

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Three Rivers Petroglyph Site

Self - Guided Walking Tour





The Three Rivers Petroglyph site has long captured the imagination of the public and of professional archaeologists.

These petroglyphs (literally meaning rock carvings) were made by a group of prehistoric Native Americans that archaeologists refer to as the Jornada Mogollon. The pictures were made with stone tools by removing the dark patina on the exterior of the rock. The patina is formed through oxidation (when oxygen in the air comes into contact with the minerals in the rock's surface).

Some of the petroglyphs were made expediently, by simply scratching through the patina to the light inner layer of the rock. Others were painstakingly created by pecking through the patina. This was done with two rocks used like a hammer and chisel.

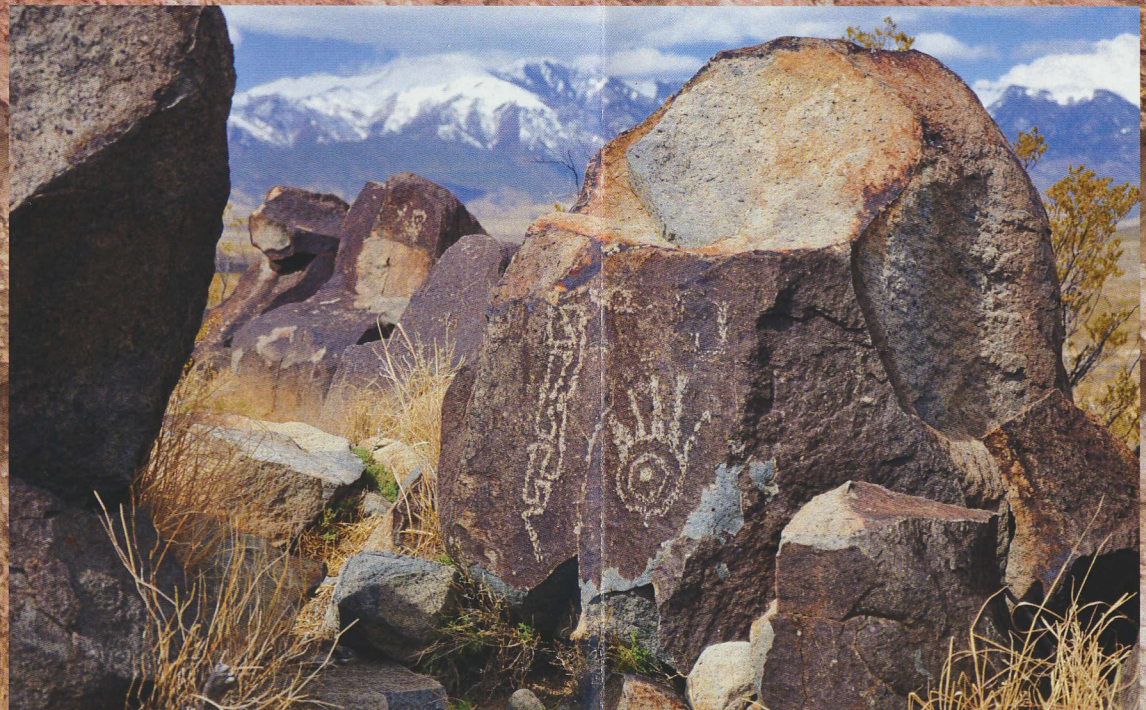
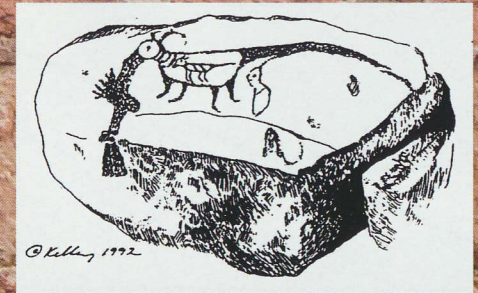


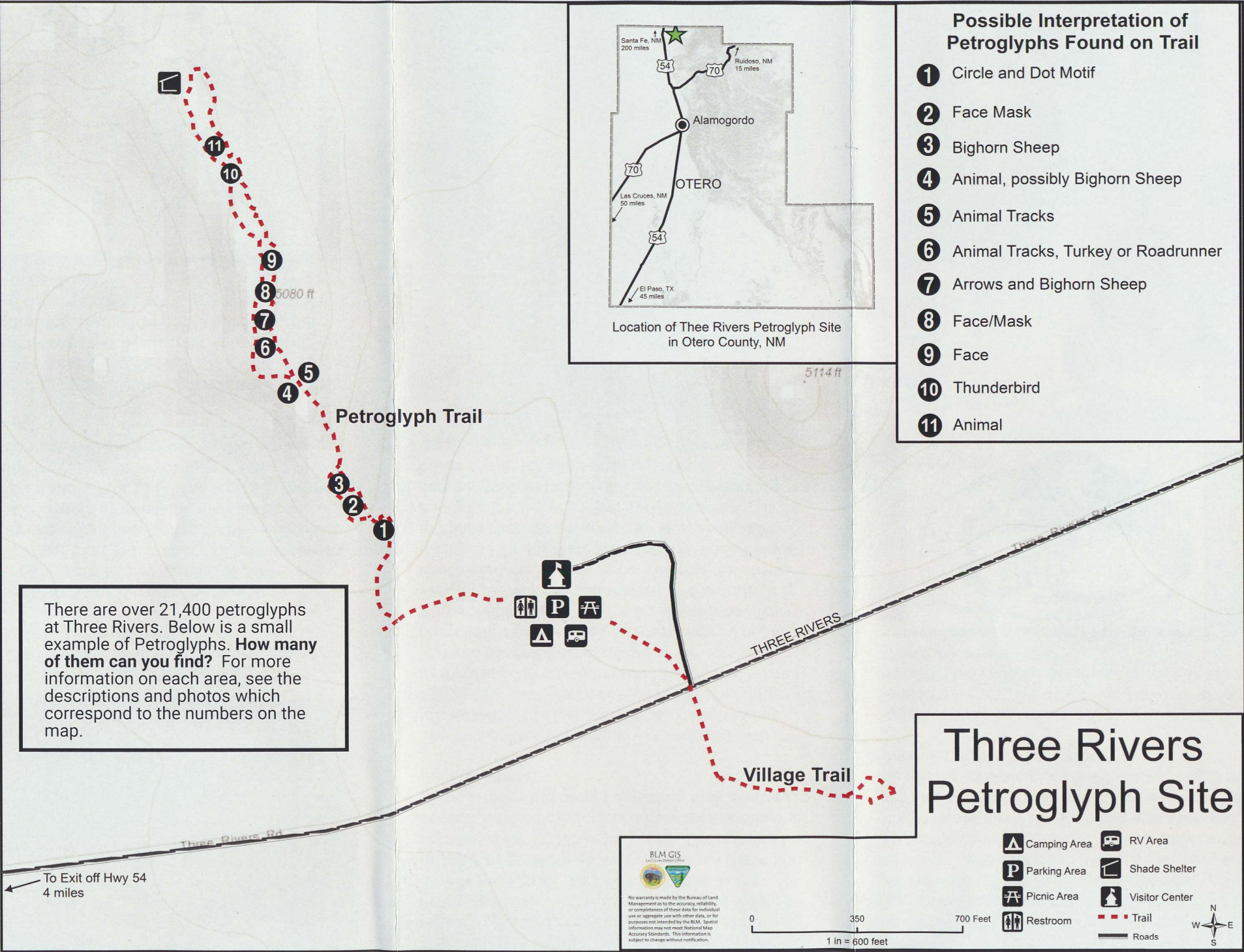
There are two hiking trails in the Three Rivers Petroglyph site. The northern segment is the Petroglyph Trail, which is about 1 mile in length (2-mile round trip). This segment follows the basaltic ridge rising above the Tularosa Basin and contains over 21,000 petroglyphs. The number and concentration of petroglyphs here makes this one of the largest and most interesting rock art sites in the Southwest.

The Village Trail is the southern segment, and is shorter and less strenuous. An easy walking trail begins on the east side of the Petroglyphs Campground, crosses the paved road, and takes you into the prehistoric village of the Jornada Mogollon. This area was intermittently inhabited from roughly 200 to 1450 A.D., and is most likely associated with the petroglyphs to the north. It is speculated that significant environmental changes prompted the local culture of the Jornada Mogollon to adapt strategies towards an increased reliance on agricultural production, the development of ceramic traditions, and changes in architecture better suited for sustained occupancy.

Petroglyphs have a unique visual impact, providing immediate connection between the modern viewer and the original creators. It gives us a glimpse into the minds of the people who lived here over 1,000 years ago. While we know how the petroglyphs were made, and are fairly certain of who made them, we are much less sure about why and what they may mean. Some believe that the petroglyphs are picture writing, with each one representing a word or thought.

Together, they may relate a story, an idea, or directions to travelers. We may never know the meaning of the petroglyphs because we were not there when they were created.





Possible Interpretation of Petroglyphs Found on Trail

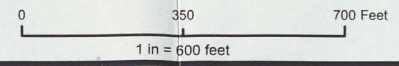
- ① Circle and Dot Motif
- ② Face Mask
- ③ Bighorn Sheep
- ④ Animal, possibly Bighorn Sheep
- ⑤ Animal Tracks
- ⑥ Animal Tracks, Turkey or Roadrunner
- ⑦ Arrows and Bighorn Sheep
- ⑧ Face/Mask
- ⑨ Face
- ⑩ Thunderbird
- ⑪ Animal

There are over 21,400 petroglyphs at Three Rivers. Below is a small example of Petroglyphs. **How many of them can you find?** For more information on each area, see the descriptions and photos which correspond to the numbers on the map.

Three Rivers Petroglyph Site

To Exit off Hwy 54
4 miles

BLM GIS
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- Camping Area
- RV Area
- Parking Area
- Shade Shelter
- Picnic Area
- Visitor Center
- Restroom
- Trail
- Roads

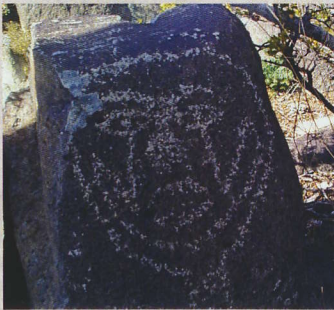


Along the Petroglyph Trail, there is a shade shelter that offers an excellent vantage point. From there, look west to the San Andres Mountains and notice the glistening gypsum white sands at their southern base and the contrasting black lava flow to the north. The beautiful Sierra Blanca, rising to 12,003 feet, is to the east on the Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation.

1 The circle and dot motif is prevalent at Three Rivers. In fact, circle petroglyphs account for over 10 percent of the approximately 21,400 petroglyphs. Curiously, it is not that common at other Jornada Mogollon rock art sites.



2 Jornada style faces and masks are usually round, with almond-shaped eyes and triangular noses.



3 Jornada rock artists often cleverly incorporated natural rock features into their work. Here, a nodule on the rock is a bighorn sheep's eye.



4 Often, animals are abstract to the point that they are not identifiable, but in Jornada-style rock art, bighorn sheep like this one are usually depicted realistically. The legs are bent representing motion.



5 Animal tracks, especially mountain lion and bear, are common at Jornada rock art sites. Perhaps significant, this particular petroglyph depicts an animal apparently pierced by an arrow.



6 Tracks like these are usually identified as roadrunner or turkey tracks.



7 This image is probably the best known and most photographed petroglyph at Three Rivers. The body of this bighorn sheep is filled with a Mimbres-style geometric design and is pierced by three arrows.



8 Sometimes masks are positioned on rocks in such a way that they are three dimensional. The effect is that the whole boulder has a life-like quality.



9 Note the typical round face and almond-shaped eyes. This figure was drawn with earrings.



10 Bird petroglyphs are commonly associated with corn and cloud terraces, symbolic of rain.



11 Quadruped (four-legged) images are similar to those found on Mimbres black-on-white pottery. The body is usually filled with geometric designs.



Welcome to Three Rivers Petroglyph Site.

The Three Rivers Petroglyph Site is managed by the Bureau of Land Management, and is open to the public year round. The site offers six shelters, a family unit, and one Handicap unit with tables, barbecue grills, and trash cans. Restrooms and water are provided for your convenience. Two RV sites have covered picnic tables, grills, water, and electric hookups. There are two hiking trails. One, about 1-mile long, begins at the visitor's shelter and guides you to many interesting petroglyphs. Another short trail begins on the east side of the picnic area and takes you to a partially excavated prehistoric village. Please refrain from climbing on the boulders, stepping on petroglyphs, or touching the them. The oil from your hands can be detrimental to their longevity. Please preserve your history and take your time exploring the history of Three Rivers.

LOCATION / ACCESS

The site is located 17 miles north of Tularosa, NM, and 28 miles south of Carrizozo, NM off U.S. 54. Turn east from U.S. 54 at Three Rivers onto County Road B30 and travel 5 miles on paved road.

SEASON/HOURS

Open year round from April to October, the entrance gate is open from 8 a.m. until 7 p.m. From October to April, it is open from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. Non-campers must be out by 10:00 p.m. year-round.

FEES

- Day Use (per vehicle): \$5
- Camping (per campsite): \$7
- RV Hookup (per campsite): \$18
- Day Use (bus): \$15
- Group Site (per group): \$50
- Las Cruces District Office Day Use Pass: \$30

ACTIVITIES

Camping, watchable wildlife, picnicking, historic interpretation, hiking, stargazing

Visitors Please Note:

- Three Rivers has a wonderful visitor center. Please feel free to stop in and talk to our knowledgeable volunteers. Trail guides for the self-guided walking tour are also available.
- This is a fee area for day and overnight use.
- Collection of artifacts, unauthorized digging within an archeological site, and destruction of historical resources on public land is prohibited by law. Please, no artifact collection or metal detecting.
- For the protection of your pets from other animals and snakes, please keep them on a leash in the campground. To protect the petroglyphs, dogs are not allowed on any of the trails at Three Rivers.
- If you plan to hike, we recommend you wear sturdy shoes or boots and sunscreen; and please carry a lot of water with you. Three Rivers is at a higher elevation and dehydration can be common.
- Rattlesnakes are common in this area and have been found within the boundaries of the petroglyph and village sites. Stay alert, and watch your children and your pets.
- Discharge of firearms is prohibited.

For more information, please contact:

Bureau of Land Management
Las Cruces District Office
1800 Marquess Street
Las Cruces, NM 88005
(575) 525-4300

To report unauthorized activity/concerns call
1-800-637-9152
BLM/NM/GI-22/003+1220

