

# Docent Introduction Script and Tour Talking Points

This document is a guideline for giving thorough introductions and covering important talking points before and during the tour. You do not need to memorize and repeat this information verbatim. Feel free to use your own words and style for your introduction and tour. Points during the introduction can be individually covered by docents at the beginning of their tours if needed.

## Introduction

Use your cheat card to remember the main points of your introduction.

- Welcome
- The Wells Petroglyph Preserve, Mesa Prieta and the Petroglyphs
- Mesa Prieta Petroglyph Project – our mission, what we do and how to help
- Geology of Mesa Prieta
- Patination
- Time Periods
- Etiquette – Photo permissions, staying on trail, no touching the petroglyphs
- Safety – Snakes, cactus and loose rocks.

## Welcome

- Welcome to the Wells Petroglyph Preserve! Your tour of the Wells Petroglyph Preserve is made possible by the Mesa Prieta Petroglyph Project.
- **THE MESA PRIETA PETROGLYPH PROJECT** was founded in 1999 with the goal of **recording** all of the petroglyphs on the mesa, **educating** local children and others about them, and **working toward their long term preservation**.

## The Wells Petroglyph Preserve, Mesa Prieta and the Petroglyphs

- **The Wells Petroglyph Preserve is a 181 acre section of MESA PRIETA**, a 12-mile long, 32,000 acre landform that is mostly privately owned. There are over **10,000** petroglyphs on the Wells preserve and we estimate that Mesa Prieta contains over **100,000** petroglyphs, making it the **largest petroglyph site in New Mexico**. What you see today is a small fraction of Mesa Prieta and its petroglyphs. To date, our recording teams have recorded around 60,000 petroglyphs on less than half of the mesa.

## MPPP – our mission, what we do and how to help

- We have two outstanding STEM-based (science, technology, engineering and math) programs for children. Our national award-winning **Summer Youth Intern Program** trains teenagers mostly from local Pueblos and Hispano communities to record petroglyphs and works with them in the field for two weeks each summer. Our **4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum, *Discovering Mesa Prieta***, is being taught in schools from Taos to Santa Fe. It can be downloaded free of charge on our website
- We have an **office in Velarde**, a **full-time Director**, a **full-time Archaeologist** and two part to ¾ time employees working in outreach, education and tours management. MPPP is supported by foundation grants, contributions from private and corporate donors, tours and merchandise sales. We would be thrilled if you choose to **donate to help** us continue this important work.
- We have **100 volunteers**, but we always need more, especially docents. Look on our website for volunteer opportunities if you or someone you know would like to help.

## Geology

- The mesa was formed more than **three million years ago** by volcanic activity in the form of a lava flow north of here. That lava flow occurred when the lowest elevation in this area was 1000 feet higher than today. The lava cap protected the ground beneath it from erosion from the Rio Grande and the action of the Rio Grande Rift. Cooled lava (basalt rocks) have fallen down this 1000 foot escarpment that rings Mesa Prieta and provided a canvas for the ancient people of this region to create images upon.

## Patination

- These rocks are naturally very pale in color. Interaction between minerals within the rock and the environment cause the dark brown surface, called **patina or desert varnish**, to form over thousands of years. A petroglyph is made by scratching, rubbing or **pecking** through that surface to the light colored rock below. Petroglyphs here are mostly made by using a sharp rock as a chisel and a rounded one in the other hand as a hammer. After a petroglyph is made, the patina begins to form again and eventually will completely repatinate, making the petroglyph very hard to distinguish.

## Time Periods

- The **earliest people, Palaeoindians**, on Mesa Prieta belonged to what we call the Folsom culture. They made no petroglyphs that we know of, but partial spear points from that era have been found.
- **Archaic** Period hunters and gatherers began to roam the mesa **9500** years ago. They made thousands of mostly non-representational images

- **Ancestral Puebloan Period** farmers began to populate the Rio Grande corridor around **600 CE**. The **Ancestral Pueblo Classic Period** begins around **1300 CE**, when ancestors of the Tewa people filtered into the area, probably from the Four Corners region and created what is now called the Rio Grande Style of petroglyphs. Their culture is known as Pueblo IV. They made tens of thousands of images that include ceremonial humans, animals, geometric forms, solar markers, shields and many others. There are many flute player images including about 18 known animal flute players. These are nearly unique in North America.
- The **Post-Contact** period began in **1598 CE** when about 450 Spanish settlers, many soldiers, priests, Mexican Indians, and 5000 European animals arrived with Don Juan de Oñate at Ohkay Owingeh at the south end of the mesa. They established the first Spanish settlement in the Southwest. Images such as the horse and the Christian cross began to appear. Petroglyphs from that time include images of European heraldic lions like those on the flag of the king of Spain. These are unique to Mesa Prieta as far as we know.

## Etiquette

- Please feel free to take photographs for personal use, however **DO NOT** post them on any form of **social media** without obtaining permission from the Archaeological Conservancy, owner of the Wells Petroglyph Preserve. (Contact info is on the Waiver Forms)
- Please do not share the location of the Wells Petroglyph Preserve. The protected location is instrumental in our preservation efforts.
- If an artifact is found, feel free to photograph the object but return it to where it was found. Please inform your docent of the artifact and its location.
- Stay on the trail and with your guide at all times. The slopes of Mesa Prieta were stripped of their natural vegetation by overgrazing after the arrival of the Spanish. They are extremely vulnerable to erosion. Every footstep off-trail makes a deep impact on the terrain.
- Do not touch the petroglyphs. Oils from your fingers interfere with advanced dating techniques. For this reason along with maintaining proper respect for the place, we ask you not to touch the petroglyphs. Walking sticks will create a scratch on the surface of the panel as well. Be careful of pointing them too close to a panel.

## Safety

- Mesa Prieta is rattlesnake habitat. You are very unlikely to see one on your tour, but always pay attention to where you put your hands and feet. The chief hazard on the

mesa is **cactus**, both prickly pear and cholla cactus. Loose rocks are on the trails. Always watch your feet while you're walking and look at the petroglyphs once you have stopped! A first aid kit is in the storage box and the outhouse if needed; tweezers are included. There is also sunscreen and bug spray

## Tour Talking Points and Frequently Asked Questions

- We can only date images relatively and cannot date anything exactly unless there is a date pecked into the rock. There are a few of those. IN GENERAL, images that are darker are older than lighter ones.
- These images are not “art” in the sense that Western culture uses that term. “Art” was not the intent of the people who made the images except perhaps for some from the Post-Contact Period. The Puebloans and Archaic people were making culturally meaningful glyphs for use in ritual and ceremony. A large percentage are associated with fertility and rainmaking.
- The only person who knows the exact meaning of any petroglyph is the one who made it and that person is long gone. None of us were there – we do not know their meaning. To record and study and talk about these images, we categorize them by shape. Today, you will hear me refer to these images using this agreed upon system of categorization. I may offer possible interpretations, but these ideas are speculative.
- How long has Katherine Wells been here? Since 1992
- How did she find the site? She and her partner were looking for land in the upper Rio Grande area. A realtor brought them to the land they eventually purchased.
- Did she know there were so many petroglyphs? At the time, they knew there were hundreds of petroglyphs on the land but it was not until she began walking the land that she realized there may be thousands of petroglyphs on her property. Almost 10,000 petroglyphs have been documented on the Preserve.
- What does Mesa Prieta mean? Mesa Prieta means Dark Mesa in Spanish. On many maps of the area, the mesa is named Black Mesa, as are a number of other landforms in the area.
- What is the Tewa name for the mesa? Tsikw'aye

- How long have people lived in this area? Humans have inhabited this area for about 9,000 years as evidenced by Folsom period spear points found in the El Guique area. In addition to petroglyphs there are prehistoric agricultural fields, water control systems, stone tools, structures and pottery sherds to be found on the Mesa. Recording teams are finding numerous pre- and post-contact trails on the Mesa.
- Who owns the Mesa other than the Preserve? Most of the Mesa is privately owned by numerous individuals and families, BLM owns most of the land at the north end of the mesa and Ohkay Owingeh owns land at the south end.
- What does that petroglyph mean? We try not to interpret what the petroglyphs mean as we have no way of understanding the culture in which they were created. We call them “iconic” or of a recognized image or “abstract” in that the petroglyph does not represent anything we can identify. Researchers do feel the petroglyphs represent ceremonial or religious images but we have no way of knowing their intended meaning.
- Can you tell how old they are? We are unable to determine how old the petroglyphs are using scientific methods. However, we can estimate their age by the degree of repatination of the petroglyph or by the image pattern. For example, a horse, wagon, cross, church, clothed or hatted person and other time specific images are assumed to be Post-Contact.
- What other time specific images are seen among petroglyphs? The Archaic images are generally not iconic. They are geometric and abstract and often do not resemble any image known today. The images include lines, circles, meanders, one pole ladders, rakes as well as abstract images. Archaic images do include tracks of animals and humans. The Pueblo IV or Ancestral Pueblo images include humans and animals including elk, deer, mountain sheep, lions, reptiles, birds and ceremonial images such as shield and spear bearers, dancers, horned snakes, flute players, etc.
- What does ‘patination’ mean? Patination is a complex chemical process by which oxidation, mineral weathering, moisture, bacteria and wind-blown pollutants affect the surface of the basalt to make it turn black. Basalt that has remained covered by soil retains its light brown color (show an example). The making of a petroglyph on a boulder breaks through the patina or patination on the rock surface. Those petroglyphs that are very light and bright are thought to be more recently made; those that have repatinated to the color of the rest of the boulder are thought to be very old. Archaic images often are difficult to see as they have repatinated to the original color of the boulder.
- Are there many snakes? Snakes are occasionally seen on the tour trails. Visitors are requested to just step aside and leave them alone.

- Where did the people live? The people who lived here likely lived in the area in the Bosque below us. Shelters are found in various areas of the mesa reflecting Pre-Contact and Post-Contact seasonal use.
- Are there any pueblos on the mesa? Several ancient Pueblo villages are in the area.
- Pfiogeh (Flicker Village) is the Pueblo on the east bank of the Rio Grande, near Los Luceros.
- Sahui Owingeh (Corn Silk Pueblo) is on the east bank of the Rio Grande near Velarde.
- Yungue Owingeh (San Gabriel Pueblo) is west of Ohkay Owingeh.
- Ohkay Owingeh (Village of the Strong People, formerly San Juan Pueblo) present day Pueblo.
- Who made the petroglyphs? The petroglyphs on Mesa Prieta were made during four different general time periods. It is unknown whether only men made them or if women also made petroglyphs.
- Aren't the petroglyphs protected by law? On public lands including State, BLM, Forest and Conservancy lands, National Antiquities Laws protect them from damage, removal or destruction. Unfortunately, petroglyphs and any pre-contact resources on private land are not protected by these laws. That is a very important reason for private lands with archaeological resources such as we see on the Wells Petroglyph Preserve to be placed in some sort of protective conservancy. Fortunately, many private land owners do an excellent job of protecting the pre-contact resources on their land by limiting visitation and other means.
- Do flute players have a hump or pack? What do they represent? We do not know what the hump on a flute player's back represents. Researchers feel the flute players are ceremonial symbols of fertility for both humans and crops. Often the image is seen with a female figure and or with corn or other plant images. It is common also to see war or hunting images in conjunction with flute players.
- Do you think aliens could have made them? This is a question we get from time to time. Who knows? As a MPPP ambassador, please remain objective and respectful when these topics come up.