

FIRST DRAFT

# Archaic Indians and Utes left messages in Shavano Valley

Perhaps as early as 3,000 years ago, native people of western Colorado began pecking messages in the Dakota sandstone of Shavano Valley, west of present-day Montrose.

They continued to peck out drawings of animals, animal tracks and symbols of unknown meaning for many centuries. They used cracks and



BOB SILBERNAGEL

holes in the rocks to connect their drawings, perhaps creating maps of

today's world or connections to the underworld.

The petroglyphs are on private land, protected by a nonprofit trust. To view them, visitors must make an appointment to hire a guide through the Ute Museum in Montrose.

We don't know what became of those early people, who were different from the Fremont Indians who lived mostly farther north and west. But we do know that sometime in the past 1,000 years, a new group arrived — the people we call Ute Indians today.

They, too, found Shavano Valley a great place to stop, obtain water, hunt and leave messages. Hundreds of the petroglyphs at Shavano Valley are of more recent design, created by Utes in the past few hundred years.

In fact, Shavano Valley is named for Tabeguache Ute Chief Shavano, a contemporary of Chief Ouray. He is said to have made his home in what's now called the Shavano Valley until 1881, when he and most other Utes in Colorado were moved to reservations in north-eastern Utah.

Shavano Valley was attractive to both archaic Indians and Utes for a number of reasons. First, it is sunny and relatively warm in the winter, and there was abundant game nearby and grass for Ute horses, sheep and cattle.

An artesian spring near the south end of the valley provided a constant, reliable source of water. And the valley sits about a third of the way between the Uncompahgre River Valley, where many Utes wintered, and the top of the Uncompahgre Plateau, which was a prime summer hunting region.

The petroglyphs at Shavano Valley have been recognized by white settlers and studied by them for more than a century, with a variety of stories put forth about their meaning.

Sydney Jocknick, who lived and worked at the Los Piños Reservation in the Uncompahgre Valley before the Utes were removed, mentioned the Shavano Valley petroglyphs in his book, "Early Days on the Western Slope of Colorado."

He said a Boston professor named F.K. Porter had deciphered one small part of the drawings from a photograph he had seen.

"According to Prof. Porter, the ancient dwellers of Shavano Valley had a war over a woman," Jocknick wrote. "The chiefs of three tribes loved her, and when the contest had ended all had been killed, including the princess, who had been hit in the eye by a fine-pointed



Photos by BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel

Ute Museum docent Russ Barr points to a confusing array of symbols at the Shavano Valley site.



This petroglyph may show a hunter throwing an atlatl, with the line depicting the spear's trajectory.

arrow."

There are few human figures in the Shavano Valley panels, and it's not known what Professor Porter viewed that led to his conclusions about an Indian princess.

One, clearly male figure, has been interpreted more recently as a hunter throwing an atlatl, the prehistoric spear-throwing device.

A 1907 interpretation of the Shavano Valley rock art by an Omaha expert — who claimed the drawings told the story of a long journey and a battle between warring tribes — was declared to be "the rankest fraud" by a Washington archaeologist that same year.

Interpretations of the Shavano Valley rock art these days don't claim such elaborate stories, but they are fascinating, nonetheless.

Montrose archaeologist and anthropologist Carol Patterson spent considerable time with the late Ute elder Clifford Duncan of Roosevelt, Utah, viewing and interpreting the Shavano Valley rock art and other art in western Colorado.

At the Ute Museum, visitors can purchase "Shavano Valley Petroglyphs Trail Guide," which includes Patterson's explanations for some of the most important panels, based on her discussions with Duncan.

But even today, there is debate over exactly what is



This panel shows several bears, including one that may have just left its cave. On the right is a drawing believed to be a map of the Shavano Valley.

depicted in each of the panels and what they mean.

Utes have long revered bears, and their spring bear dance reflects that. Several bears are depicted on one large panel in Shavano Valley, including one climbing a tree with tracks leading from a crevice in the rock. This drawing and tracks "may indicate the bear's emergence from the underworld or hibernation in the spring," Patterson wrote.

Nearby on the same rock is a seemingly abstract drawing that Patterson said is actually a map of the Shavano Valley and nearby areas. Her trail guide includes a superimposed photo of that drawing on a modern map of the Shavano Valley, and they fit well.

There are also much earlier petroglyphs on the same panel, from the Archaic period that ran from 1,000 B.C. to 1,000 A.D. More recent Ute drawings have been placed nearby or even on top of the older ones.

There are some petroglyphs on boulders on the valley floor at Shavano, but most are higher up on the sandstone ridge. In one place, the trail to those ridge drawings passes through a narrow crevice in a large rock. Inside that crevice are multiple, hard-to-see archaic petroglyphs.

The passage through that crevice may have represented

to the ancients a passage from one level of the cosmos as they viewed it, to a higher level.

In addition to the Indian drawings, there are numerous inscriptions from early pioneer visitors to the site, from the late 19th and early 20th century.

It takes an hour and a half to two hours to view all the petroglyphs at the Shavano Valley site, guided by an expert such as our docent, Russ Barr. The trail is treacherous in places. Hiking sticks, good shoes and a reasonable ability to negotiate rugged terrain are all recommended.

But the experience is well worth it to get a glimpse of what earlier residents of the Western Slope thought important.

To arrange a tour of the Shavano Valley site, call the Ute Museum at 970-249-3098. But be advised: There are only a few docents available to guide groups, and it may take several days or weeks to schedule a trip.

Sources: "Shavano Valley Petroglyphs Trail Guide," by Urraca Productions; trail docent Russ Barr; Zebulon Miracle, historian at Gateway Canyons Resort; "Early Days on the Western Slope of Colorado," by Sydney Jocknick.

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## BLOTTER

COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

### Stabbing attempt alleged

A 28-year-old woman was arrested for alleged domestic violence last week.

Deputies responded to the home in the 100 block of Vista Grande Road on Thursday after being dispatched to the address on a report of a suicidal subject.

According to the arrest affidavit, they found Casey Mathis naked, observed knives scattered on the floor and interviewed the man who called 911, who said she had been drinking and he thought she was going to

hang herself.

The man also reported that Mathis wouldn't let him leave, tried to stab him with a butcher knife but gouged the wall instead, hurt his hand that he had surgery on recently and also punched him in the eye.

Mathis was booked into the Mesa County Jail on suspicion of felony menacing, false imprisonment, third-degree assault, obstructing a peace officer, criminal mischief, domestic violence and harassment.

Mesa County Judge Craig Henderson issued a \$5,000 cash-only bond for Mathis on Friday.

According to the Mesa County Sheriff's Office:

■ Tasha Dixon, 25, was arrested Friday in the 2900 block of Orchard Avenue, on suspicion of criminal charges including drug violations. Dixon also had eight warrants for her arrest from the Grand Junction Police Department, Mesa County Sheriff's Office and Colorado State Patrol.

The Grand Junction Police Department did not release blotter information Sunday.

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## Snowboarder, 20, dies at Snowmass

ASPEN — A 20-year-old snowboarder died after attempting a jump in a terrain park at Snowmass in western Colorado.

The man, whose name and hometown have not been released, crashed while trying to jump at the Makaha Terrain Park on Sunday morning. Aspen Skiing Co. spokesman Jeff Hanle says ski patrollers found the man unresponsive with no pulse and were not able to revive him. No other information was released.

The Daily Sentinel (ISSN 1445-8962)  
Printed editions published Wednesday thru Sunday, electronic editions published every morning at 734 S. Seventh Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501.  
Periodical Postage paid at Grand Junction, CO.  
Carrier home delivery prices: 13 weeks - \$65.00, 26 weeks - \$130.00, 52 weeks - \$260.00.  
Weekend delivery packages: Wednesday thru Sunday - \$244.40, Friday thru Sunday - \$197.60.  
Saturday & Sunday - \$163.80, Sunday only - \$163.80.  
Weekend Delivery includes the following date in 2019: Nov. 28.  
Single Copy: \$1.00 daily and \$2.00 Sunday.  
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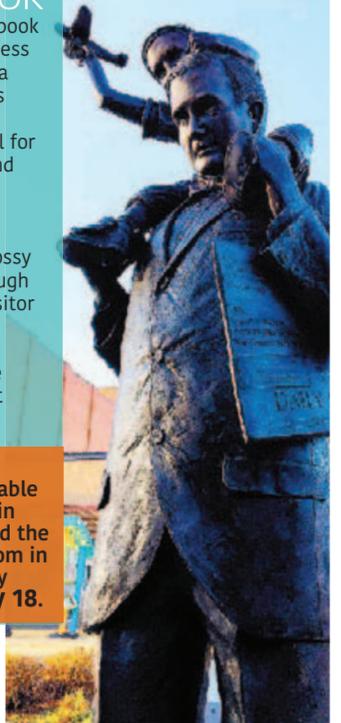
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