

STEVE FREERS: SHOOTING ANTIQUITIES

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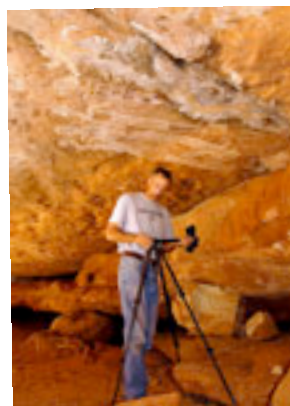
Stenciled handprint on a large boulder within the Kaibab National Forest
©Steve Freers

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Note: Because of the special nature of Steve Freers' photography, we decided to include explanatory captions to give the view some explanation of what they are seeing, beyond the "record" of the shot itself.

The Editor



Steve Freers Setting up the Shot
©Rick Bury

STEVE FREERS: SHOOTING ANTIQUITIES

When Steve Freers was about three years old his father allowed him to try to take photographs with his Rollicord twin lens reflex. Freers was not allowed to use Dad's more expensive Rolli, but through the years advanced to various bellows-type cameras and finally to an old 4x5 press camera. His dad taught him film processing and printing, and he did quite a bit in high school. Later, at the portrait studios of [Albert and James](#) in Orange County he learned important lessons about lighting.

Though his family also owned an 8x10 camera for a while, Freers

never got a crack at shooting with it. Probably because of cost, he remembers being extremely frugal with his shots. Most of his early photography was limited to taking family shots at special events.

A high school chemistry teacher, Freers says his profession is his passion, and it gives him time to pursue his hobbies. His home in Murrieta, a growing Riverside County community not far from Interstate 10 in Southern California, gives him easy access to the Great Southwest.

While it's not a morning commute, Freers can comfortably drive from Murrieta to the Grand Canyon in a single day. En route there are any number of prehistoric sites filled with relics of ancient civilizations dating back as many as 12,000 years.



Rick Bury peers into Esplanade sandstone shelter cave containing Archaic pictographs within the Grand Canyon
©Steve Freers

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cient civilizations dating back as many as 12,000 years.

It's the petroglyphs and pictographs of those Ancients of the Four Corners area that feed Freers' other passion, finding, studying and photographing and preserving the remnants of peoples now only a memory.

While much of Freers' work is for documentation, he considers it a treat to work a subject for purely aesthetic purposes.

Archaeological photography in the field presents challenges, not the least of which is protecting your gear. Because Freers is limited in the amount and type of equipment he can carry, he's be-



New Mexico snake petroglyph on basalt

©Steve Freers

come adaptive - a challenge he enjoys. A fifteen mile backpack over rugged backcountry terrain with little or no available water requires being highly selective with gear. Seldom completely satisfied with an imaging opportunity, Freers constantly assesses how he might have handled a situation better.

While shooting digital can make things easier, Freers misses film. Shooting transparency required

Editor's Note:

This is an interactive newsletter. To view larger versions of photographs, *please click on the thumbnail* and a larger image will automatically load.



Petroglyphs are created by percussion with a hammer-stone to pulverize and remove the rock's patina. This reveals the lighter color of the parent rock underneath and provides the motif visual contrast.

©Steve Freers

discipline and was a favorite because of the rich colors and wide dynamic range of some films.

Freers, not surprisingly, finds successful outcomes especially rewarding, and says a shortcoming of digital imaging is the tendency to develop cavalier approaches and lazy habits to imaging in the field. In other words, shoot all you want, because at least one of them will turn out right.

Saying he enjoys the drama and mood black and white imaging evokes out of landscapes with intense atmospherics, he admits he purposely adjusts digital captures to black and white just for fun.

Because his digital work is always in RAW, he can convert files into black and white post-capture. One observation he makes of the High Dynamic Range black-and-white work being done is to wonder if the photographer went that route because the color was "so off." Black and white, he says, can mask a failed HDR effort.

Freers' father was a professional retoucher of photographs and introduced Freers to many of the professional photographers he worked with. They turned him on to the works of some of the early masters of photography and would give him books or articles written

about these greats. He says a list of his most influential photographers should not be much of a surprise.

Among others, they include:

Edward Weston--brilliant master of still-life and light. Freers never gets tired of looking at the detail and exquisite dimensionality of his work with light and shadow.

Annie Leibovitz-- Freers considers her an awesome contemporary portrait photographer, saying, "I'm sure she could tell wild stories for days about the crazy folks she has imaged."



Monsoon thunderstorm developing over the Vermilion Cliffs

©Steve Freers

Frank Chow -- a gifted commercial and portrait photographer friend of his father. Freers admired Chow's humility and brilliant work. Chow was well-known in the Los Angeles professional community for his consummate skill. He was kind to Freers and took a genuine interest in helping the young photographer.



Big horn sheep petroglyphs carved into a limestone shelter cave and over some earlier pictographs

©Steve Freers

Edward S. Curtis--for his brilliant and timeless photography of Native Americans.

David Byrne - A contemporary artist/musician, Byrne dabbles in many art forms. He can take an old Brownie image of a phone-book and make it interesting. Freers likes his "eye" and celebratory aesthetic toward the mundane.

Ansel Adams--what needs to be said, "Brilliant!"

Freers would like to like develop better skills photographing wild-



Arizona near Fort Bowie National Monument. The lighting on this memorial was terrific thanks to an incoming storm in the background.
©Steve Freers

life, especially birds. *Anyone have an extra EF 400mm they would like to send his way?* He would like to get some bird photography instruction from [Richard Cronberg](#), a local SoCal pro with a broad and interesting background in wildlife photography. There is a lot Freers feels he could gain by that experience.

In recent years Freers has become acquainted with members of the [Inland Empire Photography](#)



Beautiful lichen-encrusted rock textures set off this spiral petroglyph from the Zuni region, poised on a remnant of the rock's former patina surface.
©Steve Freers



A unique ruin in southern Utah in its "Battleship Ready" position
©Steve Freers

[Club \(IEPC\)](#). He has worked with Rick Bury, a contributor to [Rock Art of the Grand Canyon Region](#), the newest release of [Sunbelt Productions](#) on landscape and rock art photography. Freers admires Bury's work with multiple off-camera flashes in cave shelters with Native American paintings, and says Bury has a keen eye for exposure and composition. He's practical in the field and knows the trade-offs with various pieces



Butte displaying geologic layers within the Grand Canyon
©Steve Freers

of equipment.

Lighting is critical in photographing cave art because most pictographs and petroglyphs are found on the back walls of shelters of overhanging rock. It's not unreasonable to assume the rock art was created during leisure time, such as days when it would otherwise be difficult to be out in the weather.

Archaeologists believe believe much of the rock art was created

as a result of ceremony or intense/intimate experiences. As a result, these recessed areas can be rather dark, making a packable tripod essential. Freers favors lightweight yet stable ones that are capable of providing ground-level perspectives, especially handy when imaging artifacts.

While vertical surfaces or walls were most convenient for drawing, painting or "pecking" into the rock, there are numerous instances where the low ceiling of a rocky



Wyoming "Wind River" petroglyph on a rugged hillside.
©Steve Freers

overhang became the artist's canvas.

Mysteriously, some rock art is far overhead, out of reach of any Native American standing on solid ground. Perhaps the artist created a "scaffold" of rock piled high enough to enable reaching the "ceiling," or perhaps the floor fell away because of erosion or a rock collapse. In at least one case the rock art is almost twenty five feet above the floor, beyond reach even of [Big Foot](#).



New Mexico "goggle-eyed" petroglyph motif on fractured basalt.
©Steve Freers



Bright yellow lichen provides a nice aesthetic to these petroglyphs
©Steve Freers

As a major contributor to [Rock Art of the Grand Canyon Region](#), Freers' perspective is different than most when it comes to looking at an image. Most of what Freers does is from a landscape documentation or presentation perspective, so he looks at the context of the image and the parameters of shooting it as much as anything else. A fan of soft and subdued light, he gravitates to imagery reflecting a calm mood and



This set of pictographs conveys a naturalistic scene in the manner by which they were placed on the contours of stone
©Steve Freers

details of how something "really" looks, trying instead, to let the subject to speak for itself. Then he does whatever he can to "get out of the way." He says his attitude is counter to the current "look at what button I can push on my computer" epidemic sweeping through modern photography but it stems from the traditionalist in him.

"When we record an archaeological site, we need to shoot everything," says Freers. He usually does that first then selectively returns to photograph things he finds

interesting. Because lighting is constantly changing throughout the day and year, he may have to return several times to get adequate coverage. Some rock art images are redundant and it is unnecessary to photograph them extensively. There are times, he says, a relatively mundane image is situated on rock surface in such a way that you can get a nice context shot--like capturing clouds in the background, but this is more the exception than the rule. Because



This is one of only four HDR shots used in the book. I wanted to capture the horizontal line-up of pictographs within the limestone shelter and give the exterior shelter context equal luminance. The lighting at the time was rather harsh, mid-afternoon, and the HDR compromise provided a pleasing balance.
©Steve Freers

many of the rock art images in [Rock Art of the Grand Canyon Region](#) are up against a wall of rock in the recess of a shelter cave, it's unrealistic to shoot these and also capture sky or associated contextual material. To do so would require serious ultra-wide angle distortion. Distortion, Freers finds, gets old quickly; the audiences to whom he presents to want to



Archaic Esplanade Style pictographs
©Steve Freers



Ancestral Puebloan pictographs on ceiling of a limestone shelter cave located deep in the forest
©Steve Freers

clearly see the art, not the ultra-wide "Wow" factor.

Freers explains there are special issues with photographing pictographs and petroglyphs. The biggest issue is you don't want to touch the art in any way or create disruption of the site materials. Archaeological sites are special places and need to be respected, both in terms of their research potential and their importance to the



Abstract pictographs located 30 feet above the floor on the ceiling of a large alcove.
©Steve Freers

descendants of the people who once lived there. Many sites are on private land and you must first get permission to visit. Most often, folks enjoy learning about the cultural heritage sites on their property if you properly ask them and share what you know. Mostly, people need to be assured you are responsible and will not cause them any concern.

Freers is fortunate to have access to many protected or special places. It is a privilege he does not take lightly. Relationships of this nature evolve out of trust and a



Simple anthropomorphic pictograph on a flange of sandstone
©Steve Freers

shared concerned for the well-being of the rock art. Many places Native American communities prefer the general public not visit and Freers respects that view. He says two things protecting these sites more than any other factor are: (1) inaccessibility; and, (2) anonymity. Keeping sites a secret is a prime way to protect them. In [Rock Art of the Grand Canyon Region](#) the authors took care not to divulge site locations or even give the sites names.

Modern communications and wondrous electronics present a significant downside for Freers. He calls cell phones the bane of cultural heritage resources. Yes, they are convenient and compact, giving freedom to capture an image and instantly upload it to one's 1,000 closest friends, but an image



Several Ancestral Puebloan pictographs on the ceiling of a limestone shelter cave located deep in the forest.
©Steve Freers

loaded with GPS location information can unveil a hidden location at the speed of light. Word of a “special place” can spread like wildfire, and with it the potential for degradation and destruction at an accelerated rate.

There may not be an effective way to counteract the effect other than to emphasize public education to improve the general appreciation and sensitivity toward cultural sites. With some of us spending upward of eight hours a day on



This image was shot vertically to capture the tall array of pictographs and petroglyphs ascending the cliff face. The touch of sky provides orientation context. The most difficult aspect of this shot was revealing the low-contrast petroglyphs (carvings) located in the lower aspect of the frame.
©Steve Freers

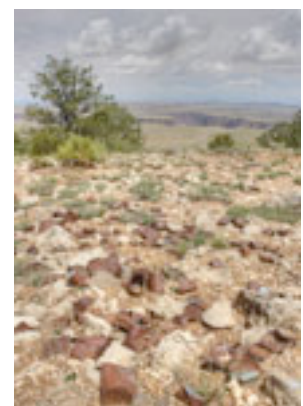
digital screen devices it's likely there will be a lessening of connection to things like museums and cultural sites. Expect this, Freers says, to cause an increasingly cavalier or dismissive attitude about tangibly experiencing historical things. That can't be a healthy prescription for public stewardship of these special places.

But, when asked what keeps his passion burning after twenty five years, Freers replied, “*There is so much to learn and discover in rock art that no one lifetime can take it all in. So I suppose the real challenge is accepting the limitations*



This pictograph is located in the greater San Francisco region and provided a multitude of challenges. It is located in a small shelter cave that is home to wild boars. We were charged by several juveniles as we approached the mouth of the cave. Once inside the stench was overwhelming; the dust really problematic--not to mention the harsh cave opening illumination. We laid a tarp down to mitigate the dust to a small degree and wore masks to help prevent inhalation of bacteria, among other things.
©Steve Freers

and optimizing the opportunities. Rock art study provides me the three things I most enjoy doing: (1) hiking and spending time in the great outdoors; (2) adventure in new places and discovery; and, (3) photography. Combine these with the intellectual stimulation of research and you have a winning combination for a lifelong area of interest.”



Historic trash scatter looking out over the Little Colorado River.
©Steve Freers

You can order [Rock Art of the Grand Canyon Region](https://www.amazon.com/Rock-Art-Grand-Canyon-Region/dp/093265309X) from Amazon:

[amazon.com/Rock-Art-Grand-Canyon-Region/dp/093265309X](https://www.amazon.com/Rock-Art-Grand-Canyon-Region/dp/093265309X)

Rock Art of the Grand Canyon Region is described on Amazon as, "Over the past 25 years the authors have worked in cooperation with the Kaibab National



This white bighorn sheep pictograph was positioned such that the cave wall and background landscape could be shot wide
©Steve Freers

Forest, Grand Canyon National Park, Bureau of Land Management/Arizona Strip, and the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument to analyze the hard data and to form a comprehensive overview of the 5,000 years of Native American art



Basketmaker pictographs known as the "Blue Marvels," Arizona.
©Steve Freers

... painted and engraved on the walls and boulders within the greater Grand Canyon region.... This visually stunning book opens a window to the past within the majestic Grand Canyon region rarely seen by the millions of visitors who visit this area annually. It is a feast to both the serious rock art researcher and to the general public who may not be aware of the enticing and elaborately rich rock art found in some of the more remote areas within this spectacular landscape."



Fantastic elaborated anthropomorphic pictographs adorn the ceiling of large Esplanade sandstone shelter cave.
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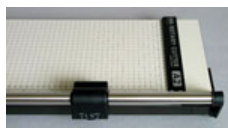
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the Photographers' Formulary

WE'RE LOOKING FOR STORIES; HOW ABOUT YOU?

The Photographers' Formulary newsletter goes out monthly to more than 4,000 photographers world wide. It's our way of publicizing the Formulary and showcasing our talented customers and friends.

If you have a story, or you simply lust for fame and glory, then we'd like to talk to you.

Here's what to do:

1. Send us an email telling us about your work.
2. Answer a few questions about yourself and your work.
3. Select about 21 of your best photographs
4. Format the photographs this way:
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6. 96 dots per inch (dpi)
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We are especially interested in those who work with the Alternative Processes. If you make your own film, create your own negatives, or print your work using one of the Alternative Processes you'll go to the front of the line.

But if you are simply an excellent photographer with beautiful images, we'd *still* like to talk to you, even if you *do* shoot digital!

Send your note to: The Editor

We look forward to hearing from you,

Anthony Mournian, Editor



STANDING STONES B&B

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Located about an hour and a half south of the entrance to Glacier National Park, Standing Stones offers a convenient stopping point on the way north from Missoula.

The B&B sits on a 26 acre plot of land, sharing space with the Photographers' Formulary workshops and warehouse facilities. Just off Highway 83 North, on the



most direct route from Missoula to Glacier National Park, it's fast becoming the favored stopping point for cross country bicyclists as well as motorists.

Standing Stones features six guest rooms equipped with high speed internet access, satellite television receivers, and private baths.

The highlight of Standing Stones B&B is Lynn's cooking. Guests start the day with a hot Western style breakfast, enough to tide over

the heartiest appetite till dinner is served in the Photographers' Formulary workshop dining room. Meals are prepared by Lynn and her staff in the adjoining commercial

kitchen where Lynn has been known to whip up a Southern chicken dinner, a savory pork roast or a delicious casserole. Bud's speciality is

salmon slowly cooked on a plank of cedar. It's enough to make your mouth water.

Standing Stones has been host to weddings, family reunions and small business retreats. Lynn caters events onsite and away for groups as small as ten guests, and as large as a hundred and fifty. There's no nicer place to stop on the road to Glacier.

Winter sports are everywhere, with groomed cross country skiing and snowmobile trails. Standing

Stones is in the heart of the Swan River Valley with the Rockies, the Bob Marshall and the Mission Mountain Wilderness areas across the road!

Plan the Standing Stones B&B as your next getaway for a fall vacation, family reunion or small business retreat. Bud and Lynn will send you home warm and well fed, and you'll

soon be making plans to be coming back for more!

How did Standing Stones get its name? From Bud Wilson's hobby of collecting rocks! Bud brings home rocks of "glacial till" as large as ten feet long and weighing

as much as 65,000 lbs. He plants them in the front yard of the B&B for all to see. Affectionately known as "Bud's Rocks," it's a collection of some of the

most unusual and biggest rocks you'll ever hope to see!

