

WELLS PETROGLYPH PRESERVE REPRESENTATIONAL TIME PERIODS OF PETROGLYPHS

Please note that there may be gaps between periods in the descriptions of time periods. Transition from one culture or way of life into another within an area (thus the end of one and the beginning of another) are difficult to interpret in the archaeological record.

PALAEOINDIAN PERIOD – 14,0000 years ago to about 9500 years ago

So far, we have very few possible images on Mesa Prieta that we recognize as having been made in the Palaeoindian time period. Two Folsom point fragments have been found, and one possible Palaeoindian biface fragment. Paleoindian people, like those of the Archaic, are believed to have traveled through a large range to hunt big game and collect plant and stone resources. They lived in a much colder time than the Archaic peoples, hunted with larger spears, and lived in very small groups.

ARCHAIC PERIOD – 9500 years ago to about 1400 years ago (7500 BCE to 600 CE)

- Early Archaic (**9500-3500 years ago, 7500 – 1500 BC**) – Early Archaic images are generally abstract and geometric such as meandering lines, asterisk images, one pole ladders and rakes and other abstract forms.
- Archaic images generally do not resemble images of things we know today other than simple geometric figures.
- During the Early Archaic, petroglyphs throughout the western United States looks remarkably similar.
- Later Archaic (**3500-1400 years ago, 1500 BCE – 600 CE**) - Late Archaic images include animal tracks, human handprints, footprints and sandal tracks.
- The Archaic People were hunter/gatherers and did not build permanent structures for shelter.
- It is thought that the Archaic People's use of hallucinogenic substances impacted the images they created.
- Archaic images are often deeply pecked and are very dark and heavily or totally repatinated. However, not all totally repatinated images are Archaic; images made more recently may be darkened by increased exposure to the chemicals in the air and water
- Archaic images often face upward but can be found on rocks facing all directions.
- Up to 10% of the images on Mesa Prieta could be are Archaic.

EARLY ANCESTRAL PUEBLO (DEVELOPMENTAL PERIOD) 600 CE to 1100 CE

- Serpents, spirals, concentric circles, anthropomorphs.
- Footprints, sandals, and animal tracks continue.
- During this time, small populations lived in pithouses part of the year, mostly along the Rio Chama.
- Small amounts of pottery are produced in the area beginning around this time.

MIDDLE ANCESTRAL PUEBLO (COALITION PERIOD) 1100 AD to 1300 AD

- Many of the same themes of the Developmental period
- Still few images being made on the rocks

- Larger communities slowly form along the Rio Chama drainage

ANCESTRAL PUEBLO CLASSIC PERIOD (OR PUEBLO IV) – 1300 CE to about 1600 CE

- Ancestors of the Tewa people filtered into the area, probably from the Four Corners region and created what is now call the Rio Grande Style of petroglyphs.
- Ancestral Pueblo images are generally “figurative”. They resemble things we recognize today such as human and animal figures, implements of war including shields, shield bearers, spear bearers and hunters; celestial images such as stars and crescents and geometric forms.
- Mythological figures include one and two horned serpents, star beings, composite human animal figures and other supernatural images.
- Fertility figures include birthing scenes, anatomically correct females and phallic males, flute players, sprouting seeds (apostrophe like images), copulation scenes, water and plant images.
- A large number of Classic Period images depict ceremonial activities much like we see in the Pueblo ceremonies today including deer and buffalo dancers, adornment with feathers, hand rattles, leggings, turtle shell rattles and hand implements that are unknown to us.
- The petroglyphs from the Classic Period range from the crudely done and lightly pecked to others masterfully executed by Puebloans with great skill and a refined sense of line and form. Many of the images created during this time period are abstract forms that resemble nothing in the physical world.
- In addition to petroglyphs, the Ancestral Pueblo people constructed numerous water control features on the mesa including reservoirs, check dams, gravel grid gardens, garden terraces and other structures. Trail constructions are also common.
- Ancestral Pueblo rock images generally face east, south east or south. Exceptions abound.
- About 80% of the rock images on the Wells Petroglyph Preserve and Mesa Prieta are Ancestral Puebloan.

POST-CONTACT PERIOD and PUEBLO V – 1600 CE – PRESENT

The Post-Contact Period is from the time of contact when the Spanish entered the area in about 1600 AD and to 1970. The Spanish conquistador Juan de Oñate arrived in 1598 and established a crown colony at Ohkay Owingeh at the southern end of the mesa.

- During early Colonial times, rock images were created reflecting subject matter relevant to their lives. Christian crosses, churches, horses and equestrians, names, dates and initials are among the most common Post-Contact Period elements. These images were likely made by both Europeans and Puebloans.
- Mesa Prieta lies at the northern terminus of the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, a National Historic Trail that spanned from Ohkay Owingeh to Mexico City. It served as a principal avenue of communication, commerce, and religious conversion.
- A section of the Old Spanish Trail connecting Santa Fe to Los Angeles passed along the foot of Mesa Prieta.
- A unique feature on the mesa is that of Spanish heraldic lion images; approximately 25 have been found, and some are magnificently done.

- Shepherding was widespread on the mesa in the 1800s and early 1900s; structures such as corrals, fences and rock shelters exist all across the mesa.
- Post-Contact images face any direction; those made by shepherders often face the pastures where the sheep were grazing or on the leeward side of their shelters away from the wind.
- About 10% of the rock images on Mesa Prieta are Post-Contact Period.

The Post-Contact Period can be subdivided into three periods:

SPANISH COLONIAL PERIOD (1598 – 1821 CE)

- This was the time New Mexico was under rule of the Spanish crown. Spain's influence spread slowly over the span of a century or more.
- Perhaps the most important event during this time was the Pueblo Revolt, led by Tewa man Popé from Ohkay Owingeh. We believe there are petroglyphs from the Pueblo Revolt at Mesa Prieta.

MEXICAN NATIONAL PERIOD (1821 – 1848 CE)

- This was a brief period after Mexico's independence from Spain up to the end of the Mexican-American War.
- In 1847, residents rebelled against the planned US annexation of New Mexico, leading to the Battle of Embudo where they fought with US Army troops just east of the Mesa between Velarde and Dixon.

AMERICAN COLONIAL PERIOD (1848 – 1912 CE) AND STATEHOOD (AFTER 1912)

During this latest period, images were largely made by Anglos using metal tools as well as rocks to incise, abrade, scratch and peck images into the boulders. Copies of early petroglyphs are among these images as well as modifications to older petroglyphs. Drawings, initials and names also were made during this time period.

- Literacy was limited among the Spanish until the late 1800s. It was not until then that names or even initials began to appear commonly in Post-Classic rock images.
- In the late 1930's, the WPA (Works Progress Administration) workers were active in the Lyden area working on roads and irrigation dams and ditches on the Rio Grande.
- Extensive mining occurred on the mesa from the 1950s on and continues today.
- Preservation and education are foremost in the mission of the petroglyph project today. Project members work with landowners, schools and residents in the northern Rio Grande Valley to help protect the archaeological features of the mesa.
- Much of the imagery that is placed on the boulders on the mesa today are additions, some of which are defacement of earlier images, using paint, scratching, gouging, and shooting or in other ways damaging the images.

OTHER CULTURAL INFORMATION

HOW DO WE "DATE" THE PETROGLYPHS?

- Dating of the petroglyphs is subjective based primarily on subject matter as described in the time periods above.

- Repatination is often used to categorize time periods but is not always accurate as images are affected in varying manners by the chemicals in the environment and constituents of the boulders.
- Often the cultural features found in the same area of the petroglyphs assist in approximating time periods such as Archaic projectile points in the area of Archaic appearing images.
- Scientific studies using infrared photography, spectroscopy and, more controversially, desert varnish lamination and micro erosion studies are being developed to attempt to date the images more accurately.

REPATINATION OR DESERT VARNISH

- Repatination is a dark, sometimes reflective coating or patina made over time on rock surfaces through chemical processes involving many factors such as oxidation, mineral weathering, moisture, bacteria and wind-blown pollutants. Repatination is the re-establishment of patina broken by a rock breaking, spalling or the making of a rock image.
- Archaeologists look at repatination to approximate the age of petroglyphs. The darker the repatination and closer to the original color of the rock an image is, the older it is likely to be.
- Recently applied features are very light and have little or no repatination.

SUPERIMPOSITION

- Superimposition is the placement of rock images over older images; many examples of this exist on the Wells Petroglyph Preserve.
- Often superimposition changes the character of the image to represent another subject.
- Sometimes images are re-drawn in part or in whole. An old image may be given new “life” by someone re-pecking a faded design to brighten back up its appearance.

MYTHOLOGICAL IMAGES

- The Rio Grande Style of petroglyphs include many styles of mythological images
- Avanyu –
 - The one and two horned serpents are among the most common of the mythological images seen on the mesa; both are called Avanyu – a water deity in Puebloan culture.
 - The one horn serpent is sometimes seen in profile with the horn arcing behind or in front of the head.
 - This figure is sometimes called a “plumed” or “feathered” serpent.
 - The two horned serpent image is seen much more frequently in images on the mesa than its one horned counterpart.
 - The images may be hastily drawn but most often are carefully and elaborately crafted on the boulders.
 - The images are often seen near water or springs, near water drainages and “emerging” from cracks in boulders or from the ground level of boulders.
 - All snake images, including the Avanyu, have an association with water, rivers, rain and lightning.
- Other mythological images include star-beings (stars with life forms), composite human – animal figures, cloud terraces and other supernatural images.

ARTIFACTS

- In addition to the rock images and structures found on the mesa, a number of different artifacts also exist from all time periods.
- The most common artifacts are ceramic sherds - pieces of broken pots dating back to Ancestral Puebloan Times. Occasionally post-contact pottery pieces or glass are found.
- Lithic material or worked stone includes stone chips, knives, scrapers and projectile points. The materials most often used for these stone tools were obsidian and chalcedony. Cerro Pedernal chert is occasionally found on the mesa. Fine grained basalt tools and flakes are also found.
- Other stone tools include ax heads, hoes, mauls, hammer stones, manos and infrequent metates.
- The Ancestral Puebloans often enhanced boulders with more than rock images. Worked boulder edges, worked natural holes, grinding slicks and other rock alterations are noted. The natural feature of a depression in a boulder that holds water following snow or rain is called a tenaja (Spanish); rock images are often seen nearby suggesting that pre-contact people may have relied on those water sources while they lasted.
- Post-Contact artifacts include pots and lids, buckets, rope, wire, steel tools such as ax heads and shovels, horse shoes, cisterns and other items useful for living and working on the mesa.
- Other indications of human occupation are also noted on the mesa including hand axed tree stumps, trails, old roads, water management features, structures, etc.

ALL ARTIFACTS AND CULTURAL EVIDENCE OF HUMAN OCCUPATION FOUND ARE RECORDED AND LEFT IN THE FIELD.

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