

FOCUS

Wild Arizona

Key Words

Culture: a group of people with a common set of beliefs

Petroglyph: picture carved onto the surface of a rock

Pictograph: picture painted onto the surface of a rock

Sacred: something important that is regarded with great respect

Symbol: an item or object that stands for or represents something else

Vandalism: intentional damage to or destruction of objects

Have you ever been hiking and seen unusual pictures carved into rocks? Unfortunately, some of this **vandalism** is from careless people who damage the environment. Often, however, it is writing left behind by early Native Americans.

Petroglyphs, pictures carved onto the surface of rocks, are the most common type of rock art in Arizona.

Pictographs, pictures painted onto rocks, also are found here. Because

the people who created the pictures are no longer alive, it is difficult to understand the meanings of these pictures. Some people believe the pictures are **symbols**, representing important ideas or objects in a **culture**. Others believe they are simply an early form of vandalism.

Bighorn sheep are the most common rock art image in Arizona. Petroglyphs of sheep can be found throughout the state in many differ-

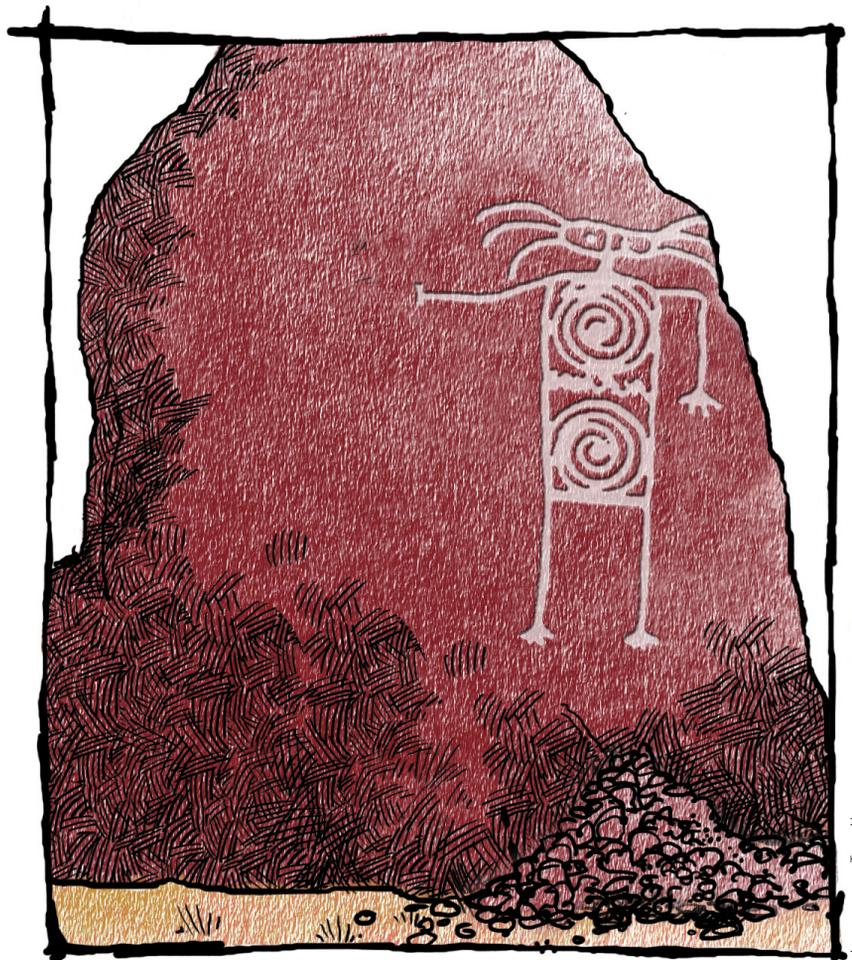
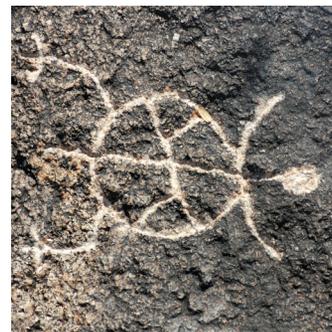
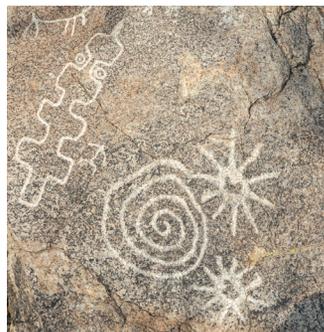


ILLUSTRATION BY TRACY HILL



By Eric Proctor



MATT ANDERSON

Artist John Palacio's re-creations of Hohokam petroglyphs, above, are found at Tohono Chul Park in Tucson (reprinted with permission).

ent forms. Sometimes, sheep are alone. Sometimes they are pictured in a large group or herd. They even have been drawn surrounded by people holding spears or bows and arrows. So what do all these images mean?

You may get a different answer depending on which scientist you ask. Petroglyphs may tell the story of a successful hunt or some other important event. They may be records of dreams. Perhaps they are markers, showing the location of a **sacred** or special site, a gathering place or a trail that bighorn sheep travel. Or, they may be completely meaningless. Perhaps they mark a site where children carved on rocks while they waited for their parents to return from a hunt. What do you think?

Although the exact meanings of

petroglyphs still are unknown, most people agree that because bighorn sheep appear so often in Arizona rock art, the animal was an important part of the daily lives of early Native Americans here.

What is important to you? If you were going to create a petroglyph of a special animal, what would you draw?

Just for fun:

Although you should never make petroglyphs on real rocks, you can try a simple activity at home. You need sandpaper and some hard objects (such as popsicle sticks, spoons or forks). Make sure you do not use sharp objects. Try using the different objects to carve designs onto the sandpaper. Is it easy or difficult? Do some objects work better than others? Early Native Americans probably had to try many different types of rocks

and different tools before they found some that worked well.

Once you have found a tool that works for you, create a sandpaper petroglyph of your favorite Arizona animal. Try to draw a picture that tells a story. What is the animal doing? Perhaps your animal is drinking from a river or chasing down prey. What would these actions look like as petroglyphs?

Give your petroglyph to another person. See if he or she can figure out what your picture means.

Explore your world:

Petroglyphs can be found throughout Arizona. The weather and the types of rocks here are perfect for preserving the pictures. Go on a hike with your parents and see if you can find petroglyphs. Research Arizona petroglyph locations with your parents and visit those sites. 🦋

■ This feature is part of the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Focus Wild Arizona program, a free

educational program for teachers, parents, students or anyone interested in learning about wildlife and

habitat. Visit our Web site, www.azgfd.gov/focuswild, to find exciting lessons and resources.