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“Coso” Style Pictographs of the Southern Sierra Nevada

ALAN PHILIP GARFINKEL

Two recently discovered pictograph sites have similarities indicating common origin to the “Coso” style petroglyphs identified by Grant, Baird and Pringle (1968). These sites were located during field reconnaissance in the Southern Sierra Nevada. The two sites appear unique for two reasons: (1) they date to the late prehistoric and historic periods which previously have not been noted as containing “Coso” style rock art; and (2) “Coso” style *pictographs* are exceedingly rare and are unknown for these periods.

Grant, Baird, and Pringle (1968) defined a peculiar petroglyph style found within the Coso Range located in the western Mojave Desert. Petroglyphs are found on patinated basaltic cliffs and boulders and display a wealth of representational zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms. The most recurrent zoomorphic form and that which has come to characterize this locality is the full front-facing horned and boat-shaped bodied bighorn sheep.

Grant, Baird, and Pringle (1968:18) say of this pattern:

This method of drawing the horns (often with ears added) is probably the most characteristic feature of the Coso sheep. Both these features are extremely rare in other parts of the west. A few isolated examples in Texas may be laid to independent invention, but a single example in Nevada east of the Sierra Nevada and numbers of horn-front sheep from the middle Columbia near Vantage suggest a northern extension of Coso ideas.

Pictographs in the Coso style are rare and none seem to be attributable to the late period. Grant and his associates state that

In the Coso Range, there are six sites where

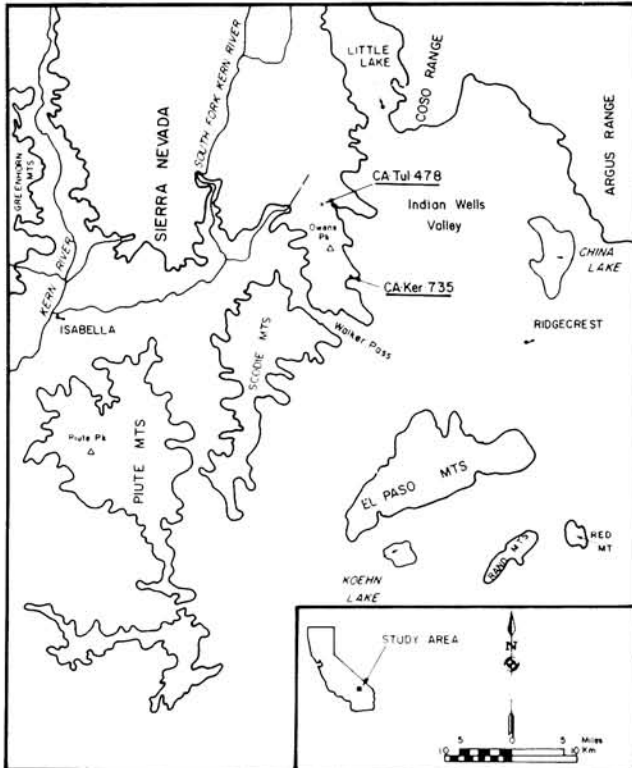


Fig. 1. Locations of sites with Coso style petroglyphs in the Sierra Nevada.

some designs are painted, and the style indicates that they are late and done by *another group of people* [emphasis added].

Most if not all the late period pictograph sites in the Coso Range are abstract and bear no resemblance to the earlier period petroglyphs. Furthermore, the only "Coso" style pictograph with zoomorphic representations appears very old (Campbell Grant, personal communication).

The two pictograph sites to be described here contain elements which appear similar to those found on petroglyphs in the Coso Range. Both sites appear to date to the historic period based on the representation of "Europeans" on horseback. The second site is located adjacent to a small open campsite containing pottery, which is suggested to further date the site to the late prehistoric or historic periods.

The first site (CA-Ker-735) is located north of Walker Pass in Indian Wells Canyon (Figs. 1, 2). Above the drainage, on a large granite

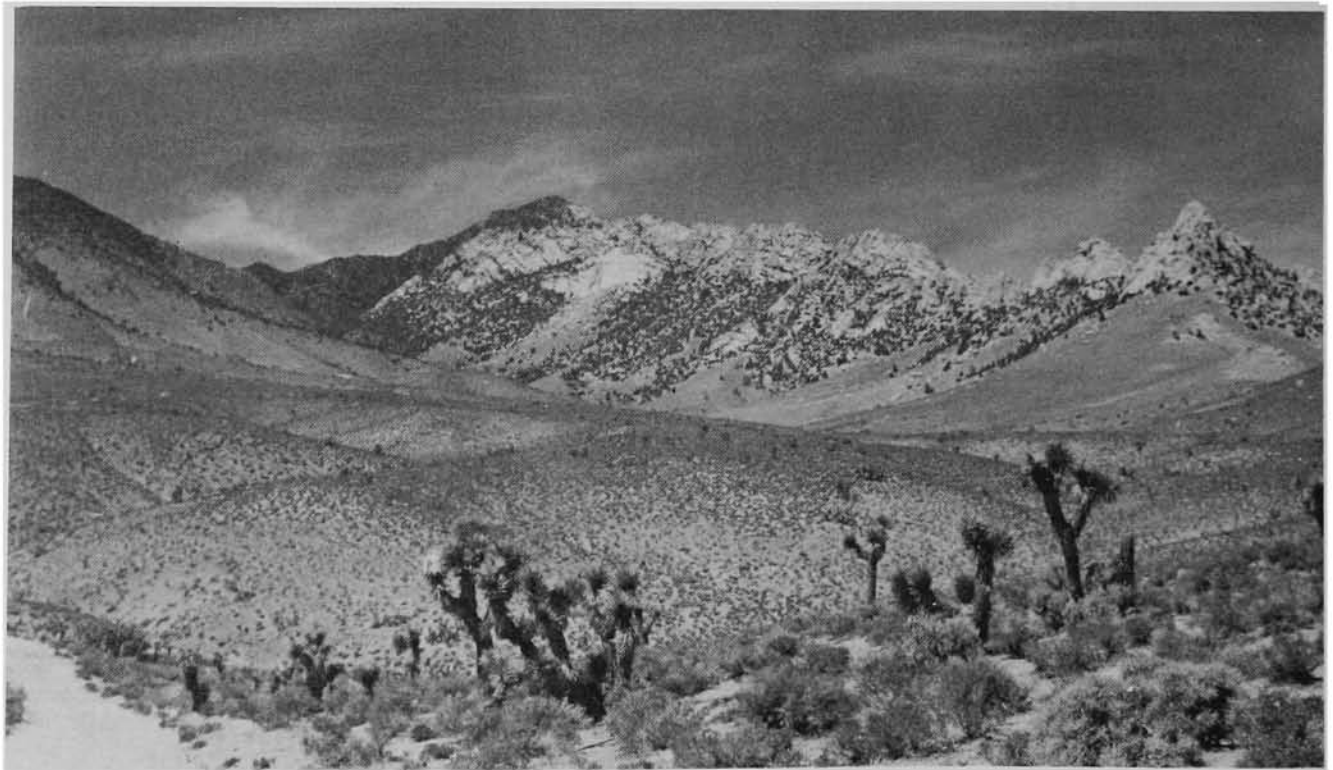


Fig. 2. Indian Wells Canyon in the Western Mojave Desert.



Fig. 3 "European" anthropomorph and horse at pictograph site in Indian Wells Canyon (CA-Ker-735).

boulder rockshelter facing eastward, is a large polychrome panel consisting of approximately 50 different elements. Some of these elements are superimposed on earlier ones which are mostly painted in black and red pigment. The ceiling of the shelter is fire-blackened. No artifactual remains were noted in the vicinity of the site, although a boulder containing seven bedrock mortars or "cupules" is found in front of the shelter.

The panel is approximately 2 m. in width and 1 m. in height. Most significant is the depiction of men wearing hats and riding on horses (Figs. 3 and 4), thus dating the site to the period of European contact in the area. These elements would appear to date to a time around the 1860's when gold and silver mining interests attracted Whites to the region; but they could also document earlier events, such as the Bonneville trapping expedition which

passed the mouth of Indian Wells Canyon in 1835.

The paintings appear so fresh that the actual pigment looks as though it was smeared on and has not been absorbed into the rock. Many of the other pictograph sites in the region appear older, with no actual pigment evident but only the stained rock manifesting the designs. The question immediately arose as to whether the site could be a forgery or manufactured even later in time than previously suggested. In an attempt to resolve this question a scraping of the white pigment was collected and analyzed using quantitative X-ray fluorescence.

Through conversations with paint specialists, it was discerned that white pigment would be amenable to analysis in this way and that it would be possible to tell, first, whether the paint is of commercial or native origin, and

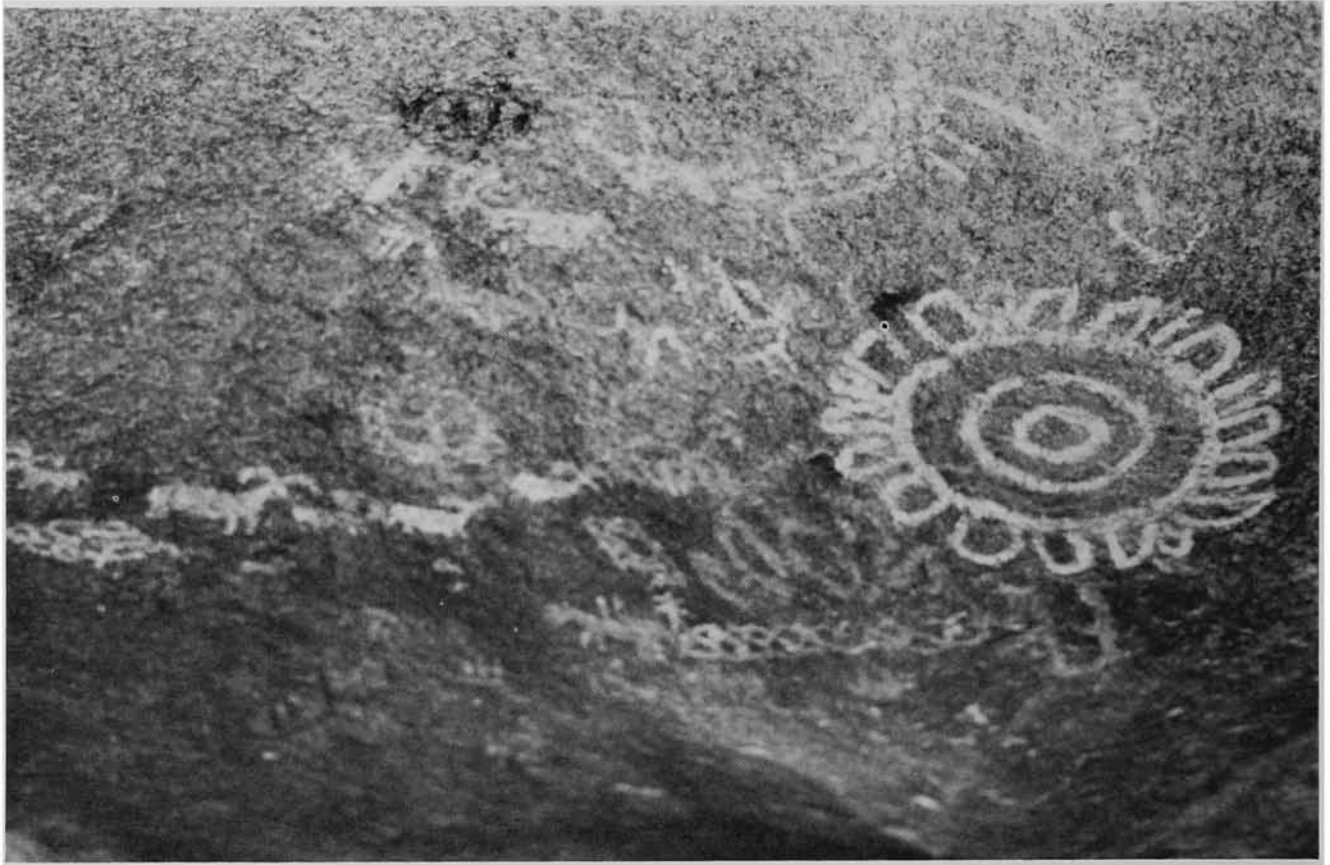


Fig. 4. Pictograph panel at CA-Ker-735. Flower-like form measures 52 centimeters in diameter.

second, if the paint was commercial, whether it was purchased prior to the 1930's. White paint manufactured in the late 1800's and early 1900's was lead-based. Lead was replaced in the 1930's by titanium as the base for the white pigment, and this latter substance is still in use today.

The analysis revealed the elements enumerated in Table 1. Error factors for major constituent elements through this type of analysis run as high as 15% per element, so care was taken to obtain a more precise measure of lead and titanium. No lead was revealed in the sample but a trace (0.62%) of titanium was present. This percentage is much too small to have come from commercial paint where titanium is a major constituent, amounting to 10% or more by weight.

Since the pigment used apparently was not commercial paint, and the site apparently is

authentic, analysis of the stylistic elements was undertaken. Fifty different elements are distinguishable in the pictograph panel. Seven of

Table 1
ELEMENTAL CONSTITUENTS OF WHITE PIGMENT FROM INDIAN WELLS CAN—YON PICTOGRAPH (CA-Ker-735)*

<u>Element</u>	<u>Total Percent</u>
Ti	0.6
K	11.0
Ca	0.8
Fe	0.8
<u>Major Constituents</u>	<u>Percentage Estimates</u>
$H_2KAl_3(SiO_4)_3$ (muscovite mica)	≈ 96
$CaSO_4$	2.7
TiO_2	1.0

*Analysis conducted by Trace Analysis Laboratory, Hayward, California.

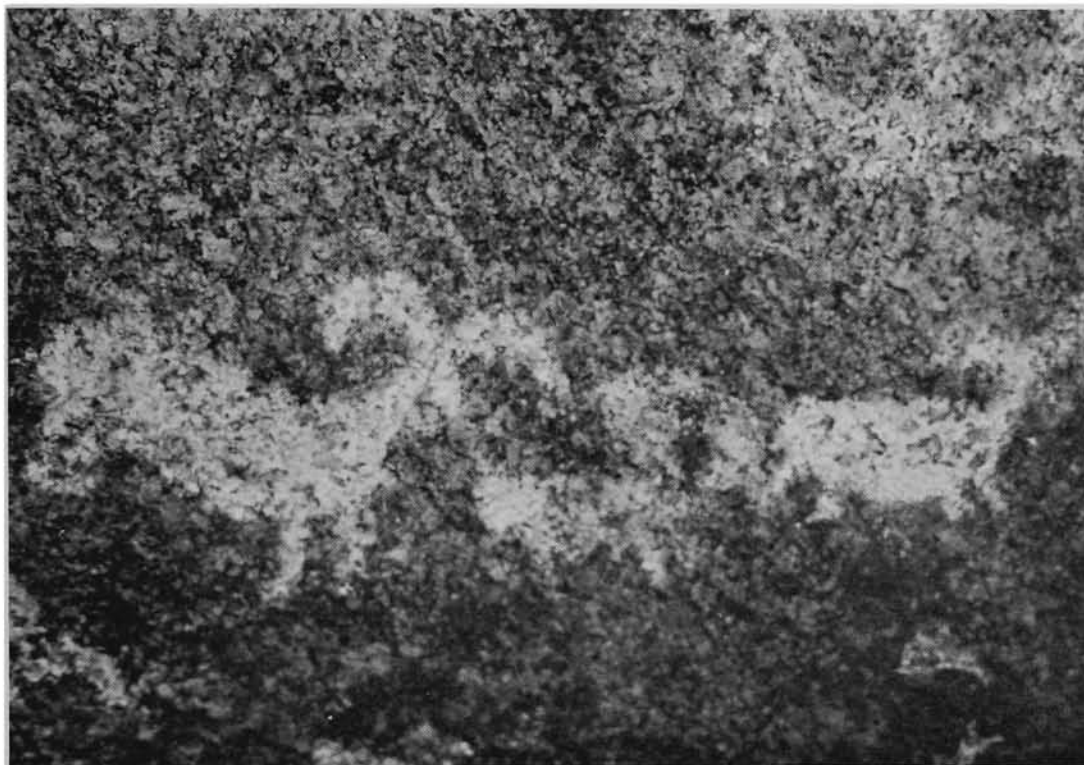


Fig. 5. Close-up of Coso style bighorn sheep at pictograph site CA-Ker-735.



Fig. 6. Close-up of Mountain lion (?) or dog form at pictograph site CA-Ker-735.

these are definitely bighorn sheep. Six are shown with full front-facing horns and one has side-facing horns. They are all rendered in white pigment. These sheep bear striking resemblances to elements found in the Coso Range (compare Figs. 4 and 5 with Grant, Baird, and Pringle 1968:27, 61, 75, and Heizer and Clewlow 1973: Pls. 11 and 18).

Another large zoomorph (Fig. 6) may be interpreted as a dog, coyote, or mountain lion. The resemblance to Coso style elements is again quite noticeable. Grant and his associates have suggested that this zoomorph is a dog, as it is sometimes shown attacking mountain sheep in petroglyph panels found in the Coso Range. Almost identical petroglyphs are illustrated in the report on the Coso rock art (Grant, Baird, and Pringle 1968:22). Heizer and Clewlow (1973:Figs. 60*l* and 61*c*) depict other Coso glyphs illustrating this same element.

Other elements in the panel include at least three recognizable horse and rider motifs all painted in white pigment. Other elements include anthropomorphs, sunbursts, chains, "shields," other abstract elements, and a very notable "flower form." This large flower form (Fig. 4) is painted in orange and white. The only other large element in orange pigment is a fading shield-like pattern. Superimposition of some elements is common with earlier designs painted in red, black, and, less frequently, white.

The second pictograph site (CA-Tul-478) displaying Coso affinity is found above Lamont Meadow in the Southern Sierra Nevada (Fig. 1). The large granite boulder upon which the panel is painted orients east and is found above a stream terrace. Adjacent to the site is a small area of midden containing a sparse amount of fire-affected rock and several potsherds (type unknown). Also placed nearby are three bifacial manos, found *in situ*, perhaps cached by aboriginal inhabitants for future use. One of the manos is made of nonlocal material, vesic-

ular basalt transported from the desert floor to the east.

The pictograph panel is badly faded but contains two clearly distinguishable bighorn sheep in red pigment with full front-facing horns and boat-shaped body. Also depicted is a man on horseback. This site would seem to date to the historic period, based on the presence of the horse and rider motif and its assumed contemporaneity with the adjacent archaeological locus. This would be the first documented occurrence of a Coso style pictograph outside of the desert area of the western Mojave.

Both these sites appear intriguing and suggest a late reappearance of interest in ceremonialism in the form of paintings, perhaps "copying" earlier petroglyph forms found in the Coso Range. The Coso Range was the territory of the ethnographically described Little Lake Shoshoni (Steward 1938:80-84). Since the Shoshoni and neighboring groups denied any knowledge of the purpose or the production of rock art, it is illuminating to learn that the actual practice continued to some extent into historic times. During historic times, the Little Lake Shoshoni moved far south of their original territorial boundaries and most likely utilized the productive piñon stands above and adjacent to the pictograph localities described herein.

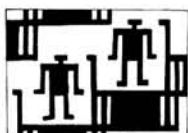
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A Cache of Deer Snares from Owens Valley, California

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The recovery of a cache containing a bundle of nine deer snares is one result of a program of archaeological site survey in the 1940's and 1950's by the junior author and O. B. Riddell (Riddell and Riddell 1956: 28). In that time period, this two-person team recorded some 300 archaeological sites in the Owens Valley region and made a collection of some 13,000 specimens from these sites. (The specimens are now housed in the Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley.) The research plan followed by the Riddells was primarily limited to areal survey of the Owens Valley to obtain the location and artifactual inventory of the sites in an effort to preserve as much data as possible at a time when critical inroads by development and private collecting were destroying the data

base. No outside funding for this expensive effort was solicited and, of course, none was obtained. Naturally, the program had its limitations, but its basic goals were met. Much of the data preserved by the program were timely, as many of the sites recorded have ceased to exist or have been so severely vandalized that representative collections of data and artifacts can no longer be obtained from them.

Whereas the major effort of the program was to record sites and make surface collections, some test excavations were made. Most notable were those at Iny-2 (Riddell 1951) and at Iny-382 (the Rose Spring site). The latter prompted a full-scale excavation (see F. Riddell *in* Lanning 1963). It was this last excavation which provided sufficient stratigraphic control to allow Lanning to prepare his chronology of projectile point types which, with minor modification, serves as a basis for subsequent ordering of archaeological chronologies through typological differentiation in the Great Basin (Lanning 1963).

The other controlled excavation as an element of this research plan was done at an earlier date than the one at Rose Spring. It was a test excavation of a protohistoric/historic Owens Valley Paiute winter village, the Cottonwood Creek site (Iny-2). The published report defines and describes for the first time Owens Valley Brown Ware as a distinct pottery ware. The work at Iny-2 further elucidates the last native cultural component of the Owens Valley region (Riddell 1951).

Other removal of subsurface cultural material was limited, but included the recovery of the deer snare cache from a rockshelter (Iny-46) near the confluence of an unnamed creek and Cottonwood Creek, near Rogers' pack station above Diaz Creek. The rockshelter is an exogene cave in a granitic mass (Fig. 1), the floor of which is covered to a depth of about 45 to 60 centimeters with granitic sand. The only cultural evidence in the sandy deposit was the cache itself. The sloping floor area, which