

*From the mid-eighteenth century until after World War II, thousands of young Basques came to the American West to tend the vast flocks of sheep that roamed the mountains and meadows of the region. Isolated in remote areas and frequently arriving and departing without ever appearing on official records, they left their mark on the western economy and the western forests. For more than twelve years, J. Mallea-Olaetxe has been documenting more than 20,000 tree carvings and studying them as valuable records of the Basque presence in the American West.*

# CARVING OUT HISTORY:

## *THE BASQUE ASPENS*

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**A**spen tree carvings or arborglyphs are ubiquitous to the American West, yet most people have never heard of them. They are a phantom by-product of shepherders—mostly Basques—whose involvement in the sheep industry started in the 1850s and lasted through the 1970s. It is strange, but true,

that something that covers so much of the western geography can be so unfamiliar. In this age of Internet and paper documents, they represent a strange way of recording history. Finding in the mountains a stately aspen with a name carved in 1900 is somehow more valuable and exciting than seeing that same name written on a piece of paper.

The carvings provide the closest thing to a compressed autobiography of shepherders, who are one of the most forgotten social groups in American history. But during the development of the West, shepherding was a major and critical industry.<sup>1</sup> Many ranchers ran both cattle and sheep and they provided meat for the early mining camps throughout the West. People ate a lot more mutton than we perceive they did. Fred Fulstone, member of a pioneer Nevada ranching family, is convinced that the early miners could not have endured the harsh working conditions in

the mines without the high quality protein of mutton.<sup>2</sup>

The Basques are the “Indians” of Europe, the original Europeans that we know of, and the likely descendants of the Paleolithic peoples who lived in the Pyrenees.<sup>3</sup> We can say this for the following two reasons: 1) the Basques speak a language that is unrelated to any other on earth,<sup>4</sup> and 2) their blood type shows the highest incidence of Rh-negative and lowest B-type in Europe.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, they stand out as a unique group, and recent studies on human genes confirm that.<sup>6</sup> After thousands of years, the Basques are still in their original homeland in the Pyrenees Mountains, straddling the modern nations of France and Spain, and are clinging fast to their own identity.<sup>7</sup> Today, fewer than three million people live in the Basque country and about half a million are *Euskaldunak* (speakers of *Euskara*, the Basque language), which is how the Basques define and call themselves.

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**BY JOXE MALLEA-OLAETXE**



P E 1896 JULY 10. This arborglyph is very old for an aspen carving. After it was carved the tree has been growing for over a century, which explains the great distortion of the “P” (it looks as if there is a “B” in front of it, but that is an illusion caused by the large vertical gap in the bark). The figures are difficult to identify. The one on top appears to be a star (the most common symbol carved by sheepherders). Below the date, 1896, a sketchy human figure can be discerned. P. E. may stand for Pierre Erramouspe, who was known to be sheepherding in this area. P. E. carved other trees as well, the last one in 1909. In 1911, Erramouspe and three others—two Basques, one Englishman—were killed by Indians, during the episode known in Nevada history as “The Last Indian Massacre.” (Humboldt County, Nevada).

## THE BASQUES IN THE AMERICAS

There was an influx of Basque emigrants to the United States in the wake of California’s discovery of gold in 1848, but their presence in the Southwest dates from much earlier. During the 1492–1848 period the Basques emigrated throughout the American continent from Argentina to California. Though small in numbers they wielded disproportionate economic and political clout. One reason for this was that since the early sixteenth century, they all claimed noble status. In the eighteenth century Basque governors, officials, Jesuits, friars, and notable explorers

could be found in Baja and Alta California and in the Southwest.<sup>8</sup> Because the Basques did not have an officially independent country of their own (and the inherent entrapments such as national literature, universities, schools of thought, etc., as the French, the English, and the Spaniards), their distinctiveness has been often diluted and their history assimilated under the umbrella of Spanish and French narratives.

## THE TREE-CARVING ENVIRONMENT

Soon after 1848 the Basques in the American West found their niche in sheepherding, which required them to spend many months isolated on the range. Arborglyphs were produced during the summer months—normally from late June to September/October—when the sheepherders lived alone in the remote high country. Each herder was charged with the care of a herd (usually 1500 ewes plus their lambs), and on a daily basis his only company were the donkey—or horse—and the dogs. Occasionally, the closest herder on the same mountain range might ride in or walk for a visit. The camp tender visited the herder from once a week to ten days and brought the provisions, the all-important mail from home, and news from the “other” world.

Sheepherders were ambivalent about summertime. On the one hand, the job itself was fairly easy. With the exception of drought years, pasture in the high country was plentiful and the sheep grazed until 10 A.M. and after 5 P.M. They laid down in the shade the rest of the day. The herder could do the same, unless predators were present. He selected a campsite in the cool aspen forest, preferably near a creek, and most days he could daydream, take a long siesta, do some cooking or laundry, or go fishing to spice up his diet of beans, potatoes, bread, mutton, and wine.

In this life in Eden there was an important detail missing: Adam had no Eve; he was all alone and the isolation could be crushing. Therefore, the happy coincidence of three components—leisure time, loneliness, and trees—made the arborglyphic phenomenon possible.

The herders used knives to carve, though the paper-thin soft, white bark of the aspen could be carved or scratched easily with just about any sharp object, even a thumbnail. The herders made a thin incision or cut, which could hardly be seen, and that was all the human hand contributed. The rest was up to the tree itself. The outline of the carving begins to show a few years later after the tree scars over. If the incision is too deep the scar will be thick and hard to read later on, because as the tree grows, the letters will merge together. If the carver had a steady hand, the scar is likely to remain clear for a century. It is the darkness of the scar against the whiteness of the bark that many people find appealing.

No matter how beautiful a carving might be, it always is a one-try art, like life itself. No re-doing and no correcting mistakes are possible, and in the end you know that the tree will wither, revert to the earth, and the carving will self-destruct.

## A VAST AND SECRET LIVING-FOREST MUSEUM

Nobody knows even remotely how many arborglyphs the sheepherders carved, and we shall never know. The average lifespan of an aspen tree is considerably less than one hundred years, so we have already lost the great majority of the carvings. We do know



Researcher recording a grove. *The tree closest to the camera contains a highly unusual carving: “Arima baduca nic ez ikusia dut 15 aout 1925 zer astoa den Jakes Marchanta arima saldut” (If he has a soul, I have not seen it, August 15, 1925, what a jackass Jakes Marchanta is! I sold my soul). The only problem here is that it makes more sense if it said “he sold his soul.” The photograph illustrates the physical environment in the high country, where the shepherd set up his summer camp. (Humboldt County, Nevada).*

that hundreds of thousands of aspens were carved, and over the decades the Basques created nothing less than a “museum” that stretches from Washington to Texas and from California to North Dakota.<sup>9</sup> In the American West you can still hike up a canyon and come face-to-face with historical documents growing on trees, which stand as living witnesses to the herder who passed through in 1935, 1913, or in 1901, and they might even tell us what he was thinking at the moment. More significantly, in 95 percent of the cases you cannot find that information anywhere else, not on Ellis Island and not at any city hall. In fact, the names of most shepherders are not in the censuses.

The shepherders rarely, if ever, mention in conversation the existence of these forests of inscriptions, as if the carvings did not mean anything or they simply forgot about them. Actually, the reason for such cautious behavior was that a number of the messages and the figures are of a very private nature, and Basques are tight-lipped about these things. One shepherd interviewed for general information on arborglyphs on a certain mountain range of Nevada was slow to offer any information. He said that the grove would be extremely difficult to find, and that I would need a horse. When asked if he carved any trees himself, he answered “Lots, but don’t look at them.”

## A LOST OPPORTUNITY

What made a phenomenon that geographically extends so far and wide to be so unknown? Primarily the immensity of the land. Most of the arborglyphs are now located on public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Shepherders did not share their landscape with the rest of the population. Distance kept the arborglyphs remote and that was just fine, because the shepherders carved trees for the exclusive consumption of fellow herders.

Had the Basques been cowboys, the fate of the carvings might have been quite different, for cowboy lore captured the imagination of popular culture. The Basques were shepherders and did not attract nearly as much attention as the cowboys did. However, what tipped the balance against the arborglyphs was the minority status of the Basques and the inaccurate perception that they were clannish or refused to learn English.

The often-strained relationship between the Basques and forest rangers and land managers must be regarded as a factor for the loss of the arborglyphs. Some of the charges against the shepherders—Basques and others—were true no doubt, as millions of sheep invaded public lands, causing erosion and overgrazing,

but others were more imaginary. Until the federal land managers discovered the benefits of fire for themselves, the Basques were often accused of setting fires deliberately.<sup>10</sup> John Muir, a former shepherd turned environmental crusader, certainly contributed to the anti-herder sentiment in literature when he called sheep “hoofed locusts.”<sup>11</sup> Because of the anti-herder sentiment and the strained relationship between the shepherders and the early park rangers<sup>12</sup> the arborglyphs went unrecorded until the 1970s and 1980s, and by then the heydays of aspen carving, Basque immigration, and sheepherding were over. Had arborglyph research started in the 1930s we would have a rich and a fairly complete roster of Basque immigration (95 percent of the herders carved), and a better understanding of the sheep industry in the American West.<sup>13</sup>

### WHAT WE LEARN FROM THE CARVINGS

About 80 percent of the recorded arborglyphs include the name and surname (and very often the nickname) of the carver as well as the date, because they documented each passing year meticulously. These individuals did not pick a historian from among them to interpret their life experiences for them. Instead, each became



PHOTOGRAPH BY J. MALLEA-OLAETXE

Daniel Peyron. *The style of the thousands of names carved by shepherders is as individualistic as each carver. In this example Daniel Peyron deviated considerably from the more conventional patterns. First he incised huge block letters on this large aspen and wrote the name in the vertical position beginning at the bottom (most others begin at the top and are carved horizontally), and then he used a spent bullet shell to embellish the letters. (Douglas County, Nevada).*



PHOTOGRAPH BY J. MALLEA-OLAETXE

Carrantza. Herder petting his dog. *This was carved in 1932 by the great artist Etienne Maizkorena, who favored animal figures, but also carved self-portraits, couples, and symbols. The dog was the sheepherder's confidant and right-hand worker, as this figure suggests. The square above the head of the herder, sporting a big hat, is a puzzle, and it turns out that “Carrantza” is not the name of the herder's farmstead, as initially believed. This arborglyph—in fact, the whole grove—has deteriorated rapidly in the last ten years. (Lake Tahoe, Nevada).*

a historian and offered their own version of life as a shepherd.

This behavior was a reflection of Basque society, which was predominantly classless. The majority of the herders in the United States came from rural areas where the economy was the only variable socially. However, to a Basque, democracy is not as important as individuality and personal pride. The thousands of names and surnames are the ultimate answer to the question, “to be or not to be” (*bok ezpok* in Basque). As primitive as shepherd life was, some of them confessed to feeling as somebody important, lords of immense mountain ranges and plains, since there was no one else near to dispute their claim or will.

Along with the last name the herder sometimes gave his birthplace and the region, which allow us to track immigration patterns. Most shepherders were young single men who overnight had to learn to cook, wash clothes, and do dozens of other unfamiliar chores. We may think that the culture shock was hard on them, but in reality they suffered most from emotional starvation. They did not know America, therefore, they could not miss it. Their only recourse was to replicate home, including their spirit of competitiveness, which is reflected in the many hurrahs to their hometowns, regions, and countries.



**Equesto Lea Jodido Como Yo Se Vea 1908** A good example of striking black-on-white-bark inscription, still very clear after almost a century. The message in Spanish is typically misspelled; it should be, “El que esto lea jodido como yo se vea.” (Whoever reads this may be as [messed] up as I am). It is not what it appears to be, a message by a grouchy and mean old herder. Those who read it took it humorously and laughed about it, no doubt. In standard fashion it combines the cry of the solitary herder with humor, all wrapped up in a rhyming verse. (Elko County, Nevada).

After personal information, naturally, the most common topic carved is sheepherding. The unpleasant aspects, such as problems with coyotes, the sheepowner, or the camp tender are freely discussed. The latter was often accused of being lazy and full of excuses. Envy may have played some role in the criticism; because the camp tender had mobility, he could go to town, and the sheepherder couldn't. One aspen carving equates the camp tender's life to a “lazy donkey with a sombrero.”

The condition of the range was the most pressing matter for the welfare of the herd and the herder. The West was a shock for the Basques, who had hailed from a rainy country with green fields and valleys. At first, they could not believe that sheep could thrive in such a barren environment, but eventually they found out that the dry grasses in Nevada were more nutritious than the green blades in the Basque Country.

However, during drought years, then the sheep let the herder know their displeasure by running away to forbidden greener

pastures or by simply acting restive and unruly. “Put a sierra” (“damn sierra”) is a classic statement on many groves. Sometimes, their frustration would turn them against the sheep. “Sheep, you are killing me,” one carved, but this was a no-no. It showed a weakness on the herder's part, who should never forget that the welfare of the sheep was paramount.

There is considerable and very localized information on the condition of the range, pasture, rainfall, heat, wind, and especially cold weather and snow storms. Tree carvings can be used as markers on the western map to determine the presence and impact of sheep on the range. They are like toy soldiers left on the western landscape, while the provided dates can be used to retrace their movements as well.

## HURTING AND HUMORING

The third largest topic of the arborglyphs is that of loneliness, though the issue is not so simple. People who are not acquainted with Basque disposition will definitely find strange the combination of painful cries from loneliness and humor carved side by side by the same herder and replicated by many others.

With sheepherding came a solitary life, away from human contact, and many herders were not ready for it. Some herders who said they were misled about life in the United States, which had been painted to them in glowing terms. One tree that stands near Reno, Nevada, puts it this way, “If [sheepherder] life is what these damn oldtimers told me it was, my balls are carnations.”

But there was an unspoken code about complaining; you could not complain too much, lest you were labeled a complainer or worse, a weakling. In the last message quoted, the herder is complaining all right, but the wording doesn't make him appear as a weakling—after all, what's more manly than one's genitals!

Loneliness and melancholy were the herder's number one enemies. Talking to the dogs was acceptable, but when a herder started to talk to himself aloud it was a sign for alarm. No man wanted to remain too long in the mountains and risk becoming “sagebrushed,” (gone crazy or weird), though a number of them did. One herder carved the neat figure of an animal with four legs, a tail like a coyote's, and a human head.

J.L., a sheepherder, recounted that when he arrived in America the camp tender took him to this godforsaken mountain in the wilds of northeastern Nevada and told him, “This is going to be your home for a while.” After the camp tender left he felt so terribly alone that he instinctively walked over an aspen and carved, “Hotel Derrepente” (“Hotel Suddenly”). It was a classic example of ironic Basque humor that consisted of stating the opposite of what reality was: a desolate place, that for this sheepherder, suddenly, turned into home (which, for contrast, he called “hotel,” a comfortable place that the rich can afford). The other herders of the outfit found the inscription so funny that from then on that camp was called Hotel Suddenly.

There are dozens and dozens carved examples of this duality of emotional pain (from loneliness) and humor. Some are truly discordant statements, such as the following by a fellow named Candido, “[I am] screwed up, but happy.” Another wrote that life in America was the most miserable but “there are no dollars without [it].” Another, who was feeling the load, carved a Basque message that was as defiant as it was uplifting, “Hurrah for the sheepherders and those who have the guts to stay here.”

To lift their spirits herders could think of their families back home and feel better. The carved figure of an imposing, three-story Basque farmhouse—of which there are many—must be understood in this vein. The chimneys are prominently displayed with smoke billowing upwards and serve as a symbol of family life around the warm, faraway hearth.

## EROTIC FANTASIES

Mention tree carvings in some circles and people will have a knee-jerk reaction and think of pornography and sexual art. Yet, erotic material is only the fourth largest topic of the arborglyphs. For many young and healthy Basque males, loneliness easily translated into erotic expression, and they proceeded to carve figures of women, many stark naked with high heels, often without arms—as to not obscure the curves. Many of these women shown in compromising positions depicted the prostitutes that the herders visited in town.

The herders were often very young, inexperienced, and they could not speak English. Some carvers provided lavished details of that first rendezvous, which remained burned in their memory. A few actually confessed to losing their virginity. When the encounter with the prostitute was satisfactory, the herder, after returning to the range, would proceed to carve an image of her or a statement about the experience. A large majority of the comments were favorable, but if the experience had been soured by something—like overcharging for the services—the tone of the carving was understandably very different.

All in all, it was a convenient reciprocity. Some enterprising prostitutes drove wagons to the high country and parked them for the summer in areas where the herders were particularly numerous. Several of these “Whorehouse Meadows” are known in the West.

## NOT EXACTLY E-MAIL

The herders used aspens as their medium of communication, though it was not a very speedy one—in the best cases it took years for a “conversation” to be completed. Actual questions and



A running female. Notice what happens to the original single line incised by the carver. It spreads as the tree grows, making it look like a double line. The lady is running from the man carved on the back side of the aspen. It is not dated, but it is probably between 80 and 90 years old. (Alpine County, California).

answers were carved on aspens. For example, someone stated, “Wine and women both are good,” which, years later another answered, “Yes, but they are hard on your pocket.” By then the first herder may have retired or returned home to Europe.

When new co-workers arrived in the groves they often added their own comments to many of these earlier carvings, especially the humorous ones. The messages tend to be very laconic. They chose words carefully in order to deliver the punch with just a few words. The whole idea behind the exercise was entertainment, a powerful weapon to fight isolation and to remain sane.

The arborglyphs cover a wide range of other subjects and sometimes include Latin words and Roman numerals. Some tried to communicate local situations such as when a coyote killed a lamb. That was an emergency situation, the top news of the day. When a bear or a cougar killed ten or twenty sheep, now, that was “world war.” Political statements are abundant and indicate that the herders followed major world events, albeit in delayed form. Most references are pro-Basque and anti-Spanish, particularly against the dictator Franco. Numerous comments and diatribes on the 1936–39 Spanish Civil War in the Central California mountains appear to be made by one or two individuals. Northern Basques carved many “*Biba Frantzia*” (“Vive La France”) slogans with various spellings, especially during World War II.

The messages that refer to the United States are overwhelmingly favorable, but some Mexican herders made some harsh statements about the “Gringos.” One Basque didn’t agree with President Nixon’s policy of overture toward China, and several times he carved that Mao had fooled him (the actual word used is more graphic). There are hails to Fidel Castro, hurrahs to the Russian sputniks, and pedestrian details recorded, such as the reaction of one herder who watched television for the first time.

There are many carvings in English. Lacking formal knowledge of the language, the herders tried to spell English terms phonetically. The first words that they learned were expletives such as, *fok*, *chit*, *buse*, *sanabich*, etc. Usually within three or four years herders started spelling their names in the American form, again phonetically, thus, *Pit* or *Pet* (for Pete) or giving their profession as that of *siper* (for shepherd). Sheep was spelled *chips*, *seeps*, or similar, and good-bye as *gudbay* or *goodbay*. Place names, too, are frequently misspelled—*Troki* (for Truckee), *Kacepik* (for Castle Peak), *Reino* (for Reno), and *krik* (for creek), but California is always correct.

## REFLECTIONS

To put the arborglyphs in their proper historical perspective, one might compare the sheepherders to other groups in western United States like Indians, trappers, early explorers, scouts, and prospectors. These groups spent considerable time alone in the wilderness and could have recorded their names and movements on trees or rocks, like the Basques did, but in fact few did. Also, there were other groups of sheepherders, such as the Scots, the Irish, and the Chinese, but they, too, carved much less.

One reason may be that the Basque is an oral society; people are the number one topic of conversation. Every individual must be accounted for, therefore, in the sheep ranges of the American West nearly everyone’s name is recorded. So, it was the type of history that an oral society might “write,” that is, democratic,

which soon became a tradition, and no Basque will tamper with tradition. Conformity and uniformity are important elements in Basque culture as expressed in their saying, “you don’t want to be any less than the others.”

On the other hand, the arborglyphs signified a drastic breakage of a long-standing practice. Traditionally, the Basque peasants and farmers, because of the oral nature of their society, had written little or nothing. But in the American West these nearly illiterate people were somehow persuaded to change and started to write, not with pen and paper but with knives on trees. They certainly wrote more than they would have had they not emigrated.

While some has been written about the quarrels between the cowboys and sheepherders, not one of 20,000 carvings mentioned anything about disputes with cowboys. There are plenty diatribes against fellow herders and even their own bosses, but nothing about cowboys. On the contrary, several sheepherders recalled the times when hungry cowboys riding the range would pay them a visit, hoping to find a few leftover beans at the bottom of the Dutch oven, a slab of bread, and a swig from the wine jug. The cowboys were seldom disappointed. Literature eagerly embellished the slightest disagreement between sheepowners and cattlemen and ignored the friendships forged in this manner between two lonely workers who could hardly communicate with each other.

The fate of the arborglyphs is reminiscent of the fate that the Basques have suffered at the hands of historians: they either ignored them or they deprived them of their identity. They say that one has to die in order to become famous and recognized and the same seems to be true about arborglyphs. Only now that most of them have disappeared have we become concerned about their recording. But the best we can do now is to hope that the guardians of the arborglyphs, the federal agencies, will implement a strategy for recording the last of the carved aspens that remain standing. □

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*Joxe Mallea-Olaetxe is an instructor in Basque history at the University of Nevada, Reno. He also teaches Latin American history at Truckee Meadows Community College.*

## NOTES

1. Wool and meat were two fundamental commodities that the sheep industry produced. In 1885 there were 50 to 60 million sheep in the United States (Government statistics vary considerably), versus 29–30 million cattle. In 1900 the numbers had dipped to 41 million sheep, versus 27 million cattle; see *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1908* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909), 144. Sheep numbers fluctuated wildly in the West, specially in California, which in 1880 had 5,727,349 head but in 1900 only 1,724,968. During the same period the ovine numbers in the western states increased into the millions. Montana, for example, went from 279,277 sheep in 1880 to 4,215,214 in 1900; see *Census Reports. Volume V. Twelve Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900: Agriculture. Part I: Farms, Live Stock, and Animal Products*, William R. Merriam, Director (Washington: United States Census Office, 1902), 708. But these national figures are only estimates at best. According to a lifelong sheepman, the sheep owners reported just 60 percent of the total number of sheep they owned, and, he said, everyone followed that practice. (Conversation with J. G. taped by author, Elko, Nevada, 1990).
2. Interview with the author, June 1996. As an aside, the first item featured in the menu of upscale What Cheer Restaurant in nineteenth-century San Francisco was mutton. Joseph R. Conlin, *Bacon, Beans, and Galantines: Food and Foodways on the Western Mining Frontier* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986), 141.
3. Thomas J. Abercrombie, “The Basques: Europe’s First Family,” *National Geographic* 188, no. 5 (November 1995): 74–97.
4. James M. Anderson, *Ancient Languages of the Hispanic Peninsula* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), 103, 109.
5. *Etre Basque*, Sous la direction de Jean Haritschelhar (Toulouse: Editions Privat, 1983), 100–103.
6. See L. Luca Cavalli-Sforza, Paolo Menozzi, and Alberto Piazza, *The History and Geography of Human Genes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 276, 300.
7. Ten thousand years ago the homeland of Basque-speaking tribes was no doubt much larger, but curiously, even today’s Basque Country, a mere 20,742 sq. kms., is located almost dead center of the great Paleolithic cave-painting region of southern France and northern Spain. Experts have labeled it as Franco-Cantabrian Paleolithic art, even though we know that the historic Franks had nothing to do with the paintings (see Annette Laming, *Lascaux: Paintings and Engravings* (New York: Penguin Books, 1959, 19, 21). As for the Cantabrians, long ago they may have spoken Basque, but not any more. Today, only the Basques can claim a virtually unbroken link to prehistory.
8. Since the 1560s, all of northern Mexico, including parts of present-day United States, was called Nueva Vizcaya or New Basqueland; see J. Lloyd Mecham, *Francisco de Ibarra and Nueva Vizcaya* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1927). Many prominent people were Basque or had Basque ancestry, for example, Juan Oñate, colonizer of New Mexico; four governors of California; explorers like Sebastian Vizcaino (which means Basque), and J. B. Anza, who was instrumental in the settlement of San Francisco in 1776. For an overview of these questions, see William A. Douglass and Jon Bilbao, *Amerikanuak: Basques in the New World*, (Reno: University of Nevada, 1975). Finally, the very name Arizona appears to be Basque rather than Pima Indian or Spanish (from *aritz*=oak tree[s], *ona*=good). See, Donald T. Garate, “Who named Arizona? The Basque Connection,” *Journal of Arizona History* 1999 40(1): 53–82. This makes sense, for the oak is a symbolic tree among the Basques, and according to Garate the original “Arissona/Arissonac” (*onak*, plural) was part of a Basque-owned ranch. Incidentally, in the same general area there is another toponym that seems to bolster the theory in question—the town of Arizpe in northern Mexico, which is clearly Basque (*aritz*=oak tree[s], *pe*=below of).
9. Aspens cover just a small part of the western landscape, because they require a considerable supply of water and only grow near creeks and wet meadow areas.
10. Wm. S. Brown and S. B. Show, *California Rural Land Use and Management: A History of the Use and Occupancy of Rural Lands in California*, (United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, California Region, 1944), 155.
11. Barney Nelson, “The Flock: An Ecocritical Look at Mary Austin’s Sheep and John Muir’s Hoofed Locusts,” in *Exploring Lost Boundaries: Critical Essays on Mary Austin*, edited by Melody Graulich and Elizabeth Klimasmith (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1999), 221–242.
12. See Mary Austin, *The Flock* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1906), Chapter XI.
13. I began researching aspen carvings in 1989, which resulted in the publication of *Speaking Through the Aspens: Basque Tree Carvings in California and Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000). Recently, Forest Service archaeologists and historians are using programs such as Passport in Time to attract volunteers to search the forest for carvings. In past projects we were able to record over 1000 carvings in a few days.