

The Petroglyph Site

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Age: 7 and up

Objectives: Engages participants in the process of creating petroglyphs; fosters appreciation of the challenges of carving or pecking a design into a rock face; initiates an understanding of the fragile nature of petroglyphs; and encourages stewardship of archaeological sites in general.



Materials: Plaster of Paris; water; measuring cup; mixing container; long handled mixing spoon; rubber gloves; molds (plastic storage containers, margarine tubs, etc.) for the “rocks”; push pins or thick screws approximately 1 ½ inches long; black tempera paint; paintbrush; photocopied Rock Art Images handout; and images of actual rock art from BLM/Anasazi Heritage Center or similar

Preparation: (Complete at least 3-4 hours prior to activity.) Follow directions on Plaster of Paris container. Pour approximately ½ inch of mixture into molds. When surface has hardened, remove “rock” from mold. To create a dark surface on a rock similar to a patina, paint the surface with black tempera paint and allow to dry. Photocopy a sufficient quantity of the Petroglyph and Pictograph Rock Art Images handout to give one to each visitor.



Number of volunteers: 1 volunteer for every 4–6 children

Procedure: Give each participant 1 rock, 1 carving tool, and 1 copy of the Petroglyph and Pictograph Rock Art Images handout. Display additional images if available. Referring to rock art pictures, participants will re-create petroglyphs onto their rocks.



What they take away: Participants take home their personal petroglyphs.

Preservation message: Illustrates the vulnerability and impermanence of rock art.

Pictograph and Petroglyph Rock Art Images



Petroglyphs and Pictographs

Images like these were created by Native Americans. They are similar to images that were carved or pecked into or painted onto rocks for centuries. Images that were carved or pecked into rocks are called petroglyphs. Images that were painted onto rocks are called pictographs.

Protecting Petroglyphs and Pictographs

Natural oils from our skin can stain or wear away the designs. Making rubbings or tracings can also damage rock art. Never add images to rocks or cliffs. Doing so would disturb the area. Names, dates, or images added today are “graffiti”.

Scientists who record rock art images take photos or make scaled drawings using a grid and graph paper without ever touching the image.

For more information on the “Dos” and “Don’ts” of rock art sites visit the American Rock Art Research Association Webpage: <http://www.arara.org>.