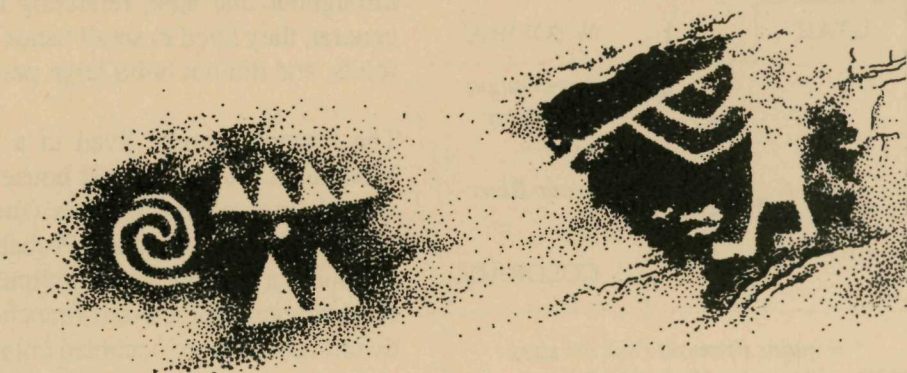




Rock Art



As you travel around the Colorado Plateau, you have a great opportunity to discover and learn about the ancient cultures of the region. In the Dinosaur National Monument area, you will find evidence of a group of Native Americans we call the Fremont people, who lived here about 1,000 years ago. The Fremont were not the only early dwellers here; archaeological evidence indicates human occupancy as far back as 8,000 years ago. However, it was the Fremont who left the most visible reminders of their presence, in the form of their rock art.

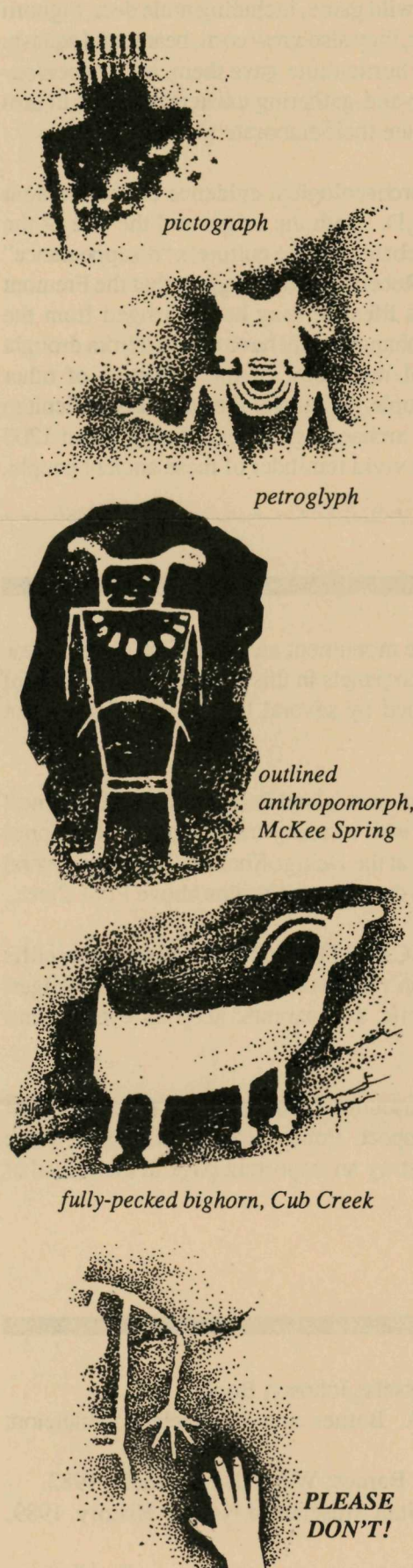
Fremont rock art includes both **pictographs** (designs created by applying pigment to the rock surface) and **petroglyphs** (designs chipped or carved into the rock). Pictographs are relatively rare here, perhaps because they are more easily weathered. Most of the rock art in the monument is in the form of petroglyphs, usually found on smooth sandstone cliffs darkened by desert varnish (a naturally-formed stain of iron and manganese oxides).

The style and content of Fremont rock art vary throughout the region. In the Uinta Basin, in which most of Dinosaur National Monument lies, the "Classic Vernal Style" predominates. It is characterized by well-executed anthropomorphs (human-like figures), zoomorphs (animal-like figures), and abstract designs. The anthropomorphs typically have trapezoidal bodies, which may or may not include arms, legs, fingers, and toes. They are often elaborately decorated with designs suggesting headdresses, earrings, and necklaces, and they may hold shields or other objects. The zoomorphs include recognizable bighorn sheep, birds, snakes, and lizards, as well as more abstract animal-like shapes. Purely abstract or geometric designs, such as circles, spirals, and various combinations of lines, are common.

Among petroglyphs, most designs are outlines, but some are completely pecked to form solid figures, and a few consist of small holes in closely-spaced rows. Some petroglyphs show traces of pigment, and it is possible that many designs originally included both carved and painted areas.

Why did the Fremont create this rock art, and what did it mean? The designs may have served some ceremonial or religious purpose, been related to hunting activities, identified clans, or simply have been artistic expression—or perhaps all or none of these. Some people have attempted to interpret the rock art by comparing it with symbols used by more recent Indians, but basically, no one knows what its true purpose or meaning was.

ROCK ART IS VERY FRAGILE—DO NOT TOUCH IT. Years of weathering and erosion have taken some toll, but far less than the damage from thousands of people touching the soft sandstone. Your fingers leave oils, abrade the rock, and are **THE** most significant factor in destroying petroglyphs. If you want to record rock art, photograph it (cloudy days or indirect light is best) or sketch it. **DO NOT TRACE OR MAKE RUBBINGS, OR PUT CHALK ON THE ROCK.** If you see someone touching rock art ask them to stop, or tell a ranger.



pictograph

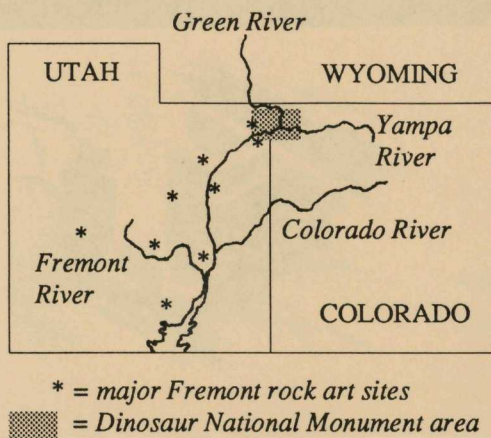
petroglyph

outlined anthropomorph, McKee Spring

fully-pecked bighorn, Cub Creek

PLEASE DON'T!

The Fremont people

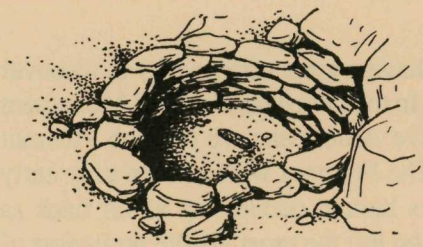


Archaeologists first studied and named the Fremont culture along the Fremont River in south-central Utah, and have since traced it through much of the Green and Colorado River drainages. The lifestyle of the Fremont people varied considerably throughout that area, reflecting the diverse environments that they inhabited. In general, they lived in small bands or family groups, grew crops to supplement native foods, and did not build large permanent dwellings.

The Fremont people lived in a large portion of what is now Dinosaur National Monument, but few actual house remains are found here. Known dwelling places ranged from natural shelters (such as rock overhangs or shallow caves) to small "villages" in open areas. Probably the most advanced Fremont structure was the pithouse: a shallow, usually circular pit in the ground, into which wooden poles were set to support the mud-and-branch-covered upper walls and roof. It is likely that many dwelling sites were occupied only seasonally, as the people moved into and out of an area according to the availability of water and food.

Like other early people, the Fremont relied heavily on native plant foods, such as pinyon nuts, berries, and cactus fruits, and on wild game, including mule deer, bighorn sheep, smaller mammals, and birds. However, they also grew corn, beans, and squash, sometimes using irrigation techniques. This horticulture gave them, at least seasonally, a more settled life than a purely hunting-and-gathering existence, which in turn may have given them the time needed to create their elaborate rock art.

In the Dinosaur National Monument area, archaeological evidence of the Fremont dates from about 200 A.D. to about 1300 A.D. Both the origin and the fate of the Fremont culture are the subject of ongoing debate, and the culture's "disappearance" is especially provocative and controversial. Recent theories suggest that the Fremont did not simply vanish, but that the people's lifestyle may have changed from the pattern it had held for some centuries. Such a change might have resulted from drought or other climatic factors, dwindling natural resources, or the influence of other cultures, such as neighboring Shoshonean people. Whatever the case, it is difficult to trace the Fremont as a distinct culture in the archaeological record after about 1200 A.D.—but the Fremont rock art survives as a vivid reminder of these ancient people.



this rock-lined storage cyst in a cave floor still held one corn cob, centuries old

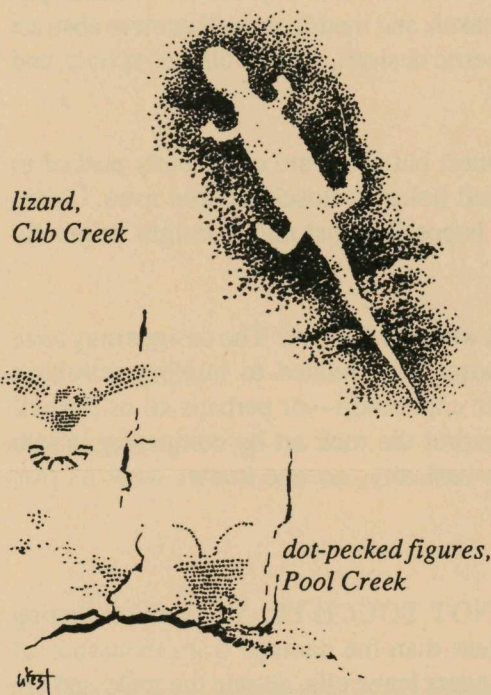
Rock art in the monument

The most easily accessible rock art sites in the monument are along Cub Creek, a few miles east of the Dinosaur Quarry. Petroglyph panels in this area feature a variety of typical Fremont designs, but are distinguished by several large lizard figures, not common at other sites.

Other sites are more remote. At McKee Spring, near Island Park, are some of the finest large anthropomorph designs in the area, as well as many other figures. The Jones Hole trail passes pictographs and petroglyphs at the Deluge Shelter. There are several sites around Echo Park, including a panel of dot-pattern designs above Pool Creek.

BE CAREFUL AROUND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES. Rocky slopes below cliffs are often unstable, so watch your step, and don't try to climb steep or exposed ledges. Watch out for occasional snakes or scorpions, and parents, keep an eye on your children.

Treat these places as fragile, irreplaceable museums. You would not touch the art of great masters...treat rock art with the same respect. Ponder it, enjoy it. Watch where you place your hands and feet. You may destroy an important page in the record of the past. **DON'T BE A THIEF OF TIME.**



Further reading

- The Archaeology of Colorado*, E. Steven Cassels; Johnson Books, 1983.
- Canyon Country Prehistoric Indians*, F. A. Barnes and Michaelene Pendleton; Wasatch Publishers, 1983.
- Canyon Country Prehistoric Rock Art*, F. A. Barnes; Wasatch Publishers, 1982.
- Exploring the Fremont*, David B. Madsen; Utah Museum of Natural History, 1989.

These titles and others are available at monument visitor centers or by mail order from the Dinosaur Nature Association, 1(800)845-3466.