

Issued in various publications in English, French, Spanish, Italian and Afrikaans from 1980 on. The full issuing title is Minimum Recording Standards Proposed by the American Committee to Advance the Study of Petroglyphs and Pictographs. The version here is the most widely disseminated though slightly copy edited from the official release. It was published in Current Anthropology, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 94-95 (1981) though an institutional statement, the text was written by me. I have prepared an updated version published in Rock Art Research, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 264-65 (2006).

STANDARDS FOR THE RECORDING OF PETROGLYPHS AND PICTOGRAPHS¹

The American Committee to Advance the Study of Petroglyphs and Pictographs, formed in 1979 and numbering some 80 scholars, has proposed a set of minimum standards for the recording of petroglyphs and pictographs. Its statement is as follows:

It is impossible to prepare a universal, objective set of standards for recording petroglyphs and pictographs. Data collected often relate to specific problems being investigated. Many of the data are not objective, but observational and contextual. Also, strictness of standards should vary with site fragility and accessibility. A deteriorating petroglyph 100 miles from permanent settlement encountered by a solitary archaeologist doing survey work in rugged wilderness is to be differently from one scheduled to be destroyed by imminent highway construction or one that is thoroughly stabilized a bluff across from a national park headquarters. The following standards are minimal and intended to apply to a single transitory visit to a friable surface locality. Ideal conditions for recording, such as the relation of the season and time of day with face light exposure for photographic enhancement, may not always obtain. Broad regional archaeological observations should be made in concert with specific recording.

In deciding which techniques are to be applied in any particular case, the goal should be optimal data recording and minimal resource destruction. Methods requiring surface pressure, application, or insertion, such as painting (aluminum powder, tempera, etc.), tracing, rubbing, molding, or grid-anchoring, cannot be universally condoned and should not be attempted on friable surface markings. These approaches break down the basic rock structure, and some also contaminate or alter surfaces in such a way as to distort potential trace-element studies. Direct transfer records demand storage space that may not be available. Chalking should never be done, and water spraying, especially of pictographs, should not be done except when there is no doubt that destruction is imminent. Varied photographic techniques are stressed, since they document and do not require physical contact. Careful photographic work and draftsmanship are probably sufficient for basic recording, but metric data are included because they are easy to gather and may provide useful comparative information.

The following types of records should be made:

Face recording, metric data (objective):

1. Site and face (or panel) designation

2. Face datum
3. Face dimensions (straight)
4. Face dimensions (surface)
5. Direction of face (in degrees, compass; check for magnetic distortion, iron in rock, etc.)
6. Inclination of face (in degrees, plumb bob and protractor)
7. Height of base of face from ground
8. Height of top of face from ground (check overhangs, boulder tops, etc.)
9. Discrete design-element designation and dimensions
10. Distances between design elements
11. Distances of design-element data from face datum
12. Range of line width (for each discrete design element and each style)
13. Range of line depth (for each discrete design element and each style [petroglyphs])
14. Cross-section of lines (for each discrete design element and each style [petroglyphs])
15. Colors, including rock surfaces (Munsell color charts [pictographs])
16. Hardness of rock (Mob scales)

Face recording, observational data (descriptive):

1. Vandalism
2. Natural defacement (e.g., erosion of surface, water lines, lichen, patina, smoke blackening, etc.)
3. Old ground surfaces
4. Superpositions
5. Type of rock
6. Conformation of rock (cracks, holes, incorporation, etc.)
7. Wear surfaces (e.g., carved, cut, engraved, pecked, ground, or abraded, rubbed, drilled, with secondary smoothing, etc. petroglyphs]; brushed, daubed, blown, stenciled, etc. [pictographs])

Photographs: Take many (especially when site is difficult of access), both fine-grained black-and-white and, especially for pictographs, externally coupled color film with a Macbeth ColorChecker. (Avoid using internally coupled film, even for truer color.) Vary exposures and angles, take closeups and panoramas from site and of site, use slide-lighting, and experiment with filters. Photograph everything; attempt to use constant distances and systematic coverage, and record procedure. Keep records of photographs with site and face designations; omit scales, which may clutter photographs, where face dimensions are recorded. Have black-and-white negatives fully processed chemically, not machine-processed; send developed color film to a professional laboratory for processing. Store prints in acid-free envelopes.²

Drawings (not a substitute for photographs):

Make drawings to a consistent scale. Work with pencils to allow for revision. Use a different color for each technique of rendering or style or (in pictographs) pigment on face and to note, by "drawing over," superpositions. Learn important design-element conventions; note offsetting in designs. Do not assume the markings are art, and avoid interpretive preconceptions. Record all markings, including "graffiti." If at all possible, have two or more persons make drawings independently. Include scale,

directional indicator, and site and face designations on each drawing.

Map (if multiple sites or site with multiple faces):

Show relationship of faces within sites and of sites to each other, unmarked boulders, trails, other significant landforms, data points (preferably from U.S. Geological Survey bench marks) to map, site, and face, directional indicator, and complete field numbering of sites and faces.

General description (subjective):

Describe geomorphology of area: landforms (e.g., routes, passes, washes, etc.), site situation (e.g., river-valley cliff, cave, mountaintop, etc.), distribution of plant cover, location of other archaeological sites in the area, and cultural associations (portable and nonportable), especially diagnostic and decorated remains such as points and pottery or tools or materials that may have been used to produce the markings. Note unique features of the surroundings. Offer conservation recommendations based on site uniqueness, condition, and location: ignore (initiate no policy--keep from public), protect (barriers, fences, grilling, security system), restore, stabilize (impregnation, coating), salvage (record more intensively).

¹ The standards were compiled by B. K. Swartz, Jr.; contributors were V. E. Richard Baraville, Georgia Lee, Doris Lundy, William Breen Murray, Karen Nissen, Joseph J. Snyder, James L. Swauger, Christy G. Turner IL, and Sharon L. Warner. This is a copy-edited version of a slightly revised statement voted upon by the ACASPP membership and contains no changes of substance from the one publicly issued.