

Caravans existed for millennia crossing mountains and deserts, supposedly organized on a domestic or village level in most prehistoric periods. Not only were they relevant for transporting goods, but also for spreading information and connecting people and cultures over great distances. Over the millennia, the modes of caravanning have been modified according to a more or less centralized political and economic organization. Relevant is the existence that most caravan routes exhibit art features for different purposes, a trait that requires some explanation.

A wide range of colonial documents deal with the descriptions of caravans, but archaeological evidence is scarce because nomadic life leaves only ephemeral traces other than numerous trails that cover the mountains. Thus, ethno-archaeological studies have been the most appropriate approach to reason by analogy for prehistoric caravanning. Especially in the South-Central Andes, certain case studies present different local patterns but all combine with the general aspects of caravanning.

Focal points for comparisons are: a) reasons for herding/caravanning in the different areas, b) role of rock art in the planning of caravan routes; c) the relation of man and transport animal and the respective environment, d) socio-political organization of caravans in relation to economic systems.