

PAINTED ROCK

Carrizo Plain National Monument



Painted Rock, a horseshoe-shaped monolith rock formation, stands about 55 feet above the high plain adjacent to the Caliente Mountain Range. The geologic formation is a sedimentary rock called sandstone. This sandstone is of marine origin formed about 25 million years during the Miocene Epoch. An ancient river flowing northwestward carved the central portion (saddle) of Painted Rock during the Pleistocene (Ice Age).

The Chumash, Yokuts, and other native peoples lived, hunted and traded in this central region of California. Painted Rock, a special place to the native peoples, is recognized as one of the most important rock painting (pictograph) sites in the United States. Some of the lifeways of the American Indian use of Painted Rock are expressed through their multiple-colored paintings and bedrock mortars used to process seeds and nuts.

Spiritual leaders and other tribal members created the rock paintings as an expression of their cultural and religious beliefs. These beliefs are not fully understood or documented by scientists. These paintings are both intriguing and puzzling as some are drawn in an abstract or stylized form. To the native peoples, Painted Rock is sacred as they continue to express through their visitations to the site.

At Painted Rock, three colors dominate the paintings; red, black and white. The red ochre is made from hematite, a mineral found locally. Pigment for black paint was made from wood charcoal. The source for white paint comes from diatomaceous shale and/or gypsum, both minerals found locally in the Monument. Animal fat or oil extracted from crushed plant seeds, whites of bird eggs, or milkweed may have served as a binder for making paints. Paint was applied to the rock surface by finger or with a fibrous plant stick.

The paintings were done over a long period of time, with some paintings superimposed or painted over previously painted images. The paintings are estimated to be from 200 to 3000 years old. The pictographs exhibit a diverse and intricate style that has been long and widely recognized as among the most impressive in North America. Unfortunately, vandalism ranging from graffiti to gunshot impacts over the past 100 years has destroyed or severely damaged some of the rock paintings. Wind and water erosion, and other natural occurrences such as bird excretions and honeybee activity have also damaged the preservation of the rock paintings.

Please help us protect Painted Rock, a cultural resource of the American Indians of California and a special place for future generations of people to enjoy and benefit. The native peoples today are actively involved in the management and preservation of Painted Rock.

Please do not touch, climb, or walk on any part of the rock to help preserve the painted images. Oils from your hands, as well as physical contact with the rock will accelerate the deterioration of the painted images on both the vertical and horizontal rock surfaces. Tread carefully while visiting the site and do not disturb or collect artifacts, remove plants, or disturb the wildlife. Enjoy your visit and leave everything as you found it.

No hunting or shooting is allowed in the area of Painted Rock or along the trail for one-quarter (1/4) mile radius. Pets are not allowed at Painted Rock. Please **BEWARE** of rattlesnakes and honeybees at Painted Rock and along the trail.

Federal Laws make it illegal to excavate, remove, damage, or otherwise alter or deface (or attempt to do aforementioned activities) archaeological resources located on public land. Any person found in violation of the Archaeological Resource Protection Act could be fined not more than \$100,000, or imprisoned not more than five years, or both. Please report any violations to archaeological resources to the Bakersfield BLM Office (661) 391-6000. Thanks you for helping us preserve California's heritage resources.