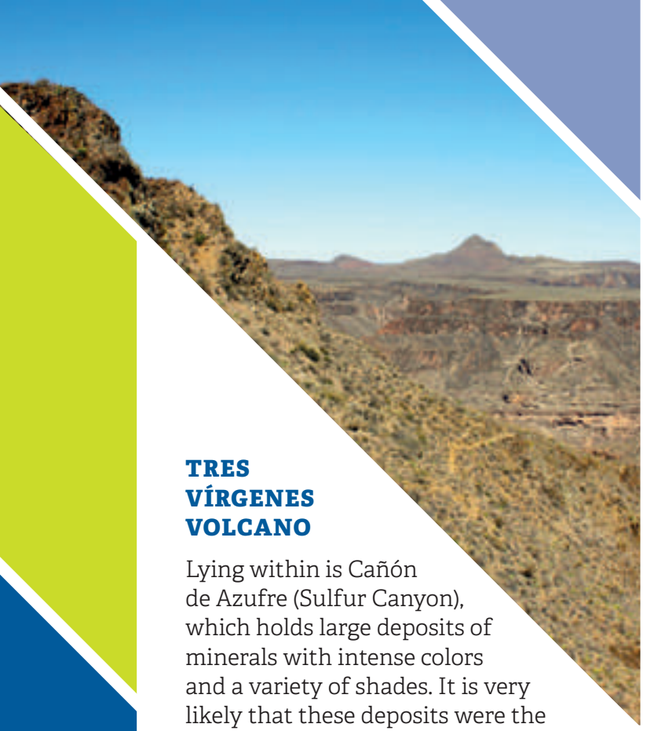


TRES VÍRGENES VOLCANO

Lying within is Cañón de Azufre (Sulfur Canyon), which holds large deposits of minerals with intense colors and a variety of shades. It is very likely that these deposits were the source of the raw materials needed to prepare the paint used in the sierras of San Francisco and Guadalupe.

SYMBOLISM

These sets of images make up a complex symbolic system that shows us a fragment of the world vision of these peoples, with some of the paintings depicting important figures, tribal ancestors, and mythical characters. Although it is hard to interpret their meaning, we can say for now that some of these symbolic sites were places where indigenous people from different tribes gathered periodically to exchange goods, arrange marriages, and perform various rituals, including the act of painting the sites. From ethno-historical sources, we know that these peoples practiced body painting, with the members of each tribe painting themselves in different colored patterns to distinguish themselves from the others. They reaffirmed their social identity by painting their rock shelters and their bodies.



Location
The paintings are located within the El VIzcaíno Biosphere Reserve in Baja California Sur, 80 km from the town of San Ignacio.

Information
Contact: Dr. María de la Luz Gutiérrez Martínez, person responsible for the SSF Archeological Zone, BCS INAH Center. Tels. (612) 12 27389 & (612) 12 30399 INAH Information Module in San Ignacio Tel. 615 154 0222

Opening Hours
From 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Your visit to the canyons must be reserved and planned beforehand.

www.gob.mx/cultura
www.gob.mx/mexicoescultura
www.inah.gob.mx
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Text: Dr. María de la Luz Gutiérrez Martínez, BCS INAH Center.

CULTURA SECRETARÍA DE CULTURA | INAH

ESTHETIC VALUES

There are many painted panels that have been well preserved. The style is realistic and is dominated by human figures and terrestrial and aquatic animals painted in red, black, white, and yellow. Some of the pictures are larger than life size, and it is common to see figures superimposed upon each other. Their monumental nature is accentuated because the paintings were executed in very elevated parts of the walls and ceilings of these rock shelters.





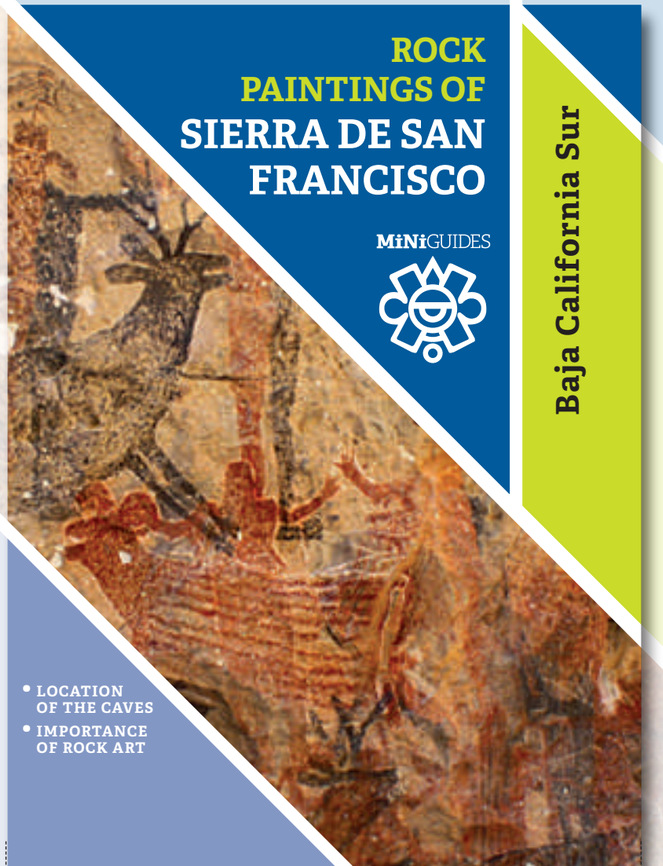
THE ART OF PAINTING AND CARVING

The painters developed an outstanding technique that enabled them to skillfully capture hundreds of sets of images that make up complex symbolic systems, allowing us to learn about a fragment of their world vision. They constructed wooden scaffolding to reach the highest parts of the sites, and it is important to note that the indigenous people produced ropes of different thicknesses, especially from the fibers of a local species of agave.

HERITAGE

Sierra de San Francisco holds one of the most remarkable and best-preserved collections of rock art in Mexico. Hundreds of "Great Mural" rock art sites are contained within its canyons, which were added to the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1993 and are considered one of the most important sets of rock art in Mexico. It includes several symbolic sites: Cueva del Ratón, Cueva Pintada, Cueva de Las Flechas, Cueva de la Música, Cueva de La Soledad, Boca de San Julio, and Cuesta Palmarito. Specialists believe these paintings are 4,500 years old.

Their authorship has been attributed to the Cochimí indigenous groups, hunters, gatherers, and fisherfolk who painted these sites over the course of millennia.



ROCK PAINTINGS OF SIERRA DE SAN FRANCISCO

MiNiGUIDES

Baja California Sur

- LOCATION OF THE CAVES
- IMPORTANCE OF ROCK ART

YOUR ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE MINI GUIDE

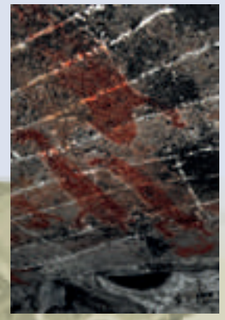
Sierra de San Francisco

The rock art of Sierra de San Francisco represents a cultural tradition that was developed over the course of millennia, and these paintings have been dated to at least 4,500 BP. When the indigenous population was eliminated, these sites remained intact until the mountains were repopulated in the late 19th century.



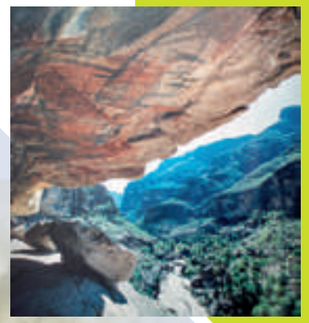
Boca de San Julio

This almost entirely consists of zoomorphic figures, which convey the sensation of movement through the position of their front and back legs, raised heads, and the curved axis of their bodies.



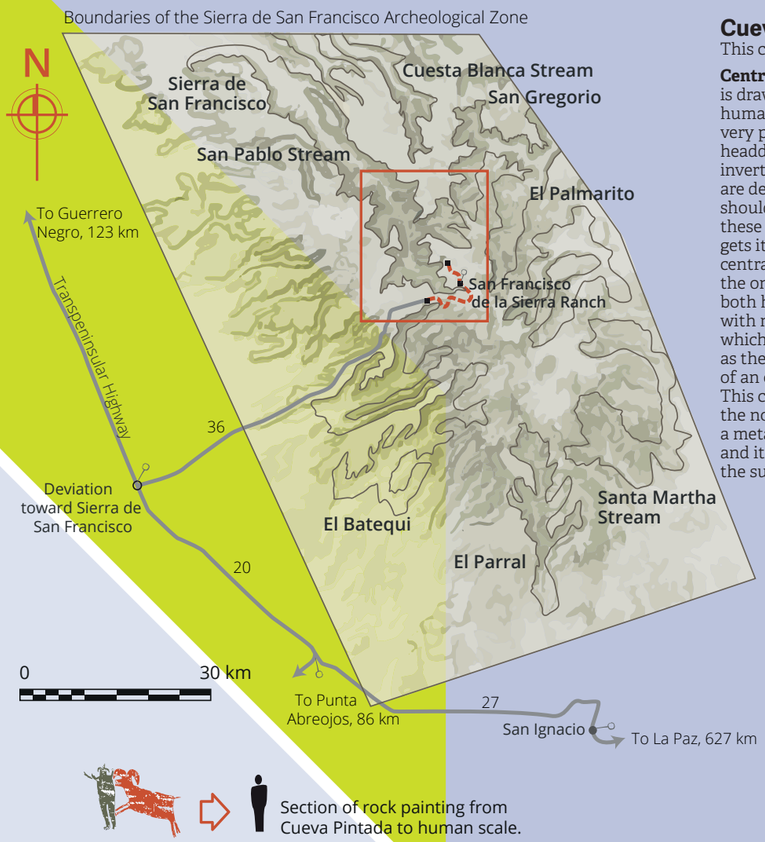
Cueva de la Música (Cave of Music)

This shows a set of human figures who appear to be painted in a grid, thus giving the cave its name. These lines are similar to a musical stave, in which the figures with raised arms would be the musical notes.



Cueva Pintada (Painted Cave)

This cave is one of the biggest on the site, measuring nearly 175 m from one end to the other. The outlines, characteristics of the support, monumental scale, and techniques for applying the color of this painting place it among the most important in the world. Taken as a whole, these paintings have been connected to several myths that narrate the beginning of life and creation of the first human beings in the ancient world of the peninsula; they have also been connected to depiction of the dead, ancestors, and mythical characters. This is a symbolic place in which people from different tribes gathered to reaffirm their social identities.



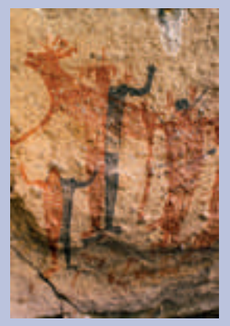
Section of rock painting from Cueva Pintada to human scale.

Cueva de las Flechas (Cave of Arrows)

This consists of three sets of images.

Central Set: Our gaze is drawn to large human beings with very prominent headdresses. Small, inverted figures are depicted on the shoulders of two of these people. The cave gets its name from the central character and the one to its right, as both have been pierced with many arrows, which some interpret as the commemoration of an outbreak of war. This could also convey the notion of death in a metaphorical sense and its contact with the supernatural.

Right panel: One remarkable example of these zoomorphic figures is a stag on which a large bird with outspread wings has been painted, a figure that may depict a golden eagle; also of note is a bighorn sheep bearing a majestic set of horns. Some small human figures can be seen below and on top of this figure.





- Easy access: General public, hiking. Requirements: INAH permit and guide. 1 hour.
- Moderate access: General public. Hiking and horse-riding (4 to 6 hours) or camping (2 to 4 days). Requirements: INAH permit and guide.
- Restricted access: Hiking and horse-riding (4 to 6 hours) or camping (2 to 4 days). Requirements: INAH permit, participation of an INAH custodian and guide.

Highway
Dirt Road
Tours on foot or on mule-back by bridle paths

Cueva de la Soledad (Cave of Solitude)

This shows human and animal figures, among which stand out deer and birds painted in red and black, some of which have been pierced with arrows or spears. Our attention is drawn to the design of a crow among the birds. Also shown are abstract figures in which we can see geometrical shapes, straight and curved lines forming symbols whose meaning is still unknown.





Cueva El Ratón (Mouse Cave)

This has paintings of human forms, deer, peninsular pronghorns, bighorn sheep, hares, and even a puma. We can also see abstract geometrical figures such as squares and friezes in alternating red and black colors. The small figures depict hares, rabbits, and some male anthropomorphic figures.



DID YOU KNOW...?

- Some scholars have discovered hunts, wars, sacrifices, and rituals in these paintings. Others have sought different readings related to astronomical events that occurred thousands of years ago.
- The paint was obtained from mineral pigments. Once these had been ground up, water and emulsions obtained from plant extracts were mixed in, with gypsum occasionally being added to obtain different shades of red and yellow.

INTERESTING FINDS

1894 & 1895

Léon Diguet published descriptions of several mural sites the year after had explored Sierra de San Francisco.



1962

Erle Stanley Gardner and Clement Meighan investigated Cueva Pintada, Cueva de Las Flechas, Cueva del Ratón, and Cueva de La Soledad.

1970-1980

Writer and photographer Harry Crosby and photographer Enrique Hambleton documented dozens of sites belonging to the Great Mural pictorial tradition for the first time in Sierra de San Francisco.



1981 TO DATE

The first INAH research work began in Sierra de San Francisco. Since then, many seasons of field research have been spent on recording these rock art sites.





Photo: Ma. De la Luz Gutiérrez Martínez