



Rock Art

Archaeologists study people of the past by the “things” they left behind. These things are called artifacts. Archaeologists put many artifacts in museums for everyone to see. But one kind of artifact you won’t see often in a museum is rock art.

Rock art consists of petroglyphs and pictographs.

Petroglyphs are images and symbols pecked or scratched on a rock. The artist used a small pointed rock to make the image. By doing this, the lighter colored rock underneath would show through, making the picture visible.

Pictographs are images and symbols painted on a rock. The paint was made with minerals, clay, charcoal and plants. Fat, urine or boiled plants were mixed into the paint to help it stick to the rock. Then the paint was put on the rock with sticks or fingers.

What is the meaning of rock art?

Rock art can’t be read like a written language, but archaeologists may wonder what the ancient artists were trying to say. Perhaps the images showed a successful hunt, storytelling, clan or family symbols, or a ceremony to heal the sick. Some images could represent warnings, a sacred place, or a connection to spirit helpers. Native Americans may also have information about the meanings.

Now that you know the importance of rock art please do your part to protect it!

