



Rangely's Self-Drive Rock Art Tour

It's a mystery why Native Americans inscribed petroglyphs and paint pictographs on the sheer sandstone walls in so many places around Rangely and the West? Were they doodles, religious scripture, boundaries, events, hunting maps, memories, leaders, ghosts? No one knows for sure, but studying these mysterious messages from civilizations long past may trigger your imagination and give you a feel for history that you probably can't fully experience in any museum.

Rock art was applied to the stone in two ways: A **petroglyph** is a drawing that has been "pecked", or rubbed into the rock. The artist pecked an image by repeatedly tapping on the rock surface with another stone. A **pictograph** was painted onto the rock using pigments from animals, plants or minerals. In rare cases, one of the early artists would use both methods for a single image.

Principal rock art in the Rangely Area is located along two corridors:

The **Canyon Pintado National Historic District**: a property listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is located in northwest Colorado in the Douglas Creek Valley, between Rangely and Fruita on highway 139. The canyon has been occupied by prehistoric people for as long as 11,000 years and was visited repeatedly by a variety of cultures throughout its long history. Many of the rock art sites in the Canyon Pintado District were the handiwork of Fremont-age peoples.

Other sites are located both **East and West from Rangely** on Highway 64 and are all readily accessible by car. Generally, the local rock originated from two peoples: Fremont and Ute. One culture that left a visible mark on the canyon was the Fremont.

THE FREMONT INDIANS

Lived here from about 200 BC to about 1200 AD. They were at the outer limits of a culture centered in the Colorado Plateau; they mysteriously disappeared. Actually, they probably moved south following a period of unrest and/or drought. The Fremont lived in villages and raised corn and vegetables and supplemented their diet by hunting and gathering and in the summers followed the deer herds into the high country. Each village had a high point, often associated with what are now ruins, where holes were that lined up with the solstices, equinoxes, and the movement of the stars. Some of these ancient astronomy sites were quite sophisticated. Thirteen local sites like these have been mapped. Because our galaxy has moved relative to other stars in the heavens, astronomers have been able to date these ancient sites to a period between 400 and 800 AD.

The Fremont lived in pit houses. They were built by excavating an area in the ground, building partial walls of wood and forming a roof of bark. During the later years of their occupation in the Rangely area, they built dwellings of stone and mortar in easily defended locations. One such shelter, located south of Rangely, is a two-story ruin on a high point surrounded on three sides by cliffs. It can be reached only by a narrow causeway and a scramble through a hole in the cliff. It was occupied in the late 1100s.



The Fremont painted and carved strange carrot-shaped figures and symbols of unknown meaning as well as representations of things important to their lives such as corn, animals, birds, reptiles, and events. Perhaps one of the most striking pictographs in Canon Pintado is of Kokopelli, the hunched back flute player. An interesting interpretation of this figure is that he was a trader carrying a pack who entertained his prospective customers by playing a flute.

THE UTES

Followed the Fremont and lived here until the 1880s. They were banished to Utah after killing an Indian agent and some of his employees in Meeker. The Utes were hunters and gatherers, not farmers, and their rock art reflects that way of life. Much of their rock art is associated with the horse and the coming of the white man. Although there were buffalo in this region, just when they were hunted to extinction is uncertain. But buffalo skulls can still be found on eroded slopes and river banks. The Utes, once they incorporated the horse into their way of life, took long trips to the plains to the east to hunt buffalo.

There is a Ute petroglyph some miles south of Rangely that pictures a horse with a brand on it. An enterprising resident checked out the brand with the National Brand Registry and found that it was from the Seventh Cavalry under General Crook who fought the plains Indians in the 1870s. Utes served as scouts for the Cavalry, and one of these scouts no doubt carved a picture in stone of the horse he rode during those wars.

Touring the Sites ...

There are hundreds of rock art sites in the Rangely area. The Rangely Museum Society runs tours several times a year to many of the sites. Often, the participants are asked to note how many categories of rock art they can observe. The list is quite long: apparel and adornment, birds, buffalo, corn maidens, deer, designs, fun and games, headdresses and masks, ghosts, human feet and hands, human forms, hunting scenes, insects, monsters, mountain sheep, plants, reptiles, shields, supernova, useful things, war and weapons, water, weather, and white man comes.

First things First: **ROCK ART IS VERY FRAGILE - DO NOT TOUCH IT.** Years of weathering and erosion have taken some toll, but far less than the damage from thousands of people touching the soft sand stone. Your fingers leave oils, abrade the rock, and are the most significant factor in destroying petroglyphs and pictographs. If you want to record rock art, photograph it (cloudy days or indirect light is best) or sketch it. Do not trace or make rubbings, or put chalk on the rock. Treat these places as fragile, irreplaceable museums. You would not touch the art of great master...treat rock art with the same respect. Ponder it, enjoy it. Watch where you place your hands and feet. You may destroy an important page in the record of the past.



Don't be a thief of time. Unfortunately, the remoteness of the region also lends itself to a very small minority who decide to use these local treasures as target practice or attempt to cut them out. The result is easily seen in some of the sites including one site where someone actually tried to cut the rock art out. The figures depicted on these rocks hold clues as to what Fremont people considered important in their lives. Although we don't understand what all the figures mean today, we do know that they are precious gifts to us from our past. This art is worthy of protection from vandalism, theft and destruction and we should treasure and preserve them for all generations to come. If you see someone in any way damaging the rock art, ask them to stop, or get a license plate number and report it to the authorities. Each rock art site is designated with a brown sign located along the road. The sign doesn't necessarily mean you've arrived at the actual site; in some cases, you will have to walk or drive a short distance off the road into the backcountry.

The following pages provide self guided tours of various sites in the Rangely area consisting of either Fremont or Ute Rockart, and many have both. Please Remember that these sites are hundreds (and some cases thousands) of years old. Time and weather have caused many to disappear, but the greatest destroyer is the vandal who defaces, chalks, chips, shoots at, and generally destroys these priceless treasures.



CANYON PINTADO NATIONAL HISTORIC DISTRICT 'ROCKART' SITES

#1 - Mellen Hill Site ...mile post 7.3

Park in the turn-out. You are on the south side of a small canyon with the Mellen Hill Caves on the north side. Walk on the ridge opposite the caves until you can see a path crossing the draw. Some agility is required to visit the three caves. Panels are generally found on the ledges at each side of cave entrances. The small overhand at the very top of the canyon and the big cave right next to it have the most art. The triangular bodied figures with the fancy headgear are Fremont but Ute art is also represented here.

#2 - Reservoir Site ... mile post 26.9

Turn through the gate and take the first left fork and travel back south along the reservoir for .4 miles. You are now above the draw that has panels including anthropomorphic figures, two spirals, and problematics. The panels are on the south face of the draw and about 200 yards west of the highway.

#3 - Ute Horse Site ... mile post 2.9

Traveling on County Road 65 you will be heading towards the Deserado Coal Mine. There is a Ute panel of horses and tepees to be found on the cliff face, about a 250 yard walk. You will also find grooves used by Native Americans to sharpen their bone awls and needles at this site.

#4 - Keely's Homestead Site ... mile post 4.7

An old homestead site is just by the roadway. A few timbers and part of the foundation remain but evidence of Walter Keely's life is scattered throughout the area. His hand-dug cistern is located on top of the low ridge about 100 yards north of the homestead, and the lone fenced grave is directly across the road.

#5 - Camel Ridge Site ... mile post 70.5

Pull off the road on the right. The panels are about 250 yards away on the north-facing cliffs just above the road and consist of a camel-like figure, anthropomorphic shapes and abstracts. Carved tracks are located at waist level on the east-facing cliff.

#6 - Lookout Point Site ... mile post 67.6

This may have been a watchtower and is located on the ridgeline north of the pullout. A sharp eye will see the wall on the cliff-top. There are many of these along the valley within viewing distance of each other. They may have served as part of an early warning system. The walk to the site is not difficult and provides an excellent vantage point to survey the valley. You will also see Ute pole support holes drilled into the caprock.

#7 - East Four mile Site ... mile post 61.3

The large draw opens to the east. It has a great number of panels and a pioneer line shack. Cross the draw to reach the panels along the northern cliffs. Panels scattered along this ledge are principally Fremont. Petrified logs are embedded in the overhang and the presence of corn stalks indicate farming occurred. Pioneer cabin ruins are about 300 yards further east along the main draw and another 400 yards along the path is a stunning Fremont panel that faces in the direction you are traveling.

#8 - State Bridge Site ... mile post 59.7

Within sight of the highway, a small ridge south of the dirt road is capped by cliffs. It is on the west and south faces of this cliff that you will find the rock art. Probably Fremont, they include deer trails, and anthropomorphic figures.



#9 - Cow Canyon Site ... mile post 57.8

Philadelphia Draw opens to the east of Highway 139. Turn in here and go .2 miles. Turn right (south) and go .8 miles. You will cross two cattle guards. Immediately after the second cattle guard you turn up (east) a small draw. Drive .1 mile past this turn and park. The panels are about 90 yards to your left, facing the road. Look closely to find the hidden art.

#10 - White Birds Site ... mile post 56.5

Approximately 100 yards above the highway on the west side you will see a painted panel. White bird figures will probably catch your eye but there is much more to this panel and while it is a steep climb you will be rewarded. It is much more impressive up close.

#11 - Canyon Pintado Site ... mile post 56.0

This is a principal Canyon Pintado site. The rock art adorns the cliff face just across the road. This is the site that is described in the journals of the Escalante Expedition of 1776. Of particular interest is the figure of Kokopelli, the hump-back flute player of Anasazi mythology. His presence indicates a tie with the more civilized cultures of the four corners area whose relics can be seen near Mesa Verde.

#12 - Waving Hands Site ... mile post 53.5

Look to the right of the road at the dark red figure that waves to you from the cliff face. He has some company so pull over and join the crowd. There are several small painted Fremont characters on the rock and just around the corner to the south is an overhang that has Ute figures, horses, arrows and outlined hands.

#13 - Shield Site ... mile post 5.6

Turn east and go .3 miles. Where the road forks, go right (southwest) through the gate and bear left for .2 miles. Remember to close the gate behind you. The figure will be on the cliff just to the right of the road. It is a decorated shield figure .3 feet high.

#14 - Fremont Ridge Site ... mile post 9.7

Turn onto the dirt road at the top of a slight hill. You will be heading east. Go 1.3 miles. The road will fork. Go left .6 miles to the crest of a ridge. Follow the east face of the ridge, north for 250 yards to this eye-level panel. It is a Fremont petroglyph panel marked by soaring carrot-shaped figures.

#15 - Crooks Brand Site ... mile post 10.1

This turnoff is to the west. Go .15 miles and turn right just before the well site. Then go up toward the low cliff face ahead of you .15 miles. Here you will find incised horses, with the brand of General Crook. The Ute depiction of a white man (top hat & great coat), and some pin-up art left by a Basque Shepherder, as well as a historic inscription (probable lamentation of some lost cowboys).

#16 - Carrot Man Site ... mile post 11.6

This is the Moon Canyon site listed on the National Register of Historic Places and Moon Canyon turns off to the west. Go .3 miles, pull off the road and park. Just to the left (south) of the road is a small gully. Walk down the gully until you see the painted figures on the roof of the overhang. The B.L.M. has a descriptive sign. There is both pecked and painted art at this locale with soaring "carrot-men" the most stunning feature.



HIGHWAY 64 (EAST & WEST) ROCKART SITES

East

Mileage is figured from the museum parking lot. Turn right (east) on Highway 64 at the stop sign and continue through Town past the Highway 139 turn, airport, golf course, and reservoir. Deduct the mileage you travel off the main road. Miles to turn offs are stated first, then the miles or usually 1/10 of mile that you turn off. The main road is paved but the turn offs are bumpy dirt roads, passable for cars only in good weather.

1. 7.9 miles

On the right-hand side of the road you will see a cliff with the words "Jesus is Coming" (sic) painted on it. Just to the right on the same rock are two Ute horses.

2. 8.7 miles

On the left-hand side of the road you will see a low cliff that runs down toward the reservoir. The panel of petroglyphs is on this cliff. They are anthropomorphic figures, two spirals, and some problematics. They are located a fifty foot walk from the road.

3. 12.2 miles

At 9.3 miles from the museum, you come to the Deserado Mine Road. Turn left (north) on this road, cross the white river, go up a big hill. At 12.2 miles pull over and look at the cliff face behind the cedars to your right (east). This is where a Ute panel of horses & teepees can be found on the cliff face, about a 50-75 foot walk. Also of note at this site are the grooves used to sharpen their bone awls and needles.

4. 14.0 miles

You will have a low line of cliffs on your right. Here is the old homestead site. There are just a few timbers and part of the foundation left of the cabin. On top of the low cliff you will see the cistern carved out of the cliff rock. It is partially filled in now but was about 12 feet deep originally. A lone fenced grave site is across the road. What courage these pioneers had in locating in this unknown country years ago!

West

Return to the Museum parking lot. Turn Left (west) on Highway 64. You will pass through the middle of the Rangely Oil Field. As you climb out of the Oil field, you are going up 'Mellon Hill'. There are caves on the far side.

5. 10.8 miles

There is a speed limit sign (55) and immediately beyond a turn out on the right side of the highway. Take it and park. From here on it is 'Shank's Pony' for about 1/2 to 3/4 mile. You are on the south side of a small canyon with Mellon Hill Caves on the north side. The small overhang at the very top of the canyon and the big cave right next to it have the most art but each of the three caves down the canyon have rock art, either above the cave or on the sides. You will see both Pictographs and Petroglyphs. The triangular bodied figures with the fancy headgear are Fremont but the Utes are also represented. There is a good foot trail between the caves. Note the metates ground into the large boulder on the floor of the third large cave.

6. 11.8 miles

On the right there is a dirt road leading to the bottom of the little canyon; it leads to another little cave or rock shelter that has a lovely branch antlered elk or deer figure on the rock to the left of the cave. The walk is about 50-75 feet to this one. It marks the base of Mellon Hill. It was of Ute origin, but because of the depths of the deposits in these caves, some of the art is estimated to be over 1000 years old.



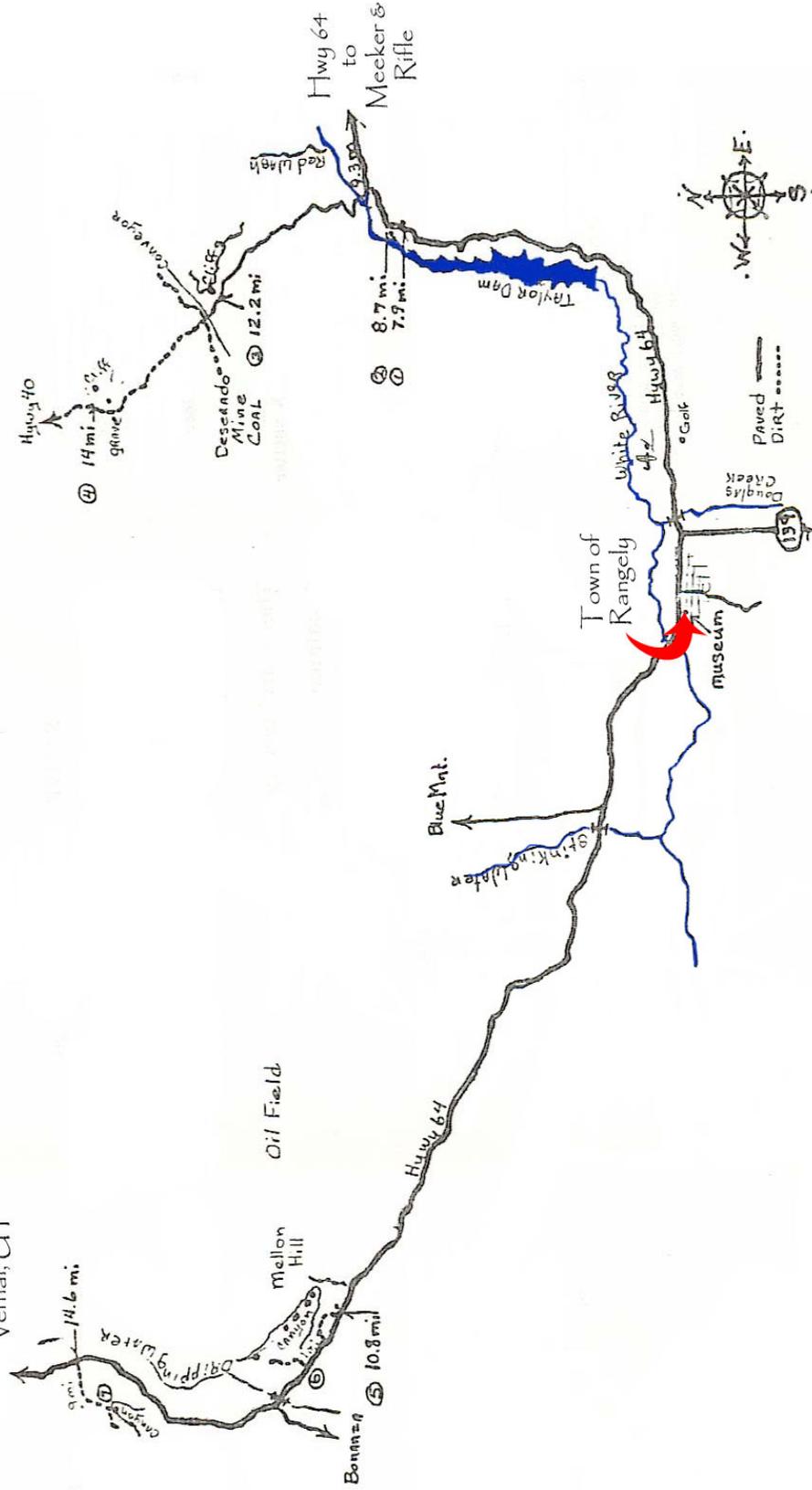
7. 14.6 miles

Continue on Highway 64. You will go over an overpass (electric railroad from Deserado Mine) and pass the Bonanza turnoff and a bridge over dripping Rock Creek. At 14.6 miles there is a dirt road to the left (west) with a large cottonwood tree near it. Take this road for 0.9 miles. As you near the site you will see a canyon on the south side of the road and the road dips to the very edge. Park here. There is a large buffalo and calf, horses, and some anthropomorphic figures in the very end on the right as you look down from the road. With a bit of care this is the place to go down into the canyon and it is maybe 50 feet to the panel.

From here you can return to Rangely or you could continue north along Highway 64 to Dinosaur and Highway 40. Dinosaur is the gateway to the Dinosaur National Monument. Turning left on Highway 40 will take you to Vernal, UT and access to the Utah Field House of Natural History, Ashley National Forest, Flaming Gorge Scenic Byway and other great places to visit. Of course you have only traveled a small section of the Dinosaur Diamond Scenic Byway, a dual State All-American prehistoric Highway.

Dinosaur
Hwy 40
Dinosaur National Monument
&
Vernal, UT

Self Drive Rock Art Tour (Map)



Hwy 139
Canyon Pintado
Douglas Pass
&
Grand Junction