



## Jeff LaFave, Master Rock Art Photographer: *an interview*

by Chris Gralapp

BARARAnS were delighted when the prestigious Oliver Award for Excellence in Rock Art Photography was bestowed on Jeff LaFave at the American Rock Art Research Association conference in Redmond, Oregon this last May. I tracked him down to learn more about his story and his trajectory as a fine rock art photographer.

*Of course, we all love rock art—what was it that attracted you?*

I was attracted to rock art because it combines several of my passions – hiking/being outdoors, viewing art and “the hunt” of trying to find things. I was always into art and loved going to art museums, but when I got interested in rock art, I began to be very drawn to hike to “outdoor art museums.” Interestingly, I initially saw rock art on 2 occasions over several years before I got “bitten by the bug.” I had first seen rock art at the Valley of Fire site in Nevada in 1988. Then I visited the Alta site in Norway in 1991. I enjoyed seeing both sites, but my rock art obsession really started a few years later, when I found out that there was rock art in my home area of San Diego County. At that time, I found out that a pictograph site existed in Anza-Borrego and I could not believe there was rock art so close to home. I had always thought of rock art as being somewhere else, likely in some exotic location. As soon as I found out about the site only a couple hours away, I decided I had to visit it the next morning. In fact, I



*Jeff in the Kimberley at the King Edward River Falls, Australia*

was so excited, I ended up reading about rock art all that night without falling asleep, and drove to the site in the dark, arriving at dawn. At that point “it was on.” That was when it hit me that rock art was essentially everywhere and was part of what it was to be human. That realization really elevated my interest in rock art, to what has now become a huge part of my life.

*I know you are an adventuresome world traveler in pursuit of rock art experience—can you describe a couple of your more memorable journeys?*

Rock art has been the impetus for me to travel to some wonderful, remote places. I have seen rock art on all six continents that have rock art. I have been to Australia 5 times, including 3 wonderful trips to the Kimberley and 2 to Arnhem Land. The last Kimberley trip included being dropped off by helicopter to survey an extremely remote area for 2 weeks, and then an additional 3 days of helicopter travel to numerous large Wanjinna sites.

Another great trip was one to Sudan and the “Western Desert” of Egypt. The focus was a visit to the legendary Cave of the Swimmers, Jebel Uweinat, the Gilf Kebir and the wonderful Foggini-Mestowkowi site. I put that trip in motion for myself and some ARARA members (including BARARA founder Leigh Marymor), but it was organized and led by my friend Andras Zboray, a pre-eminent Sahara rock art researcher. We started in Egypt, eventually

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*Wanjina style site from SW Kimberley, Australia*



*The Foggini- Mestokowi site*



*The "lost site" from the Niola Doa area of the Ennedi Massif, Chad*



driving off pavement for 2 weeks including visiting Sudan, going a slight bit into Libya and returning to Siwa by crossing the Great Sand Sea, including massive dunes.

In 2016, I completed a dream trip involving a visit to the Niola Doa site in the Ennedi Plateau region of Chad. The site includes the famous “beautiful ladies” panel. I had wanted to go since seeing a photo in 2001, but war and land mines had prevented that trip. It was an extremely remote Sahara trip, also led by Andras Zboray.

*Your images are amazing—you really have a great compositional eye. Can you tell us about your evolution as a rock art photographer?*

I was always a pretty awful photographer. I have no natural talent whatsoever when it comes to photography. However, I was lucky

enough to see some great rock art photography over the years, which caught my eye, and caused me to start pondering how to get better images. Those photographers included Rick Bury, Jim Zintgraff, Courtney Smith, David Lee, and Francois Gohier. I also started to study landscape photography, especially people like Galen Rowell. That influence, and especially the work of Rick Bury and Courtney Smith caused me to decide I wanted to start trying to shoot rock art images in their landscape context, and that has been my focus ever since. What also really helped me was talking photography in the field with a few friends like Greg Dziewit, David Lee, Steve Freers and especially Courtney Smith. Courtney is a naturally gifted photographer and he gave me a lot of feedback and suggestions over the years. Without his help I would not have improved as much as I have.



Site from the Western Desert of Egypt/on the border with Libya



Bradshaw/Gwion Gwion panel from the Parrot Gallery Site in the Drysdale River region of the Kimberley



Site from the Chhattisgarh, India, near Raipur



Volcanic Tablelands, Bishop area, California

*Inspirations along the way? Photographers / researcher influences?*

As far as other inspirational people along the way regarding rock art, and not just photography, Don Christensen has been a huge influence. Don really focused me to not just being a “site bagger” who wanted to visit sites, but to become a more serious student of rock art and to get involved in recording, site monitoring and helping land managers. Ken Hedges has always been an influence and since I live in San Diego, his Rock Art Symposium had a big impact.

*I understand you are contemplating publishing a book—can you describe your aspirations?*

My goal is to publish a world rock art book. That seems to be a logical extension of my rock art travels and photography. Now, I

need to find a publisher and a layout professional. So, if anyone reading this has any ideas, please contact me so my dream can become a reality!

*What’s your next adventure?*

Probably a trip to China, including Inner Mongolia. However, Bolivia, southern Peru and a 4 corners backpack are upcoming on “the list.” I will also likely visit Valcamonica for the IFRAO conference in 2018.

all photos © Jeff LaFave



## A New Discovery: Pieta Rock Art Site an interview with Ben Frey

by Rachael Freeman Long

*Sometimes catastrophic events like droughts and floods bring unexpected surprises. This happened along the Russian River north of Cloverdale, where high flood waters from our stormy winter scoured out a new channel, leaving behind an extraordinary rock art site that was recently discovered by Ben Frey from Hopland. His remarkable find sheds light on the richness of a California Native American culture that spans thousands of years in the heart of Mendocino County. The following is an interview with Ben about his discovery of the site.*

### *How and when did you find this site?*

I found it this past May on an outing with our son Chris. I scavenge for old wood for building materials, including custom made furniture, that give my pieces a timeless feel. You can see a lot of my work at the Piazza de Campovida restaurant in Hopland. I also like to look for interesting rocks for our yard. After a flood, there's always new things to find in the river bed as lots of things wash downstream and it's like going on a treasure hunt.

After the flood waters receded, Chris and I got in my little rail car (named Pumpkin) in Hopland and drove down the old Northwestern Pacific Railroad tracks that once connected the Bay Area with the north coast. It's a lovely ride, with tunnels and trestles, that's no longer being used by the railroad. We were looking for brush piles along the river when about 5 miles downstream we were stopped by a landslide that covered the tracks. Since we couldn't go any further, we decided to explore the area to see what materials we could find.

We walked down to the riverbed in an area recently scoured out by floods this past winter. The first thing I found was a big chunk of soapstone, that neat blue-green rock, which is really rare and a great find. Chris climbed a nearby rock with a gigantic log on top of it and it was then that I noticed a huge boulder in the riverbed that was the same color as the Cloverdale boulder with the petroglyphs on it. I told Chris that we needed to look at it because it looked like an Indian rock. When we got up close, we were really excited to see

that it was covered with cupules and a few PCN's. I knew right then that we'd found something really special.

### *Why did you name the site Pieta?*

Pieta is a nearby community that was supposedly named in honor of a local Native American chief. There used to be an important village site in this area. In the late 1800's, a post office was established and then a toll road was built that went over the mountain to Clear Lake.

### *What is the rock art like?*

It's incredible as the boulder is covered with hundreds of cupules. We went back about a month later and pulled off the sand that was



covering half of the rock and found even more cupules. There were also a few PCN's, like the ones I've seen at the nearby UC Hopland Research and Extension Center, which I think means that it's a really old site and probably used for centuries for ceremonial purposes. Someone mentioned that the cupule rock is likely a woman's site. It's big, open and right next to the water. The neat thing is that there's a second rock right across the river channel that appears to be a men's site, hidden between two tall rocks that protect it, like a man cave. On the side walls are deeply scoured long grooves, as if someone scraped it to gather powder from the rock.

### *What type of rock is it?*

The cupule rock is soapstone, a talc-schist, largely composed of the mineral talc and is rich in magnesium that gives it the turquoise color. It's been used for carving for thousands of years because it's fairly soft. Baby powder is sometimes made from talc or talcum powder for preventing rashes. The Native Americans likely used it for medicinal purposes as well. The 'men's' rock is some type of bedrock, not soapstone.

### *Do you know the last time it was seen by anyone?*

It's been a long time, perhaps centuries. I've walked this stretch of the river many times but never noticed the rock. It was likely buried in the river bottom because only the top few feet has lichen



growing on it, suggesting that only that part was exposed to the elements. But the area used to be covered in brush and debris for as long as I can remember, so it's not surprising that no one noticed it. The floods this year really cleaned everything out and completely scoured out the rock.

*What do your grandkids think about the rock?*

They love swimming and jumping off the rock into the pool below it. They've been told it's a magic rock, but they're still so young that they can't process its importance yet. Perhaps this is a good thing because if no one knows it's there or its cultural value they aren't likely to damage it, because to most people, it's probably just another rock.

*Can we visit the site?*

Of course, come up any time and I'd be glad to take you to the site. It's really neat.

Our interview concluded with a promise that BARARA would love to visit the site and record it sometime before the next rainy season that might bring high water and cover the rock again, as it probably has for a millennium.



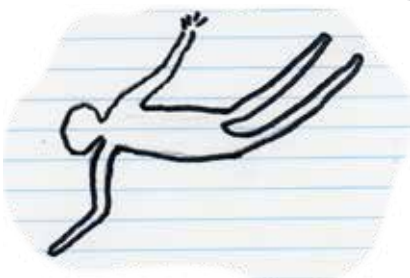
## Gold Butte National Monument and the Falling Man Petroglyph

*by Pierre Pelet*

I became interested in the area because it was the only land north of the Grand Canyon not yet National Park or monument until Obama's last days in office. But the road to the monument goes right by the Bundy ranch, site of an armed standoff between the Bundys and the BLM. Also at the time I was planning to go, the Bundys were on trial in Las Vegas. What if I stumbled into an armed confrontation I had nothing to do with?

It turned out that everything was quiet at the Bundy ranch and soon enough I was at the turn off for the petroglyph site. It was confusing at first because there are three distinct red rock formations, and the first two despite having beautifully varnished cliff faces show no rock art at all. The third formation down the road toward Lake Mead, where it floods the Virgin River Canyon is less colorful but there is a small parking lot and a trail going into the formations. It was easy to find several panels with bighorn sheep and abstract designs.

The falling man takes a bit of persistence because it is perched way up a rocky spur about 50 feet or maybe more above the canyon floor, and is not part of all of the larger panel. But finally, here it was, the coolest petroglyphs I have ever seen.



## A Visit to Rocky Hill

*by Rachael Freeman Long*

Easter weekend brought our BARARA rock art group together in Exeter, CA to explore the nearby Rocky Hill Native American rock art site. This visit carried a celebration of life, as this place is the traditional spiritual grounds of the Foothill Yokuts, a sacred site that is still in use today. As visitors, we were privileged to experience the site and see the extraordinary rock art with each drawing uplifting our spirits, like being a kid on an Easter egg hunt. Just as eggs are a symbol of life and spirit for many cultures, the Native Americans certainly expressed a reverence for life through their beautiful drawings, that felt connected to a spiritual world.

We visited two sites on Rocky Hill, one on private land and the other on Archaeological Conservancy property. The west site overlooks the Central Valley, a massive expanse of agricultural land that once supported herds of deer and elk on vast grasslands. The other site faces the Sierra Nevada mountains that were covered with snow from our extremely wet winter. Both areas were village sites and gathering places with the west side being more open and having a spring with year round water. A canal now winds along the base of Rocky Hill, providing irrigation water for surrounding orange groves from the nearby Kaweah River. This river, along with the Kings and Kern, once flowed into Tulare Lake, the largest fresh water lake west of the Mississippi River before it was drained and developed into the most productive farmland in the world. A good insight into Native American life in the Tulare area is 'Adopted by the Indians', by Thomas Jefferson Mayfield.

We were fortunate to have three wonderful guides for our rock art tour, Manuel Andrade, Laura Manser, and Mary Gorden, long

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time site stewards and/or members of the Southern Sierra Archaeological Society and/or Archaeological Conservancy. Our group of 25 or so rock art affiliates gathered at a rendezvous site, and after signing liability waivers that left me wondering what we were getting into, we car pooled to the first site. An easy half-mile walk put my mind at ease as we passed wild flowers, a small pond, and cows grazing on lush grass. When we reached the base of Rocky Hill, we split into two groups, with half going to a women's site and the other to the men's site. On the way to the woman's site we passed lots of bed rock mortars, deeply incised into the granite rocks, showing a long history of occupation of the area.

The women's site was special with a small cave with hundreds of cupules. This is where young women apparently stayed during a ceremony held after their first menses. At the end of the ceremony, they pecked a new cupule on one of the rocks. Nearby was a phallic rock, caused by natural weathering that resulted in its unique shape. The connection of this rock to the nearby cupules in a slotted cave couldn't but help be noticed, suggesting that this could have been teaching site for young girls about life that felt significant.

From the women's site, we made our way to the men's site, passing friends heading our way as high spirited as us, like being on another Easter egg hunt. The paintings at the men's site were stunning and we marveled at the richness of the mural before us under an overhanging boulder that protected the pictographs from the elements. Figures of animals and people of all types, colors, and shapes dazzled us with a blast of color, stretching far back in time to those more current of a cowboy wrangling cows. The vivid reds, blacks and whites were apparently created from local natural minerals including hematite, magnetite, kaolinite, charcoal, and graphite. A binder of local wild cucumber juice and milkweed was used to make the paint stick to the rocks.

Lunchtime brought our group back together where we shared experiences. I asked others about what they thought when they entered the woman's site. Some felt a spiritual fulfillment through being connected with the land and people before us in a continuous cycle of life. Others just felt happy to be out on a beautiful spring day, exploring the sites and looking at incredible rock art with family and friends. My favorite was our guide Manual, who



heaved a great sigh of contentment and replied, "It put me in touch with my feminine side, which my granddaughter loves".

After lunch, we drove to the east site where we were treated to an even more amazing array of pictographs. But, accessing these sites is not for the faint hearted, as we had to negotiate boulders, slippery slopes, caves, and ladders, making the signing of waivers totally valid! But it was all worth the extra effort with seeing extraordinary figures that were often painted in red and white. These included guardian figurines like big bears, medicine men, a rainbow, outstretched hands, centipedes that might have represented time, turtles, sheep, coyotes, and an immense painting of a large bird that might have been a condor. We also got to experience being in a healing cave, that felt like being in a dream world with a splash of colorful rock art, the focus of another article.

Rocky Hill is a unique place with granite outcrops and oak trees that's different from the bare hills around it. Jim Hale, our long-time BARARA friend, shared the magic of the area with listing all the bird species that shared the site, which was a lot! He was even serenaded by a family of coyotes that had a den in the area, while sitting on a rock as we explored a nearby cave. We are so grateful to our guides for the opportunity to see this special place and can't think of a better way to celebrate Easter and life.

On our drive back to Exeter, we noticed the Badger Hill housing development on the next hill that was so very wrong in this special place. J. G. Boswell Company is planning for further development with a 10,000 home community nearby. There appears to be significant organized opposition to the plan for a variety of reasons and hopefully it'll never materialize. This is our heritage and a place of spiritual significance that deserves protection forever.



## Rethinking the 'Birth Chamber' at Rocky Hill

by Dorothy Bohntinsky

Taking part in BARARA's April 2017 fieldtrip to Rocky Hill near Exeter, CA, not only brought delight within the moment but also provided an opportunity to reflect upon ancestral Yokuts practices. The final experience for our group was explained to be a female birthing place. This very unique combination of a natural patio-like enclosure created by large boulders and a small chamber-like cave was deemed so sacred that, unlike the other settings, silence was requested and no photography was allowed. While climbing the steep slope to this obscure location, our female guide reminded us of the guidelines, including that the men were to wait until each woman had experienced the setting individually. My husband was so convinced that it was a woman's sacred place for birthing that he did not enter.

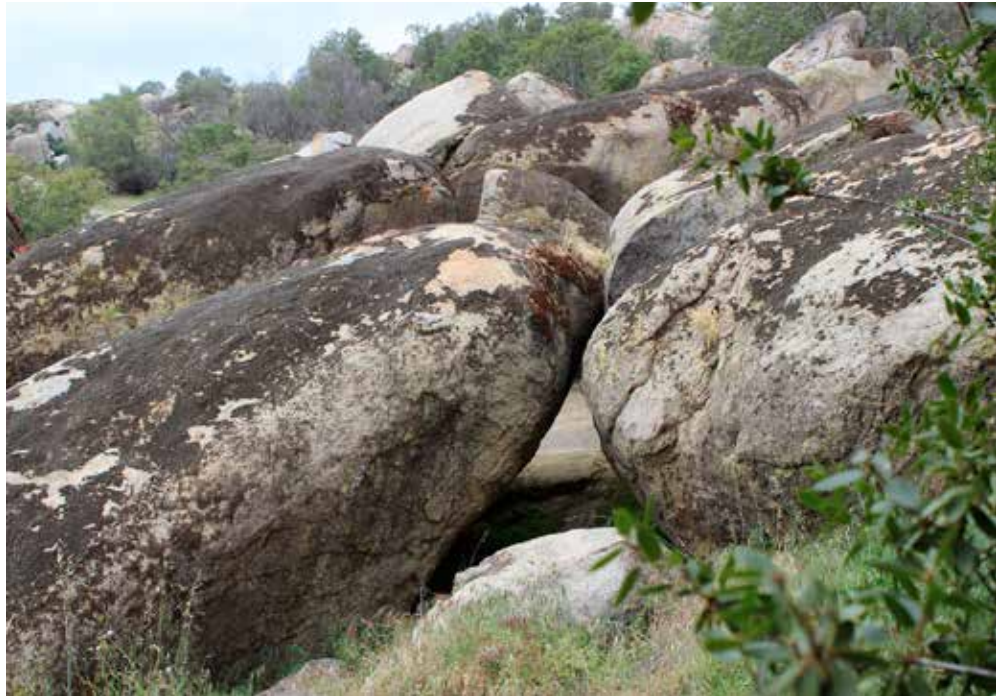
Having delivered two daughters, my focus was on experiencing the perspective of the docent's explanation. However, as the days passed, my doubt grew when I imagined myself as a young Yokuts woman ready to give birth. Climbing a steep slope while in labor, being greeted by participants on the patio, bending my pregnant body forward, maneuvering my head around in order to lay my torso in the small chamber-like cave, and planting my feet on the ground outside seemed contraindicative. There is a strong desire to move around during labor, and women have even been known to squat at the time of giving birth. Labor, which requires coordinating the breath with contractions, could interfere with focusing on the cosmic-like images overhead. Yet, it is possible to imagine the setting as some kind of birthing chamber and the rock art above symbolizing important truths.

Another possibility came to mind from my experiences as a speech language pathologist with a D.Min. in creation spirituality (cosmic forces that interconnect all things along a path of evolution) and ordination in interfaith ministry. This combination inspires me to look for universalities within interpretations. Exploring the blend of theology and ritual in earth-based religions at sacred sites (including my travels in small study groups to Tamil Nadu, India and Eleusis, Greece) has helped me to look for commonality within spiritual and psychological practices. One universal is the practice of initiation—spiritually and culturally. It is common practice to initiate young boys and girls into adulthood as well as people into religious and cultural societies. Another universal is the use of sacred sites as places for connecting to supernatural powers and the transformation of one's psyche, whether in a great temple or natural cave. Caves are known to serve as places for transformation, and the natural settings can offer connection with non-denominational

supernatural powers as well as to the earthly womb.

While initiation continues today in "modern" religions, the practices in earth-based religions have become less understood by the westernized world. There is a universal framework within the slow process of initiation: idealistic innocence, loss, creating newness, and transformation. During formal initiatic rites, caves have served the symbolic function of the womb. Prior to birth, it is a place for gestation or transformation into a "new life" after a symbolic death of the old ways.

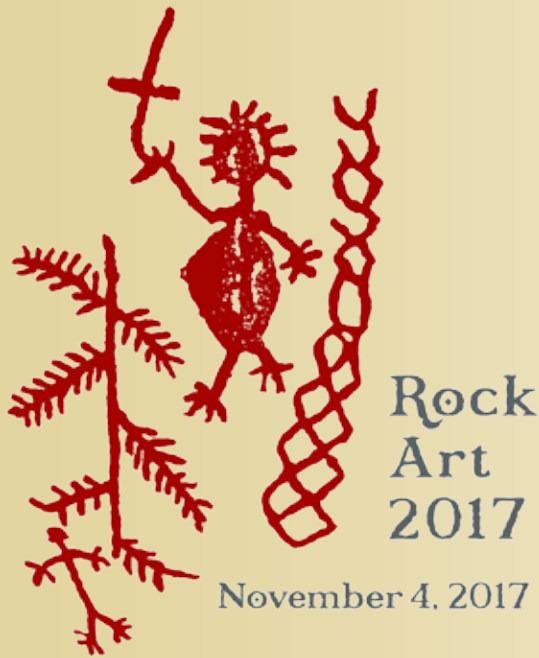
Iconic symbols, whether carved into or painted upon grand temples or natural landforms, tap into parameters of cognition that effectively integrate previously-learned complex concepts and emotional associations simultaneously. Yet, they have a multi-vocal function whereby meaning depends on each individual's level of mastery. Interpretation varies from literal and secular by the



uninitiated to the figurative and esoteric by the initiates. Thus, the concrete story of birthing in a tiny cave at a prehistoric site can be abstractly metaphorical. Most indigenous peoples honor both levels of interpretation of sacred places and imagery verses an either/or explanation.

Yet, having experienced childbirth, it becomes more difficult to entertain this site as a literal female birthing place. Such suggests that the rock art upon the chamber's ceiling is there to remind the mother and/or infant about what is to be held sacred. I suspect the mother and child already knew, because the newborn would be suckling. I am more comfortable engaging this setting as a sacred place of ancient ritual and ceremony where individuals possibly experienced the final stage in a long process of initiation: death within the enclosure followed by gestation in a womb-like chamber prior to rebirth. Adding this reinterpretation expands potentiality for further investigation and offers visitors an equal invitation regardless of gender. Maybe, from this perspective, my husband would enter it next time.





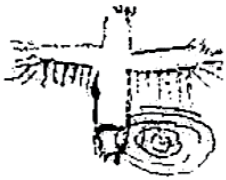
## San Diego's 42nd Annual Rock Art Symposium

Saturday, November 4, 2017

San Diego Community College District  
Educational Cultural Complex Theatre  
4343 Ocean View Blvd, Room 159,  
San Diego, CA 92113

Registration and Check-In 8:00 a.m.  
Symposium Papers 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
More information and registration:  
<http://www.sandiegorockart.org/symposium.html>

The Symposium Registration Fee is \$25 for all attendees, with complimentary registration for Native Americans. Registration includes our commemorative mug with the conference logo, and T-shirts are available for purchase. Visit [www.sdraa.org](http://www.sdraa.org) for complete information and online registration and payment.



## Join/Renew your membership in the Bay Area Rock Art Research Association!

Founded in 1983 by Dr. Paul Freeman and Leigh Marymor, BARARA attracts like-minded individuals who are committed to exploring rock art all over the world, preserving and conserving it, providing education, and studying rock art in creative and interesting ways. Members enjoy access to field trip information and receive a newsletter that is published twice a year.

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