

Petroglyph



National Monument
New Mexico

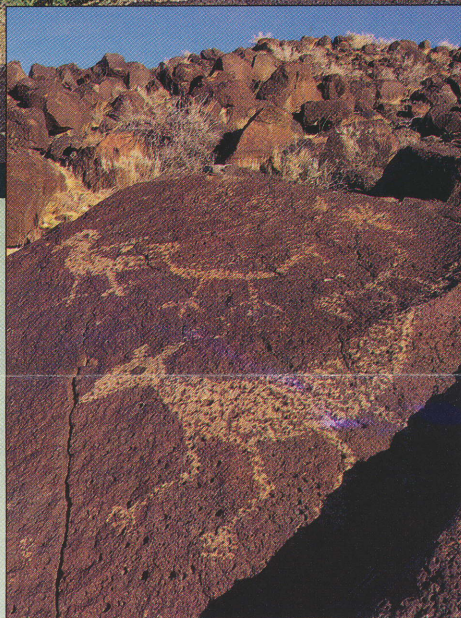
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Open Space Division
City of Albuquerque





Images created in the rock centuries ago are found primarily in concentrations along the east- and south-facing slopes of West Mesa. The petroglyphs include animals, insects, and geometric designs.



Piedras Marcadas Canyon

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Rinconada Canyon

©TOM BEAN

As you walk among the petroglyphs, you are not alone. This world is alive with the sights and sounds of the high desert—a hawk spirals down from the mesa top, a road-runner dashes into fragrant sage, a desert millipede traces waves in the sand. Petroglyph National Monument contains over 20,000 images pecked in stone—some recognizable as animals, people, and crosses, others more mysterious. All are inseparable from this landscape and from the spirits of the people who created them. Today these images carved into the black rocks invite people to step back in time, to think about the people who inhabited and traveled through the Rio Grande valley long ago. These images help us learn from those who continue to interact and reaffirm their spiritual connection with this place. Be still. You may feel another presence beyond what you can see or hear.

“Each of these rocks is alive, keeper of a message left by the ancestors There are spirits, guardians; there is medicine”

—William F. Weahkee, Pueblo Elder

After 1692 sections of the West Mesa became part of the Atrisco Land Grant, presented to certain colonists by the Spanish crown. These colonists also left their marks: Christian crosses, sheep, horses, cows, and various animal brands. On this land remote communities became settlements of Hispanic culture in the New World.



Rinconada Canyon

©TOM BEAN

West Mesa, a 17-mile-long table of land west of the Rio Grande, emerged about 150,000 years ago when lava flowed from a large crack in the Earth's crust. Layer upon layer of lava flowed over and around existing landforms. Eruptions continued from isolated points along the fissure, forming the cones we see today. Over time, softer sediments on the mesa's eastern edge eroded, leaving a jagged-edged escarpment strewn with basalt boulders broken away from the lava caprock. This is the setting for the petroglyphs you see today.

Long ago people discovered that chipping away the rocks' thin desert varnish revealed a lighter gray beneath and left a lasting mark. American Indians believe these images are as old as time. Archeologists estimate that most of the images were made 400 to 700 years ago by the ancestors of today's Native people. Some images may be 2,000 to 3,000 years old. Beginning in the 1600s Hispanic heirs of the Atrisco Land Grant carved crosses and sheep brands into the rocks. Other explorers in the 1800s chiseled their names and dates into the boulders. Walking the trails and studying these petroglyphs gives you a chance to contemplate the meaning of cultural continuity in our world of fast-paced change.

Why were these images created? What do they mean? These questions may be answered by clues in the subject matter, carving technique, or setting. It took a long time to create each image with stone tools—so subject and setting for each petroglyph were carefully planned. Images of birds native to Central America indicate that the Native people were involved in an extensive cultural network. Other questions are more difficult to answer. Were nearby stone bowls, called grinding slicks, used to process plants for ritual medicines? Do spirals represent a calendar, the cycles of life, or perhaps a desert millipede? Human-like faces look out in two directions from the corners of boulders. Are they guarding a sacred location? Only the carvers know the petroglyphs' true meanings.

Protecting the Petroglyphs



Gunshot damage



Enjoying the park's seasonal wildflowers

Petroglyphs are fragile, non-renewable cultural resources that, once damaged, can never be replaced. Organized efforts to protect the petroglyphs began in the 1970s with the establishment of Indian Petroglyph State Park at Boca Negra Canyon and Albuquerque's Volcano Park, incorporating the five cinder cones. In 1986 the entire 17-mile escarpment, location of most of the petroglyphs, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Friends of the Albuquerque Petroglyphs and other groups led efforts to create Petroglyph National Monument, established by Congress in 1990.

To American Indians the entire monument is a sacred landscape. The landscape lives in the stories passed on from one generation to the next. Like places of worship throughout the world, the area demands respect and care. We ask your assistance in protecting this rich cultural landscape. It is illegal to remove, damage, alter, or deface cultural or natural objects or sites within the national monument. Violations are punishable by heavy fines or imprisonment. If you see any vandalism, please call Petroglyph National Monument 505-899-0205, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act Hotline 800-227-7286, or Open Space Dispatch 505-452-5206.

What to See and Do

Visitor Center The best place to start is at the visitor center. Travel west of Albuquerque via I-40, exit on Unser Blvd. (exit #154); go north three miles to Western Trail, turn left, and follow signs. The visitor center is open daily 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; it is closed Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Here you will find information, trail guides, restrooms, and a bookstore. Staff can answer questions and help you plan your visit.

Trails All trails for viewing the petroglyphs are a short driving distance from the visitor center.

Boca Negra Canyon is two miles north of the visitor center on Unser Blvd. Open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (last entry at 4:30 p.m.). You can see petroglyphs along three partly paved self-guiding trails. Hiking times: 5 to 30 minutes round-trip. Water, restrooms, and picnic tables are available. The City of Albuquerque manages this area and collects a nominal parking fee. No pets allowed. **Rinconada Canyon** is one mile south of the visitor center on Unser Blvd. A 2½-mile round-trip, unpaved trail follows the base of the escarpment. Water is not available. **Piedras Marcadas Canyon** area may be entered from a small parking lot

west of Golf Course Road. The **Volcanoes** area offers few petroglyphs, but you can get a close-up view of the park's important geology. Open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Take I-40 west to Paseo del Volcan (exit #149); drive north for 4.8 miles to the unmarked entrance on right. Proceed along unpaved road to trailhead parking. Water is not available.

For a Safe Visit Please observe these warnings.

- Stay on established trails. While hiking on trails watch for sudden storms. Seek shelter in your vehicle at the first sign of thunder or lightning. Do not walk in drainages (arroyos, dry washes) or on top of the mesa.
- Watch for rattlesnakes; report sightings to a ranger.
- Wear sunscreen, protective footwear, and a hat.
- Carry plenty of water.
- Keep your pet on a leash at all times, and pick up after your animal.
- There are no public phones, food services, lodging, or camping in the park; services are available nearby.
- Some areas may be closed in bad weather.

EMERGENCIES: CALL 911

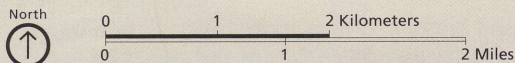
For More Information
Petroglyph National Monument
6001 Unser Blvd. NW
Albuquerque, NM 87120
505-899-0205
www.nps.gov/petr

City of Albuquerque
Open Space Division
P.O. Box 1293
Albuquerque, NM 87103
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Collared lizard
NPS

Petroglyph National Monument



- Information
- Restrooms
- Picnic area
- Parking
- Hiking trails
- Pets on leash

Note: Not all of the park area is currently in public ownership. Certain areas are closed to visitors; please respect posted signs. As more land is acquired, more areas will be opened to visitors.

