The Jumano Pictographs at Paint Rock, Texas (41CC1)

Tom Ashmore and C.A. Maedgen, West Texas Archeological Society January 2026

The Campbell family, long-time owners and preservationists of the quarter-mile-long limestone bluff covered with historic pictographs at Paint Rock, Texas, has long believed the pictographs were primarily created by the Jumano Indians of early Texas. The pictographs number over 1,500. Artifacts found along the riverbanks and in front of the site indicate that the site served as a camping stop as early as 1300 A.D. into the early 1700s. The Paint Rock pictographs were first documented in the 1930s by A.T. Jackson and rock art illustrator Forrest Kirkland. However, until now, archeologists have been unable to find evidence linking any of the myriad of geometric designs, animals, Indian depictions, and various solstice and equinox solar markers (Houston and Simonia) directly to the Jumano people. Our work with the Campbell family goes back 16 years, primarily photographing the pictographs and identifying a historic camping area at the far western end of the bluff. In this report, we worked with WTAS Member Bill Campbell to provide evidential support for what the family has believed all along. Our research does not identify the Jumano with all the pictographs on the bluff. However, the history of the Jumano in this area, along with the comparison of our recent identification of Jumano pictographs at Meyers Spring, Texas, provides strong evidence that many of the bluff's depictions are from this group of Indigenous people during the established period.

The story of the Lady In Blue and the 1629 meeting between the Spanish friars from New Mexico and the large Jumano gathering took place in the area now known as Caprock Canyon State Park. We previously reported this in our report entitled, The Jumano Picture Story of 'The Lady in Blue' at Meyers Spring, Texas.

At the time, the Jumano people had moved north to the summer buffalo-hunting grounds because of recent problems with a lack of game in their home territory.

In that report, we presented the pictograph story created by the Jumano people at Meyers Spring. (Ashmore) The images of the people celebrating after the healing of their sick and lame are very distinctive. These images are key to analyzing the Paint Rock pictographs in similar celebratory settings.

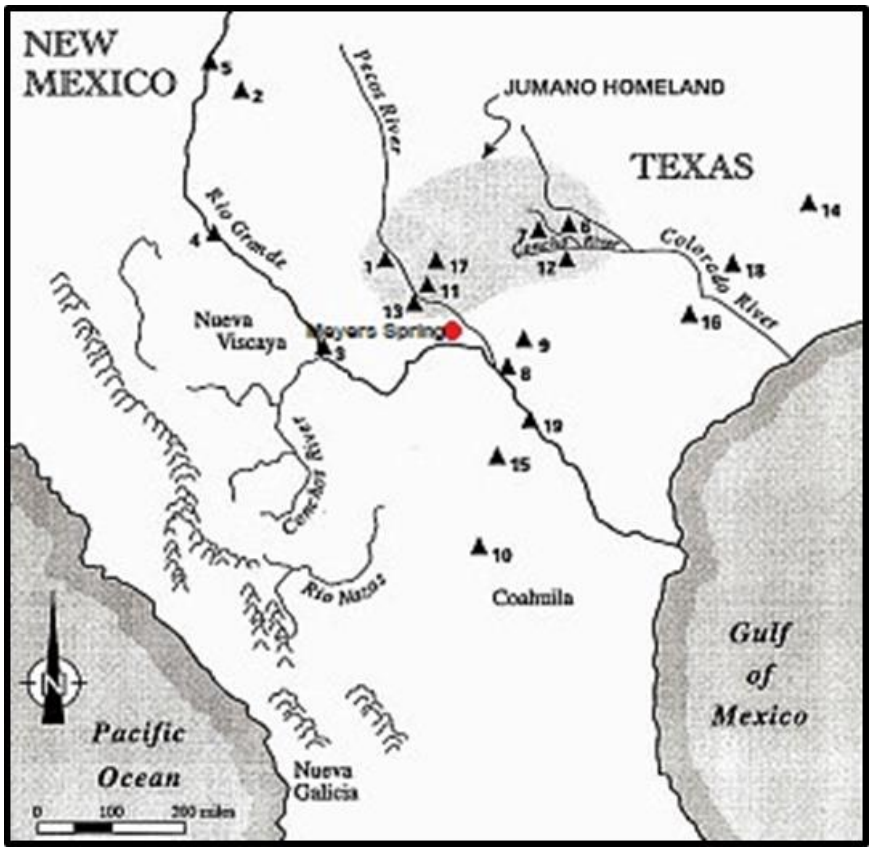
Meyers Spring Pictographs

History

In the early 1600s, the vast Jumano territory extended from below the Rio Grande River, south of the current location of Del Rio, and westward to the region beyond the Big Bend, Texas. There were multiple groups of Jumano, living in diverse areas. There were those along the Rio Grande River, from northern Mexico into northern New Mexico. This included a group living in the Coahuila area of northeastern Mexico. These people were living alongside other Indigenous groups and were mostly farmers. There was a Plains group who were mainly buffalo hunters and traders, traveling with the seasonal herd migrations. Finally, there were the Jumano living along the Texas Concho River and its tributaries. The Concho River Jumano's eastern border was the confluence of the Concho and Colorado Rivers. In the south, Meyers Spring is situated at the center of the known Jumano territory, and served as a stopping point for Jumano people traveling back and forth from the Coahuila area of northern Mexico.

The Concho River Jumano people enjoyed the clear, spring-fed creek tributaries and the Concho River, which provided an abundance of fish, mollusks, deer, and other wildlife. Their seasonal harvests of pecans were unsurpassed, and the buffalo came through every winter, providing them with meat and hides. They

were a blessed people, and because of their bounty, the Concho River had become the heart of the Jumano nation. They traded their pecans, pearls from the Concho River, buffalo skins, and their powerful bows, used to take down buffalo.



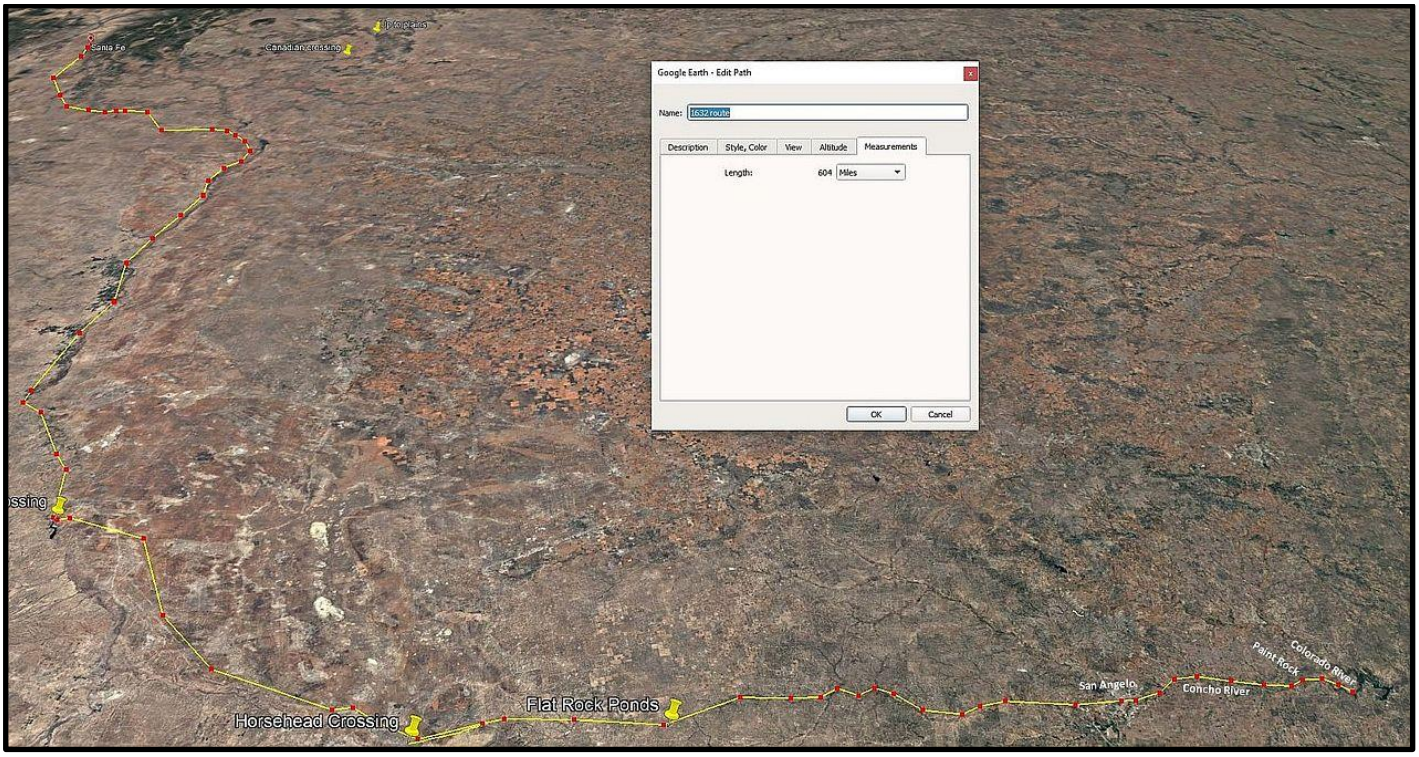
A map of the original homeland of the Jumano Indians based on early encounters with Spanish explorers. The Meyers Spring location is shown in red. (Texas Beyond History)

After the 1629 meeting, the Spanish friars in New Mexico planned to return to the Jumano territory. Their planning and approval took until 1632. However, the Jumano had returned to their primary Concho River area, and the travel route needed to be modified with the help of visiting Jumano. This travel would take them on the traditional trading route from Santa Fe down the Pecos River to what later became the Pecos River's Horsehead Crossing. From there, they made their way east until reaching the head of the Concho River and followed it to the mouth of the river, where it meets the Colorado River. That is where they found a Jumano's main river village. The Spanish documentation states the total travel route was 200 leagues, or 600 miles.

Between 1400 and 1600, the Spanish nautical league was equal to four Roman miles of 4,842 feet, making it 19,368 feet (5,903 meters or 3.1876 modern nautical miles). However, the accepted number of Spanish nautical leagues to a degree varied between 14 1/6 and 16 2/3, so in actual practice the length of a Spanish

nautical league was 25,733 feet (4.235 modern nautical miles) to 21,874 feet (3.600 modern nautical miles) respectively. (Spence)

A measurement using Google Earth's tool shows that the route took them precisely to the confluence of the Colorado and Concho Rivers, as stated in later Spanish expeditions to the same area.



Route from Santa Fe to the confluence of the Colorado and Concho Rivers

Two friars, Fray Pedro de Ortega and Fray Ascension de Zarate, departed on the long trek, guided by Jumano and accompanied by a small contingent of soldiers. Fray de Zarate did not remain long with the Jumano on the "Rio de las Nueces" or River of Nuts, which the Concho was so well known for. However, Fray de Ortega stayed for six months. He came to his final end there, possibly at the hands of the Jumano, rejecting his "apostolic zeal." (Hickerson) On their journey to the Jumano village, they had to pass the Paint Rocks, a regular stopping point for the Jumano, 15 miles upstream from the main village.

Although the Jumano remained Christian in their own unique form, probably due to the miraculous teachings of the Lady in Blue, it is telling that Spanish friars made no further attempts to make the trip to their home territory along the Concho River after Fray de Ortega. However, in 1650, a Spanish trading expedition did make its way from New Mexico to the confluence of the two rivers. They had an amicable trading relationship and stayed for six months.

A third expedition made its way to the heart of the Concho Jumano nation again in 1654. This time, it was a military contingent of 30 soldiers, at the Jumano's request for protection and to explore the area east of their nation's Colorado River border.

Thirty years later, in 1683, the famous Mendoza expedition made its way to the home of the Jumano nation. The Jumano petitioned for this expedition, stating that 10,000 souls were jointly submitting the request. The petitioning Jumano explicitly stated that their home was at the junction of the Rio del Norte (Colorado River) and the Rio del Nueces (Concho River). This time, the expedition started from El Paso, by way of the Rio Grande to La Junta de los Rios (near modern Presidio, TX, and Ojinaga, Mexico), and then up the Pecos to meet their Jumano guides. According to their report, the distance was again 200 leagues. The general distance via the Mendoza route is 550 miles from El Paso. This breaks down to about 2.75 miles per league. In New Spain around 1680, a Spanish league was generally about 2.6 miles, though its exact length could vary slightly depending on local definitions of the vara. Thus, this distance is close to the projected route mileage.

After the Mendoza expedition, the Jumano nation began to come apart due to Apache encroachment. There is no definite period for the Jumano's relinquishing their territory. It is generally considered that starting around 1700, a slow but steady period began of various groups either moving farther south, being killed in battle, or being absorbed into the Apache tribes moving into the territory.

This very short synopsis provides insight into the few times that Spanish expeditions passed Paint Rock over a period of about 55 years. However, the Jumano themselves had been passing this famous formation for hundreds of years. This information is important as we look to the pictographs for indications in the pictures that we can analyze to find direct ties to these people. Additionally, their drawing techniques depicting their people, which correspond to the studied depictions at Meyers Spring, can now be used to help make these analytic determinations.

The Pictographs

Two particular locations on the Paint Rock bluff stand out as meeting the criteria for our comparison analysis with the Meyers Spring pictographs. One area of pictograph panels depicts males, and the other area is primarily female, with a few males. The depictions in both areas are similar to the pictographs at Meyers Spring.

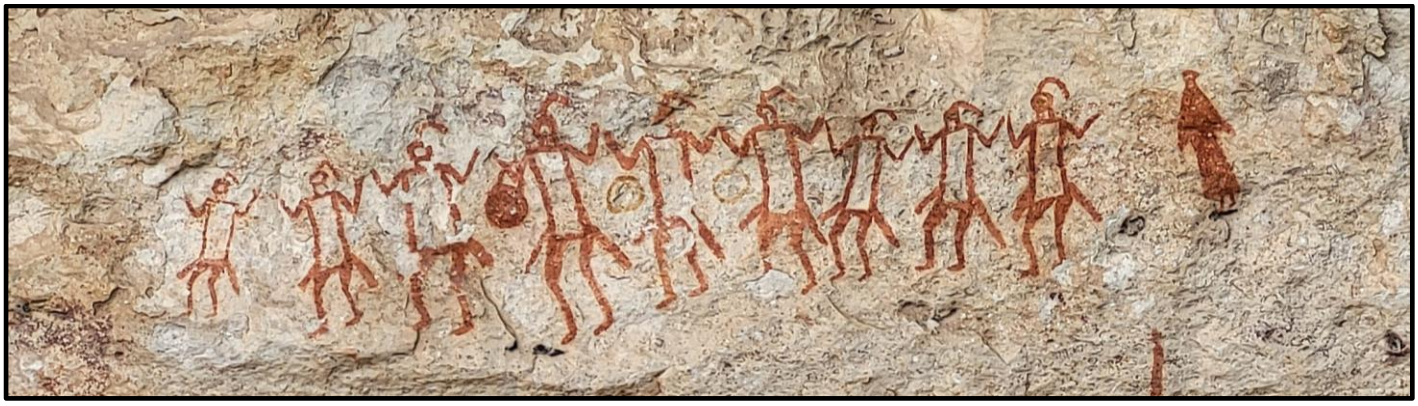
Area one shows three males. The depictions were placed above multiple rows of tally marks, some in red and some in black.

The male to the right appears to have a drum looped on his arm. Their ears are enlarged, indicating large earring decorations. They have the hair loop at the top of their heads, indicative of the Jumano tradition.

Overall image of entire area of pictographs

Close up of human figures and tally marks

Paint Rock Celebration Dancers



Meyers Spring Celebration Dancers

Carrying the drum continues today in Puebloan/Jumano ceremonies. The hair loop on top of the head was a well-known hairstyle among historic Jumano males.

Traditional ceremonial drum

Jumano Hair Loop

Many Jumano men in the 1600s were described as wearing large earrings, and this was notable to Spanish observers. Spanish explorers, missionaries, and chroniclers from the early mid-17th century repeatedly described Jumano males as wearing large ear ornaments, often made of shell, stone, bone, or turquoise. Having pierced ears, sometimes stretched to hold sizable pendants. One of the most cited accounts comes from Juan de Oñate's expedition (1598) and later missionaries such as Fray Alonso de Benavides, who remarked on the Jumano's distinctive appearance—especially their earrings and body decoration, which differed from neighboring groups. Among the Jumano (a trade-oriented people), earrings were not unusual or marginal—they were part of normal male dress. Large earrings were common across many Indigenous groups in the Southwest and Plains, so the Jumano fit into a broader regional pattern.

One postulation regarding the tally markers below the figures is that they are related to a calendric calendar to track the periods of solstice and equinox. The theory is that this location provided a platform for viewing the horizon from a horizon notch (the western end of the bluff) and subsequent sunrises. By one count, the section of marks just below the figures reported a total of 47. By noting the first observed sunrise at the horizon notch on November 6th, 47 sunrises would take it to the winter solstice day. (Houston and Simonia) This theory is plausible. However, it does not account for the many tally marks that extend both above and along the wall on both sides of the section with the 47 marks.

In total, there are 159 – 160 tally marks across the entire area of this pictograph site. This number cannot be precisely determined due to weather deterioration and graffiti in many places. Above the 47 is another red row of 36. To the far right, there are 46 that include black marks along with the red. To the left, there is a line of 50 that stretches around a 90-degree angle.

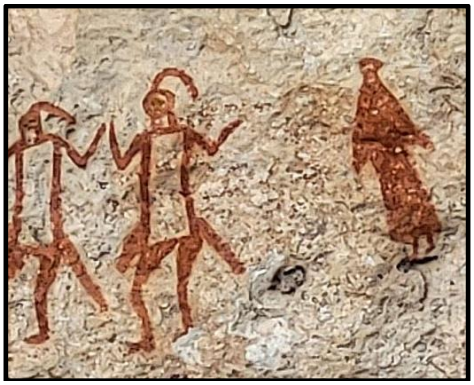
Markers above and continuing to left of the 47 counted markers

Black markers to far left (some placed on top of other weathered red images)

Black and red markers to right

Markers to far right
(Note that dissolved calcium carbonate from weathering is now covering much of this section)

Another possibility for these markers is a pronouncement of important events that took place at this location, and how many people may have participated. In the image above, one figure may represent a Spanish friar, similar to one on the wall at Meyers Spring.



Meyers Spring Spanish Friar

Paint Rock image

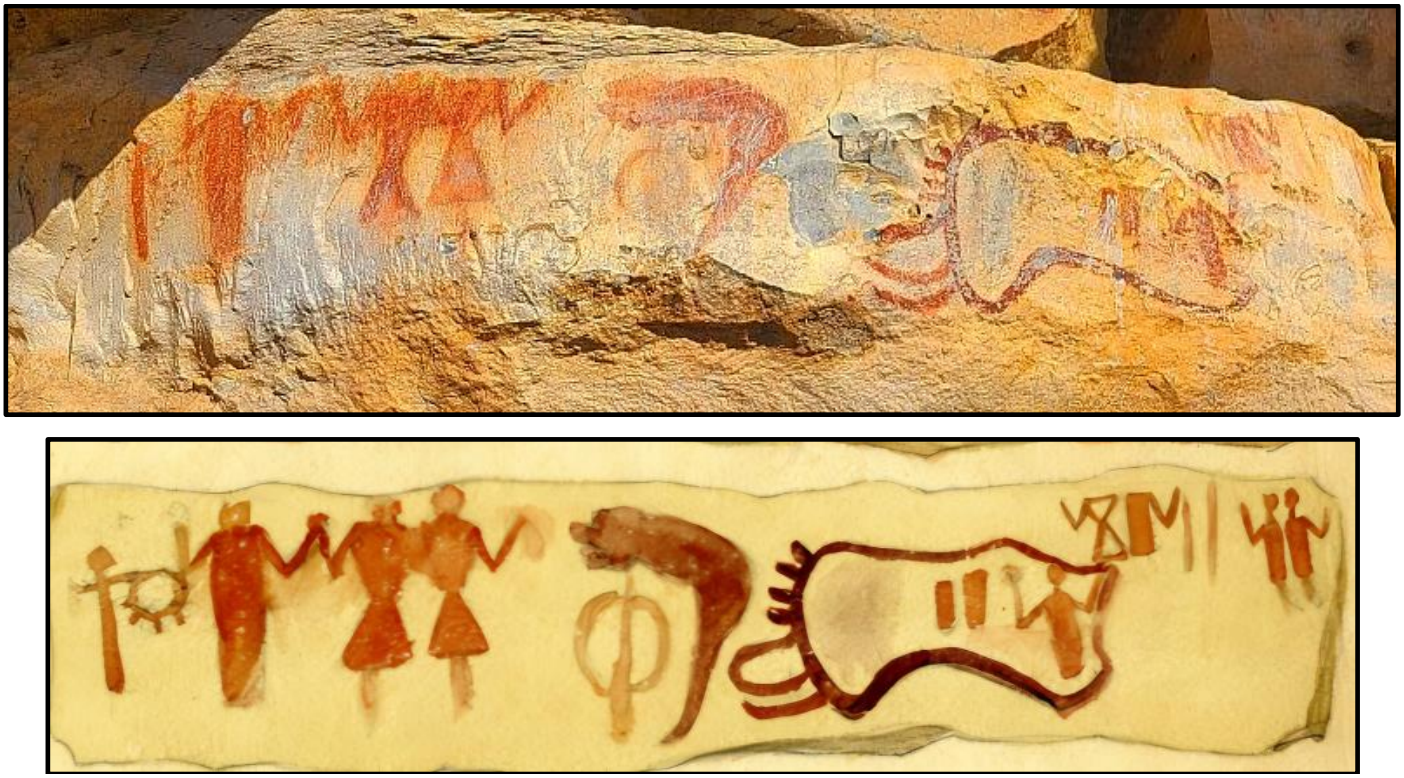
If this is the case, the black markers may indicate that Europeans (Spanish) were noted during some of the expeditions to the downstream Jumano home, as reported in historical documents. As with all pictographs, everything is interpretation. Thus, the solar marker theory and the pronouncement of important events and participants are both possible. Or, it could even be a third option that we have yet to understand.

The second area is 60 yards further down the bluff, at the far west end. This area has two panels that appear to be telling female stories, and one solar marker panel above them. In this case, we have the benefit of Forrest Kirkland's 1935 drawings to see the details that are slowly fading.

The lower panel appears to tell a story of an important female's death. The other females appear to be honoring her passing with ceremony. There appears to be one male included. This may be a shaman assisting in the ceremony. An upside-down figure represents death. This is common throughout pictographs in the Southwest.

Forrest Kirkland Drawing

The panel just above appears to tell a completely different story, but also a female one. This story needs the Forrest Kirkland drawing to understand the intended meaning.



Forrest Kirkland Drawing

This panel appears to tell the story of the blessings of pregnancy and the upcoming birth. In the upper section, the left images show a side-by-side view of a woman and a man. There are no heads or feet. The woman only has one right arm, and the man only has one left arm, representing half of a woman and half of a man. What they create is a baby. Below them is an image of a person (baby) in a womb. The two marks probably represent the essences of the woman and man that create the baby. There are two lines to the right of the man/woman image. This represents the division between our world and the spirit world. The two entities to the right represent those in the spirit world from which the baby has come. To the left of the womb image is an image of a woman bending over and vomiting. This represents morning sickness, which indicates the pregnancy. We know this is a human image by comparing it with another similar image in the bluff, which is in a similar position and clearly shows it is a person.

Separate image of a bent-over woman

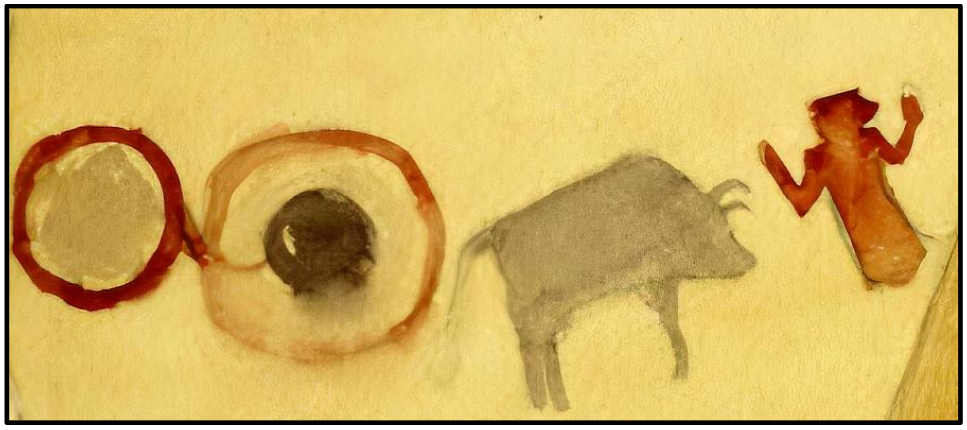
To the left in the image are two women, one man, and possibly a child with a drum, celebrating the pregnancy.

The hourglass-like shape of the female in these panels can also be compared to the Lady In Blue depiction at Meyers Spring. In fact, this shape helps to validate the analysis of the Lady In Blue at that site. In that case, the Jumano were attempting to depict a spirit-like female entity, shown here guiding the expedition to the grand gathering of the Jumano Nation in northern Texas.

Meyers Spring Lady In Blue Pictograph

Puebloan women in ceremonial dress and dance

There is a solar marker panel above the two female pictograph panels. This is a well-known marker, studied since its discovery around 2009. It creates a sunlight frame animation, crossing from one circle to the other on both solstice and equinox days. It is probably the reason for the nearby placement of the two female panels. Once again, Forrest Kirkland's 1935 drawing helps to understand the possible intention and meaning behind this creation.

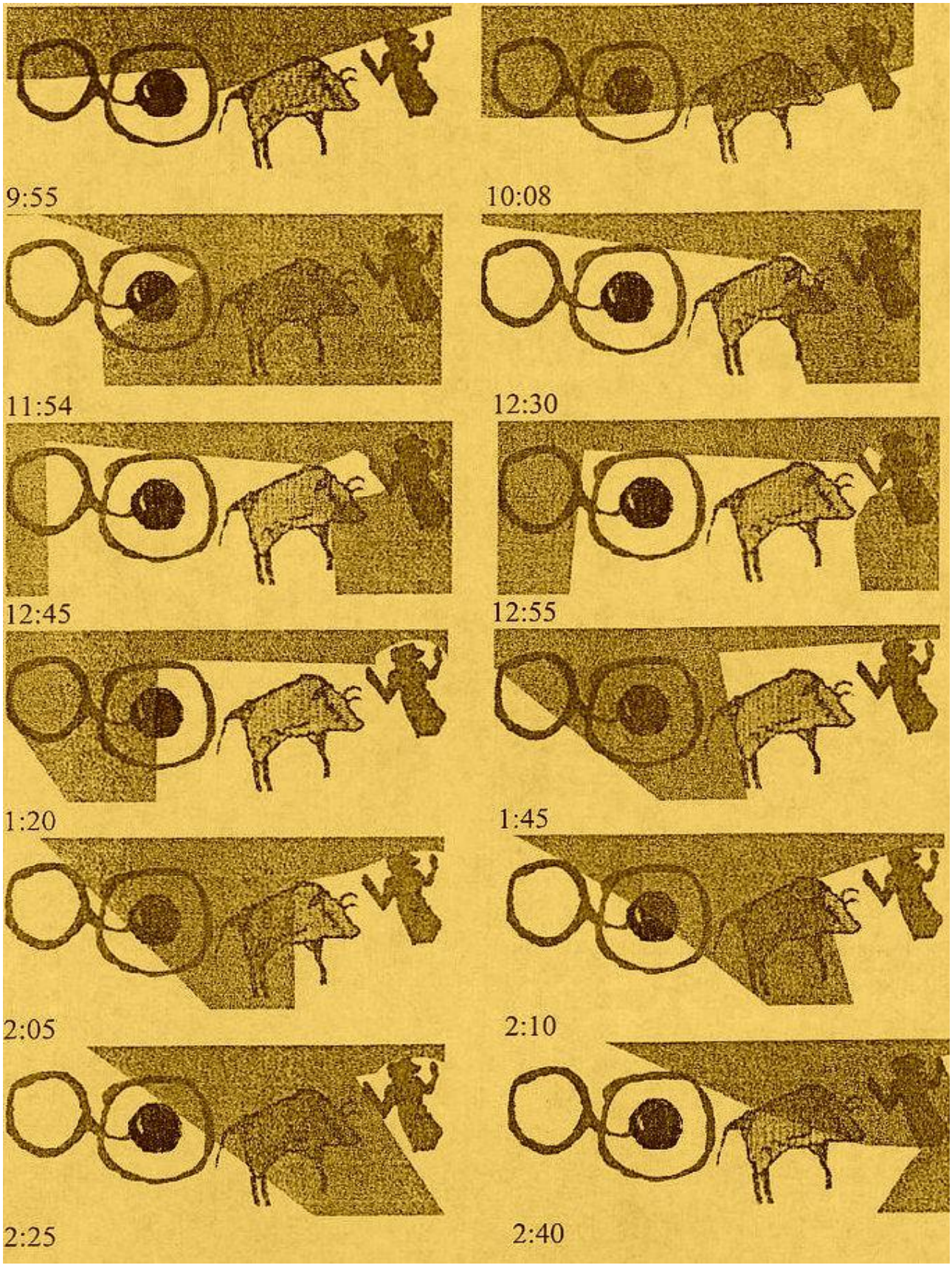


Forrest Kirkland Drawing

We discovered a critical item about this pictograph that was not known until our recent visit. Although the paint is faded, you can see that the circle on the left was originally painted with a small white circle at the center, surrounded by black paint. The circle on the right has a black circle that was surrounded by white paint. That makes these two circles opposites.

The small white circle with surrounding black paint is visible in these two images. The left image was taken during the Winter Solstice, and the right photo was taken during the equinox.

The design likely symbolizes the duality and balance between light and darkness (or day and night), reflecting broader Indigenous cosmological themes of harmony, cycles, and renewal. The left circle—with its white center surrounded by black—may represent the dominance of darkness encroaching on light, akin to the shortening days leading into winter. The right circle, inversely colored with a black center surrounded by white, could signify the return of light overtaking darkness, marking the lengthening days after the turning point.



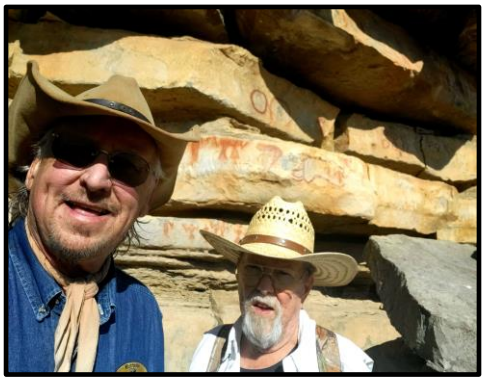
(images by Bill Yeates)

The bull is now thoroughly washed out, but was visible when Kirkland made his drawing. We interpret it as a bull rather than a buffalo because of its long tail. A buffalo has a tail half the length as the drawing, which the Indian buffalo hunters would have known. Thus, we are analyzing this to be a bullfight depiction. Bullfighting began in New Spain as early as 1529, spreading from Mexico City northward as territories were acquired in the northern region. Bullfighting spread into northern New Spain, with the establishment of mining settlements in the mid-to-late 1500s. The earliest reliable written documentation in the northern provinces dates from the late 1500s to the early 1600s. Bullfights were held in the Jumano area of northeastern Mexico during town festivals as early as the 1600s. Documentation is sparse, but one actual reference documentation for Saltillo, Mexico, comes from a 1712 edict of bullfighting conducted in the town square. Saltillo is number 10 on the map of early Jumano settlements on page 3 of this report. The experience of viewing a bullfight likely came from an event in that region.

A similar animation of sunlight framing the circles occurs in both drawings, crossing from the bull to the bullfighter, creating a similarity in the story, with the changing of winter's darkness, symbolized by the bull, to the return of the earth to man, symbolized by the bullfighter.

Conclusion

The road to the main Jumano village on the Concho River ran right past the Paint Rock bluffs. It is reasonable to assume that most of the pictographs were created by these people. However, this is the first evidence of another Jumano location and its pictographs could be compared and analyzed to be using the same drawing techniques. These human-form images are unique among human figures at Texas pictograph sites, increasing the likelihood that the same group of people produced them. Jumano of the plains and Concho River were hunters and traders, traveling far and wide. They were also a spiritual people, both before and after the Lady In Blue's Christianization. This is reflected in their ceremonial drawings. These revelations should help to find similar human-figure drawings at additional sites.



Tom Ashmore and C.A. Maedgen

Acknowledgements

We want to thank Bill Campbell for his assistance and collaboration on this project. Bill Martinez Acosta, a WTAS member and Jumano spiritual and cultural leader, also collaborated in the pictograph interpretations addressed in this report. We would also like to honor Bill Yeates for his extensive archeoastronomy work on this site in 2002.

1938- 2022

Resources

Ashmore, Tom

2025 *The Jumano Picture Story of 'The Lady in Blue' at Meyers Spring, Texas* https://assets.zyrosite.com/AzGE74rQ66UMXrKb/the-jumano-picture-story-in-pictographs-at-meyers-spring-QoHyIMBSq1HMA50N.pdf

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