



ROCK CARVINGS AND PAINTINGS

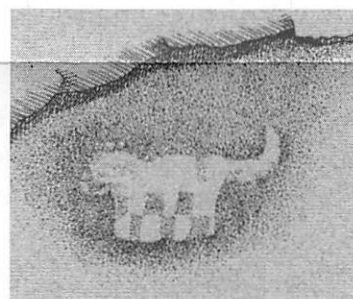
Chaco Canyon is home to thousands of rock carvings and paintings. Some call these images “rock art” while others don’t believe that term captures the true significance of the images. For the purpose of this publication, the images will be called “rock carvings and paintings” or “rock images.” These skillfully created images have continued to fascinate viewers for centuries. You can see many rock carvings and paintings on your visit to Chaco.



Where to see Rock Carvings and Paintings

There are many places you can see rock images in the park. Often the best time to see or photograph petroglyphs is in the early morning or evening.

- *Penasco Blanco trail* boasts the largest stretch of rock images available to visitors including ancient rock images, Navajo petroglyphs, historic markings, and the so-called supernova pictograph.
- *Petroglyph trail*, located between Pueblo Bonito and Chetro Keti, offers views of ancient and historic images. Many believe this katsina image (pictured right) was painted by a member of Zuni Pueblo during the 1920's.
- *Una Vida trail* features relatively easy-to-see petroglyph panels.
- *Wijiji trail* has a few pictographs at the very end of the trail.
- *South Mesa trail* will lead you to Tsin Kletzin, which features historic markings on the south facing southern wall of the building.



Types of Rock Images

There are two different types of rock images: pictographs and petroglyphs.

Pictographs were painted on cliff walls, often using yucca paintbrushes. Pigments were created using hematite to make red, calcium carbonate for a white, charcoal to create black, yellow ochre to make a yellow, turquoise to create blue, and even vegetable dyes to create a variety of colors. For the paint to last centuries, it needed an organic binder such as vegetable oil, animal fat, urine, or blood. The surviving pictographs in the park today are often found in sheltered areas.

Petroglyphs were carved into rock faces using a variety of techniques. Rock artists used a striking stone to peck designs into the rock, sometimes also using a hammer stone which helped them gain better control. They also used a technique called incising, by using a sharp stone to scrape a line into the rock. Rock artists also abraded or rubbed the sandstone using a stone to smooth out an area, either to prepare the surface or to fill in an area of the rock image. In addition, they created holes by drilling.

Chaco's Unique Rock Carvings and Paintings

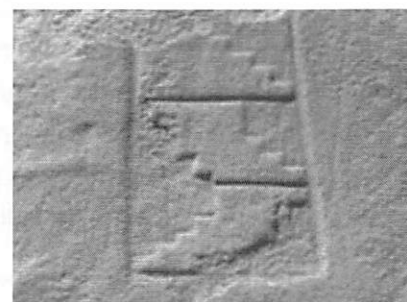
The most common rock images found around the world and at Chaco include the spiral and the hand. While Chaco's rock imagery has similarities with images found throughout the world, Chaco's rock carvings and paintings are also unique.

For example, Chacoan rock images are often created using 3 or 4 different techniques. In addition, figures are sometimes placed on a ground line.

Techniques were also used to make depressed or raised images, known as bas and haut relief. Furthermore, Chaco's rock artists often avoided using the natural patina of the rock to create contrast between the rock and the carving, thereby making it difficult to see many of the petroglyphs. In this way it is possible that the rock artists could control when people could or could not see many of the designs depending on the lighting conditions at different times of day.



Figures on a ground line



Bas relief rock art

Dating Rock Carvings and Paintings

An accurate way to date petroglyphs has yet to be developed. However, some pigments in pictographs, can be radiocarbon dated. Other techniques include relative dating and using superimposition to tell which petroglyph or pictograph came first. Some researchers use the different styles of rock image to create a basic chronology. The clearest differences in rock imagery at Chaco are between ancient rock images, Navajo or Dine petroglyphs, and historic graffiti. We ask that you respect the rock imagery by not adding graffiti to the walls.

Ancient rock images (see top right) were mostly pecked into the rock, generally on cliff faces and often on the south or east facing sides of boulders. Depictions range from flute players and human forms, to animals and birds, to hands and feet. Some of these hands and feet have extra fingers and toes, most often 6 digits.

Navajo petroglyphs (mid-right) tend to be scratched or incised into the wall and is generally located on any face of a boulder. Common scenes include horses, women, ceremonial figures, and sand painting designs.

Historic images were often created by travelers, who wrote their names on the canyon walls. Men on military expeditions often left their mark and Preciliano, a Spanish sheep herder, was fond of etching a picture of himself on his horse (bottom right). A 1940's archaeological field school in the canyon often labeled sites with a BC marker.



Meanings

Why did people create rock carvings and paintings? The rock imagery at Chaco does not have the structure of a language, but certainly it had a purpose. What exactly those purposes were, we cannot know for certain. Rock carvings and paintings may have been used to record stories, solar events, important occasions and migration, for hunting, fertility, or for religious purposes. The descendants of Chaco often recognize symbols in the rock images, but different people see different meanings.

The spiral is a very common symbol. Ramson Lomatewama of Hopi said the spiral is a migration symbol: people start their journey in the center of the spiral and head towards the outside of the spiral. Porter Swensel of Santa Clara Pueblo related the spiral was also a migration symbol, but for him, the center was the final goal. Others have different interpretations of the spiral.



Rock images may also be representational. Some think the petroglyph (right) depicts a caterpillar. Others think that it portrays the cacao plant, found in Mesoamerica. There is evidence of cacao found at Chaco.



Some rock images may have illustrated important celestial events. The pictograph to the right may represents a possible representation of the supernova explosion of 1054, recorded by Chinese astronomers. Other celestial events or cultural interpretations have been suggested to explain this pictograph.



Preserving Rock Carvings and Paintings

Help us preserve the rock art at Chaco for future generations. Do not add your own graffiti and notify a ranger if you see someone defacing ancient images. Please don't touch the rock carvings and paintings as this may lead to further disintegration and hinder future studies.