

Submitted Abstract

ID IMC22-FSAbstr- 139

First Author First Name Last Name	Alice Wright
Submitting Author First Name Last Name	Alice Wright
Correspondence	wrightap2@appstate.edu
Co-Authors >> E-Mails will be not listed	
Organisations	Appalachian State University, United States of America
Country	United States of America
Region	North America
Title	Rivers, Ranges, And Rock Art: Evidence Of Intermontane Interaction In Southern Appalachia, Ca. 1000 Bc - Ad 1500.
Keywords	Archaeology, Prehistory, Native American, Appalachia, Ritual Sites
Type	List Of Focus Session
Focus Session ID	63

Abstract

The Southern Appalachian Mountains of what is now known as western North Carolina, USA comprise a unique topographic landscape in eastern North America, featuring the highest elevations east of the Rockies and unparalleled microclimatic and microenvironmental diversity. Multiple lines of evidence indicate that the region was also culturally diverse before European contact; it was intensively occupied by ancestral Cherokee, Catawba, and other Southern Appalachian groups, and regularly visited and traversed by Indigenous peoples not local to the immediate area. To the extent that cultural diversity has been inferred from artifacts (mostly ceramics), it appears that social relationships and affinities were strongest within Southern Appalachian watersheds, and that the high ranges separating these watersheds were an impediment to social and material interaction. However, recent research on Southern Appalachian petroglyphs suggest that certain symbolic and ritual behaviors may have cross-cut topographically defined social boundaries. In this paper, I discuss newly discovered petroglyphs near the New River in extreme northwestern North Carolina, and compare them to well documented and deeply contextualized petroglyph sites in the modern Cherokee heartland of southwestern North Carolina, revealing similarities and differences in their formal characteristics. I then consider the relationships between these petroglyphs and their surrounding landscapes - particularly their locations relative to gaps, passes, confluences, raw material outcrops, and known historic trails that may have structured social interactions across the mountains. This study underscores how ritual and symbolic practices are central to far-reaching social interactions among seemingly remote mountain communities in (and beyond) Southern Appalachia, and highlights the inextricable connections between such practices and the unique topographic, geological, and ecological settings associated with mountain environments.