

WRITING-ON-STONE PROVINCIAL PARK ÁÍSÍNAI'PI NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Writing-on-Stone Rock Art Tour

Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park boasts a unique history. Join a Park Interpreter for a guided walk of the Archaeological Preserve to discover the significance of this history written in stone.

Duration:

2 hours including travel to and from the Archaeological Preserve.

For your comfort and safety, Come Prepared!

Please bring for each participant:

- 1 litre of water
- Sunscreen
- Hat
- Insect repellent
- Closed toe and heel footwear (NO sandals or flip-flops)
- Recommended: light wind or waterproof jacket

Program Cancellations:

In the event of rain, wet conditions, unsafe road conditions, or other conditions that threaten the safety and comfort of participants, programs may be replaced with alternate programs at the regular ticket price. Content of program is the same or similar. Refunds are available if visitors choose not to participate in the alternate program.

Cancellation Policy:

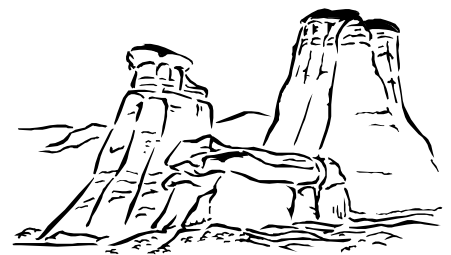
Participants may cancel up to 48 hours before the event and receive a refund of their program fee, however the \$5.00 booking fee is non-refundable. Events cancelled by the participant with less than 48 hours notice will not be refunded. Program cancellations may only be done by calling (403) 647-2400.

Note: Smoking and pets are not permitted on our tours.

We look forward to hosting you on your tour at Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park! If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to call (403) 647-2364.

Historical Information

For centuries, First Nations peoples left a record of their history and culture by incising Rock Art on the cliffs of Writing-On-Stone. The Rock Art is composed of numerous carvings (petroglyphs) and paintings (pictographs) on sandstone cliffs. Here at Writing-On-Stone/ Áísínai'pi, visitors are able to explore Canada's most extensive rock art site and discover the significance of this history written in stone by joining a Park Interpreter for a guided walk into the Archaeological Preserve (Restricted Area). Áísínai'pi is the Blackfoot word for Writing-On-Stone and means 'where the drawings are'.



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Additional Information about Tours

- Tours are led by a Park Interpreter.
- They take place in the Archaeological Preserve (Restricted Area) – to view this area you must be accompanied by a Park staff member.
- The distance walked for each tour is a few hundred meters (approximately 2 to 3 city blocks).
- Trail difficulty: low to moderate – there are some stairways and parts of the trail are over uneven ground. The trail is not wheelchair or stroller accessible.
- Our Park bus is used to transport visitors to the Restricted Area. The maximum capacity of the bus is 24 passengers. All passengers must have a ticket to attend, including infants.
- The Park bus leaves the designated departure location at the specified tour time. Please ensure you are at the meeting location 5-10 minutes prior to the start of your tour. Inquire with the front desk staff where the tour participants are to meet for boarding the bus.
- If you pre-booked your tour online or by phone, please pick up your tickets at the Visitor Center or Camp Store 30 minutes prior to the tour.
- It is recommended that you use the washroom facilities before the tour. There is vault toilets in the preserve but they are not near the trail.
- The main constraint can be the heat – often +40°C (104°F) or more, on summer days. There is no shade along the trail on which the tour is conducted. Please keep this in mind when preparing for your tour.
- During hot weather it is recommended that children 6 years of age and younger and anyone who is sensitive to heat not attend the afternoon tours.
- Pets are not permitted on the bus or tour due to possible allergies of other attendees.
- Smoking is not permitted on the bus or during the tour for the comfort of other attendees and the potential for fire hazards.
- Children under the age of 14 must be accompanied by a paying adult.

PARK NOTES

ROCK ART

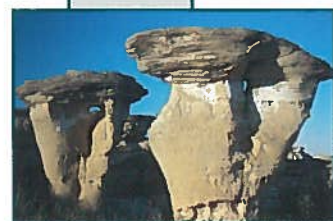
A SACRED PLACE A wide, green valley, steep sandstone cliffs, strange rock formations called hoodoos - all of these things make Writing-on-Stone a special place. For thousands of years, this unique environment has drawn First Nations people to Writing-on-Stone. In the past, nomadic bands often returned to traditional camping spots along the Milk River where they found shelter, water and a great abundance of game and berries.

Writing-on-Stone was, and still is, significant for another reason. Traditional beliefs hold that all things in the world - animals, plants and even rocks - are charged with supernatural powers. In this strange valley, the cliffs and hoodoos are the home of powerful spirits - spirits with the ability to help people who come to pray at this sacred place.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND From archaeological evidence, we know that some First Nations people camped at Writing-on-Stone as long as 3,500 years ago. Although some rock art may be this old, the date of its first appearance at Writing-on-Stone remains uncertain.

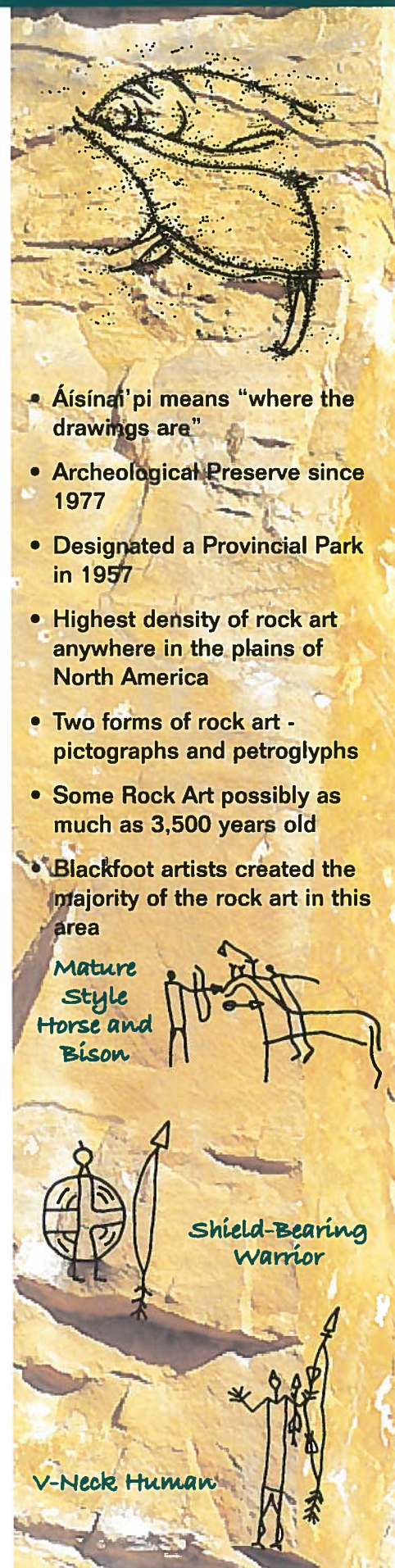
Many archaeological sites dating from the *Late Prehistoric Period* have been found in the Park, and much of the rock art also dates from this time. During this period, which began around 1800 years ago, the First Nations people followed the bison herds on foot. The Shoshone and Blackfoot are two of several groups who are possibly responsible for Late Prehistoric rock art at Writing-on-Stone.

The *Historic Period* began circa. 1730 A.D. with the return of horses and the arrival of guns and metal on the northern plains. The horses, acquired from Spanish Conquistadors, via other First Nations groups to the south, and the guns and metal, obtained from the first fur traders, revolutionized First Nations culture. Travelling and hunting became easier and warfare more common. Rock art continued to be created at Writing-on-Stone throughout this period, well into the first quarter of the twentieth century.

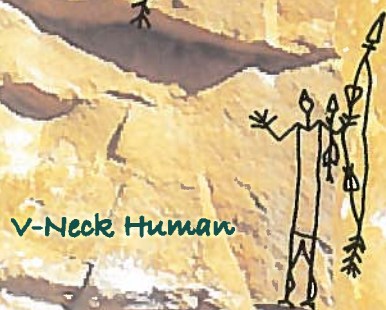


The Blackfoot Nation controlled the Writing-on-Stone area during most of the Historic Period. Hunting and raiding parties from other groups, such as the Cree, Gros Ventre, Assiniboine, Crow, Kutenai and Shoshone who were also known to pass through this area. Although researchers believe that Blackfoot artists created most Historic rock art, these other groups may have been involved as well.

THE ROCK ART Before the introduction of metal tools, most petroglyphs were *incised* or *scratched* onto the sandstone cliffs using antlers or bones. Some pictographs were painted with red *ochre* (crushed iron ore mixed with water or bison fat), while others were drawn with a lump of charcoal. No technique for precisely dating rock art exists. In some cases, approximate dates can be determined by identifying objects depicted in the rock art, or by analyzing changes in rock art styles.



- *Áísínai'pi* means "where the drawings are"
- Archeological Preserve since 1977
- Designated a Provincial Park in 1957
- Highest density of rock art anywhere in the plains of North America
- Two forms of rock art - pictographs and petroglyphs
- Some Rock Art possibly as much as 3,500 years old
- Blackfoot artists created the majority of the rock art in this area



Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park *Áísínai'pi National Historic Site*

Human figures were created in several styles. *Shield-bearing warriors*, holding the large *body shields* used before the arrival of horses, date from the Late Prehistoric. Both *V-neck humans*, the most common and elaborate human style and *square-shouldered (or rectangular bodied)* humans, date from prehistoric and historic times. The *triangular body* style usually appears with historic objects. Other *unique figures* are difficult to place within a style or time period.

Animal figures, including bison, dogs, deer, bears, mountain sheep and elk have been classified into three styles: *naturalistic*, which may be the oldest style; *boat-form*, which originated in the Late Prehistoric; and *mature style*, which developed during the Historic Period. Horses, the most common animals, are generally mature style, but a few are boat-form. While all horses at Writing-on-Stone were drawn after A.D. 1730, boat-form horses may be the oldest.

Many items of *material culture* are depicted, including shields, bows, spears, hatchets, guns, tipis, headdresses, decorated clothing, travois, and ceremonial objects. Some items, including body shields, can be identified as prehistoric, while others such as guns are historic. The significance of *vertical marks* remains unknown. They may have been used for counting or for sharpening bone tools, or they may have had a ceremonial function. Many other *abstract figures* cannot be identified or interpreted.

The styles and figures just described are repeated at many different sites. While a few of the nearly 50 rock art sites found in Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park consist of only a single petroglyph, other sites contain hundreds of figures.

WARRIORS, SHAMANS, SPIRITS Much of the rock art at Writing-on-Stone was probably *ceremonial*, created as part of rituals. In the *vision quest*, young warriors would spend several days fasting and praying at a sacred place, waiting for a vision. Rock art may record the spirit dreams attained during these vision quests.

It is the belief of many First Nations people that the rock art is the work of spirits. *Shamans*, or medicine men and elders in the past, and today interpret these images, often to predict the future. Perhaps more rock art was added, in times past, to communicate with the spirit world. Some of the rock art may have been *biographical*, recording the outcome of actual events, such as hunts or raids.

Through time, the mystery of the rock art has deepened, and the exact meaning of the images may never be known. Today, many different sources are used to interpret the rock art, including legends, archaeology, historical records and First Nations elders.

PRESERVATION OF A LEGACY The rock art of Writing-on-Stone records centuries of native culture and history, a unique and irreplaceable legacy. The gradual loss of the rock art from natural weathering can't be stopped, but we can help prevent the greatest threat to rock art - human destruction.

Graffiti and vandalism have taken a heavy toll. To protect the rock art from further damage, the Archaeological Preserve was set aside in 1977, restricting access to most of the sites in the Park. Under the Historical Resources Act of Alberta, fines up to \$50,000.00 and a year in jail can result from altering, marking or damaging rock art.

Please help us protect this invaluable resource by reporting any acts of defacement you witness.



For more information, contact:

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403-647-2364

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