

Picture Gorge Rock Art

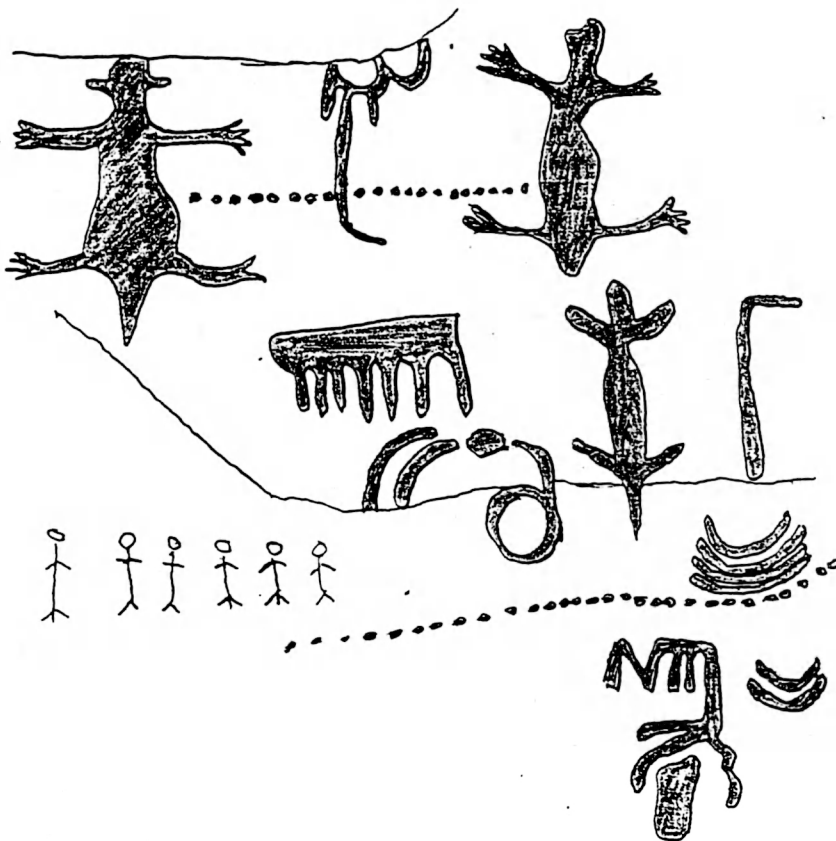
The walls lining Picture Gorge display pictographs, painted by an American Indian culture centuries old. The gorge is named for these pictographs.

What are pictographs?

Pictographs are rock art painted with pigments made from various minerals. The red pigment is derived from crushed iron oxide. The oxides were then added to water, or an organic binder. Many different organic agents could be used as a binder, such as eggs, blood, fat, or plant juice. This differs from petroglyphs, which is a type of rock art that has been drill into, or punctured the rock wall.

How was the paint applied?

After the paint was made it would typically be applied by finger painting. This is apparent, because the lines are finger-width.



These pictograph images located in Picture Gorge depict human, animal, and geometric designs.

How are pictographs able to stand the test of time?

The pigment, when freshly applied, is absorbed by the small pores of the rock, consequently staining the rock. When the water or the organic binder evaporates it leaves the iron oxide pigment, which becomes part of the rock. The pictograph then weathers away at the same rate the rock does. Some of the remaining pictographs may be thousands of years old.

Who were the American Indians of the John Day Basin?

The Northern Paiutes, Umatilla, Wasco and the Warm Spring Indians are some of the tribes known to have frequented the John Day River basin in the recent past. Evidence of an American Indian influence in the basin is provided by the pictographs and discovered artifacts. Seasonally, American Indians used the John Day River basin as a means of subsistence and passage. The basin provided riparian, rangeland, and forested habitat for fishing, hunting, and gathering food.

Pictographs are protected by law on all federal land ...

Preservation of the pictographs is vital since they represent a direct bond between our world and a previous culture, and many questions have not yet been answered regarding the pictographs. Some of the rock art has endured a thousand years of weathering. It would only take minutes for someone to destroy them. Should you discover a pictograph, examine and enjoy the rock art, but also remember its cultural importance. *The best way to protect pictographs is to look, but do not touch.*

MAJOR GEOLOGIC FORMATIONS
of
John Day Fossil Beds National Monument

Formed:

8 to 6 Million Years Ago

Rattlesnake Formation

15 to 12 MYA

Mascall Formation

16 MYA

Picture Gorge Basalts

39 to 20 MYA

John Day Formation

54 to 37 MYA

Clarno Formation

100 MYA

Goose Rock*

* Goose Rock is made up of ocean bottom deposits when this portion of Oregon was under water; primarily rocks and pebbles deposited near the mouth of a large river on the ocean shoreline.