Betwixt and between: the occurrence of petroglyphs between townhouses of the living and townhouses of spirit beings in northern Georgia and western North Carolina

Johannes Loubser, Scott Ashcraft, and James Wettstaed

This chapter sets out to demonstrate two main hypotheses: first, petroglyphs in the mountains and foothills of northern Georgia and western North Carolina are selectively placed along trails – between inhabited river bottoms on the one side and isolated mountain tops or abandoned mound sites on the opposite side; and secondly, the specific placement and contents of these petroglyphs show that they occupy a space where visible physical and invisible spiritual realms overlap. The conformity, or self-similarity, between petroglyph surfaces on a micro-scale and landscape surfaces on a macro-scale provides additional demonstration that petroglyphs occupy zones of transition, or liminal spaces. It is argued that without paying attention to Southeastern landscape and Indigenous ethnographic contexts, the correspondence between location preferences and culturally-shared conceptual schemas would most probably have been overlooked.

In order to convincingly demonstrate that petroglyphs in the mountains and foothills of northern Georgia and western North Carolina fall physically and conceptually between inhabited river bottoms and isolated mountain tops or abandoned mound sites, it helps to gather and integrate seemingly different kinds of evidence. Compared with archaeological artifacts and features that are often hidden below the ground, most petroglyphs and other forms of rock art are visible on the surface. Yet, as far as systematic archaeological research is concerned, rock art sites and their landscape contexts have by and large been ignored by conventional dirt archaeologists. Even where dirt archaeologists have noticed and acknowledged the existence of rock art, only rarely do they properly
integrate rock art sites into their analyses and interpretations; to this day it remains a challenge showing colleagues why the study of spatially-fixed and chronologically-enduring rock art sites is beneficial to better understand other aspects of the archaeological record.

To successfully capture the interest of archaeologists concerning the value of rock art, it becomes necessary for the rock art specialist to stand on a proverbial soapbox. To qualify as a robust and reliable support, it is important that such a soapbox has a number of legs that are re-enforced by cross-linking ties. The virtual legs supporting the soapbox include the basic physical characteristics of petroglyph surfaces and the kind of petroglyphs (what?), their relative age (when?), their placement on the macro- and micro-landscape (where?), their makers and users (who?), and their use (why?), while the re-enforcements that tie the legs together are the integration between space, time, and cultural significance.

The specific physical characteristics and placement of the petroglyphs become more intelligible when relevant links are made with relevant statements in ethno-historical accounts, gathered from Indigenous people whose ancestors once inhabited the region. To demonstrate at least a partial chronological overlap between the petroglyphs and Indigenous groups who lived in the project area during proto-historic and early historic times, this chapter starts with evaluating different strands of evidence for the petroglyphs' coherency and age range. It then outlines aspects of the ethno-historic record regarding Indigenous world-views and associated cultural practices as they relate to rock surfaces. Only once aspects of the petroglyph record are linked to the views and practices of Indigenous people can the deliberate placement of petroglyphs with certain designs at particular points on the landscape be properly comprehended.

Environment, inferred similarities, relative sequence of application, and age range of petroglyphs

The following discussion is based on a sample of 28 petroglyph sites recorded in the foothills (also known as Piedmont) and mountains of northern Georgia (n=15 sites) and the mountains of neighboring western North Carolina (n=13 sites) (Fig. 7.1, Table 7.1). The study area can be further sub-divided into the ridges of far northwestern Georgia (n=2 sites), the upper Piedmont of Georgia (n=9 sites), the mountains of northern Georgia (n=4 sites), the mountains of western North Carolina (n=10 sites), and the mountains near the North Carolina/South Carolina state line (n=3 sites). It should be stressed that although this is by no means a complete list of petroglyphs in the study area, we have good reason to assume that it is a representative sample of variation found within.

A brief description of the natural landscape is necessary to better appreciate the physical backdrop within which the makers of the petroglyphs lived. For the purposes of this chapter it is important to note that the landscape features and associated plants and animals provide useful natural models to Indigenous communities. Like Whitley (2001) and Van Pools et al. (2006), we propose that
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Name</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Site type</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Rock Type</th>
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<td>Biotite</td>
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<td>Granitic Gneiss</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Semi-detached slab</td>
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<td>Semi-detached slab</td>
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<td>Sandstone</td>
</tr>
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<td>Warren Shelter</td>
<td>GA</td>
<td>Dade</td>
<td>Shelter</td>
<td>Cliff</td>
<td>Sandstone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brinkley Rock</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Loose boulder</td>
<td>Creek Edge?</td>
<td>Soapstone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Harris Rock</td>
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<td>Towns</td>
<td>Loose boulder</td>
<td>Ridge Slope</td>
<td>Soapstone</td>
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<td>Cobb</td>
<td>Loose boulder</td>
<td>Ridge Spur</td>
<td>Soapstone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaculla Rock</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Semi-detached slab</td>
<td>Creek Source</td>
<td>Soapstone</td>
</tr>
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<td>Turkey Track Rocks</td>
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<td>Macon</td>
<td>Semi-detached slabs</td>
<td>Ridge Slope</td>
<td>Soapstone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track Rock Gap Rocks</td>
<td>GA</td>
<td>Union</td>
<td>Semi-detached slabs</td>
<td>Ridge Slope</td>
<td>Soapstone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinhardt Rock</td>
<td>GA</td>
<td>Cherokee</td>
<td>Semi-detached slab</td>
<td>Ridge Slope</td>
<td>Soapstone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.1 List of recorded petroglyph sites sorted by rock type.

models corresponding to certain natural phenomena, such as the physical appearance of topographical features, animal behavior, and the properties of plants, are used by Indigenous peoples to derive metaphors by which they live. Natural models and corresponding concepts can be seen in the following instances: mountains allow distant vision, caves facilitate being hidden from everyday view, water hints at transformation, felines and canines denote physical power, birds signify weightlessness, snakes are known for their unexpected appearances and disappearances, seasonal shifts are reminders of reversals, and herbal plants have curative associations.
Most mountains in far northern Georgia and neighboring far northern South Carolina and western North Carolina are commonly known as the Blue Ridge Mountains (Fig. 7.1). Comprising very old metamorphic rocks with some igneous intrusions, the generally rounded mountains of the Blue Ridge for the most part lack the vertical rock faces and dark zone caves that characterize the more angular limestone and sandstone formations of the Ridge and Valley Ranges in far northwestern Georgia, northeastern Alabama, and neighboring Tennessee (see Chapter 6). Nonetheless, exposed cliffs and rocky gorges do occur in those areas of the Blue Ridge where more resistant intrusive rocks occur, such as granite. Also, a few shallow caves and rock overhangs can be found in the steep valley sides and certain peaks of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The height of the Blue Ridge Mountains varies between 1000 and 6000 ft (ca. 300–1820 m) amsl, whereas the Ridge and Valley ranges vary between 1000 and 2000 ft (ca. 300–600 m). The Piedmont, underlain by metamorphic and igneous rocks, forms the foothills immediately to the south of these mountains. The rolling ridges and narrow valleys of the Piedmont vary in height from 500 to 1000 ft (ca. 150–300 m) amsl, with the occasional hill of more resistant rock standing out above the surrounding landscape. Rock outcrops are particularly prevalent at nick points, or shoals, along river and creek courses.

The Blue Ridge Mountains, the Ridge and Valley Ranges, and the Piedmont foothills have broadly similar climatic, botanical, and zoological characteristics, although the mountains experience higher rainfall, milder summers, colder winters (and more snow), and exhibit a greater biodiversity than the foothills. Summer precipitation falls chiefly during thunderstorms, whereas in winter precipitation
is chiefly rain with occasional snow. Extreme seasonal shifts in temperatures bring hot and humid summers and cold winters. The comparatively dense tree cover can perhaps be best termed as an oak-chestnut-hickory deciduous forest, with pines being pioneer species. Isolated patches of grass or brier-covered ground normally occur where wildfires or humans have removed trees. Mammals include white-tailed deer, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, raccoon, squirrels, chipmunk, and various other rodents. The long and narrow floodplains along rivers and larger creeks are well suited to migratory ducks. Reptiles in the area include various turtles and snakes. Aquatic life in rivers and creeks includes brook trout, catfish, various amphibians, and freshwater mussels. Whereas deep alluvial soils in valley bottoms along rivers and bigger creeks are suitable for cultivation, topographic variation in the surrounding hills and mountains provides a range of contrasting but juxtaposed rock types, edible and medicinal plants, and wildlife.

Soapstone outcrops can be found in both the Blue Ridge and the Piedmont. Due to the fact that some of the more well-known petroglyph sites in the study area occur on soapstone surfaces with Late Archaic soapstone bowl quarry scars, some researchers have assumed that the associated petroglyphs date to the Late Archaic (e.g., White 2002). However, a closer consideration of the wider range of rock types and overlapping order or rock markings shows that automatically equating spatial proximity with contemporaneity is flawed.

Petroglyphs in the project area were applied to a variety of rock types (Table 7.1), the majority (n=18, 64%) occurring on metamorphic rock, ranging from granitic gneiss through schist to quartzite. Only three sites occur in sedimentary rock, two of these being cavernous cliff sites in far northwestern Georgia. A mere seven (25%) petroglyph sites are soapstone. Of these, six have scars resulting from soapstone bowl extraction activities, including pedestals within the center of scallop-shaped hollows, scallop-shaped hollows without pedestals, knobs/truncated pedestals, and cuts (see Elliot 1986 for terminology). There appears to be no necessary relationship between petroglyph boulders and soapstone working, bearing in mind that most soapstone quarries in the region contain no petroglyphs (e.g., the Soapstone Ridge quarry complexes south of Atlanta) and one of the soapstone petroglyph boulders shows no signs of soapstone quarrying. Petroglyphs on harder rocks within the recorded sample show no signs of quarrying either (i.e., 22 or 79% of the petroglyph boulders show no signs of quarrying). Clearly then, the petroglyph makers did not necessarily select soft rock nor did they focus exclusively on rocks that were used for soapstone quarrying. Conveniently, determination of the overlap sequence between soapstone quarry scars and other markings on the same rock help with the construction of a relative chronology.

For the purposes of this assessment, 15 generalized categories of markings were recognized on the recorded boulders. These categories are the following:

- soapstone extraction marks (n=16 sites) (Fig. 7.2);
- grinding hollows (n=5 sites) (Fig. 7.3);
- grooves (n=9 sites) (Fig. 7.3);
- cupules (n=25 sites) (Fig. 7.3);
- meandering lines (n=7 sites) (Fig. 7.4);
- lobed intersecting lines (n=8 sites) (Fig. 7.5);
- feet (n=8 sites) (Fig. 7.6);
- tracks (n=9 sites) (Fig. 7.6);
- human figures (n=12 sites) (Fig. 7.6);
- vulvas (n=9 sites) (Fig. 7.6);
- concentric rings (n=14 sites) (Fig. 7.7);
- cross-in-rings (n=5 sites) (Fig. 7.7);
- rayed rings (n=3) (Fig. 7.8);
- rings (n=4 sites) (Fig. 7.9); and
- rectilinear designs (n=2 sites) (Fig. 7.10).

The following ten design categories were deemed significant for comparative purposes, although they can be further sub-divided on the basis of outline: meandering lines, intersecting lines (some are rectilinear, while others are curvilinear):

- feet;
- tracks;
- figures (mostly stick-shaped, but a couple are hollow-bodied);
- vulvas (football-shaped vulvas in the north Georgia mountains differ slightly from the horseshoe-shaped vulvas in the Piedmont);
- concentric rings (these include spirals);
- cross-in-rings;
- rayed rings; and
- single rings

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**Fig. 7.2** Re-drawn tracing of Sprayberry Rock, showing soapstone extraction scars and superimposed nested rings.
Each petroglyph site was compared to all others by means of a similarity index based on affinities between paired sites. Presence or absence scores were calculated from the sum of common scores divided by the maximum common score (Robinson 1951). The presence/absence scores of the ten design categories at 26 sites in the study area are presented in Table 7.2. According to the results, sorted by diminishing percentages from the top left to the bottom right, the Track Rock Gap complex (northern Georgia), Judaculla Rock (northwestern North Carolina), and the River Hill Rocks (Georgia Piedmont) share most designs with one another and with the other sites. Witches' Nest, which is a shallow cave in far northwestern Georgia, surprisingly shares more designs with open air boulders in the Piedmont than it does with the nearby Warren Shelter. The sites along the remote granite outcrops immediately north of South Carolina state line are definitely an outlier, although Bridal Veil Falls contains a few curvilinear designs similar to those found on Judaculla Rock (Fig. 7.5). Line Creek Rock (Fig. 7.8), located in the Piedmont south of Atlanta, has a solitary rayed ring design that is present at only two other sites, both in the Piedmont.

As can be seen in Table 7.2, the design categories are distributed fairly even across the study area, suggesting that sites from the different sub-areas are related. However, the absence of certain design categories in specific sub-areas could be of potential significance. Intersecting lines are absent in the ridges of northwestern Georgia and the Piedmont of Georgia. Feet are absent in far northwestern Georgia and in the mountains near the North and South Carolina state line. Tracks, figures, and concentric rings are absent in the mountains near the North and South Carolina state line. Vulva-shapes were not observed in the mountains of western North Carolina. Cross-in-ring designs were missing from far northwestern Georgia and along the North and South Carolina state line. Rayed rings were only present in three Georgia Piedmont sites, while simple rings were concentrated along the mountains near the North and South Carolina state line. Spirals were limited to the sites along the Hiwassee River corridor and Witches’ Nest cave (Fig. 7.4). Other than the absences and concentrations of specific designs in certain
| Track Rock Gap | Rock Bluffs | Judaculla Rock | River Hill Rocks | Brinkley Rock | Hawasse Rock | Witches Nest Cave | Silver City Rock | Young Harris Rock | Chatauge Rock | Spruce Rock | Silver City Bratstown Rocs | Silver City | Rainbow Rock | Bridal Veil Falls | Turkey Track | Boling Park | Hawasse Rock S | Sunrise Path | Sweetwater Creek Rocs | Gardner Rock | Long Rock | Big Rock | Line Creek |
|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|------------|-----------------------------|-------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|------------|----------|----------|----------|
| 100           | 80        | 80            | 60              | 60          | 60          | 60              | 60              | 60              | 60            | 60         | 60                          | 60          | 60            | 60                   | 60            | 60          | 60            | 60            | 60           | 60              | 60            | 60           | 60          | 60        | 60        | 60        |
sub-areas, the correspondence analysis in Table 7.2 suggests that the different sites are part of an overarching tradition. An assessment of the overlap sequence supports the assertion of a broadly-shared tradition that cross-cuts the sub-areas within the study area.

Considering that direct overlaps between soapstone quarry scars and petroglyphs were observed at six separate sites, it is possible to date the petroglyphs relative to the soapstone quarry dates. Direct radiocarbon dates of soot on soapstone bowls from sites in the coastal plain and piedmont of South Carolina and Georgia show that soapstone cooking bowls were made and used between 1300 and 900 cal BC (Sassaman 1997). This date range places soapstone bowl extraction scars within the terminal Late Archaic. Based on excavated stratigraphic associations with Early Woodland ceramics, archaeologists such as Dickens and Carnes (1983) have proposed that soapstone quarries in the Piedmont and Blue Ridge continued to be worked into the Early Woodland period. Based on these dates then, any petroglyphs truncated by quarry scars must pre-date the terminal Late Archaic and any petroglyphs cutting into or occur within the quarry scars must post-date the Early Woodland.

In all recorded instances where soapstone quarry scars and petroglyphs overlap, the petroglyphs are always on top, strongly suggesting that the petroglyphs
post-date the Late Archaic/Early Woodland period of soapstone bowl quarrying activities. Except for three instances at Young Harris Rock where cup-shaped cupules are truncated by soapstone bowl extraction depressions, cupules always cut into or occur within soapstone extraction hollows. Based on stratigraphic evidence then, the three cupules at Young Harris Rock probably pre-date the Late Archaic/Early Woodland, while the majority of cupules are most likely later than that period.

The overlap sequence between cupules and various petroglyphs motifs help reconstruct the Late Archaic/Early Woodland sequence of petroglyph application. At Judaculla Rock (Fig. 7.5), Track Rock Gap (Fig. 7.6), and Hickorynut Rock, a few cupules are truncated by track and feet petroglyphs, indicating that these cupules are older. Yet other cupules are located over or within tracks and feet on the same boulders, indicating that these cupules are younger. In terms of the anti-symmetric rule within stratigraphic relationships (Orton 1980), cupules and tracks and feet at these sites should then be considered as broadly contemporaneous. Pecked deer and turkey tracks are particularly prevalent at Gardner Rock and Boling Park.
Rock. A site with Woodland ceramics occurs near Gardner Rock, suggesting that the petroglyphs date to the same period. This suggestive date is supported by the observation that tracks and feet occur under concentric rings at Track Rock Gap (Fig. 7.6) and Reinhardt Rock (Fig. 7.7).

Independent stylistic evidence for a post-Archaic date of the petroglyphs comes from concentric ring (n=14 sites) and cross-in-ring designs (n=5 sites). The multiple concentric ring designs that have been carefully pecked into Reinhardt Rock (Fig. 7.7) and Sprayberry Rock (Fig. 7.2) resemble concentric ring designs that have been stamped onto Early Mississippian Etowah ceramics in the area, whereas the cross-in-circle motif at Sprayberry Rock resembles local Middle Woodland Early Swift Creek Stamped ceramic designs and Middle Mississippian Savannah Stamped ceramic designs (e.g., Wauchope 1966; Williams and Thompson 1999). The cross-media isomorphism and likely contemporaneity of concentric ring and cross-in-circle motifs on petroglyph boulders and on ceramic containers in the region were previously recognized by Perryman for sites in Georgia (1950), Henson
for Alabama sites (1986), and Ashcraft and Moore for sites in western North Carolina (1998). Spiral motifs at three Hiwassee River petroglyph sites in western North Carolina are variations of concentric ring designs (e.g., Hansen 2009; Loubser 2014). Moreover, a rectilinear design carved into a solitary boulders inserted into a V-shaped stone fish-weir in the Hiwassee River (Espenshade and Loubser 2010) resembles line-blocked impressions on Late Woodland/Early Mississippian Woodstock ceramics (Wauchope 1966).

Lumped with the generalized category of human figures used to compute Table 7.2 are two unique-looking motifs from a site within the Hiwassee River/Brasstown Creek confluence, western North Carolina. These are a hollow-bodied winged-figure and a full-bodied figure with raised arms and bent knees. These idiosyncratic motifs differ stylistically from other petroglyphs in Georgia and North Carolina, and are visually similar to pictographs from Ridge and Valley dark zone caves and bluff-side sites in Alabama and Tennessee to the west (e.g., Simek et al. 2013a). Although the technique of pecking within the Hiwassee River differs from the technique of painting at Painted Bluff (Alabama) and related pictograph sites in Alabama and Tennessee, the fine-lined style in which the hollow-bodied figure winged-figures and associated coiled serpents are executed at both the Hiwassee River/Brasstown Creek confluence and Painted Bluff are strikingly similar, but quite different from the Georgia and North Carolina petroglyphs (the latter two areas being characterized by human and animal tracks, concentric rings, and stick-like figures) (e.g., Loubser 2013).

The badly-weathered and hardly-visible winged figure with a crested bird head within the Hiwassee River/Brasstown Creek confluence is reminiscent of the so-called bird-headed figures depicted on Mississippian period gorgets, copper plates, and pictographs (e.g., Ashcraft 2009; Loubser 2013). The figure holds a bow in its right hand/wing and a staff, implements also depicted on various media during the Mississippian period. Likewise, the nearby paired dog and/or panther-looking petroglyphs within the Hiwassee River/Brasstown Creek confluence resemble dated Mississippian period motifs found carved into shell gorgets and painted on the walls of open rock shelters and dark zone caves (e.g., Simek et al. 2013a). The weathered appearance of the Early to Middle Mississippian motifs (ca. 800 years ago) is suggestive that other petroglyphs in the study area with much better
preservation cannot be much older. Moreover, relatively fresh-looking cupules occur on top of the Mississippian motifs in the Hiwassee River/Brasstown Creek confluence where they overlap, showing that the cupules were done some unknown time afterwards.

The most detailed motif overlap sequences recorded within the study area are at the Track Rock Gap petroglyph complex and at the closely-related Hickorynut Rock (Loubser 2010). When the motif overlap observations from these two sites are combined, then it is clear that cupules and vulva-shapes are always on top
Table 7.3 Relative sequence of motifs at Track Rock Gap Rocks and Hickorynut Rock

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motif</th>
<th>On top (n)</th>
<th>At bottom (n)</th>
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<th>Sequence</th>
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<td>–</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td>stick figures</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>middle</td>
</tr>
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<td>bird tracks</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feet</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curvilinear lines</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>-35</td>
<td>early</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

of/later than curvilinear lines. Cupules are also always later than feet, but vulva-shapes and feet are relatively contemporary (following the asymmetric rule of overlap exceptions). Also following the asymmetric rule is that feet and curvilinear lines are relatively contemporary, which suggests that curvilinear lines are not necessarily earlier than all the other motifs (there is evidence that two feet below curvilinear lines were repecked over the curvilinear lines). Curvilinear line designs tend to occur at the bottom of the observed sequences (Table 7.3). The occurrence of a vulva-design below a foot shows that not all vulva-forms are later than feet. Knowing that human figures are both on top of and below feet and on top of vulva-forms, no clear placement within a sequence can be assigned to human figures either. Whereas cupules occur mostly on top of other motifs, they occur at the bottom in four instances and so cupules have to be considered as integral of the overall motif repertoire. Ordered by diminishing proportions of top versus bottom placements, the motifs at Track Rock Gap and Hickorynut Rock can be arranged in a relative sequence as shown in Table 7.3.

At none of the recorded sites were concentric rings, spirals, and cross-in-rings observed below any other markings, besides cupules. The observation that curvilinear lines and a foot also occur below concentric rings, cross-in-rings, and cupules on Reinhardt Rock (Fig. 7.7) shows that the Table 7.3 sequence is not confined to Track Rock. Importantly, no evidence has yet been recorded to contradict the sequence. At sites such as Witches’ Nest, curvilinear lines occur mostly on their own, but incorporate a spiral, suggesting contemporaneity. Hiwassee Rock 5 (Fig. 7.3) has cupules pecked over concentric rings. At Hiwassee Rock 5, Boling Park Rock, and Young Harris Rock, cupules were also pecked partly over a few grinding hollows and grooves. Apart from these overlaps, the stratigraphic sequence between grinding groove/hollows and petroglyph designs has not yet been observed. Almost all concentric rings are centered on a cupule, while some cross-in-rings and globular intersecting line designs include cupules. Cupules also form the head of many stick figures. In addition to being part of these designs, in many instances cupules have been pecked into the same concentric ring designs at a later date, ostensibly in a haphazard fashion.

Viewed overall then, of all petroglyph designs (excluding extraction scars, grooves, and cupules), concentric rings and cross-in-rings are last in the sequence of application, while curvilinear lines tend to be the earliest. In between the two is a generalized trend from earlier feet through bird tracks and stick figures to later vulvas. It is important to note that the vertically-interwoven occurrence of these designs within the same palimpsest, notably those within the Track Rock Gap complex, indicates that they were part of the same overall tradition.

The terminal point of a petroglyph making tradition in the Southeastern United
States might well be in early historic times. Early 15th century radiocarbon dates of charcoal associated with Late Mississippian period ceramics excavated from directly above pecked cupules next to the Yellow River, Atlanta, provide additional support for a fairly recent date of pecked surfaces (Loubser 2005, 146). The current owner of the private property across the road from the Track Rock Gap petroglyph complex, Mr Brown, was told by his grandparents about a Cherokee tradition handed down within the local Cook family, who inter-married Cherokees in the 19th century, that a grid-looking image on the big boulder portrays a historic period house (Loubser 2010, 83). If this is indeed the case, then petroglyph production could have continued up until the time of large-scale Cherokee removal to west of the Mississippi River in 1838. When combined dating evidence suggests that petroglyph date to between the Middle Woodland Period (AD 800) and historic times (AD 1838).

The oldest known reference to petroglyphs in the mountains of Georgia and North Carolina was made by a Cherokee known as Charles Hicks (Haywood 1823, 280). Hicks recounted a story of the Cherokee Master of Game, a giant being known as Tuli-cula or Judaculla, and his wife and two children leaving their footprints on the rocks within Track Gap while journeying to Brasstown Bald in far northern
Georgia. Statements made to Brett Riggs (pers. comm. 2013) and Scott Ashcraft suggest that Judaculla’s journey followed Brasstown Creek, from its confluence with the Hiwassee River. This imprinted rock is also known as Datsun’alásąñį (Where their Tracks are this Way) or Degayeláñį (Printed Place). Mooney (1900, 480), however, claims that Haywood confounds Track Rock Gap with Datsun’alásąñį in the Balsam Mountains of western North Carolina. Mooney unfortunately offers no evidence to support his assertion. That Haywood indeed referred to Track Rock is supported by his explicit reference to Brasstown and his familiarity with the north Georgia/south Tennessee terrain. Moreover, the Judaculla story being linked to two or more separate locations is merely one of many instances where the Cherokees ascribe similar events to similar-looking, but geographically separate, locations. For example, in one account the Cherokees have Kana’ti/Lucky Hunter and his wife Selu/Corn Mother living in a townhouse within Pilot Knob (Mooney 1900, 242), whereas in another account (Mooney 1900, 432) these same deities live behind the north face of Mount Mitchell, in the Black Mountain subrange of the Blue Ridge Mountains. To better understand the role of such spirit beings in the Cherokee and Creek cosmos and how rocks and watery trails relate to them, the discussion now turns to a consideration of southeastern Indian religious beliefs, practices, and experiences.
Indigenous beliefs, practices, and experiences regarding rock surfaces and water

Considering that the inferred petroglyph date range overlaps with the known habitation of various proto-historic and historic Creek and Cherokee communities in the region (Fig. 7.11), it follows that an understanding of the society and culture of these people helps us to better understand the petroglyphs and their placements on the landscape. Whereas the mountains of western North Carolina can be considered the heartland of various Iroquoian-speaking Cherokee town-centered groups (e.g., see reference in a 1733 map by Moseley to this portion of the Appalachian Mountains as the “Cherokee Mountains”), the foothills of northern Georgia have changed hands between the Iroquoian and Muskogee and Hitchiti-speaking Creek groups. But even within the mountains, small numbers of Natchez Indians, traditionally associated with Louisiana and Mississippi, and Catawba, who mainly lived in the South Carolina foothills, were known to live among the Cherokees (Mooney 1900, 380–6). Moreover, that Muskogee-speaking Creeks once lived around and among Cherokees can be seen in Creek place names in western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and northern Georgia (Mooney 1900, 383). The fluidity of ethno-linguistic associations with particular areas is demonstrated by a letter dating to 1826, for example, in which John Payne refers to an old Indian custom of changing the names of specific towns. The letter describes that depending on changing demographics and political fortunes, the Cherokee town of Echota was re-named Occhays by the Creeks and then back to Echota again by the Cherokees.

The intricate and changing mosaic of ethno-linguistic groups in the study area should not obscure long-lasting and shared social and religious notions among these seemingly diverse peoples. Among all Southeastern Indians associated with the region the town was the primary economic unit, each town comprising several maternally-related families (e.g., Bartram 1955; Champagne 1990; Lankford 2011). The town unit was conceptually centered on a townhouse with its square ground among the Cherokees (e.g., Loftin 1983, 42) and on the square ground with its communal building among the Creeks (e.g., Grantham 2002, 67). The townhouse, also known as a council house or communal building, was commonly located on a pre-existing mound. In the Cherokee heartland these mounds varied in shape and size, those pre-dating AD 1600 being far more visible on the landscape than those occurring afterwards (e.g., Rodning 2015, 187; Steere 2015, 198). It is from these townhouses that agricultural, hunting, and raiding activities were planned and coordinated. The townhouse also served as a focal point for rituals, particularly the going-to-water ceremony. This ceremony was central among almost all Southeastern Indian groups. Going-to-water was normally preceded by fasting and sweating. These purification rites, witnessed in the 18th century by the trader James Adair (1930, 39, 103, 109, 117, 126, 127, 130, 132, 176) and Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins (1982, 75–8) among neighboring Creek groups, was also part of the annual renewal Green Corn Dance or Busk ceremony, ball games, and many other communal and private rituals. Rituals of transition or rites of passage (see Bloch 1992; Van Gennep 1960) included preparation for raiding, hunting excursions,
menstrual seclusion (Fogelson 1980, 70; Mooney 1900, 469), and obtaining altered state dreams or visions (e.g., Mooney 1900, 492, Hawkins 1982, 78–9). The central importance of the going-to-water purification ritual among the Southeastern Indians in part explains why their towns and structures were normally located near rivers and creeks (e.g., Adair 1930, 238–9; Mooney 1900, 395).

Mooney (1900, 234–5, 452) suggests that the various Southeastern Indian groups shared social structures, economic and political systems, and religious beliefs and practices in a large part due to constant economic and political interactions, but also due to shared ancestral links extending back into prehistoric times. Given the extreme 16th–19th century changes that resulted in the fragmentation and re-aggregation of various communities (see Ethridge and Shuck-Hall 2009 on Mississippian fragmentation and re-organization following European colonization) that became known as Cherokees and Creeks (e.g., Muller 1986, 38), it is testimony to the tenacity of religious tradition that commonalities in beliefs and rituals survived (e.g., Grantham 2002, 10, 86; Moore 1994, 130). Instead of detailing the numerous commonalities found within the myths and rituals of the various Southeastern Indian groups who once lived in the study area, this chapter focuses on common conceptions regarding the spirit world, the rock surface, and water.

Often relegated to sub-sections or footnotes in ethnographic syntheses and archaeological interpretations, close-up reading of the primary ethnographic literature shows that a parallel and multi-tiered world of spirit beings was of cardinal importance to the Cherokees and Creeks. Only certain medicine people or spiritual specialists, who had undergone many years of instruction and first-hand experience, were sufficiently qualified to successfully enter the spirit world and commune with the beings therein (e.g., Grantham 2002, 54). Mythical stories and recollections of dreams and trance-like visions were culturally-mediated ways to receive and transmit information concerning the world of spirit beings. Referring to the Southeastern Indians overall, the 18th century naturalist Bartram (1955, 541) observed that:

“They believe in visions, dreams, and trances. They relate [an] abundance of stories of men that have been dead or thought dead for many hours and days, who have revived again, giving an account of their transit to and from the world of souls [spirit beings], and describing the condition and situation of the place and spirits residing there.”

As is the case in many different cultures around the world, the notion of visiting spirit beings during dreams or trance experience was akin to temporary death among the Southeastern Indians, while permanently joining the ranks of spirit helpers implied actual physical death (e.g., Fogelson 1980, 62; 1982, 93; Hudson 1978, 62; Mooney 1900, 262, 347, 348, 445).

According to various Cherokee and Creek accounts, the world of spirit beings was metaphorically and physically hidden from everyday view, most often behind rock surfaces or below water level. These people believed that spirit beings could see them from behind the veil of rock or water wherever they went and were with them whatever they did, but they in turn could not properly see or communicate with the spirit beings unless they fasted and underwent the going-
to-water ceremony (Mooney 1900, 342), preferably following the instructions of ritual specialists among them. However, there are also numerous accounts of spiritually-unprepared individuals unexpectedly encountering spirit beings, often with unfavorable results, such as when individuals permanently join animal spirit helpers in the world of the physically-departed.

Various Cherokee and Creek stories, for example, mention Indians accompanied by bear or panther spirit helpers, sometimes shape-shifting into these creatures and joining them behind the rock veil within the spirit helpers’ isolated mountain-top townhouses, leaving behind grieving relatives down in the settled floodplain (e.g., Grantham 2002, 42, Mooney 1900, 264, 322, 324, 326–9, 400). Physical and metaphorical deaths during battles, hunting outings, menstruation, or seeking visions were seen as temporary, stemming from the belief that the spirits of the departed from everyday physical life would hopefully be resurrected during their sojourn through the dark land of the dead in the west to re-appear in the east (e.g., Grantham 2002, 38, 40; Mooney 1900, 262). The disappearance and re-emergence of human and animal spirits were accordingly viewed as mirroring the path of the sun, moving from birth in the east to death in the west (e.g., Hawkins 1982, 80).

Each of the four cardinal directions was associated with different properties, as were up and down and the place where the individual was placed on the landscape at any particular time (i.e., hence the concept of seven directions, seven levels, and seven potential ways of being) (cf. Mooney 1900, 431). These directions existed within a multi-tiered and nested universe. The all-encompassing sky-vault, which was made up of rock (Grantham 2002, 21; Mooney 1900, 239), resembled the roof of a massive townhouse. It is against the huge dome-shaped ceiling of this roof that the sun, moon, and other heavenly bodies (and spirits of the physically departed) moved. Townhouses and associated square grounds built by people on ground level were copies of those used by powerful spirit beings in the sky dome (e.g., Grantham 2002, 67, 69). Below the rocky surface of the ground were additional townhouses (Mooney 1900, 240). All three levels of townhouses contained plants, animals, and people, except that conditions were reversed when a person succeeded in passing from one townhouse level to another. Bearing in mind that these tiered worlds were linked when medicine people and spirit beings or their messengers intermittently passed through gateways – notably mountains, caves, and river pools – actions in one world influenced events in the other. To avoid discordance between these parallel worlds, traditional medicine people took great care when dealing with spirit beings, particularly conducting the correct rituals and leaving proper gifts (Grantham 2002, 55; Mooney 1900, 455, 469).

Relationships with members of the spirit world tend to articulate with socio-economic relations in the everyday physical world (Lewis-Williams 1982), including among the Southeastern Indians (Loubser 2013). Comparative sociological research has shown that ritualized relations with transcendental spirit beings intertwine with the everyday economic undertakings of people (e.g., Bloch 2013, 91); instead of being epiphenomenal or divorced from daily living, religious practice was part-and-parcel of Southeastern Indian life. For example, Mooney (1900, 455) noted that when everyday Indians went digging hematite for red paint or chert for arrowheads, they first had to make a prayer beside the outcrop and hang a small
Concept of seven

With slight variations from one southeastern Indian group to the next, the _seven directions_ basically refer to:

1. Up (Physical Life)
2. Down (Physical Death)
3–6. North (Physical Death), South (Physical Life), East (Physical Life), West (Physical Death), and
7. the Center (the body with the potential to move in any one of these directions).

So depending where the body is centered and in what direction it is facing and/or moving determines the individual’s state of being (e.g., Mooney 1900, 431).

_Seven levels_ refer to seven levels of spiritual ascent and is often expressed in physical terms. For example, Pilot Knob in western North Carolina is said to contain “a town, with houses ranged in two long rows from east to west … there was another town … above them in the same mountain, and still farther above, at the very top, lived the … Thunders” (Mooney 1900, 342). This refers to an essentially multi-tiered spirit world, with the greatest spirits, the Thunder Boys and the transcendent Kanati and immanent Judaculla, living at the top and beyond. Before entering this tiered spirit world through a door in the rock surface at the base of the mountain, supplicants had to “fast seven days, and we [two spirit guides] shall come to take them” (Mooney 1900, 341–2).

gift upon a nearby bush or stick before quarrying. Cherokee and Creek hunters sung deer and bear songs on reaching the hunting ground (Mooney 1900, 435), which was often marked by a change in landscape or altered features, such as petroglyph boulders (Parris 1950, 37). When Judaculla, the earthbound Master of Game, was invoked in hunting songs, the hunter first prayed to the fire, from which he drew his omens; then to the reed, from which he made his arrows; followed by prayers to Judaculla; and finally to the very animals he intended to kill (Mooney 1900, 342).

Warfare and hunting, both integral parts of the Southeastern Indians’ agricultural-based political-economy, were perceived as sacred activities intricately linked to the spirit world (e.g., Adair 1930, 334; Kelly 1978a, 223; Mooney 1900, 374, 393–4, 470; Tuggle 1973, 176). It was during preparation for these activities that people were often sequestered to isolated locations. And it was sometimes during dream and visionary experiences that competing medicine people waged “war,” either against each other (e.g., Witthoft 1983, 70) or against spirit beings guarding the pathway to the dark land of the west (e.g., Swanton 1928, 513). Menstruating or pregnant females, who like spirit beings had life-giving powers, monthly spent highly-ritualized time in secluded settings (Fogelson 1980, 70; Grantham 2002, 65; Mooney 1900, 27, 469).

It is critical to note that every important detail of these ritualized activities and experiences “is supposed to be in accordance with _direct instruction from the spirit world as communicated in a vision_” (Mooney 1900, 492 [our italics]). Basically then, movement and communication between and within the physical and spiritual worlds were ultimately mediated and informed through altered state experiences, although neither specialists nor everyday ritual participants did not always communicate with spirit beings while in an altered state of mind.
The Primal Medicine Man and the Master of Game

Kanati is the transcendent "Primal Medicine Man" and "Master of Game" who lives with his wife, Selu, above the sky dome, whereas Judaculla and his medicine woman wife are imminent representations of Kanati and Selu down on earth. Cherokees supplicated Kanati and Judaculla for success in hunting, whereas they supplicated Selu for successful harvests and/or childbirths.

It appears that certain medicine people emulated Judaculla and his wife in order to be adopted into his extended family of spirit beings (Haywood 1823, 280). For example, Judaculla instructs devotees to "go into the townhouse and fast seven days, and in all that time they must not come out from the townhouse ... and on the seventh day I shall come with new dresses for you to put on so that you can all see me" (Mooney 1900, 340).

Not everybody possessed equal capacity to experience controllable, meaningful, or useful altered states. Also, thorough and accurate knowledge of received religious traditions was needed to safely journey into the spirit world and back (for example, see the story of a Creek man physically dying while trying to exit the spirit world (Grantham 2002, 42) and of Cherokees permanently changing into spirit animals (Mooney 1900, 326–9)). And finally, a fair degree of charisma and pragmatic know-how was needed to convincingly report on encounters with spirit beings and successfully communicate and predict the results of those encounters to fellow townspeople back in the everyday physical world. According to Bartram (1955, 390) every prominent Southeastern Indian town was ruled by a "priest" or "conjurer" who had

"communion with powerful invisible spirits ... as well as the elements; that they can predict the result of an expedition ... and indeed their predictions have surprised many people. They foretell rain and drought, and pretend to bring rain at pleasure, cure diseases, and exercise witchcraft, invoke or expel evil spirits, and even assume the power of directing thunder and lightning."

Considering that various ethno-historic sources suggest certain "conjurers" were either in charge of towns or had considerable influence over decisions being made (e.g., Bartram 1955, 390; Corkran 1969, 97; Kelly 1978b, 17), it can be inferred that only those individuals who could successfully negotiate both spirit and physical worlds were likely to attain leadership roles.

All medicine people and most ordinary Cherokees (Champagne 1990, 4) and Creeks (Adair 1930, 409) had spirit helpers, whom they addressed and looked to for protection during warfare, hunting, and certain critical transition phases in life. These individuals also had their own medicine bundles, which normally included a crystal, native tobacco, and red ocher powder (e.g., Adair 1930, 19, Mooney 1900, 298). Individuals at times retreated to isolated locations (e.g., see Witthoft and Hadlock 1946, 413 for Cherokees and Gatchet 1888, 237 for Creeks), often with an experienced proctor, "to see the pictures that the spirit people will show" (Garrett and Garrett 1996, 59, 66). Claassen (2015, 249) reports an ongoing practice of Cherokee initiates and their ritual leader ascending a mountain in the
Ashville area of western North Carolina, referred to as “going up the mountain.” Cherokees were also known to invoke the aid of certain rivers and creeks with prayer and fasting during transitional periods in life, including birth, curing, war, love, hunting, fighting sorcery, and during the ball game (Mooney 1982).

Apart from the fact that the Southeastern Indians treated their dreams as real experiences in the spirit world with real consequences in the physical world (e.g., Mooney 1900, 295, 305), less has been recorded on how the Southeastern Indians entered a trance-like state to enter the spirit world. Mooney (1900, 439) documented Cherokees smoking wild tobacco leaves (Nicotiana rustica) during ritualized occasions, a practice which almost certainly induced mind-altering sensations (Winter 2000). To become a medicine person among the Creeks, students had to fast in isolation for 12 days within a winter house and chew on the bitter-tasting root of the Sou-watch-cau plant for inducing visions (Hawkins 1982, 78–9). As already mentioned, meditation and sensory deprivation in remote and isolated locations helped induce visions. Likewise, a wide range of stories suggests that prolonged meditation and sensory-deprivation within the relatively small sweat lodge (Adair 1930, 128; Swanton 1987, 774; known as âsî among the Cherokees (Mooney 1900, 230) and tsokofa among the Creeks (Grantham 2002, 130)) or repeated drumming, dancing, and singing in the family's larger winter house or even larger communal townhouse (Adair 1930, 453), resulted in altered state sensations of either spending time with animal-looking spirit beings or shape-shifting into animal forms.

Certain Cherokee (Mooney 1900, 253, 304–5) and Creek (Grantham 2002, 25, 199–208, 211–20) stories refer to an individual (usually one of a twin or a pair of humans) shape-shifting into a serpent-like being, most often a Horned Serpent (of which Uktena is a specific category), but sometimes a rattle- or tie-snake. Having the antlers of a deer, a Horned Serpent can move along the ground, swim under water, and even ascend up to the skydome (Mooney 1900, 297). An unusually skilled and experienced medicine person transformed into a Horned Serpent was accordingly able to visit townhouses found at different tiers in the cosmos, the skydome being the most challenging to reach. Particularly powerful medicine people, such as a Shawnee known as “Ground-hog’s Mother,” could successfully battle Horned Serpents (transformed medicine people) and take a crystal from their foreheads, above their eyes (Mooney 1900, 300).

The name Uktena is derived from akta, or eye, and implies being a “strong looker” as everything is visible to it (i.e., it can see thoughts). From the same root is derived akta’ti, “to see into closely,” which is also the Cherokee word for a magnifying lens and telescope (Mooney 1900, 458–9). So the name of the Uktena implies that it sees thoughts and it does so in an accurate way. The crystal on an Uktena’s head is called uššištî, literally “it is on its head,” but when it is in the possession of a medicine person it becomes ulânsástî, or “transparent.” Considered together then, the changing names and associated contexts for the crystal imply that the thoughts on the head of the snake become transparent to the medicine person who took possession of it. Like the spirit beings they interacted with, successful medicine people could read the thoughts of other people (Mooney 1900, 244, 327, 345, 364, 459). Overall, spirits and medicine people had a distinct advantage over everyday
people on the ground surface in that they could see and know peoples' actions and thoughts from behind their physical and mental veil in the spirit world.

On their travels to or from the spirit world, transformed medicine people, spirit beings, and spirit familiars often left physical imprints in the ground and rock. Animals, also referred to as medicine people, imprinted the ground surface when they originally descended from the sky vault (Mooney 1900, 24). Bears, which were physically-transformed people (Mooney 1900, 447), are said to have left tracks that closely resemble human footprints on their way to and from their underground townhouses (Mooney 1900, 321–2). The Creeks have various stories of humans changing into sharp-breasted snakes that then would cut grooves into rock surfaces next to river pools (Swanton 2000, 493). According to one Cherokee spokesperson, the *Uktena* was so strong that it made dents in the rocks as it traveled the rivers (Kirk 2013, 89). A related worm-like snake among the Cherokee, known as *Ustū'ili*, had four feet, but no legs. Each flat foot was triangular and left imprints on rocks. Of importance for the purposes of this discussion, Cherokees told Mooney (1900, 302) that “wherever its footprints were found there was danger.”

Cherokees living in north Georgia were particularly wary to hunt around Cohutta Mountain due to their fear of the *Ustū'ili* guarding the game. Spirit familiars, known as Little People, were also known to leave their footprints on their way to their underground abodes, often behind waterfalls or near the headwaters of rivers (Mooney 1900, 333–4). The immanent Master of Game, known as Judaculla, his wife (who was an accomplished medicine woman), and their two children (also medicine people) similarly left their footprints on their way from an ăsi near Kanuga town to Judaculla’s townhouse in Tsumegăñyi Mountain, at the headwaters of the Pigeon River (Mooney 1900, 339). During the late 19th century, a rock with petroglyph imprints of their feet could still be seen along this route. It was known as *Datsun’ăllăsųñi*, or “Where their tracks are this way” (Mooney 1900, 480). The imprint of where Judaculla’s wife’s menstrual blood gave birth to a child could also be seen along the riparian trail (Mooney 1900, 339).

In most of these instances, imprints occurred near, but not immediately at, surfaces that contained spirit beings. Moreover, instead of physically representing spirit beings in real time or space, imprints were physical testimony and warning of their presence; either some undetermined time in the past or their unexpected return any time in the future. Things associated with the spirit world and spirit beings were best avoided by everyday people. For example, being near the ăsi or crystal of a powerful medicine person (Adair 1930, 92) or seeing the *Uktena* could result in death (Kirk 2013, 89). Spirits being hidden from everyday sight and medicine people conducting many of their rituals in private in effect protected human beings from the overwhelming potency of the spirit world. Being hidden behind the rock or ground surface also gave power to those who could see but not be seen.

If the rock and ground surface was a barrier behind which spirits hide from human beings, water was the transformational medium that helped people penetrate the barrier and enter the hidden world. Examples have already been cited above concerning medicine people and spirit beings traveling along and across rivers. Cherokees viewed certain rivers and creeks as a “Long Man,” an animated giant with its head in the foothills of the mountains and his foot far down in the
lowland, speaking in murmurs only trained and experienced medicine people could understand (Mooney 1982, 30). Cherokees explicitly state that the “streams that come down from the mountains are the trails by which we reach this underworld [of the spirit beings], and the springs at their heads are the doorways by which we enter it” (Mooney 1900, 240), and they go on to say that “to do this one must fast and we go to water [for purification] and have one of the underground people for a guide.” Prophets, priests, healers, weather controllers, medicine people, and sorcerers among the various Creek groups also conducted their transformative rituals and cleansing near and within bodies of running water (e.g., Grantham 2002, 45–9). Moreover, both Cherokee (e.g., Mooney 1900, 347) and Creek (Swanton 1928, 71) stories detail experiences of people entering inundated cave-like townhouses via river whirlpools, often with the assistance of a human or animal spirit helper.

The transformative property of transparent water seems to contrast with the enduring hardness of solid stone. Whereas rocks and water are binary opposites in many contexts, they can also be complementary. Water is a medium that helps people penetrate rock surfaces—and not just spiritually. It makes it easy to carve and peck hard rock, by creating abrasive slurry, and (in the case of sedimentary rocks) by dissolving or expanding the matrix that binds together their siliceous grains. That is why so many soapstone bowl quarries in the Southeastern United States occur near water sources. From a spiritual point of view, the water that is contained within rock, and emanates from rock, links the visible world of everyday living beings with the parallel world of invisible spirits who live behind the surface. Water is also a necessity for the ritual cleansing required of those who wish to visit special places. In many of these descriptions, the watery journey to the rock face and the sensation of entering the rock face become interwoven as a spiritual experience that is given “topographical materiality” (Lewis-Williams 1997, 328). It is to the “topographical materiality” of specific petroglyphs that the discussion now turns.

The significance of petroglyph locations and motifs in indigenous context

The following discussion describes and interprets the location and motifs of the 28 petroglyph sites recorded in the foothills and mountains of northern Georgia (n=15) and neighboring western North Carolina (n=13) in the context of relevant ethnographies (Table 7.4).

Most petroglyphs in the study area occur on rock surfaces that are either semi-detached from the bedrock or resting on the ground surface. Of the 27 sites recorded, 17 (61%) are loose rocks that can be lifted up with heavy machinery or by people with super-human strength. Of all the rocks recorded, only three are sufficiently small to be transported by human hand, albeit over short distances. These three rocks are Sweetwater Creek Rock, Line Creek Rock (both from the foothills around Atlanta), and a small slate slab inserted among other rocks within a V-shaped fish weir in the center of the Hiwassee River, western North Carolina. With the probable exception that these three rocks were moved from their production site prior to their discovery, all the other petroglyphs were
discovered in their original locations. For a variety of reasons the following rocks or fragmented portions of the rocks have been moved since their discovery: a section of Hickorynut Rock (now called Squirrel Rock in front of Baldwin Hall on the University of Georgia campus, Athens); Line Creek Rock (now in a display case within the Fayette County Library); Reinhardt Rock (now the central display in the Funk Heritage Center, Reinhardt College, Cherokee County); River Hill Rocks (two slabs now on the Cumming Showgrounds, Forsyth County); Silver City Rock (now in front of Baldwin Hall on the University of Georgia campus, Athens);

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<th>County</th>
<th>Site type</th>
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<td>Bedrock</td>
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<td>River Edge</td>
<td>Schist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Clay</td>
<td>Bedrock</td>
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<td>Slate</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Semi-detached slabs</td>
<td>Ridge Toe</td>
<td>Biotite</td>
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</table>

*these three rocks were possibly not discovered in their original locations
Sweetwater Creek Rock (now in a museum display case at Sweetwater Creek State Park near Atlanta); Brinkley Rock (now in the front yard of Wolf Creek Nursery, near Judaculla Rock, North Carolina); and Chatuge Rock (now in the front yard of a private residence in Murphy, North Carolina). Except for Sweetwater Creek Rock and Brinkley Rock, the approximate original locations of all the historically moved rocks are known and are listed accordingly in Table 7.4. Most of the petroglyph boulders and slabs occur on ridge top spurs or ridge toe slopes of one kind or another (n=15, 54%).

Bearing in mind that we have primary information regarding Cherokee views of and interactions with certain petroglyph locales, we focus our discussions on Cherokee accounts. All of these occur within the Cherokee heartland after their mass removal in 1838 – i.e., it is only after 1870 that the State of North Carolina and the U.S. Federal Government acknowledged the right of the remnant Cherokees to remain in their homeland (Kirk 2013, 32). Once the cognitive significance and preferred placement of petroglyphs among the Cherokee of western North Carolina and far northern Georgia mountains have been demonstrated, the heuristic potential of these ethnographically informed findings is evaluated against likely ancestral Creek petroglyphs in the Georgia foothills, immediately to the south. The existence of a generalized pan-Creek/Cherokee cognitive system allows for using ethnographic information interchangeably, acknowledging that some differences in beliefs and practices did indeed exist.

Judging from various Cherokee accounts, the placement of semi-detached petroglyph boulders on ridge lines is significant. Cherokee stories mention the Primal Medicine Man and transcendent Master of Game beyond the sky vault, commonly known as Kana’tí, ascending a ridge, presumably on the way to the cave-like entrance into the sky vault on the northern side of the Black Mountain range, western North Carolina (Mooney 1900, 242, 432). Here Kana’tí lifted a large rock and “at once ran out a buck” (Mooney 1900, 243). Upon seeing this, his twin sons, both medicine people in their own right, realized that Kana’tí kept all “the deer shut up in that hole [beneath the rock on the mountain slope].” A few days later the twins “started up the mountain to where their father kept the game. When they got to the place, they raised the rock and the deer came running out.” After the last deer escaped into the forest below “came droves of raccoons, rabbits, and all the other four-footed animals ... last came great flocks of turkeys, pigeons, and partridges” (Mooney 1900, 243). The great noise generated by the fleeing birds and animals resembled thunder (i.e., the powerful world of the arch-Thunder, Kana’ti, being released into the physical world through audible sound). On a prominent ridge line northwest of Black Mountain is an elongated boulder with numerous petroglyphs of animal tracks, today known as Gardner Rock, which geographically corresponds with the account. Yuchi from far western Georgia and eastern Alabama had similar stories concerning a Master of Game releasing deer from a cave (Tuggle 1973, 174), leaving their imprints on a malleable water-soaked rock surface (Gatschet 1893, 280).

The association between escaping game and petroglyph tracks is supported by other accounts in the same region. For example, a Cherokee account explicitly states that “birds and animal fleeing through the gap to escape some pursuing
danger from the west” (Mooney 1900, 419) left their imprints on the various rocks within Track Rock Gap (Fig. 7.6), northern Georgia. This “danger from the west” could have been Kanà·t’si’s twin sons, or their equivalents, who were members of the extended Thunder family living beyond the sky dome to the west (Mooney 1900, 435). The earth bound equivalent of the transcendent Kanà·t’si, was the immanent Master of Game, commonly known as Judaculla. This red-colored giant derived his name from his eyes, known as tsul’kàlù’, said to have been slanted (e.g., Mooney 1900, 338). The slanting referred to the pupils of his eyes, similar to those of certain snakes and cats with good night vision (Tom Belt pers. comm. 2014). Like spirit beings in general and certain powerful medicine people in particular (Speck 1909, 144), Judaculla could see the thoughts of other people and visited certain favored individuals in their dreams (Mooney 1900, 327, 338; Ziegler and Grosscup 1883, 23). Mirroring the marriage between Kanà·t’si and powerful Selu beyond the sky vault, Judaculla married a powerful medicine woman in a sweat house.

Similar to the emergence of Selu’s twin sons from her menstrual blood dropping into a river (Mooney 1900, 242), the menstrual blood of Judaculla’s resting wife falling onto the wet rocks next-to the Pigeon River gave rise to her offspring, leaving vulva imprints and footprints on the soft surface (Mooney 1900, 339, 480). Powerful females among the Muskogee Creeks were also said to have given life to offspring when their menstrual blood fell onto wet pathways (e.g., Swanton 1929, 15–17). For example, by carefully scraping the dirt from her menstrual blood within her footprint, an elderly Muskogee woman managed to grow a boy in a ceramic jar from the scrapings. She teaches this boy to hunt and grow corn. A related Cherokee story in Mooney (1900, 323–4) recounts how Selu taught a lost boy about hunting and agriculture in his dreams. Such accounts can be seen as “mythical charters” of the relationship between human supplicants and spirit beings; physical beings can tap into the fecundity of the spirit world by communicating with spirit beings while in an altered state of consciousness where everyday restrictions do not apply and physical reality can be reversed (for instance, menstrual blood giving instantaneous birth to grown children or fully-formed deer appearing from nowhere).

The underworld as a source of life can be seen in numerous other accounts, including those mentioning petroglyphs. For instance, on a pathway where the “Great Female’s Family” appeared to the Cherokees next to the Tuckasegee River slightly upstream from Kituwah Mound (Mooney 1900, 407), Judaculla and his deer left imprints on a petroglyph boulder that had since been destroyed by railway construction (Mooney 1900, 409–10). Other than knowing that she was invoked by medicine people, it is not clear from the accounts if the “Great Female” refers to Selu or Judaculla’s wife or both. Haywood (1823, 280) collected an account of Cherokees partaking in dancing and fasting rituals to be adopted into the extended family of Tuli-cula or Judaculla, who was a member of Selu’s Thunder family. Commonalties in these stories include individuals traveling, resting, or sleeping along trails on their way towards powerful portals from where game or even human beings were released from the other side. “Resting” could refer to meditation, while “sleeping” implies dreaming. Importantly, physical imprints on the rock give materiality to mental experiences and concepts. Instead of necessarily always occurring immediately next to a gateway into the spirit world,
petroglyphs were almost always on the way to such a gateway. It is instructive to note that the Cherokees know the area immediately south of the Hiwassee River/Brasstown Creek confluence, with its concentration of petroglyphs and depiction of Judaculla, not only as “Big Place,” “Great Place,” or “Place where it is Strong,” but also as the “Southern Gate” (Brett Riggs, pers. comm. 2013). This gate links Peachtree Mound and associated Cherokee settlements along the Hiwassee River with a potent southward corridor to Brasstown Bald and Blood Mountain beyond.

Being close to or on the way to potent and potentially dangerous places, it could be argued that petroglyph surfaces were among other things warning signs that people are about to enter spiritually-charged precincts (i.e., analogous to the outer gates leading to an inner sanctum). The game around Cohutta Mountain, northern Georgia, being guarded by the worm-like Üstü’iti is one example (Mooney 1900, 302) and Judaculla’s jealously-guarded hunting domain in the Balsam Mountains of western North Carolina is another (Parris 1950, 37).

Cherokee hunters who did not properly fast and purify in a river before visiting Judaculla’s townhouse within Tannasse Bald at the headwaters of Caney Creek, roughly 10 miles (16 km) southeast of the Judaculla Rock petroglyphs, ran the risk of either failing to supplicate the reclusive deity or worse, being pursued by the vengeful giant. In the account given to Parris (1950, 36) an irate Judaculla “gave chase and the [transgressing] Indians escaped into the dense forest of spruce [below his mountain top rock-encased townhouse].” The angry giant:

> "bellowed and the heavens rumbled. From his massive bow he arrowed shafts of lightning into the forest, driving the Indians down into the valley of Caney Fork Creek and into the open. Seeing them break into the open Jutaculla [sic] made a mighty leap. He sprang from his habitat to the valley below. As he landed he stumbled and put out a hand to keep from falling. His hand pressed against a giant boulder [Judaculla Rock], steadied his massive frame [this hand reputedly created the downward-facing seven-digit claw-like image in the lower portion of the boulder]. The Indians hovered at his feet, trembling in awe. Then there was a flash of blinding light, the roll of thunder, and a puff of smoke, and the Indians were gone [they entered the spirit world]."

In a related account collected by Zeigler and Grosscup (1883, 22), Judaculla turned into a snake and devoured the trespassing Cherokees (another way of expressing their physical death and incorporation into the world of spirits).

In this and related Cherokee accounts, Judaculla manifests as Red Man of the Lightning or Thunder (Mooney 1900, 340, 341, 477; Zeigler and Grosscup 1883, 24). In his benevolent state Judaculla gives hunters medicinal powers so that they can find game (Mooney 1900, 300). As seen in the Zeigler and Grosscup account (1883, 22) Judaculla and his Thunder transformation (Mooney 1900, 481) can shape-shift into a snake or a feline being with claws. From available evidence then, it appears that Judaculla and his transformations lived “lower down, in the cliffs and mountains, and under waterfalls” (Mooney 1900, 257). This suggests that Judaculla in his various serpentine and feline forms is an immanent or earthly, manifestation of the transcendent Thunder/Red Man, or Kana’tì, who has withdrawn from human view beyond the sky dome of the upper world.

Taking his clawed hand, Judaculla scratched “with the nail of his right finger
... across the face of the [Judaculla] rock ... to remind the Cherokee that death would come to all who crossed it [without first fasting, purifying in a nearby stream, and/or saying the necessary prayers]" (Parris 1950, 37). In another account, Judaculla's claw-like toes scrape the "roof in the right-hand corner by the door" of his wife's sweat lodge (Mooney 1900, 338). The cat-like imprints left by the Master of Game contrast with the giant human footprints he left at Judaculla Rock (Fig. 7.5) demonstrate his ability to shape-shift from animal to human and back again. Cherokee spokes people identify a petroglyph figure with a six-fingered hand on a rock outcrop island at the Hiwassee River/Brasstown Creek confluence in western North Carolina as Judaculla. It is indeed appears that polydactyly is a distinguishing feature that helps Cherokees to identify their Master of Game. Polydactyly is a congenital physical anomaly not infrequently found among medicine people and certain animals around the globe (e.g., Ripinsky-Naxon 1993, 71). Spirit beings in Cherokee accounts are often described as having animal characteristics, such as the two girls who lived within Pilot Knob Mountain having dog-like feet (Mooney 1900, 344). Bearing in mind the shape-shifting abilities of beings interacting with the spirit world, perhaps an overly rigid distinction between human and animal imprints on the rocks could be misleading.

One might well ask why Judaculla's slanting eyes are not portrayed in any of the petroglyphs. At present, no definitive reason for this omission can be found. Perhaps the depiction of the clawed hands shows that it is his shape-shifting abilities that are important at transformative locales such as the petroglyph surfaces. Another question that could be posed is why Judaculla is depicted so small and in less than obvious placements. Perhaps the answer lies in the observation that the creator being among the Blackfoot Plains Indians, commonly known as Napi, is depicted as a relatively small and inconspicuous figure within a circular shield at the Writing-on-Stone petroglyph site in southern Alberta, Canada (Loubser 2012). It is most likely the context that informs the decision how to portray supernatural beings or whether to portray them at all. For example, Napi is most often believed to be a creator being, but in certain stories he is portrayed as a coyote. Likewise, Judaculla take on a number of different shapes, the animal side of his persona is seemingly an important facet as far as petroglyph locales are concerned.

Human and animal imprints have been identified at the following nine petroglyph sites: Track Rock Gap (Fig. 7.6), Hickorynut Rock, Boling Park Rock, River Hill Rocks, Witches' Nest Cave (Fig. 7.4), Judaculla Rock (Fig. 7.5), Chatuge Rock, Gardner Rock, and Turkey Track Rocks. Deer tracks are particularly prevalent at Boling Park Rock, Track Rock, Hickorynut Rock, and Gardner Rock. Boling Park Rock is slightly downstream from a shallow cave, which recalls accounts deer spilling out from the underworld and leaving their tracks on the soft and wet rock outside. Witches' Nest is a small damp cave that similarly fits the description of a physical portal from the spirit world. The fairly massive boulders at most recorded sites can be lifted with heavy machinery or by imaginary spirit beings with supernatural strength. The directionality, concentration, and overprint of petroglyph animal and bird tracks on some of these boulders emulate their actual appearance on a soft surface, such as a muddy river bank or wet overland trail. The vast majority of petroglyph tracks are pointing upward, as if the animals and birds have emerged
from the ground immediately in front of the boulders and then moved up and over the boulders, away from a viewer who would be standing on the down-hill side.

Many of the three-digit bird tracks at various petroglyph sites resemble vulvas. A few deer tracks at Track Rock Gap resemble vulvas too. Instead of being sunken like the majority of deer track designs, the two halves of the “hooves” on certain Track Rock examples stand proud and appear bulbous, like lips. Also, small cupule-looking holes occur within the central portion of each shape. Some observers have confused horseshoe-shaped and football-shaped vulva motifs at Track Rock (Fig. 7.6) with horse tracks (e.g., Mooney 1990, 419 quoting White on the authority of Stevenson in 1854). However, these petroglyphs are clearly divided into two halves by a central vertical line and a hole, unlike anything that could be associated with a horse hoof (Murie and Elbroch 2005, 263). Sundstrom (2004, 85) notes that the Lakota and Dakota Indians visually and metaphorically link animal and bird tracks with human vulvas. Animal and bird tracks not only resemble vulvas, but are also points of contact with the fecundity of the spirit world.

Tellingly, the football-shaped vulva motifs at Track Rock Gap (Fig. 7.6) and Hickorynut Rock have meandering appendages attached to their lower ends, resembling menstrual bleeding. In Cherokee and Creek stories the menstrual blood of powerful female seers and/or spirit beings give rise to various forms of life from the spirit world, including a girl (Mooney 1900, 339), a boy (Mooney 1900, 339; Swanton 1929, 10), deer (Mooney 1900, 304), and corn (Mooney 1900, 245; Swanton 1929, 12). Menstruating women and blood associated with menstruation were considered very powerful. Bearing in mind that this power was particularly dangerous to men and male spirit beings, Cherokee men tended to avoid anything that had to do with menstruation (Mooney 1900, 319–20). Lines that emanate from below many vulva-forms at Track Rock and Hickorynut could very well be depictions of such life-giving menstrual blood falling on wet surfaces or directly into water. Like animals and birds exiting from the spirit world across the rock surface, vulva-forms signified the fecundity and danger of that world. Significantly, when wet, such as following a rain storm, the slight pooling of water makes many of the fainter petroglyphs appear on the surface; it is as if moisture brings forth and animates the imagery.

It is not certain if any of the ridge toe sites are also associated with hidden or dried-up water sources, bearing in mind the active springhead that was recently exposed during archaeological excavations at Judaculla Rock (Shumate and Loubser 2010). At least 11 (39%) petroglyphs are located directly next to or within permanently flowing water (Table 7.4). Of these, three occur in the center of the Hiwassee River and three on the edge of a river. Of the latter three, two are on the Hiwassee River and one is on the nearby Brasstown Creek. The following three petroglyphs are directly next to permanently flowing creeks: Shoal Creek Rock and Boling Park Rock in the Georgia foothills and Bridal Veil Falls in the North Carolina Blue Ridge Mountains. A fourth came from near a creek edge (Brinkley Rock) and a fifth (Judaculla Rock) is at a springhead. It should also be noted that at least some of those petroglyphs located on level sections of ridge lines, notably Sprayberry Rock, were once on upland swampy ground, also known as soaks. While producing these petroglyphs, the makers’ feet got wet. To peck the images
on an isolated rock within a river pool near the Hiwassee-Brasstown confluence, the maker had to stand chest deep in water. Many petroglyph surfaces near water get regularly inundated by high water levels during seasonal rains. Even the two cliff-side petroglyph sites, located in the sedimentary ridges of far northwestern Georgia, are occasionally soaked by water breaching the dripline.

As mentioned before, the abrasive slurry created from wet rock dust particles significantly increases the ease and speed of cutting and pecking petroglyphs. In spiritual terms, water was seen as having cleansing and transformative properties. Water as a transformative medium to visit and penetrate spirit rock townhouses is mentioned in various Cherokee and Creek stories. For example, canoeists on the Tennessee River could see in the water below “the round dome of a townhouse — now turned to stone” (Mooney 1900, 336). When a whirlpool sucked down a capsized canoeist “he could look down as through the roof beam of a house [the narrowest circle of the maelstrom], and there at the bottom of the river he had seen a great company of people, who looked up and beckoned to him to join them” (Mooney 1900, 347).

Related Muskogee Creek stories refer to a giant serpent causing a whirlpool to cover the old townhouse at Coosa where sometimes “people used to see beams whirling around this eddy, and occasionally men sitting upon them” (Swanton 1928, 71). It is in such places where horned serpents and water cougars also lived (e.g., Grantham 2002, 208), normally directly below the center point of a river pool or below where an inserted river cane has created an outward-moving ripple effect on the surface (Methvin 1927, 394). Feline and serpentine spirit beings living within hot houses (Mooney 1900, 338) or at the bottom of pools (Swanton 1929, 31) are described as taking on a curled shape, mirroring the shape of whirlpools gateways at the surface. It is important to note that many townhouse roof beams and supporting posts that surround a central smoke hole and fire place take on a concentric ring configuration (e.g., Bartram 1955, 297). River cane splits have been reported to be arranged in the central fire place of a townhouse as a tight spiral (Bartram 1955, 358). Central fire places within townhouses were seen as places of access to the spirit world, particularly during annual renewal ceremonials (e.g., Swanton 1987, 775).

From these accounts we can see that concentric rings and spirals are graphic allusions to entrances into the spirit world. Entry into the spirit world normally started during dances or seclusion within physical townhouses or smaller hot houses and continued through whirlpools; often with the persons involved escorted by or transforming into serpentine or feline beings. Journeys normally ended in the submerged river bottom or elevated mountain top townhouses of snake or cat-like spirit beings. The equivalence between snakes and townhouses can be seen in various Cherokee stories, ranging from accounts of snakes residing alongside the macro-cosmic sky dome of the sun (Mooney 1900, 294–5) to accounts of Cherokee medicine men coiling an invisible snake around the microcosmic hot house of a sick person (Mooney 1900, 433). The close conceptual relationship between townhouses and snakes is moreover hinted at by statements made by current Cherokees. When shown a copy of paired concentric ring motifs on Reinhardt Rock, a Cherokee elder identified them as townhouses, while another Cherokee
identified a pair of concentric rings towards the lower portion of Judaculla Rock (Fig. 7.5) as coiled snakes.

Closely related to concentric ring designs are cross-in-rings. Cross-in-rings are incorporated into concentric ring designs at petroglyph sites such as Sprayberry Rock (Fig. 7.2). They also occur separately at Track Rock Gap (Fig. 7.6), Reinhardt Rock (Fig. 7.7), Sunrise Path Rock, and Judaculla Rock (Fig. 7.5). As already mentioned, cross-in-ring designs occur on Middle Woodland and Middle Mississippian period ceramics too. Bartram (1955, 358) mentions the central fire within the townhouses of various Southeastern groups comprising split cane or logs arranged in a cross-like fashion (also see Hendrix 1983, 77). Cherokees danced in concentric rings around such townhouse fires (Adair 1930, 101). Re-kindled fires marked transition from one year to the next (Adair 1930, 105), while the fire places were gateways of departed souls to the spirit world (Withoft 1983, 70–1). Fire places were seen as an old woman or a grandfather and a fire was addressed as “Ancient and Honorable Red Person” (Hendrix 1983, 76). Medicine people ritualistically kindled fires as they performed their duties, often at night by the side of a running stream while preparing supplicants for “going-to-water” ritual cleansing (Hendrix 1983, 77). The cross-in-ring image is also mentioned in stories related to life-giving powers. Notably, when Kana’li’s twin sons drag their Corn Mother (Selu) seven times in a ring and then seven times cross-wise within the ring, her dripping blood produced corn as they hit the ground surface. Similar to concentric rings then, cross-in-rings signify transition points between different states of being. Additionally, similar to vulva forms, cross-in-rings also mark places where living things emerge from the ground.

Numerous accounts use crossing physical thresholds as a way to allude to shifting perceptions. One Cherokee account describes the prolonged dancing of seven boys in a circular fashion within a townhouse causing them to float through the central smoke hole where they shape-shift into the Pleiades constellation (Mooney 1900, 258–9). Another account has a woman following her husband along a trail only to see him shape-shift into an owl as he reaches a river bank (Mooney 1900, 292). In a third account an eagle changes into a human being as he enters the townhouse of his enemies to avenge the death of his brother (Mooney 1900, 293). When a Cherokee trader known as Yahula stepped out the doorway of his family’s house “he vanished as if he had never been” to join the Immortal spirit beings in their mountain abode (Mooney 1900, 348). A strange man who appeared from nowhere to a Cherokee boy constructing a V-shaped fish-weir near the historic period Nottely Town, mysteriously disappeared during the boy’s return journey from his visit to the stranger’s family of spirit beings (Mooney 1900, 331). Significantly, these and other stories of a shift in mental perception involve people travelling along arduous routes and/or indulging in strenuous activities.

Cherokee accounts of individuals entering the supernatural realm specifically involve strenuous journeys to certain towns and/or townhouses of spirit beings. For example, it was an arduous journey to reach the townhouses of bears within four juxtaposed peaks in the Great Smoky Mountains (Mooney 1900, 264). One story has an exhausted hunter following a bear until the two reach a hole in the side of the mountain, beyond which was a townhouse full of multi-colored bears (Mooney
Tellingly, bear tracks crossing in every direction could be seen on the shores of a shallow spring-fed lake (Mooney 1900, 321) on the way to the bear townhouse. In a related account a hunter follows seven talking panthers through thick winter snow to their summer-time square ground within a mountain. The narrative states that “they came to the head spring, when it seemed as if a door opened on the side of the hill and they went in” (Mooney 1900, 324). Once inside, the hunter found himself in front of a large townhouse. Spirit beings, known as Immortals, live in mountain-top townhouses too, including Pilot Knob in western North Carolina and Blood Mountain in northern Georgia. Mountain townhouses also included Little People (e.g., the mountain at the source of the Oconaluftee River) (Mooney 1900, 333), the Master of Game (Tannasee Bald at the source of the Pigeon River and Caney Creek) (Mooney 1900, 339–40), and the Thunder People and Horned Serpent (Hickory Log Mountain above Tallulah Falls) (Mooney 1900, 347). Note that all these townhouses were located at springheads and/or behind waterfalls (i.e., the rock wall that encased the spirit towns could only be breached through a watery medium). Also, as previously mentioned, many of these spirit beings were known as the Thunders, the name of the extended family to which Judaculla and the Horned Serpent belonged.

The typical layout of a spirit town within the mountains of the study area can be seen in the description of Pilot Knob, western North Carolina. When supplicants from the valley town of Kanasta followed two spirit helpers through a door into the side of Pilot Knob they found “houses ranged in two long rows from east to west . . . there was another town . . . above them in the same mountain, and still farther above, at the very top, lived the . . . Thunders” (Mooney 1900, 324). This description of ascent into a multi-tiered spirit world, with the most powerful spirits, Judaculla and Kana’ti’, living at the top, is implied time and again in other descriptions of descent into the lower world preceding ascent into the upper world.

It is proposed here that lobed intersecting lines found at two petroglyph sites in northern Georgia (Track Rock Gap and Allen Rock) and at six sites in western North Carolina (Judaculla Rock (Fig. 7.5), Brinkley Rock, Chatuge Rock, Hiwassee Rock, Bridal Veil Falls, and Long Rock (Fig. 7.9) represent underground townhouses that are arranged in long rows, such as within Pilot Knob. Some townhouses are depicted in side-view, basically as inverted U-shapes, while those depicted in plan-view are curvilinear shapes with a central dot. When compared to a schematized line map of excavated structures at the Qualla Phase (ca. AD 1450–1720) Cherokee settlement of Cowee Creek in North Carolina (Rodning 2009, 629), the dot-in-outline motifs at sites such as Judaculla (Fig. 7.5) and Track Rock exhibit certain similarities. Of particular note are the semi-rounded outlines (walls?) of the shapes (winter houses?), the central dots (hearth?), and gaps (the entrance ways?). The surrounding straight and curvilinear lines pecked and engraved into the same boulders could represent trails and rivers that connect houses and settlements of living human beings and departed spirit beings.

The Immortals were also known to have inhabited abandoned successive townhouses that were once located on or within low mounds, such as the old Nikwasi Mound near Franklin in western North Carolina (Mooney 1900, 330). It was believed that fires burn permanently within these buried townhouses.
(Mooney 1900, 396). On cold winter days the Cherokee claim that smoke still rise from these mounds, as it does from a natural vent, believed to be the smoke hole of an Immortal townhouse (Mooney 1900, 332) on a ridge line east of and above the Track Rock Gap petroglyph complex (Loubser 2010). The Creeks had related beliefs of spirit beings occupying abandoned mound sites (Bartram 1955, 314). Adair (1930, 39) reports that in 1715 Muskogee saw apparitions and heard voices of spirit beings going-to-water from the abandoned townhouses at the Ocmulgee mound complex. Adair (1930, 355, 406) mentions Choctaws living in southern Mississippi travelling to an abandoned mound site known as Namph Waiya or “Slanting Hill” in northern Mississippi, said to be occupied by subterranean beings. This mound was also the origin point of the Choctaw people and their point of exit to the upper world of spirits (Gatschet 1884, 106, Swanton 2001, 7). As in the case of mountain top townhouses, entry points to abandoned mounds tend to be lower down which then leads into a multi-layered landscape with the sky vault at the top. For these and other reasons, it is not difficult to see why the Southeastern Indian groups, such as the Cherokee, conflated sacred mountains and mounds (Knight 1989, 424; Mooney 1900; 335-7).

Most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, petroglyph sites are located on known trails connecting inhabited townhouses on the floodplains with spirit townhouses in the mountains. The journey of Judaculla and his family from a townhouse in Brasstown Valley via Track Rock Gap (Datsun’alāsąɣuɣi) to Brasstown Bald was implied by Charles Hick’s statement to Haywood (1823, 280). Judaculla and his family clearly journeyed to Tannassee Bald, also known as Tsuneguňyí Mountain, from a sweat lodge in Kanuga Town via the now destroyed petroglyphs at Datsun’aląsąɣuɣi (Mooney 1900, 339). Later on Judaculla’s brother-in-law followed the same route via the same petroglyphs. Cherokee hunters wishing to approach Tannassee Bald from the east, in and around Cullowhee, followed the trail along Caney Creek with a critical stop-over point at Judaculla Rock (Parris 1950, 37). When following the two sisters along a trail that connected Old Sākwi’yí Town with the Thunders’ townhouse, also known as Ugiši’yí, behind Tallulah Falls (Mooney 1900, 345-6), a young Cherokee warrior must have passed by the turtle-shaped petroglyph boulder known as Allen Rock. The dome-shaped mountain itself could have represented a turtle on the macro-scale, judging from an Alabama Indian account of medicine people travelling along a trail confusing a mountain for a small turtle (Martin 1977, 68). By the time of their realization, the medicine men “were no longer astonished: the inexplicable had ceased to surprised them” (Martin 1977, 69). The counter-intuitive world of spirits beings is also apparent in the Cherokee account shared with Mooney (1900, 346) considering that a boulder that served as the young man’s seat inside the Tallulah Gorge Mountain turned into a turtle.

There are additional examples of petroglyph boulders in the study area that are located on known trails which once linked townhouses and mountain tops and/or old mounds. Judaculla and his deer left their imprints on a now destroyed petroglyph boulder on an old trail connected to Kituwah Mound (Mooney 1900, 410). Hickorynut Rock is located on a prominent ridge toe spur between Nacoochee Mound, or Itsa’ı˘, and Hickory Knob, or Tray Mountain. Farther to the southwest, upper Piedmont counties immediately north of Atlanta contain a series of
pictograph boulders along the ancient east-west Toccoa Trail (see Whitley and Hicks 2003 for GIS and historic map relocation of this trail). These boulders, which include, from west to east, Boling Park Rock, Reinhardt Rock, River Hill Rock, and Silver City Rock, occur between mound centers along the Etowah River in Bartow County and Coal Mountain in Forsyth County. Sprayberry Rock in Cobb County occurs on a prominent and fairly level and straight ridge line which connects mounds in the Chattahoochee River valley, such as Annawakee Creek mound, with Sweat Mountain.

Other sites occur along river corridors near mound sites, such as the destroyed pictographs near Kiuumah Mound mentioned above. Additional examples include the row of pictographs along the Hiwassee River, not far upstream (south) from Peachtree Mound with its townhouse (Duncan and Riggs 2003; Espenshade and Loubser 2010), and Shoal Creek Rock, along a big tributary of the Etowah River. At Shoal Creek Rock (Fig. 7.10) a pecked square enclosing nine circles resembles a townhouse next to a pecked rectangle that resembles square grounds as documented among early historic period Creeks (Hewitt 1939, 131).

Some meandering lines on Hiwassee Rock on the southern bank of the Hiwassee River resemble rivers, while others resemble snakes, and yet others could be construed as snakes and/or rivers with human-looking arms and legs. These images recall the whirlpools, horned serpents, and rivers as Tall Men already discussed. Also as already shown above, meandering lines comprise the earliest layer of pictographs at a number of recorded sites, so anything that is combined with these lines or done on top of these lines can be seen as elaborations or “comments” on them. Many of the meandering lines and also straight lines could represent trails and river courses, such as the ones on the floor in Witches’ Nest (Fig. 7.4) or on Brinkley Rock.

There is compelling evidence that Judaculla Rock (Fig. 7.12) is a three-dimensional “picture map” of the surrounding Balsam Mountains (for more details see James Blythe, a Cherokee Indian being quoted in a Special Report of the Asheville Citizen 1937; Loubser 2009; Willburn 1952b). First, the natural orientation of the soapstone boulder on which the pictographs have been pecked coincides with the orientation of the Balsams. Secondly, the orientation of the two most prominent rill-like lines on the boulder coincides with the orientation and location of the Tuckasegee River and Caney Fork Creek. Thirdly, places associated with Judaculla can be seen pecked on the boulder, more-or-less where they occur on the landscape. These include Cullowhee Town, Judaculla Mountain, Judaculla Rock, Judaculla Ridge, Tannasee Bald, Devil’s Courthouse, and Track Rock and Kanuga Town on the opposite side of the ridge line. The placement of paired pecked concentric ring design near the lower edge of Judaculla Rock coincides with the location of historic period mound sites in the Cullowhee Valley (or Judaculla-whee/Judaculla’s Place). Overall, it is proposed that Judaculla Rock is a stylized depiction of Judaculla’s domain, centered on the Balsams.

According to some Cherokee traditions a time came when it was no longer viable for Judaculla to live among human beings (Kirk 2013, 81). Prior to his departure to the land in the west, Judaculla revealed his secrets to the people, such as instructions to talk to plants and animals, proper procedures for rituals, and
sacred formulas. These instructions he carved into Judaculla Rock. People living in a nearby Cherokee village became custodians of Judaculla Rock. In response to a prophetic vision, medicine people from other villages in the region gathered at the rock at specific times in the year to obtain medicine (Kirk 2013, 82). An account given by Wilburn (1952a, 21) independently corroborates the importance of the rock as an assembly point long after the removal of many Cherokees from the region in 1838. Even the Cherokees who were forced to move west retained knowledge of the rock for a considerable time; designated individuals travelled from Oklahoma to join designated local Eastern Cherokees for ceremonies at the rock.
According to information recently volunteered to Kirk (2013, 82), the map on Judaculla Rock contained multiple layers. One layer showed the location of heavenly bodies. This contemporary emic interpretation shows a remarkable agreement with the traditional Cherokee idea of layered worlds found within certain mountain tops, which were believed to be “all the same” as far as their internally layered make-ups are concerned (Mooney 1900, 342). According to Kirk’s informant, only the “old ones” knew how to “read” the different layers. As already discussed, petroglyph layers were interwoven and included a mixture of motifs such as curvilinear lines, animal imprints, human figures, concentric rings, cross-in-circles, and cupules. What appears as a chaotic jumble to the uninitiated eye was in fact a conflation of multi-layered worlds (Lewis-Williams and Loubser 2014); underwater towns were depicted among imprints of animals exiting from that world and alongside townhouses, rivers, and trails connected with that world, apparently also including hitherto unidentified features and beings from the sky dome. As is the case in many modern interpretive maps, scale clearly did not matter, bearing in mind that feet and tracks were much bigger than stick figures and depictions of structures. In a sense then the petroglyphs in the study can perhaps best be viewed as highly stylized “picture maps.” Like the rock named after him, accounts of the shape-shifting Judaculla portray the giant as a nexus between layered worlds. Like Judaculla Rock, the other petroglyph surfaces within the study area can be seen as imploded microcosmic depictions of a multi-layered macrocosm. In the topsy-turvy world of dreams, visions, and other forms of altered consciousness, big exists along with small, and bird-eye views with close-ups. Also, vast distances can be crossed in a very short time, such as Judaculla’s mighty leap from his Old Fields down to Judaculla Rock.

Belief in Judaculla or beings similar to him could once have extended beyond the Balsams. In western North Carolina, landscape features associated with Judaculla also include Shining Rock and Pilot Mountain to the south, and in Georgia locations include Blood Mountain, Yonah Mountain, Enchanted Mountain, and Track Rock Gap near Brasstown Bald (Ashcraft and Moore 1998; Foster 1885; Haywood 1823; Kirk 2013; Knight 1914; Lanman 1849; Loubser 2009; Mooney 1900; Wilburn 1952a; 1952b; 1954; Ziegler and Grosscup 1883). Spirit beings related to Judaculla can be found in neighboring areas, such as Kana’ti and his hunting preserve around Black Mountain (Mooney 1900, 431–2). Similar to Judaculla and his wife living within Tannasee Bald and Kana’ti’ and Selu living within Black Mountain, Spear Finger (Utlunta) and his wife, known as Stone Coat (Nunyungwii), lived within Whiteside Mountain, Jackson County, western North Carolina. Reminiscent of the other spirit beings, Spear Finger and his wife were mostly invisible but could shape-shift and appear to human beings. However, unlike the other spirit beings, they seem to have the unique ability of taking on a human form so that they could trick humans and steal their livers (Kirk 2013, 90). Whereas Spear Finger sought out stream heads and mountain passes, Stone Coat preferred traveling along ridge lines. Although stationed at Whiteside Mountain, Cherokee stories have them travel far to the west, including Chilhowee Mountain in eastern Tennessee (Kirk 2013, 98. Mooney 1900, 317–20). According to White (1854, 660) the Cherokee’s Great Spirit had his sanctuary within Track Rock Gap, while Stephenson (1871, 214–15) was told that a
“Great Warrior” left his footprint on the main rock within the gap. It is conceivable that slightly different versions of a powerful spirit being were associated with different townhouse centers. Petroglyph boulders that occurred on trails to the abodes of the spirit beings marked the transition between physical townhouses in the valleys and spirit townhouses in the uplands.

Spirit beings, townhouses, and ancient mounds

Choctaw legend has it that a red man came down from the sky vault and threw up a large mound or hill to form Nanib Waiya (Gatschet 1884, 106). This account is reminiscent of one a Cherokee told Haywood (1823, 280) that Judaculla, also known as Red Man, produced the quaking of the earth and a rumbling noise that threw up mounds and associated townhouses. In this and other Cherokee narratives (e.g., Mooney 1900, 335), mounds formed when supplicants within townhouses fail to complete their regime of fasting that would have enabled them to successfully visit spirit beings in their mountain top townhouses. What these narratives seem to imply then, is that due to the supplicants’ failure to reach the spirit beings’ mountain, the spirit beings brought the mountain down to the supplicants. Such tumultuous events, which were accompanied by thunder, lightning, rumbling, and quaking, appear to be a narrative convention that Cherokees used to describe entry of spirit beings or Thunders into peoples’ consciousness.

From roughly AD 1600 to the late 1700s in western North Carolina and northern Georgia, townhouses replaced mounds as the primary form of visible public architecture (Steere 2015; Rodning 2009). Townhouses were often rebuilt in place over time, a process that gradually resulted in the formation of a low mound and creating an elevated base for additional townhouses. In some instances, Cherokee communities built townhouses on ancient platform mounds (Bartram 1955, 297), themselves containing townhouses or “temples” from earlier Mississippian periods. Moreover, archaeological evidence suggests the abandonment of some mounds for considerable periods of time, such as evidenced by the 200 year hiatus within the Chauga Mound in northwestern South Carolina (Rodning 2015, 180). It is proposed here that it is primarily within the ancient mounds, such as Nikwasi and Peachtree (Sezler and Jennings 1941), where powerful spirit beings, notably the Immortals, were believed to reside. Moreover, the very layering of mounds could likely have been protracted multi-generational projects to emulate and recreate the layered nature of the cosmos. Objects taken out of use and circulation from among the living were buried out of sight with recently interred humans to enter the world of spirits. Many townhouses and mounds were placed directly on prepared surfaces with burials of what appeared to be important individuals, such as town chiefs and elders (Mooney 1900, 395–7).

Citing a Carolina trader who resided among the Cherokees during the early 18th century, Corkran (1969, 29) states that the Cherokees took great care placing gifts into the graves of recently departed relatives. These gifts were given to the physically departed in part to accompany them in their journey to the land of spirit beings in the west, but also to pass on at least some of the gifts to spirit
beings already there. The souls of the dead were not only reluctant to leave the physical world, but faced obstacles on their way to the spirit world, such as malicious medicine people, or sorcerers, trying to steal their souls (Witthoft 1983), reminiscent of Spear Finger and his wife Stone Coat stealing the souls residing in the livers of dreaming victims. In order to ensure that relatives passed safely into the world of spirit beings and stayed there, every effort was made to keep burials secret and tightly sealed. Of importance was to keep the parallel worlds of physical and spirit beings separate as far as possible, even though interaction inevitably had to occur during rituals of transition, supplication, and renewal and/or when spirits made their appearance. Periods of interaction were necessary, because it was in the spirit world that life-giving forces resided. Also, the goods and services provided by the spirits had to be reciprocated with gifts and certain actions by human supplicants. Due to the ever-present dangers involved in interaction with spirit beings, supplicants needed to be spiritually-purified by means of fasting and going-to-water.

Townhouses and associated mounds, petroglyphs, and mountain tops (and certain river bottoms) can be viewed as anomalous places along a paper-thin boundary between parallel physical and spiritual worlds that were occasionally breached. Townhouses and mounds within physically active communities were places where physically inactive bodies and objects (like dreaming or trancing people) were placed below the ground surface to enter the hidden but parallel world of spirit beings. Townhouses, winter houses, and small sweat houses were also places that served as preparatory areas from where people could prepare themselves to join the spirit world with the purpose of obtaining favors, albeit only on a temporary basis. On the opposite side of the continuum were the mountain top townhouses and long-abandoned mound sites occupied by long departed and powerful spirit beings. On occasions these beings exit the world behind the ground and rock surface to show themselves to physically active people, normally because the people actively sought out assistance from the spirit beings, although spirit beings also appeared unsolicited. Bearing in mind that the boundary between the opposite worlds and places was fractal and unpredictable, both in terms of space and time, intermediary places had to be created to allow for the overlap and occasional “bleeding” between the physical and spiritual realms. It is proposed here that petroglyph locales, physically and metaphorically placed between townhouses of physical beings and townhouses of the spirit beings were such places, with markings depicting features and beings from both realms. Bearing in mind that communicating with beings from the spirit world was a risky business, one characterized by great rewards and multiple dangers, petroglyphs marking the way to the spirit world can also be seen as cautionary signposts reminding people that only highly experienced and physically and mentally-purified initiates were qualified to pass.

Associated markings on the rocks

The question might well be asked how other markings on some of the petroglyph boulders fit into the scenario outlined above. These markings include soapstone
beings already there. The souls of the dead were not only reluctant to leave the physical world, but faced obstacles on their way to the spirit world, such as malicious medicine people, or sorcerers, trying to steal their souls (Witthoft 1983), reminiscent of Spear Finger and his wife Stone Coat stealing the souls residing in the livers of dreaming victims. In order to ensure that relatives passed safely into the world of spirit beings and stayed there, every effort was made to keep burials secret and tightly sealed. Of importance was to keep the parallel worlds of physical and spirit beings separate as far as possible, even though interaction inevitably had to occur during rituals of transition, supplication, and renewal and/or when spirits made their appearance. Periods of interaction were necessary, because it was in the spirit world that life-giving forces resided. Also, the goods and services provided by the spirits had to be reciprocated with gifts and certain actions by human supplicants. Due to the ever-present dangers involved in interaction with spirit beings, supplicants needed to be spiritually-purified by means of fasting and going-to-water.

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Associated markings on the rocks

The question might well be asked how other markings on some of the petroglyph boulders fit into the scenario outlined above. These markings include soapstone
bowl extraction scars, grinding hollows, grooves, and cupules. It is argued here that the majority of these features are evidence of ritualized behavior relating to spirit beings.

Only 21% (n=6) of the 28 petroglyph surfaces recorded showed signs of soapstone extraction, and with the exception of a few cupules, the Late Archaic Period extraction scars pre-date the Woodland to proto-historic period petroglyphs. However, viewed in terms of Indigenous perspectives concerning stone quarries in general, the soapstone extraction activity on these boulders probably had a spiritual component too. A well-known example of a quarry site with religious significance is a prominent pipestone quarry in southwestern Minnesota. According to various Indian stories in the region, the rock is solidified ancestral blood (Maroukis 2004, 147). In addition to its sacred nature as a place where Indians went to meditate, the quarries served as trail markers (Howard 1965, 17–18, 71). Albeit beyond the reach of the ethno-historic record, archaeological evidence for long-distance transport of pipestone and soapstone fragments strongly suggests that these rocks were valued in their raw and unworked form.

Among agriculturalists and hunters the act of quarrying is viewed as defleshing the earth in order to extract its blood and bones (see Maroukis 2004). This act is normally mitigated through rituals that re-establish reciprocal bonds between hunter/stone extractor and prey/quarry (see similar action taken by Cherokee hunters after killing a deer in Mooney 1900, 251, 261, 445, 446, or prior to digging red hematite in Mooney 1900, 455). Through repeated and prolonged use and physical modification, natural places with perceived supernatural powers, such as hematite or soapstone outcrops, are transformed into sacred shrines of the land (Scarry 2008, 212). However, observations of soapstone quarry boulders without petroglyphs (e.g., Soapstone Ridge south of Atlanta) and non-soapstone boulders with petroglyphs (e.g., Hickorynut with its biotite) show that there is no necessary relationship between soapstone quarrying and petroglyph production. Nonetheless, the fact that quarries and petroglyphs do occur on the same surfaces in at least some instances suggests that both activities involved interaction with the spirit world.

The smooth interior surfaces of circular-shaped hollows at five petroglyph sites in the study area show signs of grinding. Had it not been for the smoothly polished interiors of these hollows, they could have been mistaken for scalloped-shaped hollows resulting from stone quarrying. Two of the sites with grinding hollows are soapstone, while the others are meta-siltstone, granitic gneiss, and schist. All circular-shaped hollows occur on top of upward-facing surfaces, indicating that materials could be retained within. These hollows most probably resulted from grinding activities, such as reducing rock to powder or processing plant material. Other functions cannot be ruled out, such as the smaller and deeper hollows very likely being used as containers for ocher and medicinal herbs (see below).

Grooves with smoothed interiors occur at nine petroglyph sites. These are found in soapstone, slate, schist, quartzite, granitic schist, limestone, and sandstone. Many grooves occur on slanted surfaces, but also occur against vertical surfaces,
such as against the side walls of the two rock shelters in northwestern Georgia. Judging from the elongated-oval shape of many grooves, they probably resulted from grinding and sharpening stone, such as stone celts (Pillans 2013). How stone-grinding activities relate to the petroglyphs and the spirit world is not clear at this stage of research.

Cup-shaped circular hollows, commonly known as cupules, occur at 25 of the 28 petroglyph sites (the small petroglyph in the Hiwassee River fish-weir and two sites high up the ridges near the North and South Carolina state line contain no cupules). Cupules are ubiquitous throughout most of the U.S. and beyond. Their occurrence on a wide range of surfaces, including vertically-oriented ones, indicates that they were not necessarily used as “nutting-stones” or hollows for pulverizing or grinding other materials. Cupules can occur on their own or were incorporated as the heads or eyes of figures or be the central dot within a concentric ring design. Countless rock surfaces in the study area contain cupules only, without any other modifications. Such “cupule-only” rocks normally occur close to or within habitation sites, although a few are known to occur in isolated settings. Rock hardness does not seem to be a factor in choice when producing cupules, as they occur on all rock types encountered within the study area.

Judging from ethnographic evidence globally, cupules are the by-product of obtaining powder from the rock (Bednarik 2008; Callahan 2004). In a cross-cultural comparative study, Rau (1882) found that rural people living in France, Germany, and Switzerland pecked and ground holes in the stone work of churches and other sacred structures to obtain rock powder for healing and fertility purposes. Pomo and Shasta Indians from far northern California obtained powder from cupules to ensure success in giving birth, killing game, and making rain (Merriam 1955). Among all these Indians, spiritual power from the underworld was believed to reside within the rocks and imbibing the extracted rock powder allowed individuals to share in that power.

Once produced, cupules can take on an additional function, such as being used as containers for medicinal plants, some with hallucinogenic properties. Twentieth century accounts collected from Southeastern Indians show that ordinary people still encounter spirit beings at isolated locations where cupules are to be found. At the age of 6 a Muskogee Creek was directed by an invisible voice to “a big flat rock” on the edge of a river to begin his initiations into the world of shamans (Lewis and Jordan 2002, 49). In the middle of the rock was a meticulously pecked cupule and within the cupule were root medicines. After chewing some of the root, the rock made a loud cracking sound like thunder that scared the boy away. In a related story a Natchez told Swanton (2000, 497) that while out hunting he heard a voice. After a while he saw the Little Person who was doing the talking. This apparition directed him to a stone cupule filled with medicine that would help him find deer. After drinking the medicine he successfully killed a deer. In these accounts the altered state of consciousness experienced by the Natchez adult was more intense than that of the young Muskogee initiate; whereas the Muskogee boy only had a supposedly aural hallucination, the Natchez man experienced a visual hallucination of a Little Person as well.
Concluding overview

This chapter is an attempt to show how it benefits archaeologists and rock art scholars to integrate into their interpretations of encounters on the landscapes the experiences, beliefs, and actions of Indigenous descendants of people who made the petroglyphs. Such integration is justified considering that at least some petroglyphs continued to be produced in the early historic period and that many traditions concerning petroglyphs survived in the Cherokee heartland of western North Carolina. An overview of the Indigenous lifeways shows that social practices and beliefs were shared over a wide region, including areas formerly occupied by various ancestral communities of what later became known as the Creek Indians. This region encompasses the entire study area in western North Carolina and northern Georgia. People living in the study area shared beliefs in a parallel multi-layered realm inhabited by a hierarchy of spirit beings; in addition to a readily-visible surface toposcape, their landscape included topographies hidden from everyday view, below the ground surface and above the sky dome.

A shared belief was that the parallel realm of spirit beings is hidden from everyday sight, but could be entered and seen in dreams, visions, and by physically-departed/dead people. This mental separation between the physical and altered-state worlds was given material expression by the common belief that the spirit world was located below the ground, within the rock, and beyond the sky dome. The spirit world was envisioned as a mirror image of Southeastern Indian society and the surrounding terrain. It was moreover believed that powerful life-giving forces resided in the realm of spirit beings. The powerful life-giving forces of the spirit world made it a potentially dangerous place that should be avoided whenever possible. Yet, it had to be approached by experienced and ritually-purified ritual specialists during time of food and rain shortages, annual renewal, and to address the personal life crises of everyday supplicants. It can be argued that a reciprocal exchange relationship existed between physical and spirit beings; grave goods were placed in the ground with the physically-departed, while spirit beings released deer and other furs from behind the ground surface (Fig. 7.13). Not shown in Figure 7.13 are accounts of snake spirit helpers residing in townhouses submerged within certain river pools. Similar to Immortals from old mound sites assisting the living to vanquish the enemy, snakes from submerged townhouses were believed to assist warriors.

Although interaction was normally initiated by ritual practitioners, spirit beings could appear unexpectedly in the physical realm. Certain mountain tops and old mounds were believed to be the abodes of spirit beings (certain dome-shaped rocks in deep river pools were also seen as spirit townhouses). Prior to visiting the spirit beings it was imperative that people first ritually prepare in townhouses, winter houses, or small sweat lodges. This they did by prolonged seclusion, meditation, repetitive singing and dancing, fasting, smoking native tobacco, scratching their skin, and going-to-water. Basically then, townhouses and related structures were staging areas, or “launching pads,” for ritual specialists and others who wished to enter the spirit world.

To enter another realm often involved individuals changing shape and identity.
Some stories have individuals shape-shifting within ritual structures, while others only changed shape on their way to or back from the spirit town houses. In almost all the stories personal transformation involves passing through or touching water and moist substances, which includes snow and a variety of other damp surfaces. Water then can be viewed as a substance that mediates and helps breach the mental and physical divide between opposing worlds. Like water, petroglyph boulders can be seen as mediating between opposing realms. Often located near water or wet areas, petroglyphs almost certainly were produced with the aid of water and almost always become more visible when covered by a thin layer of water.

Importantly, petroglyph boulders occur along trails that lead to the towns of spirit beings, usually at locations where there is a change in landscape, be it within a mountain gap, change in slope or vegetation, or a river's edge. Changes in landscape usually, but not always, occurred at a shift from inhabited and cultivated floodplains to hilly hinterlands used mostly for hunting and collecting wild plant foods and herbs (Fig. 7.13). Mirroring human lifeways, spirit beings, such as Judaculla, were believed to have their own cultivated fields in the uplands. Petroglyphs normally
occurred on trails that went by the fields and hunting grounds of the spirit beings. Located on trails that connect physical and spiritual realms, it can be expected that petroglyph boulders contain traces of various beings moving between the realms. Animals released from the realm of spirits into the physical world left their tracks on the rocks, rendered soft by water. The fertility of the spirit world is moreover testified by the bleeding vulvas of medicine women travelling to the spirit world, leaving their imprints on the rock. Spirit beings and medicine people travelling between realms left foot prints and tracks, either human or animal, depending on their state of transformation. But stratigraphic evidence suggests that many petroglyph surfaces were initially pecked and/or incised with meandering and straight lines to map of the terrain where the overlap, or intersection, between physical and spirit worlds occurred. Connecting overland and riverine trails are depicted as well as multi-layered renditions of towns and townhouses, usually in plan form, but sometimes also in profile outline. Stylized concentric rings and cross-in-ring designs signify plan views of various portals between the realms, ranging from whirlpools through serpents to townhouses. Stick-like figures and animals provide profile views of beings that travel between the realms too, most notably members of the Thunders family. The different designs are at times fused or re-pecked, showing their interconnectedness. Cupules that occur throughout the sequence of petroglyph application were incorporated into certain designs but also resulted from activities to obtain rock powder and to serve as containers for ritual items and medicines on these spiritually-charged surfaces.

Marking the route to the abodes of potentially harmful spirit beings meant that the petroglyph boulders alerted travelers that they are about to enter highly charged terrain. Powerful spirit beings, ranging from Kana’ti’ at Black Mountain, Judaculla at Tannasee Bald, the Worm-like Snake at Cohutta Mountain, Spear Finger at Whiteside Mountain, and the Great Spirit at Brasstown Bald are known to have jealously overseen and guarded the resources in their respective domains. It is worth mentioning that evidence suggests that the nature and extent of the domains and the roles of the beings could have changed through time. Ethno-historical evidence also shows how Immortals inhabited old mounds and how these beings could come to the assistance of their descendants. Since all these spirit beings played an active role in the lives and sustenance of Indigenous communities which once inhabited the entire study area and since the petroglyph boulders played an important role mediating the relationship between physical and spiritual beings, archaeologists are ill-advised to ignore Indigenous religion, petroglyphs, and the overall landscape setting.

Had petroglyphs been an idle passing of time randomly executed on the closest available rock surface, we would have dealt with hundreds of pre-European petroglyphs scattered throughout the mountains and foothills of the Southeastern United States. Instead, we are dealing with surprisingly few places with petroglyphs, even when the possibility of natural erosion and weathering is factored in. Also, there are relatively few petroglyphs per rock surface, given the long period involved in which the imagery could have been produced. This and the limited range of subject matter support the ethnographically-informed
interpretation that petroglyph boulders were the products of a few medicine people. Interpreted properly, petroglyph surfaces in the mountains and foothills of the Southeastern United States show that petroglyphs are convenient microcosmic representations of the Indigenous macrocosm. Future detailed studies of the trails that connect physical towns and spirit towns along which petroglyphs were located can benefit from historical and GIS research. Tantalizingly, a northeast–southwest alignment of petroglyphs intersects almost perpendicularly with a northwest–southeast alignment (see site dots on Fig. 7.1). This suggestive cross-pattern could be confirmed or rejected by locating additional recorded petroglyphs. If a large-scale pattern corresponding with the four cardinal directions can be confirmed, then we are arguably dealing with an extensive cosmogram on the Southeastern landscape. Significant in this regard is that Cherokees travelled in different directions to achieve different goals. For example, in order to acquire game for food from Judaculla, Cherokee hunters (e.g., those living in the Tuckasegee Valley) traveled in a southeasterly direction (i.e., in the direction of the rising sun and life-giving powers), while medicine people (e.g., “Ground-Hog’s Mother” or the female medicine woman from Kanuga Town) travelled southwestward to encounter spirit beings and/or become part of their world (i.e., in the direction of the setting sun and life-taking powers). The cosmogram in the mountains and foothills of northern Georgia and western North Carolina indeed encompassed seven directions or states of being: north, south, east, west, up, down, and the person or petroglyph placed therein.
Transforming the Landscape
Rock Art and the Mississippian Cosmos

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