



## Buffalo Eddy

The ancestors of the *nimí•pu•* or Nez Perce created the images we see here today. These images provide links to the past, reminding us of the timeless connection humans have to this land.

The site takes its name from images on the Idaho side of the river, depicting bison chased by Indians on horse back. Rock art can be seen on both sides of the Snake River, but only the Washington side is open to the public.

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### What is a Petroglyph?

Petroglyphs are made by removing the outer weathered surface of rock to reveal the unweathered rock underneath. This is done by pecking, rubbing, scratching, or incising the surface with a harder rock, such as quartzite.

There are several styles of petroglyphs at Buffalo Eddy. Some are naturalistic with human figures and animals such as big horn sheep, elk and deer. Some stick figures at the site hold an item that looks like a dumbbell. Some believe that this may

represent a double headed rattle or paddle.

Groups of naturalistic animals and humans in a single panel appear to tell a story related to hunting. Other petroglyphs, consisting of abstract designs and patterns that include dots, circles and triangles, are considered to be the oldest at the site.

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### What is a Pictograph?

Whereas petroglyphs are literally scratched into rock, pictographs are made by painting or drawing on the rock surface with pigments. These pigments were made from minerals that could be found in the area.

The pigment was turned into something akin to paint by mixing the pigment with water, urine, blood, saliva, raw egg, or animal fat. These 'binders' help the minerals adhere to the rock.

The pigment was applied with fingers or a brush type implement. Over time this pigment actually becomes a part of the rock.

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### Dating Rock Art

The subject matter of rock art can often help determine a possible age. For example, the Nez Perce obtained the horse as early as 1630, therefore pictograph panels containing horses were probably made after that date.

Rock art showing an ancient hunting tool called an atlatl, used prior to the introduction of the bow and arrow, would suggest an age of at least 2000 years. In some cases dateable artifacts like an arrowhead found at the base of a partially buried rock art panel, can suggest a minimum date for the art.

There have been many advances in research to date pictographs and petroglyphs through scientific analyses. Some petroglyphs can be dated based on an analysis of the weathered varnishes or patination that forms over rocks as they age. This method compares the varnish layers from the unpecked surface with the varnish of a pecked surface.

Pictographs are dated by testing very small samples of the pigment removed from the surface of the rock.

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## What Do These Images Mean?

Anthropologists who study rock art can often find patterns in the symbols that are found in the Columbia River Basin. We can make educated guesses on why symbols were painted or pecked into rock faces. Perhaps they told stories of finding abundant fish and game in the area. They may be of spiritual significance. Scientists can make assumptions, but we are still left with the question of what do they really mean?

Without the benefit of looking over the shoulder of the person who created these symbols and ask-

ing them, no one but their creators knows for sure the exact meaning of the images.

Even if the original intentions of the people who created these images is unknown, we should still respect the images they left behind. They remind us that people have been part of this land for thousands of years.

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## Preservation

The rock art at Buffalo Eddy has endured for thousands of years. Although the art remains fairly well preserved, it takes only one senseless act of vandalism to destroy this fragile resource.

It is imperative that this irreplaceable site be protected as a historical and cultural resource. Damaging the petroglyphs or creating graffiti in the vicinity of the art is a federal offense subject to arrest and prosecution.

Rock art sites are considered sacred and are to be respected just as a cemetery or church is.

Archaeological sites, battlefield, and artifacts are protected by state and federal law. Anyone who injures, destroys or appropriates artifacts or objects of antiquity on park lands are subject to arrest and prosecution to the maximum extent of the law.

Please call 208-843-7001 to report any incidents.

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## How do I get to Buffalo Eddy?

Buffalo Eddy is 18 miles south of Asotin, Washington on Snake River Road.

On Hwy. 12, cross the blue bridge across the Snake River and at the first intersection veer to the left, following the signs to Asotin. This is State Hwy 129. Hwy. 129 heads south, along the bank of the Snake River. In Asotin, Hwy. 129 goes west to Joseph, Oregon. Continue following the river along county road 209 or Snake River Road. Travel approximately 15 miles and the turn out for the trail head will be marked.

