

## BLACK CANYON (PAHRANAGAT) PROJECT

In April 2009, NRAF assisted Far Western Anthropological Research Group in recording rock art features at Black Canyon on the Pahranaagat National Wildlife Refuge, Lincoln County.



Overview of Black Canyon

The archaeological significance of Black Canyon was recognized in the 1970s with its listing on the National Register of Historic Places as an archaeological district. The US Fish and Wildlife Service contracted Far Western to complete an intensive archaeological survey and recording of Black Canyon to provide data that would serve as the basis for future management, conservation, and interpretation of the district's unique cultural resources. The rich natural resources in this area appear to have been intensively used in prehistory, reflected by the abundant rock art and other archaeological features. Black Canyon also probably served as a transportation corridor for peoples moving between the upper reaches of the White River and the marshes of Lower Pahranaagat valley.



Rock ring at Black Canyon

## Recording Black Canyon

NRAF supported Far Western's survey and documentation of Black Canyon's archaeological resources by recording rock art in the archaeological district. A total of approximately 100 panels at 7 sites was recorded through photography, scaled line drawings, and detailed observations made of each panel's style characteristics and physical condition. NRAF volunteers contributed 416 hours of donated labor and worked enthusiastically and effectively despite the difficult conditions, particularly snow and tough terrain.



Photo crew at work at Black Canyon

## Rock Art Styles at Black Canyon

Black Canyon is well-known for its concentration of Pahrnagat Representational Style petroglyphs. This distinctive style is composed of varying treatments of the human form: a headless rectangular form with internal decoration, often bearing an atlatl-like design, and a solid-pecked oval or rectangular form, with a line protruding from the head and with down-turned arms and extended hands.



Pahrnagat Representational Style anthropomorphs

This anthropomorph style appears restricted in distribution to the Pahrnagat Valley drainage and adjacent areas, representing a localized cultural development. The chronology and functions of the Pahrnagat Representational Style are not well understood and have fueled much speculation. Based on its formal properties and landscape context, Black Canyon's rock art may have influenced the lived experience of economic and social practices by providing a source of cultural symbolism that was engaged with in domestic routines. Elsewhere, such symbolism often plays an important role in the construction and negotiation of cultural identities and social roles.

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