

## Cultural Resources

### History

The petroglyphs site was discovered in 1924 by Mr. Charles Kingam, a local resident and a member of the Peterborough Historical Society. His discovery was not widely publicized. Thirty years passed before there was a renewed interest in the site, prompted by its rediscovery by a geological team from Industrial Minerals of Canada (Indusmin Ltd.), who stumbled across the carvings on May 12, 1954. The first report was completed by Paul Sweetman, a member of the team from the University of Toronto, who mapped the site and made a preliminary study and record of the carved characters. His survey recorded 92 glyphs, including animals, human and humanoid figures, of which triangular figures were the most common. An extensive search for associated village remains or other petroglyph sites along with ecological surveys has since been made. These surveys did not have any positive results. However, two other small petroglyph sites were uncovered in the immediate area of the main site.

An intensive re-examination of the site was done by Joan and Romas Vastokas of Trent University in the summer of 1967. Their findings were published in the Sacred Art of the Algonkians in 1973. This study was instigated for several reasons. First, the petroglyphs were believed to be more extensive than the original report had indicated. Secondly, the introduction of a clear hiking trail in the 1950s and a forest access road in 1966 allowed easier access to the site and thus increased the number of visitors. The increase in the number of visitors to the site in turn increased the possibility of overuse and vandalism and further justified the new study. The study revealed that new information was needed on new methods of protecting the site, reducing rock erosion and providing new interpretive programs to explain these problems.

The Vastokas checked 232 sq m of rock, mapped 900 glyphs and excavated the area's crevices and depressions. Their study produced approximately 300 distinct glyphs and 600 vague glyphs, 30 hammerstones and seven pieces of clay pottery. Their study revealed that there was a main petroglyphs site and two smaller ones nearby (Figure 10).

The main marble outcrop on which the glyphs are carved is roughly 12 m to 20 m in size and rectangular in shape. It extends north-south and slopes towards the rising sun. In addition, there are numerous crevices and circular potholes in the site's facies and a wide and deep fracture with an active underground stream in the outcrop. The stream, which, is especially audible during spring runoff, is believed to have personified religious spirits. It was probably a major deciding factor for the large concentration of glyphs on one particular limestone surface.

Figure 10

The Petroglyphs of the Main Site



One of the smaller sites is directly north of the major concentration, while the other site is 250 m to the northwest. The second small site consists of 23 distinct glyphs. In addition to these sites, there are a few glyphs scattered through the peripheral areas of the site. The Vastokas recorded glyphs that ranged in size from centimetre-sized dots to 3-m snakes. The carving depths vary from vague, barely perceptible impressions to distinct, deep impressions, such as the large crane which is almost 4 cm deep. The glyphs would have appeared white when freshly done and would have been a definite contrast to the weathered grey of the surrounding rock. Recently, however, the glyphs have been made more distinctive with the application of black wax crayon. This process facilitates the recording of the carvings, and allows for corrections based on future evidence that superimposition has occurred or evidence that a glyph has been coloured inaccurately.

The 30 hammerstones discovered on the site are believed to be the instruments used by the Indians to make their carvings in the marble. The hammerstones are made of gneiss and were found in crevices among decaying matter. While marble is three on the Moh Scale of 10 for rock hardness, gneiss is harder and measures six or seven. Therefore gneiss makes an ideal tool that is readily available in the vicinity of the site.

Leading authorities estimate the age of the petroglyphs to be about 500 to 1,000 years old. It is difficult to date rock art because there is no method of accurately identifying the age of inanimate objects. Carbon dating, in this instance, is useless because it can only record formerly animate objects. The more recent date of 500 years is arrived at because none of the carvings indicates European contact, and the outside date of 1,000, rather than 3,500 years, is fixed as a result of the historical data pertaining to the semi-nomadic people.

Evidence indicates that the Ojibwa of the Algonkian linguistic group in the Late Woodland Era were the glyph carvers, since they were historically in the area, and some of the glyph styles are identical to their documented birch bark scrolls. The site probably filled the role of a sacred place for consecutive generations over a 500-year period. Also, the fact that they had an oral system of communication helps to explain why the site sank into oblivion.

To a native carver, the natural rock features would have represented a sacred site. According to Algonkian mythology, holes in rock were entrances to the spirit world situated directly beneath the surface. It was also believed that spirits preferred to live near water. The site in the park combines both features and would have been an ideal place to communicate with the supernatural. Thus the petroglyphs site served as a natural shrine for the Algonkian culture. Although this site is remote, it is still close to the Trent-Severn system, the old Algonkian travelway.

Historically, Algonkian youth, particularly the Ojibwa, journeyed to remote places for four to 10 days. This traditional retreat was probably based on the concept that the youth's pilgrimage and endurance

signified his entrance into manhood. They executed drawings and carvings as a symbol of their changes. They frequently returned to the site to add to their original carvings.

Paul Sweetman developed the idea that the natives searched for visions associated with the change into manhood and that these visions were the main reason for the carving of the petroglyphs. Sweetman went on to say that individuals in a culture based on small, isolated hunting bands saw the relationship between man and animal as a delicate and magical one. He thought the basic theme of the site was a depiction of man's relationship with nature, with an underlying theme of fertility and sexuality.

The Vastokas concluded similarly that the petroglyphs were done by the Ojibwa of the Algonkian linguistic group. However, they believe that the shamans, rather than young boys, were responsible for the carvings, because the symbols are too religiously complex to have been executed by inexperienced carvers. In the Algonkian culture, the shamans were the people with supernatural powers acquired through visions. These visions were often received at sacred places, such as the petroglyphs site. The Vastokas believed that the visions were manifested as symbols representing man's relationship, not with nature, but with the supernatural.

Evidence indicates that no effective dream drugs existed for this culture, but physical deprivation, whether artificially or naturally induced, was usually sufficient to enter the supernatural world.

Three definite carving styles seem to be present. The deepest glyphs are in the area of the highest concentration in the middle of the northern section of the largest site. It is hypothesized that the northern end of the rock face was used first, and, as it filled up, the carvers moved toward the southern end. Later, as it became cluttered with carvings, the carvings shifted toward the north again because the original glyphs had faded. It seems that the deep, stylized glyphs were superimposed on older figures by making deeper cuts with coarser tools. This ensured that the latest carvings were more distinct. One other hypothesis relating to the depth of the petroglyphs impressions is that the power emanating from the vision that inspired the images, such as the sun-figure, the crane and the triangular shapes, was so strong that the carver reaffirmed this faith or "mana" yearly with renewed cutting.

The next style of carving occurs at the southern end, where the glyphs are shallower but freer in their motion and more natural. What appears to be a third style is found at the second site, which is older and more weathered. It contains the only fish carving among all the glyphs and is composed of subject matter different from that of the other two. Although the historical and cultural context into which the carvers of the site can be fitted is delineated fairly well, many questions about the site are as yet unanswered. The general view is that the carvers reflected their spiritual experiences in as permanent a medium as their environment permitted. The glyphs depict the close harmonious relationship between the Ojibwa and their environment, ultimately penetrating into realms beyond the earth.

In the Shield's woodlands, there are over 300 known occurrences of rock art, pictographs and petroglyphs attributable to the Algonkian peoples. Of the 300, only some 20 are petroglyphs. The majority of occurrences are pictograph rock paintings. The pictograph rock paintings in the Canadian Shield are more recent than the petroglyphs carvings. It appears that the Peterborough petroglyphs are far removed from the other petroglyphs and pictograph sites, most of which are located along the Ontario-Manitoba border. The Peterborough petroglyphs are unique because this site is one of the largest concentrations of petroglyphs in North America. It is the correlation of styles which links these widely-separated sites.

Other Ontario rock art sites accessible to the public are found in Sandbar Lake Provincial Park, Sioux Narrows Provincial Park, Bon Echo Provincial Park (Mazinaw Lake), Lake Superior Provincial Park (Agawa Bay) and Missinaibi Lake Provincial Park.

Even sites which are not directly attributable to the Algonkian culture can be related to the petroglyphs. For example, one petroglyph depicting a snake with dots signifying eggs is a reproduction of the landscape of the Adena-Hopewell Indian burial ground at Serpent Mounds Provincial Park.

