For thousands of years, Northwestern Plains Indians carved and painted images on cliffs, rock outcrops, and boulders throughout the region—images with which Native people recorded their visions and chronicled their history. Often found in the spectacular settings of these peoples’ most sacred places, rock carvings and paintings represent the intimate connection between Native people and their spirit world. These images are a remarkable artistic accomplishment and a lasting cultural legacy of the Plains Indians. More than 1200 rock art sites have been recorded across the plains of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Montana, Wyoming, and the Dakotas (Map 1.1), and the images at these sites span the last 5000 years, with some possibly dating to the end of the Ice Age (ca. 10,000 B.C.). An expression of the spiritual and social lives of these ancient artists, rock art offers a fascinating glimpse into Native culture and history from the earliest occupation of the New World to the early 1900s.

Northwestern Plains rock art has captured the interest of Euro-Americans from the time of the earliest explorers in the region, which attests to both its abundance and its artistic beauty. Lewis and Clark provided the first written record of this art, but many other explorers, soldiers, traders, artists, and missionaries sketched rock art sites and collected examples of robe and ledger drawings. Early anthropologists also recorded sites and obtained information about the more recent designs from knowledgeable tribal elders (Wissler 1912, 1913; Mallery 1893). These early studies have proved invaluable for studying several rock art traditions, but most sites predate the occupation of this region by historically known groups; thus, much of the rock art is known only from its archaeological context.

The numerous articles and scientific monographs about Plains sites and styles, most written since the 1960s, form the most diverse body of rock art literature for any region of North America. Some works are broadly based syntheses of known data (Renaud 1936; Conner and Conner 1971; Wellmann 1979a; Keyser 1990), but even the most recent of these studies omits the four least-known rock art traditions and relies on incomplete data for three others. In the 1990s alone, hundreds of new sites have been described and interpreted in dozens of new publications. While researching this book, we consulted more than 200 written sources ranging from Ph.D. dissertations to single-site summaries written by local amateur researchers; we incorporated additional information from almost 100 other sites that have yet to be described in the literature (Map 1.2).

Despite this richly documented record, the public remains relatively unaware of and uninformed about much Northwestern Plains rock art. A few famous sites are visited by
Map 1.2. The Northwestern Plains: Locations of Major Rock Art Study Projects

Boxed numbers indicate regional studies

40. Keyser 1978, Brink 1980
thousands of tourists each year, but information at these sites can vary greatly in quality and accuracy; sometimes it even suggests that rock art is a complete mystery. All too often the public receives the impression that this art’s origin and meaning are lost, and any interpretation of these images is therefore purely speculative. Inaccurate statements by professional researchers concerning its chronology (cf. Grant 1983:49) also lead to false impressions of the antiquity and significance of these images. Some sites have even been subjected to absurd “interpretation”: the work of Pre-Columbian Chinese cartographers, Celtic scribes, or Spanish bankers recording their transactions.

Rock art sites in fact chronicle the long histories, the hunting ceremonies, and the religions of the region’s diverse Native peoples. They reveal their relationships with the spirit world and record their interactions with traditional enemies and the earliest Europeans, Americans, and Canadians who explored and later colonized the area. Although some rock art conveys only enigmatic messages from an unknown past, many sites can be dated or attributed to a specific group or culture. Some rock art can even be read almost like a simple sentence. Unfortunately, ignorance of this rich cultural record has led to thoughtless vandalism and the defacing of many sites with graffiti. At some sites petroglyphs and pictographs have been removed and stolen, or destroyed in the attempt. A few sites, like Ludlow Cave in South Dakota, have been entirely destroyed.

This book is intended to help interested persons learn about and appreciate the origins, diversity, significance, and beauty of Northwestern Plains rock art. We hope first to provide the reader with a general overview of this art, and further, that this effort will lead to increased public appreciation and concern for this treasure from the past.

Petroglyphs and Pictographs

Rock art includes both engravings, or petroglyphs, made by cutting into the rock surface, and paintings, or pictographs, made by coating the rock surface with pigment. A wide variety of techniques was used to make each type.

Incising and pecking were the most common methods for making Northwestern Plains petroglyphs. Pecked, incised, and scratched petroglyphs cover this panel in the North Cave Hills. The pecked horse and rider (top left center) and pecked horse hoofprint (bottom left center) are unusual.
Plains petroglyphs. Incised petroglyphs were originally cut into the soft sandstones of the region by bone, antler, or stone flake tools to produce sharp, deep U-shaped or V-shaped grooves. After the introduction of metal to Plains cultures in the early postcontact era, knives and other sharp iron tools were also used to incise petroglyphs. Although most incised petroglyphs were probably drawn freehand, some nearly perfectly circular shields suggest that an aboriginal thong-and-pin compass was occasionally used. Sometimes a well-executed design is paired with a similar but coarse and uneven scratched or incised version, suggesting that a rough sketch may have been executed before the finished carving.

Pecked petroglyphs were made by direct and indirect percussion. Direct percussion involves repeatedly striking the rock surface with a piece of harder stone to produce a shallow pit, which was then gradually enlarged to form a complete design. Indirect percussion, whereby a small chisel stone is positioned against the rock surface and then struck with a hammerstone, provides more accurate control of the pecking and was probably used to produce the more carefully made pecked designs. Pecking occurs throughout the region on harder sandstone surfaces and also on granite and quartzite glacial erratic boulders scattered across the Plains north of the Missouri River.

Scratched petroglyphs occur frequently on the Northwestern Plains. These were made by lightly incising the rock surface with a sharp stone or bone flake or metal tool. Unlike incised petroglyphs, which are carved by repeated strokes along the same line, most scratched petroglyphs were made with a single stroke. The freshly made scratches were highly visible to the artists, as the scored line contrasted sharply with the darker surface of the weathered rock. Weathering eventually renders many scratches nearly invisible except under optimum lighting conditions.

A few petroglyphs are abraded—rubbed into the naturally rough cliff surface with a harder stone to create an artificially smoothed and flattened area, which contrasts with the natural surface texture. Large pecked designs, such as hoofprints and oversized animals, were sometimes refined by abrading within their outline, but a few designs were formed solely by abrasion. Finally, a few designs at some sites were made by drilling into the sandstone surface small pits arranged in lines to form figures.

Petroglyph techniques are frequently combined on the same panel or even on the same figure. Often new petroglyphs in different techniques were added to a panel by different artists at a later time. In many instances, an artist used multiple techniques to make a single figure, but sometimes the original design was modified by a later artist using another technique. The most frequent multiple-technique petroglyphs are pecked figures with incised features such as eyes, mouth, heartline, fingers, legs, or horns/antlers. Many pecked designs also have abraded parts, and a few Historic period figures were first scratched and then abraded. Incising and scratching sometimes occur together deliberately, but a few very carefully incised figures have somewhat carelessly executed scratched features that appear to be later additions. One design at Writing-on-Stone is an incised human partially pecked out by a later artist.

Northwestern Plains pictographs are most often red, but yellow, orange, blue-green, black, and white pictographs are also known. Most pictographs were painted using a single color, and polychrome paintings are very rare. The most notable polychromes are the Great Turtle Shield and other shields at Castle Gardens, Wyoming, and painted shields in the Valley of the Shields, southern Montana.

Pictograph pigments were made from various minerals. Iron oxides (hematite and limonite), often found in clay deposits, yielded
reds ranging from bright vermillion to dull reddish brown, and also yellow. Often called red and yellow ochre, these minerals were sometimes baked to intensify their color. Some orange pigments were made directly from powdered ironstone or other naturally occurring iron-rich rocks. Ash-rich clays and diatomaceous earth yielded white pigment, copper oxides produced blue-green colors, and charcoal made black pigments.

To make a pigment suitable for painting, the crushed mineral was mixed with water or an organic binding agent to form a paste or liquid. Ethnographic descriptions and archaeological work from other areas of North America document such binding agents as blood, eggs, animal fat, plant juice, or urine. As yet, little analysis of Northwestern Plains pigments has been undertaken to identify possible binding agents.

Most pigments were applied to the rock surface using fingers and brushes. Northwestern Plains pictographs are most often finger painted, as indicated by finger-width lines on many figures. Some paintings show fine lines of relatively evenly applied pigment that indicate the use of small brushes made from animal hair, feathers, porous bone fragments, or frayed twigs. Twig and bone brushes are well documented in the Plains ethnographic record. In some cases, both finger and brush painting were used on the same figure. Other designs show a characteristic waxy texture and somewhat spotty paint application, indicating that they were drawn with an ochre “crayon”—a lump of pigment with a greasy consistency, perhaps from being mixed with animal fat. Some black and reddish-orange designs were drawn with a piece of charcoal or a raw lump of ironstone, much like using chalk on a blackboard. These have a similarly spotty appearance, but lack the texture of “crayoned” drawings.

Handprints at sites along the Rocky Mountain front ranges in Alberta, Montana, and Wyoming were made by dipping the hand in paint and then pressing it against the rock surface. Paint was also spattered, smeared, and blown onto some sites to produce designs. Paint spatters or smears measuring several meters across are common at some central Montana and western Alberta sites. Blowing paint through a tube or spitting it directly from the mouth was used to make negative handprints at a few Wyoming sites and two Montana pictographs. To make such designs, the hand is held against the cliff, and paint is blown around it so that when it is lifted, an unpainted hand-shaped area remains.

How pigments can survive on exposed cliff faces has long been the subject of scientific debate. Early scholars, presuming that pigments would fade rapidly, argued that all
of these paintings were made during the last few hundred years. Some even reported that they would not last beyond a few more decades. We now know that most rock paintings are not rapidly disappearing. While there is evidence that some designs on sandstone cliffs are fading, some sandstone surfaces retain pictographs quite well. One site at Writing-on-Stone looks as vivid in a photograph taken today as it does in one taken in 1897. At a central Montana site, a painting of a shield-bearing warrior using an atlatl remains distinct and readily visible, even though it may be more than 1700 years old. Other paintings at two sites have been dated to between 800 and 900 years ago using scientific methods.

Research has demonstrated why these paintings are so durable (Taylor et al. 1974, 1975). When freshly applied, the pigment stains the rock surface and seeps into microscopic pores by capillary action. By this means, it becomes part of the rock. Mineral deposits coating many cliff surfaces further preserve these paintings. Rainwater, washing over the surface of the stone or seeping through microscopic cracks and pores, leaches naturally occurring minerals—calcium carbonate, aluminum silicate, or other water soluble minerals—out of the rock. As the water evaporates on the cliff surface, it precipitates the mineral as a thin, transparent film over the pigments. Microscopic thin-section studies show that staining, leaching, and precipitation have made the prehistoric pigment part of the rock surface, thus protecting it from rapid weathering and preserving it for hundreds of years. In areas with extensive water seepage, however, mineral deposits may eventually become so thick that they form an opaque, whitish film that obscures pictographs, which explains why some may eventually fade from view. In fact, at a few sites, prehistoric artists painted new designs over those more ancient ones partially obscured by precipitated minerals, and thus provided evidence of the relative ages for these designs.

Descriptive Terms

The appearance or form of rock art images is often described in the archaeological literature by a variety of technical terms unfamiliar to many readers. Here we have attempted to keep the use of jargon to a minimum, but the specialized nature of the subject requires some technical terms.

“Anthropomorph” and “zoomorph” derive from the Greek root words anthropos, “man”; -zoon, “animal”; and morphe, “form.” Thus, anthropomorphs have human form, and zoomorphs have animal form. Many researchers use these terms, as we do, when they are unsure if the original artist intended a specific figure to represent an actual human (or animal) or merely the concept of humanness, or even the personification of a spirit or other nonliving thing. We use the terms “human,” “human figure,” “animal,” and “animal figure” in this book when fine distinctions of meaning are not required.

The best Northwestern Plains anthropomorphic examples are the petroglyphs of the Dinwoody tradition, often drawn with bizarre combinations of human and animal attributes (fig. 1.1), and also the Foothills Abstract tradition pictographs showing mazelike figures with limited human or animal features. A mazelike design with clearly depicted human arms and hands is considered anthropomorphic, while a painted face that most closely resembles a bear is zoomorphic. Some authors use the term “therianthrope” for such combined figures, but here they are categorized as either anthropomorphic or zoomorphic, depending on their primary attributes.

Sometimes, as with the maze figure at Audrey’s Overhang in Montana, the distinction is difficult to make. Painted on the ceiling of a small, low rockshelter, the figure lacks an obvious vertical or horizontal orientation, as the observer must lie on his back to see it. Partially obscured by a light coating of mineral precipitate, the figure was originally
identified as anthropomorphic because of vague similarities to a maze figure with two arms at another site (Keyser 1977b). In that and subsequent publications, the figure was shown in a vertical orientation. However, a recent reexamination of this site, together with the discovery of nearby sites showing bears in various degrees of abstraction, strongly suggests that the Audrey’s Overhang figure is a very abstracted bear (fig. 1.2), in a horizontal posture, with the two limbs ending in short claws.

Representational images depict real objects—humans, animals, weapons, tipis, plants, celestial bodies, and so on (fig. 1.3). They may range from naturalistic to abstract or stylized. These terms are more suitable for comparing relative categories rather than for the rigid classification of images.

Anthropomorphs illustrate the variation from naturalistic to abstracted images very well. Naturalistic examples are portrayed much as humans actually appear in the world. Some show realistic facial features, body proportions, and extremities, while others are simple outline or stick figures with varying degrees of anatomical detail. More abstracted anthropomorphs, such as V-neck humans and some Dinwoody anthropomorphs, show imagined elements and details (power rays, internal structures, V-neck) or internal organs or structures not visible in nature. The most abstracted images, such as numerous Dinwoody and Foothills Abstract anthropomorphs, are barely recognizable as representations of humans. Often their identification hinges solely on our ability to recognize eyes, arms, or other anatomical features.

Nonrepresentational images, on the other hand, do not occur in nature. They may take a variety of geometric, abstract, and amorphous shapes, including geometric designs, spirals, vertical marks and grooves, mazes, and so on (fig. 1.4). Geometric shapes may be rectilinear, composed of straight lines, or curvilinear, composed of curving lines, or a combination.
1.3 Stylization of representational images
of both. Many nonrepresentational images are now completely inexplicable, or it may be that we simply do not recognize what objects they represent. Some nonrepresentational images, however, clearly symbolize a concept or an idea rather than represent an object. For instance, some groups of vertical marks appear to have been used for counts of things or as ritual mnemonic devices. Other designs are pictographic or ideographic symbols. Still others apparently depict entoptic phenomena or phosphenes (not to be confused with visions or hallucinations)—the electrical images experienced in the brain during altered states of consciousness, such as shamanic trances.

No Northwestern Plains rock art tradition is composed exclusively of either representational or nonrepresentational forms. However, some traditions are classified by their predominant forms. Northwestern Plains traditions that tend to be almost entirely nonrepresentational include Pecked Abstract and Vertical series, while the Early Hunting, Ceremonial, and Biographic traditions tend to be composed primarily of representational images. Other traditions fall somewhere in between.

Northwestern Plains representational traditions also vary from very naturalistic to highly abstracted. The Biographic, Early

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1.4 Stylization of nonrepresentational images
Hunting, En Toto Pecked, and Columbia Plateau traditions tend toward more naturalistic images, while Dinwoody and Foothills Abstract traditions are significantly more abstracted.

The terms “conventionalized” and “schematic” relate to the form of individual images. For example, the V-neck human motif in the Ceremonial tradition has been standardized or conventionalized in such a way that it almost always consists of a rectilinear-outline body, arms held to the side and bent at the elbow, and a V-shaped shoulder area. Schematization refers to the reduction of a representational image to only those pictorial features necessary for it to be recognized. For example, both V-neck and “stick-figure” humans are schematized depictions of a human being (fig. 1.5). The latter, however, is more schematized than the former: everything except the very basic elements of a human—arms, legs, torso, and head—has been omitted. Schematization allows the rapid, conventionalized depiction of specific subject matter in such a way that it is easily recognized and repeated by all those producing images of a specific tradition.

Subject matter refers to the types of things depicted in representational rock art. Human and animal figures comprise the most common categories of representational subject matter. Much Northwestern Plains rock art also frequently illustrates items of material culture—that is, the tools, clothing, and other human-made objects. Such items are most often shown being used by human figures, but others may be drawn as isolated images or as the primary subjects. Only three traditions—Early Hunting, Ceremonial, and Biographic—depict items of material culture in significant numbers. The Dinwoody and Columbia Plateau traditions show a very few such objects, and the remaining traditions show almost none.

Finally, the compositional relationships of images may be described as solitary, juxtaposed, or integrated. Integrated compositions consist of a group of images either directly linked or depicted in a state of clearly intentional interaction. For example, a horse and rider attacking a pedestrian figure shooting arrows or bullets is an integrated scene. On the Northwestern Plains, Biographic and Early Hunting tradition rock art characteristically show integrated scenes. Juxtaposed compositions, on the other hand, consist of formally and spatially associated motifs in a clustered arrangement, but depicted without any obvious evidence of direct interaction. For example, a stickman, stick animal, and series of tally marks grouped together to commemorate a successful vision form a juxtaposed composition. Columbia Plateau, Ceremonial, En Toto Pecked, and Foothills Abstract tradition art frequently show juxtaposed compositions. Finally, solitary compositions consist of separate individual images that

1.5 Human portrayals range from very simple, schematized stick figures to the highly conventionalized V-neck figures.
display no evidence of intentional juxtapositioning or integration—such as a lone shield-bearing warrior, or the bear’s face at Bear Mask Cave. Although solitary images can occur in any tradition, they are most common in the Pecked Abstract, Dinwoody, and Ceremonial traditions.

**Styles and Traditions**

When seen from a regional perspective, the Northwestern Plains presents a confusing array of rock art images carved and painted over a period of several thousand years. Understanding this vast body of art is often quite difficult—frequently the variation at a single site, or group of related sites, is nearly as great as that of the region as a whole. For instance, Kibbey Canyon shows simple red-painted, stick-figure humans on the same panel with abstract spirit figures and a shield-bearing warrior using an atlatl, while V-neck humans with headdresses, earrings, and heartlines are chalked in black charcoal on the roof of a small, nearby rockshelter. Pecked petroglyphs at Legend Rock include herd scenes of small animals overlaid by almost life-sized anthropomorphs with strangely patterned bodies. Close by are groups of small pecked humans and other scratched compositions of horses and riders. Writing-on-Stone, Pictograph Cave, the North Cave Hills, Craven Canyon, Twin Creek, Recognition Rock, and Castle Gardens are just a few of the other sites displaying similar collections of such obviously different kinds of rock art.

In order to classify this art into units that can be easily described and compared with one another and with similar rock art units in other areas and periods, we use the terms “rock art tradition” and “rock art style.” As used in this book, traditions and styles are descriptive, organizational units based on traits shared by a group of images. These traits include (1) characteristic subject matter; (2) the forms used to illustrate these subjects; (3) the compositional relationships typically noted between them; and to a lesser extent, (4) the technique used to produce the designs; and (5) the specific landscape setting in which they are found. Taken together, these criteria produce an overall distinctness of expression that enables us to recognize a characteristic pattern of depiction for each rock art style or tradition. Each style is generally restricted to a specific time and place, and in many cases may indicate a specific cultural or ethnic group. Traditions, on the other hand, consist of a set of related styles for which a spatial, temporal, and cultural continuity can be demonstrated (Schaafsma 1985; Sundstrom 1990). On this basis, we can construct a general framework to help determine when, why, how, and sometimes even by whom the art was made.

For example, we can distinguish between the red painted pictographs of the Columbia Plateau and Foothills Abstract traditions. These traditions contain some of the same designs, including stick-figure and block-body humans and simple animals and geometric figures, but each tradition uses them in significantly different numbers and arranges them in different structured relationships. Furthermore, in each tradition these shared designs are associated with characteristic motifs (tally marks in Columbia Plateau art; handprints and mazelike figures in Foothills Abstract art) that are rare or entirely absent in the other tradition. The traditions also show differences in site setting. Columbia Plateau art is typically painted in isolated locations, difficult of access and with commanding views of the surrounding terrain. These locations suggest that the rock art was an individual effort. In contrast, Foothills Abstract sites, though isolated, are usually easy to reach, and many appear to have served some sort of public function.

Traditions cannot be separated into perfectly distinct entities, however, because some if not all of their defining criteria vary continuously over space and time, as motifs,
subject matter, compositional structures, and techniques increase or decrease in popularity. Geographic groups of artists often favor some forms and compositions over others, thereby giving the art of a particular tradition distinctly local flavors, much like regional dialects in a language. Such variants may constitute styles within the tradition. Furthermore, some blending almost always occurs among traditions that are geographically and temporally associated. Artists may even have borrowed designs from sites seen during travel to distant places, or from much older styles and traditions, thereby bridging large gaps in space and time. This blending does not preclude defining specific traditions and styles, since precise boundaries in any multidimensional classification scheme dealing with such a flexible subject are always somewhat arbitrarily fixed.

Rock art traditions are not necessarily restricted to specific cultural groups or even related groups speaking similar languages. For instance, the Columbia Plateau tradition was carved and painted by both Kutenai and Salish speakers in Montana and by Sahaptian speakers farther west in Idaho, yet their art is so similar as to be nearly indistinguishable. The Biographic tradition was carved and painted by groups representing numerous Northwestern Plains language families (and several others on the central and southern Plains). The Biographic tradition as a whole shares characteristics widely understood by many different groups, yet certain differences in Biographic rock art, noted from area to area, may correspond to tribal groups, and thus constitute ethnic or regional styles within a larger tradition. Similar situations likely existed with Hoofprint, Ceremonial, Early Hunting, Pecked Abstract, and other traditions produced by members of several groups.

On the other hand, more than one art tradition can also coexist within a single cultural group, with each usually made for different functional purposes. The Historic

period Salish used two representational traditions and one nonrepresentational. Columbia Plateau tradition rock art was made for religious purposes at vision quest locations, Biographic tradition art was drawn in several media to document a warrior’s status; and nonrepresentational geometric art was used for painted or beadwork decorations on clothing, moccasins, parfleches, and other items. Similarly, among the Historic Wind River Shoshone, warriors drew Biographic art, shamans pecked Dinwoody tradition motifs, and women decorated clothing with geometric painted, quilled, or beaded designs.

Rock art traditions may be broadly or narrowly defined, depending on the orientation of the researcher and the current state of site description. For example, we identify the Early Hunting tradition, but note significant temporal variations within it at Whoopup Canyon, a major complex of dozens of related sites (Tratebas 1993). Whether these same temporal variants can be identified in similar nearby sites in the Black Hills has not yet been demonstrated. Spatial variations occur between the Whoopup Canyon and other Black Hills sites and those in the Wind River basin (where some hints of temporal variations that may or may not correspond to those at Whoopup also occur). Similarly, temporal and spatial variation are beginning to be documented within the Dinwoody, Foothills Abstract, and Ceremonial traditions.

Rock art traditions related in content and expression, and sharing some spatial and temporal continuity, constitute a macrotradition. On the Northwestern Plains, at least four such macrotraditions are represented: the Western Archaic, Eastern Woodlands, Northwestern Plains, and Northwest Montana. The similarities among traditions that make up these macrotraditions may simply be the result of the movement of ideas among groups who share general modes of cultural/ ecological adaptation. This appears to be the case with the general similarities between
the several traditions throughout the Northwestern Plains, Great Basin, and Colorado Plateau, which compose the Western Archaic macrotradition. In other situations, the similarities might represent the migration of people. For example, it is likely that the historically documented immigration of Siouan- and Algonkian-speaking groups introduced the Hoofprint tradition, representing the Eastern Woodlands macrotradition, to the Northwestern Plains.

In still other cases, the relationships among traditions are best explained as evolutionary change through time, with a single parent tradition slowly developing into a slightly different one, or branching into several related ones. A combination of these processes seems to best characterize the relationships among the Ceremonial, Biographic, Robe and Ledger art, and Vertical Series traditions, which together form the Northwestern Plains macrotradition. This macrotradition is based on the similar geographic distribution, shared formal characteristics, and apparent cultural relationships of the four traditions.

In the end, we have organized Northwestern Plains rock art (and the closely related Robe and Ledger art) into eleven distinct traditions. Most of these traditions closely correspond to styles previously defined by various researchers, although sometimes these styles have been given multiple names, and in some cases a full description of their characteristics has never been published. In each chapter, we have included a summary of the distinguishing characteristics that help to define that tradition. It has also been necessary to assign new names for several traditions in order to incorporate recently reported sites and greater variation than was previously known. For example, the Foothills Abstract tradition was created in order to incorporate both Central Montana Abstract style sites (Keyser 1979a) and many newly documented sites with similar rock art in Alberta and north central Montana. We have attempted to use the best known and least ambiguous names when two or more occur for the same tradition.

For descriptive convenience, we often include several temporal and spatial variants within a single tradition. We recognize, however, that it may be possible to define these variants as distinct styles within each tradition, and future efforts may even split a tradition into two or more distinct entities when more complete data are available, or if someone wishes to pursue different research questions. This process of splitting and defining new traditions (and styles) has occurred continuously over the past several decades; various researchers have separated the Biographic, Central Montana Abstract (Foothills Abstract), En Toto Pecked, and Vertical Series entities (Conner and Conner 1971; Conner 1980; Keyser 1979a; Loendorf 1984; Loendorf and Porsche 1985; Sundstrom 1987) from the general stylistic descriptions of earlier researchers (e.g., Malouf 1961; Conner 1962a; Conner and Conner 1971). As our knowledge and understanding of Northwestern Plains rock art expands and evolves, so too will the sophistication and consistency of its description and organization.