

Petroglyph National Monument

Rinconada Canyon

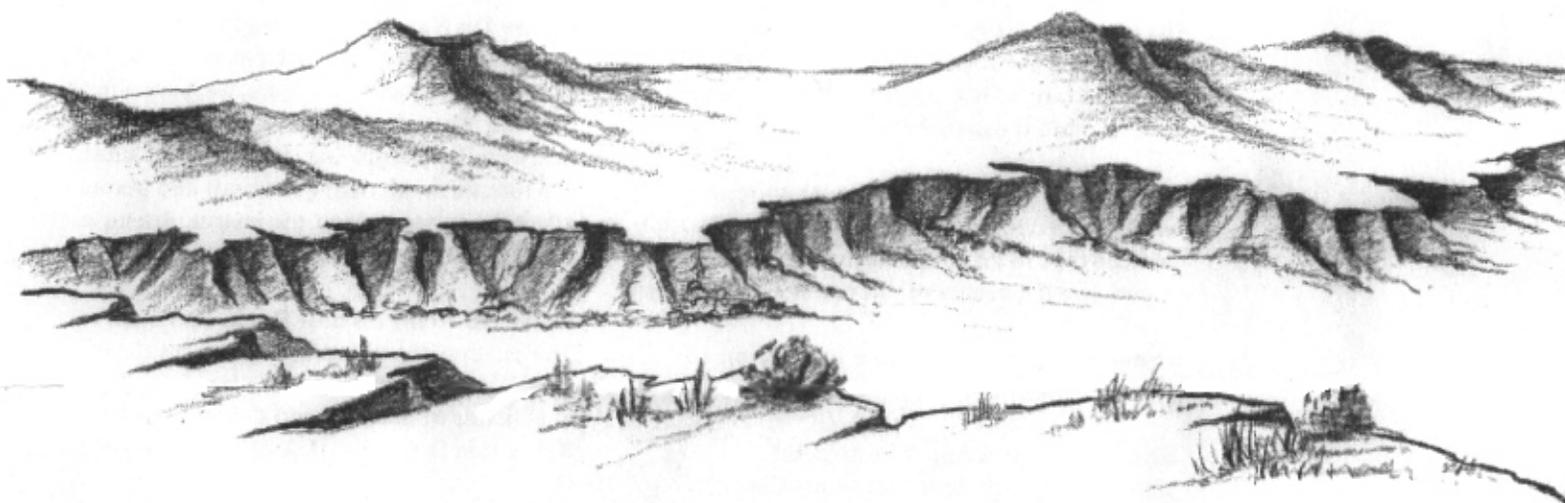


- Round trip distance: 2.1 miles (3.5 km).
- Degree of difficulty: easy to moderately strenuous.
- Leashed dogs allowed, owners must pick up waste.
- Water is not available.
- Lock and alarm your vehicles.
- Secure and hide valuables.
- Report Vandalism (505) 899-0205.





Rinconada Canyon



Explore a Narrow Valley

Rinconada Canyon offers insight into the geologic, cultural, and natural resources of Petroglyph National Monument. Follow the path of past inhabitants of this landscape along silent volcanic boulders yearning to speak to those willing to listen. Enter a narrow valley that seems to have frozen in time, carrying you over sand dunes and alongside a volcanic escarpment abundant with desert plant and animal life. As you walk into the canyon the sounds and sights of the city fade away and may be replaced with the coo of a mourning dove or a collared lizard sunning itself on a basalt boulder.

The Geologic Story

As you hike the sand dunes in Rinconada Canyon you walk on the Santa Fe Formation, which is believed to be up to 25,000 feet thick in some areas. This formation is comprised of alluvial sediments (sand and gravel) that eroded from nearby mountain ranges and were washed down toward the Rio Grande valley by ancient flash floods and streams.

Geologists estimate the most recent volcanic eruption was 200,000 years ago. Basaltic lava flowed

from a 5-mile long fissure, or crack, in the earth's surface three miles west of Rinconada Canyon. As the sand eroded from underneath the basaltic cap, the rock tumbled down forming the escarpment on which the petroglyphs are found. As you hike this canyon you may see the results of this past geologic activity. The escarpment is moving very slowly westward as the erosion process continues. However, the current dry conditions of the southwest have kept the erosion process to a minimum.

Human Connections

Around A.D. 1300 there was a population increase in the Middle Rio Grande Valley by ancestors of today's Pueblo Indians and other Southwestern tribes. The Ancestral Puebloans lived in adobe villages along the Rio Grande, utilizing this desert landscape for hunting, gathering, dry-farming, cultural, and religious activities.

Spanish explorers and Mexican natives arrived in the Southwest in 1540, meeting groups of people along the Rio Grande who lived in what they de-

scribed as *pueblos*, or towns, hence the name Pueblo people. Rinconada Canyon exhibits remnants of early Spanish activity including rock shelters, rock wall alignments (possible sheep corrals), Christian crosses, and petroglyphs of livestock brands. These shepherders were likely descendants of the Atrisco Land Grant holders who were granted an 82,000 acre parcel in 1692 by Governor Don Diego de Vargas. Local Spanish and Pueblo people continue to have a long and enduring relationship with this land and its resources.

The Petroglyphs

Archeologists believe Ancestral Puebloans made most of the 1,200 petroglyphs in Rinconada Canyon four to seven hundred years ago. The earliest known method of making petroglyphs was by striking the basalt boulders directly with a hammerstone removing the dark, desert varnish on the boulder's surface. Later, a more controlled execution was developed by using two stones, in much the way a modern hammer and chisel is used, to make images on the boulders. This "hammer and chisel" method gave petroglyph makers the ability to peck images with detail.

Pueblo elders believe the images are as old as time. They also believe that the petroglyphs choose when and to whom they reveal themselves. You may not see them all. The images include anthropomorphs (human-like figures), concentric circles/spirals, animal figures, and geometric designs. Pueblo

Indians use petroglyphs to teach their children about their history, culture, and spiritual beliefs.

Petroglyphs offer the opportunity to think about how human inhabitants interacted with nature and with each other. Many Southwest Indians are able to claim cultural relationships to past inhabitants of this area because they recognize the images as having deep cultural and spiritual significance.

As you view the images, consider how they fit into the landscape and how the images might be important in Southwest Indian, Spanish, and Mexican cultures and religious beliefs. Also recognize that petroglyph images have varied interpretations or meanings to different people. Please respect the importance of petroglyphs to the inhabitants, both past and present, of this sacred land.