

Rock Art at Momonga (CA-LAN-357)

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ABSTRACT

In 2012 the author reported that, “There are three significant archaeology sites in the eastern Simi Hills that have elaborate polychrome pictograph components. Numerous additional small loci of rock art and significant midden deposits also characterize these sites. Almost all other painted rock art in this region consists of red-only paintings. During the pre-contact era, the eastern Simi Hills/west San Fernando Valley area was inhabited by a mix of Eastern Chumash and Western Tongva (Fernandeño)” . . . Even so, “the style of the paintings at the three sites (CA-VEN-1072, CA-VEN-148/149, CA-LAN-357) is clearly Chumash in style. If the quantity and the quality of art are good indicators, then it is probable that these three sites were some of the most important ceremonial locations for the region. An examination of these sites has the potential to help us better understand this area of cultural interaction” (2012:1).

To do this, this paper will examine the rock art of the CA-LAN-357 (the Chatsworth Site) in additional detail. The paper includes, 1- An introduction to the site complex, 2- An overview of the ethnographic context, and 3- A summary of the previous research at the site complex. The paper then proceeds to 4- Describe and discuss the rock art.

Note that the current paper is a preliminary DRAFT, which is being circulated for comments. The author intends to prepare an expanded version of the DRAFT, which will (hopefully) include color photographs of all the pictographs and additional photographic examples of cupule loci.

INTRODUCTION

The Chatsworth Site is recorded as CA-LAN-357 (State of California Primary # 19-000357), but it is part of a larger complex of sites that includes the Stoney Point Site (CA-LAN-89), Walker’s Chatsworth Carin Site (CA-LAN-21), and several other associated sites. Based on the presence of a “main panel,” and several other small painted panels and numerous loci of cupules, it is obvious that the Chatsworth Site would have been an important ceremonial location. When it was fully extant, the main panel may have been almost as impressive as the main panel at Burro Flats Painted Cave (CA-VEN-1072). Unfortunately, the main panel at CA-LAN-357 is in a shallow rock shelter and is not well-protected from the elements, and it is gradually being destroyed by natural exfoliation. Historical and ethnographic records show that CA-LAN-357 was the important Fernandeño village known as *Momonga*.

Frank Latta noted (1977:600), “The Wukchumne of the Sierra Nevada foothills said that the paintings generally were placed at an important village site, one which was inhabited

permanently or at some place where ceremonies were performed. They stated that tribal equipment, such as symmetrical bowls or mortars and pestles used for mashing and cooking jimson weed [*Datura*] roots, and for grinding Yokuts tobacco, or costumes for tribal ceremonies, often were concealed near these paintings. . . . The idea furnished was that the paintings added prestige to the spot, indicated that it was *tripne* (supernatural) and served to awe the lesser characters of the tribe and instilled in them respect for the equipment concealed there.” The numerous rock shelters and small cavities at the Chatsworth Site, would have made perfect places to cache equipment, regalia, or food, etc., so it is likely that Latta’s observation is also true of the Chatsworth Site.

ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

The eastern Simi Hills were an area of major cultural interaction, and both Eastern Chumash (or *Ventureño*) and *Fernandeño* people lived there (Grant 1978a, 1978b; Johnson 1997, 2006; King 2011; Knight 2012, 2016; Knight et al. 2017). Note that King avoids using the term *Fernandeño*, and instead distinguishes between the *Western Tongva*, who lived along the western coast of Los Angeles County, and included the people of the San Fernando Valley, and the *Eastern Tongva* (or *Gabrielino*), who lived across the Los Angeles Plain, in the San Gabriel Valley, Santa Catalina Island, etc. We follow that practice here, for the most part.

Another tribe also lived in the area- this was the *Tataviam*. Johnson (2006:15) states that, “The closest rancheria of certain Tataviam affiliation was *Tochonanga*, located in the vicinity of Newhall to the northeast.” Johnson states that, “Chester King proposed that *Momonga* was occupied by speakers of the Tataviam language, which was mainly associated with rancherias in the upper Santa Clara River watershed.” Johnson disagrees with King on this point and discusses why he thinks that King’s extension of Tataviam territory into the San Fernando Valley is unjustified (Johnson 2006:17, 20-22). Note that Harrington’s *Fernandeño* consultants (Harrington 1986) consistently distinguish between *Fernandeño*, Chumash, *Tataviam*, and *Gabrielino* peoples and languages, and none of them provided any information (to Harrington) that showed that the *Tataviam* had been present in the San Fernando Valley before Mission San Fernando was established and the Spanish moved essentially the entire tribe there (for discussions of the *Tataviam* see Johnson and Earle 1990, and King and Blackburn 1978).

Chumash culture was regionally dominant, and the *Western Tongva* (*Fernandeño*), *Eastern Tongva* (*Gabrielino*), *Tataviam*, and *Kitanemuk* are included in what Hudson and Blackburn (1979, 1983, 1984, 1986a, 1986b) call the Chumash Interaction Sphere (also see Whitley and Simon 1979). One of John Peabody Harrington's *Kitanemuk* consultants told him that, “. . . the religion of the *yivar* [the Chumash *siliyik*] was the custom at Ventura and of the Castec [interior *Ventureño*] people, and of the *Fernandeño* . . . and *Gabrielinos*, also of the people of Santa Barbara and Santa Inez. . . . The religion of the coast [the Chumash religion] . . . was not here [among the *Kitanemuk*]. It was at Ventura and reached to San Gabriel -- it was very strong at San Gabriel. . . . The *Gabrielino* sang their long verses . . . in *Ventureño* Chumash (Hudson and Underhay 1978:30; Librado 1981:17-28, 31, 39-42). According to Blackburn (1974:100), “People came to the host villages for these important ceremonial occasions from a long distance. An important *Ventureño* Chumash fiesta, for example, might be attended by sizeable numbers of people from as

far away as Gaviota or the Santa Inez Valley, as far east as Malibu or the San Fernando Valley, and as far north as Tejon, while performances by Yokuts dancers were not uncommon.” And this probably would have been the case at Momonga, where the “main panel” would have been an important focus for Western Tongva ceremonial activities. Note that although Spanish Period Mission records (see following) show that Momonga was ethno-linguistically a Western Tongva village, the main panel and other pictographic rock art (most notably the polychrome paintings at locus P47) are clearly Chumash in style; this is an affirmation of Hudson and Blackburn’s “Chumash Interaction Sphere.”

The *Momonga* area continued to be an important place during the early historic period. According to Johnson (2006:15), “The rancheria of Momonga was commonly known as the *Rancheria de las Piedras* (*Village of the Stones*) in the San Fernando mission registers. The first group of children to be baptized, on the day Mission San Fernando was founded (September 8, 1799) belonged to families from Momonga. “The parents of several of these initial converts were . . . from Momonga, and several later converts . . . were close relatives . . . A total of 39 people have been associated with Momonga” (Johnson 2006:17). According to Johnson, “Of those . . . affiliated with Momonga, the majority were baptized at San Fernando . . .,” while two were baptized at Mission San Gabriel and two were baptized at Mission San Buenaventura. A linguistic analysis of the native names of 18 people baptized at Mission San Fernando shows that the majority had Fernandeano names; only a few had Chumash names. The mission records also show (ibid. 2006:18-20, Table 6) that the people of Momonga most often married people from Western Tongva or Eastern Chumash villages (e.g. *Jacjauybit/Huwam* at *Los Escorpiones Canyon* [Bell Canyon], *Achoicominga*, where Mission San Fernando was established, and *Taapu*, in northern Simi Valley. An analysis of the records for Mission San Buenaventura shows that the Chumash called the village *Calushcoho*.

In 1916 Harrington’s Fernandeano consultant Setimo Moraga Lopez told Harrington that “he did not know it [Momonga] as a place-name” but “that Momonga means ‘mareno. el mar, la playa’” (1986, 106-040:4:1 – 041:1:2). Setimo’s comments about “. . . not knowing it as a place-name “suggest that the name Momonga dropped out of use early. Or maybe he simply meant that it was not known by the native name any longer, having been replaced by the Spanish *Las Piedras*. It is also interesting that Setimo used Spanish terms that refer to the ocean (*mareno* and *el mar*) and the beach (*la playa*) when discussing *Momonga*. But, unfortunately, we do not know what the exact connection was.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The first excavations at CA-LAN-357 took place during 1970-1974, and were directed by Robert Pence of Pierce College, and Ken Kraft of Reseda High School (he later also taught at El Camino High School). Pence excavated there again in 1976 (Romani 1981:115). According to Sanberg et al. (1978:30), “the site itself is 0.4 x 0.2 kms in dimension. The midden is black and well defined.” The artifact collection from CA-LAN-357 is curated at the Pierce College Anthropology Laboratory, in Woodland Hills. During 2008-2010, Pierce College students under the direction of Professor Noble Eisenlauer catalogued the collection, sorted, measured, and weighed the artifacts, and recorded them in an electronic database. Recovered artifacts include,

“bone awls, hammer stones, tarring stones, steatite bowl fragments, manos, pestles, metate fragments, hammer stones, blades, choppers, beads (Olivella and steatite), pendants, projectile points made from rhyolite, fused shale, chert, chalcedony and obsidian, flakes, 843kg. of burnt rock . . . and some 8000 faunal specimens” (Nupuf 2010:1).

As to the nature and date of the site, Romani et al. (1988) state that, “Archaeological information suggests that LAN-357 . . . appears to have been occupied from the Middle Period (1500 B.C. to 500 A.D.) until historic contact. . . Historic occupation is based on the presence of Spanish trade beads. . . The extensive rock art at the site suggests that it had a significant ceremonial component which distinguished it from other villages. Romani (1981:167) also pointed out that the presence of a sulfur spring -- often considered sacred and medicinal -- coupled with the extensive presence of rock art, clearly establishes a sacred/ceremonial value to this site. . . The sanctity and magical power of rock art strongly implies that this is not a village of commoners or a more secular assortment of individuals, but rather a highly prestigious village occupied by high status individuals.” Note that although Romani refers to CA-LAN-357 as a “village,” this author believes that it is actually (only) the ceremonial area for an extended village, which may have included all (or most) of the many sites found from the L.A./Ventura County line on the west, to as far east as CA-LAN-21 and CA-LAN-209 (both sites are located near the mouth of Brown’s Canyon/Canoga Avenue) on the east. It is of some interest that a sulphur spring is also located at Huwam/Jacjauybit, at Bell Canyon.

ROCK ART AND ARCHAEOASTRONOMY

The rock art of CA-LAN-357 has been previously described in Bleitz-Sanberg (1988), Edberg (1987), Knight (1997:58, 128-130, 2001:25, 2012:11-13), Lowe (1977:41-42), Romani (1981:115-129, 140-141, 147-151, 161-169), Romani et al. (1985, 1988), and Sanberg et al. (1978). According to Romani (1988) there are at least 47 loci that are or include rock art. Six, or perhaps seven loci consist of pictographs and almost all the rest are cupules; numbers of cups vary from a few in loose groupings, to clusters of several, sometimes in patterns. There is also at least one petroglyph and several bedrock mortars. The most important of these is the polychrome main panel (Knight: 2012:11-13), which would have been an important ceremonial location (Figures 1-2). This panel is in a very shallow cavity in a low bedrock outcrop, and it is suffering from natural weathering. Another, less well-known, small polychrome loci is better protected from the weather, and is in good condition (Figures 3-5), while the remaining four (5?) areas with pigment are all in poor condition. Grooves are present in a few places (Figure 6), and there are numerous loci consisting of or including cupules. Figure 7 shows cupules on a vertical rock face with one directly associated petroglyph, and Figure 8 shows cupules in patterned groups, on the semi-horizontal top of a boulder. Morgan Jones, an avocational rock art researcher, notes that cupules, incised lines, and grooves, are frequently associated with, “. . . the Chumash style of the [Northern Channel] Islands, Santa Ynez [Valley], Vandenberg Air Force Base, the Thousand Oaks [area], Hurricane Deck, New Cuyama, and the Carrizo Plains . . . These features can be connected to major villages . . .” (personal communication July 18, 2018).

Sanberg et al. (1978:28-32) state that “. . . on the panel naturalistic figures, typified by appendages that project away from the body with no bending, or bending down, and three digits on the arms and legs, are common. Rakes, unconnected groups of lines, and extremely abstract rectilinear alignments are seen. There are some curvilinear designs. These are all excellent examples of the Santa Barbara style associated with the Chumash. . . . Of some interest are the pecked pits, ground circles, and lines. . . . With the lack of rock art in any reported form from the Fernandeano- Gabrielino area, except at some considerable distance, it may be safe to assign this site to . . . the Chumash with their near at hand comparable examples.” Sanberg et al. also noted the presence of red, white, and black pigments; one orange painting is also present (Figure 2); this painting may be the swordfish motif (Devlin Gandy, personal communication 2015). Given the size and shape of the rock face, it appears that the main panel was once about 3 meters wide about one meter in height (approximately the size of the Burro Flats main panel).

The rock paintings of the Chumash include some of the most spectacular and best-known pictographs in California (Grant 1965). They were called the *Santa Barbara Painted Style* in times past, but the style is found well beyond Santa Barbara County, including in all of Ventura County, and in western Los Angeles County, as in the case here. The style is characterized as having angular and curvilinear elements in roughly equal proportions; commonly seen motifs include circle and dot arrangements, “suns,” concentric-circles, or mandalas (depending on who is doing the describing); human, animal, and insect figures are frequently seen, as is the “aquatic” motif, and (occasionally) the swordfish motif, as may be the case here. Based upon his research in the area, Romani believed (1981:91) that, “the west San Fernando Valley was an area of religious and/or ceremonial prominence for both the Chumash and Fernandeano/Gabrielino.” There are several sites with elaborate red pictographs in the region (e.g., CA-LAN-717/H, CA-VEN-195), but none of these sites has polychrome paintings. Given that polychrome pictographs in the area under discussion are so rare, it seems likely that the use of multiple colors at the Chatsworth Site, Burro Flats Painted Cave, and Chatsworth Lake Manor was one way of signaling that these sites were especially sacred.

In closing, we also note that Romani et al. posited that the main panel at CA-LAN-357 was placed so as to help identify the solstices, but in this case, it was the solstice sunsets that may have been observed, not the sunrises (as at Burro Flats Painted Cave, etc.) (Romani et al. 1988:110-111, 114, 116, 119, 122). Romani observed that there is a single bedrock mortar on top of the outcrop where the Chatsworth Site main panel is located, and he used that specific mortar as a datum point to make observations of the winter and the summer solstice sunsets. Indeed, when standing at the mortar above the main panel, the summer solstice sunset occurs behind the highest peak above the northwest corner of the San Fernando Valley (this is probably Rocky Peak), while the winter solstice sunset occurs behind the highest outcrop at nearby Stoney Point (see 1988:122). To Romani, this showed that Native Americans had knowingly located the mortar, and therefore the polychrome painting below, on the particular rock formation from where, when looking west, the sun would set no farther north than the highest peak to the northwest (at the summer solstice sunset), and it would set no farther south than the highest peak to the southwest (at the winter solstice sunset). So again, we can ask, given that there are numerous rock faces and rock shelters at this site, why was the main panel at CA-LAN-357 put where it was put?

To try and answer this question, the author decided to observe the December 2016 winter solstice sunset from the high outcrop on the south edge of the peak at Stoney Point. That is, the author (and Dr. Edwin Krupp, the Director of Los Angeles Griffith Observatory) positioned themselves in front of the very rock that the sun sets behind, as seen from the bedrock mortar above the CA-LAN-357 main panel. This observation showed that Stoney Point acts as a giant sundial, and in the few minutes that it takes the sun to set, the shadow cast by Stoney Point points at and then touches the CA-LAN-357 main panel outcrop. Thus, the earth itself indicates which outcrop has the proper significance to qualify as the most sacred place in the area, and that is where the main panel was placed.

THE FIGURES

Figures 1-8 show prehistoric rock art. Figure 9 shows what appear to be historic petroglyphs. These are in the easternmost end of the Chatsworth Site, well away from the prehistoric rock art. Figures 1-2 are by Devlin Gandy, 3-8 are by Tom Hnatiw, and 9 is by Albert Knight.

Figure 1
Enhanced Chatsworth Site Main Panel 1

Figure 2
Swordfish Motif – Detail of Main Panel

Figure 3
Polychrome red and white pictograph at P47

Figure 4
Red pictograph at P47

Figure 5
Red pictograph at P47

Figure 6
Set of small bedrock incisions

Figure 7
Set of multiple cupules and a single round petroglyph on the vertical wall of a small rock shelter

Figure 8
Cupules on the top of a generally horizontal boulder

Figure 9
Small set of historic petroglyphs



Figure 1
Enhanced Chatsworth Site Main Panel 1

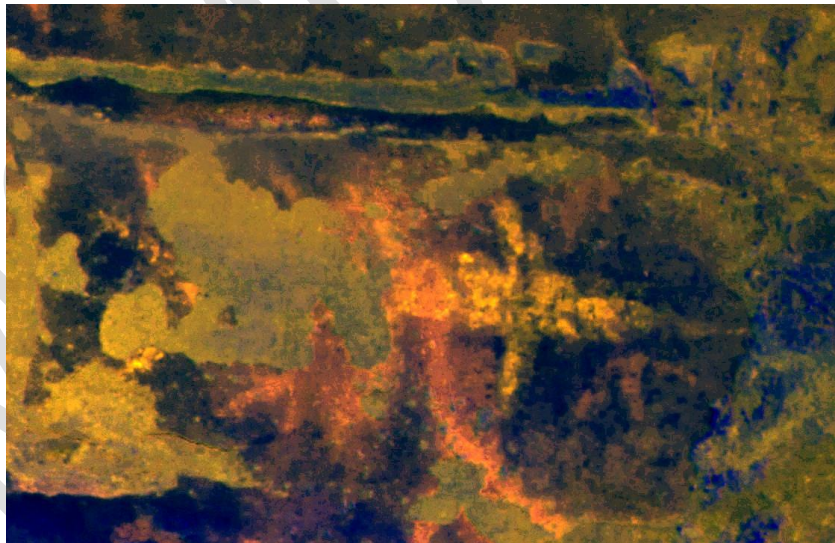


Figure 2
Swordfish Motif - Detail of main Panel



Figure 3
Polychrome red and white pictograph at P43



Figure 4
Red pictograph at P47

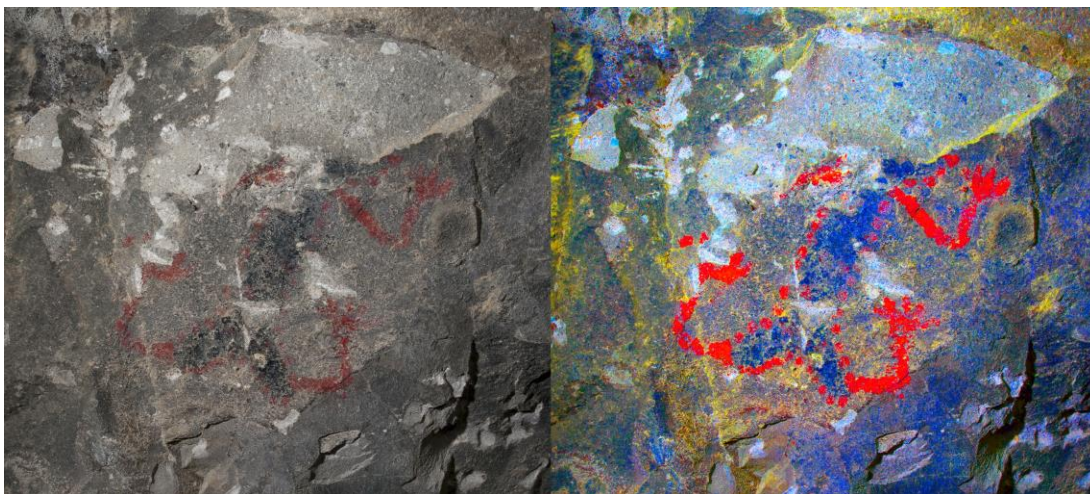


Figure 5
Red pictograph at P47

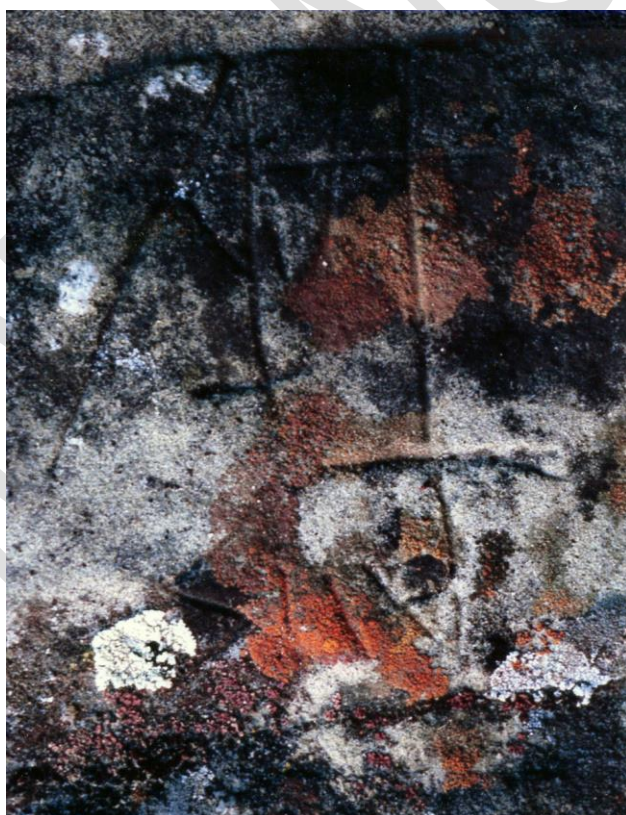


Figure 6
Set of small bedrock incisions



Figure 7
Set of multiple cupules and a single round petroglyph
on the vertical wall of a small rock shelter



Figure 8
Cupules on the top of
a generally horizontal boulder



Figure 9
Small set of historic petroglyphs

2012 ROCK ART CHECK LIST

Romani et al. (1988:113) lists 47 loci of rock art and one leaching basin (LB48). In 2012 a group led by Noble Eisenlauer and the author made a cursory attempt to relocate as many loci of rock art as possible, using Romani's 1988 map. The 2012 survey managed to relocate several of Romani's loci, and it also identified four loci that did not seem to appear on Romani's map; these were assigned loci #s 49-52. Upon closer examination it was decided that the provisional assignment of loci #50 was not warranted. It is possible that a more careful examination of the site would show that these loci are indeed on Romani's list. Note that there are several BRMs at this site that are not associated with pictographs or cupules. These loci are not included in Table 1.

TABLE 1

ROMANI # (1988) PAGE??	KNIGHT # (2012)	THE ROCK ART	COMMENTS
Dm = Datum L = Cupule Loci M = BRM P = Rock Art Panel PG = Pit and Groove LB = Leaching Basin	The numbering system used in 2012 was adapted from Romani et al. (1988) Each Romani # is now a locus #	<i>Loci in italics were observed in 2012</i> Otherwise the description is based on Romani et al.	
Dm	Locus 1a Datum is a single BRM	<i>1 BRM</i>	This is the BRM that is on top of the outcrop with the main panel
P1 Pictographs below Dm	Locus 1b Main Panel	<i>Very weathered polychrome pictograph main panel</i>	This is the west-facing main panel
P2	2	Pictograph	Need to locate
L3m	3	Cupules BRM	
L4	4	Cupules	
L5	5	Cupules	
L6	6	Cupules	
L7	7	Cupules	
L8	8	Cupules	
L9	9	Cupules	
L10	10	Cupules	
L11	11	Cupules	
L12	12	Cupules	
L13	13	<i>6 cupules</i>	
L14	14	<i>2 cupules on large flat area of bedrock</i>	
L15	15	Cupules	
P16	16	<i>7 vertical red lines, condition very poor</i>	
L17	17	<i>6 cupules</i>	
L18m	18	<i>1 cupule BRM</i>	
L19	19	<i>1 cupule</i>	
P20	20	<i>2 faint red pictographs</i>	
L21	21	<i>Several cupules</i>	
L22	22	<i>1 cupule</i>	
L23	23	<i>1 cupule</i>	
L24	24	Cupules	

L25	25	Cupules	
L26	26	Cupules	
L27	27	<i>1 cupule</i>	
L28	28	<i>1 cupule (adj. to cactus)</i>	
L29	29	<i>1 cupule</i>	
L30	30	<i>3 cups on flat outcrop of bedrock</i>	
L31	31	<i>3 small BRMs</i>	
L32	32	Cupules	
L33	33	Cupules	
L34m	34	Cupules BRM	
L35m	35	Cupules BRM	
L36	36	Cupules	
L37	37	Cupules	
L38	38	Cupules	
L39	39	Cupules	
L40	40	Cupules	
L41	41	Cupules	
L42pga	42a	Vertical groove with 1 cupule at top	
L42pgb	42b	1 vertical groove	
P43	43 ????	<i>Small area of well-preserved polychrome and monochrome pictographs</i>	Correct #/location? Check!
L44	44	Cupules	
L45m	45	Cupules BRM	
L46m	46	<i>1 cupule</i> <i>1 BRM</i>	
P47	47	Pictograph	Need to locate
LB48	48	<i>Leaching Basin</i>	
How did the 4 below end up with #s beyond what Romani listed			
	49???	1 red picto in sm shelter, 3 cupules just outside of shelter	And Romani #?
	50	# not assigned	
	51???	1 cupule	Any Romani #?
	52???	1 sm BRM	Any Romani #?

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