

Bears in Northwestern Plains Rock Art

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INTRODUCTION

- Bears are prominent in the rock art of Montana and Wyoming, but they are not the most numerous.
 - ✓ Bears are portrayed as complete animals, head only, paws only, and combined with human figures.
 - ✓ When portrayed as the entire animal, many are over a meter long.
 - ✓ They are frequently shown with exaggerated claws to ensure they are not mistaken for another four-legged animal.
 - ✓ Bear tracks also often have extended claws, although the rest of the paw is usually realistic in size.
- Definitions.
 - ✓ *Paw* represents a foot or footprint (track) not connected to the rest of the body.
 - ✓ *Body* is the portrayal of the head or face as well as the complete bear.
- Data Collection.
 - ✓ Counts of bears in the rock art of Wyoming and Montana are based on fieldwork and file and literature searches.



BEAR IMAGERY CATEGORIES FOR ORGANIZATION AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

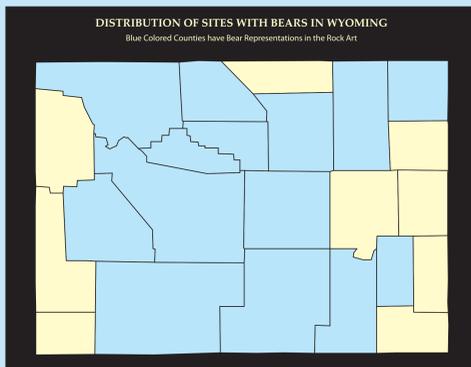
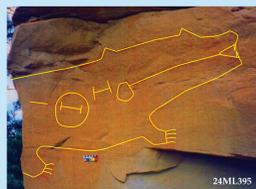
Bear motifs are separated by bodies and paws into categories pertaining to appearance based primarily on perspective, morphological variation, and method of application. Body and paw categories are mutually exclusive. Occasionally bear paws are made in deliberate detail to distinguish the front and back feet. When this is done the front foot is made more rounded or squared on the heel, and the rear foot is more triangular.



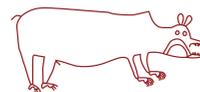
DATING

- The only absolute date for a bear in the region is from a Dual Perspective petroglyph at the Bear Shield Site near the Montana / Wyoming state line (Loendorf 1992). The cation-ratio date suggests an age of less than 1000 years, or after A.D. 950, during the Late Prehistoric Period.
- Superposition and seriation of central Montana pictographs indicate that paint kinds and colors are temporally the most consistent and sensitive attributes for chronological change. Thus, the relative chronology was applied to petroglyphs of the same forms. The resulting chronology:
 1. Outlined paws (earliest).
 2. Solid Paws and Small Bears (middle).
 3. Large Dual Perspective and Interior Line Bears (latest).

Paws are usually not seen near or around horses suggesting that they were declining in rock art by the early 1700s. By the Protohistoric Period rock art scenes increasingly contain more weapons and acts of violence and fewer scenes associated with ritual, ceremony, and shamanism. Weapon evidence supports a pre-contact date for most bear rock art in Wyoming, with bears less important during the later Biographic tradition.



BODY FORMS



Dual Perspective. Bears with their body and head drawn in profile, but both eyes face the viewer, thus producing a dual perspective for the animal. The profile often emphasizes the snout, mouth, and teeth, while usually both ears are also present.



Interior Line. Bears are portrayed in profile and contain lines inside the torso that range from a single heart line to complex interior designs. In most cases of interior line bears, the face is detailed in single perspective only (if at all), but there are usually two ears if the head is shown.



Solid. Bears have a completely painted or pecked body shown in profile. The face is detailed in single perspective (if detailed at all), and there are often two ears. However, there are no interior lines or other features.



Outlined. Bears have a body boundary shown in profile, with no interior lines or other features. The face, if detailed, is done so in single perspective only, although there are often two ears.



Mask. A frontal view of a bear's face only, apparently intended either as a portrait or as a representation of a mask.

PAW FORMS



Solid Realistic. Paws are either drawn in liquid paint or fully pecked. They can be triangular, rectangular, or square pads with rounded corners. If dots representing toes are included, they are placed a short distance from the distal end of the pad. If claws are shown, they are drawn as curved or straight lines either a short distance from the distal end of the pad or attached to the pad. Claws can range from short to very long.



Outlined Realistic. Paws are triangular or rectangular pad boundary designations with slightly rounded corners. In some cases one or two lines are placed across the paw about one-third distance from the distal end. Claws are usually attached to the pad and are slightly to dramatically curved, but they may be short straight lines.



Nonstandard. Paws have either the pad or the claws distorted or abnormally shaped. Pads may be compressed or just partially present, and claws may be somewhat stylized to not at all realistic. The figures are either solid or outlined. In some cases nonstandard paws are hard to distinguish from human hands or feet. This ambiguity appears intentional since it occurs in widely scattered geographic areas and fits well with the bear / human shamanism beliefs of several cultures.



Middle Archaic Period 3000 B.C.	Late Archaic Period 1000 B.C. - A.D. 100	Late Prehistoric Period A.D. 500 - A.D. 1100	Protohistoric Period A.D. 1750	Historic Period A.D. 1800
Orange Liquid	Red Liquid	Black Liquid	Black Crayon	
Medium-Light Red Liquid	Dark Red Liquid	Yellow Liquid	Red Crayon	
		Purple Liquid	Yellow Crayon	
			White Liquid	
		Outlined Liquid Paws		
		Solid Liquid Paws		
		Solid Liquid Bears		
		Dual Perspective Bears		
		Interior Line Bears		
		Face Mask		
		AVONLEA		
		PELICAN LAKE - BESANT		

Seriation chart for paints and bear categories.



24RB401 (Deer Medicine Rocks) has an unusual bear scene that includes an arrow through the bear, a nearby tipi and gun, and a surrendering warrior. This is one of the few bears associated with biographic rock art.

OCCURRENCE & DISTRIBUTION

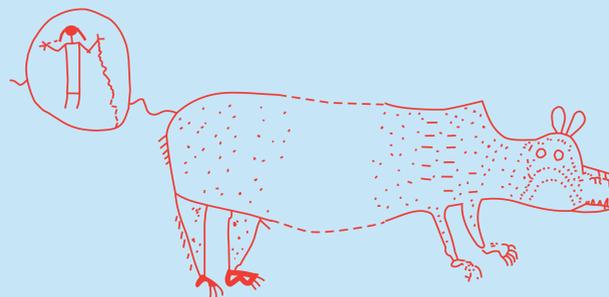
- Montana:** Of the 733 rock art sites recorded statewide in Montana, bear imagery is reported from only 70 sites, or about 10%.
- Wyoming:** Of the 430 rock art sites recorded statewide in Wyoming, bear imagery is reported from only 40 sites, or about 9%.
- Montana:** 71 paws; 59 bodies.
- Wyoming:** 103 paws; 32 bodies.
- Continental Divide:** Bear imagery occurs on both sides of the Continental Divide in Wyoming. All bear imagery in Montana occurs east of the Continental Divide even though other animals are common motifs in the western part of the state, and many bears live there today.
- Bears are most numerous in central Montana rock art where animal figures are infrequently portrayed in the island mountain environments. In Wyoming bears are in both plains and foothills landscapes and are often on panels with other figures, including animals that do not appear to be directly related, unlike panels in much of Montana.



Bear Shaman at Recognition Rock (24RB165).



Outlined bear with Dual Perspective at Joliet Site (24CB402).



BEAR FUNCTIONS

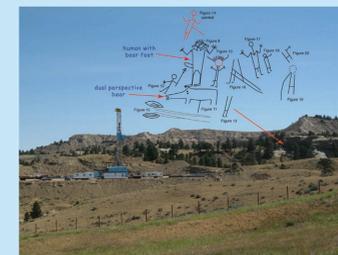
Bears were associated with **POWER** in the northern hemisphere.

- ✓ **OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE SUPERNATURAL**
 - Photos and drawings of shamans in full bear costumes were made by early Europeans.
 - Occur on integrated rock art panels with powerlines and shamans.
 - Rock art depictions of a combination bear-shaman usually have a human body with attached bear attributes such as feet, claws, and/or teeth.
- ✓ **ASSOCIATED WITH RITUAL**
 - Ethnographically associated with medicine bundles.
- ✓ **POSSIBLE CLAN SYMBOLS**
- ✓ **PLACED ON SHIELDS FOR PROTECTION BY VIRTUE OF THEIR POWER**
- ✓ **RARELY ASSOCIATED WITH HUNTING PARAPHERNALIA**

The presence of other figures on rock art panels with bears may have been part of the overall power of the message on the rocks rather than commemorating an individual event or ceremony, such as a vision by a seeker of a spirit helper.



Shield figure with bear feet at the Carboni Site (24BH404).



Bear below human with bear feet at the Dangling Legs Site (48NA3535).

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