



## Petroglyph Canyon



The Petroglyph Canyon archeological site includes two panels containing a total of over 150 figures. Almost all of these figures are petroglyphs (pecked, scratched, or incised images), but one pictograph (painted) is also present. As you enjoy these images, please remember to *look without touching*—repeated touching has already partly eroded some of these images, adding to the effects of rock spall and, in some cases, deliberate vandalism.

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### A Vanishing Resource?

Deliberate vandalism impacts many rock art sites, and the Petroglyph Canyon site has been no exception. A more aggressive enforcement of the Archaeological Resources Protection Act and greater public awareness of the value of rock art are two of our best weapons against this destruction of an irreplaceable resource.

Yet such sites also face another threat—unintentional harm caused by the many visitors to such sites. Visitors can impact rock art sites in many ways.

**Please Do Not Touch Rock Art** Direct contact with rock art is destructive. Repeated touching wears away the images. Applying chalk or other substances can interfere with dating methods, permanently affect the appearance of the images, and otherwise cause damage. Attempts to remove existing graffiti often cause further damage. Respect the past inhabitants of this land and their cultures—leave these panels as you find them.

**No Climbing** Climbing across rock art panels will damage them by creating marks and encouraging rock spalls. Climbing above rock art can cause falling rock to damage the images. Please do not climb within 100 feet of rock art panels.

**Please Stay Outside the Site** Camping in archeological sites is illegal; worse, camping activities damage sites. Fires are especially destructive: they can damage rock art through soot staining, the high temperatures can cause the rock to flake, and burning can invalidate techniques used to date the sites.

**Stay on Established Trails** Foot traffic alters sites in many ways, including removal of vegetation and, often, displacement of artifacts. Restricting the number of trails helps preserve the natural setting.

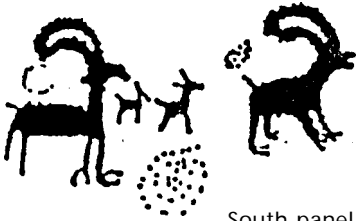


North panel

## The Two Panels

The north panel contains at least 76 figures, including the site's only pictograph—a small red triangle. The figures include anthropomorphs—human-like figures, concentric circles/spirals, and zoomorphs—animal-like figures.

Most of the figures were made by pecking. This could have been accomplished by striking the cliff directly with a hammerstone. The very controlled execution, however, may indicate the use of the hammerstone to strike another hard object, in much the way that a chisel is used.



South panel

Between the two panels, is a series of wide grooves along a rock shelf at about knee height. These grooves suggest tool sharpening, perhaps of the very tools used in creating the images.

The south panel is 200 feet from the north panel, along the same cliff face. It has at about 77 figures. Most are animal figures, especially with curving horns resembling bighorn sheep. Animals thought to be bighorn sheep are common themes in Southwestern/ Great Basin rock art. Many archeologists believe that these depictions reflect the economic importance of bighorn sheep, since the bones of these animals often appear in sites in the area. Southern Paiute elders say that their ancestors hunted mountain sheep in Petroglyph Canyon.

Bighorn sheep pictographs and petroglyphs were made in many different styles. The styles should tell us something about the movements and interactions of different cultural groups. Compare the sheep at this site with those at other sites as you travel throughout the southwest.

## Interpretations

Rock art images offer the opportunity to think about what past inhabitants of the landscape meant to depict, and why they left a particular set of images. As you enjoy the images at Petroglyph Canyon, consider how they fit into the landscape and how the figures and designs might have been important in prehistoric lifeways. For example, why did the makers include the circular/spiral designs?

In some Southwest locations such as Chaco Canyon and Fajada Butte, New Mexico, similar circular designs/spirals interact with sunlight or shadow effects in particular ways during a solstice or equinox. Could the images at Petroglyph Canyon also mark such

events? Systematic observations of light and shadow effects may answer this question.

Many American Indian groups greatly value rock art. It is one way in which they teach their youth about their culture. Some tribes are able to claim cultural relationships to past inhabitants of this area because they recognize clan symbols in rock art. In some cases, rock art is viewed as sacred. Please respect the importance of rock art to American Indian groups. Also, recognize that American Indians often interpret rock art very differently from non-Indians.

## Dating the Images

Rock art in the vicinity of Zion National Park was once assumed to date to Anasazi times—about 1000 years ago. However, people have lived in the area for as many as 7000 years. The Archaic people preceded the Ancestral Puebloan peoples formerly known as the Virgin Anasazi. The ancestors of the

modern Southern Paiute occupied this area as well. Non-disruptive dating techniques are now being developed that may answer such questions as the age of rock art.

## Getting Involved

Rock art sites such as Petroglyph Canyon offer unique opportunities to appreciate and study the past. Unfortunately, vandalism and looting can cause irreparable harm to them. Please report any suspicious activities to a ranger, or call the Archaeological

Resources Protection Act Hotline at 1-800-227-7286. You may also get involved by volunteering to monitor these sites.



South panel