

Petroglyphs at the Redemptorist Renewal Center



The Picture Rocks petroglyphs archaeological site is situated on private property owned by the Redemptorist Renewal Center. Most of the rock art at this site is believed to have been created by the Hohokam Indian culture between

A.D. 750 and 1350. The RRC encourages public visitation to the petroglyphs hill but does not allow climbing on its rocks. Please check in at the Center office or call 520-744-3400 before visiting.

A reconnaissance survey of the petroglyphs hill in 2006 by archaeologist Allen Dart, Executive Director of Tucson's nonprofit Old Pueblo Archaeology Center, determined that there are at least 76 petroglyph panels on the top, south, and east sides of the hill, and at least another 70 panels on its west face, so at least 146 panels total, and there may be more. The term "panel" here means an individual rock face that contains rock art designs and/or graffiti. Since most of the rock panels contain multiple petroglyphs, Mr. Dart estimates there are between 800 and 1,000 individual glyphs on the hill.

Most of the rock art is on the west face of the petroglyphs hill and on the hilltop. Very few panels are present on the south side, and no rock art or other archaeological features are visible on the hill's north face except for one nearly hidden rock art panel that faces inward toward the top of the hill on the northwest slope. Another north-facing panel depicting what appears to be a bighorn sheep is pretty high up on the north hill face close to the main west-facing group of rock art panels; and some north-facing rock art panels are at the very top of the hill.

Some of the most prominent rock art panels on the western hill face include two panels with groups of animals and human-like figures that may represent prehistoric hunters, dancers, and shamans; one panel that contains a very well-worn spiral petroglyph above a design depicting a row of hand-holding human-like figures who appear to be dancing in a line; and another panel with two hand-holding human-like figures who appear to be dancing, farther south and higher than the row of hand-holding figures that is on the panel with the big spiral design. The big spiral petroglyph is a calendar marker that displays striking sunlight interactions on the summer solstice and on both the Spring and autumn equinox days. Beginning at 11:40 a.m. (Mountain Standard Time) on the summer solstice

day, while the west-facing spiral glyph is still in the morning shadow a small, triangular patch of sunlight forms on the outer coil of the spiral as the sunlight starts to break over the west face of the hill. Then the point of the triangle grows larger, opening up into a “sunlight dagger” that traces the outer coil of the spiral around counter-clockwise, ultimately ending up with the right side of the “dagger” over the center of the spiral around noon. On each equinox day a “sunlight dagger” opens up diagonally and points approximately into the center of the big spiral petroglyph in late morning.

On the hilltop, around the base of the wooden cross and almost directly above the tile-mosaic picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (both of which were placed on the hill by the RRC), there are at least three bedrock mortars: cup-shaped, intentionally worn or pecked-in circular depressions that probably were used by the Hohokam to grind bean pods from the local mesquite, ironwood, and palo verde trees for food. There also are at least six shallower, mortar-like cupules in the bedrock on the hilltop that may have been used by individual Hohokam Indians to divine certain aspects of their future. (Remember, the top of the hill cannot be visited without prior permission from the RRC.)



Directions from Interstate-10: Take Exit 248 (Ina Road) and drive west 2.5 miles, then turn left (south) onto Wade Road. After about a half-mile Wade Road curves to the right (west) and becomes Picture Rocks Road. Once you're on Picture Rocks Road continue west only about 0.3 mile and turn left (south) into the Picture Rocks Redemptorist Renewal Center (7101 W. Picture Rocks Road). Follow the paved driveway past the retreat's building complex, and park where the lower driveway turns south past the buildings. The Picture Rocks petroglyph site is on the low hill immediately west of the building complex. Most of the petroglyphs are on the west and east sides of the hill. Climbing on the rocks is not permitted so please stay on or close to the trail that goes around the east and south sides of the hill, and down the brick stairway into the wash below the hill, where you will find the best view of the glyphs along the hill's west side.