

# WELCOME TO JEFFERS PETROGLYPHS

Minnesota's 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.
- **Daily** stationed tour experience.

## WHEN SITE IS CLOSED:

- **Explore the site and trails** with this interactive visitor guide.

Learn more about Jeffers Petroglyphs and browse our calendar of events at [mnhs.org](http://mnhs.org).

VISITOR GUIDE



27160 County Road 2  
Comfrey, MN 56019

## EXPLORE THE BEAUTY, HISTORY, AND CULTURE OF THIS ANCIENT AND SACRED SITE

### THE ROCK

#### What are petroglyphs?

Petroglyphs are images carved on a rock face. The word comes from the Greek *petra*, meaning stone, and *glyphe*, meaning carving. Some of the ancient petroglyphs found here are 7,000 years old, making Jeffers one of the oldest continuously used sacred sites in the world. How many petroglyphs are carved into the rock? More than 5,000 Native American images are carved into the Sioux quartzite outcroppings. Images of buffalo, turtles, thunderbirds, and humans tell the stories of Native American ancestors.

### THE PEOPLE

#### Who carved the petroglyphs?

Oral histories, historical records, and archaeology tell us that this area was inhabited and visited by several tribal nations, including the Ioway, Ojibwe, Cheyenne, and Dakota. Native Americans continue to conduct prayers and religious ceremonies here, as their ancestors did thousands of years ago.

#### What do the petroglyphs mean?

The petroglyphs document Native American presence, historic events, and spiritual beliefs. Native American elders have participated in the conservation and ongoing interpretation of the petroglyphs' meaning and significance, but mysteries remain about what each glyph represents. Visit [mnhs.org/jefferspetroglyphs/learn/rock](http://mnhs.org/jefferspetroglyphs/learn/rock) for more information.

### THE PRAIRIE

#### What plants live here?

Jeffers Petroglyphs maintains 33 acres of native prairie and more than 100 acres of restored prairie. The more than 300 species of flowers and grasses found here include prickly pear cactus, buffalo grass, cordgrass, and sedge. Much of the site showcases the big bluestem and Indian grass prairie that once covered southwestern Minnesota.

#### How can I help preserve Jeffers?

Please stay on roped, gravel, or mowed paths and put all litter in the garbage cans provided. Pets are not permitted on the main trail to the rock face or on the rock face. Please do not pick wildflowers or other plants or disturb the rock surfaces. Thank you for respecting this sacred site in the same way you respect your own place of worship.



# JEFFERS PETROGLYPHS

BUFFALO  
RUB

**PETROGLYPH TRAIL**  
1.1 miles - Gravel path to rock face,  
grass path prairie loop

P

ATLATL  
RANGE

**VISITOR CENTER**

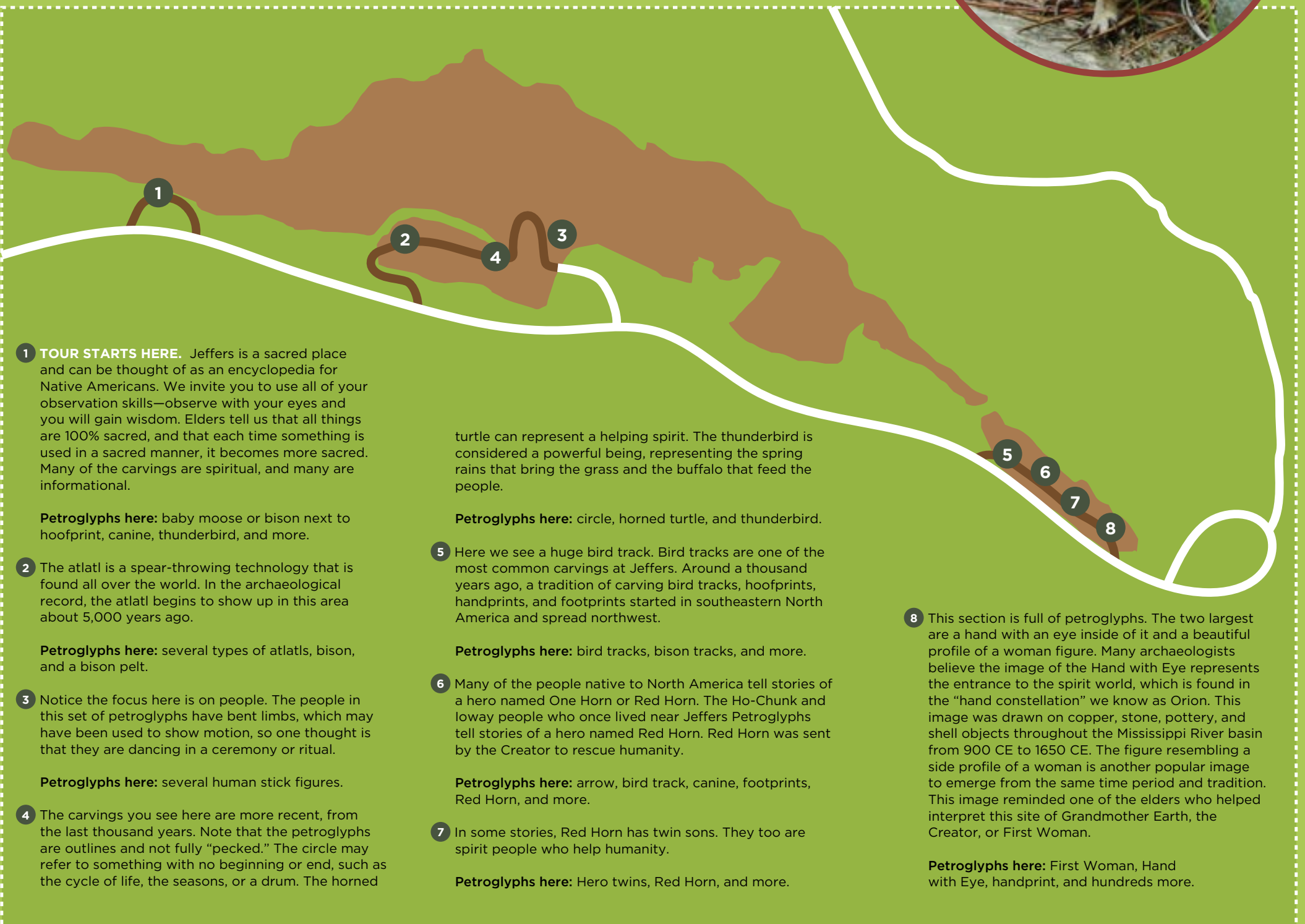


**HOUSE FRAME**  
Experimental  
archaeological  
interpretation of  
what a Fox Lake  
Phase house may  
have looked like.

**GARDEN** Features crops  
traditionally grown  
in the region  
from around 1,000 years ago.

**PRAIRIE TRAIL**  
1.2 miles - Grass path

SEE INSET BELOW



**1 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.

**2** 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.

**Petroglyphs here:** several types of atlatls, bison, and a bison pelt.

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

**Petroglyphs here:** several human stick figures.

**4** The carvings you see here are more recent, from the last thousand years. Note that the petroglyphs are outlines and not fully "pecked." The circle may refer to something with no beginning or end, such as the cycle of life, the seasons, or a drum. The horned

turtle can represent a helping spirit. The thunderbird is considered a powerful being, representing the spring rains that bring the grass and the buffalo that feed the people.

**Petroglyphs here:** circle, horned turtle, and thunderbird.

**5** 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.

**Petroglyphs here:** bird tracks, bison tracks, and more.

**6** Many of the people native to North America tell stories of a hero named One Horn or Red Horn. The Ho-Chunk and loway 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.

**Petroglyphs here:** arrow, bird track, canine, footprints, Red Horn, and more.

**7** In some stories, Red Horn has twin sons. They too are spirit people who help humanity.

**Petroglyphs here:** Hero twins, Red Horn, and more.

**8** 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.

**Petroglyphs here:** First Woman, Hand with Eye, handprint, and hundreds more.