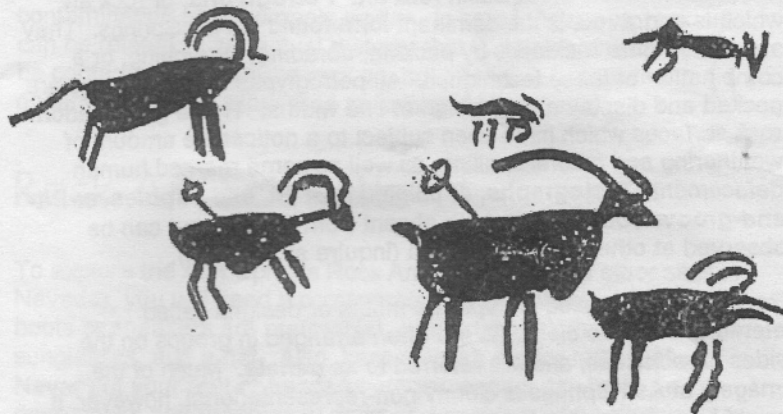


The Ash Springs Rock Art Site



Petroglyphs at Marker #17

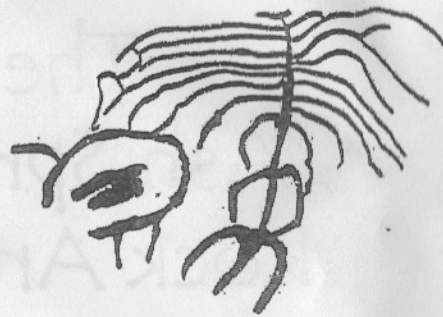
Ely Field Office
HC 33 Box 33500
Ely, Nevada 89301-9408
(775)289-1880

Caliente Field Office
P.O. Box 237
South US 93
Caliente, Nevada 89009
(775)726-8100



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Introduction



Petroglyphs at Marker #6

The Ash Springs Rock Art Site, located in Lincoln County, Nevada, is typical of much Great Basin rock art. **Petroglyphs**, or rock art which is engraved, is the dominant form found at Ash Springs. They are etched onto rockfaces by pecking, abrading, scratching, or a combination of these techniques. All petroglyphs at Ash Springs are pecked and display a wide range of line widths. These glyphs adorn rock surfaces which have been subject to a noticeable amount of weathering and natural spalling, as well as some marked human defacement. **Pictographs**, or painted rock art, and **cupules**, or **Pit-and-groove rock art**, are both absent from this site but can be observed at other sites in the area (inquire at the BLM).

Rock art is composed of separate motifs or designs called **elements**. These elements are often arranged in groups on the sides of rockfaces, and are referred to as **panels**. Much of the imagery at Ash Springs is clearly non-representational, however, it would have been clearly understood by the cultures who created it. Other glyphs present are more recognizable. Elements resembling animals are called **zoomorphs** and include all four-legged types or **quadrupeds**, as well as birds, insects, and other animals. Mountain sheep are the most common zoomorphs at Ash Springs, and occur throughout the Great Basin and western United States. Human figures, or **anthropomorphs**, are the other recognizable forms found at Ash Springs and exhibit striking variations in design.

The predominant rock art style at Ash Springs is the Great Basin Pecked Style. This includes the substyles of Great Basin Representational, Great Basin Curvilinear Abstract, and Great Basin Rectilinear Abstract. There are no examples of the Great Basin Painted Style present (Heizer and Baumhoff, *Prehistoric Rock Art of Nevada and Eastern California*, pp.197-208; 1962). All of the rock art depicted in this manual can be found at the Ash Springs Rock Art Site.

Rock art is found wherever there has been human activity. It is found at both public and private sites, and played an essential role in the transmission, reception, and storage of information. Although we cannot be sure what most rock art means, we suspect it was deeply significant to those who created it. We know that some rock art was ceremonial and therefore contained sacred knowledge. Other speculated uses for rock art are the marking of game trails, the designation of cultural territories, and the functioning as astronomical markers pertaining to such phenomena as the solstices and equinoxes (**Marker #13**). Even with the development of scientific dating methods, we still find it difficult to accurately calculate the age of most rock art. Sophisticated methods of C-14 dating have been designed to analyze the tiny particles of organic matter which collect in the grooves of petroglyphs after having been etched onto the rock surface. Despite the continual refining of these methods, there are still significant problems related to the contamination of the organic matter. In some instances, rock art can be related to artifactual material that is datable and thought to be contemporary with the rock art, but often it is impossible to generate anything other than an estimated timeframe.

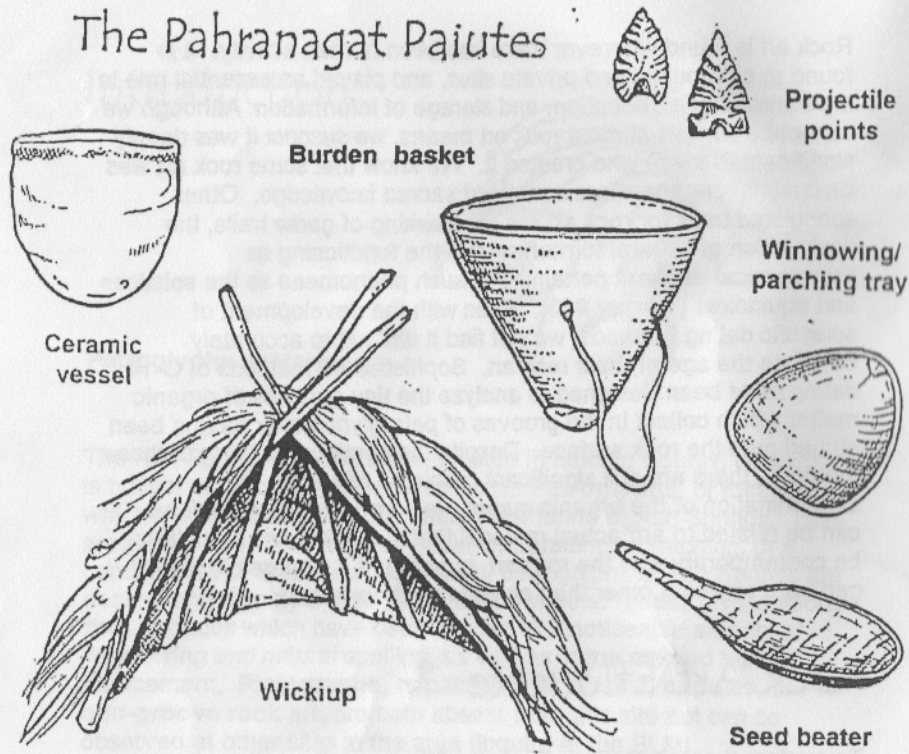
Rock Art Etiquette

To explore the Ash Springs Rock Art Site (as well as other sites in Nevada), you will need a comfortable pair of walking shoes (hiking boots or sneakers are preferable), comfortable clothes, sunscreen, sunglasses, and a hat. Also, keep a watch out for rattlesnakes. Never put your feet or hands where you cannot see them (i.e., in deep nooks and crannies of rocks and boulders while climbing). Most importantly: *always bring water*. Even though you may only plan to go for a short hike, be sure to always have water with you.

When examining rock art, please be sure to observe the following: *Do not ever touch rock art and do not ever walk on it*. The rock art is very fragile and the application of any material, including water and especially the oil from your skin, can cause irreparable damage. If you yourself see any vandalism taking place, please call the Bureau of Land Management's resource protection hotline (1-800-722-3998). Always exercise courtesy while visiting archaeological sites and do not disturb any artifacts you may find, and remember: *"Leave what you find so that others may have the thrill of discovery."*

To access the site, refer to the map (pp. 13-14) and follow the trail to the first marker. Each marker will correspond to a page in this manual.

The Pahrnagat Paiutes



The Ash Springs Rock Art Site was frequented by a culture known as the **Pahrnagats**, one of several known **Southern Paiute** groups and is known to have been a winter site accomodating a small village (25-40 individuals). In general, less food gathering took place during the winter months, although there was occasional hunting. Instead, winter was a time of visiting, and gambling and story-telling were frequent activities. The presence of debitage, or stone flakes, indicate that many stone tools were created here. These included knives, drills, scrapers; hammerstones, and a variety of projectile points. Tools were fashioned mostly out of cherts which were obtained locally, and obsidians, which came from farther away in Utah. The Pahrnagats also had a highly specialized basketry tradition. Baskets specifically fashioned to gather and process plant foods included burden baskets, winnowing and parching trays, bowls, and seed beaters. By contrast, pottery was simple and utilitarian, although some vessels had cord-impressed or fingernail-incised decorations. At the Ash Springs Site, sherds of Fremont-like greyware have also been found, indicating the presence of these

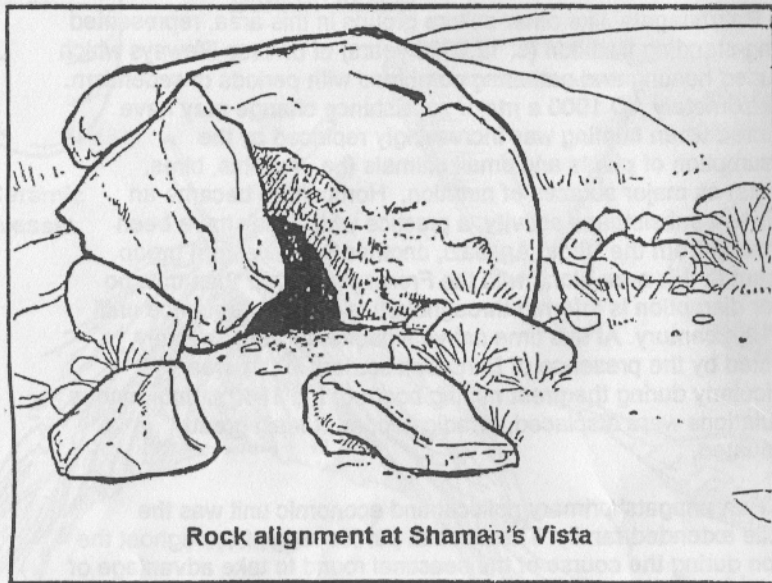
Southwestern groups who co-existed in this area along with the Pahrnagats c. AD 500-1250.

The Pahrnagats, like other culture groups in this area, represented a long-standing tradition (c. 12,000 years) of diverse lifeways which included hunting and gathering combined with periods of sedentism. Approximately AD 1000 a major subsistence change may have occurred when hunting was increasingly replaced by the consumption of plants and small animals (i.e., rodents, birds, insects) as major sources of nutrition. Horticulture became an important subsistence activity, a practice which may have been borrowed from the Virgin Anasazi, another Southwestern group present in this area along with the Fremonts. Other than this, no major disruption is inferred throughout this cultural sequence until the 19th century. At this time native inhabitants were severely affected by the presence of European settlers in the area, particularly during the great mining boom of the 1860's. Indigenous populations were displaced, eradicated, or at least greatly attenuated.

The Pahrnagats' primary political and economic unit was the mobile extended family. These small parties ranged throughout the region during the course of the seasonal round to take advantage of the varying availabilities of local resources. Despite the Pahrnagat's excellent survival skills, starvation was often prevalent in the spring when winter stores were depleted and spring food plants had not yet begun to germinate. When food plants did become available, populations dispersed along the valley floors during the spring and summer. Seeds, roots, tubers, and berries were collected and small animals were trapped and eaten. The practice of horticulture yielded crops of maize, beans, squash, pumpkins, sunflowers, lambs' quarters, and winter wheat. Garden plots were situated along the margins of lower altitude lakes and marshes and were watered by irrigation ditches.

During the fall people came together in large gatherings for the purpose of harvesting pinenuts, communal rabbit drives, and mourning ceremonies. Winter was the most permanent phase of the seasonal round and was spent in villages, usually around the lower fringes of the pinyon-juniper forests (5000-8000 ft.), although Ash Springs is not in this area, and is at a much lower altitude (3600-3800 ft.) The boulders here would shelter people from the cold. Water was ordinarily obtained from snow meltoff, however, the constant availability of (warm) water at Ash Springs rendered this unnecessary and made this site extremely desirable.

Marker #1

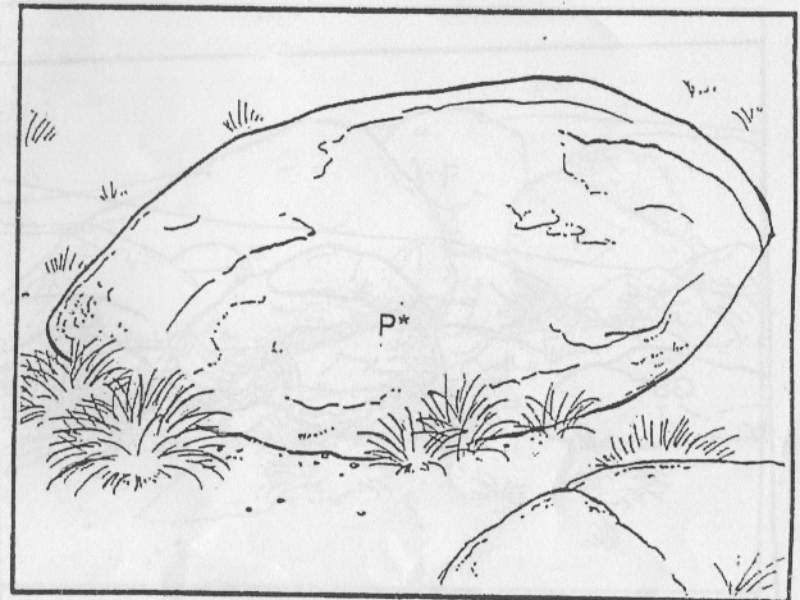


Rock alignment at Shaman's Vista

Welcome to the Ash Springs Rock Art Site. This site is predominantly a habitation site comprised of two high-intensity areas of domestic activity and includes 12 semi-circular cobblestone alignments along with associated lithic material. The site also extends to the top of the eastern-situated hill known as "Shaman's Vista" (see Map pp. 13-14). Due to the availability of diverse and abundant food resources in the valley, this site could also have been utilized as a base camp in the winter. In fact, there are ethnographic accounts from the turn of the last century which state that the Pahranaagats did in fact spend winter at Ash Springs, and dispersed to the north during the warm seasons. The presence of the warm natural springs added a unique and special feature which would have been particularly welcome during the cold weather.

A suggestion which might make this tour even more enjoyable would be to sketch the rock art as you make your way along the trail.

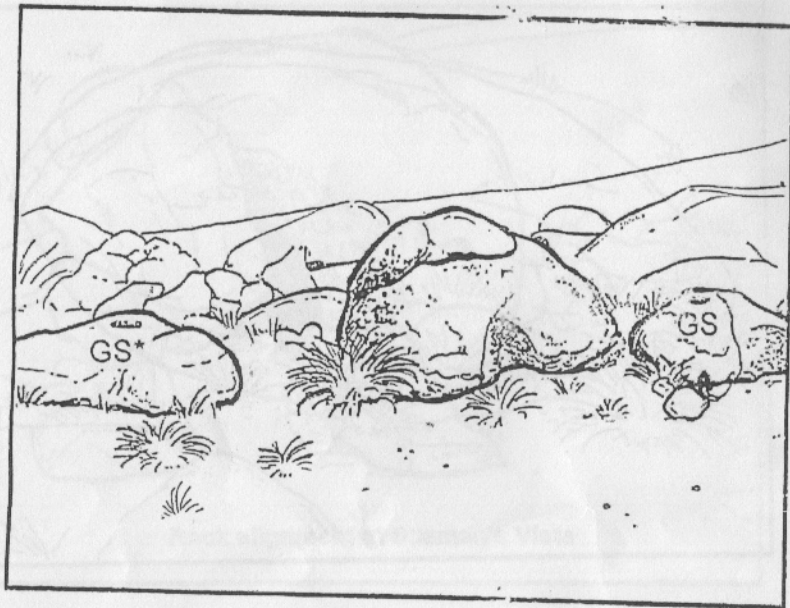
Marker #2



This panel depicts a large bighorn sheep with very long legs on a flat boulder. This image is an example of a representational motif called a **zoomorph**. This term includes any depiction that is recognizable as some kind of animal, and includes bighorn sheep as well as other quadrupeds and animals in general. Sheep are not only the most common zoomorph in this vicinity, but are found all throughout the western states as well. This rock art panel is very lightly rendered so the image may be difficult to see in direct sunlight.

*P=petroglyph

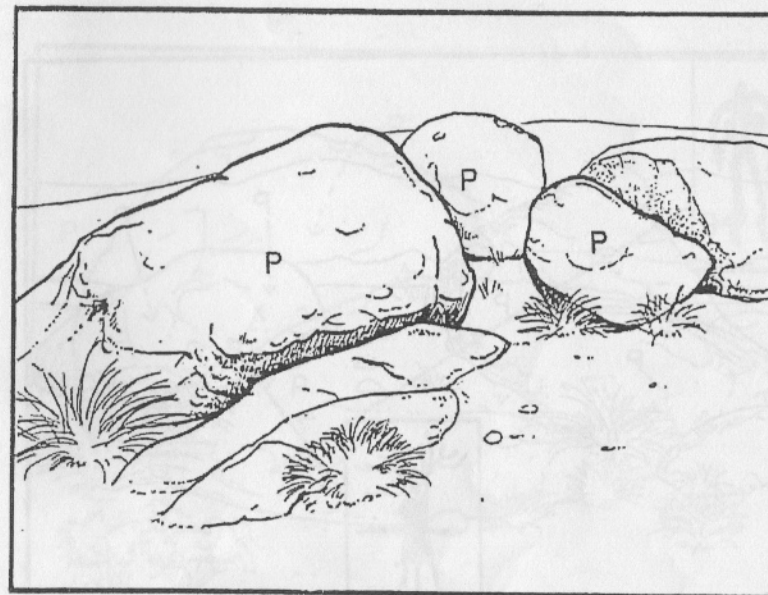
Marker #3



This is a simple panel consisting of only a line and a circle. Note the three bullet marks—one inside of the circle and two outside of it. Two smaller milling stones—one on each side—accompany this larger boulder. A grinding slick can be found on each of the milling stones. Foods and other substances (minerals for pigments) were ground into meal on such boulders with the use of a mano, or hand-held stone. Over time this activity would produce a smooth surface, or "grinding slick." Portable milling stones, or "metates," were also used. Seeds and pinenuts comprised a great deal of the plant foods which were processed; pinenut meal could be made into soup or mush. Grasshoppers and crickets were also eaten, first dried in the sun, then ground into meal and mixed with water and other ingredients (berries, pinenuts) to make cakes. Much of this food could be stored for the winter.

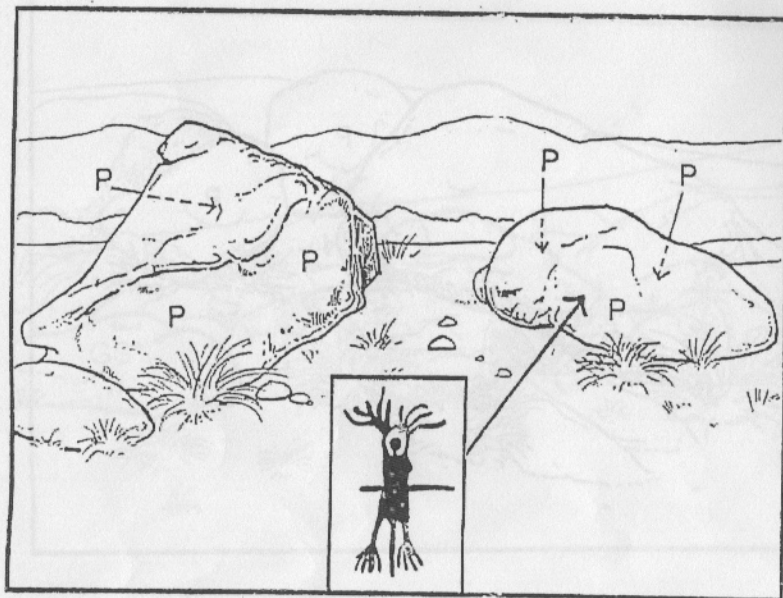
*GS=grinding slick

Marker #4



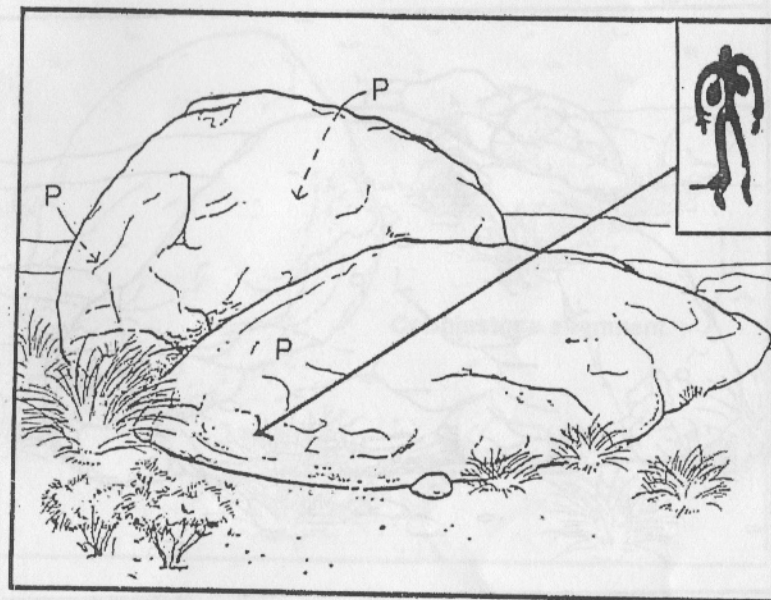
This marker indicates the entry into an area of heightened domestic activity. Note the concentration of engraved boulders here which defines a living space. Rock art is frequently associated with domestic sites, and you will observe this trend at the Ash Springs Rock Art Site. There are several grinding slicks in this area—see how many you can find.

Marker #5



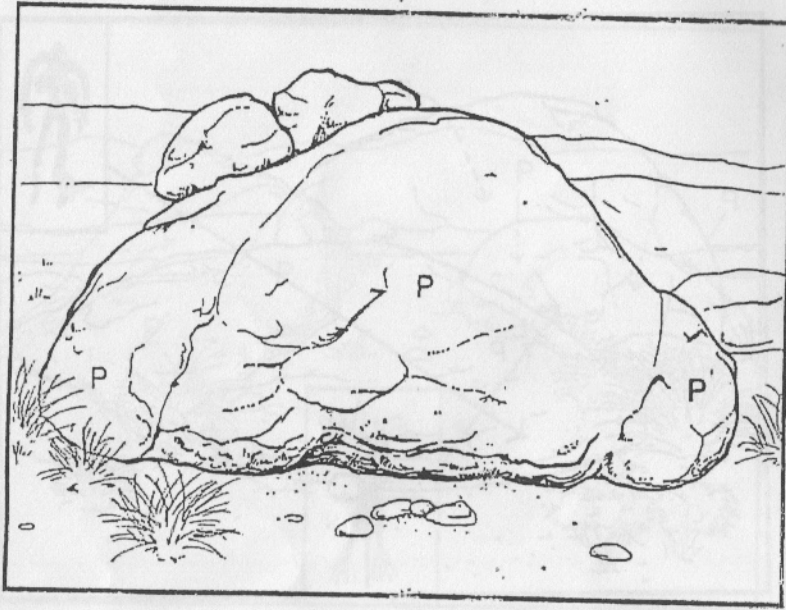
On this panel are two human figures located on the front of the left boulder. These representational motifs are called **anthropomorphs**, and include any figure that is recognizably human. There is also an anthropomorph on the righthand boulder with his arms outstretched upwards—he is known as the "Hallelujah Man."

Marker #6



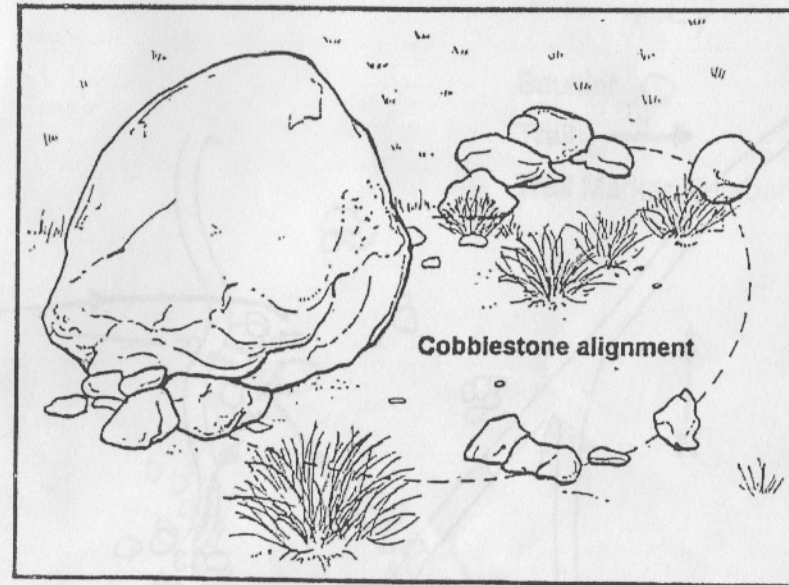
At this marker is a panel of a large and fantastic zoomorph. Underneath it is a female anthropomorph known as "Vavavoom Woman," which is visible in bright light. Note the two grinding slicks on top of the flat rock.

Marker #7



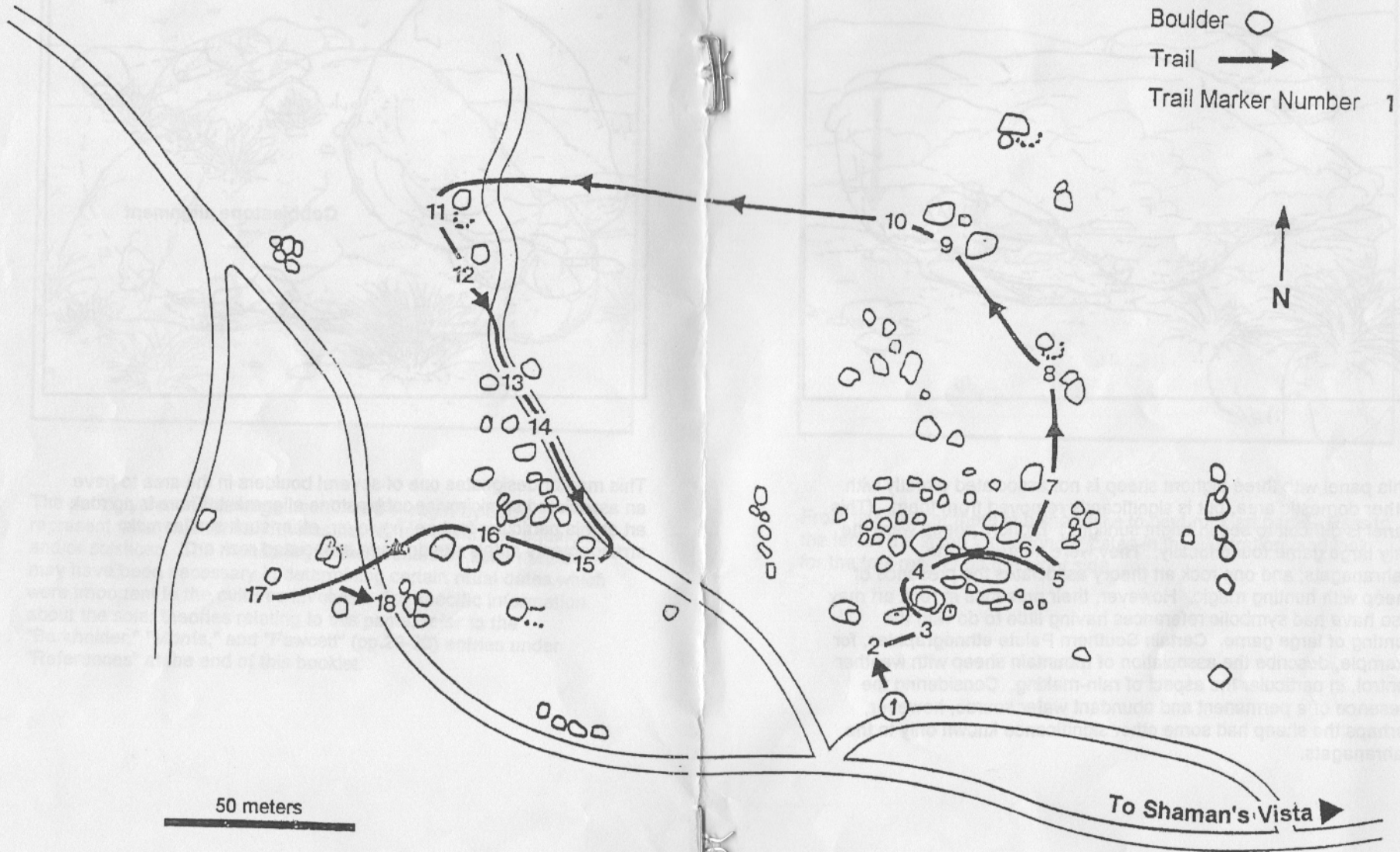
The petroglyphs on this large boulder are thought by some to represent solar calendrical devices having to do with the equinoxes and/or solstices. The monitoring of these dates by such methods may have been necessary in determining certain ritual dates which were important to the cultures involved. For specific information about the solar theories relating to this panel, refer to the "Burkholder," "Morris," and "Fawcett" (pp.29-30) entries under "References" at the end of this booklet.

Marker #8



This marker designates one of several boulders in the area to have an associated semicircular cobblestone alignment. There is no rock art at this particular feature, however, other such similar rock arrangements at this site do have associated rock art.

Map of Ash Springs Rock Art Site



Key

- Boulder ○
- Trail →
- Trail Marker Number 1

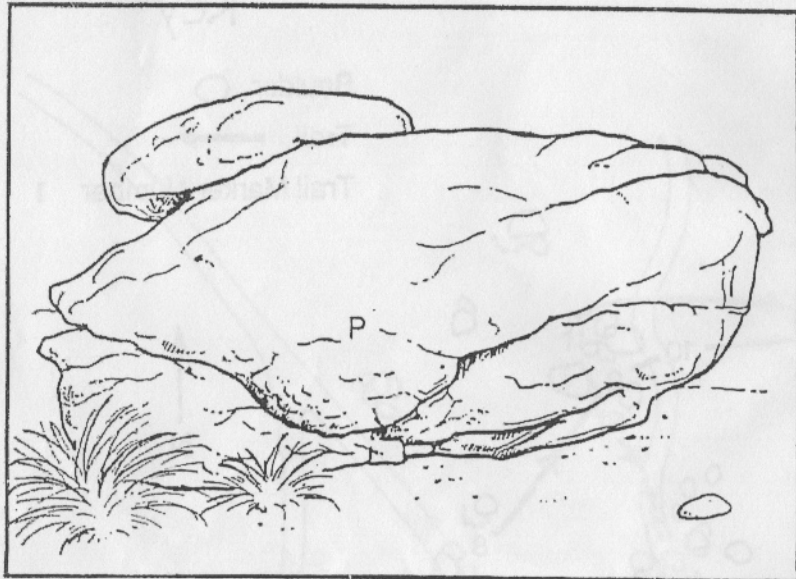


50 meters

To Shaman's Vista

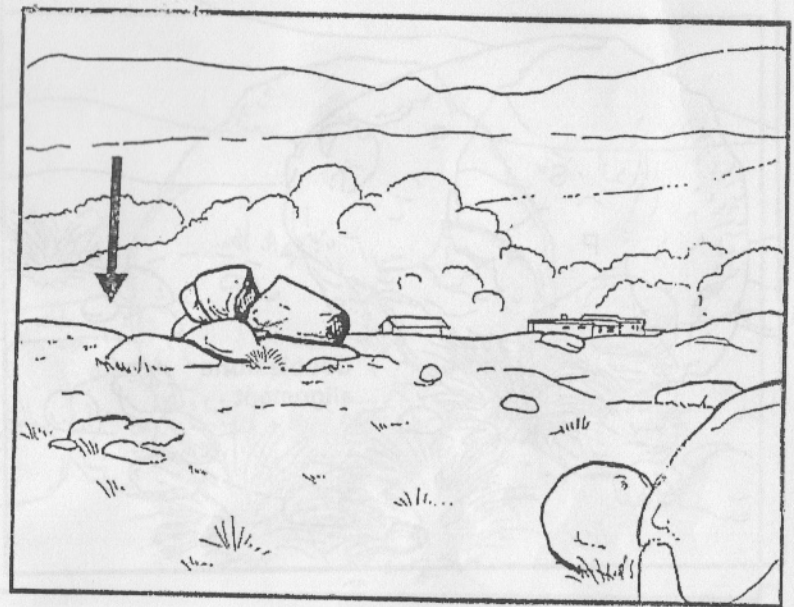
PARKING

Marker #9



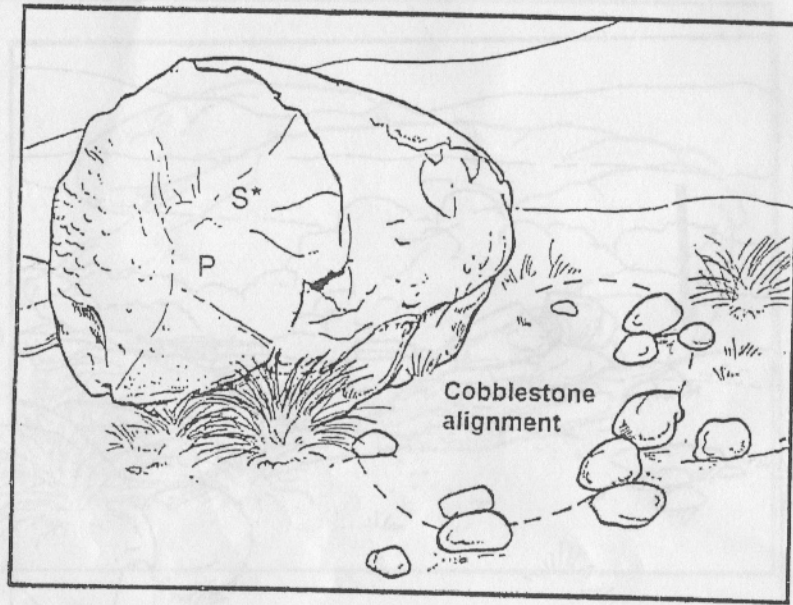
This panel with three bighorn sheep is not associated directly with either domestic area, but is significantly removed from them. (This panel is difficult to see in bright sunlight.) Bighorn sheep were the only large game found locally. They were hunted by the Pahranaagats, and one rock art theory associates the presence of sheep with hunting magic. However, their presence in rock art may also have had symbolic references having little to do with the hunting of large game. Certain Southern Paiute ethnographies, for example, describe the association of mountain sheep with weather control, in particular the aspect of rain-making. Considering the presence of a permanent and abundant water source, however, perhaps the sheep had some other significance known only to the Pahranaagats.

Marker #10

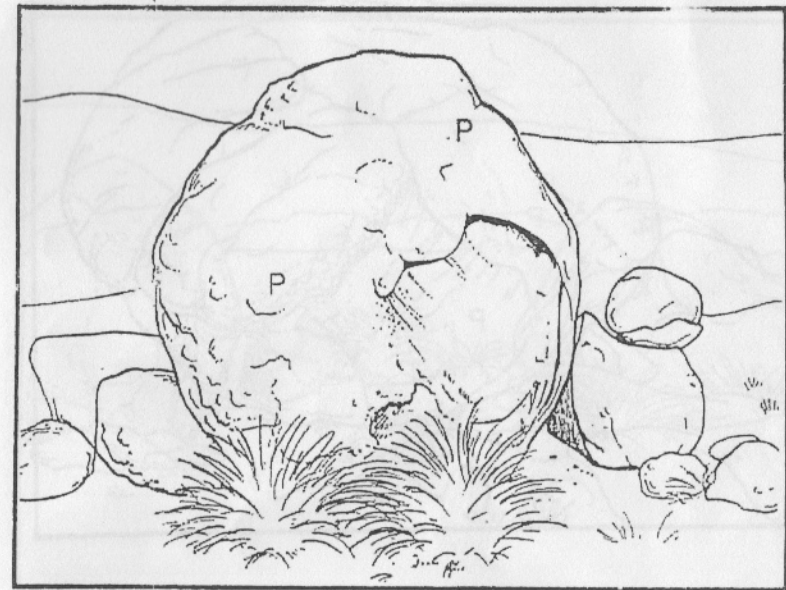


From this marker there is a short hike to next rock art panel. Pass to the left of the stone formation indicated in the illustration, and look for the trail marker on the other side.

Marker #11



This panel displays an excellent example of **superimposition**. This situation occurs when petroglyphs are engraved over already existing ones, an indication that the worked-over motifs were made at an earlier time. This can be used as a general timeframe when attempting to date petroglyphs--we may not know when or how far apart the two sequences were created, but we do know this site was probably multi-generational. In this case a heavy curvilinear line is superimposed over several sheep. The sheep to the center-left has an atlatl embedded in its back (see Marker # 15). Also note the associated semi-circular cobblestone alignment as well as the modern defacement on the panel.



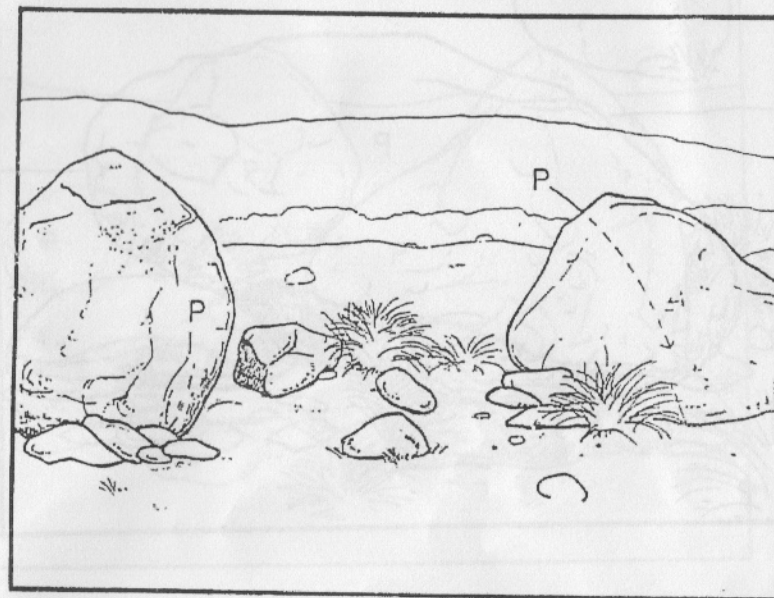
This boulder has two rock art panels which include several zoomorphs. As you can see, they are very damaged and it is possible that some original rock art is now gone. Natural weathering processes and/or vandalism have created the present situation. Note the modern defacement below to the right of the sheet panel--the initials "AR."

Marker #13



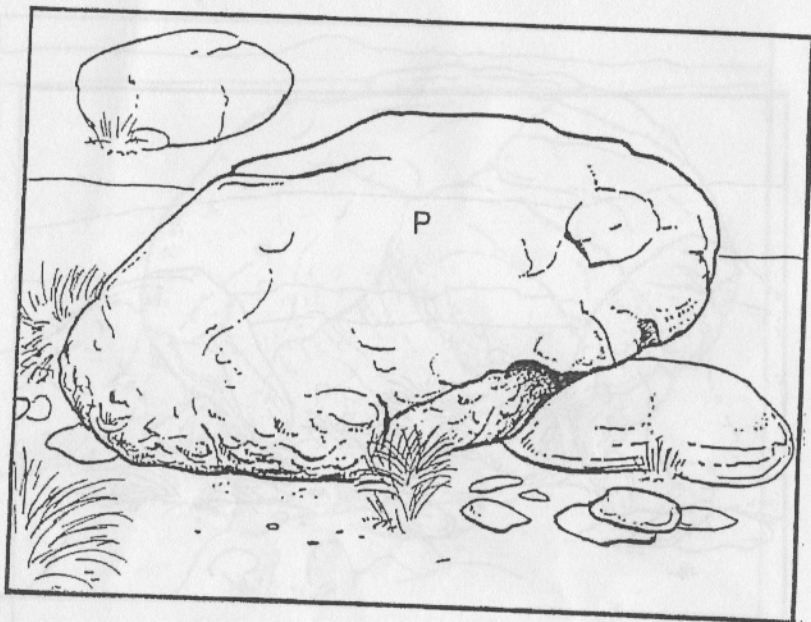
This is a panel of two lightly etched bighorn sheep. Again, this panel is very difficult to see in bright sunlight. Since the time of day seems to be significant in the viewing of so many petroglyphs, it is possible that this may have been done deliberately.

Marker #14



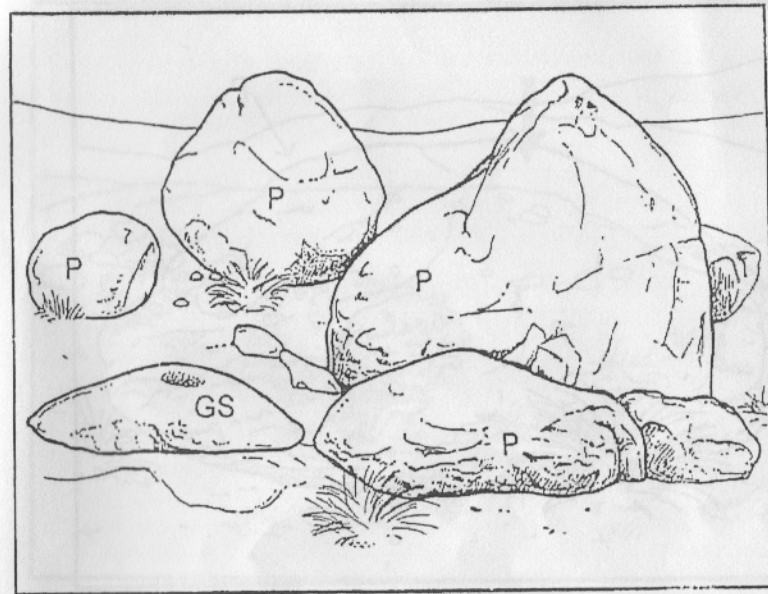
A panel containing bighorn sheep depictions is situated to the left. To locate a small panel on the other side of the boulder, go around it and look for the panel situated near the ground. Afterwards, backtrack to the trail and follow it out down the road.

Marker #15



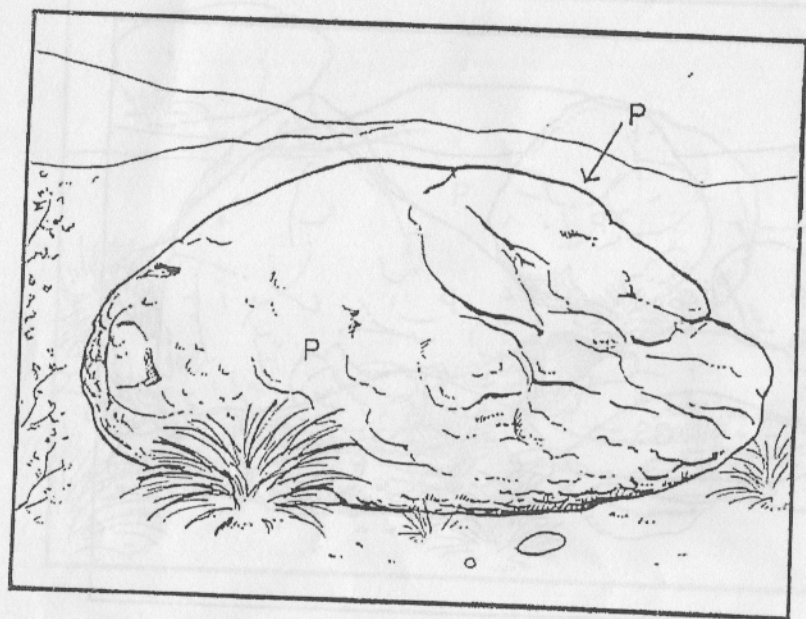
Note the atlatl embedded in the back of one of the bighorn sheep. The atlatl, or spearthrower, was a device which enabled an individual to hurl a spear at a greater distance than was possible unaided. Spears were supplemented by bows and arrows as hunting implements around AD 500, so this petroglyph may have been created before then.

Marker #16



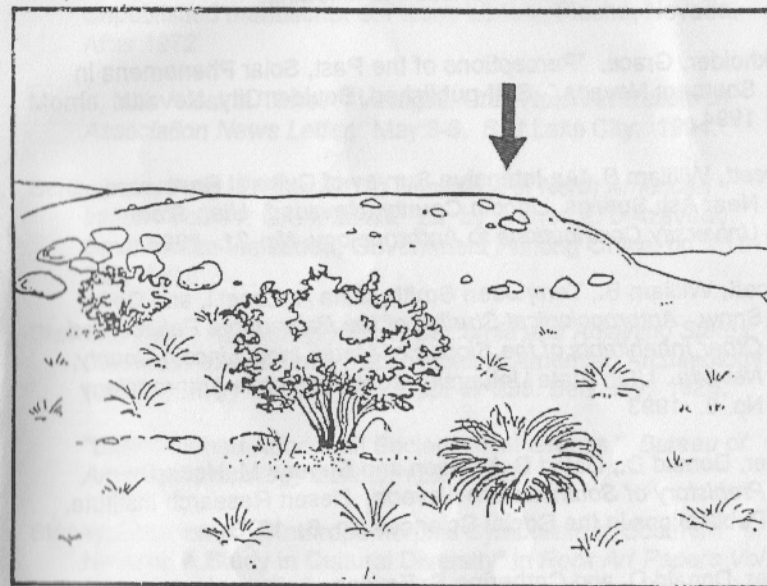
The location of this marker is situated in the heart of the other locus of concentrated domestic activity. Like the first area, there is a high occurrence of rock art indicating a place of heightened group interaction. Much food processing took place here also, as indicated by the presence of many grinding slicks.

Marker #17



The last rock art panel on this tour contains an impressive display of several bighorn sheep. Like others at this site, some of the sheep have atlatls protruding from their backs. On top of this boulder to the right can be found a concentric circle, a common motif found globally in rock art. After viewing this rock art, backtrack to the road and go to the last Marker #18.

Marker #18



This marker indicates the end of the officially marked trail. From this location you can see Shaman's Vista on top of the hill to the right. If you desire to end the tour, follow the road and exit to the parking lot. However, you can extend the tour by making an optional hike to the top of Shaman's Vista (refer to map pp. 13-14; there is no marked trail). There is no rock art, however, although there are a number of features at the summit including three rock alignments. There are also considerable lithic scatters indicating the manufacture of stone tools.

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- Whitley, David. S. *A Guide to Rock Art Sites: Southern California and Southern Nevada*. Mountain Press Publishing Company, Missoula. 1996.
- Websites:
- ARARA--<http://zzyx.ucsc.edu/Comp/Bill/ARARA/ARARA.html>
- BLM--<http://www.nv.blm.gov/Ely/Default.htm>
- Piedra Pintata Books--<http://www.rock-art.com/books/>

Location of the Ash Springs Rock Art Site

The Ash Springs Rock Art Site is located approximately 5 miles south of the intersection of Routes 93, 375, and 318, on the east side of Route 93 across the highway from "R Place."

