

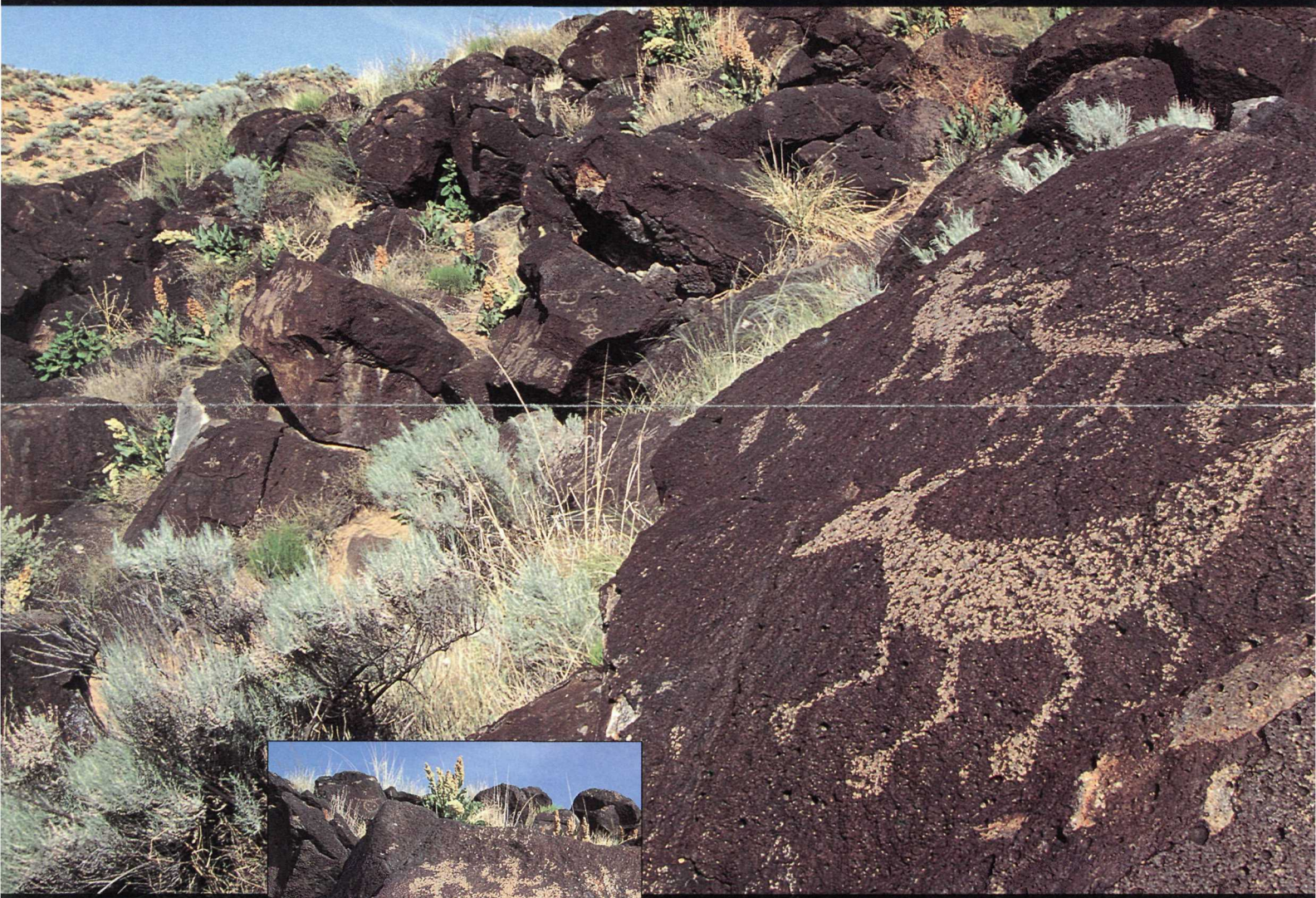
Petroglyph

National Monument
New Mexico

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Open Space Division
City of Albuquerque

Official Map and Guide



Images created in the rock centuries ago are found primarily in concentrations on the east- and south-facing slopes of the West Mesa. The petroglyphs include animals (above), people, insects, and geometrics.



Tom Bean

Tom Bean

As you walk among the petroglyphs, you are not alone. This world is alive with the sights and sounds of the high desert—a hawk spirals down from the mesa top, a road-runner scurries into fragrant sage, a desert millipede traces waves in the sand. There is another presence beyond what we can see or hear. People who have lived along the Rio Grande for many centuries come alive again through images they made on the shiny black rocks. Petroglyph National Monument is a natural gallery of some 15,000 images—some recognizable as animals, people, or crucifixes, others more mysterious. All are inseparable from the landscape and from the spirits of the people who created them.

“Each of these rocks is alive, keeper of a message left by the ancestors...There are spirits, guardians; there is medicine....”

William F. Weahkee, Pueblo Elder

After 1692, much of the West Mesa became part of the Atrisco land grant, presented to certain colonists by the Spanish crown. Shepherds and priests alike left their marks: Christian crosses and sheep brands (right), and other figures. On this land, isolated communities became outposts of Hispanic culture and tradition in the New World.



Tom Bean

The West Mesa, a 17-mile-long table of land rising west of the Rio Grande, emerged about 110,000 years ago when lava flowed from a large crack in the earth. Layer upon layer flowed over and around existing landforms of sedimentary rock. In a final burst of activity, five volcanic cones erupted atop the mesa. Over time, the relatively soft sedimentary layers on the mesa's eastern edge eroded away, leaving a scalloped edge—an escarpment—strewn with basalt chunks broken away from the lava flows. This is the setting for the petroglyphs.

Long ago people discovered that chipping away the rocks' thin “desert varnish” reveals the lighter gray beneath—and leaves a lasting mark. The earliest rock images, abstract patterns of lines, were made 2,000 to 3,000 years ago by Archaic hunting-and-gathering peoples. Beginning in the 17th century, single or grouped crucifixes and sheep brands were made by Hispanic heirs of the Atrisco land grant (see left). Anglo explorers of the late 19th century chiseled names into the boulders. The vast majority of the petroglyphs, though, were created four to seven centuries ago by the Rio Grande's Pueblo people, whose descendants still use this area for religious purposes.

Why were these images created and what do they mean? The lack of a direct answer to these questions may be a bit frustrating for today's visitors, but it also creates an opportunity for discovery. Some questions may be answered by clues in subject matter, carving technique, or setting. It took a long time to create each image with stone tools, so subject and placement were carefully planned. Images of birds native to Central America indicate that the Pueblo people were involved in an extensive trade network. Other questions are far more difficult to answer. Why do most of the images face south and east? Were nearby stone “bowls” used to grind plants for ritual medicines? Human faces look out in two directions from the corners of boulders. Are they guarding a sacred location? Perhaps the most interesting carvings are animal bodies with human heads. Are they holy beings? The petroglyphs' deepest secrets are closely held by today's Pueblo people.

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Help Preserve and Protect the Petroglyphs



Gunshot damage



Students climb the Mesatop Trail, Boca Negra.

Petroglyphs are fragile, non-renewable cultural resources that, once damaged, can never be replaced. Organized efforts to preserve the petroglyphs began in the 1960s with the establishment of Petroglyph State Park at Boca Negra Canyon and Albuquerque's Volcano City Park, incorporating the five cones. In 1986, the entire 17-mile escarpment, the location of most of the petroglyphs, was included on the National Register of Historic Places. The Friends of the Albuquerque Petroglyphs and other groups led efforts to create Petroglyph National Monument, established by Congress in 1990.

Today's Pueblo people consider the entire monument a sacred landscape. Like places of worship throughout the world, the area demands respect and care. We ask for your assistance in preserving this rich cultural landscape. It is illegal to remove, damage, alter, or deface cultural or natural objects or sites within the national monument. Violations are punishable by heavy fines or imprisonment. If you witness any vandalism, please call a park ranger at 505-899-0205.

What to See and Do

The park visitor center is located on Unser Blvd., 3 miles north of I-40 at the intersection of Unser Blvd. and Western Trail Road. Hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1.

Trails Several trails take you past groupings of petroglyphs and other points of interest. **Boca Negra Canyon** is located just north of Montaña Road at 6900 Unser Blvd, NW. The hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Petroglyphs are visible along three self-guiding trails, ranging from 5 minutes to 30 minutes round-trip. Water, restrooms, and picnic tables are available. There is a parking fee. **Rinconada Canyon** is 0.5 mile south of the visitor center on Unser Blvd. An unpaved trail follows the base of the escarpment. Restrooms are available. To reach the **Volcanoes**, take Unser Blvd. south to I-40 west; take exit 149, Paseo de Volcan north for 4.8 miles to the unmarked park entrance on right. Proceed along unpaved road to trailhead. There are no facilities. The hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For a safe visit Stay on established trails.

- Watch out for rattlesnakes; report sightings to a park ranger.
- While hiking in warm weather, wear sunscreen, protective footwear, a hat, and carry plenty of water.
- While hiking on high ground, be watchful for sudden storms. Seek shelter at the first sign of thunder or lightning.
- There are no public phones, food services, lodging, or camping in the park; services are available nearby.
- The road to the volcanoes is unpaved and may be closed in bad weather.

Further information Petroglyph National Monument is part of the National Park System, one of more than 370 areas representing our nation's cultural and natural heritage. The park is cooperatively administered and managed by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior and the Open Space Division of the City of Albuquerque. For more information, contact: Petroglyph National Monument, 6001 Unser Boulevard, NW, Albuquerque, NM 87120; 505-899-0205; or visit www.nps.gov/petr on the Internet.

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Collared lizard

Petroglyph National Monument

