



Foundation Document Overview

Petroglyph National Monument

New Mexico



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of PETROGLYPH NATIONAL MONUMENT is to protect and promote the understanding of petroglyphs in context with the cultural and natural features of Albuquerque's West Mesa (Escarpment) and perpetuate the heritage of traditional communities connected to these landscapes.



Significance

Significance statements express why Petroglyph National Monument resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Petroglyph National Monument contains the largest concentration of Rio Grande-style rock images in North America and was the first national park unit established specifically to protect petroglyphs.
- The monument's cultural resources and landscape hold profound meaning and significance for traditional communities, especially those within the middle Rio Grande Valley.
- The monument contains more than 350 archeological sites, providing evidence of human occupation and use for more than 12,000 years. This includes the Piedras Marcadas Pueblo, one of the largest pueblos of its time period (AD 1300–1600) in the Rio Grande Valley.
- The geologic resources of Petroglyph National Monument (such as volcanic cinder cones, lava flows, and dramatic surface erosional features) facilitate both an understanding of the formation of the Rio Grande Rift Valley and how natural landforms have influenced culture over time.
- Petroglyph National Monument provides outstanding opportunities for a broad spectrum of research, including understanding of petroglyphs, ethnographic studies, geomorphology, volcanism, and cultural preservation techniques.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Petroglyphs**
- **Geologic Resources**
- **Cultural and Ethnographic Landscape**
- **Archeological Sites**

Petroglyph National Monument contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Flora and Fauna**
- **Recreational Opportunities**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- The rich concentration of petroglyphs that helps define the cultural landscape at Petroglyph National Monument, recognized as important by the native peoples of the mid-Rio Grande Valley and others, offers opportunities to contemplate the meaning of cultural continuity in our world of accelerating change.
- This geologically active area, formed by rifting, volcanism, and erosional forces including the Rio Grande and its tributaries, has attracted people for thousands of years and powerfully influenced their lifeways, traditions, and beliefs—exemplifying how landscapes shape and influence human societies.
- The symbols connected to this place—petroglyphs, land grant deeds, Christian crosses, livestock brands, and inscriptions—provide opportunities to explore the many uses and stewardship of the land, identity, and ideas in the ongoing history of the American Southwest.
- The continuity of the Atrisco Land Grant from 1692 to the present provides an opportunity to understand 300 years of land grant ownership in the face of an ever-changing urban landscape and continued use by the heirs of the original Spanish settlers.



Description

Petroglyph National Monument stretches 17 miles along the Albuquerque, New Mexico, West Mesa, a volcanic basalt escarpment that dominates the city's western horizon. Authorized on June 27, 1990, the 7,236-acre monument is cooperatively managed by the National Park Service and the City of Albuquerque Open Space Division. The western boundary of the monument features a chain of dormant fissure volcanoes. Beginning in the northwest corner, Butte Volcano is followed to its south by Bond, Vulcan, Black, and JA volcanoes. These dormant volcanic cones and the long basalt escarpment show how a series of eruptions over 100,000 years ago formed the West Mesa. The dark basalt boulders that tumbled down to the escarpment's edge provided an ideal material for carving the Puebloan and Spanish petroglyphs.

It is estimated that 90% of the monument's 24,000 petroglyphs were created by the ancestors of today's Pueblo people. Puebloans have lived in the Rio Grande River Valley since before AD 500, but a population increase around AD 1300 resulted in numerous new settlements. It is believed that the majority of the petroglyphs were carved from about 1300 through the late 1680s.

The arrival of Spanish people in 1540 had a dramatic impact on the lifestyle of the Pueblo people. In 1680, the Pueblo tribes rose up in revolt of Spanish rule, and drove the settlers out of the area and back to El Paso, Texas. In 1692, the Spanish resettled in the Albuquerque area.

As a result of their return, there was a renewed influence of the Catholic religion, which discouraged participation by the Puebloans in many of their traditional ceremonial practices. As a consequence, many of these practices went underground, and much of the image making by the Puebloans decreased. A small percentage of the petroglyphs found within the park pre-date the Puebloan time period, perhaps reaching as far back as 2000 BC. Other images date from historic periods starting in the 1700s, with petroglyphs carved by early Spanish settlers.

The monument protects one of the largest petroglyph sites in North America. Many of the images are recognizable as animals, people, brands, and crosses; others are more complex. Their meaning was, possibly, understood only by the carver. The petroglyphs and landscape hold a valuable record of cultural expression and hold profound spiritual significance for contemporary American Indians and for the descendants of the early Spanish settlers.

