

Malcolm Rogers and Rock Art Research in the Far Southwest

Ken Hedges

Abstract

The pioneer archaeologist Malcolm J. Rogers had rock art as one of his many interests. Over a span of more than three decades, he provided records of numerous rock art sites, ranging from the painted mazes of Rancho Bernardo in San Diego County to desert archaic petroglyphs along the lower Gila River in Arizona, providing some of our earliest records of significant rock art in the region. This paper offers an overview of his contributions to the study of rock art in the Far Southwest.

Introduction

Beginning in 1920, Malcolm Rogers, later joined by his father Frederick S. Rogers, began assembling information on rock art in the far southwestern portion of the United States. Unlike many archaeologists of his time, he considered rock art and related topics as an important part of the archaeological record, deserving study as much as any other part of prehistory. References to rock art are found throughout his field notes, and selected panels often are included in his photo documentation of desert sites. His descriptions of rock art sites incorporate information from his ethnographic sources, reflecting the strong ethnographic component of his research most famously revealed by his study of Yuman pottery making.

Rogers did not record any sites in detail. For example, his repeated visits and lengthy sojourns at White Tanks in southwestern Arizona resulted in only a few photos of this extensive petroglyph site. However, for the desert rock art of the Far Southwest, it is clear that Rogers had definite ideas on style and chronology that

conform in broad outline to what we know today, with the exception of considerations of time depth. In an era before radiocarbon dating and a true understanding of the antiquity of desert cultures, Rogers often assigned rock art to early, middle, and late Yuman time periods, only occasionally suggesting an earlier Archaic context. Only a detailed compilation of rock art comments in his field notes will enable us to fully synthesize his understanding of the rock art.

Methods

Rogers followed the standard practices of his day with regard to rock art. Selected panels were photographed, and freehand field sketches were used to record design elements, generally presented out of panel context as collections of isolated motifs, in keeping with a prevailing emphasis on element comparisons. Many of the major sites represented in the field notes are well known today, and some, like the extensive petroglyph field at McCoy Spring west of Blythe (McCarthy 1993) or the petroglyphs of Black Canyon north of Barstow (Turner 1994), have been recorded in detail, so we know that the photographic record in the Rogers files comprises only a small sample (Figure 1). This is to be expected; unlike modern rock art practices where detailed recording of all the rock art in complete panel context is the norm, Rogers was including rock art as part of a total archaeological investigation with limited resources. Most archaeologists of his era—and many still today—ignored rock art altogether or dismissed it as insignificant since it was perceived as not lending itself to useful analysis.

To his credit, Rogers did not chalk petroglyphs, but for pictographs he used a technique guaranteed to make contemporary conservation-oriented rock art specialists recoil in horror: he painted over the designs to emphasize them for photographic recording. We do not know what he used, but it apparently was a fugitive, water-soluble paint such as tempera, and no discernible trace remains today, indicating that the paint was removed or, less likely, weathered away. To put this practice in context, consider that the ethic of the day was to get the data and that Rogers was working with limited time and resources in an era before color film, when faint, weathered pictographs did not show in black and white photos. His most extensive use of the technique was to record panels in Rancho Bernardo, home of a major and previously unrecognized style in southern California.

There is a note from the 1940s referring to a rock art manuscript in preparation, but no manuscript has been discovered. Most of the sketches in the files were checked off with penciled annotations that they had been traced, but as with the manuscript, these tracings are nowhere to be found. We will never know what form a resulting study may have taken, but it appears that the presentation would at least have followed the standards of the day, supplementing photos

with collections of design element sketches. The field notes, sketches, and photographs remain as a largely untapped source of documentation for rock art in the Far Southwest.

Changing Condition of Rock Art Panels

Historic photos in the Rogers collection serve another important function, the documentation of changes in the condition of those rock art panels. For Travertine Point in the Colorado Desert on the western shoreline of ancient Lake Cahuilla, the Rogers files give us an unblemished look (Figure 2) at significant panels that have suffered the indignities of easy access and rampant vandalism.

For the well-known Colorado Desert site of Corn Springs, the Rogers collection documents the petroglyphs (Figure 3) as they appeared before a massive rock fall. This catastrophe was most likely caused by an earthquake of unknown date.

At Palo Verde Point south of Blythe, an important panel documented by Rogers has entirely disappeared (Figure 4). Before-and-after aerial photos courtesy of Caltrans indicate that the panel was removed from the



Figure 1. Petroglyphs at McCoy Spring, Riverside County. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.



Figure 2. Maze-like petroglyph at Travertine Point, Imperial County. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.

site shortly after paved Highway 78 was completed, providing convenient access.

At Indian Hill in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, the Rogers photos clearly document the famous polychrome sunburst as having a central white circle (Figure 5), which can still be discerned underneath the yellow paint. This demonstrates that the yellow is a modern addition.

For White Tanks the Rogers photos enabled the author and colleagues to document an excellent, small bighorn sheep petroglyph of unknown provenience included in a private collection donated to the Museum of Man just a few years ago. Like so many private collections, the original site location information had been lost, but the photograph (Figure 6) enabled us to confirm that it is from this important southwestern Arizona petroglyph site.

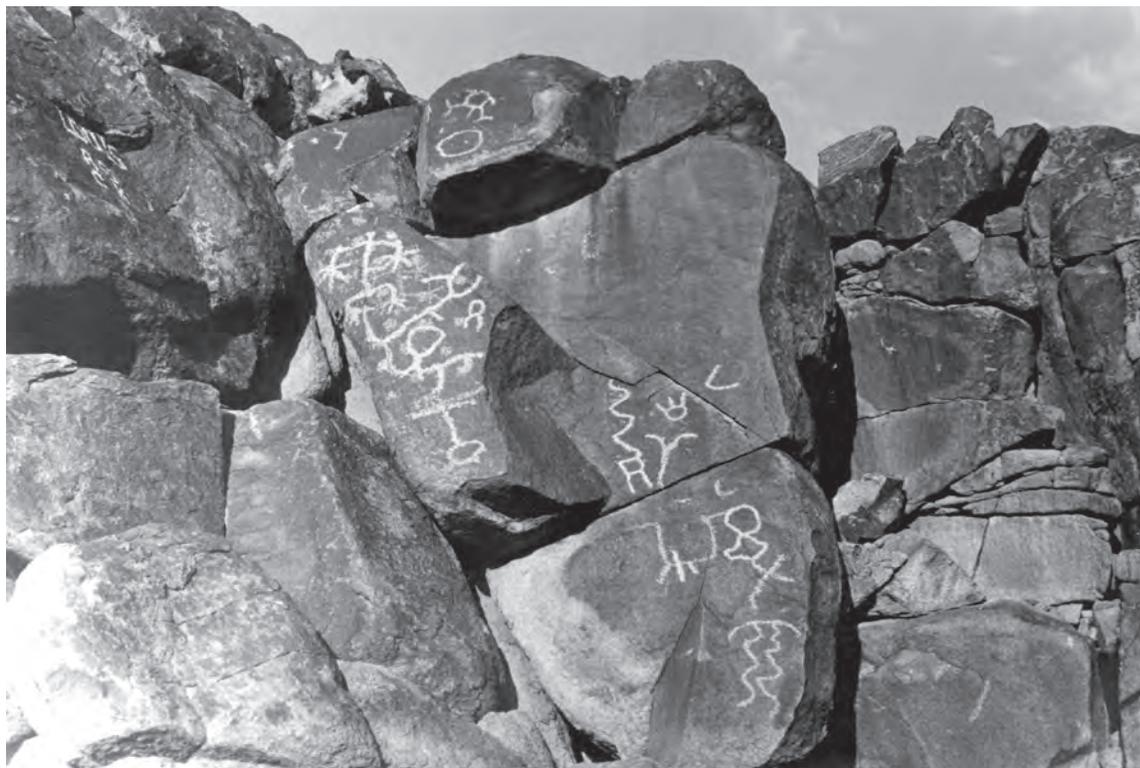


Figure 3. Petroglyphs at Corn Spring, Riverside County. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.

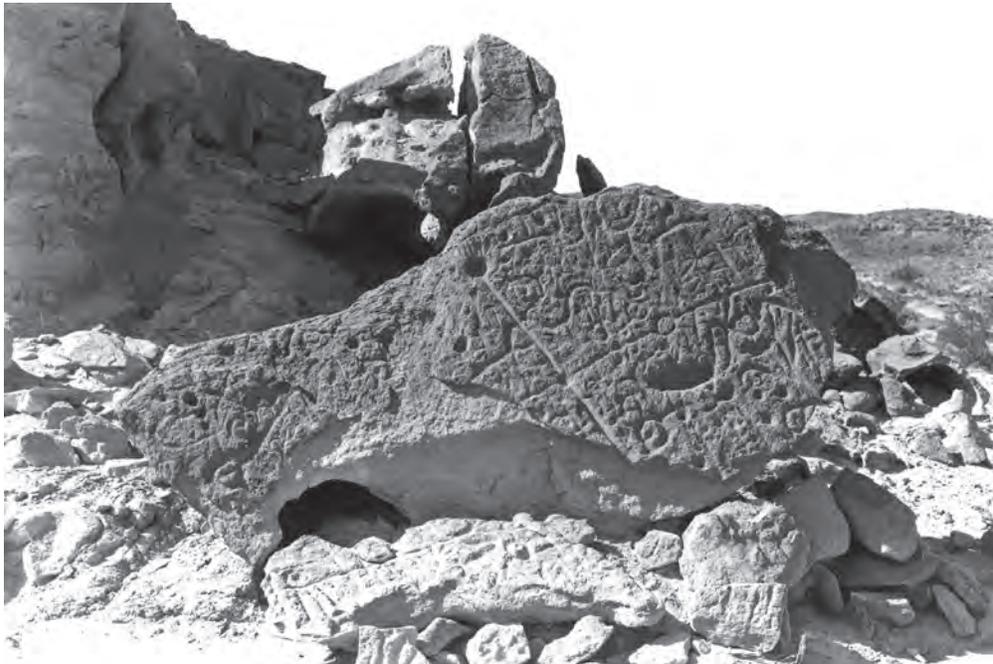


Figure 4. The “missing” petroglyph panel at Palo Verde Point, Imperial County. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.



Figure 5. Sunburst motifs in La Rumorosa style paintings at Indian Hill, San Diego County. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.

At Palmas de Cantú in northern Baja California, the Rogers photos include a significant panel (Figure 7). Unfortunately, this panel cannot be relocated today.

Geoglyphs

In addition to his interest in petroglyphs and rock paintings, Rogers conducted and published the first

detailed survey of the giant geoglyphs north of Blythe, California, and his site records document many other ground figures throughout the desert west. Of historical interest is a copy of a U.S. Army Air Corps aerial photo taken 80 years ago, on April 12, 1932 (Figure 8). In November of that year, Lieutenant Colonel—later General of the Army and General of the Air Force—H. H. “Hap” Arnold, then commander of



Figure 6. Bighorn sheep petroglyph from White Tanks, southwestern Arizona. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.



Figure 7. The “missing” petroglyph panel at Palmas de Cantú, Baja California. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.

March Field, published the first account of the Blythe intaglios in “Who Drew These Giants along the Colorado River?” (Arnold 1932).

Frederick Rogers and Adan Treganza

Frederick Rogers served as his son’s field assistant and photographer throughout the pre-World War II

period, and he took on rock art as his special area of interest. In 1936 Frederick Rogers accompanied Adan Treganza in fieldwork that included a visit to the site we know today as La Rumorosa, or El Vallecito, where they photographed several of the main sites in the valley. Treganza (1942) described a rock painting site in Baja California (Figure 9) having faded red designs overlain with later designs, brighter

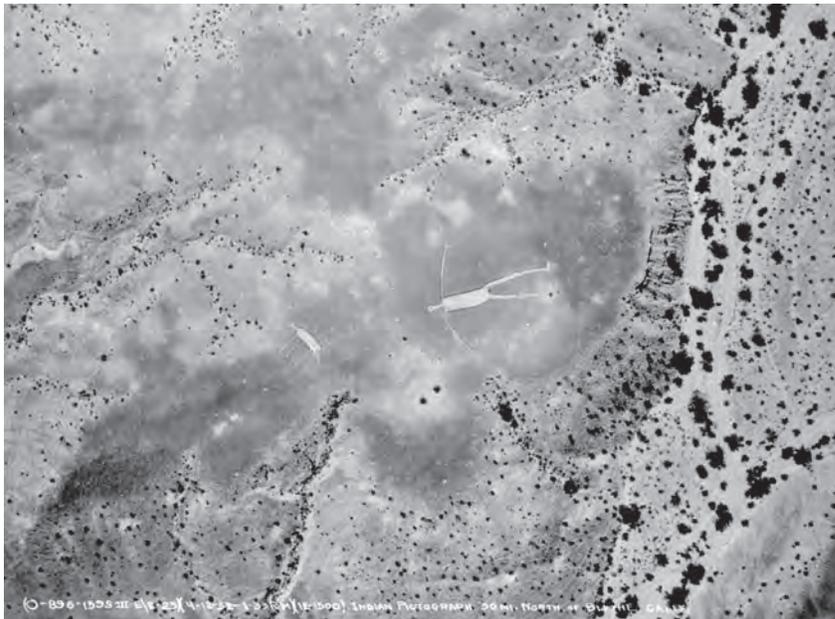


Figure 8. The Blythe Intaglios in a U.S. Army Air Corps photograph dated April 12, 1932. U.S. Government photo in the collections of the San Diego Museum of Man.



Figure 9. Pictographs from the La Rumorosa style type site at El Vallecito, La Rumorosa, Baja California. Photographed by Frederick Rogers during fieldwork with Adan Treganza in 1936. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.

in color, in red, white, black, and yellow, including thick-lined geometric figures and large anthropomorphs. This site is almost certainly La Rumorosa.

Aside from the brief summary description in Treganza's paper, the site remained unknown, and the extensive record of rock art sites on both sides of the international boundary remained hidden and unstudied in the archaeological files of the San Diego Museum of Man until 1966.

Rogers' Influence

Although they were never published, the Rogers photographs and field notes have had a major effect on our understanding of rock art styles in southern California and northern Baja California. Julian Steward characterized the rock art of the western part of southern California:

The predominant design is the zigzag in various arrangements and combinations. This is the girls' adolescence ceremony symbol. A few other elements occur, chiefly the lizard, but these, as elements 1–4—concentric circles, wavy or zigzag lines, human figures, and sun disks—are widely distributed and are of no significance in characterizing areas [Steward 1929:222].

As late as 1973, Heizer and Clewlow followed Steward's lead in assigning southwestern California to a single rock art style area characterized by rectilinear designs in red. This gave rise to the term Southwest Coast Painted style (Heizer and Clewlow 1973:38–40), despite the facts that the rock art is seldom on the coast and that two additional distinctive styles are present.

These earlier studies treat the international border region in ethnographic Kumeyaay territory as if it did not exist. Rather than one red "rectilinear abstract"

style for all southern California, studies using the Rogers data at the Museum of Man enabled the present author, beginning in 1966, to define three distinct rock art styles in southern California and northern Baja California, including the previously unrecognized La Rumorosa style of the Kumeyaay Indians (Hedges 1970). Before this time, important sites such as Indian Hill, Canebrake Wash, El Vallecito, Hakwin, Valle Seco, and Las Pilitas were unknown to researchers, who had ignored the Rogers archaeological files.

The large-scale geometric paintings of the Rancho Bernardo style constitute one of the most spectacular and unusual styles in American Indian rock art (Hedges 1979, 2002). In his work, Rogers carefully delineated the complex designs, giving us a record that compares very well with modern observations; he did not guess or "reconstruct" elements that were not clear, and he accurately replicated the lines that he could discern. The great maze in Rancho Bernardo is perhaps the largest single design element in California rock painting, and it has been irreparably damaged by years of exposure to a backyard sprinkling system; thus, the Rogers photo (Figure 10) is our best record of this amazing panel. In another instance, a Rogers photo is our only record of an important panel later destroyed by road construction (Figure 11). Remarkably, all the other panels recorded by Rogers have survived the rampant development that has occurred in Rancho Bernardo.

The rock art records and photographs stand as examples of the resources available to researchers as part of the Rogers Legacy Collections. Concerning southern California rock art, as late as 1973, Heizer and Clewlow (1973:64) stated that "no large areas with new and distinctive rock art styles will be found." In that same year the first report based on studies of the Rogers collection at the Museum of Man was published (Hedges 1973). Until 1973, according to general knowledge and the existing rock

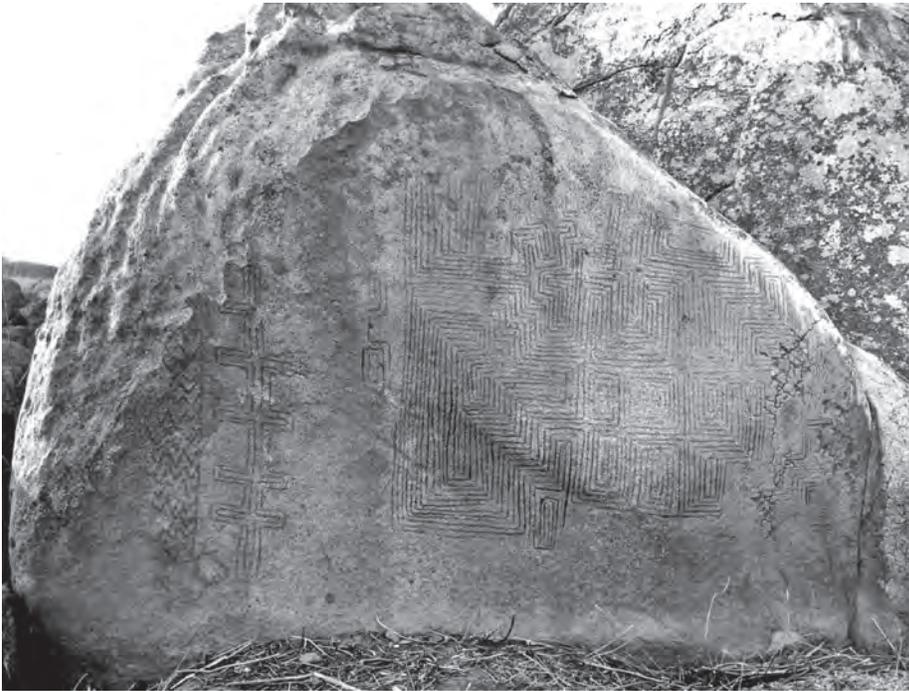


Figure 10. The large maze panel at Rancho Bernardo, San Diego County; artificially highlighted for photography. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.



Figure 11. The "missing" pictograph panel at Rancho Bernardo, San Diego County; artificially highlighted for photography. Copyright San Diego Museum of Man.

art literature, the map of southern California rock art looked like Figure 12 (from Heizer and Clewlow 1973:Map 16). Today, the map of southern California rock art styles (Hedges 2002:Figure 1) shows

the distribution of three major and distinctive rock painting styles (Figure 13). The difference is directly attributable to the records compiled by Malcolm Rogers and Frederick Rogers.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Karen Lacy, Collections Manager of the San Diego Museum of Man, for her assistance in working with the Malcolm Rogers records, and Helen Ofield of the Lemon Grove Historical Society for helping to confirm that the person in the La Rumorosa photos is Adan Treganza. Treganza grew up in Lemon Grove, where his father, well-known architect Alberto Treganza, designed the famous Lemon Grove parade float ridden by his sister Amorita as Miss Lemon Grove in 1928 and later repurposed to become the giant lemon that still stands as the symbol of the city.

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