

CHARLEBOIS PICTOGLYPHS

by Tom Kollenborn (c) 2001

The Charlebois pictoglyphs are probably the most maligned pre-historic rock writing site in the Southwest. The site is located just upstream from the confluence of the Charlebois and La Barge Canyons in the Superstition Wilderness Area. Prior to the heavy pumping of the ground water in the Salt River Valley the seeps and springs along La Barge Canyon were a verdant oases for many of the early inhabitants of the region. The pre-historic native Americans hunted Bighorn sheep, Mule deer, and other mammals in this area. Archaeologist's claimed it was the success of these hunts that were recorded on the canyon wall in the form of pictoglyphs along La Barge Canyon.

Prospectors and treasure hunters found their way into the Superstition Mountains shortly before the turn of the century. They cast their critical eye upon on these figures carved in stone by ancient hunters in La Barge Canyon and believed they had found an ancient Spanish treasure map. It wasn't long before the pictoglyphs were known as the Spanish Master Map.

One man promoted this scenario more than any other individual. He was John T. Clymenson (Barry Storm) a pulp fiction writer of the 1930's. Storm was not the only man to promote the Master Map in La Barge Canyon as Spanish rock writing. Oren Arnold (1930-1972) used the same landmark in La Barge in some of his writings. Another man, who would never allow the truth to stand in the way of a good story, was Barney Barnard. He called the pictoglyphs a master map also. Most writers have included the stone writings in their books in one way or the other.

I first visited the Inscription Rock in 1954 with my father. Dad thought it was important to check it out. He studied the main rock for a few minutes and was convinced it was nothing more than pictoglyphs. I traveled to the site several times between 1954-1959. Each trip produced some new markings on the rock.

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Author's note: Presently the entire Tonto National Forest region is closed because of the extreme fire danger.

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Ironically the pictoglyphs in La Barge Canyon are not Spanish in origin. They are without a doubt nothing more than the work of the ancient inhabitants who lived here a thousand years ago. It is sad there are people in our society, uneducated and ignorant about the early writings of early hunters of this desert country, who believe and try to make others believe these markings are treasure maps or signs. Many flimflam artists in our society try to use such ancient writings to bilk people out of their savings with the promise of buried treasure.

The pictoglyphs in La Barge Canyon, sometimes known as Inscription Rock, require a nine-mile hike from First Water Trailhead. First Water Trailhead is located Northeast of Apache Junction on the edge of the Superstition Wilderness Area. Drive northeast on the Apache Trail (SR88) from Apache Junction 4.9 miles to First Water Trailhead Road (FS78). Turn right on First Water Road and drive to the parking lot, approximately 2.5 miles.

There is a \$4.00 per day parking fee at the trailhead. Hike into the mountains on Dutchman's Trail (104) to East Boulder Canyon, then over Bull's Pass and down into Needle Canyon. Follow the Dutchman's Trail (104) on into La Barge Canyon. Once you are in La Barge hike about 1.5 miles up canyon to the confluence of Charlebois and La Barge Canyon. The pictoglyphs are located in La Barge about 200 yards up the canyon on a rocky outcrop on the left side of the canyon.

The hike is eighteen miles round-trip. Only those who are in excellent condition and experienced hikers should attempt this trip. The hike should be made only between the middle of November and the 1st of April. Always be sure to carry an ample supply of water. The average person needs a minimum of one gallon of water a day. The Arizona Fish & Game discourages camping in Charlebois Canyon near the springs.

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circa 1996



circa 1959



Pictureglyphs in LaBarge Canyon near Charlebois Springs, circa 1986