

Pictographs at Hunters Shelter: Possible Extension of the Red Linear Style into
the Guadalupe Mountains of Southern New Mexico

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Abstract

The photo-documentation of Hunters Shelter, a small, obscure shelter high in the Guadalupe Mountains of New Mexico led to a reexamination of the corpus of miniature, Late Archaic rock art known as the Red Linear Style of the Lower Pecos River region of Texas, 400 km to the southeast. Pictographs at Hunters Shelter and White Oaks Spring, and at other sites in the Guadalupe Mountains appear to have strong similarities to the Red Linear Style. While the temporal relationship between these similar pictograph styles is still unknown, the Pecos River should be considered a likely prehistoric corridor for the movement of people or ideas between the Guadalupe Mountains and the Lower Pecos region

Key Words: rockart, Texas, Pecos, net, rabbit

This study began with the photo-documentation of Hunters Shelter, a small, obscure shelter high in the Guadalupe Mountains of New Mexico. It led to a reevaluation of the corpus of rock art known as the Red Linear Style of the Lower Pecos River region (Val Verde County) of Texas, four hundred kilometers to the southeast. In addition to examining other sites in the Guadalupe Mountains, we visited or revisited all the Val Verde County Red Linear Style sites to which we could gain access. An image database has been developed to help us make comparisons.

Gebhard (1960:53, 1965:33) first introduced the term Red Linear Style (RLS) during his study of rock art sites prior to the impoundment of Amistad Reservoir. The style was more fully defined by Newcomb (Kirkland and Newcomb 1967:92-95) and Turpin (1984, 1990a, 1990c:103-106). Turpin characterized the RLS as “a representative art style which often clearly reproduces the distinguishing characteristics of animals, weapons, and human figures. ... The miniature [usually 10 cm or less in height] monochrome Red Linear style is characterized by diminutive stick figures engaged in animated group activities” (Turpin 1984:182). The RLS appears intrusive in the Lower Pecos River region, following the Archaic-Period monumental Pecos River Style. Our study suggests the possibility that the Guadalupe Mountains of New Mexico could be a source or transit-area for the RLS people or ideas.

Hunters Shelter

Hunters Shelter is an inconspicuous, small (4m by 4m) room-like shelter high on a steep slope in the Guadalupe Mountains of southeastern New Mexico (Figure 1), within the Pecos River drainage. The limestone shelter is about one meter from floor to ceiling in the area of the pictographs (Figure 2). Three panels of small red pictographs (Figure 3) are painted over two meters of the back wall. From left to right facing the wall, are Panel A, a butchering scene (Figure 4), Panel B, a lone cervid (Figure 5), and Panel C, a rabbit-hunting scene (Figures 6 and 7). Between and below panels B and C are some remnant red paint marks. The minute details of the small figures painted on all three panels indicate that paint was applied with a very fine brush.

The shelter floor is level with a mixture of fine dirt and rocks. There were no bedrock mortars or other obvious archaeological remains in or near the Hunters Shelter. We placed lightweight garden lining material on the floor while measuring and photographing the panels in order to keep disturbance and dust to a minimum. An archaeologist should carefully analyze the shelter and surrounding area, as it would be important to know how these isolated and intriguing paintings might fit into the broader archaeological pattern.

Panel A, the butchering panel (Figure 4), depicts seven small people either holding implements, the legs of the dead animal or portions of its removed body parts, and the relatively large cervid on its back, being butchered. Several additional implements are depicted nearby in a pattern consistent with hunters placing their weapons or tools down while preparing their prey for butchering. The panel is 20 cm wide and 15 cm high. Its base is 44 cm above the floor.

Centrally located, panel B, the lone cervid panel (Figure 5), consists of one element that is 25 cm wide and 16 cm high. Its base is 54 cm above the floor. The authors sought identification of the animal depicted in panels A and B from knowledgeable hunters and others who are familiar with the Guadalupe Mountains. Conflicting interpretations included deer, elk, and perhaps a metaphoric animal.

Panel C, the rabbit-hunting panel (Figures 6 and 7) depicts nine hunters holding one or more implements (curved or straight sticks), two or three canines (dogs), three rectilinear geometric patterns that most likely represent nets with anchoring sticks protruding, and seven or eight prey animals (rabbits, perhaps some deer). Eight of the hunters are aligned in two rows of four, a logical position to sweep rabbits into nets. One faces backwards, perhaps helping to keep the prey oriented to the nets, or to catch or kill any strays. One of the hunters in the front row holds a rabbit (presumably dead) along with two curved sticks. The three dogs (one is indistinct and could be another prey animal) are behind the last row of hunters. The lower one is painted with great detail, showing one eye with pupil and its teeth. There are several indecipherable remnant paint marks in front of the back row of hunters, and what may be an escaping deer at the bottom of the front row of hunters. Seven of the hunters have what is probably hair depicted in a pattern going down their backs, similar to five of the people in the butchering scene on panel A. Panel C is 80 cm wide and 55 cm high. Its base is 28 cm above the floor.

Although hunting rabbits was an important activity in prehistoric North America (Shaffer 1995), it is rarely depicted in rock art, although we now know of two such scenes within the Guadalupe Mountains. Comparable motifs, including three hunters with curved sticks and/or a hooked tool, a net with support stakes, and two rabbits, are depicted on a Mimbres bowl (Brody 1977:171) (Figure 8).

White Oaks Spring Pictographs

A second site, with similar very small red painted motifs of rabbit hunting and deer processing (Figure 9), has more recently been discovered elsewhere in the Guadalupe Mountains, also within the Pecos River drainage. Located in the Lincoln National Forest, the White Oaks Spring Pictographs site (LA 157206) is situated in a very different setting. Rather than a high, dry, obscure site, it is located in an open shelter, near a stream channel and permanent water. The paintings are located about 1.6 meters above the shelter floor, and are within an area 60 cm wide by 30 cm high (Figure 10).

The far left scene depicts six hunters with weapons surrounding five prey animals (probably rabbits), with a net depicted at the lower left. The central scene shows four people (one identifiably male) holding the legs of a cloven-hoofed cervid with a fifth person approaching from the left and carrying a very long implement that was not seen in the Hunters Shelter images. All of these humans have what is probably long hair depicted in the same style as many of the Hunters Shelter figures. There is another animated male figure with hair carrying two curved sticks chasing(?) another prey running off to the upper right. Closer to this figure is another prey animal in an unusual position with head back and legs akimbo. Several indecipherable splotches of red paint were also visible.

We know of no other rock art or pottery scenes that depict butchering, dressing, or processing of game animals. There are other hunting scenes with nets depicted as petroglyphs in northeastern New Mexico, and southwestern Colorado (Loendorf 2006) and in the archaic Northwestern Plains Rock Art Style (Sundstrom 1989; Tratebas 2000).

Red Linear Style

Approximately four hundred kilometers southeast along the Pecos River drainage, the Red Linear Style of pictographs has been defined as a regionally and temporally limited style. It includes small, fine-lined figures in various activities, usually executed with liquid red paint. According to Turpin (1984:182), the Red Linear Style has characteristic “sex differentiation, phallacism, hand-held implements, companion animals, feather headdresses, dancing or marching groups, and the use of S-shaped humans to convey the impression of motion” (Figure 11). Turpin (1990a, 1990b:272) identified scenes relating to human reproduction, and Boyd (2003:79, 100) identified datura and peyotism themes. All the previously known sites (about 20) are in the region of the lower Pecos and Devils Rivers, and along the Rio Grande River (Amistad National Recreation Area) in Val Verde County, Texas. Some of the elements have been executed in black, as well as red (e.g., 41VV1000, Figure 12).

The Red Linear Style is generally considered to be of Late Archaic age, based upon superposition and content (Turpin 1990a:376, 1990b:271-272, 2004:272). Only two experimental radiocarbon AMS dates are reported from what are most likely Red Linear Style elements (Ilger et. al. 1994:337, 1995:305; Rowe 2003:85). These reported dates are 1280 ± 150 B.P. for 41VV162A and 1280 ± 80 B.P. for 41VV75.

Rich in weapons and other implements, the Red Linear Style does not appear to depict the bow and arrows. The bow is thought to have entered the lower Pecos region during the latter half of the first millennium of the Common Era, perhaps about A.D. 1000 (Shafer 1981:130; Wiederhold et. al., 2003:90). Thus, a Late Archaic age for the Red Linear Style appears to be consistent. Turpin (1995:548, 550) places the introduction of the bow and arrow to A.D. 600-900, but favors an earlier introduction of the Red Linear Style (Cibola Subperiod, 3150 to 2300 B.P.)

Red Linear Style in the Guadalupe Mountains?

Previous studies of rock art in the Guadalupe Mountains of New Mexico and Texas include Bilbo and Bilbo (1991) and Clark (1974). Bilbo and Bilbo (1991:64) recognized a similarity between pictographs in the Guadalupe Mountains and 41VV201, the type-site for the Red Linear style. This style is distinct from the other styles found in the Guadalupe Mountains region, including the presumably earlier Chihuahuan Polychrome Abstract style (Schaafsma 1992:43), the presumably later Jornada Mogollon style (Schaafsma 1992:60) and Apache protohistoric and historic rock art (Schaafsma 1992:78).

We have now examined elements that appear to be similar to Red Linear Style in five sites in the Guadalupe Mountains. The term RLS, as applied in the Guadalupe Mountains should be considered as descriptive. In three small sites (including Hunters Shelter and White Oaks Springs Pictographs site), the RLS elements are the only ones present in the shelters. In other more extensive rock art sites (such as LA 64908), RLS appears as a minor component, along with other rock art. This pattern of occurrence is similar to that of the Lower Pecos River region, where RLS figures occur by themselves in small isolated sites, or as minor components in larger Pecos River Style sites. One Guadalupe Mountains site (LA 64908) contains RLS elements painted in black.

Comparisons

Each of the approximately 25 known sites containing RLS elements is different from the others, with respect to what the particular elements and scenes depict (if any), with the exception of the two newly discovered hunting scene sites in the Guadalupe Mountains, which are remarkably similar. Thus, comparisons are best made between elements, rather than panels or whole sites. Figure 13 shows comparisons of anthropomorphs, implements, and animals, between Guadalupe Mountains RLS elements and Lower Pecos region (Val Verde County) elements. In particular, the correspondence in implements and hair style (or headdress) are convincing evidence of a very strong relationship between these regions. The hooked stick with crossbar, which could be a representation of an atlatl, so far appears to be confined to this style. Both regions also show rabbits, canines, cervids, and nets, and both lack representations of bow and arrows. Although most of the Texas elements that we are tentatively identifying as nets appear as lines or looplines (cf. Sundstrom 1989:153; Tratebas 2000:67-69) rather than the easily recognized grids of the

Guadalupe sites; 41VV75 is the exception (Figure 14). At this site, the nets are very similar to those in the Guadalupe Mountains sites.

In addition to the similarities, there are some significant differences. Most striking is the excellent state of preservation and fine detail present at the two hunting-scene sites. This may be explained by their well-protected locations. The other sites so far examined in the Guadalupe Mountains are not so well preserved. The sites in the Lower Pecos region are generally in an intermediate state of preservation; many are weathered and are scaling.

The elaborate, well-executed scenes are not matched, or at least not as well preserved, in the Lower Pecos River region. While there is striking similarity in some important aspects of the elements (such as implements and hair), there are some notable differences. The people in the Guadalupe Mountains are typically depicted with feet, which are lacking in the Lower Pecos. The dogs depicted in the Hunters Shelter are rendered in fine detail. Those assumed to be dogs in the Lower Pecos are much cruder by comparison, lacking paws and teeth. So far, no scenes relating to reproduction, datura, or peyotism have been discovered in the Guadalupe Mountains.

Discussion

Although the panels of the Hunters Shelter and White Oaks Spring Pictographs sites are unique, they, and images occurring in at least three other sites in the Guadalupe Mountains, appear to have strong similarities to the Red Linear Style, identified four hundred kilometers to the southeast. Turpin (1984:195, 1994:76) suggested that the Red Linear painters were intrusive into the Lower Pecos region. While the temporal relationship between these similar pictograph styles is still unknown, the Pecos River should be considered a likely prehistoric corridor for the movement of people or ideas between the Guadalupe Mountains and the Lower Pecos region (Figure 15). More research is needed in the Guadalupe Mountains of New Mexico and Texas, and the greater Pecos River corridor and mountains in Texas. A site with similarities to the RLS panel has been observed in the Delaware Mountains (Broughton 1999:161-170; Prewitt 2007:105). If additional sites can be identified, and perhaps dated, it would add significantly to our knowledge of the movement of an early hunter-gatherer population who left this intriguing imagery on rock walls over great distances. We plan to continue this research.

Acknowledgments

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Hunters Shelter overview, in the Guadalupe Mountains, NM.

Figure 2. Robert Mark inside Hunters Shelter looking toward Panel C area. Panel B, a lone animal, is above his left shoulder and a portion of panel A is at far left shadow line.

Figure 3 Back wall of Hunters Shelter, showing location of 3 panels. A. butchering scene, B. cervid, C. rabbit hunt scene. A bird's nest is on a small ledge above and to right of Panel B.

Figure 4. Hunters Shelter Panel A is a butchering scene with seven small human figures around a relatively large dead animal with three legs being held apart while two of the humans remove its innards. Many implements, possibly including atlatls and darts, lie nearby.

Figure 5. Hunters Shelter Panel B is the cervid panel. This is the largest single element in the shelter.

Figure 6. Hunters Shelter Panel C is the rabbit hunt panel. This scene depicts hunters carrying curved sticks, rabbits, dogs, nets, and perhaps deer.

Figure 7. Drawing of the Hunters Shelter Panel C illustrates details of eight hunters carrying various weapons arranged in two groups of four driving rabbits toward three nets with the help of dogs with open mouths. An isolated hunter assists from a central location.

Figure 8. Mimbres bowl showing rabbit hunt scene similar to Hunters Shelter Panel C with net, two rabbits, four hunters with curved sticks and/or hooked implement. Grass, tracks, and a flag (elements not seen in the Hunters Shelter) complete the bowl scene. Drawn by Margaret Berrier from a photograph, with permission, from Brody (1977:171).

Figure 9. White Oaks Spring Pictographs (LA 157206), Lincoln National Forest, in the Guadalupe Mountains with motifs very similar to Hunters Shelter. Small red figures include animals, a net, hunters (some with hair or headdress), tools, and another game processing scene where all four legs of the animal to be butchered are being held.

Figure 10. The White Oaks Spring Pictographs shelter. Arrow points to the location of red pictograph panel.

Figure 10. Red Linear figures at 41VV201, the RLS type site in Val Verde County, Texas. Most are seated; a posture not observed at the Guadalupe Mountains sites.

Figure 12. Red Linear figures at 41VV1000, Val Verde County, Texas, with central black human among fine-line red figures.

Figure 13. Drawings of elements from Guadalupe Mountains and Lower Pecos area sites compared side by side. A. implements, B. people with hairstyle or headdress, C. rabbits, D. cervids, E. dogs, F. nets and possible nets. Lower Pecos area site numbers, all within Val Verde County, begin with 41VV.

Figure 14. Deer hunting scene at Seminole Canyon site 41VV75. The nets are very similar to those depicted in the Guadalupe Mountains Hunters Shelter and White Oaks Spring Pictographs sites. Photograph by Angel Johnson, watercolor by Nola Montgomery

Figure 15. Map showing Pecos River region, from New Mexico (ellipse study area) to the Rio Grande River in Texas (Val Verde County).



Fig. 1

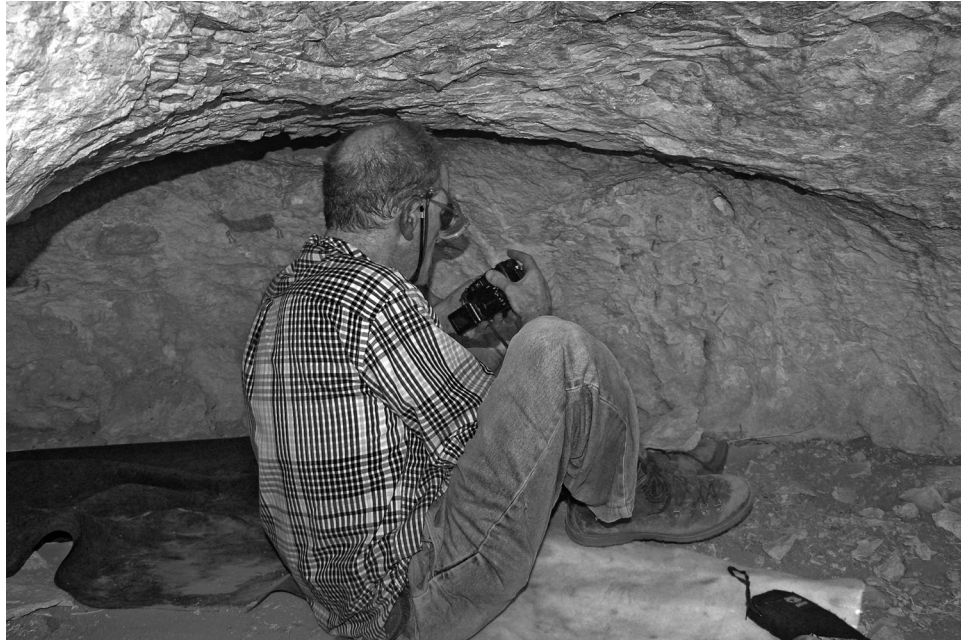


Fig. 2

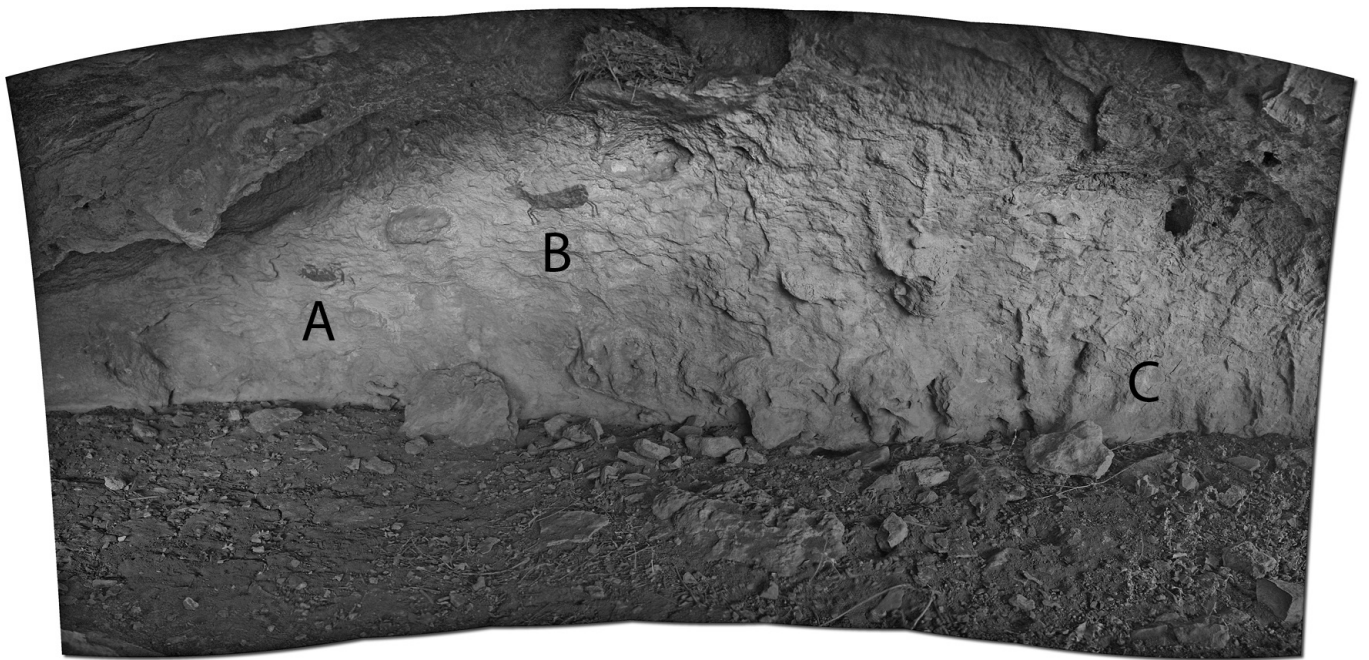


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

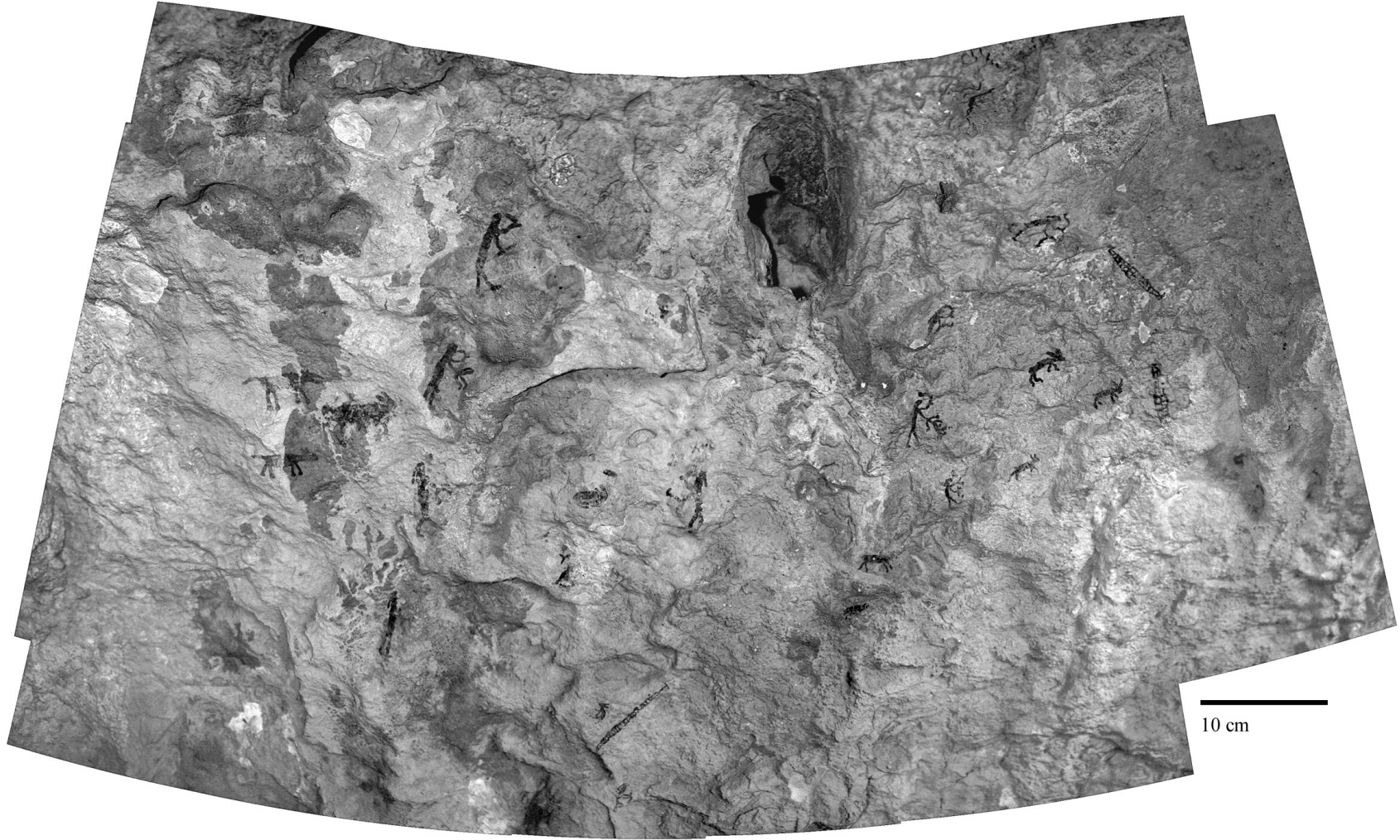


Fig. 6

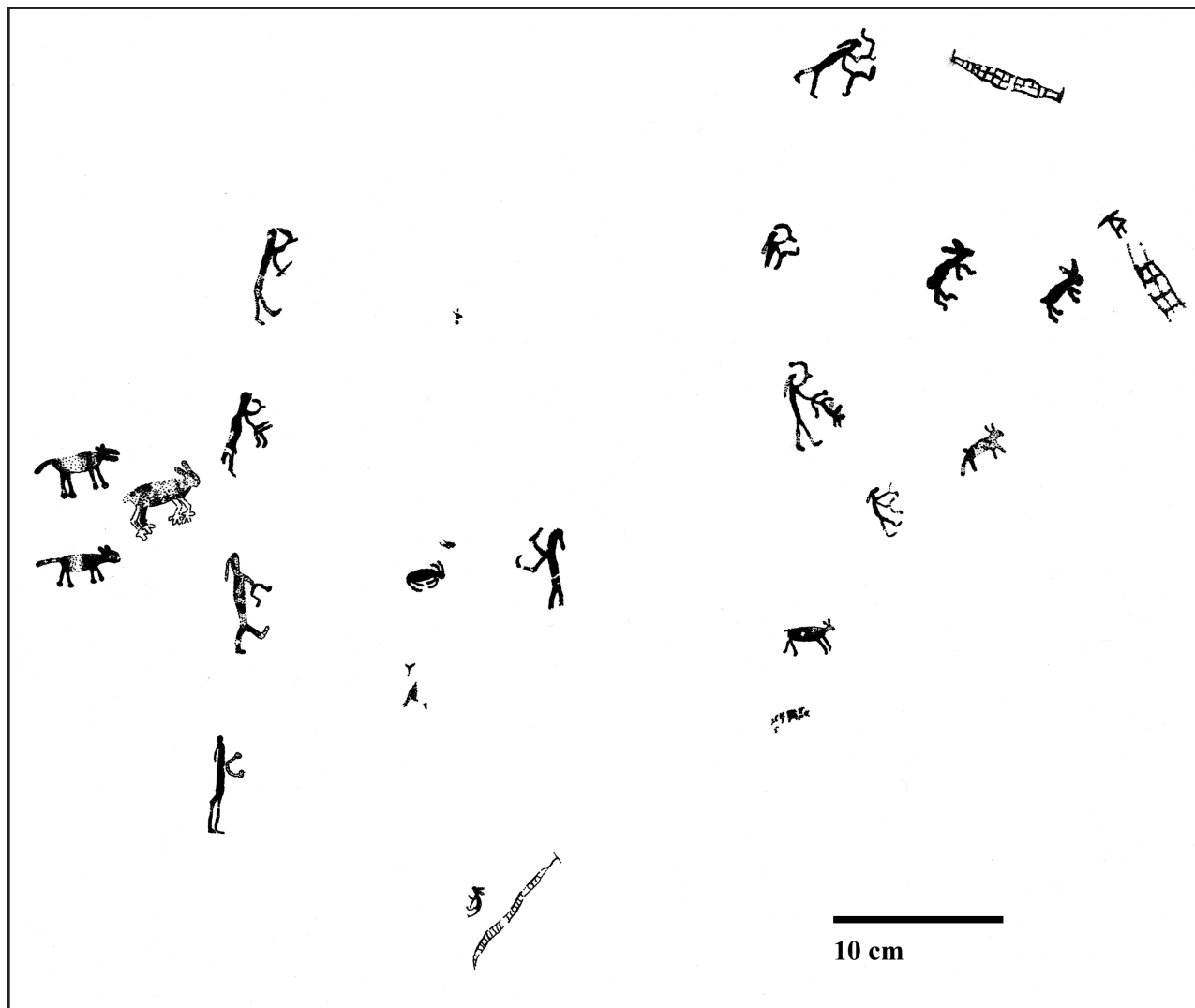


Fig. 7



Fig. 8

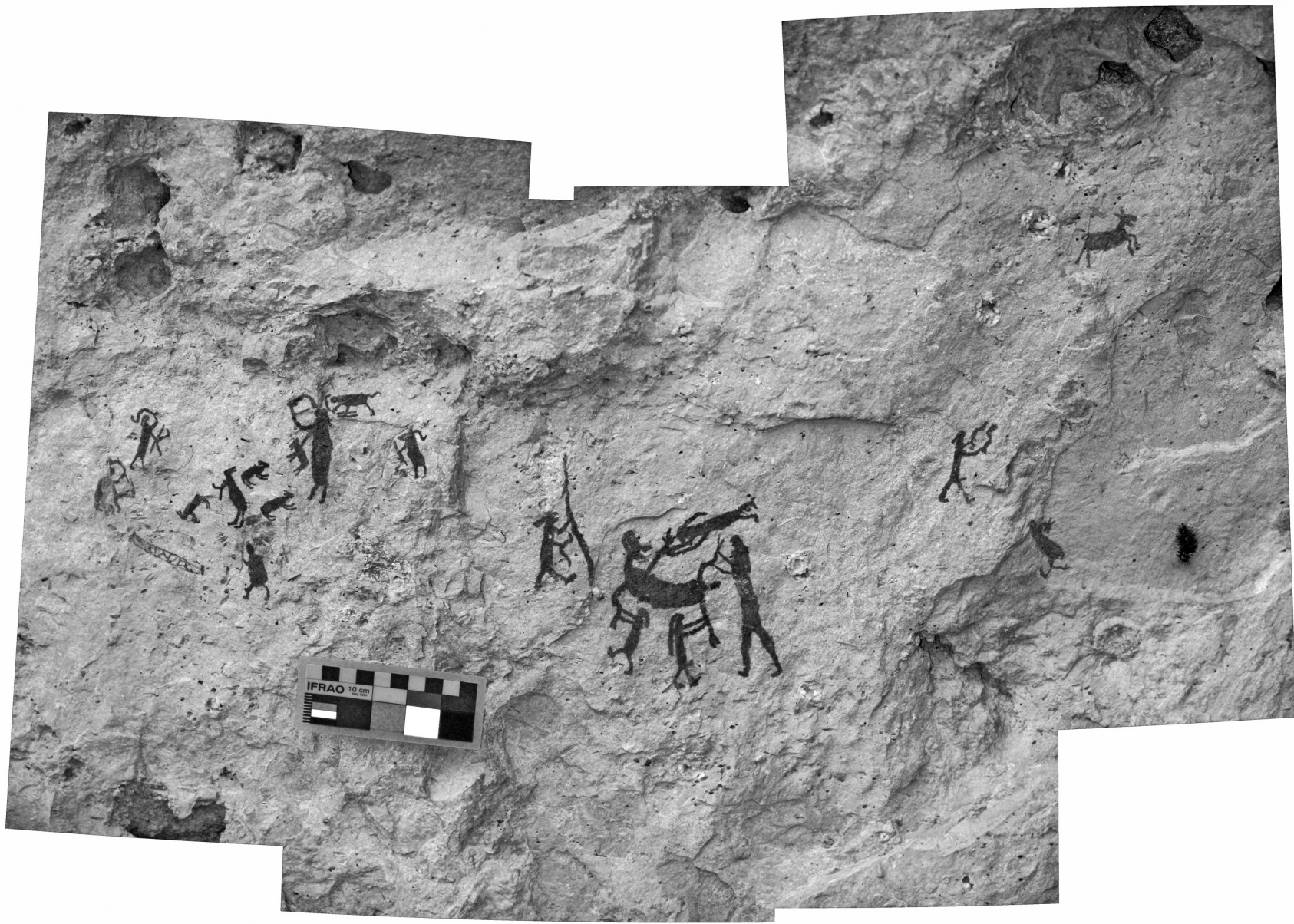


Fig. 9



Fig. 10

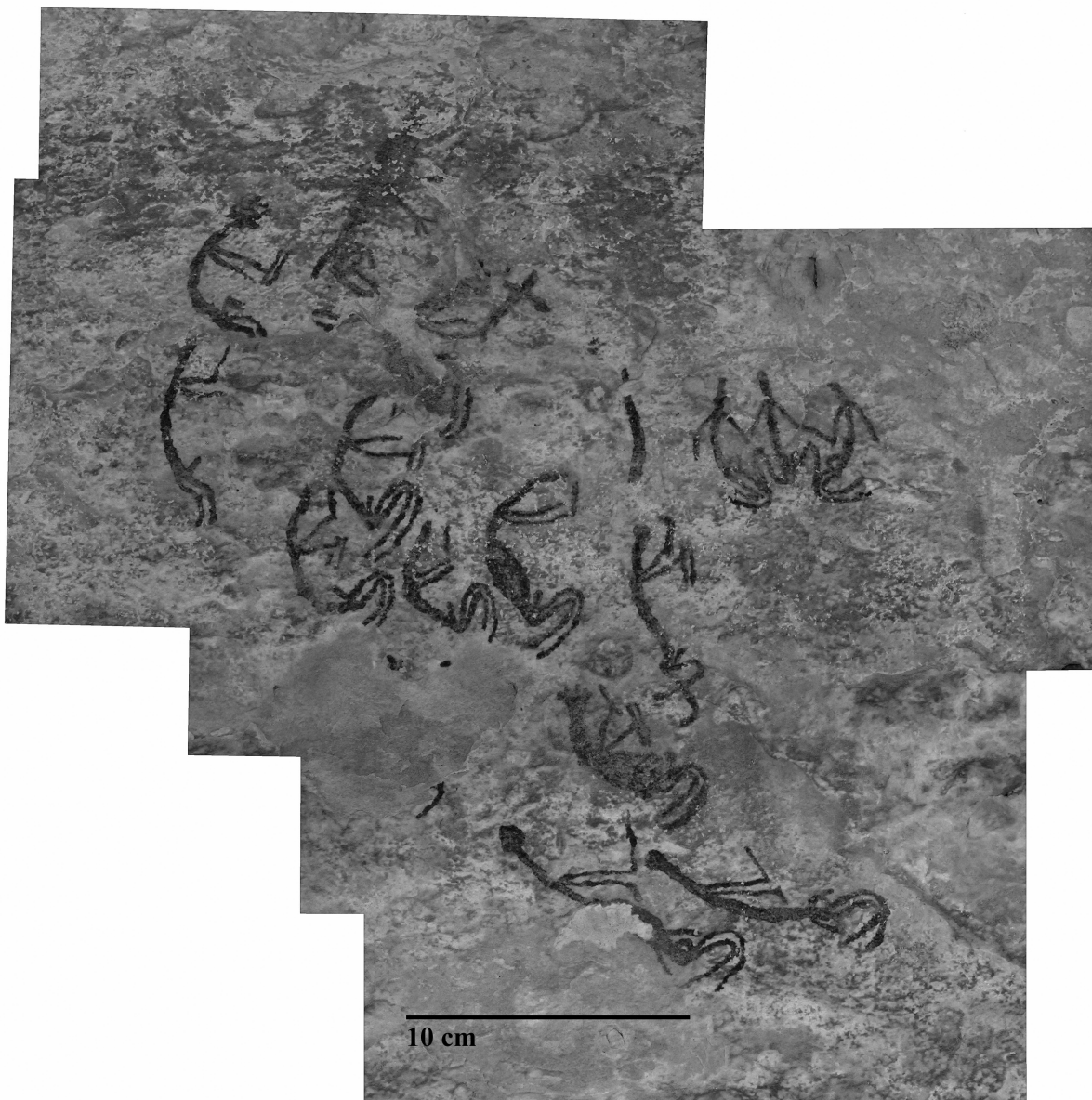


Fig. 11

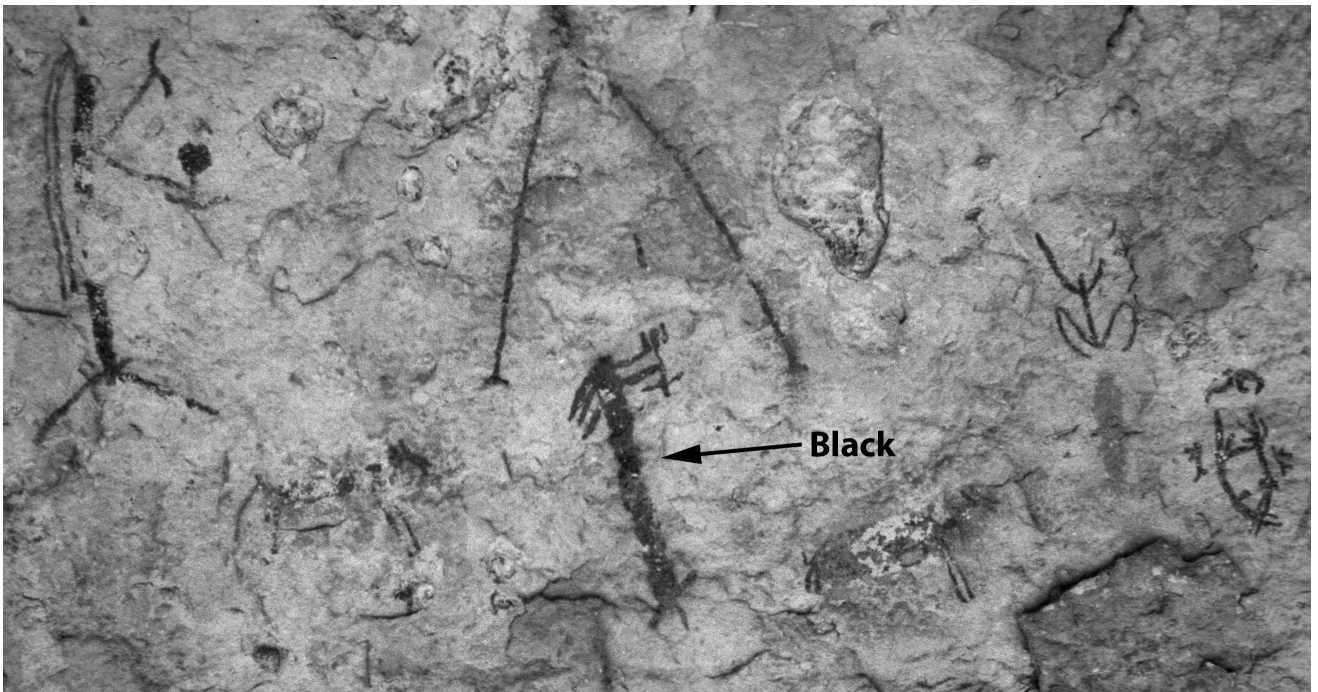
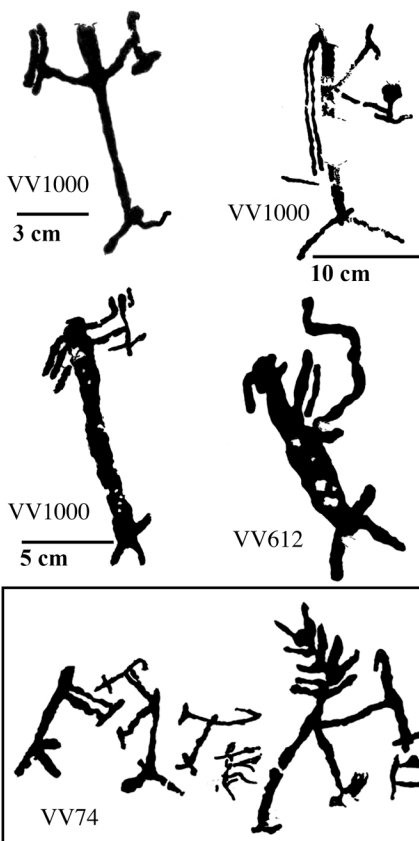
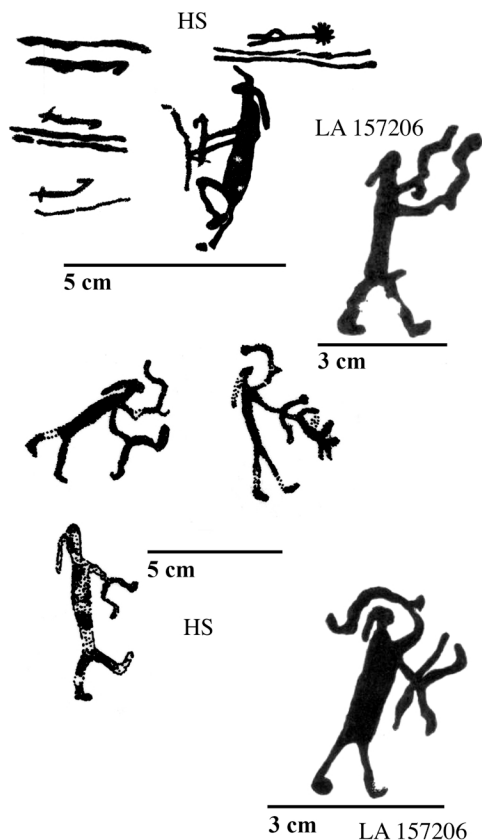


Fig. 12

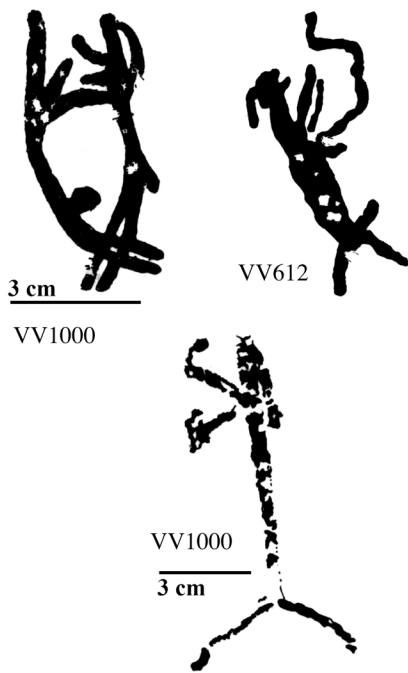
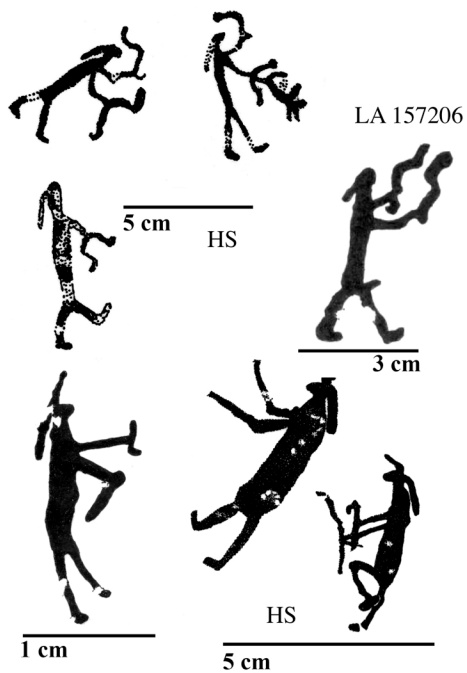
Guadalupe Mountains

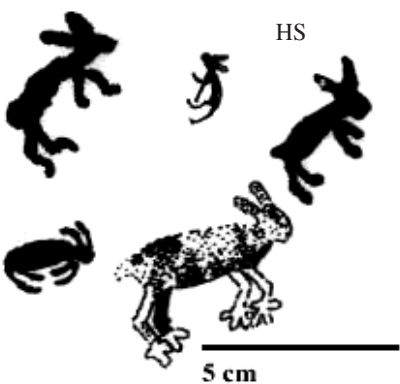
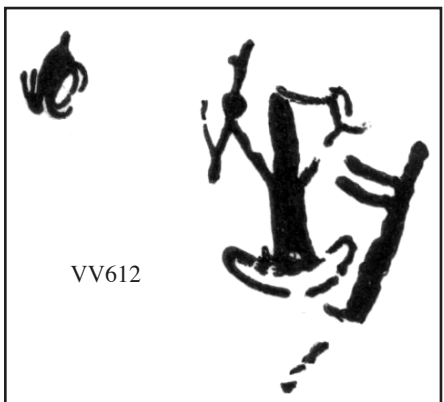
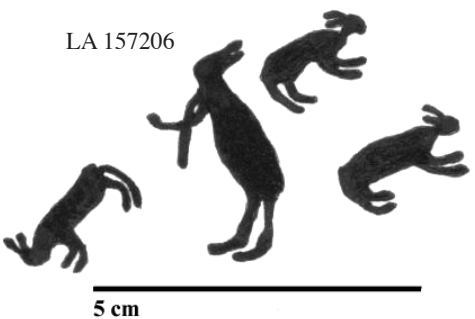
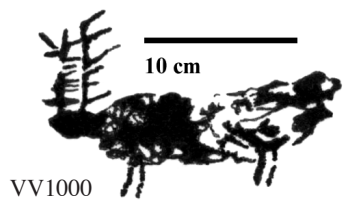
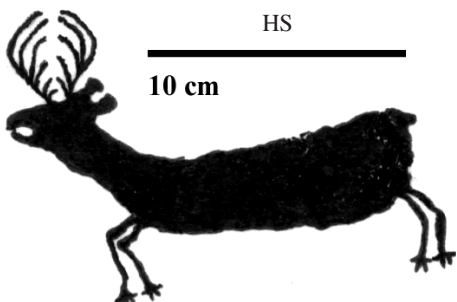
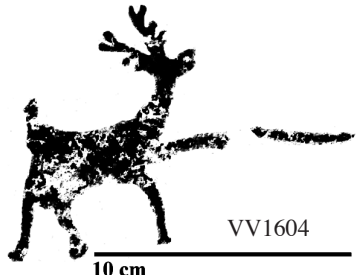
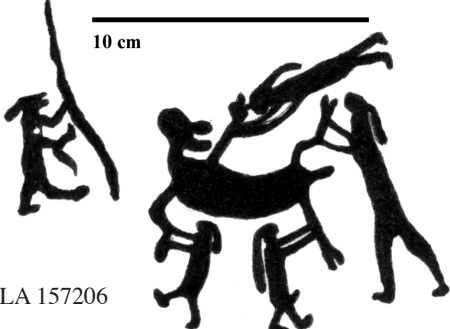
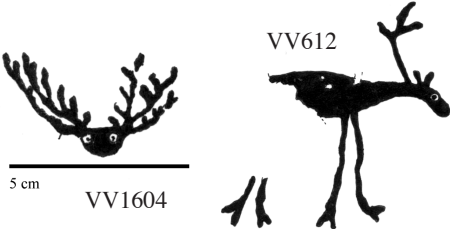
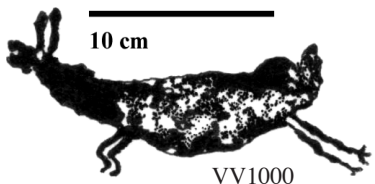
Lower Pecos Region

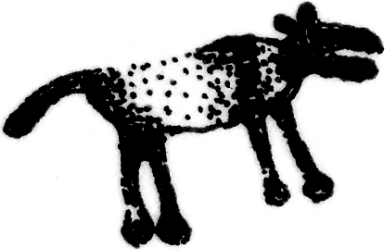


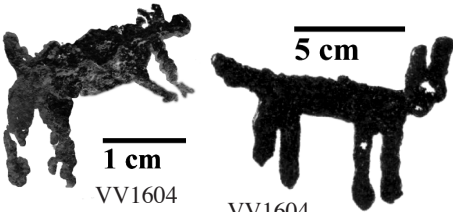

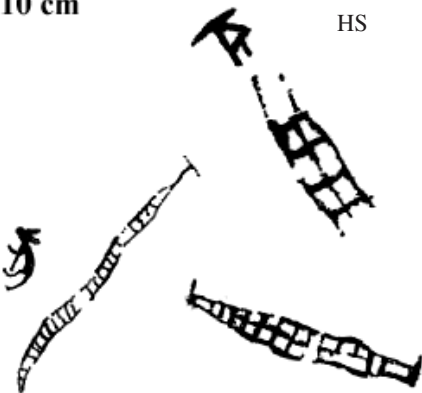

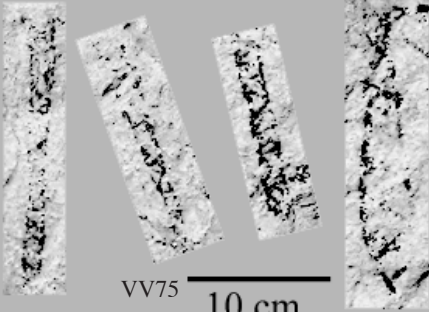

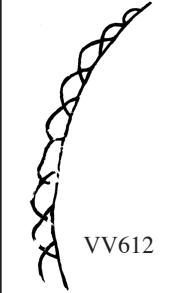
A. Implements



B. Hair or Headress



	Guadalupe Mountains	Lower Pecos Region
C. Rabbits	 <p>HS</p> <p>5 cm</p>	 <p>VV612</p>
	 <p>LA 157206</p> <p>5 cm</p>	 <p>VV1000</p> <p>10 cm</p>
D. Cervids	 <p>HS</p> <p>10 cm</p>	 <p>VV1604</p> <p>10 cm</p>
	 <p>LA 157206</p> <p>10 cm</p>	 <p>VV612</p> <p>5 cm</p> <p>VV1604</p>
		 <p>VV1000</p> <p>10 cm</p>

	Guadalupe Mountains	Lower Pecos Region
E. Dogs	 <p>5 cm</p>  <p>HS</p>	<p>VV1604</p>  <p>1 cm 10 cm VV162A</p>  <p>1 cm VV1604 VV1604</p>  <p>5 cm VV201</p>
F. Nets	<p>10 cm</p>  <p>HS</p>  <p>5 cm LA 157206</p>	 <p>VV75 10 cm</p>  <p>VV612</p>  <p>VV612</p>

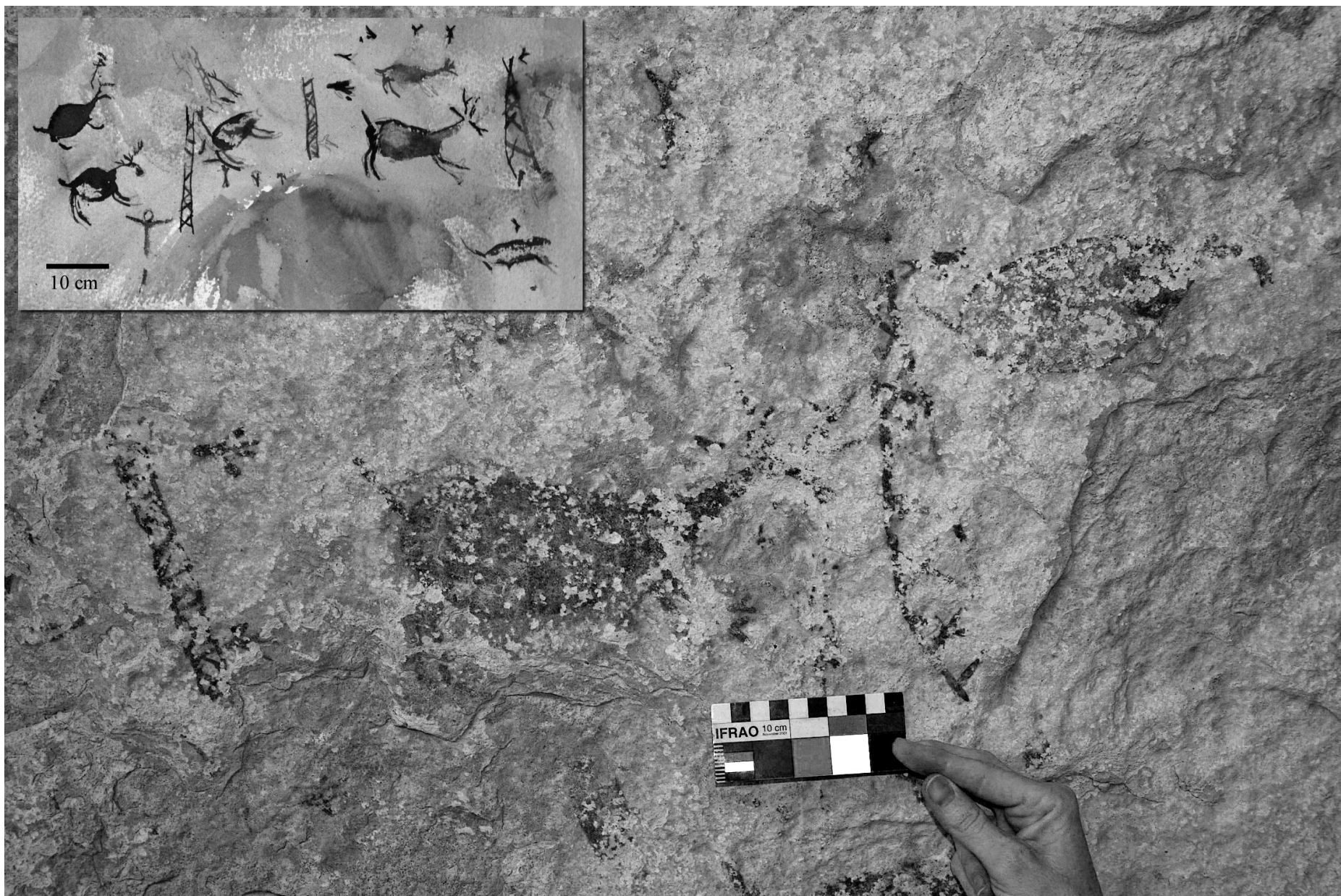
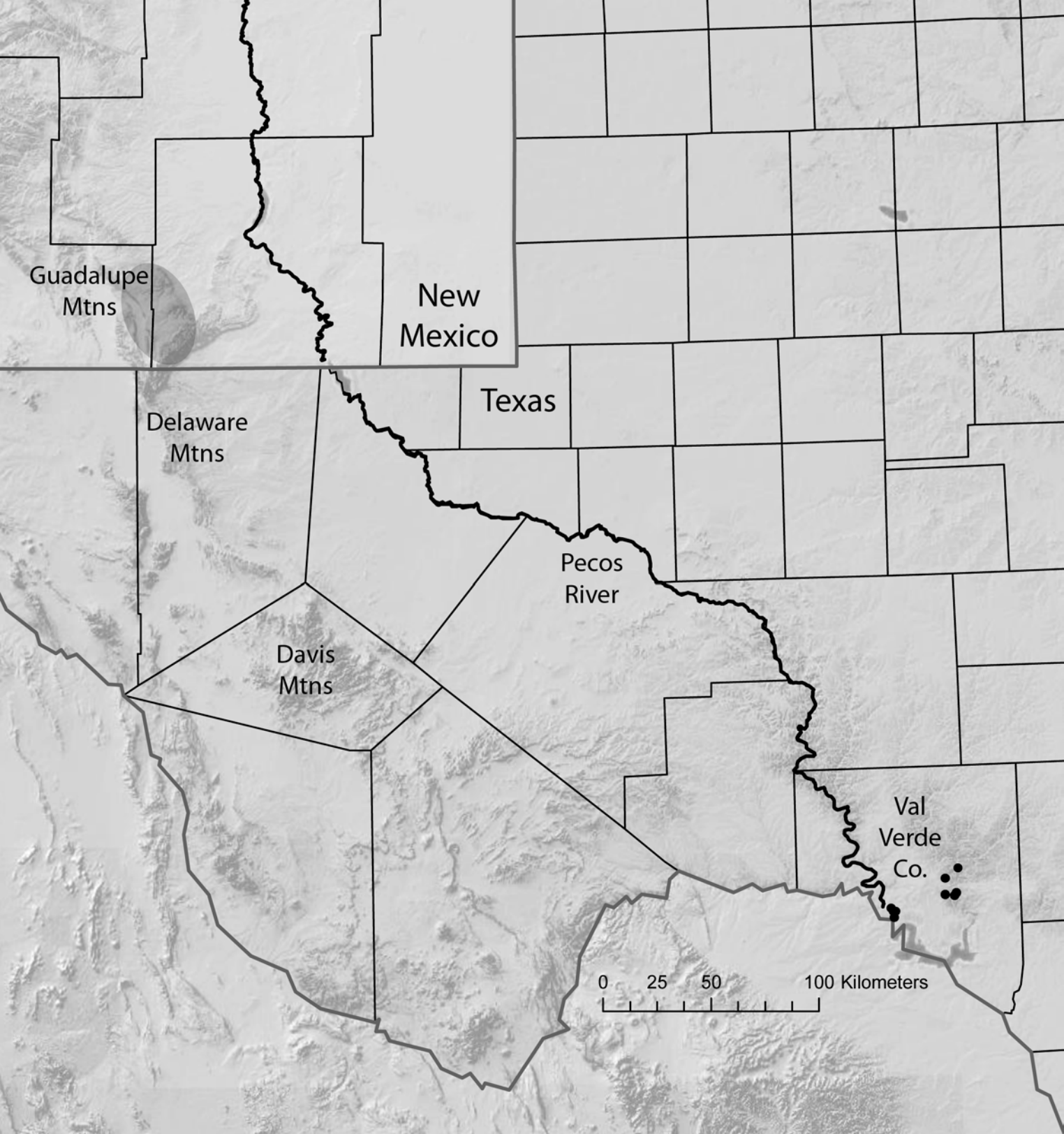


Fig. 14



Guadalupe
Mtns

New
Mexico

Texas

Delaware
Mtns

Pecos
River

Davis
Mtns

Val
Verde
Co.

0 25 50 100 Kilometers