

Time Does Not Heal All: Observable Deterioration in the Rock Art of Seminole Watering Hole

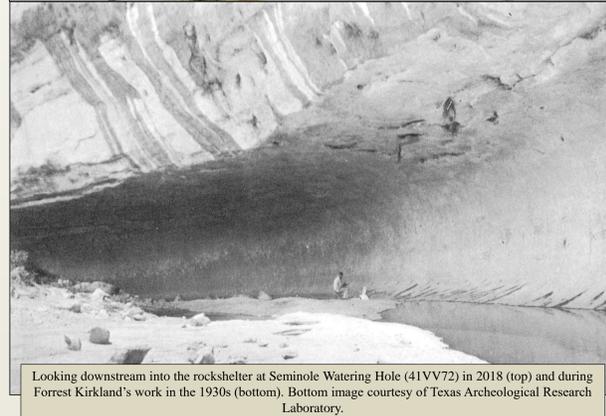
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A BRIEF HISTORY

Seminole Watering Hole (41VV72) is a multi-component site located within Seminole Canyon State Park and Historic Site. The largest feature at Seminole Watering Hole is a massive rockshelter containing an elaborate Red Monochrome Style rock art panel.

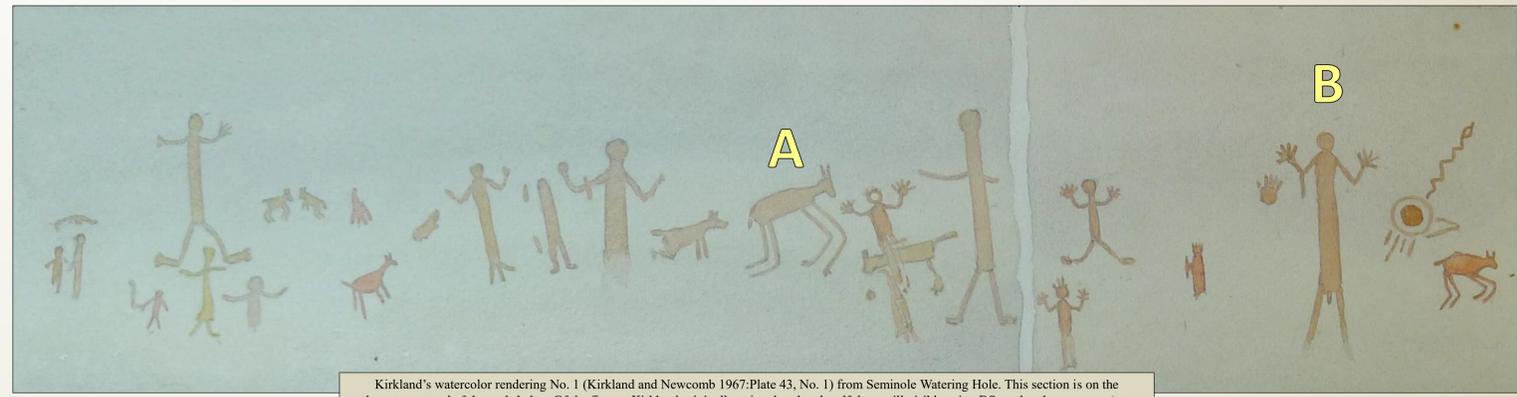
In the 1930s Forrest Kirkland visited the site and produced watercolor renderings of the pictographs. Kirkland called the Red Monochrome figures “Val Verde Flooded Shelter Style,” and Kirkland and Newcomb (1967:83) describe the images being in poor condition in the 1930s. Even though the images were deteriorated, Kirkland was able to reproduce dozens of human, animal, and enigmatic figures spanning nearly the entirety of the shelter wall.

In the proceeding years since Kirkland’s documentation his renderings have served as the primary record of the Red Monochrome pictographs preserved at Seminole Watering Hole. In 2018 Shumla documented the rock art at Seminole Watering Hole as part of The Alexandria Project. By comparing the gigapanoramas to Kirkland’s renderings, we were able to document how much the pictographs have deteriorated in the last 90 years.

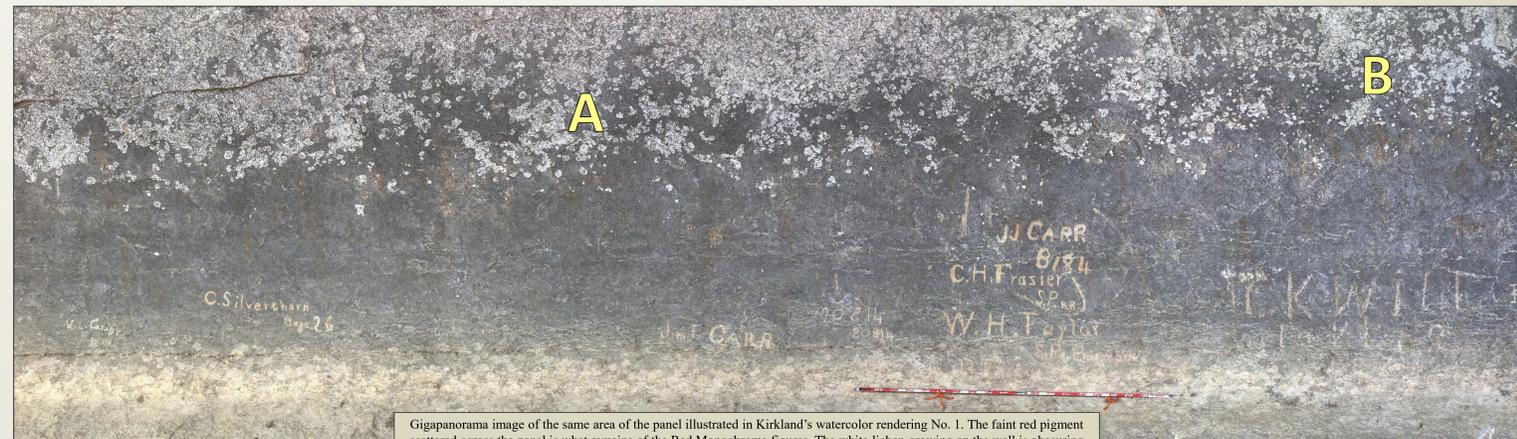


Looking downstream into the rockshelter at Seminole Watering Hole (41VV72) in 2018 (top) and during Forrest Kirkland’s work in the 1930s (bottom). Bottom image courtesy of Texas Archeological Research Laboratory.

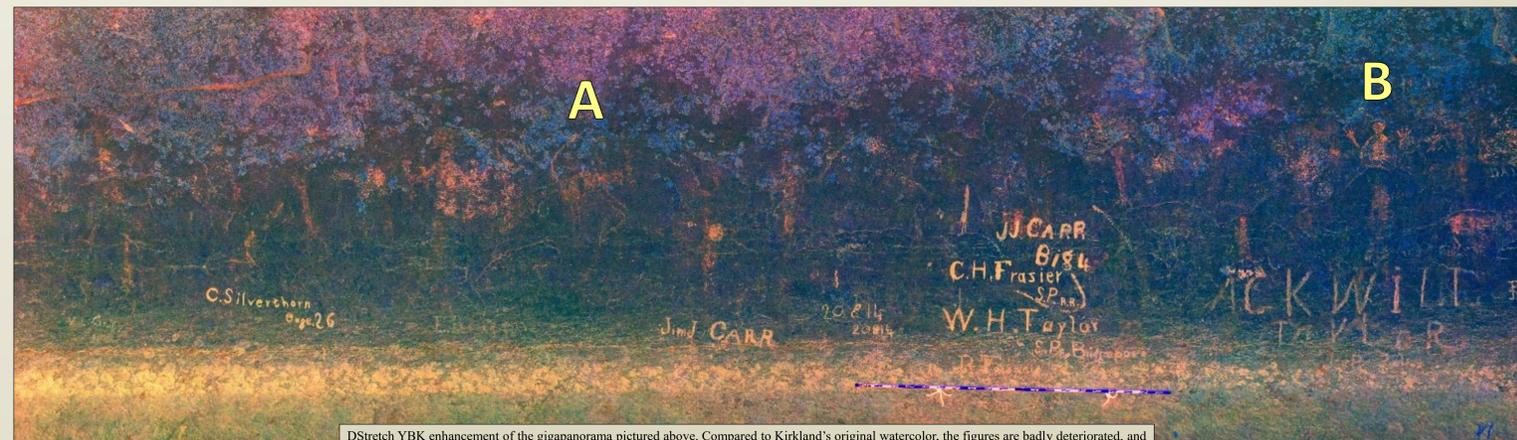
DOCUMENTATION OF SEMINOLE WATERING HOLE



Kirkland’s watercolor rendering No. 1 (Kirkland and Newcomb 1967:Plate 43, No. 1) from Seminole Watering Hole. This section is on the downstream end of the rockshelter. Of the figures Kirkland originally painted, only a handful are still visible using DStretch enhancements (see below). Image courtesy Texas Archeological Research Laboratory. The same two figures are marked (A & B) for reference in all three images



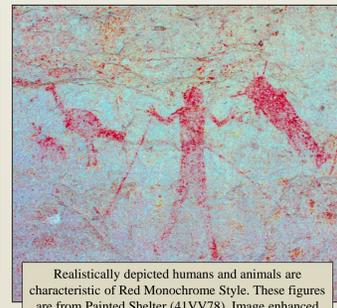
Gigapanorama image of the same area of the panel illustrated in Kirkland’s watercolor rendering No. 1. The faint red pigment scattered across the panel is what remains of the Red Monochrome figures. The white lichen growing on the wall is obscuring the upper portion of the panel. Kirkland did not include the historic railroad and ranching graffiti in his renderings.



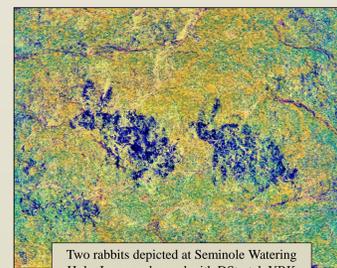
DStretch YBK enhancement of the gigapanorama pictured above. Compared to Kirkland’s original watercolor, the figures are badly deteriorated, and it is very difficult to discern the same level of detail recorded by Kirkland.

RED MONOCHROME

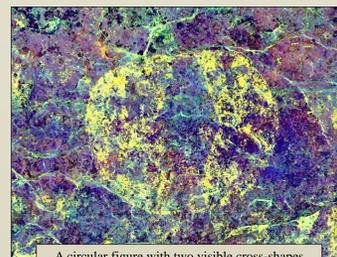
Seminole Watering Hole is one of the two type-sites for Red Monochrome Style pictographs (the other being Painted Shelter [VV78]). This style is defined by realistically portrayed anthropomorphs frontally posed, typically depicted in a “hands-up” position with splayed digits and bent elbows. The style is painted primarily in solid red, though yellow pigments has been observed. Based on the presence of bows, Red Monochrome dates to the Late Prehistoric Period (1000 – 1500 A.D.) in the Lower Pecos. Red Monochrome Style also includes a variety of distinct zoomorphs such as turkeys, fish, rabbits, deer, and felines.



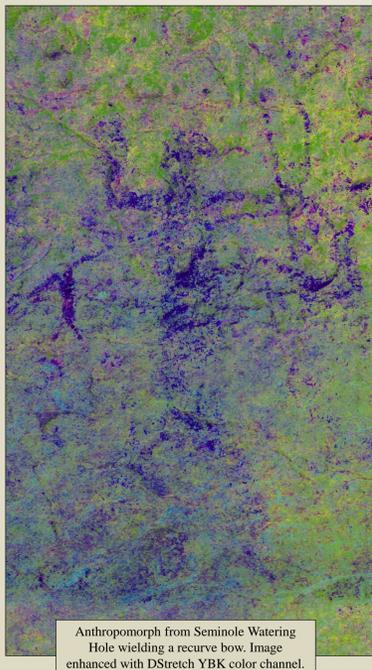
Realistically depicted humans and animals are characteristic of Red Monochrome Style. These figures are from Painted Shelter (41VV78). Image enhanced with DStretch LRE color channel.



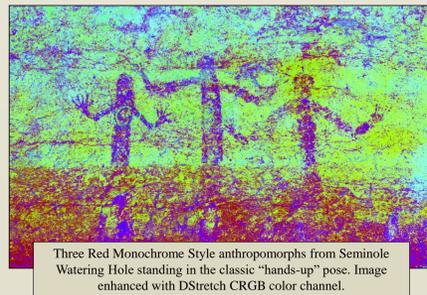
Two rabbits depicted at Seminole Watering Hole. Image enhanced with DStretch YBK color channel.



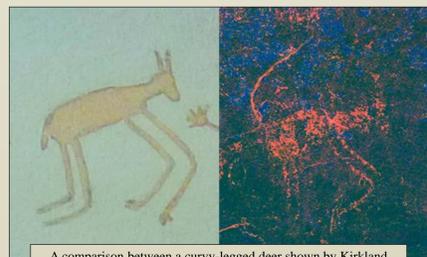
A circular figure with two visible cross-shapes near the top edges. Image enhanced with DStretch BTN5 color channel.



Anthropomorph from Seminole Watering Hole wielding a recurve bow. Image enhanced with DStretch YBK color channel.



Three Red Monochrome Style anthropomorphs from Seminole Watering Hole standing in the classic “hands-up” pose. Image enhanced with DStretch CRGB color channel.



A comparison between a curvy-legged deer shown by Kirkland (left) and the same deer recorded by Shumla in 2018 (right). The image on the left is a cropped section of Kirkland’s rendering No. 1, and the image on the right is enhanced with DStretch BTN3 color channel.

DISCUSSION

Many of the pictographs at Seminole Watering Hole are nearly impossible to see in the field. After we produced the gigapanoramas, each image was enhanced using DStretch. By comparing Kirkland’s renderings to the figures still discernable in the gigapanoramas we estimate that only 45% of the figures/motifs are still preserved. Further, without Dstretch it would have been nearly impossible to locate the figures Kirkland did record. In just under 90 years the rock art at Seminole Watering Hole has experienced rapid degradation likely due to a combination of flooding, spring activity within the site, and lichen growth on the shelter wall. Continued documentation of endangered sites like Seminole Watering Hole is vital so that we can preserve what is left for future study and education.

