

**Chaco Rock Art Reassessment Project
Western National Parks Association Grant # 05-02
Final Report**

by Jane Kolber and Donna Yoder
December 2005

The goal of this project was to complete the recording of the rock art along the north wall of Chaco Canyon in Chaco Culture National Historical Park. We came very close to accomplishing this goal; however, we were not prepared for the high concentration of petroglyphic images that we found in the central portion of the Park as we worked closer to the Great Houses. Our ultimate goal is to provide a complete documentation of the rock art of Chaco Canyon, and thereby create a greater awareness and respect for it as well as a basis for conservation and protection plans and research.

We recorded twenty sites between Kin Nahasbas and Mockingbird Canyon and between Hungo Pavi and Chetro Ketl. Each rock in these areas, not just within the designated site boundaries, was thoroughly examined. We filled in informational site forms, which are backed up in a database. Photos were taken in both slide and black and white film formats with accompanying photographic data forms. The slides were scanned onto CDs. Scale drawings were made of the most complex, most difficult to see and the most damaged panels. Daily logs provided extra information not covered on forms. Four, five-day field sessions were held during 2005. In addition, time was spent in Chaco working with the existing records and preparing for the field work. Many days at home were devoted to preparing for the field sessions and organizing the final documents. Completed records were submitted to the Chief of Cultural Resources after each session.

In the spring we worked north-westward from Kin Nahasbas, which is northwest of Una Vida and the Visitors' Center. Very little was found until we reached the rincon to the west of Kin Nahasbas. In this rincon we found mostly Navajo ruins with a number of Navajo panels, but the largest and most complex panels were prehistoric. Dominant figures were animals and geometrics. A finely pecked composition of animals resembled the style of some panels between Casa Chiquita and the Old Petroglyph Trail. One unusual image is of an animal that apparently is carrying another animal in its mouth. At the head of the rincon is a shelter with an ancient Chacoan panel with the name "WILL FINN" and the letters "RICHA." Will Finn was a cohort of Richard Wetherill. Further west is the site we designated and recorded as "Muchas Mujeres" during the Chaco Navajo Rock Art Project. To the Navajo records for this site, we added the prehistoric panels and other marks to complete the recording. Surprisingly nothing was found on the cliff faces at this site.

During the second week we worked eastward from Mockingbird Canyon. This proved to be an intensely concentrated area of rock art. It is dominated by many variations of spirals, which are the most numerous symbols in Chacoan rock art. In addition there are other unusual and complex panels. Many are located in unusual locations. Access was frequently limited to crawling into or over or could only be seen from limited observation points. Some panels are located at precarious places that must have made execution very difficult. Talus boulders contained the majority of petroglyphs. This is not a usual placement for Chacoan rock art as it is more commonly found on cliff faces or ground boulders. A walled up shelter contained the only paintings that we documented this session. The paintings are of birds. At the entrance and above the entrance are panels with Navajo images and grinding slicks. A very unusual panel is located

under a supported boulder at the top of a small hill. On it are enigmatic patterns of drilled holes which present a number of curious and currently unsupportable interpretations.

In the fall, we worked in a quarter mile segment between Mockingbird Canyon and Kin Nahasbas. Navajo panels found on some of the boulders depict people, some ceremonial figures and horses. The largest and most complex prehistoric panels dominated by animals and geometrics are located along the cliff face. An unusual boulder (which may have fallen and, therefore, been part of the cliff when originally worked) is composed of complex geometrics as opposed to simple geometrics which are the norm in Chaco.

We continued west from the first rincon west of Mockingbird Canyon. This proved to be an even more intensely concentrated area of rock art. It is dominated by large complex prehistoric panels often high on the cliff face and difficult to see. Production of these panels was not easily accomplished. Along this stretch we found some elements that are not often found elsewhere. A number of complex panels are located adjacent to what we refer to as "pedestals," tall columns with a flat top that have separated forward from the cliff walls. Some of the talus and ground boulders have scratched and incised Navajo petroglyphs.

Several of the sites were not recorded at all by the Archaeological Society of New Mexico Rock Art Field School (ASNMRAS). In some sites we found over ten times as many elements as had previously been documented. Frequently we found signs of increased erosion through cracking, breakage, spalling, mineral and sheet wash staining and wind and water damage. This is one of the few areas in Chaco where we have found damage due to the growth of lichen on and around the petroglyphs. Vandalism mostly in the form of modern writing and scratching seems to have increased. However, this is often difficult to determine as many of the

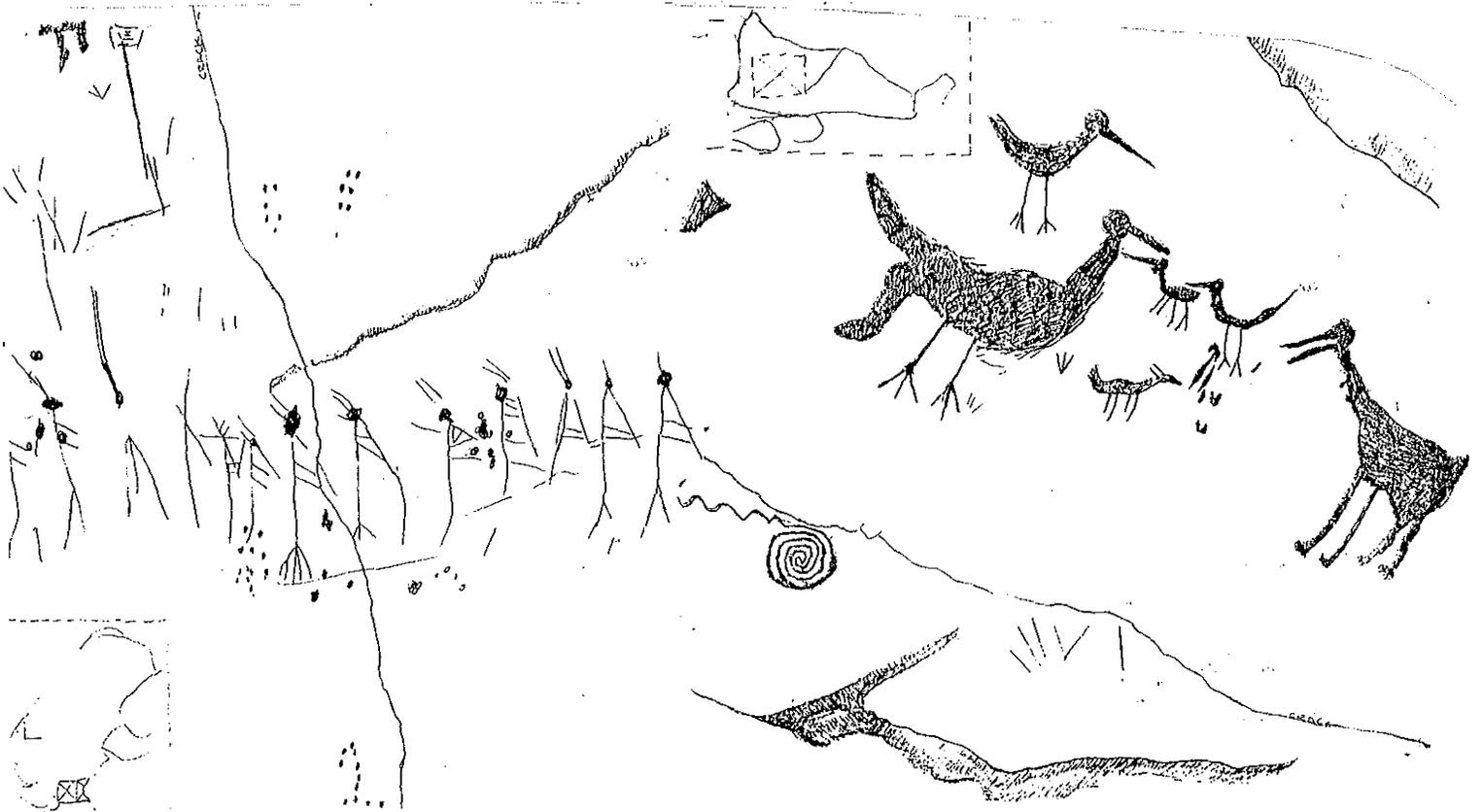
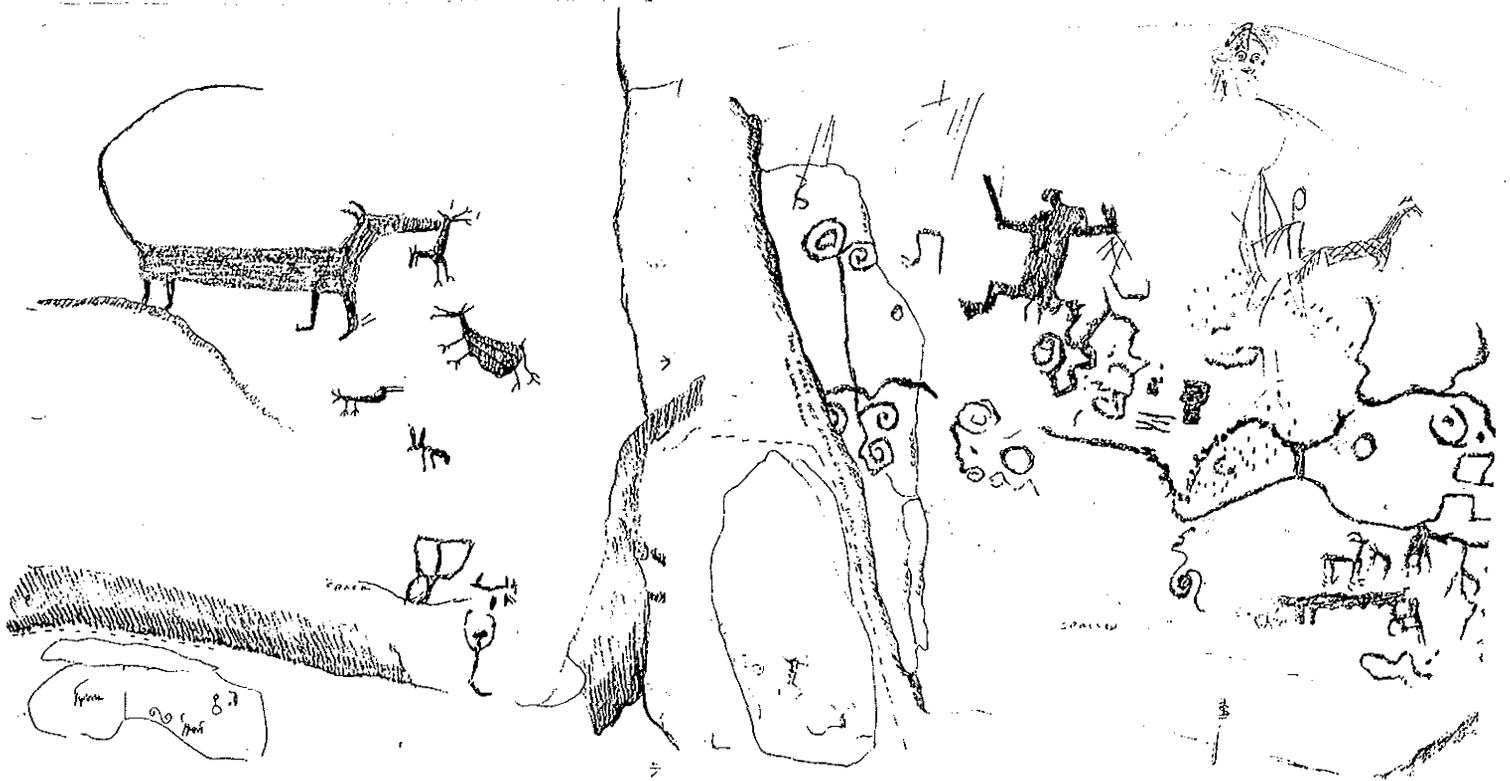
ASNMRAFS recorders did not include the graffiti present in their documentation. We have been tediously recording every human made mark that we find. In addition to the information that pertains to our project, we are ever on the lookout for other cultural remains that may be of interest to the Park. Toward this end we found the greater part of a historic pot, which was collected by Cultural Resources. We also recorded a number of corn cobs found in our sites.

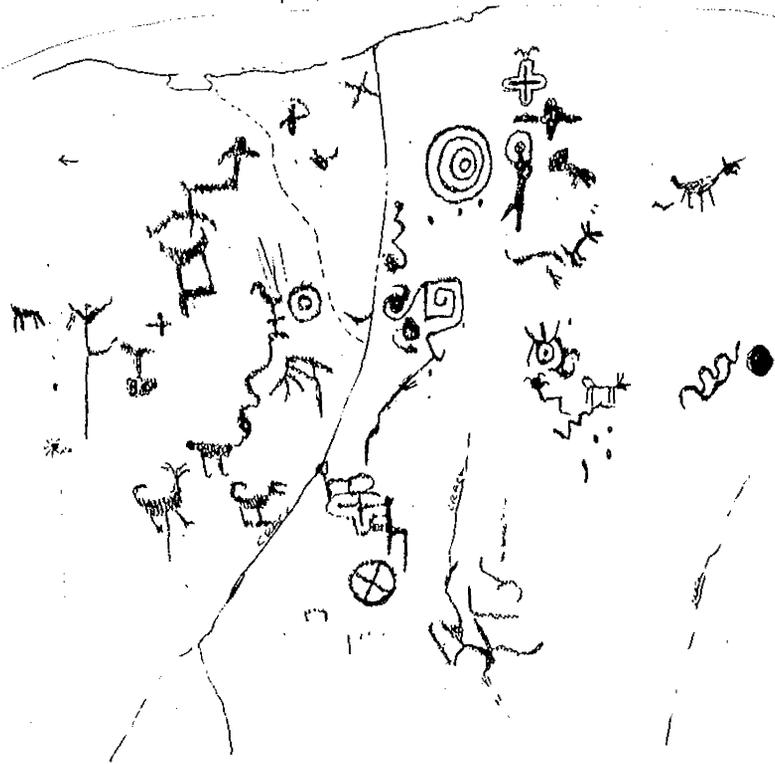
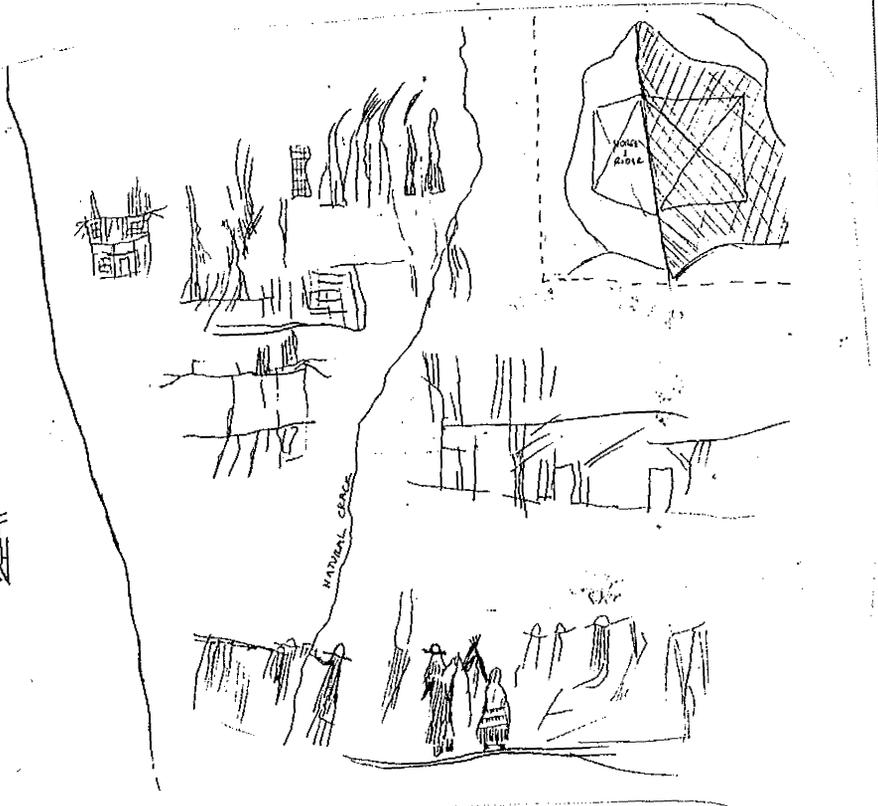
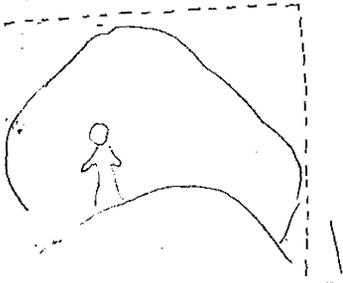
For each field session there were from four to five on our team. These included retired teachers, a doctor, a nurse, an anthropologist, a Hopi student from Arizona State University and a graduate student from Northern Arizona University, who is working on her master's thesis based on our work. Problems encountered while working included the usual difficulty in seeing many of the petroglyphs, climbing steep talus slopes with heavy equipment and parking and driving coordination with the concurrent road pavers. Many days of inclement weather slowed our progress and limited the amount of work accomplished. The spring was sometimes very cold and windy with rain and one day with snow. In the fall there was occasional heat radiating from the cliff walls.

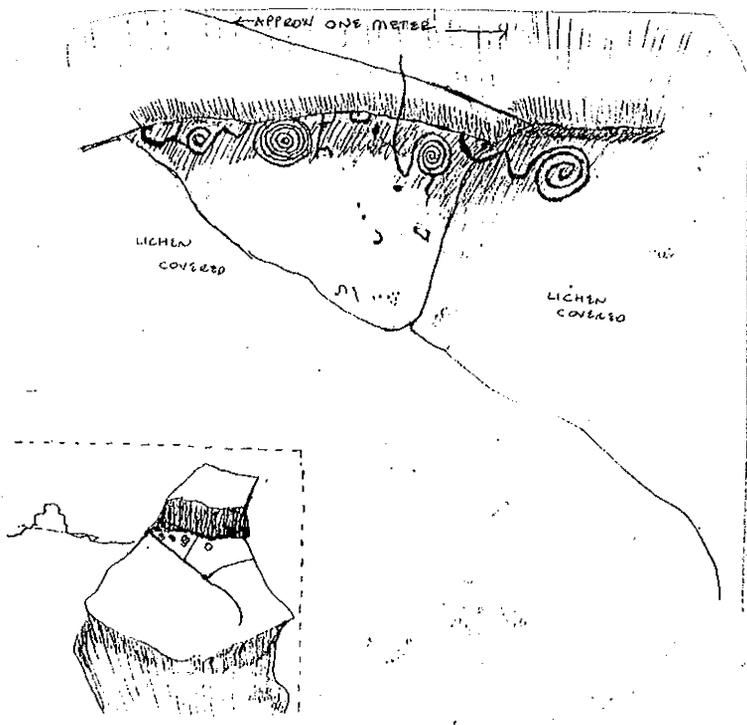
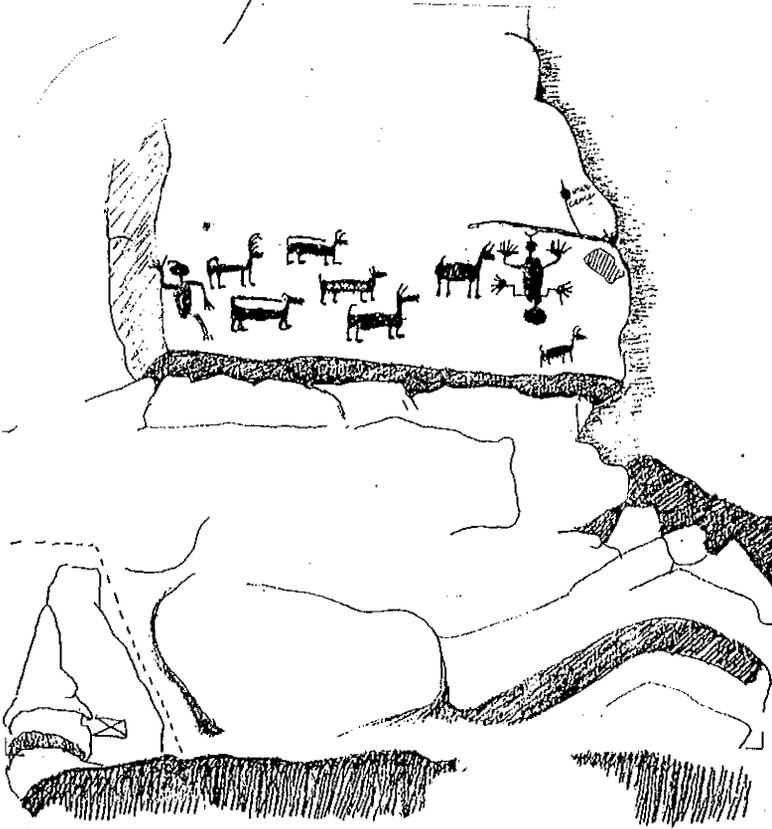
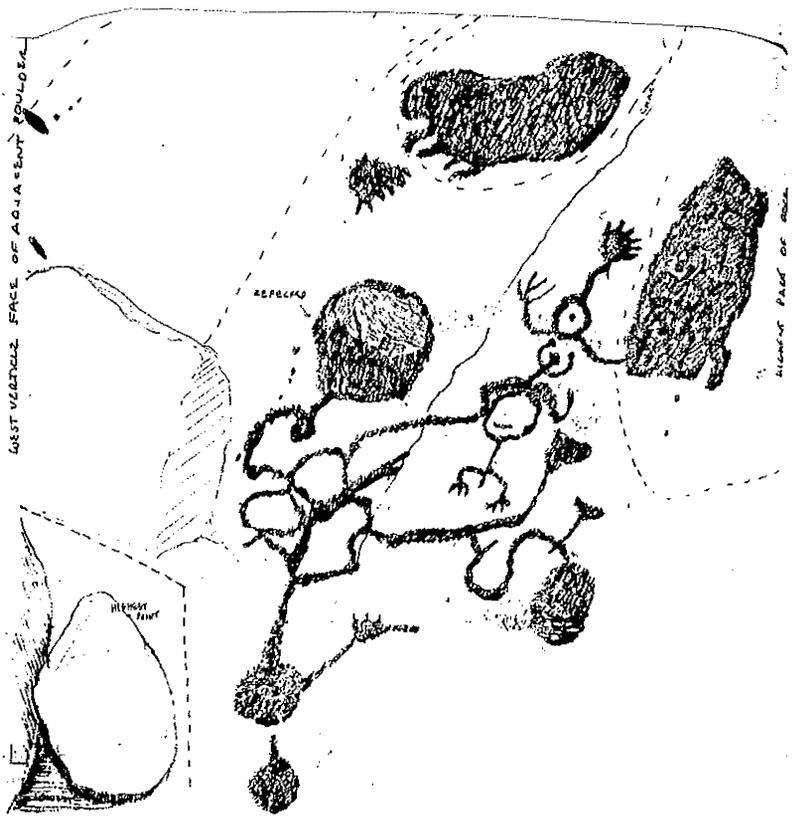
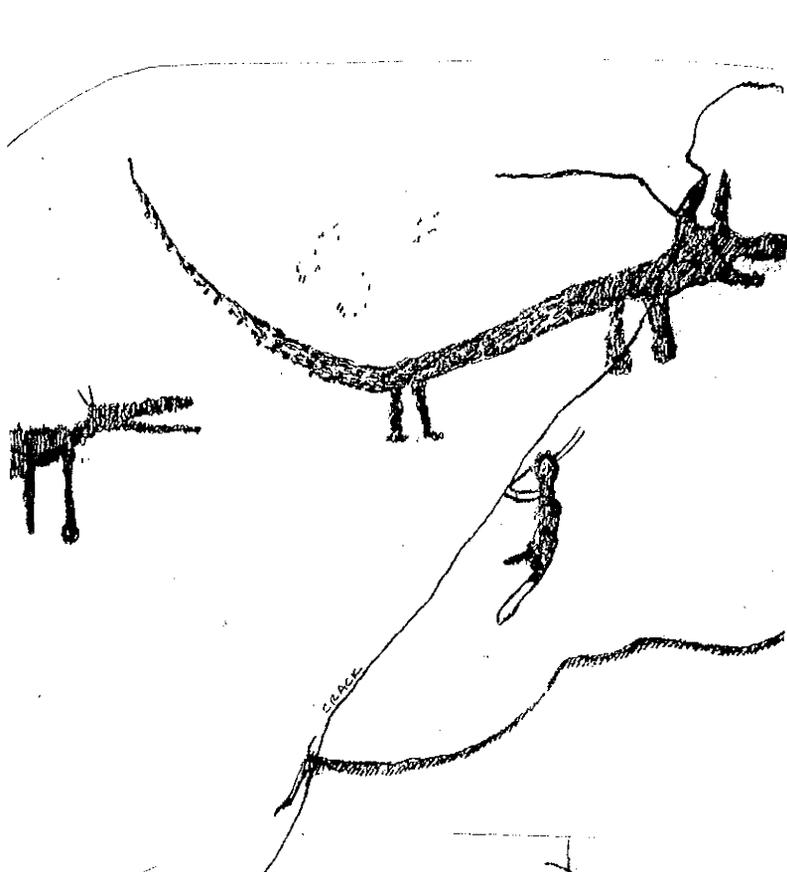
Almost every day we worked in the field, at least one and often two of the Student Conservation Association volunteers, Volunteers in Parks, and/or seasonal personnel went with us to be trained in recording, appreciation and understanding of rock art. The project director gave illustrated talks at night in the Visitors Center to the visiting public on Chaco rock art. She also gave similar talks at the WNPA headquarters in Tucson in October. When we worked in areas near those open to the public, we answered many questions and provided them with information about rock art. Drawings for an updated "Backcountry Trail Guide" were made by the project director for the Interpretation division of the Park.

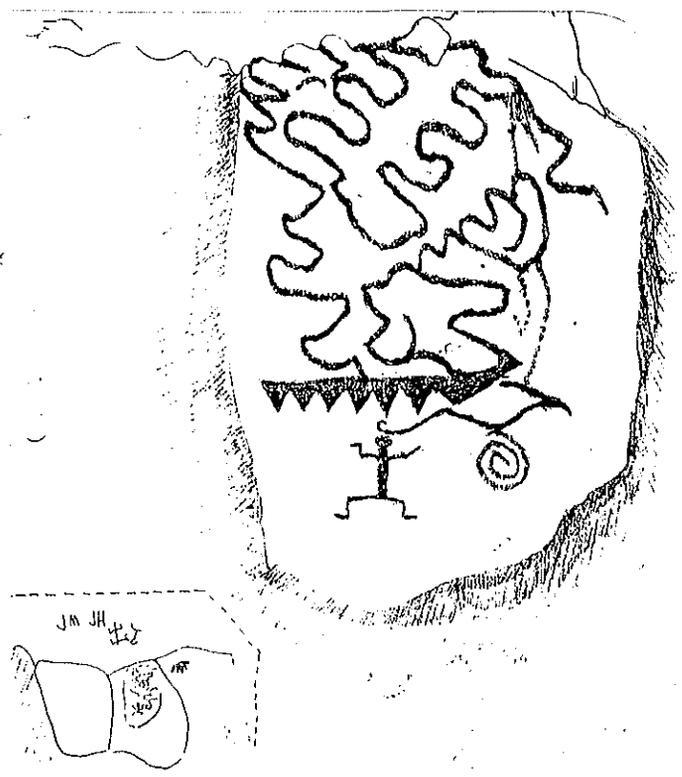
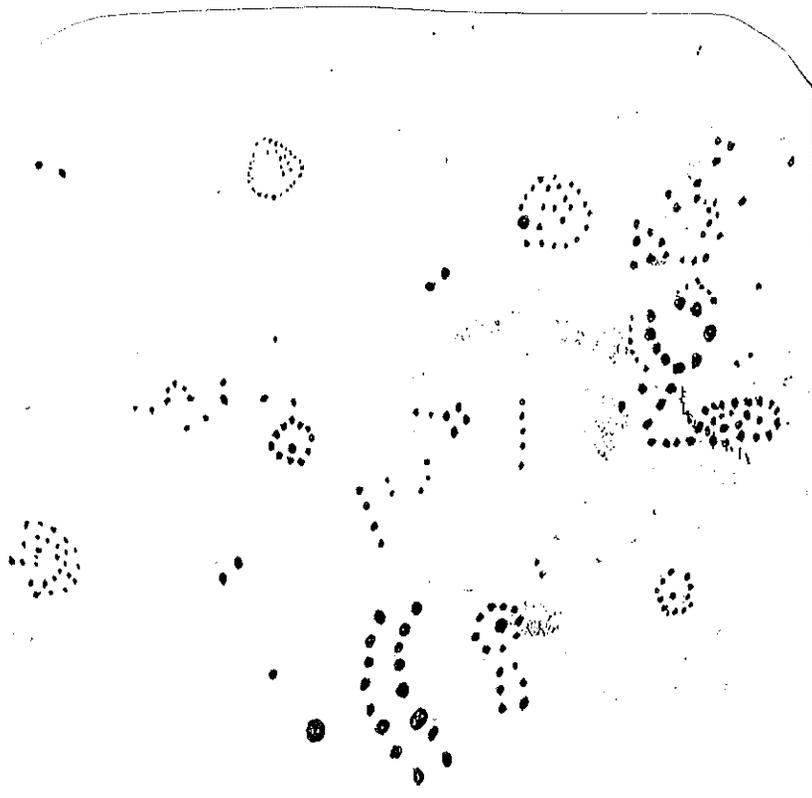
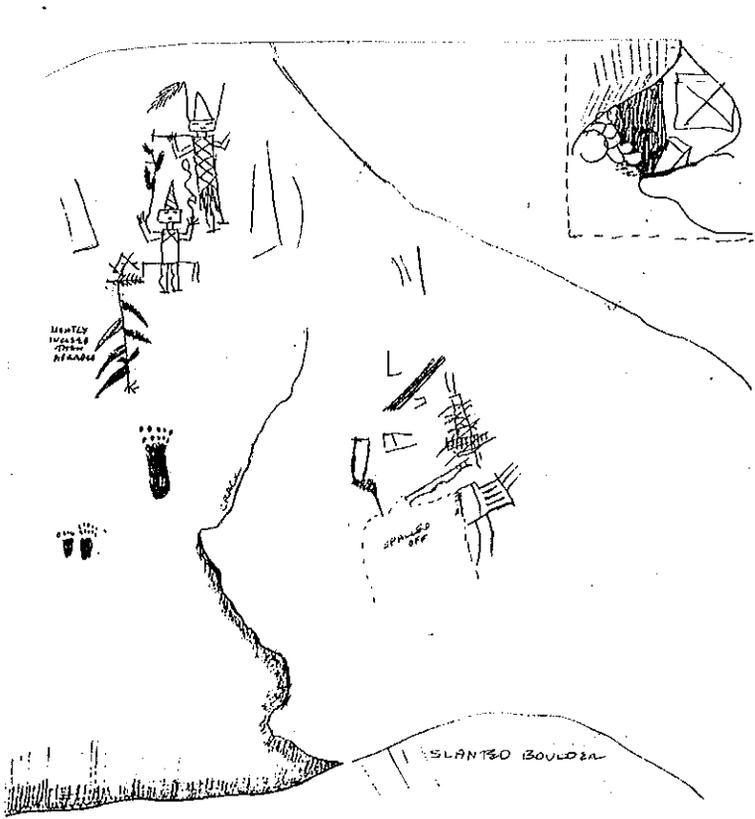
David M Brugge, a retired Park service curator and the leading expert about the Chaco Navajos visited and was escorted to Navajo rock art sites. Polly Schaafsma, a leading rock art expert, and Curtis Schaafsma, an archaeologist working in northern New Mexico, spent a day with us in the field. They shared information and viewpoints on the rock art panels we visited.

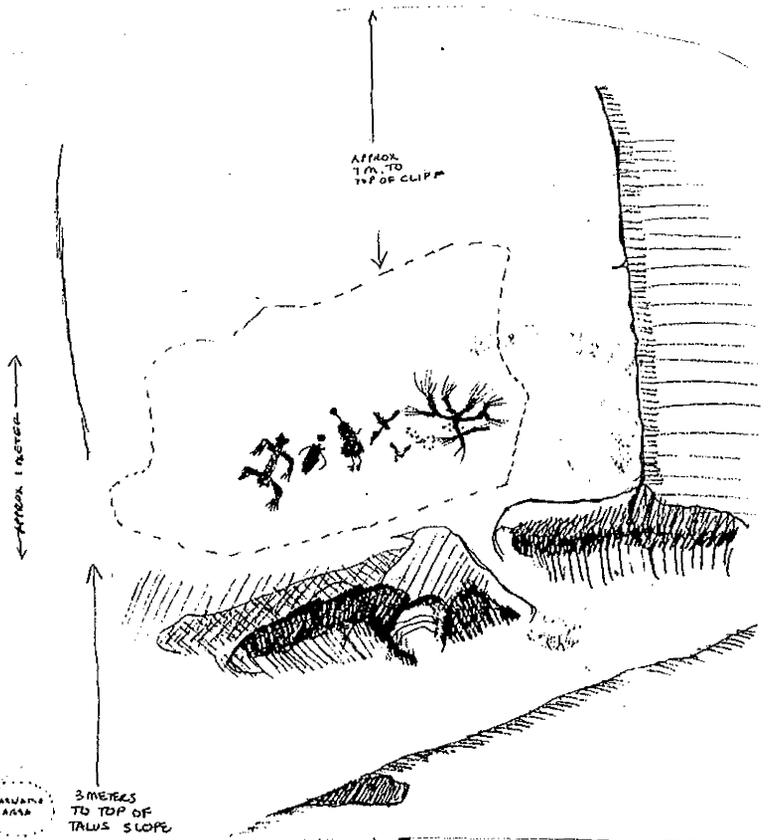
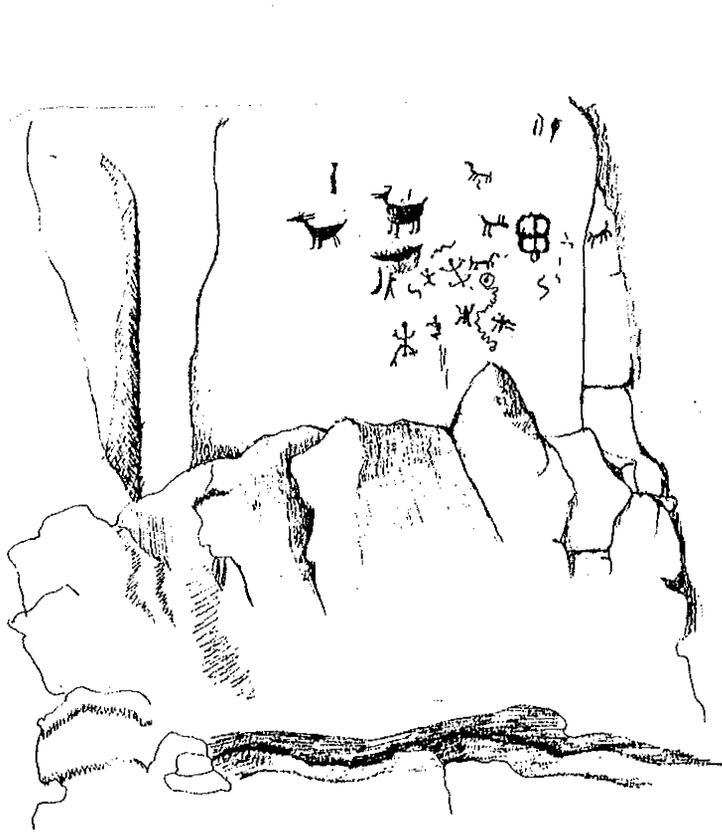
Our goal was to complete the reassessment project for the entire north wall of Chaco Canyon within the Park boundaries. However, there was much more work to be done than we anticipated. In the past we have found much more rock art than was previously recorded by the ASNMRAFS and the Field Inventory Report survey crews (FIR) and, therefore, we expected more than is in the records. We found that the closer we got to downtown or central Chaco, the greater density was multiplied even more. We completed the stretch between Kin Nahasbas and Mockingbird Canyon. There remains about a quarter mile of work between Hungo Pavi and the Lizard House rincon. The FIR crews established six sites in this area, mentioning rock art at two of them. The ASNMRAFS recorded no rock art there in the 1970s. We are aware of some very impressive panels in this location including near life-size, human-like figures, some paintings and a signature of Ogden Nash. It is necessary for us to record the area between Lizard House and Chetro Ketl in greater detail our project previously surveyed, but recorded only superficially. The other area we have not covered extends eastward from the painted cave east of Wijiji to the east gate. We hope to find a way to complete our goal. We appreciate the assistance and support of WNPA. Our commitment is to the documentation and conservation of the rock art in Chaco Canyon and we will do our utmost to achieve this goal. A book about Ancient Chacoan rock art has been started and efforts are currently in process to convert our "Chaco Navajo Rock Art Report" into book form.











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