The Richness of the Archaeological heritage of the Galisteo Basin means that many sites that would be considered impressive monuments elsewhere remain overlooked next to the dramatic remains of Pueblo San Marcos or the Creston Dike. Petroglyph Hill is a rarely noticed eminence in the western basin known for decades to only a few rock art experts. For much of that time, the site was in the middle of a private ranch, making even brief visits difficult to arrange.

Petroglyph Hill also provides a model for the type of creative partnership between land managers, archaeologists, and the public that will be needed in the coming decades. The site, and more than 1,200 acres of surrounding countryside, was purchased by Santa Fe County in 2000 as part of the open-space program that also obtained the Cerrillos Hills Park. Such forward-thinking acquisitions came in the context of spreading residential development in the region and had broad public support.

After the lands had been transferred, however, managers faced a second challenge—overseeing their new domain. It is unusual for local governments to maintain archaeological parks, particularly at this scale, and the county has only a handful of staff members to tackle the myriad responsibilities required. Their job was made more complicated by the fact that the archaeological resources of these new areas were largely unknown. In the case of the Cerrillos Hills, as Leslie Cohen points out (see page 13), an active neighborhood coalition lobbied for funding for archaeological documentation of the mining district, built trails and shelters, and continues to serve as an advocate for the entire project.

Petroglyph Hill presented a different problem. The petroglyphs themselves represented a significant—albeit undocumented—resource, but information about the surrounding countryside was nonexistent. In rural surroundings halfway between San Marcos and Galisteo, the property had attracted less public attention but was centrally located in the expanding network of county open spaces. Doing the right thing at Petroglyph Hill was going to be a challenging proposition.

It happened that the Tano Origins Project team at Burnt Corn Pueblo was also becoming interested in Petroglyph Hill (see page 6). The summit dominates the eastern horizon from the site and is only a few kilometers away. Our small-scale surveys had documented numerous sites associated with the Burnt Corn Pueblo community, and we were intrigued by what such reconnaissance at a larger scale might reveal. The fact that there have been almost no systematic surveys of Galisteo landscapes away from the later Ancestral Pueblo villages was an additional incentive. When we found out about the Petroglyph Hill purchase, we immediately began wondering whether we could arrange to conduct work there.

Several conversations with Paul Olafson, the director of Santa Fe County’s Open Space Program, identified mutual interests and challenges, and a plan of action gradually took shape. In exchange for logistical and Geographic Information System (GIS) support, we agreed to conduct...
an intensive archaeological survey of the Petroglyph Hill tract and provide that survey information to the county and the group that had been selected to prepare a management plan for the property. The team, as a part of the Tano Origins Project under the direction of Genevieve Head, would consist of students and volunteers, providing educational outreach in addition to collecting scientific data. Ultimately this evidence would be integrated with what we were collecting on adjacent jurisdictions, providing both a large-scale look at a unique cultural landscape and a concept for an integrated archaeological effort.

Almost everything we learned at Petroglyph Hill over the next two years was a surprise. While Marit Munson worked on the site itself, making a detailed record of the petroglyphs (see page 10), our emphasis was on the surrounding ridges and valleys. Ultimately more than 185 sites were found, dating from the Archaic period through the twentieth century, a remarkable record of human activity in what had seemed an “open” landscape. The countryside had been heavily used during the era of Burnt Corn Pueblo, with one outlying hamlet perhaps representing the nearest neighbors of the larger community. But people were present long after Burnt Corn Pueblo was destroyed, leaving enigmatic scatters of glazeware pottery behind. The overlap between earlier and later Ancestral Pueblo sites is limited, leaving us to wonder whether the way that the land was used had changed over time. One of the final sites recorded by the team may be a farmstead from the early Colonial period, providing a rare look at life in the countryside during that traumatic era.

Petroglyphs are actually quite rare in the study area, making the concentration on Petroglyph Hill all the more remarkable. There is some supporting evidence suggesting the sanctity of this place. Viewed from the modern road, the hill itself seems unremarkable, but we soon realized that it could be seen from throughout the Galisteo, visible on the horizon from as far away as Pueblo San Cristóbal on the far side of the basin. We are only beginning to grasp the significance of these associations, although further GIS analysis of the information collected from Petroglyph Hill will clarify matters.

With the completion of the survey, attention will shift to the team preparing the management plan. Access presents a particularly thorny issue. Besides petroglyphs, few of the sites we recorded would be obvious to passersby, raising the possibility of a network of trails that would allow hikers to enjoy the wooded hills and broad vistas. Yet while these sites are obscure, they are also vulnerable, and the repeated removal of just a few potsherds as souvenirs could obliterate them entirely.

As the survey progressed, we pondered the significance of such landscapes, largely unrecognized by the public. As knowledge spreads about the fragile nature of environmental resources, such as stream banks beaten down by cattle or cryptogamic soils (i.e., mosses, lichens, fungi, or algae) destroyed by idle footsteps, is there room for public awareness of cultural landscapes incorporating far more than large sites and obvious features? Or, since such a broad definition of critical resources would undoubtedly generate further restrictions, would this step prevent people from experiencing such landscapes firsthand and thus understanding their value? And what does this all imply for further development in the Galisteo Basin, where such landscapes are undoubtedly the rule?

As this process continues, all of us—county managers, university professors, private consultants, local landowners—will grapple with these issues. What is clear now, however, is that such partnerships are not only inevitable but desirable. Distinctions between research, policy, and management now seem quaint, relics of an era when it was possible to remain disengaged. We hope that one of the legacies of Petroglyph Hill will be the value of partnership.
I took my favorite photograph from Petroglyph Hill early one morning shortly after I began conducting fieldwork there last June. From the petroglyph of a hand in the foreground to the glorious view to the distant mountains, it encompasses the human past and the natural landscape. And, unwittingly, it also includes the human present, in the form of my shadow in the lower right-hand corner. The same elements are what drew me to work in the Galisteo Basin. As a researcher interested in rock art, I am fascinated by the region’s petroglyphs and their place in the ancient Pueblo landscape. As a member of the archaeological community, I am concerned about the sites’ present condition.

I recorded Petroglyph Hill in 2004, with the help of archaeologists and trained volunteers. The hill is actually two smaller hills, connected by a low saddle; the petroglyphs spread across the small south-facing cliffs and the exposed bedrock on the peaks. Over the span of a month, we photographed, drew, measured, and mapped more than 1,860 petroglyphs—an amount that proved to be almost three times more than I had initially anticipated.

My main research goal was to collect information that would help date the rock art, using clues such as variation in the color of the rock surface (patination), and superpositioning (overlap of multiple images). By combining this evidence with the subject matter and style of the petroglyphs, we were able to identify petroglyphs ranging from many different time periods—from the heavily patinated geometric shapes of the Archaic period to a freshly pecked windmill from the twenty-first century. The Coalition period is well represented by pictures of deer, deer tracks, and hunters, while Classic period petroglyphs include Classic Rio Grande-style images of macaws and horned serpents. Despite some similarities to Classic Rio Grande rock art sites, Petroglyph Hill lacks the large-scale warriors, shield bearers, and masked figures that are so prominent at other Galisteo rock art sites. In addition to these prehistoric images, nearly 40 percent of the rock art on the hill dates to the Historic period; signatures and dates show that men from nearby ranches and villages often visited the site in the 1920s and 1930s.

My second research goal was to document the condition of the site. Petroglyph Hill has a long history of use and, unfortunately, abuse. During our time on the hill, we found only a handful of artifacts—a half-dozen black-on-white sherds from the Coalition period and a few dozen glazeware sherds from the early Classic period, along with some projectile points and flaked stone flakes. The dates of these artifacts fit well with the dates we see for the rock art itself. However, these small and hard-to-see artifacts are all that remain because previous visitors have taken all of the larger ones. The amount of vandalism at the site has increased since the 1960s, and indeed, in recent years, thieves have removed entire rock art panels from the site, and in so doing have broken adjacent panels. Even well-meaning visitors have unintentionally impacted the rock art by walking or scrambling over petroglyphs and by causing erosion on the southern face of the hills.

The damage that I saw during last summer’s fieldwork disturbs me greatly. It should serves as a call to action for an engaged archaeology that unites research interests with the practicalities of site monitoring and protection. I am hopeful that the archaeology being carried out in the Galisteo Basin will be a positive model for combining an interest in the past with the concerns and challenges of the present.