How Old Are these Images?

The petroglyphs of Horseshoe Mesa represent an accumulation of elements from at least three distinct time periods: Archaic, Puebloan, and Historic.

**Archaic**
The oldest recognized elements are in the Glen Canyon Linear style, defined by Christy G. Turner, Jr., a former MNA archaeologist. This style represents the Late Archaic Period and occurred between about 2000 B.C. and A.D. 400. Four petroglyphs in this style were identified on two panels at Horseshoe Mesa. All of them show large animals, probably bighorn sheep. Some of the amorphous and geometric elements may also date to this time period.

Evidence for Archaic people at Horseshoe Mesa includes a complete Elko Corner-notched dart point (above), as well as bighorn sheep petroglyphs in the Glen Canyon Linear style. During this project, 58 elements on 19 panels at Horseshoe Mesa were identified as animals with antlers (like deer or bighorn sheep), but only three are Glen Canyon Linear style, compared in the photos above.

**Puebloan**
The Puebloan petroglyphs at Horseshoe Mesa and Middle Mesa probably all date between A.D. 1150 and 1300. This date is based on the similarity of designs in the petroglyphs to designs found on ceramic and textile artifacts from the region that have been carefully dated using other techniques. The duplication of the same design on ceramics, textiles, and rock surfaces indicates that the pattern had cultural significance to the people who used it. Petroglyph panels at Horseshoe Mesa and Middle Mesa share similar styles with rock images from Petrified Forest National Park, suggesting cultural and social relationships among the people living in the two areas.

These two elements from Horseshoe Mesa depict a complete Flagstaff Black-on-white design (left) and a Flagstaff design motif (center), which would have been rotated and flipped to create a complete design as in the first image. Compare these petroglyphs with the designs on the textile fragment shown here (which was found at Wupatki National Monument) and the ceramic vessels in the case behind you. Note that the presence of a border on the petroglyph design indicates a rug or blanket, whereas the lack of a border is typical of a design on a ceramic vessel.

**Historic**
Most of the scratched petroglyphs at Horseshoe Mesa reflect the historic occupation of the Wupatki Basin by Navajo families. Although there is nothing depicted in the scratched elements that is distinctly Navajo (such as hairstyle or costume), the images of horses and cows are clearly historic because both animals were brought to the Southwest by the Spaniards after 1540. Some of the architectural features at Horseshoe Mesa were also built by Navajo herders, such as constructed ramps leading to the mesa top with gates and low walls to contain animals, a corral, and windbreak shelters. These structures are typical of historic Navajo herding practices. All of the scratched horse and cow images face east-northeast, towards the Little Colorado River and Navajo land.

Historic Euroamerican petroglyphs at Middle Mesa mainly consist of names, initials, dates, and a few possible cattle brands. Examples of these elements are shown in the text panel to the right.

These geometric symbols at Horseshoe Mesa appear to be brands but do not match those of the various Babbitt Ranches. The Spider Web Ranch, nearest to Horseshoe Mesa, used the flagship CO brand. The Hart Cattle Company ranch, to the southeast but extending as far north as Grand Falls, used a distinctive pitchfork brand. This suggests the brand may have been used by a local Navajo family. This panel also features a partially completed horse (lower left) and scratched elements that are not visible in this photo, as well as a complex and heavily weathered Ancestral Puebloan design (upper center).