



## *Research Article*

# **MAYAK DATAT: THE HAIRY MAN PICTOGRAPHS**

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**ABSTRACT.** The purpose of this article is to examine the association of prehistoric pictographs with contemporary stories told by the Tule River Indians about Hairy Man. Located on the Tule River Indian Reservation, the Painted Rock Pictographs are approximately 1000 years old. According to members of the tribe, the pictographs depict how various animals, including Hairy Man, created People. Other stories tell why Hairy Man lives in the mountains, steals food, and still occupies parts of the reservation. Since the Tule River Indians equate Hairy Man to Bigfoot, the pictograph and stories are valuable to our understanding of the modern idea of a hair-covered giant.

**KEY WORDS:** Bigfoot, Pictographs, Traditional Stories, Native Americans

## **INTRODUCTION**

Painted Rock is located on the Tule River Indian Reservation, east of Porterville, California. Connected today with the Tule River Indian Tribe, the pictographs are said to represent Hairy Man, an important cultural character for the residents of the reservation. Although the tribe prefers to be called “Tule River Indians,” their traditional language and history are associated with the larger ethnographic group known as the Yokuts.

At contact, the Yokuts occupied the entire San Joaquin Valley of California, from the Sacramento River to the Kern River, and from the Sierra foothills to the Coast Ranges (Fig. 1). A minimum population of 35,000 people was broken into 40 individual tribes, each having a distinct name, dialect, and territory (Latta, 1949). For ease of discussion, most ethnographers refer to the three main tribes named for their geographical location: Northern, Southern, and Foothill (Wallace, 1978a, b; Spier, 1978).

After California became part of the United States, settlers and miners came by the thousands. The Northern Valley Yokuts were annihilated by disease, and continual pressure caused the remaining Foothill and Southern Valley Yokuts to be moved under federal protection (Wallace, 1978a, b; Spier, 1978). The Tule River Indian Reservation was established in 1873 on 54,116 acres and currently boasts a population of approximately 500 people (Fig. 2). Today, although there are three federally recognized Yokuts tribes with associated trust lands, most descendants live off-reservation in various local communities and are part of non-federally recognized tribes. This article focuses on the Tule River Reservation and the beliefs and stories of Hairy Man held by the Tule River Indian Tribe.

## **THE HAIRY MAN PICTOGRAPHS**

Painted Rock, also known as CA-TUL-19, is a rockshelter associated with a prehistoric

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village. The site, located immediately adjacent to the Tule River, includes bedrock mortars, pitted boulders, midden and pictographs (Fig. 3). The pictographs are located within the rockshelter, and are painted on the ceiling and walls of the shelter. The pictographs include paintings of a male, female, and child Bigfoot (known as the family), coyote (known as Coyote Eating the Moon), beaver, bear, frog, caterpillar, centipede, humans, eagle, condor, lizard and various lines, circles, and other geometric designs (Fig. 4). The paintings are in red, black, white, and yellow.

### PICTOGRAPH DESCRIPTION

The most dominant pictograph at Painted Rock is that of the Hairy Man, also known as *Mayak datat* or *sunsunut*<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 5; Johnstone, 1975). Hairy Man measures 2.6 meters high by 1.9 meters wide, and is red, black, and white. The painting represents a two-legged creature with its arms spread wide. He has what appears to be long hair and large haunting eyes (Fig. 6). The Yokuts identify the lines coming from the eyes as tears (because Hairy Man is sad according to their creation story). The pictograph is in very poor condition due to weathering and vandalism. A Hairy Man petroglyph is present at the site as well, but since this rock art style is very rare in the Sierras, it is likely a “modern” addition.

Probably the most unusual feature of this site is the presence of an entire Bigfoot family. Besides the male Hairy Man, there are also a female and child Bigfoot. The mother measures 1.8 meters high by 1.2 meters wide, and is solely red (Fig. 7). Like her husband, she represents a two-legged creature with her arms open (Fig. 8). She has five fingers and little other detail. Immediately adjacent to her, and directly under her right hand, is her child. The child measures 1.2 meters high by one meter wide. He is also solely red, stands on two legs, and has five fingers (Fig. 9). The

figure has an unusually rounded head, suggestive of a sagittal crest (Fig. 10).

Clewlow (1978, p. 625) estimated that the paintings were made around A.D. 500, but could be as old as A.D. 1 or as young as A.D. 1200 (2000 to 700 years old). Latta (1949, p. 179) noted that year-round occupied villages were placed at important places, either where paintings were, or at some place where Indian ceremonies were performed.

Archaeologically, the village at Painted Rock was occupied in the late prehistoric, around 500 years ago. Since it is believed that the paintings were present prior to the village, the paintings are likely 500-1000 years old.

### ETHNOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF PAINTED ROCK

The tribal band that lived at Painted Rock were called the *O-ching'-i-ta* or “People of Painted Rock.” The village at Painted Rock was called *Uchiyingetau*, which means “markings.” Painted Rock itself was called *Hocheu* (Powers, 1877, p. 370; Latta, 1979, p. 24).

Painted Rock is first described by Mallery in 1889. Mallery (1889, p. 54) stated that the paintings were “famous and well-known in the area” and likely created by being pecked, painted, and then pecked again to ensure a “long lasting effect.” Hairy Man is described as “a person weeping...The arms and hands are in the exact position for making the gesture for rain” (Mallery, 1889, p. 638). The remaining figures on the main wall (mom and child) are described as human figures making gestures for negation, or more specifically “nothing, nothing here” (Mallery, 1889, p. 639). Steward (1929, p. 111) noted the paintings as well but added no further details than those offered by Mallery.

Latta (1949, p. 180) detailed the site by stating that “the Indians readily recognize the characters which represent animals, but they offer no other explanation for the geometrical

designs and line drawings than to give the Indian name for circle, triangle, square or other common figures. They do identify drawings of a few mythological characters.”

In 1973, at the request of the tribe, Johnstone (1975) began gathering some of the traditional stories told by members of the reservation. The daughter of a tribal elder, who had been the caretaker of the pictograph site in the early 1900s, identified Hairy Man as being the same as Bigfoot (Johnstone 1975, p. 5). Johnstone (1975, p. 19) further noted that Hairy Man was described by the Tule River Indians as “a creature that was like a great big giant with long, shaggy hair” and since Bigfoot also meets that description, the two were the same.

### HAIRY MAN IN CONTEMPORARY STORIES

Yokuts mythology has been the subject of many ethnographers (Gayton, 1935, 1948, 1976; Gayton and Newman, 1940; Kroeber, 1907; Latta, 1936). Although Latta (1936, p. 56) recorded a story called the “Giant of Ah-wah-Nee,” no other myths describing a hair covered giant are documented. Yokuts myths, however, are dominated by animal characters that are often referred to as the “first people.” There is also a conspicuous absence of a human god; his place is taken by Eagle who leads the rest of the animals (Kroeber, 1907; Gayton, 1935; Gayton and Newman, 1940).

With that in mind, the following are offered as examples of contemporary stories told on the reservation today. These stories may very well be traditional, but since they were not documented until recently, it is unclear how old they may be. In comparison with stories documented by Kroeber (1907) and Gayton and Newman (1940), they are very similar in that animals are given human-like characteristics. Eagle is the leader, and common animals such as Coyote, Owl, Turtle, etc. are present.

The first three stories were gathered by the author in the summer of 1992 from tribal elders and members during consultation involving the excavation of an archaeological site. The main story tellers were Isadore Garfield, Leona Danby, and J.R. Manuel with help from others in attendance. As stories were told, information was either added or clarified until a written copy was produced and read back to the group. “How People Were Made” details how the pictographs at Painted Rock came to be and identifies the large figure on the main wall as Hairy Man. “When the People Took Over” explains why birds and animals live where they do today while “Food Stealing” is a simple story about Hairy Man and his fondness for an easy meal. The last story, “Big Foot, the Hairy Man,” was collected by Johnstone in 1975 from tribal elders Ruby Bays and Jennie Franco. It is the most common story still told on the reservation today.

### How People Were Made

All the birds and animals of the mountains went to *Hocheu* to make People. Eagle, chief of all the animals, asked each animal how they wanted People to be. Each animal took a turn and said what they had to say.

Fish said, “People should know how to swim, like me, so let them be able to hold their breath and swim very deep.”

Hummingbird said, “People should be fast, like me, so let them have good feet and endurance.”

Eagle said, “People should be wise, wiser than me, so People will help animals and take care of the Earth.”

Turtle said, “People should be able to protect themselves, like me, so lets give them courage and strength.”

Lizard said, “People should have fingers, like me, so that People can make baskets, bows and arrows.”

Owl said, “People should be good hunters,

like me, so give them knowledge and cunning.”

Condor said, “People should be different from us, so give them hair, not feathers or fur to keep warm.”

Then Coyote said, “People should be just like me, because I am smart and tricky, so have them walk on all fours.”

Hairy Man, who had not said anything yet, shook his head and said, “No, People should walk on two legs, like me.”

All the other animals agreed with Hairy Man, and Coyote became very angry. He challenged Hairy Man to a race, and they agreed whoever won could decide how People should walk.

They gathered at the waterfall, below *Hocheu*, to begin the race. Coyote started and took a shortcut. Hairy Man was wiser than Coyote and knew that Coyote would cheat to win and People would have to walk on all fours, so Hairy Man stayed behind and helped Eagle, Condor, and the others to make People, on two legs, on the ground. The animals breathed on them, and People came out of the ground. Hairy Man was very pleased and went to People, but when they saw Hairy Man, they were scared and ran away. That made Hairy Man sad.

When Coyote came back and saw what they had done, he was very angry and drew himself on the rock eating the moon (he is called *Su! Su! Na*). All the other animals drew their pictures on the rock as well, so People would remember them. Hairy Man was sad because People were afraid of him, so he drew himself sad. That is why Hairy Man’s picture is crying to this day. That is how people were made.

### **When People Took Over<sup>2</sup>**

People spread out all over the mountains, taking all the land and eating all the food. Animals didn’t have anyplace to go. Eagle,

chief of all the animals, told the animals that they could not remain in their traditional places, because people had taken them. He asked them where they wished to go. Eagle said, “What are you going to become? What will you be? I myself am going to fly high up in the air and live on squirrels and sometimes on deer.” Hairy Man said, “I will go live among the big trees (Giant Sequoias) and hunt only at night when people are asleep.” Dog said, “I will stay with people and be their friend, I will follow them, and perhaps I will get something to eat in that way.” Buzzard said, “When something dies I will smell it. I will go there and eat it.” Crow said, “When I see something lying dead, I will pick out its eyes.” Coyote said, “I will go about killing grasshoppers. That is how I will live.” Hummingbird said, “I will go to the flowers and get my food from them.” Condor said, “I will not stay here. I will go far off into the mountains. Perhaps I will find something to eat there.” Woodpecker said, “I will get acorns and make holes in the trees [to store them in].” Bluejay said, “I am going to make trees grow over the hills. I will work.” Rat said, “I will go where there are old trees and make my house in them.” Mouse said, “I will run here, there, and everywhere. I shall have holes, and perhaps I can live in that way.” Trout said, “I will live in the water and perhaps I can find something to eat there.” That was the time when animals stopped being like us and scattered.

### **Food Stealing**

In the old days, women learned never to leave their acorn meal unattended. They would spend all day pounding on the big rocks near the river, making the acorn meal, and then take it down to the river to leech it. They would then leave it in the sun to dry, but they would come back and it would be gone. They would find big footprints in the sand where they left the meal and they would know that

Hairy Man took it. He likes Indian food and knows to wait until the acorn is leached of its bitterness before taking it. We always wondered if he liked the sound of women pounding acorn and knew when to come and get food.

### **Big Foot, the Hairy Man<sup>3</sup>**

Big Foot was a creature that was like a great big giant with long, shaggy hair. His long shaggy hair made him look like a big animal. He was good in a way, because he ate the animals that might harm people. He kept the Grizzly Bear, Mountain Lion, Wolf, and other larger animals away.

During hot summer nights all the animals would come out together down from the hills to drink out of the Tule River. Big Foot liked to catch animals down by the river. He would eat them up bones and all.

It was pleasant and cool down by the river on hot summer nights. That is when grown ups liked to take a swim. Even though people feared that Big Foot, the hairy man, might come to the river, people still liked to take a swim at night.

Parents always warned their children, "Don't go near the river at night. You may run into Big Foot."

Now Big Foot usually eats animals, but parents said, "If he can't find any animals and he is very hungry, he will eat you. Big Foot, the hairy man, doesn't leave a speck or trace. He eats you up bones and all. We won't know where you have gone or what has happened to you."

Some people say Big Foot, the hairy man, still roams around the hills near Tule River. He comes along the trail at night and scares a lot of people. When you hear him you know it is something very big because he makes a big sound, not a little sound.

Children are cautioned not to make fun of his picture on the painted rock or play around that place because he would hear you and

come after you.

Parents warned their children, "You are going to meet him on the road if you stay out too late at night." The children have learned always to come home early.

### **DISCUSSION**

Many questions about the pictographs and stories can not be resolved here. Although the pictographs are thought to be approximately 1000 years old and were first documented in 1889, they were not identified, at least in print, as Hairy Man or Bigfoot until 1975. Previous to that year, the only Yokuts "giant" story recorded by an ethnographer occurred in 1936. Though one would expect the majority of traditional stories to have been documented by prior researchers, it is possible that the information was not shared. It should be noted that it was the tribe themselves that commissioned the 1975 work (see Johnstone, 1975) so that some of the stories not previously documented could be.

If the stories are to be viewed as insight into tribal knowledge of Bigfoot, researchers would be rightly curious as to what information about this creature can be gleaned. The stories and pictograph detail a large, bipedal, hair-covered human-like being. He has large feet and steals food when he can. His home is the mountains and he roams freely at night, eating animals that might cause harm to humans. The stories also suggest that Hairy Man can talk and outsmart Coyote. Is any of this information useful or particularly insightful from a zoological or a cultural perspective? What is the contemporary role of Hairy Man in Tule River culture?

According to Melba Casares, a tribal medicine woman (personal communication, 2004), the bodily Hairy Man is a spiritual, physical, and mental protector of the tribe. A sighting is very powerful and is considered a blessing. Hairy Man's most important cultural role is as caretaker of the recently dead. A

traditional song, asking Hairy Man to come and take the departed soul, requests that he come through the “east door” and take the spirit home the same way (M. Casares, personal communication, 2004).

The pictograph of Hairy Man itself is equally important. Members have long visited the painting in order to pray for healing (J. Manuel, personal communication, 1993). Through prayer, Hairy Man will appear in a dream and give needed information, be it the location of a traditional medicine or the answer sought to a question (M. Casares, personal communication, 2004). For that purpose, the tribe built the Substance Abuse Center adjacent to the Painted Rock site (J. Manuel, personal communication, 1993).

In 2004, I interviewed an employee of the Tule River Indian about a sighting he had on the reservation in May 2000 (see [www.bfro.net](http://www.bfro.net), Report 9357). The witness, who wishes to remain anonymous, is Native American but was not a member of the tribe. At the time, he was working for the Substance Abuse Center with several tribal members, including his secretary.

During their 10:00 a.m. break, the witness and his secretary stepped outside and spotted a large hairy creature on the mountain side behind the office. The creature was hunched down, hanging onto a rock ledge. They could see it from the waist up and noted that it was covered with six-inch long reddish brown hair. When it looked at them, they got a good view of a flat ape-like face. Its head was rounded and it had noticeable ears. They could not see the whites of its eyes, but could tell they were dark. They observed it for approximately ten minutes before the secretary got upset and went back into the office. She had just buried her cousin that morning and since the tribe believed that Bigfoot comes and carries the dead to Mt. Tilliman above Painted Rock, she assumed that was the event she was witnessing.

In summary, Hairy Man fills an important

cultural role for the Tule River Indians. Be it protector, healer, or spiritual guide to the next world, their belief systems appear to be deeply intertwined with Bigfoot, the pictographs, and their traditional stories. Since physical sightings of the Hairy Man are still occurring on the reservation today, it seems likely that these beliefs will remain intact.

While neither the pictographs, nor oral traditions, nor contemporary anecdotes constitute proof that Bigfoot exists as a zoological species, the cultural implications of the Hairy Man figure are interesting. Which came first - the pictograph or the stories? Did either influence the surrounding Indian or non-Indian cultures? How else is Hairy Man exemplified on the reservation today? How do the Tule River Indians compare with other tribes and their beliefs, if any, in a Bigfoot-like creature? While we currently do not have the answers to all these questions, continuing study of traditional stories and artwork will aid researchers in better understanding not only the cultures themselves, but the creature they call Hairy Man.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The phonetic system used by Johnstone was adapted by Geoffrey Gamble from *Yokuts Language of California*, Stanly Newman, Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology, Number 2, 1944. The words were translated from the Yowlumne dialect into a phonetic system, to an English translation, and then into a pronunciation: *Mayak datat* – big foot – mi!yak datr!atr! and *Sunsunut* – hairy one – shoonshoonootr!

<sup>2</sup> This story is very similar to “War of the Foothill and

Plains People," a Yaudanchi Yokuts story recorded by Kroeber (1907) in *Indian Myths of South Central California*.

<sup>3</sup> This story is from Johnstone (1975).

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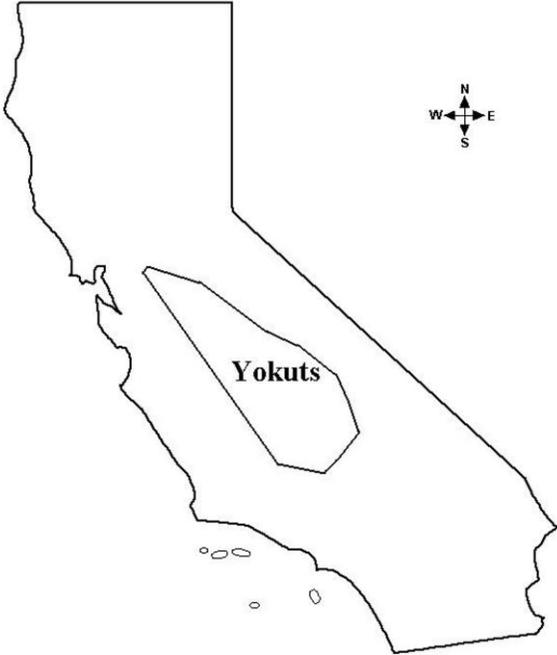


Figure 1. Map of the ethnographic territory of the Yokuts Tribe in California.

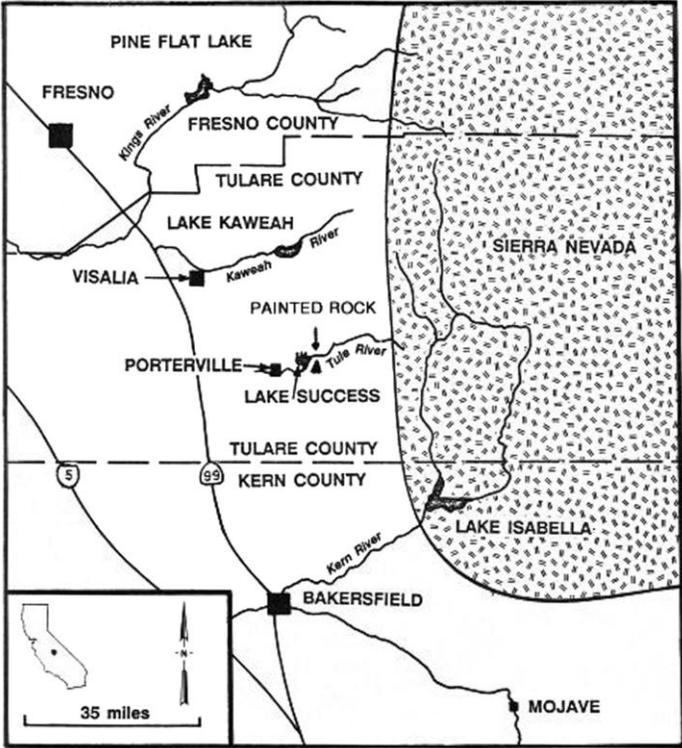
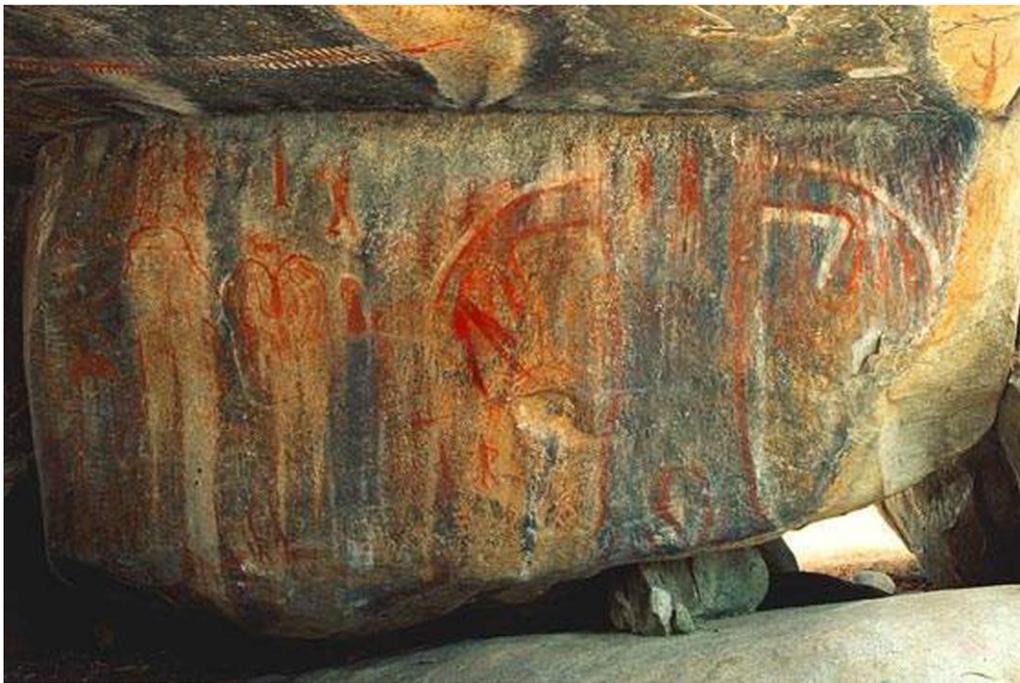


Figure 2. Location of the Painted Rock Archaeological Site (CA-TUL-19).



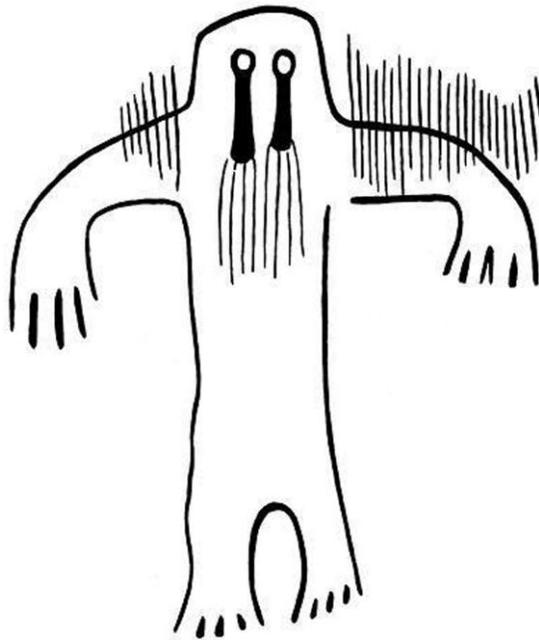
**Figure 3.** Overview of Painted Rock.



**Figure 4.** Family pictograph panel at Painted Rock. From left to right is the “child” Hairy Man, “mother” Hairy Man, and “father” Hairy Man.



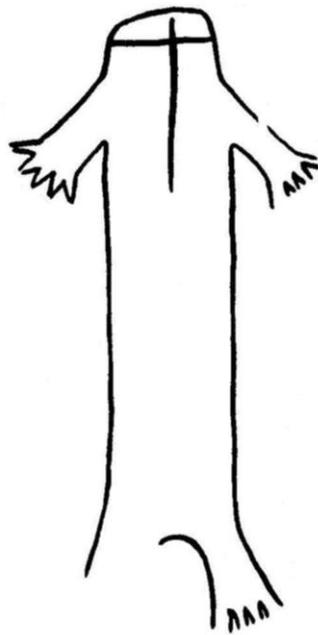
**Figure 5.** Hairy Man pictograph.



**Figure 6.** Line drawing of the Hairy Man pictograph.



**Figure 7.** The “mother” Hairy Man pictograph.



**Figure 8.** Line drawing of the “mother” Hairy Man pictograph.



**Figure 9.** The “child” Hairy Man pictograph.



**Figure 10.** Line drawing of the “child” Hairy Man pictograph.