Eastern Utah Rockart

• Utah is an extraordinarily rich state in terms of its archaeological past. Indians have lived in every part of the state from extremely ancient times, and have left rock art reminders of their presence in all parts of the state. One of the oldest cultures in Utah is the widespread Desert Culture that had a continuity of basic form for nearly 10,000 years. In Utah this incredibly stable culture persisted until about 500 A.D. when it blended with, grew into, or was replaced by the Fremont Culture.

• The culture that is characteristically, and almost exclusively Utahn is the Fremont Culture which was first described by Noel Morss in 1931. It is perhaps best represented in the canyons to the east of the Wasatch Mountains from Vernal to the Colorado River, but evidence of it is found all over Utah, except for a small corner in San Juan County. When it appeared is a much debated point, but about SIX A.D., the old hunting and gathering culture gave way to a partly farming culture which included some ideas from the Anasazi farmers to the south. Along with many other distinctive characteristics, the Fremont people developed their own art style. This was typified by horned, trapezoidal-bodied anthropomorphs (human-like objects) which seem to have been made everywhere the Fremont people lived. In the more strongly Fremont areas, such as along the Fremont River, near Vernal, Nine Mile Canyon and some sites in the San Rafael Swell, these are large and have many elaborations such as necklaces, earrings, shields, swords, loin cloths and fancy headdresses. The Fremont people also developed a stylized way of making spirals, zigzags, scorpions, mountain sheep, deer, snakes and hunting scenes.

• One of the greatest puzzles in Utah Rock Art is the Barrier Canyon Style which was until recently considered to be Fremont in origin. Polly Schaafsma, one of the leading archaeological authorities on Utah Rock Art says: “This style has only recently been separated from the inclusive rubric Fremont and recognized as a unique artistic development which seems to have antedated the Fremont Culture by an undetermined period and was the product of a culture not confidently recognized in the current archeological record. The authors of this art were extremely skillful with a command of techniques and surrealistic forms rare in primitive art. The huge, starry-eyed mummies in Barrier (Horseshoe) Canyon, with tiny, intricately drawn mountain sheep and birds prancing around them are surely some of the finest rock paintings in the world. In the classic sites around the San Rafael Swell there is no mistaking their unique nature and total differentiation from the later Fremont paintings.” There are several instances where typical Fremont painting has been superimposed on classical Barrier Canyon types.

• Barrier Canyon (shown on the maps as Horseshoe Canyon) drains northeastierly into the Green River some 40 miles south of the town of Green River. Utah. There are five excellent sites in the canyon. They are all good, but the Great Gallery, located about four miles up canyon from the very poor “road” into the canyon, is absolutely magnificent and awe-inspiring, imparting an aura of mystic wonderment and admiration about the people who painted them. It is the type site for the Barrier Canyon Style of Rock Art. The Great Gallery is about 200 feet long and perhaps 15 feet high. It is located high in an overhang in the Navajo sandstone which makes up the walls of the deep rugged canyon.

• The late Lynn Fausett was born and reared in Price, Utah. He is a nationally famous artist who has won local acclaim for his paintings in the lobby of the Price Municipal Building. In 1940, he did the “Barrier Canyon Mural” as a W.P.A. Project. There are two separate canvases. The one on display in the College of Eastern Utah Prehistoric Museum is the smaller of two (12 x 22 ft.) and depicts approximately the left hand one-fourth of the Great Gallery. The other, larger canvas (12 x 80 ft.) hangs in the Utah Museum of Natural History at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City.

• The Prehistoric Museum, USU Eastern is greatly indebted to the late Dr. Jesse D. Jennings, Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the University of Utah, and Donald V. Hague, Former Director of the Utah Museum of Natural History, for the gift of the mural originally given to the College of Eastern Utah, which has been titled “The Holy Ghost and Attendants.”