

West Virginia Archeologist. no.27, 1978, pp. 50 – 55.

© West Virginia Archeological Society

ISSN: 0043-3209

PETROGLYPHS AT THE HALF MOON SITE, HANCOCK COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

James L. Murphy

The Ohio Historical Society Columbus, Ohio

ABSTRACT

A little known petroglyph site, originally studied by James McBride, is located at the upper end of the Half Moon site, Hancock County, West Virginia, McBride's drawing and notes, along with the only previously published drawing (Squier and Davis, 1847) of the petroglyph site, which is now under water, are reproduced. The site is not to be confused with the Brown's Island or Weirton petroglyph site which lies further upstream.

Included in the Squier and Davis' (1847) Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley is a drawing and brief description of some petroglyphs along the Ohio River "four miles above the town of Steubenville," on the West Virginia side of the river. These, it appears, have never subsequently been mentioned or described in the literature, but, have instead been considered part of the Brown's Island or Weirton petroglyph site.

Judging from the E.G. Squier correspondence preserved at the Library of Congress, neither Squier nor Dr. E.H. Davis actually visited the site, but relied entirely upon the manuscript account and drawings of James McBride, the Hamilton, Ohio, antiquarian who visited the site in 1838, McBride's original drawing is reproduced herein from his notebooks which are on permanent loan to the Ohio Historical Society from the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. Squier and Davis' engraving is also reproduced, and it will be noted that their rendering is none too accurate in detail. Size and orientation of the various petroglyph elements varies considerably from McBride's drawing, though we have no real idea of how accurate McBride's drawing is, since, like the Brown's Island and similar petroglyph sites along the Ohio, these have either been destroyed or are permanently submerged.

McBride's account reads as follows: "July 4, 1838. When making a survey of a turnpike road up the Ohio River, on the of the (sic) third of July 1838 in the evening encamped on the farm of Mr. Ephraim Cable four miles above Steubenville. On the next morning July 4th accompanied by John W. Erwin, Civil Enginer (sic), crossed the Ohio river to the Virginia side, for the purpose of examining a rock which we were informed was on that side."

"We found the rock lying on the Virginia side of the river. It lies about three feet above low water mark, having a flat surface of about nine feet by seven inclining a little toward the water. It is of hard sand stone, and all over the surface are various figures cut and sunk into the hard rock, amongst these figures are rude representations of the human form, tracts (sic) of human feet

representing the bare foot and print of the toes as if made in soft mud, tracts of horses, turkeys, and a rabbit. Several figures of snakes, a tortois (sic), and other figures not understood. A drawing of them was made on the spot by Mr. Erwin as here represented.

There are a number of other rocks lying on the shore both above and below the one on which the figures are cut, which appear as though they had at some former period rolled down from the hill above. Below this rock is one of much larger size, being about twenty feet in diameter, with a flat surface inclining up stream, on which are several deep cuts or the remains of figures, with which the rock may have been covered; but owing to its exposed situation the current of the river, ice and other floating substances have worn the face of the rock and defaced the figures upon it.”

It seems clear from McBride’s description that Squier and Davis’ drawing is also inaccurate in portraying the petroglyphs as lying on an upright, monument-like slab of sandstone, for McBride clearly states that the rock had a flat surface “inclining a little towards the water”. Probably the other discrepancies between McBride’s drawing and that of Squier and Davis’ are also due to artistic licences or carelessness on the part of the engraver.

These petroglyphs appear to have been overlooked by the late Harold Barth when he undertook his outstanding effort to record and preserve the petroglyphs of the upper Ohio Valley (Swauger (1963). Two lines of reasoning suggest that the petroglyphs first studied by McBride are not the same site recorded by Barth and recently studied by Swauger (1969) as the Brown’s Island or Weirton petroglyphs (46 Hk 8). Comparison with the 47 designs recorded from the Brown’s Island site reveal few correspondences with those copied by McBride and Erwin, the most notable instance being the turtle and the bear paw, which occur at both sites. The McBride turtle, however, is clearly different from the two turtle designs at Brown’s Island. Also, although there must remain some doubt about the precise location of both sites, the petroglyphs visited by McBride were probably a mile or so below Brown’s Island. Figure 3, copied from Beer’s 1871 Atlas of Jefferson County, Ohio, shows the Cable farm stretching along most of the river frontage of Section 32, Island Creek Township, beginning at the westernmost point of Cable Bend continuing northeastward almost to the line of Section 26. Clearly, if the petroglyphs studied by McBride were opposite the Cable residence, they must have stood well over a mile below Brown’s Island, along the river bank immediately north of the well known Half Moon site (46 Hk 29), and at least two miles downstream from the Brown’s Island or Weirton petroglyph site.

The actual design of the Half Moon site petroglyphs require little comment. In addition to the turtle and “bear paw” designs already mentioned, there are two rabbit tracks and several distinct bird tracks. Most of the figures apparently represent the human form. The presence of turtle, bird, and snake motifs clearly indicates that this is a typical riverine petroglyph congeries, similar to those described previously (Swauger, 1963, 1969) from further upstream.

References

Beers, F. W., & Co.

1871 Atlas of Jefferson Co. Ohio. New York, 37 p.

Squier, E. G. and E. H. Davis

1847 Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley. Smithsonian Contribution to Knowledge, Vol. 1.
Washington, D. C.

Swauger, James L.

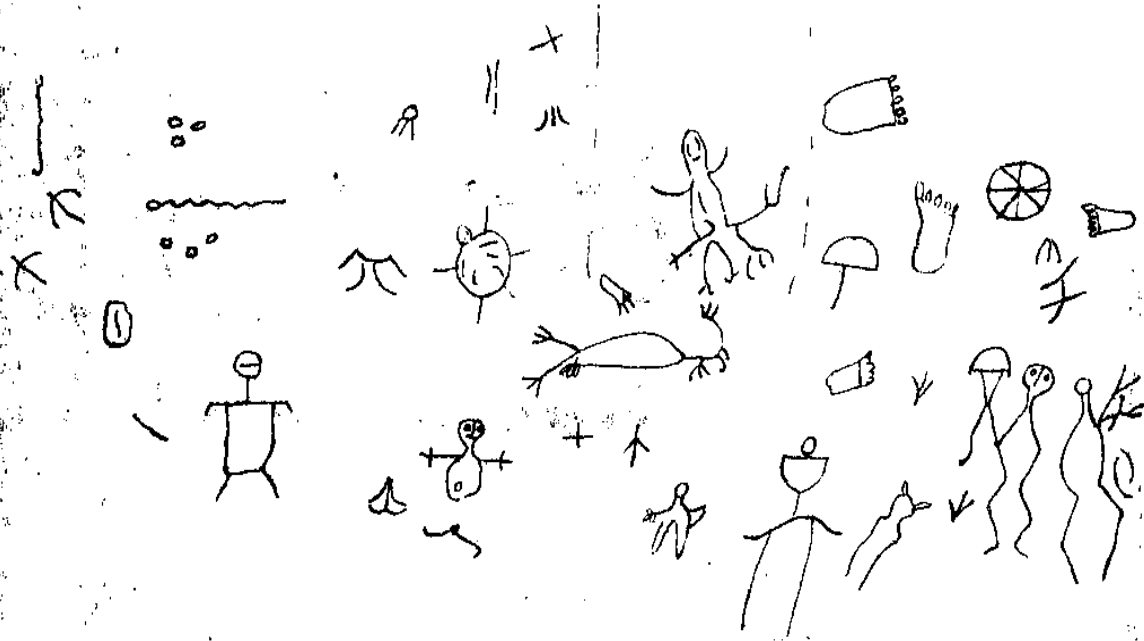
1963 The East Liverpool Petroglyph Data: A Tribute. Pennsylvania Archaeologist, Vol. 33, no. 3.
Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

1969 The Brown's Island Petroglyphs Site, 46 Hk 8. The West Virginia Archeologist, No. 21.
Morgantown, West Virginia.

NOTES:

FIGURE 1. Original drawing of the Half Moon site petroglyphs, made by John W. Erwin for James McBride, July 4, 1838

Figures carved upon a Rock (in Virginia on the Ohio river 4 miles above the town of Steubenville - opposite the house of Mr. Col. on the rock is a fine grain red stone and probably 7 ft by 9 feet -)



July 4, 1838

When making a survey of a Dunlap's Road up the Ohio river on the
of the third of July 1838 in the evening camped on the farm of Mr. Abraham
Cable four miles above Steubenville. On the next morning July 4th accompanied
by John W. Erwin, Civil Engineer, crossed the river to the Virginia side for
the purpose of examining a rock which we were informed was on that side.

part, about three fourths of an inch wide by half an inch deep, sometimes a little wider and deeper: the outline of the principal figure on the large rock is not less than an inch wide and three fourths of an inch deep. Some of the round holes, which are very regular, will contain a gill of water each. The lines, as observed respecting the rock first noticed, do not appear to have been chiseled, but *pecked* into the stone. Where hard iron seams occur in the rock, a narrow ridge is left, - the rude instruments employed having evidently been inadequate to cut or break through them. That some of the tracks of animals, particularly those of the bear, were rubbed and smoothed with stones after having been chipped into shape, seems extremely probable, from the fact that they are not rough like the other lines, and exhibit the muscular developments of the foot with much accuracy. It is barely possible that they have been thus worn by the action of the elements.

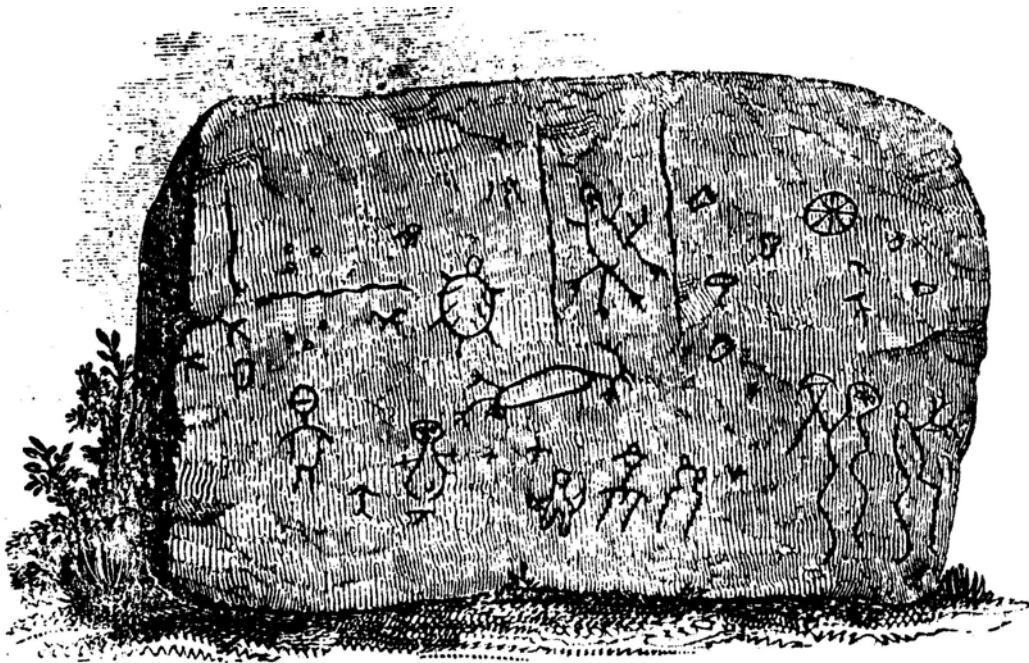


FIG. 206.

Fig. 206. A rock of similar character with those above described, occurs upon the Virginia shore of the Ohio river, four miles above the town of Steubenville in the State of Ohio, and about fifty miles below the city of Pittsburgh.* It is a detached block of sandstone, measuring seven feet by nine. The figures are cut in the same style with those before noticed, and are quite numerous. The comprise outline of men and animal, including the tortoise and several serpents. There are also human footprints, and the tracks of animals, together with other emblematic figures, including the Indian symbol of the sun. The striking resemblance of the lower right-hand figures to those occupying a corresponding position on the Dighton rock will not be overlooked.

A very interesting rock of this description lately existed at Cattlettsburgh, on the Kentucky shore, at the confluence of the Big Sandy and Ohio rivers. It was

*These rocks are noticed by Dr. Barton, Transactions of American Philosophical Society, vol. iv. P. 195. He regards them as "the work of a people acquainted with the use of iron instruments or with hardened metallic instruments of some kind." The engraving in the text is from a sketch made for Mr. McBride, by J. W. Erwin. Esq.

FIGURE 3. Portion of Island Creek Township (Jefferson County, Ohio) from Beers' 1871 atlas, showing land of Cable family lying across the river from the Half Moon site.



**Island Creek
Business Notices.**

- Andersen F. Just opened a New Store. Dealer in Dry Goods, Groceries, Lumber, &c, Dist No 1
- Blackburn James.. Proprietor of Grist and Saw Mill, Dist No 2
- Blackburn H. L. Proprietor of Grist Mill and Dealer in Grain, Dist No 4
- Clark S. W. Clergyman, Dist No 3
- Flomming H. F. Proprietor of Coal Bank and Dealer in Coal, Dist No 3
- Hartford John B. Proprietor of Grist Mill and Dealer in Grain, Dist No 3
- Palmer Alon. Stock Broker, Dist No 4
- Rhane A. M. Carpenter and Builder, Dist No 4
- Scott James. Proprietor of Grist Mill, also, Dealer in Dry Goods and Groceries, Dist No 5
- Vincent W. H. Clergyman, Dist No 6
- Walker F. A. Physician and Surgeon, Dist No 6