Welcome to Jeffers Petroglyphs

Tour starts here. Jeffers is a sacred place and can be thought of as an encyclopedia for Native Americans. We invite you to use all of your observation skills—observe with your eyes and you will gain wisdom. Elders tell us that all things are 100% sacred, and that each time something is used in a sacred manner, it becomes more sacred. Many of the carvings are spiritual, and many are informational.

Petroglyphs here: baby moose or bison next to hoofprint, canine, thunderbird, and more.

1. The atlatl is a spear-throwing technology that is found all over the world. In the archaeological record, the atlatl begins to show up in this area about 5,000 years ago.

2. Notice the carvings here are arranged in a circle: Historically, Native People composed pictorial narratives that were read clockwise. Rock carvings similar to this style are typically seen from southern Oregon to southern British Columbia.

3. Notice the symbols carved into the rock here were used in Maps created by Native Americans. Historically, dots represent overland trails, circles were towns, wiggly lines were rivers. In this set of carvings there is a small herd of bison, next to a town, near a river connected to a system of trails. A person with a spear is on the dot line trail.

4. This section is full of petroglyphs. The two largest are a hand with an eye inside of it and a beautiful profile of a woman figure. Many archaeologists believe the image of the Hand with Eye represents the entrance to the spirit world, which is found in the “hand constellation” we know as Orion. This image was drawn on copper, stone, pottery, and shell objects throughout the Mississippi River basin from 900 CE to 1650 CE. The figure resembling a side profile of a woman is another popular image to emerge from the same time period and tradition. This image reminded one of the elders who helped interpret this site of Grandmother Earth, the Creator, or First Woman.

5. Many of the people native to North America tell stories of a hero named One Horn or Red Horn. The Ho-Chunk and Ioway people who once lived near Jeffers Petroglyphs tell stories of a hero named Red Horn. Red Horn was sent by the Creator to rescue humanity.

6. Notice the focus here is on people. The people in this set of rock carvings have bent limbs, which may have been used to show motion, so one thought is that they are dancing in a ceremony or ritual.

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8. Here we see a huge bird track. Bird tracks are one of the most common carvings at Jeffers. Around a thousand years ago, a tradition of carving bird tracks, hoofprints, handprints, and footprints started in southeastern North America and spread northwest.

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Minnesotas recorded history begins at this sacred site where Native Americans have worshipped and recorded the story of their lives in rock carvings for thousands of years. Jeffers Petroglyphs is the largest petroglyph site in the Midwest. We invite you to appreciate this awe-inspiring record of the past while enjoying the splendor of a tallgrass prairie ridge crowned by rich red rock.

When site is open:

Begin your experience at the visitor center

• View exhibits about Native American culture and prairie ecology
• Shop the museum store for locally made crafts, books, gifts, cold beverages, and snacks.
• Guided 45-minutes tours begin at the rock face on the half hour.

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