

Visitor Information

The Three Rivers Petroglyph Site is managed by the Bureau of Land Management, and is open to the public year round.

There is a small fee, payable upon entry into the park.

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 pull-throughs are available with power and water.

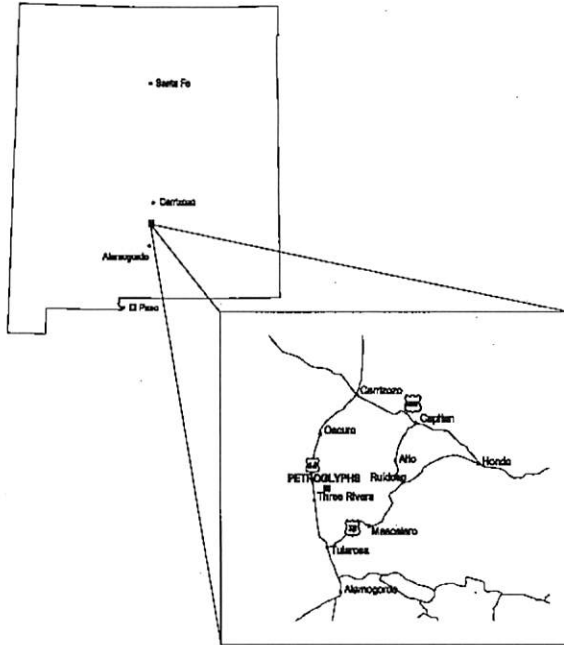
There are two hiking trails. One, about 1/2 mile long begins at the visitor's shelter and guides you to many interesting petroglyphs. Please refrain from climbing on the boulders and stepping on petroglyphs. Another short trail begins on the east side of the picnic area and takes you to a partially excavated prehistoric village. No dogs on trail.

If you plan to hike, we recommend you wear sturdy shoes or boots and sunscreen and that you carry water with you.

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.

A more detailed petroglyph guide is available at the Three Rivers Petroglyph Site.

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, following signs. Contact (575) 585-3457.



BLM

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Three Rivers Petroglyph
Site

MESSAGES

Carved in Rock

The Three Rivers Petroglyphs are outstanding examples of prehistoric Jornada Mogollon rock art. The basaltic ridge rising above the Three Rivers Valley contains over 21,000 petroglyphs, including masks, sunbursts, wildlife, hand prints, and geometric designs. The number and concentration of petroglyphs here makes this one of the largest and most interesting rock art sites in the Southwest. A rugged trail begins at the visitor's shelter. It is about a ½ mile long (1 mile round trip), and links many of the most interesting petroglyphs.

These petroglyphs (literally meaning **rock carvings**) were made by a group of prehistoric Native Americans that archeologists 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. Over time, the exposed surfaces repatinate, making the petroglyphs less distinct. You will be able to observe this and estimate which petroglyphs are older than others.

Petroglyphs are quite fragile and can be damaged easily. Rock art has a unique visual impact providing immediate connection between the modern viewer and the prehistoric artist. It gives us a glimpse into the minds of the Native Americans who lived here 1,000 years ago, showing how they conceptualized their real and spiritual world. Once damaged, they are gone forever.

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 mean. Many 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. While some people claim to be able to **read** the petroglyphs, most researchers believe that much more study must be undertaken before we will truly be able to decipher the mysteries these ancient artworks hold. One method researchers are using to attempt to understand this rock art is to compare it to similar Pueblo Indian and Mesoamerican Indian symbols.



For example, **goggle-eyed** beings and horned beings appeared in almost all Jornada Mogollon rock art sites. The goggle-eyed being is thought by some scholars to be the Jornada version of **Tlaloc**, the Mexican rain god. Other scholars strongly disagree that there is any connection between the Jornada Mogollon and Mesoamerican rock art. They believe the Jornada Mogollon rock art and religion developed independently.

Even without being sure what the artist originally intended to convey, the petroglyphs still provide much information. You will see animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, indicating what fauna lived here and may have been hunted in prehistoric times. Also, you will see corn and clouds, an indication of the importance of agriculture to these people. And, you will see faces, masks, and supernatural or mythical beings that may remind you of Pueblo kachinas, giving you some idea of the Jornada Mogollon religion world.

The petroglyphs of Three Rivers were made at a time of great social and lifestyle changes for the Jornada Mogollon people. It is assumed earlier hunters and gatherers in the Three Rivers area practiced an animistic religion, worshiping nature. As their population increased, they settled into villages. Their dependence on corn agriculture increased. Their rock art seems to reflect a strong supernatural and religious connection to their environment.