



MATURANGO NEWS

Death Valley Tourist Center • Northern Mojave Visitor Center

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www.maturango.org

Museum Director's Notes

By Debbie Benson, Director

We are jumping from an early Spring into the possibility of an early Summer. Our May flowers are blooming on the cactus, desert willows, palo verde and mesquite. The wildflowers and weeds are drying and going to seed. This is the time when our volunteers will be spending more time cleaning up the Gladys Merrick Gardens and making sure the grounds are ready for the long Summer. We have a beautiful garden that was made possible by our membership and volunteers. Much of the maintenance of it is done by the volunteers as well. Could one of those people be you? We are always happy to have any green thumbs or weed pullers come to spend some time, if you are so inclined. Just walking around the grounds pulling weeds (mostly mustard) and spending time with our lizard friends is a favorite part of my day!

The first of May begins with a musical evening with Bud Sewell in our new North Coso Gallery. It should be a great time for everyone! The program will open with Sewell singing with the "Full Circle Vocal Band." Selections will include Big Band numbers, an Irving Berlin hit and some tunes made famous by Elvis. When Sewell gets out his guitar, he'll take requests from the audience. With his amazing repertoire, he doesn't use notes or written music. See if you can "Stump the Bud." Next he will be joined by Tom Wee, Fred Freiberg and Don Whitley for two barbershop quartet numbers. Finally, Shirley Helmick will accompany Sewell on piano as they share some of the old favorites they have performed for the residents of High Desert Haven and Ridgecrest Healthcare each Monday for the past 15 years. It is fun to be able to use our bigger room for musical events and to spend time with friends and family!



In May we are happy to have a collaborative event with the HSUMD. On May 13 the USO will host the movie on the X-15 and on May 14 the Maturango Museum will host the lecture. In a community like ours, it makes it fun to "share" an event!

We hope to have a petroglyph escort training this Spring in June. If this is something that may interest you, be sure to send an email to info@maturango.org so we can start making a list. We will send further information as soon as the dates and times are confirmed.

A big thanks to everyone who made the Wildflower Exhibit and weekend a success! It was amazing!

An Evening with Bud Sewell Featuring Full Circle

Friday May 01, doors open 6:30 pm, concert starts at 7:00 pm. Tickets are \$10.00 per person. This concert is a fundraiser for the Maturango Museum.

The concert will be performed in the new North Coso Gallery. Seats are limited. Buy your tickets in the museum store or at www.shop.maturango.org

X-15 Rocket Plane

Special Showing of the 1961 movie "The X-15 Rocket Plane – Flying the First Wings into Space"

Wednesday, May 13, 7:00 pm at Historic USO Building

This breathtaking, jet-fueled journey of high-altitude filmmaking blasted audiences from zero-G to 4,000 miles per hour with its thrilling tale of America's victory in the space race. X-15 sets the sky as the limit for excitement! The courageous pilots of the Air Force's X-15 program are determined to take an experimental rocket plane high above the Earth and into space at six times the speed of sound!



Lecture by Michelle Evans at Maturango Museum

Thursday, May 14, 7:30 pm (doors open 7 pm)

Includes book signing of "The X-15 Rocket Plane"

With the Soviet Union's launch of the first Sputnik satellite in 1957, the Cold War soared to new heights as Americans feared losing the race into space. "The X-15 Rocket Plane" tells the enthralling yet little-known story of the hypersonic X-15, the winged rocket ship that met this challenge and opened the way into human-controlled spaceflight.

Ms. Evans' presentation will focus on this remarkable research aircraft that held the world's altitude record for 41 years, and still has no equal to match or better its speed of more than 4,500 mph. Beyond the X-15 are the stories of the 12 men who guided it into space, and all the people who kept the rocket plane flying for nearly a decade. This is the story that has never been told of the vehicle that was the true precursor to the Space Shuttle by being the first piloted and winged vehicle to exit Earth's atmosphere, and make a controlled reentry to a landing on hard-packed dry desert lakebeds.

In her research, Ms. Evans interviewed nearly 70 people, including 9 of the 12 pilots, such as Neil Armstrong, Scott Crossfield, and Robert White, with family representatives for the remaining pilots.

Others she spoke with include managers, flight planners, and the guys in the trenches who made the X-15 ready to fly its next research mission at high altitude and high Mach. This is the definitive book on the X-15.

Docent Doings

By Nora Nuckles, Education Coordinator

Desert iguanas, whiptail, and side-blotched lizards greeted the Las Flores Kindergarten students when they did a tour of the museum garden and then had a reptile program! The lizards seemed to come out on cue each time we walked a small group outside. We were very pleased that all the students were respectful of the lizards and resisted the urge to catch them! Students also enjoyed Rosy, our rosy boa, and the various kinds of tortoise young that Bob Parker brought. We have many more tours for April and May so we hope the lizards remember their cues!

Snakes that fly? Frogs that glide? What a wonderful presentation Dan Burnett gave to many high school students for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) day at Burroughs High School. During the PowerPoint program on Animal Flight; Dan showed many animals that glide and fly and at the same time taught the students the physics of flight. The students enjoyed this quality program that Dan presented to a new group every 15 minutes! The only thing that saved him was the long lunch period!

Mike Incantalupo installed the space saver storage system in the new docent room on April 13 and 14. We started to move some specimens to the new room after Dan and Elaine Wiley sealed and painted the deck that carries the storage unit. It will take a few months to move and organize the entire docent collection since we have many programs to present through the end of June.

By next fall we will find it so much easier to load our specimens in the cars from the back of the museum and drive away to offer our wonders to the children and adults in our community. We thank those who contributed to finance our special shelving.

Docents are offering some fun summer classes for students ready to enter 4th, 5th, or 6th grade (ages 9-12). The classes are offered through the Ridgecrest City Parks and Recreation Department but will be given at the museum in our new workspace. Registration for the June classes will be at Ridgecrest Parks and Recreation Department. The classes are:

“Critters from the Inside Out” - Up close and personal view of museum specimens, skeletons, and pelts. Fun activities to learn about our desert critters - amazing facts about each animal and its adaptations for survival. June 8, 9, 10, 11. 9-11:30 am each day. Price-\$50 for 4 days. Maximum of 15 students.

“Into the Stars: Our Solar System and Beyond” - Learn about planets and stars with time spent inside and outside of the Beth Armogida Planetarium. There will also be hands-on activities. June 16 & June 17. 9-11:30 am each day. Price: \$40 for 2 days. Maximum of 20 students.

“Fun with Kitchen Chemistry” - Hands-on activities with common kitchen products such as baking soda, Epsom salts, salt, sugar, and yeast. Children will make such things as crystals, elephant toothpaste, and Oobleck. They may do some chromatography with common products. June 23, 24, 25, 9:00-11:30 am each day. Price: \$45 for 3 days. Maximum of 15 students.

Our next docent meeting is on May 5 at 8:45 AM in the new North Coso gallery. If you are interested in volunteering and working with warm, thoughtful, knowledgeable people, please join us!

Recent Advances in Rock Art Research: Dating of the Barrier Canyon Style Type-Site

By Alexander K. Rogers, MA, MS, RPA
Archaeology Curator, Maturango Museum

Introduction

Barrier Canyon style (BCS) rock art of the Colorado Plateau is spectacular in the extreme, consisting primarily of tall, ghostly-looking anthropomorphs with various smaller, attendant figures. (Figure 1) Most BCS rock art consists of pictographs (painted figures), with some pecking of the rock surface included. Something about the figures reaches deep into the human psyche, even today, although the meaning and date of the rock art is completely unknown.

Barrier Canyon Style pictographs tend to co-occur with Fremont rock art. However, previous attempts to date the BCS style by other means have failed, and speculations on age range from the early Archaic (5600 – 5000 BC; Coulam and Schroedl 1996) to post-Fremont (AD 1400; Manning 1990).

The most common interpretation places the BCS in the late Archaic (2000 BC – AD 1; Schaafsma 1971), immediately preceding the Fremont period, an interpretation attested by numerous signs installed by the BLM and the Park Service.

The BCS type site, known as the “Great Gallery” is located on a high wall of Navaho formation sandstone in Horseshoe Canyon, Utah, in an outlying unit of Canyonlands National Park. The canyon trends generally southwest to northeast, and the Great Gallery is in an alcove on the northwest wall. The geology of the canyon is dynamic, as can be seen in any visit to the site. The floor of the canyon has been down-cut since the rock art was created, so it is necessary to climb a low alluvial bench to approach it. (Figure 2) Portions of the rock surface containing the rock art have spalled off due to natural geologic processes, as can be seen in the foreground of Figure 1.

Recent research on dating of geologic formations by optically-stimulated luminescence (OSL) has been applied to the BCS type-site (Pederson et al. 2014), the subject of this review. The research represents the application of OSL to date features that characterize the dynamic geology of the site. Dating the geological steps by which the alcove was formed places constraints on the possible age of the rock art, making it unnecessary to date the rock art itself, but is able to confine the possible age to a relatively narrow window of time.

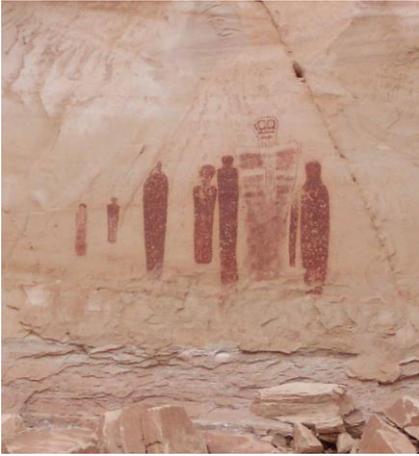


Figure 1. The “Holy Ghost” panel at the Barrier Canyon style type-site. Note the boulders in the foreground, spalled from the cliff.



Figure 2. A view of Horseshoe (Barrier) canyon, showing the active down-cutting that is still occurring.

The OSL Method

All sedimentary rocks and soils contain trace amounts of radioactive isotopes. These slowly decay over time and the ionizing radiation they produce is absorbed by other constituents of the soil sediments, particularly quartz and feldspar crystals. The resulting trapped charge within these minerals remains as structurally unstable electron traps within the mineral grains. Stimulating a soil sample using either blue, green or infrared light causes a luminescence signal to be emitted as the stored unstable electron energy is released. The intensity of emitted signal varies depending on the amount of radiation absorbed during burial, and specific properties of the mineral. The trapped charge accumulates at a rate over time determined by the amount of background radiation at the location where the sample was buried. Exposure to sunlight causes a “bleaching” effect, which resets the luminescence signal and so the time elapsed since the sample was buried can be calculated.

A further refinement, known as OSL profile analysis, makes it possible to estimate the length of time a surface was exposed to sunlight (Sohbati et al. 2012). The “bleaching” by sunlight is not simply a surface phenomenon, but extends a few millimeters into the rock surface, eventually coming to equilibrium with the natural radiation dose within the rock. Thus, the luminescence signal varies as a function of depth; by measuring the signal and performing a curve-fitting technique, the length of time the surface was exposed to sunlight can be estimated.

Application in Barrier Canyon

The research reported by Pederson et al. (2014) consisted of three principal steps: estimating when the Navajo formation sandstone of the gallery was first exposed by down-cutting; measuring when a boulder containing rock art spalled off; and estimating how long the downward-facing surface of the boulder had been exposed to sunlight prior to spalling.

The first set of measurements established a maximum possible age. By applying OSL to a sample from the bedrock bench immediately below the panel, an age of 8.01 ± 1.13 kya (thousands of years ago) was obtained. This constrains the oldest possible age for the rock art (6100 ± 1130 BC), as the rock surface containing the rock art was not exposed until then. (See Pederson et al. 2014 for details of the stratigraphy in the canyon.)

The second set of measurements addressed the rockfall, in which a boulder containing pigments was measured. The downward-facing surface was dated by OSL; in addition, the boulder fall had fortuitously trapped a cottonwood leaf under it, so its age was measured by radiocarbon. The OSL age on the boulder was 0.89 ± 0.07 kya, and the age of the cottonwood leaf was 0.93 ± 0.08 kya (calibrated). The two are statistically indistinguishable, and demonstrate a rockfall at about AD 1100. (Again see Pederson et al. 2014 for details).

The final set of measurements estimates the exposure duration before the rockfall. The analysis is complex because the surface was first exposed to sunlight for some period, then buried face-down where it started reaccumulating a radiation dose. The profile analysis yields an exposure duration of ~700 years prior to the rockfall. Pederson et al. (2014) and Sohbati et al. (2012) describe the analysis in detail.

Putting all this together, the geologic evidence indicates the Navajo formation surface containing the art was first exposed around 6100 BC, providing a “canvas” for painting. This eliminates any possibility of earlier ages. Subsequently, between about AD 400 and 1100 the panels were created by the artists, and about AD 1100 the rockfall occurred. This age bracket agrees with the tentative AD 900 AMS date previously proposed by Watchman (2003).

The research reported here is a good example of the application of improved technical methods to rock art. A previous example was provided by Pike et al. 2012, which applied Accelerator Mass Spectrometry and uranium-thorium dating to the rock art at Alta Mira. The results pushed back the chronology of cave use and cave art in northern Spain as far as the early Aurignacian, ca. 41,000 years ago, overlapping with Neanderthal. The techniques which succeed in any particular case depend on the particular geology of the site, so little generalization is possible. As a further caveat, the authors of Pederson et al. (2014) point out that they have only dated the BCS type-site, and other BCS sites may be earlier or later.

Implications and Speculations

The research reported by Pederson et al. (2014) permit a few cautious speculations about the social origins of the BCS rock art. The age constraints derived from geology place the style squarely within the Fremont period. Further, the BCS art often co-occurs with Fremont style rock art, and I suggest they were both products of the same society, although perhaps by different groups within the society. The Fremont style often appears threatening, depicting armed and helmeted (masked?) male figures, frequently holding scalps. The BCS art is not threatening, but appears almost ethereal or spiritual, and, as remarked above, prompts an immediate spiritual reaction even today, to people who do not share the belief system of the artists. This leads me to speculate that the Fremont style was intended as territorial markers and warnings of socio-political power, while the BCS art had a religious purpose. I will take the speculation a bit further and suggest the Fremont style was created by community leaders, “big men”, and the BCS by religious specialists. All of this remains to be proven, of course.

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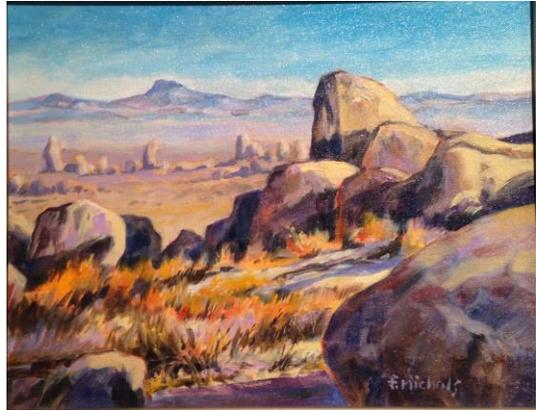
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Frances Nichols : “Seasons of Color in the Eastern Sierras and Desert Valleys”
In the Gallery until 9 June

“My paintings investigate the local scenery of the high desert and the eastern Sierra mountains. I like to explore lighting effects and the changes they create. For me the landscape is a prism where the time of day can transform the light moving through it into constantly changing color.

After thirty-four years of instructing and motivating high school students in the arts, I am enjoying retirement and pursuing my own painting while exploring Indian Wells Valley, the high desert, and the Sierras. Trips in the local canyons, camping, and off-roading have provided landscape subject matter that constantly changes with the seasons.

I was the recipient of the 2014 ALVA Award from the Desert Valleys Federal Credit Union, am a member of The Desert Artists’ League, and have been part of the Manzanar Workshop and Exhibition, an annual plein-air paintout held at the site of Manzanar, for several years.”



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Recent Historical Acquisitions Now on Display

by Liz Babcock, History Curator

One of the most enjoyable things about being a history curator is that I never know what treasures people are going to bring to add to our collections. Our generous members donate items with gratifying regularity. This month I'll share information about two such acquisitions.

Larry Zabel Print. Lee Davis of Avila Beach made a special trip here with his grandson Joe Casabar (see the photo) to bring us a Larry Zabel print, "Where Rams and Hornets Meet." The print is Print No. 4 of 500 prints created back in 1993, when China Lake was celebrating its 50th Anniversary. That low number in itself makes the print special.

Lee ended up with the print because the artist himself gave it to Lee's parents, Bill and Grethel Davis, and autographed it twice, once on the print and second in a personal message to the Davises that he wrote on the glass.

You may well remember Bill (William E.) Davis, a hardworking administrator on the base, who began his career in the Aviation Ordnance Department and ended it as head of the Safety and Security Department. Notable among Bill's many accomplishments was coordination of China Lake's 50th Anniversary celebration, and I'm guessing that Larry gave the print as tangible thanks for Bill's effectiveness in running that gala event.

IWV Search and Rescue Team Collection. Bill Moen, a member of the former IWV Search and Rescue Team, brought us a collection of pretty much everything about the team's history, plus the heavy, complicated gear a team member would have to wear during a mine search. That's pretty much *all* of the gear, including the pack Bill used to carry items to the site, the climbing gear he had to use to get into and out of a mine, the breathing apparatus he wore while he was in a mine . . . and much more. I am mounting exhibits of the Zabel print, plus much of the gear and some of the photos from Moen's collection in our Temporary Exhibit Room (the new room between the Gift Shop and the new North Gallery). And a big thank you to Maureen Goff and Nora Nuckles for helping me "dress the dummy." It was quite an exercise! I do hope you will stop in and see the results.



Young Joe Casabar helps his grandpa Lee Davis display a valuable print recently donated to the Museum.

Photo by Liz Babcock

Acoustic Technical Jam Session Thank You

By Fran Rogers

The Acoustic Technical Jam Session on Friday, March 20 evening went well in the effort to find out the "pitch" of the new multipurpose gallery/lecture and concert hall. There were approximately 60 people present for the event including musicians, audience and museum sound engineers. There were 43 surveys turned in plus two emails with more detailed comments. The surveys are helpful for future decisions on furnishing the gallery. Thank you all who participated - as musician and audience. A special thank you goes to the musicians:

R. David Pogge, guitar and vocal; CK2 (vocal) - Kathy Cummings, Carol Sakai, and Kristin Hall and Melanie Litton, piano; Flute Trio - Debra Veit, Lisa Austin, and Heidi Costanzo; David Hodgson, baritone and Melanie Litton, piano; Bud Sewell, guitar and vocal; Ruthie Hill, piano; Patrick Audinet, French Horn; Erica MacArthur, violin and viola; and Fran Rogers, cello.

PHILANTHROPY ON TAP

Join Ridgecrest Chamber Music Society and Maturango Museum to learn more about their student outreach programs.

Enjoy a complimentary glass of wine in the new Maturango Museum North Coso Gallery.

Monday, May 11.....5:00pm – 6:00pm.....RSVP by May 6.....info@kernfoundation.org • 661.616.2620

Can't make it? Watch our community impact on our YouTube channel at www.kernfoundation.org.

This is a free event : no solicitation will be made.

RSVP requested. Kern Community Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization. Tax ID 77-0555874

Maturango Museum of the IWV

100 E. Las Flores Ave., Ridgecrest, CA 93555
Open every day (except major holidays)
from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

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Regularly Scheduled Meetings

- China Lake Astronomical Society: 1st Monday of every month, 7 pm
- China Lake Photographic Society: 1st Thursday of every month, 7 pm
- Kerncrest Audubon Society: 3rd Thursday bi-monthly [Jan, Mar, May, Sep, Nov, not July], 7 pm
- Docent League: 1st Tuesday of every month, 8:45 a.m., anyone welcome to attend

Calendar of Events

Friday, May 1, doors open 7 pm, concert 7:30 pm : Bud Sewell

Sat, May 9 : Free Day

Wed, May 13, 7pm : X-15 Movie at Historical USO building

Thurs, May 14, doors open 7 pm, lecture 7:30 pm : X-15 Lecture

Friday, May 22, 10:30 -11:30 am : Children's Hour "Tortoises, Lizards, and Snakes - Oh My!"

Pizza Factory Fundraiser Day : please check website

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