaries of these sites. Fortunately, laws and regulations during the last 50 years evidence society's acceptance of archaeology as a mandate. While containing gaps in enforcement, their primary effectiveness derives from limiting access. This metamorphosed in the Galisteo Basin as public trails were closed. Although permission can be granted for research, expanded digital technology could minimize the need for on-site visits, as well as expand public access. Also, video surveillance could substitute for patrolling. As noted above, the status checks incorporated into the county's preservation plan were scrapped. The equilibrium of preservation needs to counteract the crush of population growth and tourism into the 21st century.

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