

# Petrified Forest

National Park



## At Home Activity



Make your own  
petroglyphs  
with plaster!

Petroglyphs (images carved or pecked into stone) and pictographs (images painted on stone) created by prehistoric cultures are common in the southwestern U.S. and in Petrified Forest National Park.

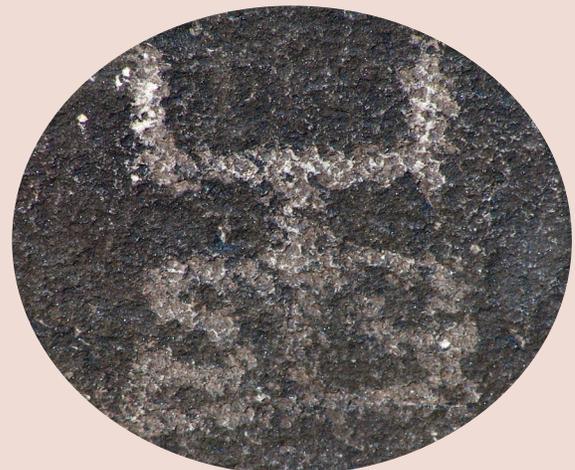
These images are representations of ideas rather than a language and archeologists do not know exactly what they all meant to the people who created them.

They can be zoomorphs (animal figures), anthropomorphs (human figures), or geometric shapes and patterns, some of which can still be recognized today in traditional American Indian artwork.

Some of the geometric shapes even serve as solstice markers, like the one seen in the park at Puerco Pueblo.

### What you will need:

- 1 package Plaster of Paris
- Water
- Shallow flexible container (a disposable foil baking pan works great)
- Black or brown paint and brushes
- A scraping or carving tool (a rock with a pointed edge works well, or you can use a large paperclip with one end straightened for fine details)
- A hammer
- Thick towel or cloth



### Step 1:

- Mix the plaster according to the directions on the package and pour into your container until it is about ½ inch thick.
- You can sprinkle sand on the surface of the plaster while it is still wet to create the feel of sandstone.
- Let the plaster dry overnight.

### Step 2:

- Flip the plaster up-side down to release it from the container. If you bend the container like an ice cube tray it will help loosen the plaster.
- Once the plaster is free, paint the surface and let the paint dry. The paint simulates the natural dark coating on the rocks that petroglyphs are carved into.
- When the paint is dry, wrap the plaster in a towel and break it into smaller pieces with a hammer.

### Step 3:

Use a scraping tool of your choice to draw designs into the surface of the plaster. This will reveal the lighter color under the paint.

### Activity tips:

- Try using different colors of paint on your plaster for some fun effects.
- Experiment with your scraping tools and see which tools work best for your designs.
- You can try a similar activity using layers of oil pastel crayons on paper then gently scratching in your designs with the end of a paperclip.

