

# Arti Facts

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## *Current Rock Art Research on the Payette NF*

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In late June, the Payette National Forest Heritage Program staff, University of Idaho Taylor Ranch personnel and interns, and Carolynne Merrell of Archaeographics visited pictograph sites along Big Creek in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. One site visited, PY-115/10VY32, is a small rock shelter with twelve narrow pictograph panels. The largest panel measures 1 m x 1.8 m and the smallest 20 cm x 75 cm. The pictograph panels at this site are polychrome, with black, red, and white paintings. Motifs on the panels include crosses, dots, vertical lines, bighorn sheep, backbone ladders, and human figures. The rock face of one panel is cracking and eroding. One small part of a pictograph was found in the rubble at the base of the panel. This fragment (6 cm x 5.5 cm x 3.5 cm) was collected and sent to Archaeological Investigations Northwest, Inc. (AINW) in Portland, Oregon, for blood residue analysis. Both red and white paints were visible on the sample.

Powdered pigments and water or organic binding agents were mixed together to make the paints used for pictographs. Research and ethnographic accounts suggest that blood, eggs, animal fats, plant juice, or urine could have been used as binding agents. Scientific analysis of prehistoric binding agents has been rare. The analysis by AINW compared the protein residues found in the paints to seventeen animal species. There was no reaction to the red paint but the white paint sample tested positive to bear antiserum, leading to the conclusion that bear blood or fat was used as a binding agent in the white paint. According to John Fagan of AINW, this is the first paint sample that his company has tested; he is excited about this line of research. Funding for the blood residue analysis was provided by the Salmon River Chapter of the Idaho Archaeological Society under the provisions of a partnership agreement between them and the Payette National Forest.