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Thunder & Herds: Rock Art of the High Plains

Lawrence L. Loendorf
Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press Inc., 2008.
254 pp., 101 figures, 3 tables, \$89.00 (cloth), \$29.95 (paper).

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Thunder & Herds is a thoroughly written and enlightening discussion of the rock art found in the central High Plains of southeastern Colorado, one of the richest rock art regions in the United States. Archaeologist Lawrence L. Loendorf, a familiar figure in North American rock art studies, reports on the results of his two decades of research and study of this area. His book will be of particular interest to those archaeologists interested in the High Plains as well as to anyone who is interested in rock art.

In the book's Prologue, Loendorf provides the reader with a compelling example of the role that weather plays on the High Plains. By his doing so, we witness the author's considerable ability to weave together a remarkable story. He describes the ferocity of an approaching summer thunderstorm, as it sweeps across the open steppes toward a helpless archaeological field camp. Loendorf goes on to note that he always packs a second tent, just in case the first one is shredded by such a storm. As anyone who has ever traveled there well knows, lightning plays a big role in the ferocity of summer storms in this region. Loendorf proposes that lightning and thunder, like the herds of buffalo that once inhabited this area, were major constituents of life on the High Plains during the time that Native Americans were creating rock art. In fact, he believes that lightning and thunder played a significant role in the placement of some rock art sites and in the choice of the subject matter that was depicted. Thus, Loendorf chose to entitle his book, *Thunder & Herds*, a reworking of the title of Zane Grey's old novel, *The Thundering Herds*. Grey's title was an allusion to the sound of thunder that was created by the multitude of hooves of a buffalo herd in flight.

Further into the Prologue, Loendorf tells us that the basic premise underpinning his research and reflected

in this book is that rock art sites are first and foremost archaeological sites. He proves his point elsewhere in the book by providing detailed archaeological site descriptions, something that is often lacking in rock art studies.

In Chapter 1, Loendorf provides a general overview of the central High Plains. He describes the physiography of the area, an upland region beginning just east of the Rocky Mountain chain. The author then presents a history of rock art research in the area, followed by a discussion of the local cultural chronology.

In Chapter 2, Loendorf discusses the rock art of the Archaic Period, paying special attention to the sites known as Clay Creek, Glorieta Mesa, and Ancient Hogback (a possible Paleoindian site). In the High Plains, the Archaic lasted from about 6,850 B.C. to A.D. 100. At Ancient Hogback, the petroglyphs are so heavily patinated that they are almost indiscernible. Here incised abstract designs underlie less heavily patinated pecked Archaic-age petroglyphs, hinting at a possible Paleoindian origin for the older glyphs.

In Chapters 3–5, Loendorf examines what are termed Purgatorie Pecked-I Petroglyphs, associated with the Developmental Period (A.D. 100–1050), Purgatorie Pecked-II Petroglyphs, associated with the Diversification Period (A.D. 1050–1450), and the Purgatorie Painted Style, also associated with the Diversification Period (A.D. 1050–1450). The sites that Loendorf offers as examples of these styles have unforgettable names like Bull Pasture, Zookeeper, Big Hands Hunter, Red-Tail Rockshelter, Rock Crossing, and Bear Dance. His detailed descriptions of some of these sites left me feeling as if I had just visited them.

The next two chapters are concerned with the rock art of the Protohistoric and Historic Periods. Loendorf describes the petroglyphs and paintings at sites appropriately named Sue, Stone Structure, Picture Canyon, Crack Cave, and Red Guns. Again, his site descriptions are detailed and practically visual.

In the final chapter, Loendorf concludes his discussion of High Plains rock art, reiterating some of the key points that were made earlier in the book. He contrasts the differences in the rock art of the High Plains to that of the Park Plateau in northern New Mexico, and he explores the possible connections that may exist between certain of the rock art motifs and

the movement of Athapaskan-speaking peoples. Finally, Loendorf stresses the importance of bringing a variety of lenses to bear in “seeing” rock art, such as those to be found in ethnographic interpretation, as well as in the spatial and temporal distribution of the materials studied. He ends with the observation that, “It is only by combining insights from these various intellectual domains that we will develop a comprehensive picture of past life on the High Plains, and the place in it of rock art.”

In conclusion, this is a thorough but easily read book on an aspect of the past that most Americans, including many archaeologists, are largely unfamiliar with. The rock art of the High Plains contributes much to the region’s cultural landscape and it helps to inform its sense of place. Loendorf successfully reveals an interesting aspect of the landscape by allowing us a glimpse of the rock art that punctuates this unique and formidable place. We see this place through the lens of the rock art itself and come away knowing it through the words of a gifted archaeologist.



A Yankee in Mexican California, 1834–1836

Richard Henry Dana, Jr.

Foreword by John Seibert Farnsworth
Berkeley, California: Santa Clara University and Heyday Books. 96 pp., 7 illus. \$9.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Glenn J. Farris

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First-person accounts of life in Mexican California are prized by scholars of this period. Richard Henry Dana’s well-known book, *Two Years Before the Mast*, contains many intriguing observations, but in its unabridged form can tend to overwhelm the average reader. This is because Harvard student-turned-common-sailor Dana was evidently so taken with his mastery of the arcane lore of sailing ships that he seems to want to provide the reader with details on virtually every change of sail or activity aboard ship for the whole voyage, and this level of detail is probably the reason many people are put off by what is really a very good read. In this version, John Farnsworth has eliminated much of the nautical language and focused on Dana’s interactions and observations during his visits ashore. The reader is thus able to more clearly visualize Mexican California in the days immediately following the secularization of the California missions, a time when the ranchos were really starting to get into full swing. As a common sailor,

Dana was not able to venture much further into the country than the ports that he visited, which included San Francisco, Monterey, Santa Barbara, San Pedro, and San Diego. His relatively low station also resulted in his not being invited to the homes of the higher class Californians, even those of the foreigners. This may have flavored his relatively negative view of the people of the country, who he considered indolent.

It is interesting to contrast Dana’s book with another contemporary account written by Alfred Robinson, who arrived in California about five years before Dana and also published an account of California (*Life in California*) about six years after Dana’s book came out. Robinson was a merchant who was regularly invited into the homes of many California families, and though he may also have noted a certain lack of entrepreneurial energy on the part of the population, at least he could balance it with a more intimate contact with the people. On the other hand, Dana does provide us with the unusual view of California as seen by a fore-mast tar and there were certainly a large number of such men who visited California over the years, but very few who could provide us with a literate account. His interaction with people otherwise not well depicted by other writers, such as the Hawaiian sailors (Kanakas), the ebullient Italian crew of the *Rosa*, and the sailors aboard the Russian American Company ship *Polifemia*, his visits to the local groggeries, as well as the details about treating cow-hides purchased for the Boston market, are all very interesting and valuable. The fact that he was aboard