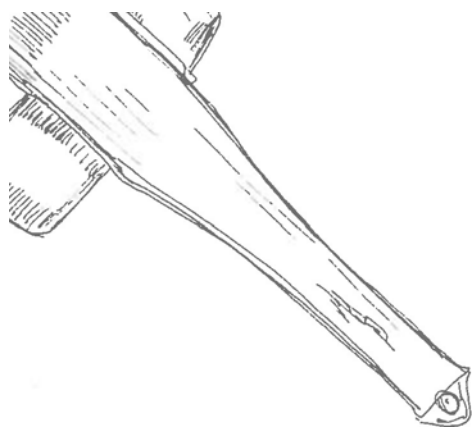


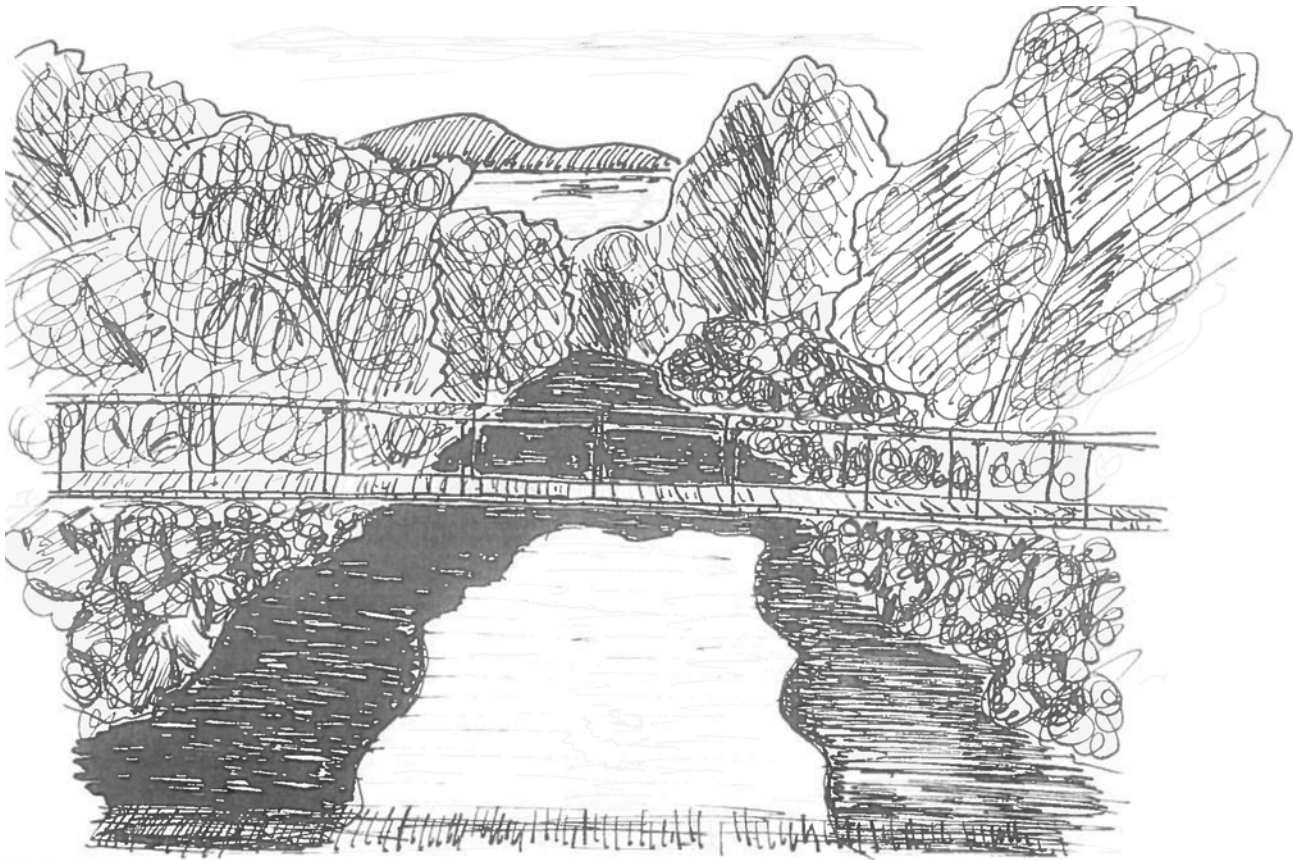
County side of the river along that stretch that serves as a border between Dickson and Cheatham Counties. These petroglyphs are painted on the perpendicular side of the cliff and it is generally agreed by their looks and color that they represent the sun and the moon, and that these representations some 200 feet above the river and visible for several miles were somehow used in religious ceremonies. The "sun" is estimated to be about five feet across and the distance that the symbols lie below the overhang of the cliff makes it difficult to imagine how the primitive artist reached this place in order to paint these images.

That these ancient people on the Harpeth should worship the sun, moon, and other celestial bodies is not strange. As a matter of fact, many American Indian peoples worshipped the sun. The Toltecs, forerunners of the Aztecs in the Valley of Mexico, at Teotihuacan had giant pyramids constructed for the worship of these heavenly deities. The Temple of the Sun there rose 216 feet high and covered 10 acres of ground. Its sister Temple of the Moon was somewhat smaller. The Aztecs themselves were also avid sun-worshippers. Their sun-god demanded blood, and it was this belief that caused the Aztecs to take prisoners of so many of the enemy, in order to sacrifice them to the Sun. At specified times, the sacred procession would climb the stairway of the great pyramid and when all was ready would await the grand moment. Then, just as the morning sun peeked over the eastern horizon, the high priest would slash open the body of the victim and go into the cavity with his hand, pulling the still throbbing heart completely out of the body. Untold thousands died a similar death in order to appease the voracious appetite of the sun god.

Closer at home the Natchez Indians of Mississippi were also sun worshippers. Their society was broken down into castes, the highest of which, the nobles, were actually called "Suns". The principal chief himself was called the Great Sun. He was thought to be the younger brother of the Sun, and every morning would find him on the top of a large mound welcoming his older brother upon his arrival in the eastern sky and directing his journey across the skies by a wave of the arm from east to west.

What type of religious ceremonies took place in ancient times on the Harpeth River, we probably will never know. It is doubtful that any future archaeological evidence will ever be produced to fill in the gaps in our knowledge concerning this important facet of these people's lives. Possibly long processions of religious folk filed out of the stockade at Mound Bottom and followed the river the few miles down to Corlew Bend opposite Paint Rock Bluff. There they might have been met by other peoples from up and down the river, possibly from such places as



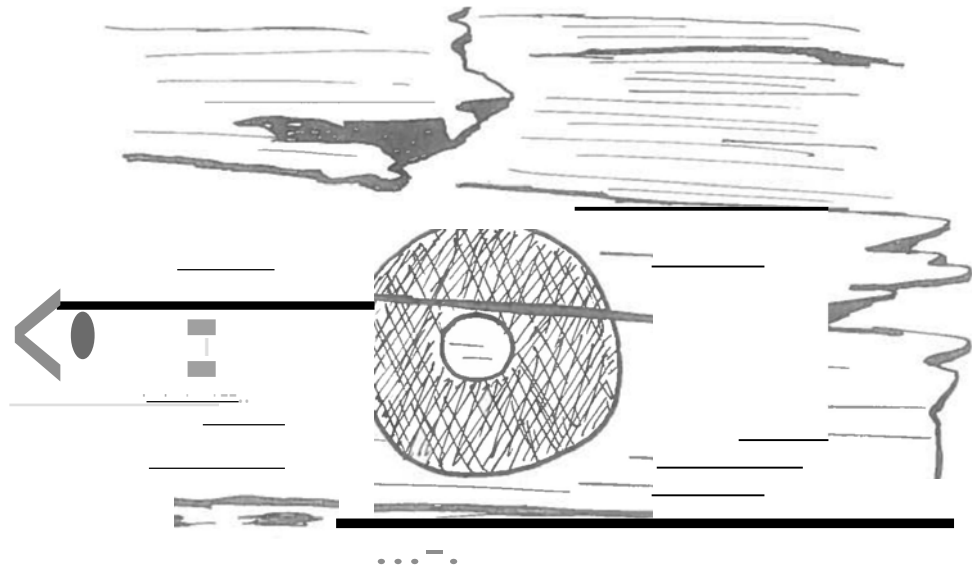


30. *Swinging Bridge over the H*  
30. *Swinging Bridge over the H*

Old Town, Gordontown, and the Fewkes Site. After the usual amenities and renewal of old friendships, perhaps the principal chief of all the river towns gathered the individual chiefs and priests together and after instructing them in their individual duties, commenced the ceremonies. Perhaps the ceremony this time was being held in order to show to all the people the new symbols being painted on the side of the bluff in order to give the sun a partner in its vigil over the Harpeth River.

Several people are gathered together here and there, and there are mumblings among them as to how an additional symbol will be painted on the side of the bluff. The sun itself was painted some years ago, and no one here can remember under what circumstances this occurred. It looks to be a full one hundred feet from the top of the bluff down to the place where the painting will take place. The mumbling suddenly ceases as the principal chief now appears atop a platform on the river's edge. It is apparent that the crowd won't have to guess long as to how the task of painting on the bluff will be accomplished because the chief is now issuing his final instructions to four men, whom the people recognize as

being the four most outstanding artisans of the valley. The chief and an his assistants, along with the priests and the four artisans, stand a long time looking at the bluffs. Then, suddenly among the roarings of a hundred drums and the cries of a thousand people, the four artisans each accompanied by a helper who carries his supplies, dash away from the platform. In twos, they run alongside the river, four of the men going off in opposite directions from the other four. About one hundred yards away from the platform, two of the men upstream and two downstream cross the river, while the remaining four continue. These four continue another hundred yards, and then they too make right angle turns into and across the river. The eight men are all obscured from sight now on the opposite side of the river as they all use different avenues of approach



31. *Paint Rock Bluff*

to the top of the cliff. Then suddenly, all eight men appear simultaneously on the bluff and the drums stop their beating and the crowd stops its howling.

For the next several hours the crowd below in Corlew's Bend stand in stark disbelief as the four artisans drop themselves on lines over the face of the cliff in order to perform the tedious task at hand. Having their paints passed to them from the top of the cliff by their four assistants, the artisans work for several hours before being hoisted up from their precarious perches high above the river. As the four regain their

footing at the top, the crowd roars its approval and the drums begin their playing. When all have had a chance to see, the principal chief puts an end to the ceremony with a wave of his hand. The finished product on the cliff is the moon, little sister to the sun. Now, instead of just the sun which was painted at a time beyond the memory of this crowd, they have the moon to worship or adore as they wish.

The long trek home now begins for the hundreds of folks assembled in Corlew's Bend. This has indeed been a day that will long be remembered in the minds of all those who attended this ceremony. Next time, when the regular ceremonies take place, all present will remember how the fabulous work on the side of the cliff was accomplished.

The preceding is a flight into fantasy because no one really knows how the images on Paint Rock Bluff came to be there. They were there when the first whites came to the area, and like the numerous mounds and deserted villages, the Indians present in the area at that time disclaimed any knowledge whatsoever of where the images came from or by whom they were performed.

Here then, within seven air miles, are three examples of American Indian prehistoric art. The first, Buffalo Gap with its paintings, and the last, Paint Rock Bluff, with its images of the sun and the moon painted onto the sheer side of the cliff above the Harpeth, represent the painted version of the petroglyph. The second one, the baton carved into the rock above Mound Bottom, more accurately falls into the category of incised glyphs.

Time and the elements have worn heavily upon these art forms up and down the valley. Man himself has not helped any. Destructive as he always is, he has striven over the past century to destroy Paint Rock Bluff by gradually chipping away the face of the cliff with rifle fire, leaving the original paintings only mere outlines of what they must have been at their zenith. The paints are gone at Buffalo Gap and the baton at Mound Bottom has to be "chalked" to really determine its detail. We're still the better however for having these examples at all. Someday nature will reclaim to the original condition through the processes of erosion and weathering the rocks that these pieces of art are painted on. That will be a sad day indeed. Let us be glad that in this small way we have been able to share in prehistoric man's thoughts and feelings across the centuries.

At Paint Rock Bluff the Harpeth enters Dickson County and from this point throughout the rest of its northward journey it serves as the