

EASY FIELD GUIDE® TO

# ROCK ART SYMBOLS

OF THE SOUTHWEST



# **EASY FIELD GUIDE® TO ROCK ART SYMBOLS OF THE SOUTHWEST**

by Rick Harris

©1995

2009 Printing

ISBN 978-0-935810-58-5 (10-digit: 0-935810-58-7)

Published by:

**AMERICAN TRAVELER PRESS**

a division of Primer Publishers

5738 North Central Avenue

Phoenix, Arizona 85012-1316

(800) 521-9221

[www.americantravelerpress.com](http://www.americantravelerpress.com)

**See inside back cover for ordering information.**

Published in the United States of America

## **INTRODUCTION**

**Petroglyphs** are symbols drawn by prehistoric cultures. This *Easy Field Guide*® focuses on those found in the four corner states of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah.

Pecked into patina of stone, chiseled with antler, or etched with the acidic juice of cactus, petroglyphs were used by the ancients as a means of conveying a message. These petroglyph and pictograph symbols are popularly known as Rock Art.

Just what these messages might have been is still a matter of conjecture, but my hope is to provide some insight into what the early Native Americans may have been trying to say. The interpretations suggested here intend to provide a point of departure in dealing with the questions ...

What were they trying to say?

Why did they say it?

First, while attempting to read the petroglyphs keep in mind that some are over a thousand years old. As these early cultures died out, or evolved, their messages may have been lost, or altered in meaning with passing generations. Therefore, exact interpretation is exceedingly difficult. Some would say impossible, at least for now. This is what makes these symbols so interesting.

Second, in order for us to gain any meaning from these messages on stone, we have to turn to the descendants of those who wrote them. Here we encounter a problem. While some theorize that at one time, most



Native Americans of the Southwest came from one people, now we have many tribes and nations, each with their own interpretation of the symbols that were drawn by their ancestors. What a Hopi sees may differ from what a Zuni reads or a Havasupai interprets despite agreement that the Puebloans were the ancestors of all three.



Third, the ancients did not leave behind a decoding key or perhaps we just haven't found it yet. This is an important reason why archaeologists ask us not to remove or deface petroglyphs, nor dig in ancient sites. If such a key could be found, it would benefit us all.

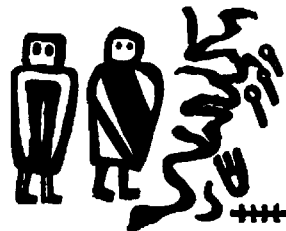
In preparing this *Guide*, friends from the Hopi and Pima nations along with others who claim to be able to read the writings of the Puebloans, Hohokam, Mimbres and Mogollon contributed. The symbols included here date from approximately A.D. 750-1450.

Are the interpretations correct? Opinions vary between archaeologists and between researchers, even between members of the same tribe. Still, for the most part what has been written here should give you some insight into what the ancients were trying to say. Among numerous theories, some are ...

### Lone, Solitary Figures:

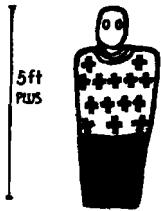


Thought by some to have been drawn by those on a hunt or vision quest, to release an animal or spirit from the earth.



### Several Figures in a Line:

It has been theorized that these should be read in the direction that shadows pass along the rock. Also, if there are human figures, you can try reading in the direction indicated by the feet.



### Large, Life Size Human Figure:

Believed by some to have been drawn in order to allow deceased warriors, shamans, or respected clan leaders to spiritually go to and from the rock as they pleased.

### Animal Figures, No Humans:

A form of prayer perhaps, or maybe they were drawn to lure animals from the earth to be hunted.



### Numerous Glyphs:

These could be a village history if there are village ruins nearby, or with no ruins, perhaps a place of religious pilgrimage. With the latter, they were probably drawn to say, "This is our land", or maybe, "This is the way we came."



Know that you will encounter other formats, as well as many symbols not depicted in this *Guide*. Use your reasoning skills as you try to understand the world of the ancients. Remember, knowing what a figure represents is one thing; knowing what it means is another.

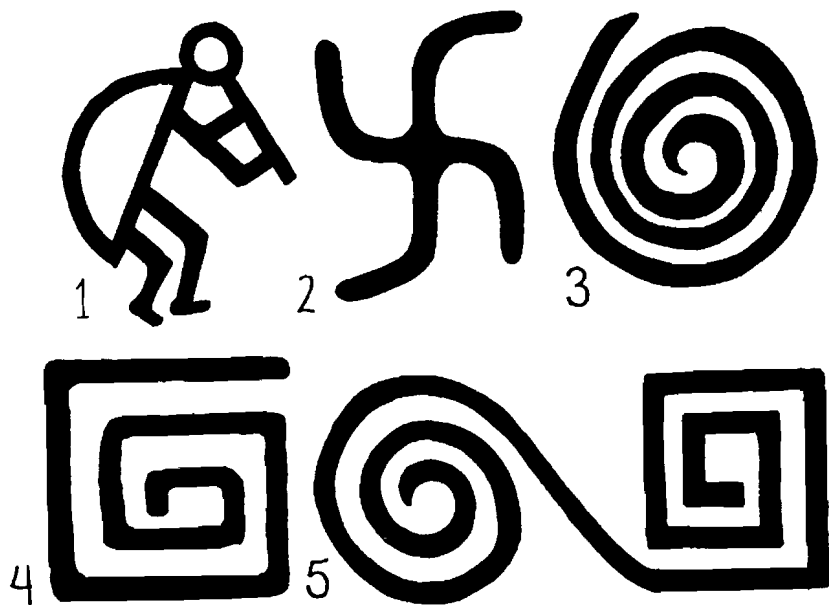
### Symbols

MIGRATION	page 6-7
CLANS	page 8-11
THE PEOPLE	page 12-15
SPIRITUALITY	page 16-17
SPIRITS	page 18-19
SHIELDS	page 20-21
MAPS	page 22-23
THE HEAVENS	page 24-25
THE ANIMALS	page 26-27
MISCELLANY	page 28-31

## Migration Symbols

- 1) Kokopelli is the name given to the humpbacked flute player. To prehistoric cultures in the Southwest, Kokopelli was an actual being who made the ground fertile, spreading seeds from his back wherever he would go. During times of famine, Kokopelli was drawn lying on his back; this meant that his spirit had left the land.
- 2) The gammadion is the symbol of primary migration. The Havasupai, Hopi and Zuni believe their ancestors emerged into this world from a single hole in the earth, and from here the Creator ordered them to populate the land in all four directions.
- 3) A spiral is the most common symbol to be found and was used when a settlement had to be abandoned. It tells others that the inhabitants have continued the migration.
- 4) Migration symbol signifying the founding of a new village.
- 5) Hopi friends tell me that after a new village had been built, a runner was sent back to the old village to place this symbol among the rest. It was meant to tell others that the Creator's command was being followed and fulfilled.

## Migration Symbols



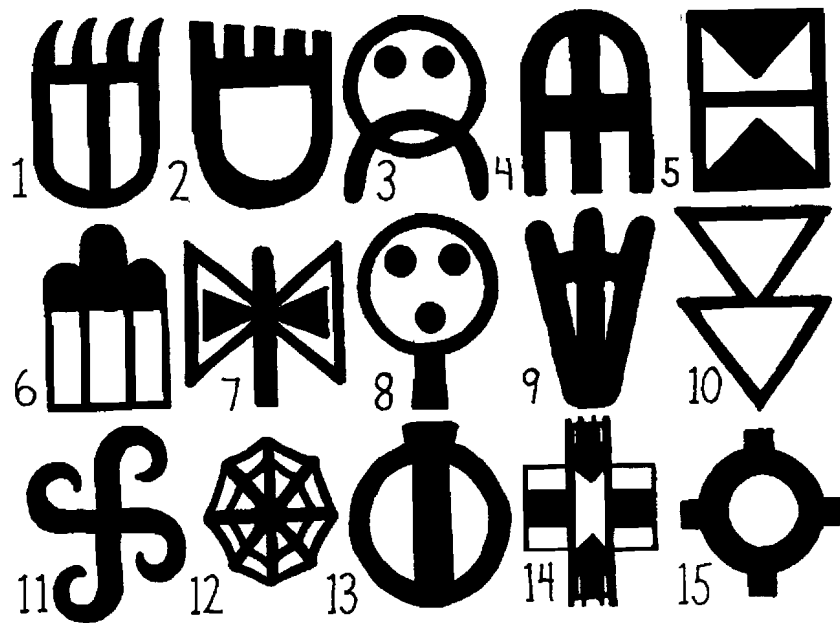
## Clan Symbols

Every village—or general area of mutual use—was inhabited by a number of family clan groups, each with specific duties to the overall community as determined by the Creator.

Thirty of the most common prehistoric clan symbols are depicted on pages 9 and 11.

- |              |             |            |
|--------------|-------------|------------|
| 1) Badger    | 2) Bear     | 3) Bow     |
| 4) Parrot    | 5) Water    | 6) Cloud   |
| 7) Butterfly | 8) Fire     | 9) Hawk    |
| 10) Crow     | 11) Kachina | 12) Spider |
| 13) Pumpkin  | 14) Tobacco | 15) Sun    |

## Clan Symbols

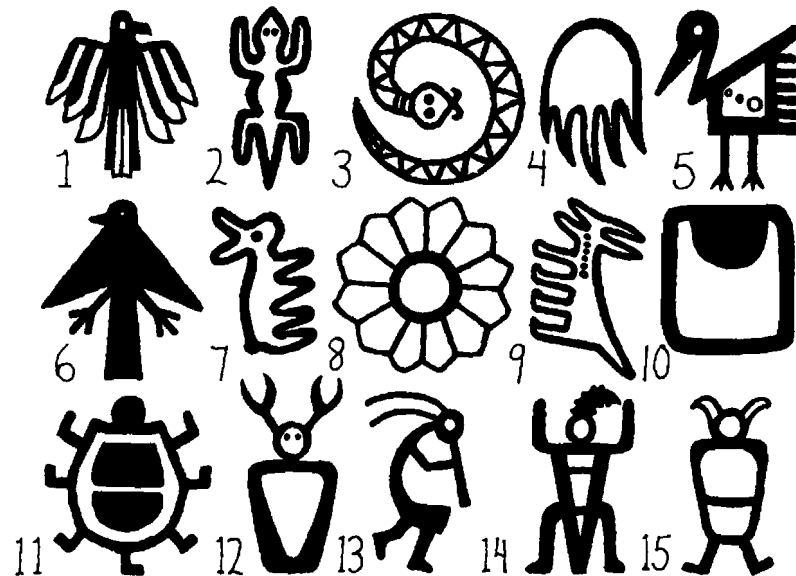


## Clan Symbols

## Clan Symbols

- |                |                      |                      |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1) Eagle       | 2) Lizard            | 3) Snake             |
| 4) Mole        | 5) Crane             | 6) Blackbird         |
| 7) Rabbit      | 8) Sunflower         | 9) Coyote            |
| 10) Corn       | 11) Black Spider     | 12) Antelope         |
| 13) Gray Flute | 14) One Horn Society | 15) Two Horn Society |

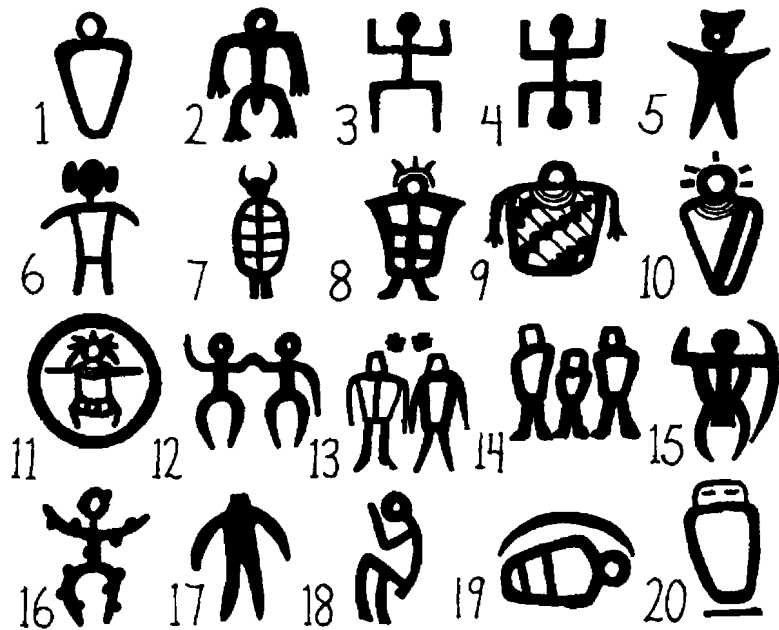
Note: One Horn and Two Horn Society were religious groups not "family" clans.



## The People

- |  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1) Generic human figure  | 2) Common male figure     |
| 3) Common human figure   | 4) Paternal brothers      |
| 5) Female figure   | 6) Unmarried figure       |
| <i>Hair coils, bowls or baskets on the head of a figure indicate a female ready for marriage</i> |                           |
| 7) The wife of a warrior   | 8) Male warrior           |
| 9) Shaman or medicine man  | 10) Clan Leader           |
| 11) Hohokam Sun Priest   | 12) Friends               |
| 13) Marriage   | 14) Family                |
| 15) Hunting  | 16) Disease               |
| 17) Slain enemy  | 18) Death/Burial          |
| 19) Burial of a Clan Leader  | 20) Spirit of an ancestor |

## The People



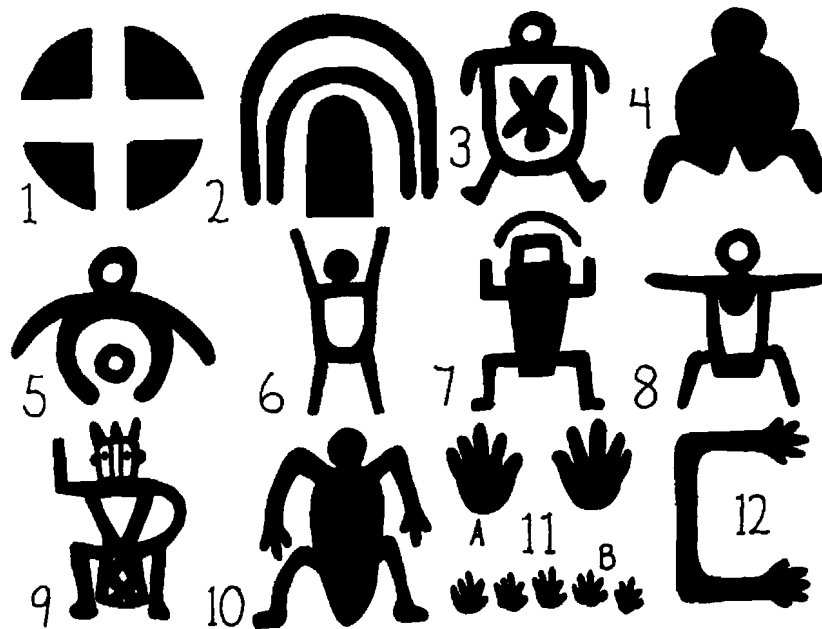


## The People

- |                            |                        |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1) Virgin, pure, untouched | 2) Sex                 |
| 3) Pregnant                | 4) To give birth       |
| 5) Birth                   | 6) Successful endeavor |
| 7) Happiness, thanks       | 8) "This is my land."  |
| 9) Welcome here            | 10) Not welcome here   |
- 11) A – Lone hand prints are a porthole to the spirit of a shaman within the rock—a future shaman putting his hand on the same spot could communicate with the living spirit of the deceased.  
 B – Many hand prints record an important family or an inter-clan marriage.
- 12) Arms joined; "We fought, we worked, as one."

Symbols 6 through 12 in this set are an example of glyphs on which archaeologists and Native Americans from different tribes disagree.

## The People

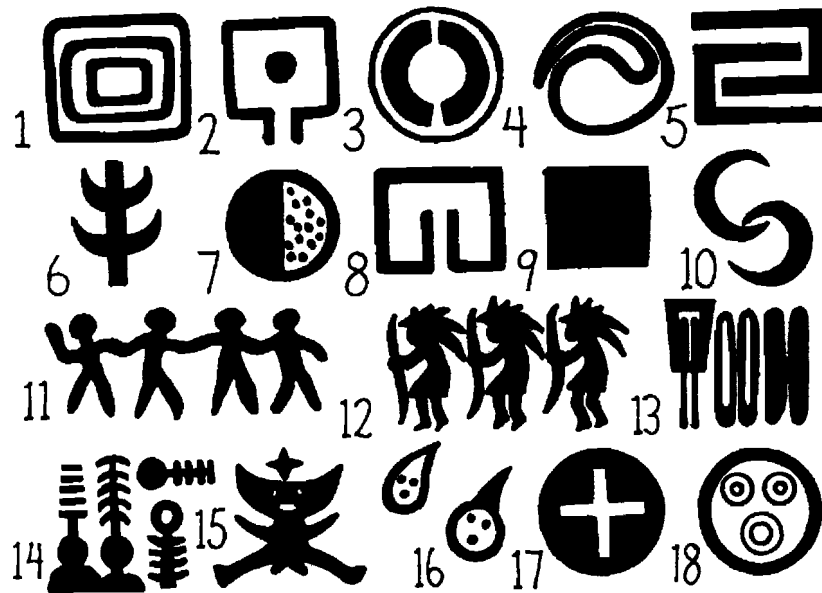


## Spirituality

If the beliefs of traditionalist modern Native Americans are any indication, the spirituality of the ancients may be summed up with the simple realization that everything is and was spirit.

- |                           |                               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1) The place of emergence | 2) Kiva, or ceremonial center |
| 3) Ballcourt (judgment)   | 4) Life Force                 |
| 5) Mutual responsibility  | 6) Good/life                  |
| 7) Evil/bad               | 8) Life                       |
| 9) Death                  | 10) Brotherhood               |
| 11) Dancing               | 12) Snake Dance               |
| 13) Prayer sticks         | 14) Communicating to spirits  |
| 15) Sky Mother            | 16) The Creator               |
| 17) The Creator           | 18) God of Death              |

## Spirituality



## Spirits

Everything in the world of the ancients was spirit. Not only humans but rock, water, cloud, animals and insects as well. Each had a lesson, each had a message and they were constantly turned to for guidance as well as assistance.

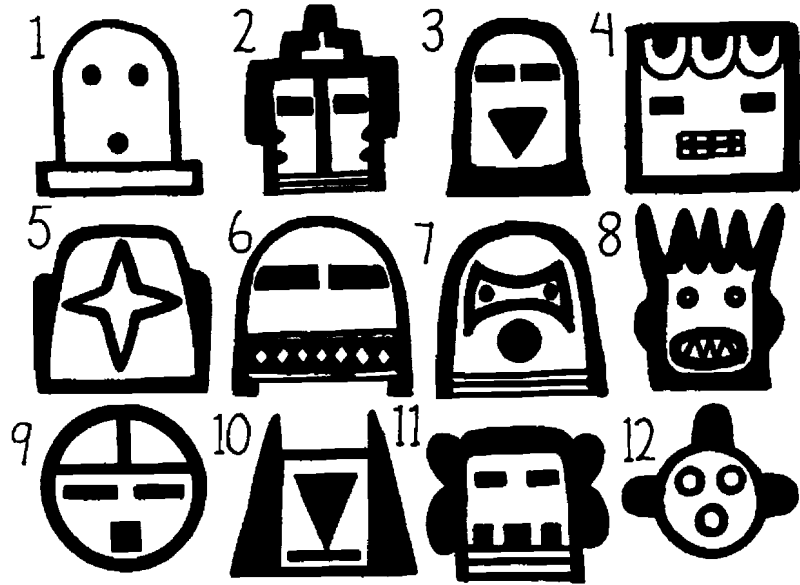
Today we call the ancestor spirits **Kachinas**

To summon a spirit, you first had to call it from the sky by using offerings, prayer, ceremonies and smoke, or try to release it from a rock by pecking or painting its image. Then, if the spirit had anything to say, it would appear sometime later on, in a waking vision or in a dream.

Out of hundreds, just a few are depicted here.

- |                   |              |             |
|-------------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1) Generic Spirit | 2) Niman     | 3) Soyal    |
| 4) Cloud          | 5) Nangosohu | 6) Heoto    |
| 7) Sipikne        | 8) Orge      | 9) Sun      |
| 10) Olupouki      | 11) Minna    | 12) Mudhead |

## Spirits



## Shields

It is possible to mistake a shield for a spirit. They appear somewhat the same, but remember that a spirit will always—even remotely—resemble a living creature, whereas a shield is a collection of symbols, each having a distinct meaning apart or combined.

We assume that every warrior bore a shield, and that every shield carried his name. On the opposite page are some shields that I have seen, and below are the translations given to me by present day Native Americans.

1) With Spirits 3 Mornings

2) Mountains In The Sun

3) Travels 3 Trails

4) Five Parrots

5) Walks 2 Days In Mountains

6) Twin Eagles

7) Rainbow Late In Day

8) Three Crows At Twilight

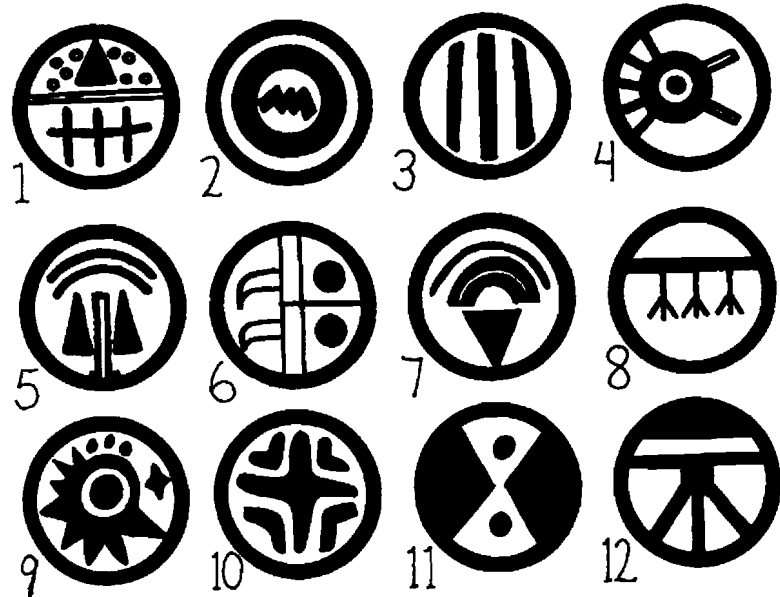
9) Bird Star Shines 3 Nights

10) Four Birds Flying North

11) Two Springs Poisoned

12) Walked With Death 3 Times

## Shields

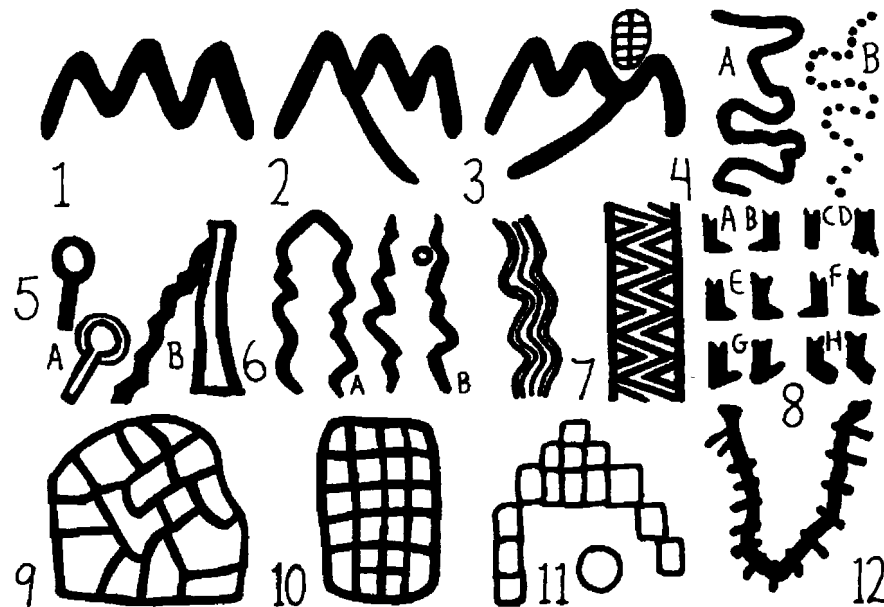


## Maps

Senseless squiggles? Geometric goof-ups?  
 Meaningless figures perhaps; my theory is they are maps.

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1) Mountains  | 2) Trail through mountains |
| 3) Trail Leads To Settlement Beyond Mountains                     |                            |
| 4) A-Human trail  | B-Animal trail             |
| 5) A-Spring   | B-Waterfall                |
| 6) A-Canyon   | B-Canyon & spring          |
| 7) Two examples of a Stream or River.                             |                            |
| 8) When figures accompany a map, look at the feet for directions. |                            |
| A-Right   | B-Left                     |
| C-Forward   | D-Backward                 |
| E-Right then Right  | F-Left then Right          |
| G-Uphill  | H-Downhill                 |
| 9) Property allotments  | 10) Settlement             |
| 11) Kiva in village   | 12) Mesa or escarpment     |

## Maps



## The Heavens

1) Sun

3) Sun during eclipse

5) Full Moon

7) A-Comet

B-Falling stars

9) Lightning

11) Rain

2) Sun

4) Moon phases

6) A-Stars

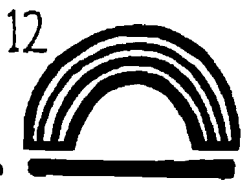
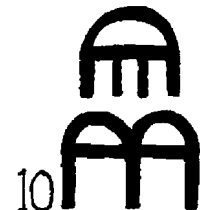
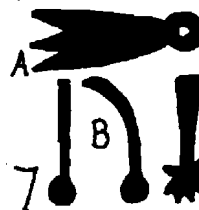
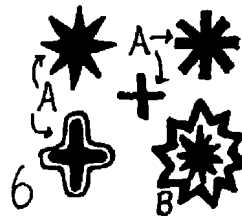
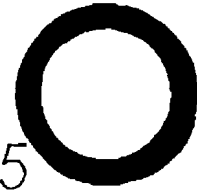
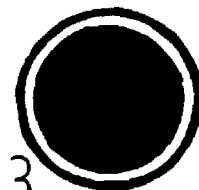
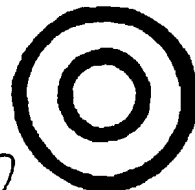
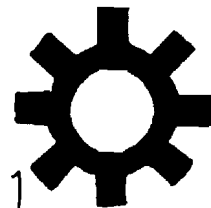
B-Supernova (around A.D. 1054)

8) Cloud

10) Rain

12) Rainbow

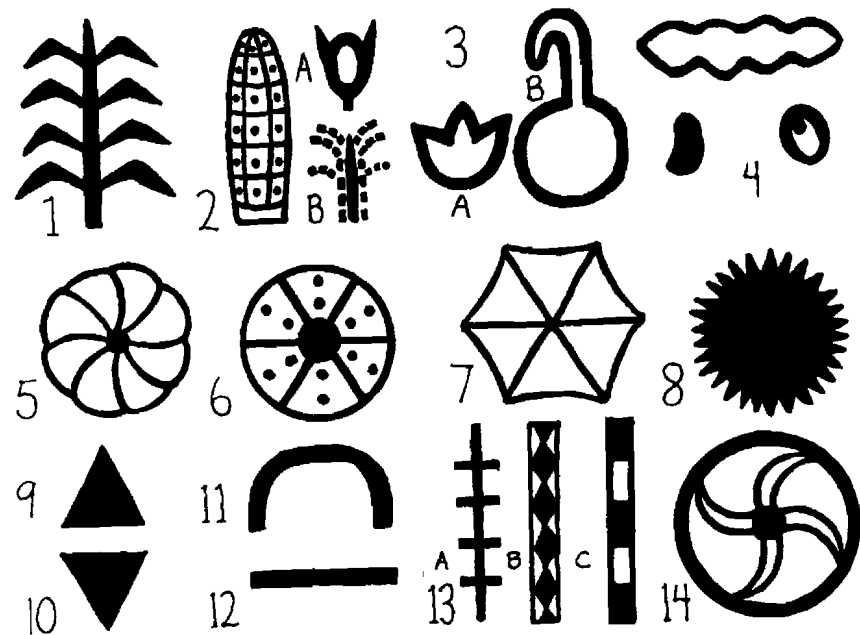
## The Heavens



## Miscellany

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1) Corn; an important—even sacred—crop to the ancients |   |
| 2) Corn<br>A—Corn Cobs<br>B—Tassels                    | 3) Squash<br>A—Flower<br>B—Fruit                            |
| 4) Beans   | 5) Pumpkin  |
| 6) Peyote (sacred)                                     | 7) Datura (Jimson) (sacred)                                 |
| 8) Datura seed pod (sacred)                            | 9) Morning/Day  |
| 10) Night  | 11) Entire Day  |
| 12) Twilight   | 13) Days<br>A—4 days    B—5 full days<br>C—2 days, 3 nights |
| 14) The planting cycle; spring, summer, winter, fall   |   |

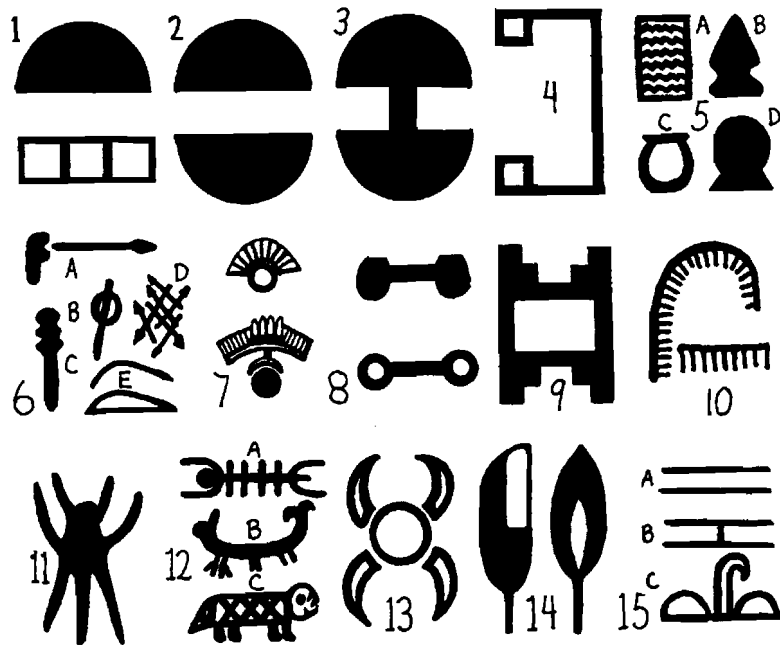
## Miscellany



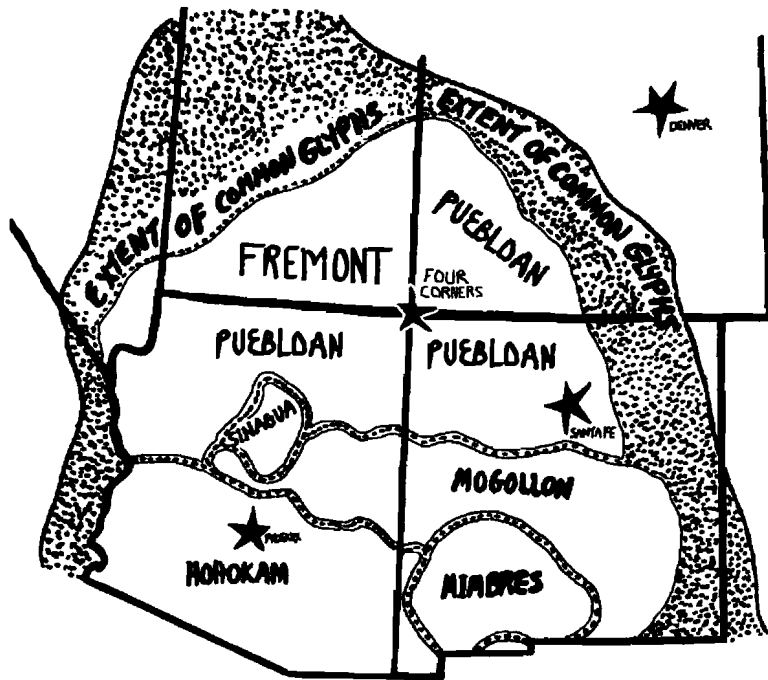
## Miscellany

- |  |                                |        |
|--|--------------------------------|--------|
| 1) Peaceful settlement                                     | 2) Peaceful villages, no trade |        |
| 3) Talk between settlements                                | 4) Trade established           |        |
| 5) Trade items: A-Blankets<br>C-Pottery                    | B-Obsidian<br>D-Shell          |        |
| 6) War: A-Spear<br>D-Warfare                               | B-Atlatl<br>E-Bows             | C-Club |
| 7) Headdresses for warriors                                | 8) Water carriers              |        |
| 9) Well  | 10) Corrals or pens            |        |
| 11) Spider Woman (from ancient myth)                       |                                |        |
| 12) Poisonous: A-Centipede<br>B-Scorpion<br>C-Gila Monster |                                |        |
| 13) Fire   |                                |        |
| 14) Eagle Feathers (sign of strength/wisdom)               |                                |        |
| 15) Paths: A-Go ahead<br>B-Turn around<br>C-The right path |                                |        |

## Miscellany







## Other Easy Field Guides® from American Traveler Press:

- Indian Art & Legends of the Southwest
- Southwestern Night Sky
- Southwestern Petroglyphs
- Southwestern Snakes
- Desert Birds
- Desert Cactus
- Desert Insects
- Mammals of New Mexico
- Trees of New Mexico
- Invertebrate Fossils of Arizona
- Mammals of Arizona
- Poisonous Plants & Critters of Arizona
- Trees of Arizona
- Triassic, Jurassic & Cretaceous Reptiles and Dinosaurs of Arizona
- Amazing Arizona Puzzles & Activities
- Invertebrate Fossils of California
- Sea & Shore Birds of California

To order more books, call  
(800) 521-9221

Better yet, visit  
[AmericanTravelerPress.com](http://AmericanTravelerPress.com).

Or you can request a catalog  
by sending a self-addressed,  
stamped envelope to:

American Traveler Press  
5738 North Central Avenue  
Phoenix, Arizona 85012-1316

# Do you have your Easy Field Guides®?

These guides help answer the question "what is that?"  
while hiking, driving, nature walking,  
or sitting in your back yard.

Learn about the plants, animals, stars,  
history and archaeology around you.

- Small enough to fit in your pocket
- Filled with interesting facts
- Fully illustrated

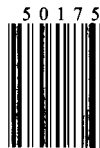
## Don't get caught without your Easy Field Guides!

ISBN 13: 978-0-935810-58-5

ISBN 10: 0-935810-58-7



9 780935 810585



5 0 1 7 5



AMERICAN  
VELER PRESS

\$2.50  
+TAX