

Summary of Field Trip to Hieroglyphic Canyon January 16, 2021 Rim Country and San Tan Chapters, AZ Archaeological Society

Text below is based on observations by Dennis DuBose who participated on the Field Trip and is responsible for all inaccuracies and photos.

Hieroglyphic Canyon is a narrow canyon on the south edge of the Superstition Mountains. It is reached from the Cloudview Trailhead at the east end of Cloudview Road, east of Apache Junction. The Hieroglyphic Trail is one of several that use this trailhead.

The round trip hiking loop for this Field Trip hike was about 3 miles. The hike took us about 3 hours, since we spent so much time at the destination.

We arrived at the trailhead at 7:15-7:30 am.



We were on the trail as the sun rose over the mountains to the east.

This seemed kind of early, but the parking area was over half full when we arrived, and it was almost full when we hit the trail.



Field Trippers on the trail to Hieroglyphic Canyon. The sun is just lighting up the peaks of the Superstition Mountains. On the trail we encountered a Boulder Metate used by prehistoric people for grinding seeds into food meal.





It was about 1.5 miles to the petroglyph site, dead ahead, to Hieroglyphic Canyon.



And we arrived.

The Petroglyphs are on the slick rock cliff overlooking a pool carved out of the rock by running water. None was running now, but it must be a waterfall when it does.

The main panel is just left of the young lady (not one of our Field Trippers) in the center of the photographs above and below. Many, perhaps most, of the rock faces in the photo contain petroglyphs, but they are hard to see at this distance.



More petroglyph panels are recognizable as we get closer.

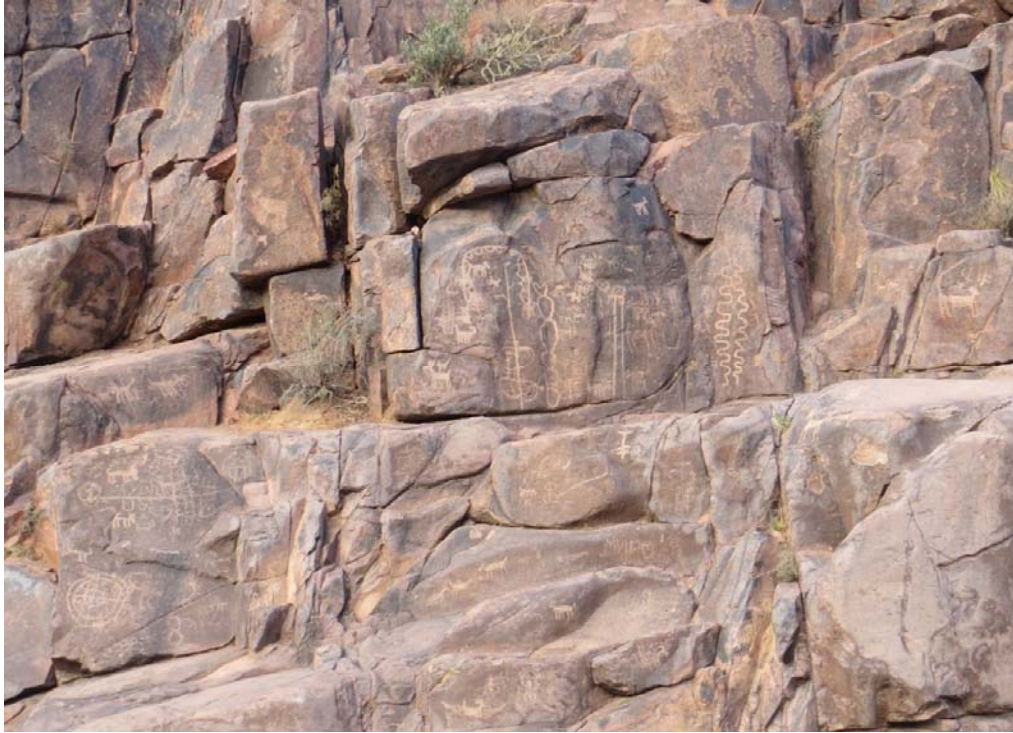


However, one of our Field Trippers wanted to get even closer. If the young lady could do it, so could he. And he did get a pretty close look.... a lot of mountain sheep.





A whole row of mountain sheep at the top.



Several Petroglyph Panels, with the one in the center shown closer below ...



The panel above appears to include several centipedes. The one at the far right has antennae. One theory is that centipedes were important due to their ability to disappear into rock cracks, making it possible for them to carry messages to the lower world. And there are perhaps several coyotes in this panel, along with at least one mountain sheep.



The panel above is below and to the left of the centipede panel (see photo before it). The circles and lines remind me of high school geometry class, but I have no idea what this is about.



Curiously, in the Petroglyph above, the figure with the rainbow headdress disappears when the panel is viewed from a slightly different direction in different light. See below.



Faint image of figure in rainbow headdress.



The March 2020 Rim Country Chapter Meeting Speaker Janine Hernbrode theorized that the vertical dumbbell figures, as in the above and below petroglyph panels, represented developing humans emerging from the lower world through cracks into the present upper world. She had a number of examples of such figures in chains changing to developed humans. Also, she proposed that the starburst figures may be flowers.





Another sunburst figure, possibly a flower.



Field Tripper takes a rest overlooking the petroglyphs.



Possible sprout figures. March 2020 Rim Country Chapter Meeting Speaker Janine Hernbrode theorized that prehistoric native farmers were interested in seed sprouts.



Field Tripper photographing the Hieroglyphic Canyon wall of petroglyph panels.



Field Tripper photographing a boulder panel that includes an antlered deer at top. Below it is one of the developing dumbbell people figures that Janine Hernbrode spoke about. Nearly all of the petroglyph panels face east, or northeast, but this one faces west.

The most common animal figure at Hiroglyphic Canyon is neither a deer or even a humanoid. It is a mountain sheep.





More sheep.



The curious connected stacked block figure with “eyes” has been labeled a “pipette” due to its supposed resemblance to a chemistry laboratory pipette. There are theories about what they represent, but no one really knows. However, they are uniquely associated with Hohokam Culture areas.



Above, Field Trippers resting before heading back to the trailhead, below.



It struck me that the environment at Hieroglyphic Canyon and Dixie Mine petroglyph sites were similar. Both were slick rock sites in narrow canyons with carved out rock pools still containing water long after the last rain, with adjacent waterfall configurations. From memory, it has been years since I visited the place, but this description seems the same for the White Tank Mountain Maricopa County Regional Park petroglyph site.



Petroglyph Site in Hieroglyphic Canyon



Petroglyph Site near Dixie Mine (Field Trips December 19, 2020, and January 8, 2021)