

Hieroglyphic Canyon Calendar Stone

by Tom Kollenborn (c) 2000

A great rock bearing the outline of the old circular calendar was once located in Hieroglyphic Canyon on the west slope of Superstition Mountain near Apache Junction. The rock, which weighs just over four tons at 8,860 pounds, was moved to Mesa on January 12, 1934. The rock required ten men to move it from its original site in Hieroglyphic Canyon to its present location on the Mormon Temple grounds in Mesa.

In 1934, Mr. J.W. Lesueur told reporters from the Mesa Journal-Tribune that the rock was a gift to the Temple by the Pimas at Sacaton. According to the Pima elders, the rock was found near the "throne of Hatschuhin" or the trysting stone of the maidens of the Pima tribe where, ages ago, they tossed pebbles against the stone seat where their lovers sat.

Mr. Lesueur was a strong advocate for the special preservation of Hieroglyphic Canyon more than sixty years ago. He never found any strong support for his advocacy, therefore many of the pictographs of Hieroglyphic Canyon were hauled off by vandals.

According to a Mesa Journal-Tribune article dated January 12, 1934, the O.S. Stapley Company of Mesa provided a truck to move the stone from its original site to its present location. Members of the Jr. Gospel Doctrine class of Mesa Second Ward, of which J.W. Lesueur was the teacher, provided the man-power to move the stone from the canyon to a point where it could be loaded on to a truck. The moving of this four-ton rock was no easy task and was accomplished by using pulleys and leverage bars. After several trips to the site, the stone was eventually loaded and transported to Mesa.

One side of the stone is completely covered with petroglyphs. An interesting feature of the petroglyph stone is the series of circles that correspond in number and in sub-divisions with the Mayan calendar stone. There are twenty-six perpendicular lines to the concentric circles forming some fifty-two boxes. When we think about it, there are fifty-two weeks in a year. There are several other interesting things involving these stones. The Mayan Calendar is a rectangular block some 13 feet and 1 inch square, weighing some 24 tons, and built into the wall of the Cathedral of Mexico City. The calendar covers a period from the year 613 B.C. for 2,147 years without the loss of a single day. It is one of the most accurate calendars known to the world.

The stone work on the Hieroglyphic Canyon stone appears to have been made to resemble the Mayan stone, in all of the circles and sub-divisions. Two smaller calendars appear with rays of the sun shining on them. The stone, according to professionals who have examined it, say it is of enormous historical significance.

Next Week, Part II

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The importance of this stone from Hieroglyphic Canyon has earned it a permanent site on the grounds of the Mesa Mormon Temple. The stone needed to be protected because, even as early as 1934, vandals had marred the stone by using it as a shooting target.

E.C. Santeo of San Tan, Incarnacion Valenzuela of Lehi and Domingo Baptisto of Lehi told J.W. Lesueur stories about the Pimas and Hieroglyphic Canyon. Lesueur considered Hieroglyphic Canyon so historically significant he advocated for preservation status of the canyon in 1934. He wanted it protected for future generations to see. He so strongly believed in protecting the calendar stone that he initiated its removal from Hieroglyphic Canyon and its relocation to Mesa. His goal was to protect the stone from destruction.

The ancient markings on this stone certainly would not have survived if it had not been moved by this dedicated group young men, some sixty-six years ago. Today we can visit this marvelous stone on the temple grounds and speculate about its origin and what the great circles represent. If the stone had remained at its original site in Hieroglyphic Canyon vandals would certainly have totally defaced it by using it as a bull's-eye for target practice. Even today the stone exhibits damage caused by bullets before its removal from the canyon.

The "art gallery" of ancient carvings in Hieroglyphic Canyon is one of the oldest in the Southwest. When I think of the British Museum of Art, New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fine Arts Institute of Chicago or the Smithsonian, all of which I have visited and all created by modern man, I must admit Hieroglyphic Canyon stands out as a museum of ancient art. It is a museum that has survived the ages with little or no protection from the elements and vandals. Ironically, the present status of the wilderness area provides little or no protection for this site today. The only protection for these artifacts are those of us who will report vandals that damage these fine pictographs. Let us hope man has enough respect for this area that it will be there for future generations to enjoy.



Native Americans often used celestial bodies in a variety of calendar applications.



Sten Linnander studying the calendar on the Mormon Temple grounds in Mesa.

