

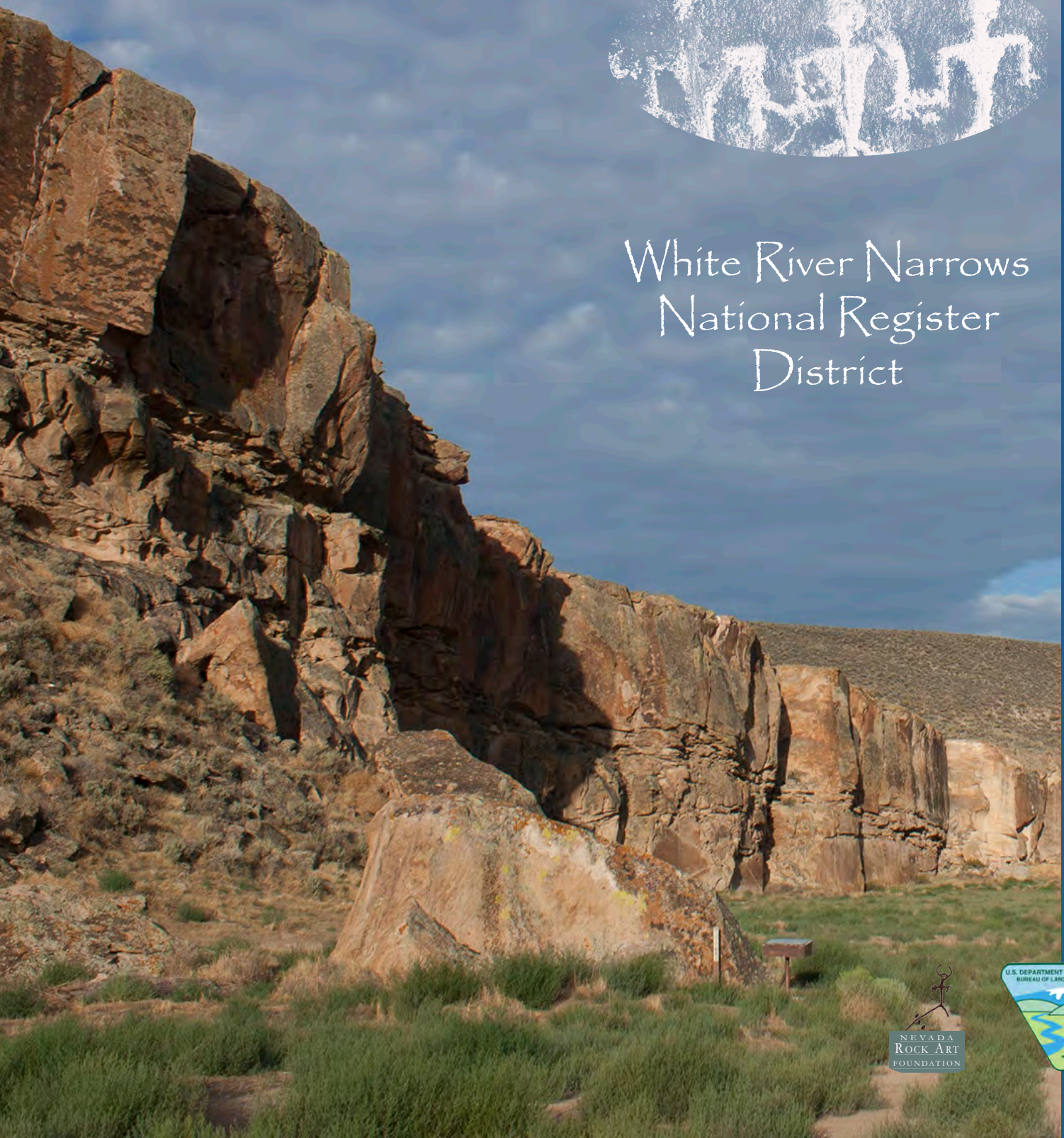
LINCOLN COUNTY  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL INITIATIVE PROJECT

The NEVADA ROCK ART FOUNDATION produced this product with funding provided by the sale of public lands by the BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT and approved under an inter-agency partnership authorized by the Lincoln County Land Act.

# Rock Art



## White River Narrows National Register District





## White River Narrows Introduction



White River Narrows, in lower White River Valley, is one of the largest concentrations of prehistoric rock art in eastern Nevada. The importance of the Narrows' archaeological heritage is recognized by its listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The petroglyphs here provide glimpses into the cultural lives of Native American peoples who lived by harvesting wild plants and animals from some 4,000 years ago until the nineteenth century. Although the exact meanings of the Narrows' rock art may be unknowable, they mark the Narrows as a place important to those who made and used these galleries of ancient art. These petroglyphs continue today to be important to Native American peoples living in the region.

White River Narrows is a winding canyon that was carved by the White River during the Pleistocene or Ice Age (ca. 2.5 million to 11,700 years ago). The Narrows forms a travel corridor used by ancient Native American cultures and, more recently, it was a route for unpaved SR38 until 1980.

For most of the region's history, until the coming of Euro-American settlers in the nineteenth century, hunter-gatherer cultures settled eastern Nevada. Hunters and gatherers skillfully harvested the wild resources of the arid Great Basin. Their deep environmental knowledge and efficient technology allowed them to prosper in the region for thousands of years. Hunter-gatherer groups lived in small, mobile family groups and moved across the landscape to gather seasonally available plants, animals, and other resources. Their cultural knowledge was expressed through song, myth, and rock art.

Early farmers from the Fremont Culture (2000-850 years ago) of Utah also influenced the prehistory of eastern Nevada. Short-term campsites and pottery made by the Fremont are found in eastern Nevada, indicating trade and cultural connections with their core territory to the east.







## Introduction (continued)

White River Narrows has two main rock art styles, one generally associated with hunter-gatherers (Basin and Range tradition) and one with Fremont groups. Basin and Range tradition rock art is distinguished by finely made abstract



designs such as circles, spirals, rectangles, and wavy lines. These were often combined to make complex images and compositions that are very ambiguous and evocative. In this tradition of rock art, artists depicted people as stick-figures. They portrayed a wide range of animal species, most commonly bighorn sheep, but also deer, coyotes, lizards, mountain lions, and birds. Fremont rock art is famous for its stylized portrayals of people, sometimes depicted wearing jewelry like necklaces and earrings.

Archaeologists have suggested that rock art may have been made to secure supernatural aid for hunting and to ensure that the plants and animals needed by people were abundant. Other archaeologists think that rock art was made by traditional healers (shamans) to secure supernatural powers and record important lore. More recently, rock art has been seen as one way that people turn their physical environment into culturally meaningful places by establishing enduring landmarks. Rock art is one of the few archaeological monuments where contemporary visitors can stand in the footprints of prehistoric peoples and their descendants. §



## Narrows I

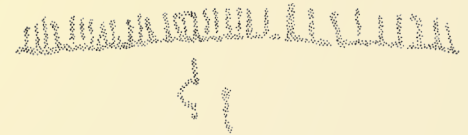


Narrows I is an isolated petroglyph panel on a large tuff boulder on the south side of the canyon. The most prominent figure at the site is a finely made, long rake-like design that runs horizontally along the width of the boulder.



Two other small figures can be seen just below the rake: a serpentine line and a vertical line.

This rock art has been suggested by some to be an example of hunting-magic, as they believe it portrays a game drive fence. Narrows I is located in an area that could have lent itself to game drives. Its narrowed entries



could have been blocked using temporary fencing made of brush, directing game animals to hidden hunters. But, there is no reason why cultural practices (like rock art) intended to ensure hunting success would have been done only at hunting locales. Alternatively, it has been observed that during the summer solstice a shadow falls on the center of the rake-like design. This has suggested to some a planned solar interaction. It is not possible to prove if this apparent solar interaction is a chance correlation or one intended by the rock art's makers. §





## Narrows II

## Narrows III



Narrows II comprises four petroglyph panels on a cliff on the west side of the canyon. Three panels are at the foot of the cliff, near the north end, and one is located at the top of the cliff. The site contains well-known Basin and Range tradition

Narrows III is located on the west side of the canyon, at a bend in the old river channel. Here, rock art was made at the foot of a tuff cliff that is, in places, soft and friable. Some designs were incised rather than pecked, a generally uncommon



design types, such as a human hand-print, sunbursts (circles with short lines radiating around their disks), wavy lines, and concentric circles. Most notable are curvilinear abstract designs that are unique to this locality. These are circles and ovals that have lines inside, with curved or slanted lines extending from their tops, resembling “horns” more normally seen on

way of making rock art in the region.

One of the largest concentrations of rock art in the District, Narrows III is also prominent because of the scale and density of its designs. Its high visibility and the fact that old SR 38 runs by the site probably explain the quantity of graffiti initials and dates at the site (the oldest of which is from 1926). Some of this graffiti has been placed near or, sometimes, over ancient rock art and is intrusive to the site’s general setting.



anthropomorphic (human) figures. The emphasis on these enigmatic, internally decorated circles and ovals at Narrows II illustrates that certain designs were

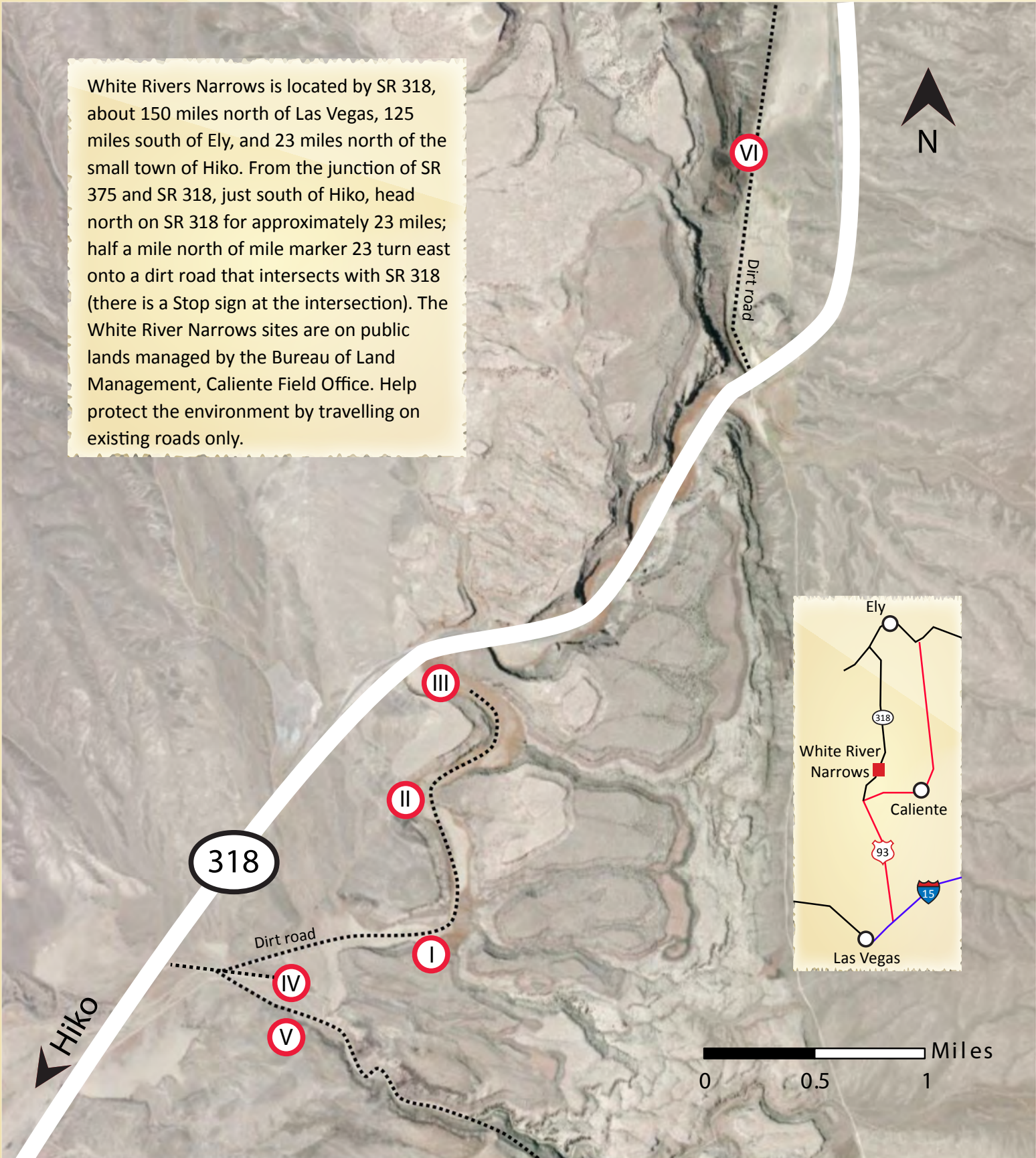
only made at particular places. What makes some locations appropriate for specific sets of symbols and cultural behaviors is an intriguing question prompted by sites such as this. §

Abstract designs are representative of Basin and Range tradition types. Several rake-like figures are notable for their length, extending 4 meters or more. Animal designs include bighorn sheep and bear paw prints. Anthropomorphs (human figures) include stick-figure types and a number of unique portrayals that apparently highlight gender. Fremont-style anthropomorphs include two figures that have short, curved lines extending from their heads. Both have traces of red pigment in-filling them, a rare feature that suggests that some petroglyphs may also have been painted. §





White Rivers Narrows is located by SR 318, about 150 miles north of Las Vegas, 125 miles south of Ely, and 23 miles north of the small town of Hiko. From the junction of SR 375 and SR 318, just south of Hiko, head north on SR 318 for approximately 23 miles; half a mile north of mile marker 23 turn east onto a dirt road that intersects with SR 318 (there is a Stop sign at the intersection). The White River Narrows sites are on public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Caliente Field Office. Help protect the environment by travelling on existing roads only.







## Narrows IV

Narrows IV is on the south side of a small hill, on a basalt cliff and talus (a slope of rock debris and small boulders). Petroglyphs are located mostly on vertical rock faces and are concentrated at the middle of the outcrop and its east end.



Rock art designs are mostly Basin and Range tradition in style, including a deer, stick-figure anthropomorphs (human figures), bighorn sheep, small rakes, circles, wavy lines, zigzags, and meanders.

Narrows IV is distinguished by the unusual style of many of its zoomorphs (animal figures) as having long, narrow necks and thin bodies. There are several miniature bighorn sheep figures that may be unique to this site. These could represent a rare case where an individual artist can be identified. Usually, it is only possible to identify broad periods in rock art production rather than individual artists. The lightness or darkness of rock art's patina (the color of the surface of the rock that darkens over time) may give some broad indication of a design's relative age. If a site's rock art has patinas that are visibly different in color then it is likely that the site was made over time by different artists. §



## Narrows V

Narrows V is located on a basalt outcrop by the side of a dirt road. To the north, Narrows IV can be seen approximately 150 meters away. Narrows V's rock art is mostly abstract designs in Basin and Range tradition style. Curvilinear



design types—such as circles, wavy lines, and complex meanders—predominate. Representational images are limited to a few bighorn sheep figures and an unusual figure that has lines extending from its head and trailing lines extending from its arms and hands. This could be a portrayal of an animal or an unusual artistic treatment of a person. Narrows V exemplifies the wide variation in design types that Basin and Range tradition style rock art takes.



The general distribution pattern of rock art in White River Narrows highlights that where rock art was made was culturally meaningful. Rock art is found in concentrations at select locations. Themes and groupings of designs distinguish each site. This suggests that different places were thought to be more appropriate for certain kinds of rock art images. Understanding why particular sets of designs were made at different places in the landscape underpins most research into rock art. §







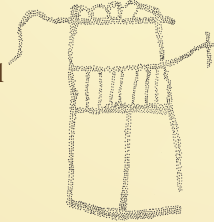
## Narrows VI

Narrows VI is near the north end of the Narrows, located on the east face of a tuff cliff. The site is notable for the sheer quantity of densely clustered rock art images, with many younger designs placed on top of older ones.



The wide range of imagery portrayed at Narrows VI is particularly striking. Abstract designs include long lines that extend for several meters, complex meanders, outlined crosses, rakes, spirals, and circles. Representational figures include a large number of bighorn sheep (arranged in groups, as if portraying herds), lizards, stick-figure anthropomorphs (human figure), and footprints. These designs are local interpretations of Basin and Range tradition rock art.

Possible Fremont-style anthropomorphs are represented by a few figures that have short curved lines extending from their heads. One rectangular design is decorated with vertical lines. This appears to be a Pahrnagat-style patterned body anthropomorph (PBA), which is distinctive to Lincoln County and is concentrated in the Pahrnagat Valley area to the south. White River Narrows marks the northernmost known extent of this regional rock art style. §



## The National Register District

The White River Narrows sites collectively form a District covering some 4,000 acres that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register recognizes places that represent major patterns in national and local



history that are worthy of preservation. The Narrows' listing on the National Register highlights the importance of the District's rock art and other archaeological features. The District is on public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, Caliente Field Office.



The Caliente Field Office's mission is, in partnership with the public, to provide stewardship of the lands and resources entrusted to it for present and future generations. §

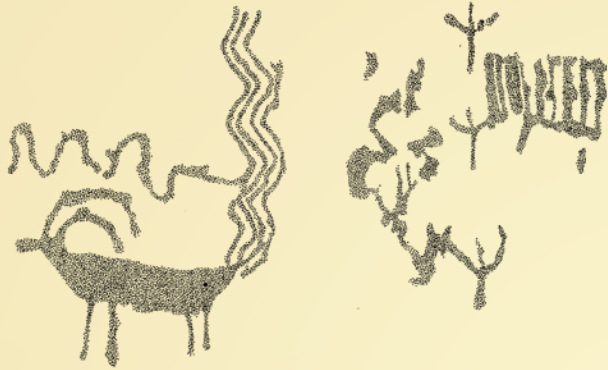






## Preserving the Past

The oldest petroglyphs in the Great Basin are 8,000 years old; in the White River Narrows, some petroglyphs are 4,000 years old. Despite this antiquity, rock art, like other archaeological monuments, is a fragile part of Nevada's cultural heritage. Natural weathering processes, such as wind and



rain, are slowly eroding these ancient markings. Other threats include intentional defacement like graffiti or other vandalism. Intentional damages cannot be removed or even camouflaged easily and are expensive to treat. Federal and state laws protect archaeological sites from vandalism and theft, and many sites are monitored by concerned local citizens volunteering in the State of Nevada's site stewardship program. Because the past deserves a future, visitors at archaeological sites can help by following a few simple guidelines.

TAKE ONLY PICTURES, LEAVE ONLY FOOTPRINTS.

BE A STEWARD—VOLUNTEER TO MONITOR THE CONDITION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES.

For more information on how you can help preserve Nevada's past, visit these websites.

- [www.blm.gov/nv](http://www.blm.gov/nv)
- [www.nvshpo.org/stewards](http://www.nvshpo.org/stewards)
- [www.nvrockart.org](http://www.nvrockart.org)

