

Sacred Sites Research Annual Report for Year 2017  
Prepared by Lawrence Loendorf, President, Sacred Sites Research, Inc.

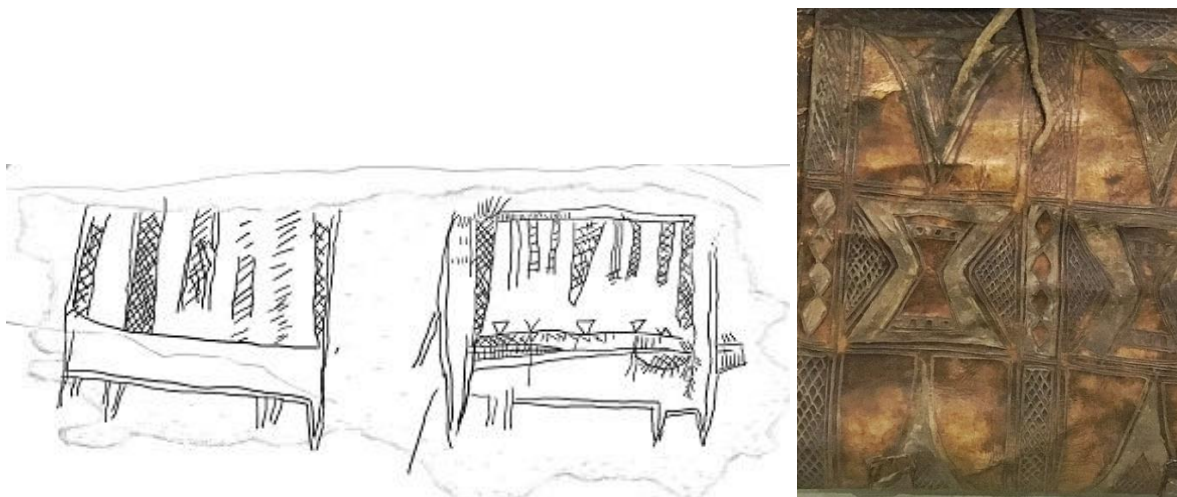
The year 2017 was a productive one for Sacred Sites Research, Inc. (SSR). We engaged in some exciting projects with new discoveries at sites in New Mexico, Montana and Wyoming. We also spent many hours in our offices cleaning up field sketches on drawing tablets, working on panel forms and writing reports. Like most kinds of archaeological research, SSR uses a 1 to 3 ratio for field to laboratory work so for every hour in the field we spend three working to produce the products for reports.

For example, the fieldwork at Valley of the Shields and Comanche Creek, reported in last year's annual report, required many more hours to finish the final reports. This effort occupied the early months of 2017 with the products "A DStretch Analysis at Valley of the Shields (24CB1094) Montana" by Lawrence Loendorf, Mark Willis, Laurie White and Jon Harman.

In the report, we described rock art panels that are in underground chambers created by large boulders stacking against one another (Figure 01). These hidden areas contain finely incised "medicine bags" with other figures which are in direct contrast to the panels of large shield warriors that adorn the canyon walls in full view of any passersby (Figure 02).



*Figure 01. An underground chamber at Valley of the Shields. The smoothed surfaces on the prominent rock near the entrance have a "medicine bag" on one. Other incised and painted panels are found elsewhere in the chamber. The small bags are apparently displayed in these recessed areas for a reason.*



*Figure 02. Drawing of two “medicine bags” from Valley of the Shields. Note the similarity in the designs to those on a Crow Indian parfleche at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. The parfleche designs are made by cutting into the outer epidermis layer of hide and then allowing it to expand as it cures. The process is analogous to incising into the rock.*

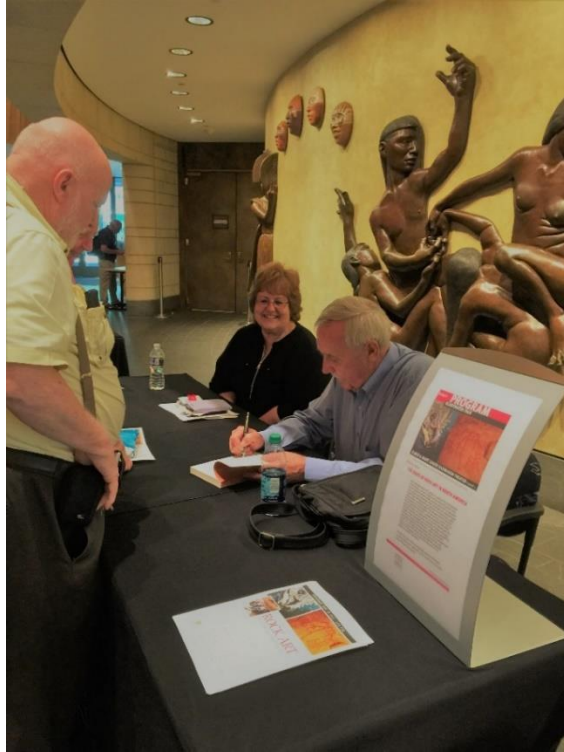
There are three of these chambers at Valley of the Shields and other areas in narrow passageways between standing sandstone stones where these “medicine bags” are found. It seems clear they represent a different kind of rock art that must have been used for some private purposes. We hope to do additional work on these “medicine bags” which occur at other locations in the Valley of the Shields region.

Laboratory work and reports aside, the year 2017 included several field projects as well. Before discussing them, I need to describe an exciting event that SSR engaged in during the year. The event was presentations at the Museum for the American Indian that were arranged by SSR board member Carolyn McClellan. The program which included lectures by Loendorf and McClellan was followed by a book signing for the University of Arizona Press release of a paper version of “Discovering North American Rock Art” edited by Lawrence Loendorf and Christopher Chippendale (Figure 03).

The program was in the main auditorium at the Museum in Washington D.C. but the exciting part of it is that it was shown live from the site so people around the world could watch in their own settings. More important is that the program which was titled “The State of North American Rock Art” is available at a web site with the following link

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLS6nSmuURFJCK2GC0FigIR7Xdq00wzZgH>.

An important summer project was at the Hole in the Wall Ranch west of Kaycee, Wyoming (Figure 04). The Wold family, who own the ranch, have coordinated with the University of Wyoming (UW) to sponsor a portion of UW Archaeological Field School. There are dozens of sites on the ranch including extensive panels of rock paintings intermixed with many petroglyphs. SSR joined the project at the request of Mary Hopkins, the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Officer, who is working to get some of the sites on the National Register of Historic Places.



*Figure 03. Carolyn McClelland and Larry Loendorf are signing books at the Museum of the American Indian.*



*Figure 04. Mark Willis photograph from a drone of the Hole in the Wall Ranch. The rock art is along the cliff face adjacent to the river.*



As part of the 2017 work, Johannes Loubser, a rock art conservator who manages Stratum Unlimited came to the site. He worked with students to clean the mud off one panel of shield warriors. Terry Moody, Laurie White, and Mark Willis also worked on the project. Terry taught students how to complete a panel form, Laurie taught tracing techniques. Mark worked with the pXRF to show students how we study paint ingredients. Mark also did extensive aerial photography of the site from a drone.

One group of petroglyphs, that contain some interior paint, is a row of shield-bearing warriors. One or two were made on prepared surfaces in the Castle Gardens style, others have standing bears etched on the shields which is common to Timber Creek style and still others are different styles (Figure 05).

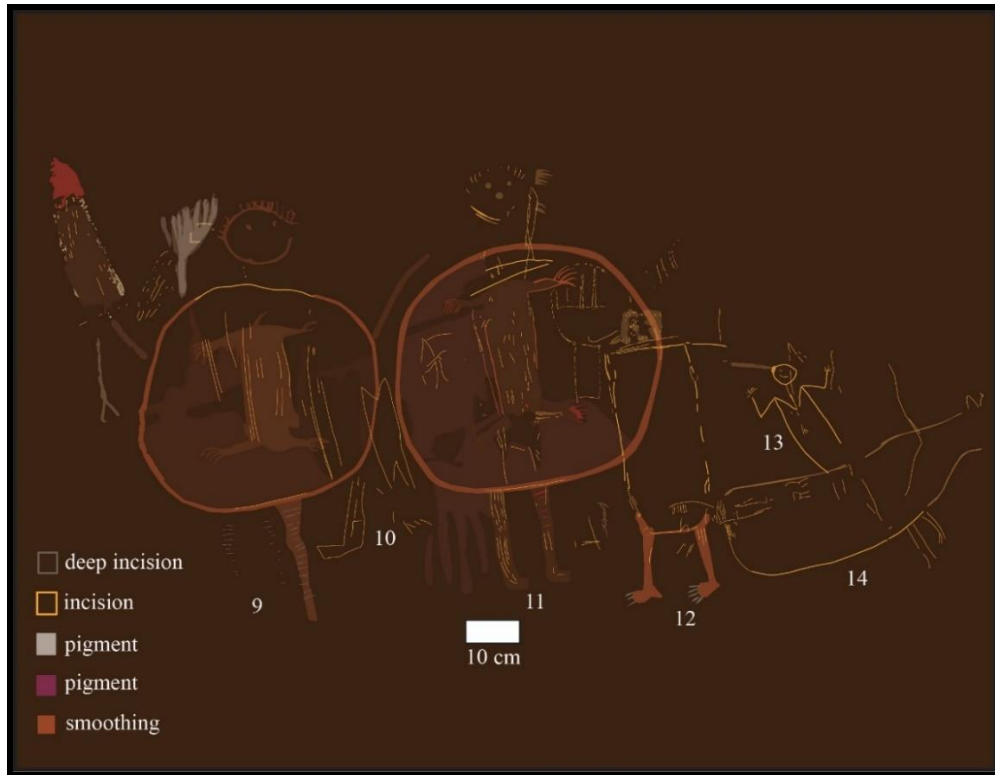
This mixture of styles suggests the site was used as a meeting place which makes sense because it is located at the intersection of two ancient trails --one that is oriented north and south along the east flank of the Bighorn Mountains and a second one that goes east and west over the Bighorn Mountains.

In addition to the shield warrior figures there are a dozen bears and bear paws at the site which also seem to have been made by different groups. These figures are impressive but the most important rock art at the site is the stenciled human hands and arms. Julie Francis and I wrote an article about them 30 years ago; more recently a UW student, Madeline Mackie did a detailed analysis of the hands to learn there are 78 examples representing all age groups. Solid-painted hands are relatively common at western American rock art sites, but stenciled hands are rare.

One panel, up high at about 15 feet above the current ground, contains human and animal figures associated with the stenciled hands. It also has green painted figures (Figure 06 and 07). We plan to work with the UW field school, the Wyoming SHPO again in 2018 to record this panel. It will require putting scaffolding up to the panel to gain access. We hope to determine the make-up of the green paint during this project. Other new finds at the Hole in the Wall will be reported in future papers and publications.

Without question, the largest project undertaken by SSR in 2017 was the Carlsbad, New Mexico rock art recording project where SSR worked with Versar, Inc. to record 17 sites and return to evaluate 4 others which were recorded in a previous project. Some of the sites were new, discovered during the project, others were known to the Bureau of Land Management who sponsored the project in its Permian Basin Program. One major site is privately owned by ranchers who want the site protected.

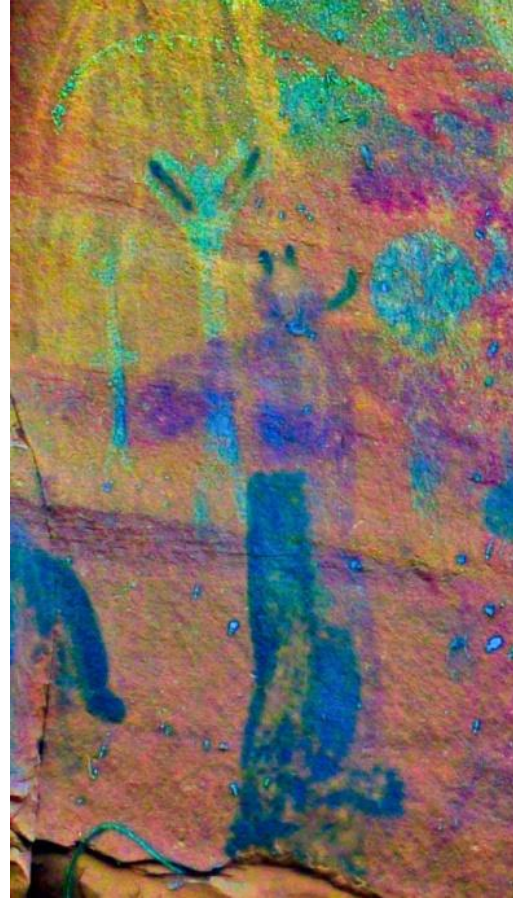
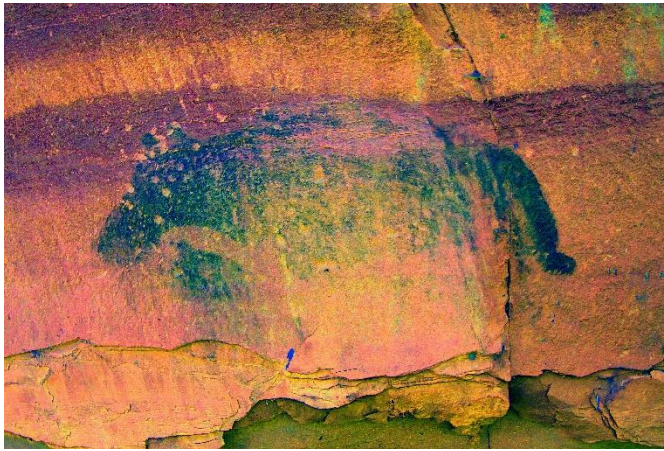
Most of the sites had paintings as opposed to petroglyphs and unfortunately the weathering and erosion has taken its toll through the ages. For example, a site might have 18 or 19 panels but only two or three complete motifs. This is common on limestone where acid rain is especially damaging to painted rock surfaces. Paintings in rockshelters or caves tend to fare better where some remain for thousands of years, even though they are very faded.



*Figure 05. Timber Creek shield-bearing warriors at the Hole in the Wall Ranch. Johannes Loubser drawing that he made after cleaning the panel.*



*Figure 06. High panel with stenciled hands and arms. The significance of the panel is the associated figures that include some long-body human figures, a possible mask, a standing bear and a bear with a long tail.*



*Figure 07. The DStretch (ybk) photo of the bear on the left is a greenish blue in its natural color. Note its long tail which is not unusual for mythical bears. The DStretch (lbk) photo on the right shows a standing bear superimposed on a long-body human form.*

A rockshelter site, known as Kee's Painted Cave, is an oval-shaped cavity with a back wall that is covered in paintings (Figure 08). By using DStretch to help make the field drawings and painstaking work, Laurie White was able to make drawings of the paintings that remain at the site. A fascinating feature about Kee's Cave is that it serves as a natural amplifier and a person talking in the cave can be heard across the canyon. We suspect this might have played a role in the ceremonies associated with the cave.

Another site, Cacti Canyon, had scenes of horses and riders. One panel may represent a Spanish or Portuguese rider with dogs attacking a group of Indians. The use of dogs in slave raids on indigenous populations is well-documented in the historic literature, but this panel of petroglyphs may be the only pictorial representation. SSR will publish more on this panel in coming weeks.

We also recorded one Carlsbad area site with petroglyphs on the flat limestone rocks where they are oriented directly up toward the sky (Figure 10). These sites are fascinating, in part because they are not on cliff walls or rockshelter interiors like most rock art sites. These "flat sites" are not common but there are examples from Texas to New Mexico in a corridor that is generally along the Pecos River and some tributaries. .





*Figure 08. Kee's Painted shelter. The shape of the rockshelter makes it a perfect amplifier for sound.*



*Figure 09. Panel one in Kee's Painted shelter. Note the large bug on the left side of the colorful panel. We think some of the other figures might represent plants but the figures are mainly abstract forms.*



Petroglyphs at these sites are usually dominated by abstract designs with a few hooved animal tracks, bird tracks and an occasional snake complete with a head and tail. More important, they can be more than 5000 years of age. We know this because portions of the sites are often covered with soil. Charcoal fragments excavated from these deposits have radiocarbon ages of 5000 years.

Solveig Turpin recorded a large flat site on the lower Pecos River at Lewis Canyon. SSR board member Mark Willis made a gigapan overview of the site [www.gigapan.com/gigapans/136529](http://www.gigapan.com/gigapans/136529) for anyone interested. Other important “flat” sites are on Glorieta Mesa, east of Santa Fe, New Mexico.



*Figure 10. Petroglyph on a flat limestone surface at a site east of Carlsbad, N.M. This site has multiple circles mixed with cupules or small ground out depressions.*

One SSR event during the year, totally unrelated to the Carlsbad Project, was coordinated by Connie Eichstaedt and Alan Osborne of Southwest Seminars in Santa Fe. They asked SSR to lead a field trip to the two “flat” sites on the top of Glorieta Mesa which we did with a short lecture at the Forest Service office at Pecos, N.M. At some point in this field trip, another unrecorded site was mentioned and again Connie Eichstad and Alan Osborne coordinated a visit to it by Marvin Rowe, Larry Loendorf and Mark Willis (Figure 11). The new site is on private land to the south of the others and although it is small, it is none the less an important addition to our understanding of these ancient petroglyphs. We are appreciative of the help of Francois-Marie Patomi in guiding us to the site.

In another fairly minor undertaking, SSR assisted in compiling an inventory of the known cultural resources on a portion of the new Organ Mountain – Desert Peaks National Monument



that is located near Las Cruces N.M. Margaret Berrier had already done much of the basic work, so the input from SSR was mainly an overview by Myles Miller and a list of the sites, including about two dozen rock art sites, with some remarks. The new monument was on the list that Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke reviewed for boundary alteration. His decision was to leave the boundaries unchanged but to alter some of the management strategies.



*Figure 11. Larry Loendorf and Marvin Rowe are looking at the exposed limestone with very old petroglyphs (left side). A petroglyph on the site (right side).*

In sum, SSR had a very good year. Board member Larry Loendorf presented papers at meetings of the Society for American Archaeology, Plains Anthropological Conference, American Rock Art Research Association, Southwest Seminars, Montana Archaeological Society, and the Albuquerque Archaeological Society.

Board member Mark Willis presented a talk on the use of drones to 25+ tribal representatives at a meeting titled “Respecting Place: A CRF Phase 3 Site Protection Gathering” sponsored by The MICA Group/Cultural Resource Fund. .

Willis also was an author of the art book, "L'art de la Prehistoire" published in France.  
<http://www.citadelles-mazenod.com/l-art-et-les-grandes-civilisations/430-lart-de-la-prehistoire.html> and he continues to work at Marsoulas Cave, France, under the auspices of SSR.

Larry Loendorf completed a report on the Wold Site "Hole in the Wall Ranch-Middle Fork of the Powder River-Rock Art Sites".

And he published the following during the year.

Loendorf, Lawrence

2017 The Fortified Cave Site, 24BH881. *Archaeology in Montana*

Loendorf, Lawrence, Lukas Wacker and Marvin Rowe

2017 Radiocarbon Dating a Pictograph at Medicine Lodge Creek, Wyoming. *Plains Anthropologist* Publication Volume 62.

Loendorf and David Kaiser

2018 Tobacco-related Rock Art and Vertical Series Rock Art in Montana and Wyoming. *American Indian Rock Art* Volume 44, David A. Kaiser and James D. Keyser, Editors. American Indian Rock Art Research Association, pp. 159-168.