

This pamphlet was produced by VersarGMI Inc. and is distributed by the BLM's Carlsbad Field Office.

The Permian Basin small grants program is administered by the Historic Preservation Division, New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs with funding provided by Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The BLM Carlsbad Field Office administers the Permian Basin Programmatic Agreement which funds research and public outreach including the small grants program. The field investigations and rock art documentation were conducted by Versar/GMI and Sacred Sites Research Inc.



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# Prehistoric Rock Art on BLM Lands in Eddy County, New Mexico



Recording rock  
art at Boyd's  
Cave

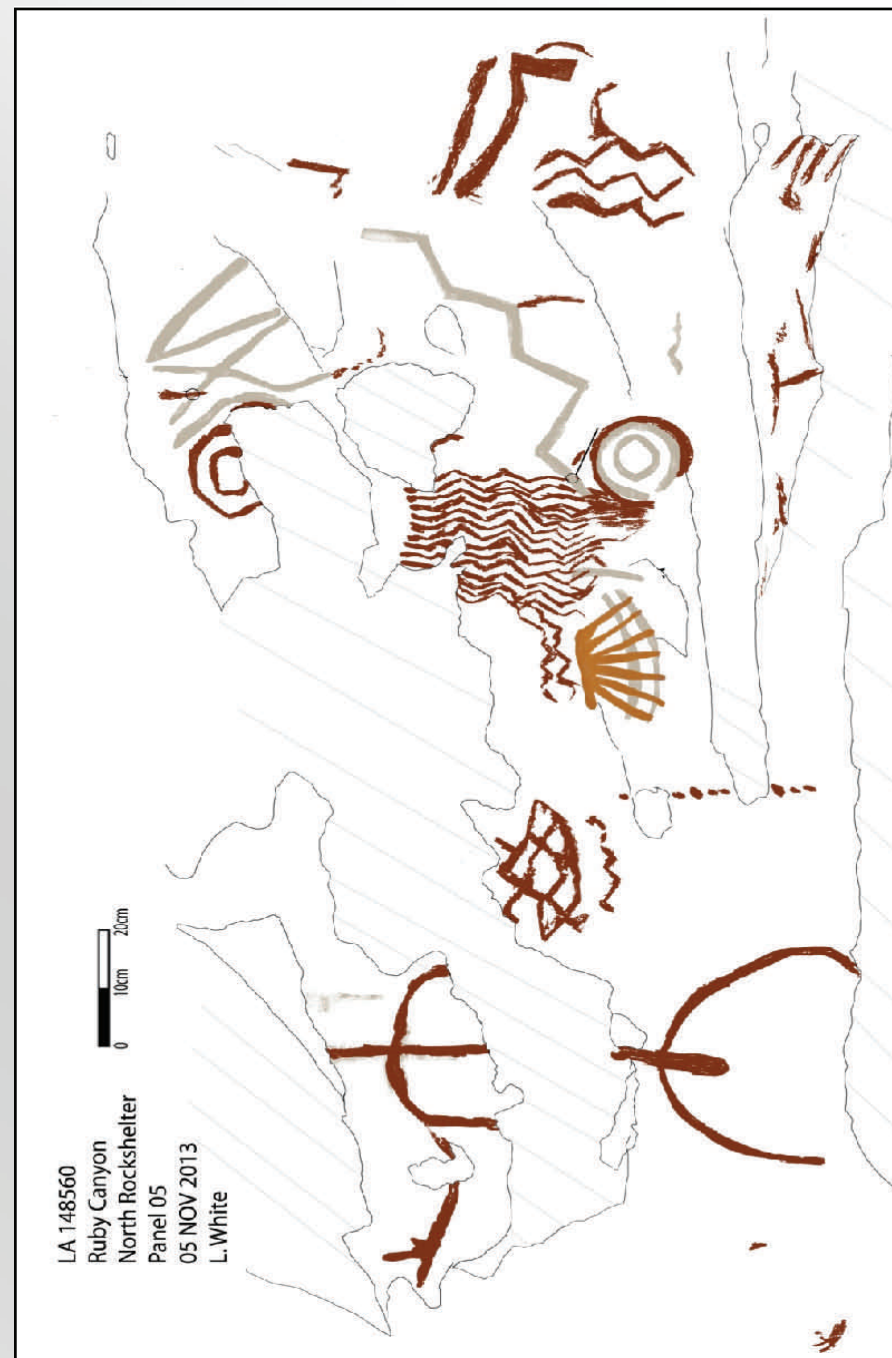


Archaeologists don't always dig in the ground to study the past. Sometimes they search the walls of caves, shallow rock shelters, and overhangs along canyons. They are looking for *rock art*, pictures in stone created by ancient humans. A team of archaeologists and rock art specialists explored four rock art sites on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands in southern New Mexico's Eddy County and recorded what they found.

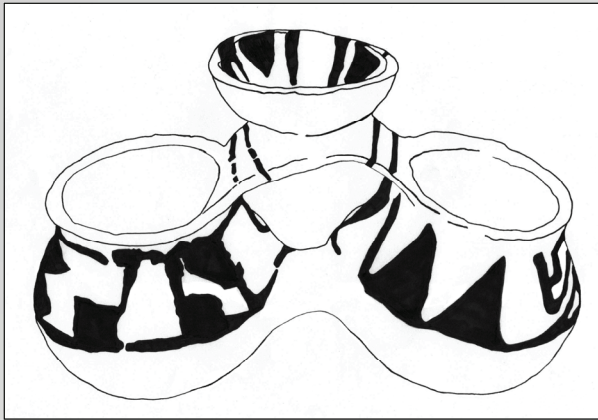
The irreplaceable images at Walt Canyon, Boyd's Cave, Ruby Canyon, and the Roney site are continually damaged by human and natural actions, so it is crucial that they be preserved through maps, photographs, and written descriptions. Two of the four sites are in the eastern foothills of the Guadalupe Mountains west of Carlsbad and two sites are along the range's northern ridge.



Archaeologists recording rock art panels at the Walt Canyon site and Boyd's Cave (opposite page)



Drawing of rock art designs at the Ruby Canyon site (drawing by Laurie White of Sacred Sites Research)



Triangle designs on paired El Paso Polychrome ollas (drawing by Terry Moody)

forming an hourglass shape and the double gourd that often was used to store water. They think it is likely that the double triangle was used as a symbol for water in rock art of the southwestern United States and western Mexico. Similar gourds were used by tribes in northwest Mexico during ceremonial journeys to obtain peyote and other plants, such as tobacco.

Native tobacco and other medicinal plants may have been used in religious ceremonies, possibly even at rock art sites like Walt Canyon and the Roney site, to contact spirit worlds through trances or visions.



A potent species of native tobacco (*Nicotiana trygonophylla*) was discovered growing below rock art panels at Walt Canyon and the Roney site

Many of the rock paintings at Walt Canyon, Boyd's Cave, and the Roney site are abstract forms such as triangles and diamonds.

Rock art researchers noted the similarity between the image of two connected triangles



The rock art consists of *pictographs* - a term meaning images painted on rock. Most of the rock art is found inside caves and shelters, which provide some protection from the elements, but images on cave ceilings and overhangs are often challenging to photograph and draw. Special photographic methods were used and line drawings were made of all the rock art panels.

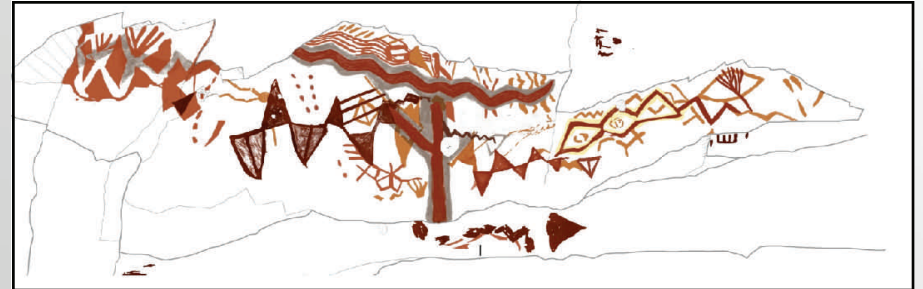
The information gathered during this study will be available to researchers and rock art enthusiasts as they study the meanings of the painted and pecked symbols left by the prehistoric inhabitants of southeastern New Mexico.

The sites are managed by BLM's Carlsbad Field Office under the Permian Basin Programmatic Agreement (PA), which supports research on the prehistory and history of southeastern New Mexico. Funds from oil and gas industry activities in the Permian Basin contributed to this and other research that fulfills guidelines of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966. The NHPA and Permian Basin PA provide the public an opportunity to learn about prehistoric lifeways in southeastern New Mexico.



Rockshelters and pictographs at the Roney site

This project contributed to the recognition of a type of rock art made throughout southern New Mexico between AD 500 and 1450. Lawrence Loendorf has identified this type as *Jornada Abstract*.



Photograph and drawing of pictographs on Panel 5 at Walt Canyon (photograph by Mark Willis and drawing by Laurie White)

The Jornada Abstract style includes the triangles, chevrons, and diamond shapes found at the four rock art sites recorded during the project, as well as at other sites across southern New Mexico and west Texas. The images on this page show examples of this style.



Dripping Spring Site, Doña Ana County, New Mexico