

Sacred Sites Research, Inc
Annual Report 2023

Sacred Sites Research, Inc. (SSR) had a good year with several significant high points that are worth sharing in this report. Foremost is the award of a major contract, together with Versar, Inc, for recording 74 rock art sites in the vicinity of Carlsbad, New Mexico. The project is sponsored by the Permian Basin Programmatic Agreement which is coordinated by the Bureau of Land Management and the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office. The sites to be recorded include 32 in Carlsbad National Park, 28 on Lincoln National Forest lands, 13 in Guadalupe Mountains National Park, and one site on private land.

The SSR/Versar team will be working with seven different Indian tribes who will be with us in the field. An important part of the recording will focus on plants growing at rock art sites to learn if the medicinal plants we now recognize like tobacco and datura and associated with the rock art or if they just grow naturally in the same canyon settings. SSR/Versar is also pleased that Karen Steelman will be joining us to collect 50 samples for C14 dates at the Shumla Laboratory.

This is an especially significant project because SSR/Versar has already recorded 21 sites in the region. The new project allows us to add to a growing data set so that when the project is completed, there will be a good understanding of regional rock art.

The recording project will follow the ten-step approach that has been used by SSR in recent projects. This leads to another accomplishment during the year. Nancy Stone and Lawrence Loendorf had a manuscript accepted for publication by University of Utah Press titled “Ten Steps for Recording Rock Art Sites: Methods and Technologies”. Hopefully the book will work as a guide for recording rock art sites with the Sacred Sites Research method.

In May and July, SSR recorded five pictograph and petroglyph sites on White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) –Hembrillo (LA162910, Bloody Hands (LA16289), Two Little Guys (LA83653), Black Mask (LA83654) and Rhodes Canyon (LA135158). The sites contain an array of figures, mostly pictographs, with several multi-colored katsina faces or masks. We were fortunate to have Karen Steelman working with us to collect samples for radiocarbon dating at two of the sites. The ages for the Rhodes Canyon faces have an average calibrated age of AD 650-960. This age is relatively old for regional paintings of katsina faces and more in line with dates obtained by Marvin Rowe for masks at the Hueco Tanks site.

The Rhodes Mask site is important, but the Hembrillo is perhaps the best known of the sites recorded during the project. It contains several outstanding sets of pecked, abraded, and painted panels of narrow-waisted anthropomorphs that are attributed to the Apache. These figures had been photographically recorded but no one had done panel drawings until Laurie White (SSR) made a detailed drawing of the main panel of Apache rock art. Several new figures were found including a horse that appears to be wearing armor with a rider carrying a lance. One standing warrior, on another panel, is carrying a sinew-back bow and one carrying a shield is also found at the site



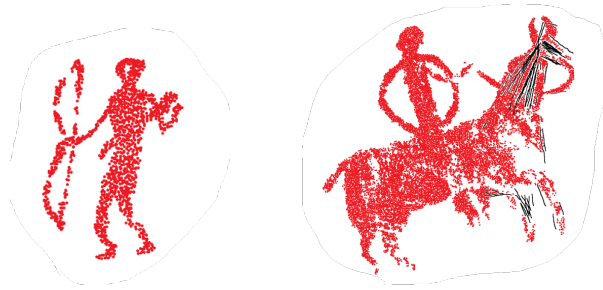
Faces or masks at the Rhodes Canyon site (left). These figures date between AD650-960 or an age that compares favorably with dates (AD600-1210) obtained by Marvin Rowe for Hueco Tanks rock paintings. Although not one of the figures dated, the Hueco Tanks face or mask (right) has attributes like the Rhodes Canyon figures. Rhodes Canyon drawing by Laurie White. Hueco Tanks photograph by Robert Mark.

A significant discovery at Hembrillo was several groups of petroglyphs on the flat, exposed sandstone floor of the canyon adjacent to the panels on the canyon walls. The canyon floor figures were all abstract, which is not unusual for a site like it in the region.

SSR is fortunate to work with WSMR archaeologist Mike Stowe, who understands the complex nature of modern recording at rock art sites.



An elaborate panel at the Hembrillo site. The horse and rider (D), discovered by DStretch, is probably wearing armor. Laurie White drawing.

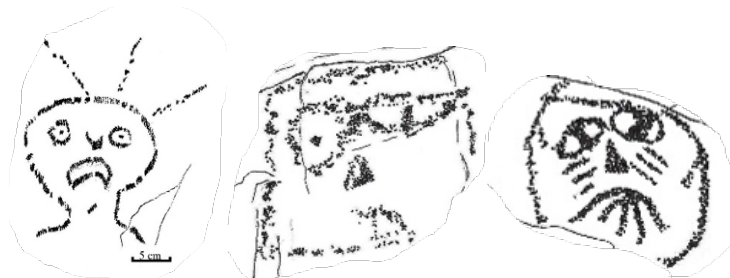


Two Apache figures at Hembrillo. The figure is using a sinew-back bow (left) which symbolizes the Apache in regional rock art. The shield-carrying warrior (right) is also common to the Apache. David Kaiser drawings.

In November, SSR returned to WSMR to work at a major petroglyph site that surrounds Cottonwood Pueblo, a large archaeological complex to the east of Las Cruces on the western flanks of the Organ Mountains. The site is on lands administered by WSMR and Jornada Experimental Range where there is controlled access which means there has been very little site looting or defacement of the petroglyphs. There are several hundred petroglyph panels at the site but fortunately Margaret Berrier had worked with LeRoy Unglaub to record most of the panels. SSR research at the site was mainly re-locating the Berrier/Unglaub panels and checking photographs and drawings to learn if there had been changes.

SSR is trying to learn if the petroglyphs of katsina faces or masks serve to focus attention and attract images that might be predicted as associated figures in a “nearest neighbor” approach. The Berrier/Unglaub research noted a possible association between profile faces or masks and animal tracks. This idea will be explored with the new research at the site.

Unrelated to the nearest neighbor project, SSR noted that many of the full-facing masks have downturned mouths. This is a recognizable katsina face image found along the Rio Grande River in rock art and in kiva wall paintings. The katsina with the downturned mouth is dated to the El Paso Phase at AD1300-1450.



Three of the faces at the Cottonwood site. Margaret Berrier drawings.

Perhaps the largest undertaking completed by SSR in 2023 was to study the superimposition in the paintings at the Medicine Lodge Creek site, Wyoming. After getting permission from Wyoming State Parks and the Wyoming Historic Preservation Office, we set up scaffold in front of the panels to gain access for a close-up study. SSR arranged to have Gilles Tosello and Carole Fritz undertake the main research. Tosello and Fritz are French archaeologists who have worked with Mark Willis, and they have considerable experience studying superimposed layers of

paintings in Upper Paleolithic caves. During the project we moved the scaffold four times across the front of an area of overlapping pictographs and petroglyphs with Willis making three-dimensional models to assist with the individual drawings of sections of the wall art.

SSR is considering ways to publish the results of the project. The final drawing contains a wealth of new details about the panel. It will be very helpful to any person who undertakes future research at the site.



Carole Fritz taking closeup photographs at Medicine Lodge Creek. Mark Willis can be seen in the background where is using a pole to photograph. Barrie Lynn Bryant photograph

In February, SSR board members Loendorf and Willis were instructors in the Texas Archaeological Society Rock Art Academy. Myles Miller and Margaret Berrier joined us in teaching the two-day event at the El Paso Museum of Archaeology and Hueco Tanks State Park. It was well attended and a successful academy except for the last day of the field trip we encountered extreme winds. The winds were so strong they knocked people off their feet which was cause for some cuts and bruises but fortunately no one was seriously hurt.

SSR board members published the following articles in 2023:

Reconstructing archaeological palaeolandscapes using geophysical and geomatic survey techniques: An example from Red Lily Lagoon, Arnhem Land, Australia by Jarrad Kowlessar, Ian Moffat, Daryl Wesley, **Mark Willis**, Shay Wrigglesworth, Tristen Jones, Alfred Nayinggul, the Njanjma Rangers. PLOS ONE Online Journal. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0283006>

Finding Truth in Legend: The Story of Texas Ranger James Coryell by Douglas W. Owsley, James E. Bruseth, Bradford M. Jones, Sandra S. Schlachtmeyer, Karin S. Bruwelheide, John W. Crain, Kathryn G. Barca, Timothy R. Rose, Leslie L. Bush, Scott D. Whittaker, Pat A. Mercado-Allinger, Amy A. Borgens, Toni S. Turner, and **Mark D. Willis**. *Journal of Archeology and History* (ISSN 2334-1874)

Further Reconnaissance in the Middle and Lower Reaches: Testing Drone-Mounted Lidar in the BREA Study Area by **Mark Willis** and Satoru Murata. *Investigations of the Belize River East Archaeology Project: A Report of the 2022 Field Season*. University of New Hampshire.

A Comparison of Drone-based and Plane-based Lidar at Two Sites in the BEAST Permit Area. By **Mark Willis**. In *The 2023 Season of the Belize Estates Archaeological Survey Team*. Edited by Brett A. Houk. Texas Tech University. Lubbock Texas.

Loendorf, Lawrence L., Karen L. Steelman, and **Amanda M. Castañeda** 2023 *The Archer and the Shield-Bearing Warrior*. *American Antiquity*, 88:252-260.

Koenig, Charles W., **Amanda M. Castañeda**, McKenna Litynski, Todd A. Surovell, and Sarah A. Allaun 2023 *The DeBarard Earth Oven: Hot Rock Cooking in the Laramie Basin*. *The Wyoming Archaeologist*, 65(2):40-56.

Loendorf Lawrence and David Kaiser

2023 *Under the Alcove: Radiocarbon Dates for V-neck Anthropomorphs*. Pps. 21-30 in *American Indian Rock Art* Volume 49. Amy Gilbreath, Ken Hedges and Anne McConnell, Editors. American Rock Art Research Association.

Francis, Julie, **Mark Willis and Lawrence Loendorf**

2023 *The Black Rock Site: Ancient Pecked Rock Art in Southwest Wyoming*. Pps. 53-60 in *American Indian Rock Art* Volume 49. Amy Gilbreath, Ken Hedges and Anne McConnell, Editors. American Rock Art Research Association.