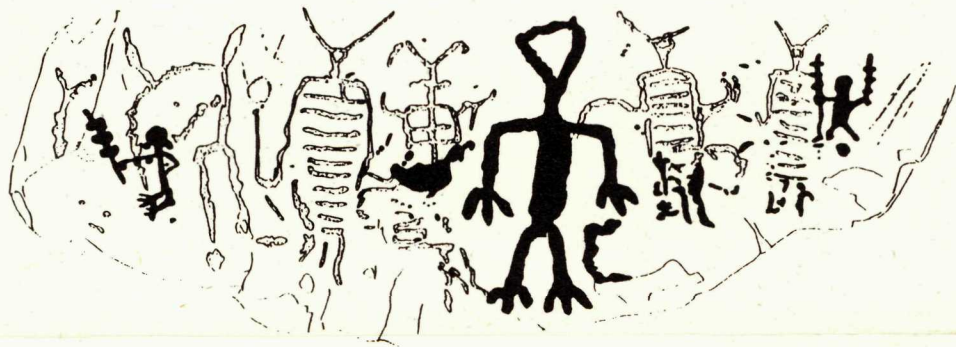


Petrified Forest

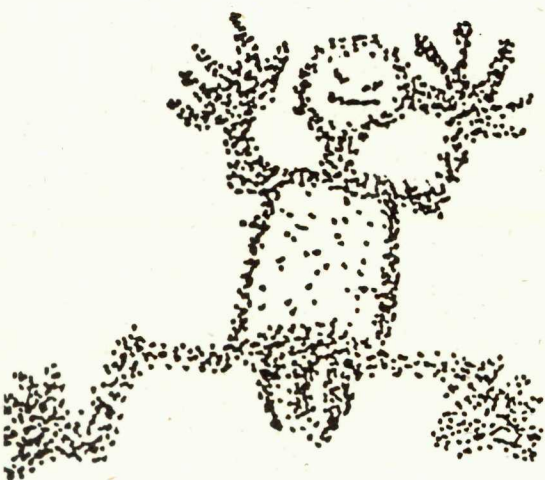
National Park
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Messages on Stone



For several thousand years the prehistoric people of the Southwest have used the surfaces of the boulders, canyon walls, and rock shelters as their drawing board. Petrified Forest National Park contains many fine examples of these images pecked into stone.

How Were Petroglyphs Made?



Petroglyphs were pecked on the exposed surfaces of boulders covered with "desert varnish." Desert varnish is a thin coating of iron or manganese, bacteria and other organic deposits which slowly builds up on the rock surface, growing darker and harder with time. This dark layer provided the contrast to exhibit the newly pecked figures.

Petroglyphs were produced in two ways. The first was with a direct blow from a hand-sized, hard, rounded rock called a hammerstone. This direct percussion did not allow

control in placing the peck mark. If a hammer-stone was used in conjunction with a chisel, however, greater control could be exercised, resulting in a superior effect.

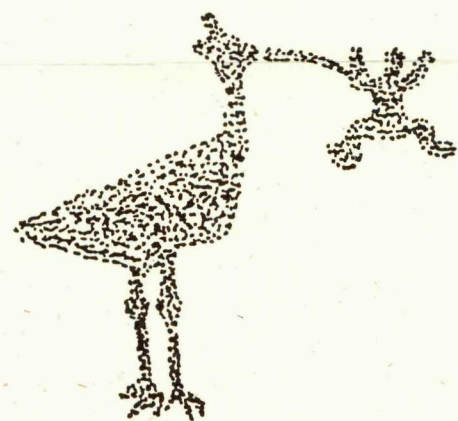
To assure their figures were well drawn, they lightly pecked a preliminary outline. You can sometimes see these outlines pecked on a rock. Solid figures tend to be smaller because of the greater amount of work involved, while outline figures may approach life size.

What Do They Mean?

Interpretation of petroglyphs is usually impossible. They may commemorate important events, facilitate record keeping, mark clan or other territorial boundaries and migrations, document natural events such as the summer solstice, or maybe some of them are just doodles.

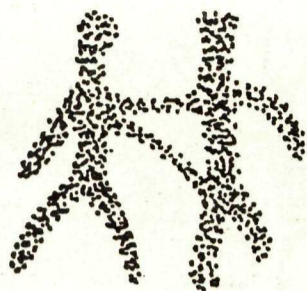
How Old are They?

Determining the age of petroglyphs is a difficult task. Archaeologists might: assign an age which correlates with a nearby habitation site; evaluate the subject matter and style to determine how it relates to a specific time period; compare the sequence of design layering; or use technical dating techniques such as radiocarbon dating.

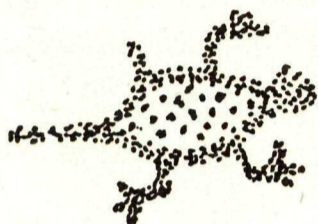


Petroglyph Classification

Archaeologists have categorized the petroglyphs found in the park into six distinct groups: anthropomorphs, zoomorphs, kachinas, hands/tracks, geometrics, and indeterminate.



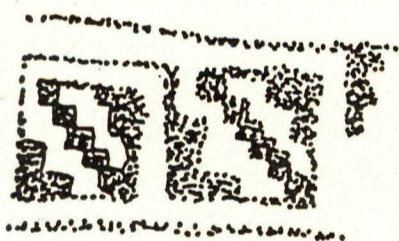
Anthropomorphs and Kachinas represent the human form. Anthropomorphic figures may have complete bodies but generally lack facial features. Kachinas usually take the form of heads or masks and most have facial features.



Zoomorphs include large and small animals, reptiles, and birds. You may see cougars, birds, lizards, snakes, bats, coyotes, and rabbits on the petroglyph panels in the park.



Hands and tracks include bear paws, bird tracks, cloven hooves and human feet or hand prints. Some human tracks even appear in pairs.



Geometrics consist of textile and pottery designs, spirals, circles, and other geometric shapes. You will see many of these elements at Puerco Pueblo and Newspaper Rock.

Please Remember

A variety of factors contribute to the erosion of petroglyphs including natural forces such as wind, rain, extreme temperatures, plant growth and rock type. Perhaps the most devastating factor are humans. The removal of petroglyphs from public lands for souvenirs, and the defacement and vandalism that frequently

occur must be stopped. Once petroglyphs are gone they will never be enjoyed by others. Join Petrified Forest National Park in protecting and preserving these valuable treasures. Please stay on the trails and remember, even the touch of your hand can eventually contribute to their destruction.

