As Arizona celebrates its centennial as a state, the reality is that people have been living here for thousands of years. Arizona has a rich cultural history that lies outside our backdoors, beckoning us to discover who these people were, what they valued, and how they lived. Despite some people's efforts to disparage rock art as “Indian graffiti,” rock art is a record of our ancestors' daily lives and deserves to be protected. Many rock art sites have sacred meaning and were located in special places that held unknown significance to ancient peoples. Some rock art is representational of daily activities while others are more abstract and their meaning is still hidden to us. All of it represents an art gallery that can be enjoyed at a stroll.

We are fortunate that there are numerous historic sites around the state that people can visit within just minutes or a few hours from their homes. Here are some of my favorites.

### V-V Heritage Site—Camp Verde

One of the largest petroglyph panels in the state is near the University of Arizona’s V Bar V Ranch north of Camp Verde. Take Exit 298 off Interstate 17 and instead of heading west to Sedona, turn east and follow the gravel road for 2.5 miles. Just past Wet Beaver Creek, you will see the sign for the V-V Heritage Site. Park in the lot and be sure to stop at the Visitor Center first to check in and get oriented. If it is a hot day, you will appreciate the fans and coolers inside. And they sell cold water. You will need a National Parks pass or pay a fee to enter.

Then take the short 0.3 mile trail south to the petroglyph panel. Usually, a volunteer is there who is more than happy to share his/her knowledge about the petroglyphs. Petroglyphs are pecked into the rock. Pictographs are painted onto rock surfaces.

This particular panel (see photo 1) is unique because it is believed that it was used like a giant calendar to track the movement of the sun and be able to predict when the equinox and solstice would occur. Large stones were intentionally placed in a crack above the panel and the shadows from these rocks fall across key petroglyphs during specific times of the year.

The panel also includes Sandhill Cranes (Photo 2) and one of the few images of a female with hair whorls still worn by some Hopi women today (Photo 3). About a half mile away, on Sacred Mountain, researchers have discovered a 60-room pueblo and may have been the largest agricultural production area for the time. Numerous cobbled-outlined plots for growing plants have also been discovered at this site.
Picture Rocks Pass—Tucson
Aptly named, Picture Rocks Pass on the way to Saguaro National Park West is a great place to see some interesting petroglyphs. Park at the pullout just past the Redemption center east of the pass and walk in the wash south to the large cliff of rocks where you will see a scattering of petroglyphs. Images of deer and sheep cover the rocks along with images of people. Thoughtless individuals have defaced some of these images, so please, teach your children respect and do not touch the images or climb the rocks (Photo 6).

Honey Bee Canyon—Tucson
This special pocket park is located in Oro Valley off Rancho Vistoso Boulevard. Look for the parking area on the south side of the divided road. This is a great hike for the family and easily done. Park and head north in the dry creek bed under the bridge. There are plenty of trees here to provide shade but seldom is there water. After about a mile and before the head of the canyon opens up to the desert, look for the rock face on the west side of the creekbed. There are a number of images pecked into the rock here. For a sample, see Photo 7. Notice the owl like figure on the right of the panel.

Palatki and Honanki Ruins—Sedona
These two sites provide a glimpse into the lives of prehistoric peoples who lived in present-day Arizona. These are the largest settlements of Sinagua culture in central Arizona. Palatki had over 60 rooms, and unlike any other cliff dwellings I have seen, the pictographs and petroglyphs are right with the dwellings. Theories are that this settlement was inhabited since the end of the last Ice Age up to the near present. Tree ring data shows habitation from 900-1300 A.D. The two sites are close to one another and about 10 miles southwest of Sedona. There is a rock art trail at Palatki Ruins, and at Honanki Ruins the pictographs are right inside the dwellings etched on cliff walls. Look for the figure above the room with a filled-in doorway. Notice the human and animal figure in red below the shield (Photo 4). There is also a pictograph of people in a line with their hands in the air—an interesting image (Photo 5).
Picacho Mountains Petroglyphs—Eloy, AZ

East of Eloy, the Picacho Mountains are an isolated range in dry desert country. The Central Arizona Project runs along the base of the mountains, and in the northern part of the range are two prominent hills with hundreds of petroglyphs. Archaeologists have documented over 4,000 petroglyphs at 19 different sites in this area. Unfortunately, this area is also a sad example of how many of the rocks and art have been vandalized and destroyed by careless people. Still, the area is interesting to explore and you can see many examples of interesting rock art. Look for the animals that are upside down next to people with their arms raised in the air (Photo 8). Be sure to take plenty of water when investigating this site as it is hot and dry during much of the year.

From Exit 211A head north on AZ 87 for about 4 miles. Turn east on Houser Road, and go another 5 miles until you come to a T-intersection. This road is called Brady Pump Road but is usually not signed. Take a left and head north on this road for about 2.8 miles until the pavement ends. There you will see a brown water tower for the CAP on your right. Rather than taking the right fork at the water tower, head north on the dirt road, crossing a cattle guard and gate. Go north for 1.2 miles, then turn east (right) on the well-travelled gravel road (high clearance is not needed although the road can be sandy at times) and continue another 1.5 miles. The petroglyphs are on the west side of two prominent hills with black rocks. The petroglyphs are located on Arizona State Trust Land. You should have a permit to recreate at this area and you can get a permit by calling 602-524-4631. Both locations have parking areas.

Kings Canyon Petroglyphs—Tucson

Within Saguaro National Park, Kings Canyon trailhead is opposite the Desert Museum and is quite easy to find. The parking area is small, and hikes up the trail are usually best in early morning or in the cool winter months. About 1 ½ miles up the trail, you can find a profusion of rock art near the picnic area. Look at the rocks on the north side of the wash and keep your eyes peeled for images. Soon, you will be seeing many including spirals and sun images (Photo 9).

Signal Peak—Tucson

Another location for some outstanding petroglyphs in Saguaro National Park is the picnic area at Signal Peak. Located off the Golden Gate dirt road in the north part of the park, these petroglyphs are found on a small rock outcropping about ½ mile from the picnic area. Spirals, deer, desert bighorns and other images are immediately recognizable before your climb out of the wash below the knob. Additional images are on top. This is a great hike for small children.
Key Hole Sinks Petroglyphs—Williams

Just to the east of Williams about 5 miles is a popular snow play area called the Key Hole Sinks. Get off of Interstate 40 at exit 171 and drive east on the frontage road (actually old Route 66 before the freeway was built) for about 3 miles. There is a pull off on the south side of the road where the sledding hill is located.

This sink resulted from collapsing limestone after many years of underground erosion. The trail starts on the north side of old Route 66 and you must enter through a small gate. The hike is only about ½ of a mile and is relatively flat. There are blue triangles on the trees indicating the cross-country ski route when there is ample snow on the ground and the route is difficult to find.

Like other petroglyph sites, this one was seriously vandalized in 2005. Fortunately, it has been restored by concerned local people. The images here are faint and can be difficult to spot, but keep looking, especially along the north side and you will see images starting to appear. The best image is of a deer hunt where hunters drove deer into this natural box canyon. It is a great image and is clearly a representation of the actual site that was used for hunting.

Other images are closer to the small pond that forms when water pours into the sink after a rain or snow storm (Photo 11). Enjoy the forest and please keep the gate closed to keep grazing animals from entering the site. And report any vandalism!

Petrified Forest National Park—Holbrook

Petrified Forest National Park east of Holbrook is fascinating just for the petrified trees that litter the ground throughout the park. But the park also has some excellent examples of rock art that should not be missed. This stunning picture of a bird holding a frog in its beak (Photo 12) can be found on a panel near the Puerco Village Ruins in the park. Puerco Village ruins are about in the middle of the park and right along the main park road. There were about 100 rooms in this village that was inhabited about 1250 A.D. and may have housed as many as 1,200 people. The image included here might just pique your interest in visiting this unique Arizona landmark.

Sears Point Petroglyphs—Gila Bend

As long as you are out and about on I-8, you may as well continue on to Sears Point—another site with hundreds of petroglyphs etched onto volcanic rocks. This site is about 75 miles east of Yuma. Exit the interstate at Spot Road, and on the north frontage road head east for about 1 mile to Avenue 76 ½ -E. Go north on this dirt road for about 7 miles to a parking area. The petroglyphs are in front of you by the low ridge of rocks.

These are just a few of many sites around Arizona. Once you get interested in viewing petroglyphs or pictographs, you will start looking for them everywhere. They represent a key element of our past and deserve our respect and protection.
Painted Rocks Road—Gila Bend

Although inaccurately named, this rock art site is made up of petroglyphs, not pictographs. There are also more modern-day inscriptions left by travelers from the past. Boulders here are covered with petroglyphs. There are at least 800 images at this site. The best time to visit this site is between October and April. See Photo 13.

To find this site, travel on Interstate 8 and exit at the Painted Rock Dam Road (#102) which is about 12 miles west of Gila Bend. Head north on Painted Rocks Dam Road for about 11 miles. The road is paved and easily traveled by passenger car. There are picnic tables but no water, so bring plenty. Please don't climb on the boulders or deface the petroglyphs. The numerous broken rocks are a result of previous visitors who did not heed this advice and have destroyed many petroglyphs. You may be lucky enough to see some of the local wildlife as well—like this collared lizard (Photo 14).

RESOURCES

PHOTOS
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