



INDIAN  
PETROGLYPH  
STATE  
PARK

WALKING TOUR





Indian Petroglyph State Park preserves a part of one of the largest rock art sites in North America. An archaeological survey completed in 1986 identified more than 10,500 petroglyphs along the escarpment. Petroglyphs are a vulnerable record of cultural expression. Unlike art taken from its original context for museum display, rock art can still be viewed as intended. Whatever the meaning of the petroglyphs, they preserve the beliefs of their makers. They are a part of our heritage and the Pueblo Indians who still live here.

Please help others enjoy our heritage of rock art and preserve these petroglyphs for future generations.

1. Vandalism of the petroglyphs is prohibited; violators will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.
2. Please don't touch the petroglyphs; some are quite fragile and can easily be eroded away.
3. Please stay on the trails; crosscutting trails leads to increased erosion and damage.
4. Please don't litter.
5. Motor vehicles are allowed on roadways and parking areas only.
6. Please keep dogs on leash.
7. No glass containers allowed in the park.
8. Alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the park.
9. Firearms are prohibited in the park.



## The Setting



You are now standing on the west mesa escarpment. This seven-teen-mile long ridge of basalt boulders is a result of volcanic eruptions of volcanoes about 190,000 years ago. The remnants of these eruptions, and resulting lava flow, can be seen from the top of the mesa and are known as the Albuquerque Volcanoes. The unique habitat of the escarpment supports many forms of life. The most noticeable plants are fourwing saltbush, sand sage, and purple sage. Animals often seen along the escarpment include hawks, owls, vultures, roadrunners, coyotes, foxes, rabbits, snakes, lizards, and millipedes.

## The Petroglyphs

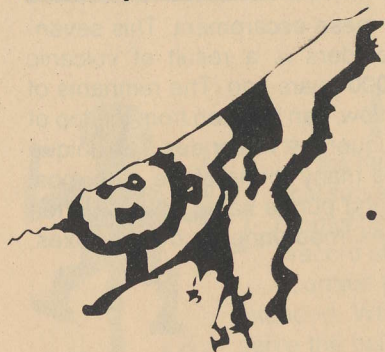


Some forms of rock art are colorful images painted with natural pigments. They are found in protected areas such as caves and beneath cliff overhangs. The petroglyphs here were made by pecking, incising, and abrading the thin coating of black patina that covers the basalt boulders. The patina formed from thousands of years of oxidation and microbial action. When the black patina is removed, the interior of the basalt is revealed and new patina immediately starts to form on this exposed surface. The lighter color of more recently formed patina creates the striking contrast between the petroglyph images and the surface of the rock. Pecking directly onto the surface of the rock with a hammerstone or using a hammerstone with a chisel were two methods used to make petroglyphs.

The petroglyphs along the escarpment range in dates from about 1000 BC to the Historic Period. Although there is no method of determining the exact date of a petroglyphs, there are several ways of knowing its relative age. Comparisons of style can be made to designs on other datable objects such as pottery and murals. The superposition of one petroglyph over another, as can be seen on the Cliff Base Trail, provides another means of relative dating. The majority of the petroglyphs along the escarpment are in the Rio Grande Style. This style developed rather suddenly between AD 1300 and 1500. Common images in Rio Grande rock art include human-like figures such as fluteplayers, masked figures, animals, including horned or masked serpents, starshapes, spirals, and many other designs.



## The People Who Made the Petroglyphs



The period between AD 1275 and 1299 in the Southwest was one of severe drought. Many people settled in areas such as the Rio Grande Valley which provided a permanent supply of water and farmable land. They built multistoried pueblos out of adobe blocks on both sides of the Rio Grande. These pueblos were 3 to 4 stories tall and often contained more than 100 adjoining rooms built around an open plaza. There were more than 20 pueblos along the river between Bernalillo and Belen. Population estimates for each pueblo range from 100 to 600 people. The pueblo of Kuaua at Coronado State Monument provides an excellent opportunity to see the roomblocks, reconstructed ceremonial rooms called kivas, and the colorful kiva murals that were created by the same Pueblo Indians who made the petroglyphs along the escarpment.

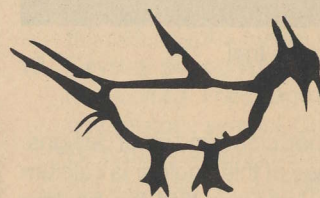
The Pueblo Indians who settled here continued their lifeway of farming and resourceful use of wild plants and animals that had been well established for many generations. They harvested corn, beans, and squash from fields lining the Rio Grande. Farming terraces were built along the southern part of the escarpment to make use of seasonal rainfall. They used ingenious traps and snares for catching rabbits and birds, and hunted deer, elk, and antelope. Domesticated dogs and turkeys were a common sight in the villages.

The Pueblo Indians maintained trade networks with the cultures of Mexico. Turquoise from the mines of Cerrillos south of Santa Fe was exchanged for items such as bells cast of copper, shells from the Pacific used in making jewelry, and macaws, tropical birds native to Mexico. Remains of macaws have been found at Chaco Canyon and elsewhere and macaws are depicted in kiva murals from the Rio Grande area. A petroglyph on the Macaw Trail shows such a bird. The colorful feathers of macaws are used on masks and head-dresses by modern Pueblo Indians.

In addition to the many thousands of petroglyphs along the escarpment, the Pueblo Indians expressed their creative skills in other forms. They developed a new pottery style, the Rio Grande glaze ware, that added to the rich tradition of pottery making in the Southwest. The colorful murals painted on the plaster of kiva walls are another form of cultural expression. Many of the images in these murals are not found before this period and suggest new ideas to the old Pueblo religion.

In 1540, Coronado became the first European to visit the Pueblo villages along the Rio Grande. Coronado and his expedition wintered in a pueblo on the west side of the river near Albuquerque. The Spaniards destroyed several of the pueblos and much of the population fled until the Spaniards left in 1542. In 1598, Oñate brought colonists to New Mexico and prepared to stay. Between 1610 and 1680, Hispanic settlement of the middle Rio Grande valley increased. Farmsteads or haciendas were founded along the river valley, and mis-

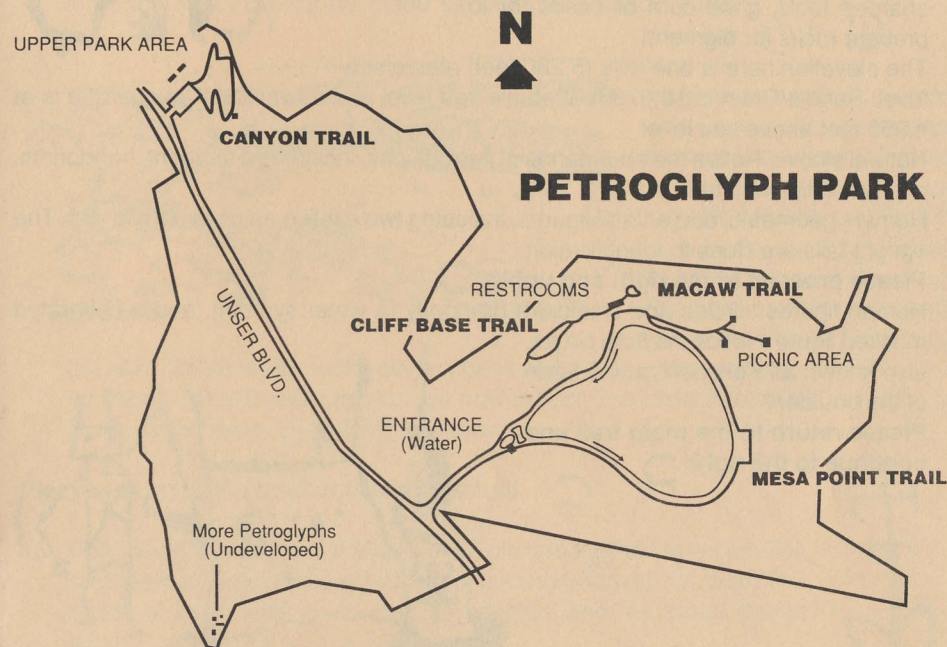
sions were established in many of the Indian communities. Indian populations were greatly reduced in the 1600's due to epidemics, crop failures, raids by nomadic Indian groups, and Spanish repression. In 1680, the Pueblo people united in revolt and drove the Spaniards south to El Paso. The Pueblos remained independent until 1693, when the Spaniards reoccupied the valley. Today, the Pueblos of Sandia and Isleta are all that remain of the original Indian communities that lined the Rio Grande in the Albuquerque area



The Trails

## The Trails

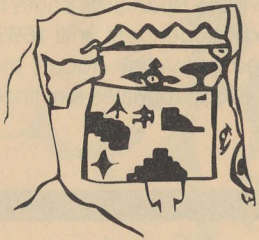
Identification of the petroglyphs are based on contemporary interpretations. One cannot say for certain what the images represent. The trails have been designed to provide a good view of the petroglyphs and to reduce the impact on the escarpment environment. Please stay on the trails and be aware that the trails go through an area where rattlesnakes live.



## The Mesa Point Trail

This trail climbs to the top of the lava flow; it is the most strenuous trail.

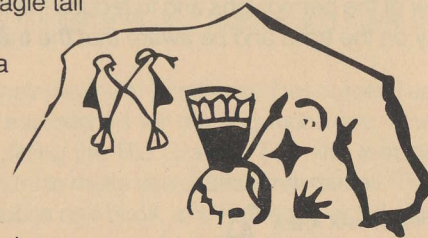
1. Four-footed animal.



2. Square enclosing step-shaped cloud and other designs. The white deposit at the base of this boulder is calcium carbonate (caliche), which indicates that the boulder was moved in recent times. Notice the numerous designs on several sides of this boulder.

3. Animal design and large solidly pecked figure to the right.
4. Birds joined at the breast, star, mask with eagle tail and spear.

5. Abstract image. Notice how the artist used a natural hole in the rock for the eye.
6. Grinding spots are found throughout the escarpment. They may have been used to sharpen tools, grind corn or seeds, or to prepare rocks for pigment.



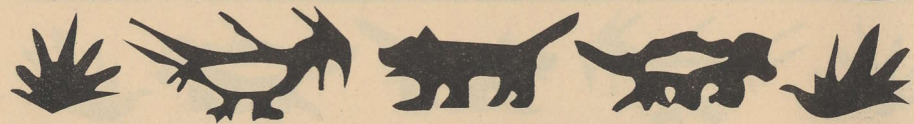
7. The elevation here is one mile (5,280 feet) above sea level. Sandia Crest is 10,678 feet above sea level and downtown Albuquerque is at 4,950 feet above sea level.
8. Natural alcove. Notice the abundance of petroglyphs, including a footprint, handprints, and an outline of a bird.

9. Human, geometric, and animal figures, including two cat-like animals behind you. The upright tails are clues to identification.

**Please proceed to the right and uphill** ➞

10. Human figures, circles and shields, a dragonfly (a water symbol), and a decorated masked figure. Notice the flute player, also known as Kokopelli, at the base of the boulder

**Please return to the main trail and continue to the right** ➞



11. Plumed water serpent and horned mask. This is an excellent opportunity to photograph the petroglyphs above you.
12. Several petroglyphs, including two small animal figures and a cross. The shape of the cross indicates it is most likely a prehistoric symbol. Christian style crosses were made by Hispanic shepherders along the escarpment but they are not enclosed by an outline.

**The trail continues uphill to your right.** ➞



13. Figure with solidly pecked area around one eye.

14. Figure with headdress. **The trail continues uphill to your right.**



15. A conclusive identification of this cleared area surrounded by three low walls cannot be made because no artifacts were found here. It



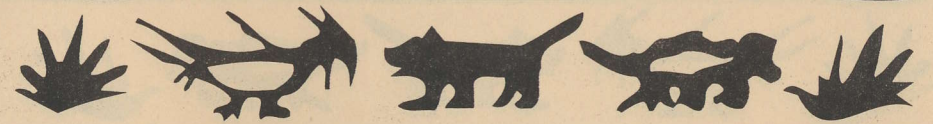
could be an ancient ceremonial area. Several of these east-facing structures have been found along the escarpment and are used by modern Pueblo people. It may have been used by Hispanic shepherders as a sheep pen.

This point provides an excellent view of the Sandia Mountains to the east. To the west are the cinder cones of the Albuquerque volcanoes. They erupted about 190,000 years ago but are now extinct. The rocks here at the top of the lava flow tumbled down as a result of erosion.

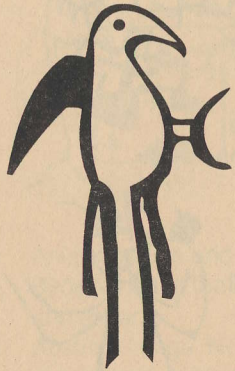
**Please return to the trail and start downhill.** ➞

16. Petroglyph of an agave. The agave is a plant related to the yucca. The soft heart of the agave was roasted in underground pits for food. The points of the leaves were used as needles, and the broad leaves served as a source of fiber for weaving.

17. Bird design.



## Macaw Trail



1. Parrots or macaws, including one in a cage. Parrots are not native to the Southwest. Their natural habitat is in Mexico. Parrots were a major trade item from Mexico in prehistoric times.

2. Seedpod and other petroglyphs

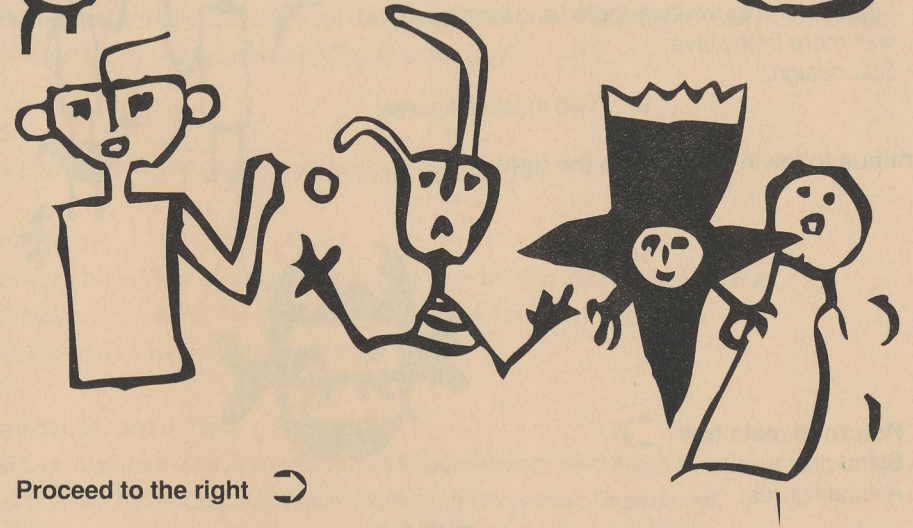
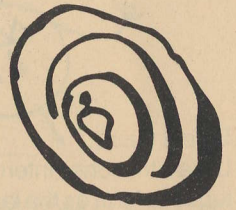
3. Here is an opportunity to make your own petroglyph. Try chipping away at this rock to see how the petroglyphs were made. **Please do not mark on any other rocks in the park; it is against the law.**



## Cliff Base Trail



1. Figures in profile above you and to the left. Concentric circles further to the left.



Proceed to the right ➞

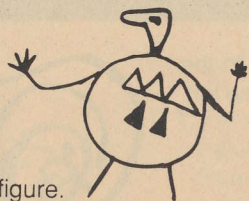
2. Masks and figures. Petroglyphs cannot be dated directly but the presence of a petroglyph over an older one provides a means of relative dating. Petroglyph styles can also be dated by association with datable artifacts.
3. Figure with shield, snake design, mask.

Please return to the trail and continue to the right ➞



4. Notice how the artist used the shape of the rock in creating this outlined figure.
5. Masked figure.





- 6. Shield figure.
- 7. Lava striations. Internal stresses caused parallel tubes to form as the lava cooled and the tubes filled with more frothy lava.
- 8. Star design.
- 9. Two masked figures.



Continue following the trail to the right ➔

- 10. Mask.



Return to main trail ➔

- 11. Spiral design.
- 12. Animal figures.
- 13. Petroglyphs of footprints — more visible if you shade them with your hand.



- 14. Grinding spot and other figures. Notice the different types of masks.

- 15. Mask with plumes.



For more information on the petroglyphs:

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1975 *Rock Art in New Mexico*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.  
1980 *Indian Rock Art of the Southwest*. School of American Research, Santa Fe, and University of New Mexico

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1986 *Las Imágenes: The Archaeology of Albuquerque's West Mesa Escarpment*.  
Report on file, Open Space Division, Parks and Recreation Department, City of Albuquerque; and the Historic Preservation Division of the Office of Cultural Affairs, State of New Mexico, Santa Fe.

Young, J.  
1988 *Signs from the Ancestors: Zuni Cultural Symbolism and Perception of Rock Art*.  
University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque

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