

AN ANCIENT HISTORY

Archaeologists are just beginning to discover more about the ancient people who inhabited southern coastal Alaska. Even the pictures put there to tell a story are shrouded in mystery.

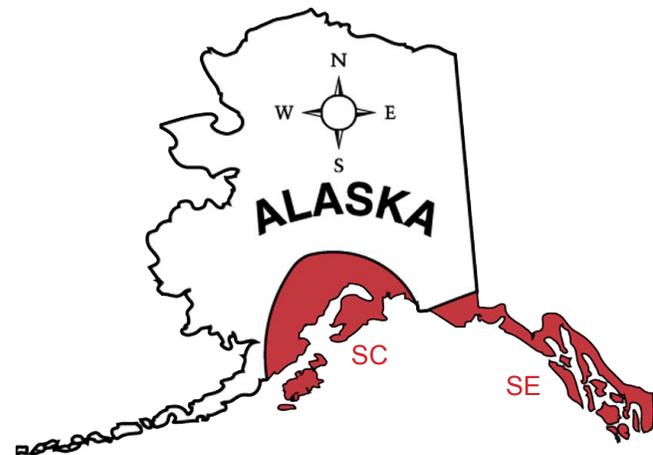


One of the ways to determine the relative age of rock art symbols is by association with other rock art sites or by comparing designs. Abstract designs may be older than representational drawings.



Some symbols are obviously more recent because of their association with historic events.

When the Tlingits first saw a Russian sailing ship, they told in pictures of its arrival as if it were the return of the Raven, the mythical creator.



You will see examples of both Southeast and Southcentral Alaskan rock art in this brochure. For easier identification, all the pictographs and petroglyphs have been labelled according to their area of origin.

Next to each drawing from Southeast you will find the letters "SE" and next to each from Southcentral, there will be an "SC."

Many petroglyphs are so old that the present inhabitants are unable to interpret them.

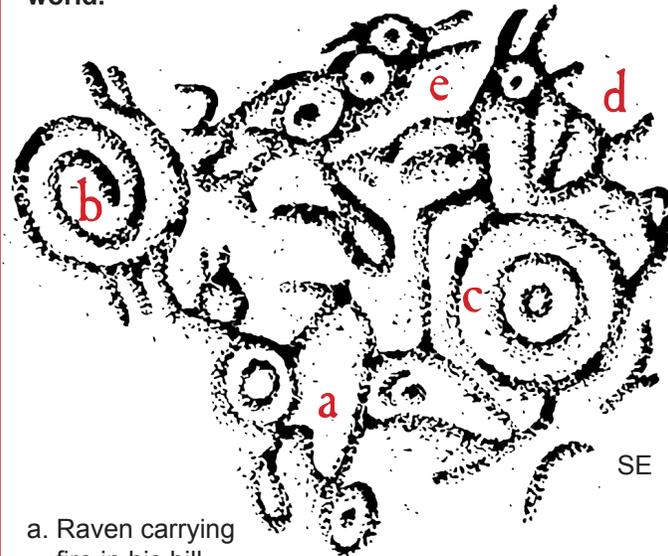
The more recent rock art drawings are usually realistic representations of animals, fish, or supernatural beings.



Rock designs may have recorded important events such as births, deaths, potlatches, legends or contact with others such as European explorers. Some mark Clan territories, indicate portage locations, or record periods of time. While others may mark or warn of burial locations for important people such as shamans and/or their paraphernalia. However, no one can say absolutely what the artist had in mind while creating many of these images. Therefore, realize what many of these pictographs and petroglyphs actually represent may in fact be very personal and known only to the person who created them.



Long ago a Tlingit elder interpreted this petroglyph as showing how Raven created the world.



- Raven carrying fire in his bill.
- The box of daylight Raven stole.
- The creation of the earth.
- The North wind brings the weather.
- The Wolf Crest representing the guardian of fresh water.



The next few years are crucial to the preservation of rock art. Destruction can be from natural or human actions. Vandalism and theft threaten the survival of this important heritage resource.

Rock art exists in a great open air museum for which we are all responsible. Be careful how you treat these legitimate artistic works. Walking on rock art causes the rock and the design to crumble; touching leaves oil residues on the surface; chalking, rubbings and tracings apply pressure to soft rock surfaces, accelerating deterioration. The most destructive action, however, is graffiti. Writing or spray painting on the rocks destroys the integrity of this fragile heritage resource.

The Native People who lived along southern coastal Alaska created some of the most outstanding rock art in the world. Take home a memory of their distinctive art by taking photos.



PHOTO HINTS:

- Use a polarizing filter to reduce glare.
- Side lighting is important.
- Maximum shadows early in the morning or late evening bring out the design.
- Artificial side lighting at night gives best results.
- Never chalk, paint or in any way alter the art to enhance your shot, as this proves destructive.
- Digital photography offers the ability to enhance the image.

Rock art along the coast of Alaska is truly unique. If you think you may have found a new petroglyph or pictograph, or you have witnessed vandalism to an archaeological site, please notify the nearest Forest Service office. When we respect and protect rock art, we help save this vital link with the past for our children's enjoyment in the future.

Contact a forest archaeologist at:

Chugach National Forest
(907) 743-9500

Tongass National Forest
(907) 225-3101

www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r10/learning/history-culture

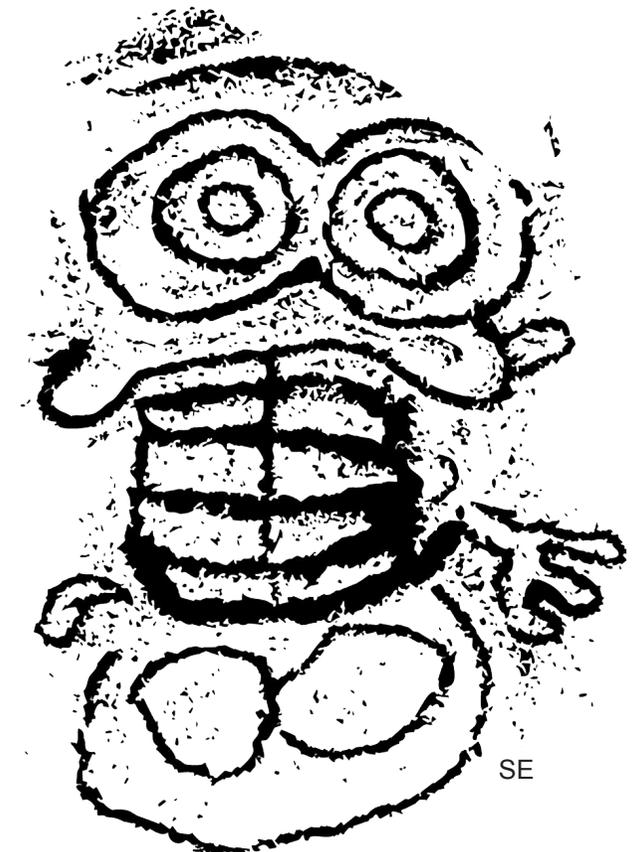
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ROCK ART

Petroglyphs and Pictographs of Southern Coastal Alaska



Forest Service Alaska Region R10-RG-228 July 2017

ART ON THE ROCKS

There are different styles of rock art found all over the world. Most of the rock art in southern coastal Alaska was made during the last 10,000 years. Seeing these ancient pictures takes us back to a world lost in time, linked to the present only by what the prehistoric artists decided to carve or paint on the living rock.

PICTOGRAPH: a design painted on rock with pigments made by mixing grease or salmon eggs with red ochre or charcoal (shown in red).



PETROGLYPH: a design that is pecked or ground into the rock surface. The designs below and the similarly styled designs throughout the brochure are examples of petroglyphs (shown in black.)

Over time, weather erodes rock so it is easy enough to imagine what can happen to pictures painted on the surface. Some designs may have disappeared due simply to weather conditions. Recent radiocarbon (C14) dating of associated cultural materials suggest that most pictographs painted in southeast Alaska are not much older than 400-500 years, and typically are found in caves or under rock overhangs, protected from wind, snow, and rain.



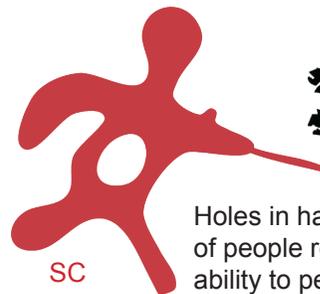
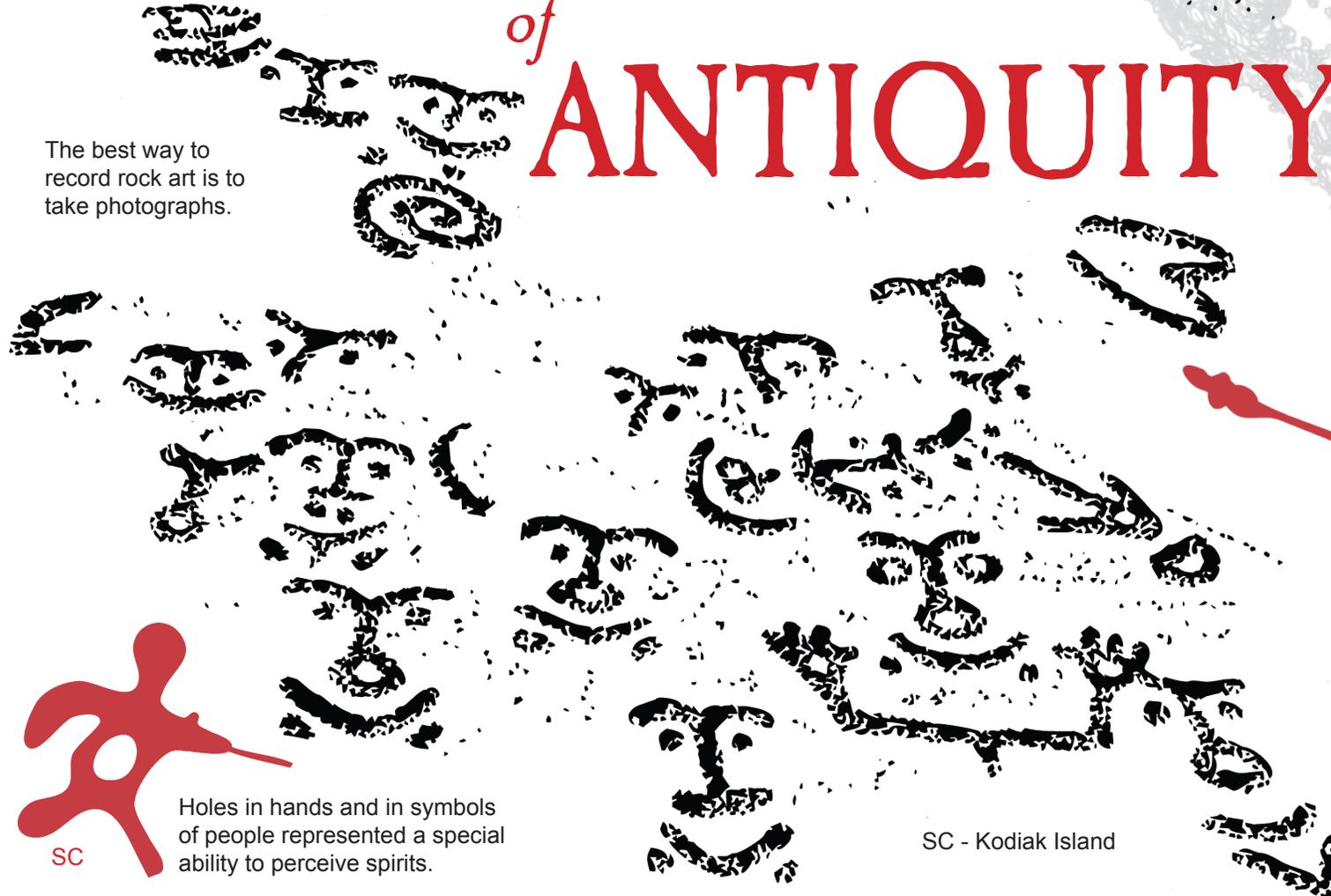
Indian religious leaders, called shamans, may have made many of the early petroglyphs during ceremonial rites to pay respect to the spirits and bring luck to their clans.

Humans have painted or pecked symbols on rocks or walls of caves for thousands of years. The rock art of southern coastal Alaska offers a unique glimpse of these ancient maritime peoples and their views of the world.

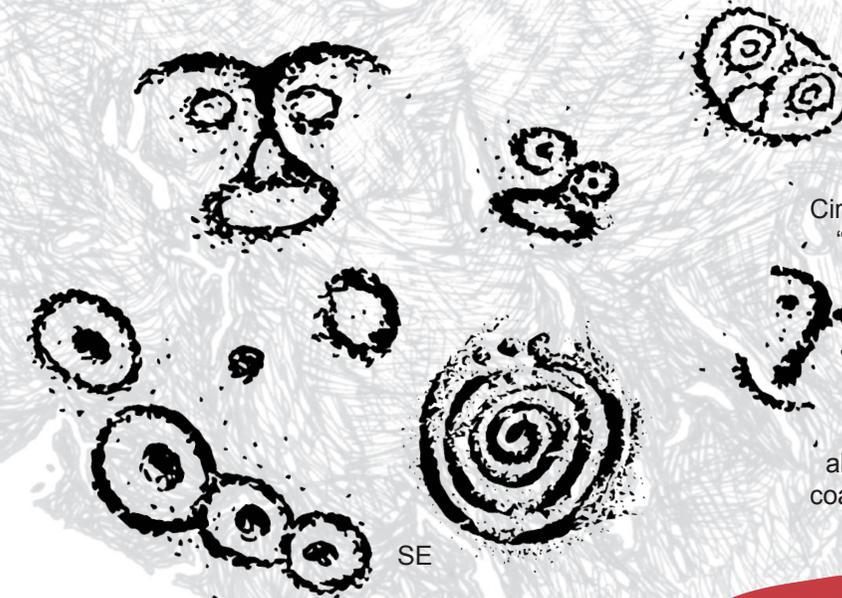


TREASURES *of* ANTIQUITY

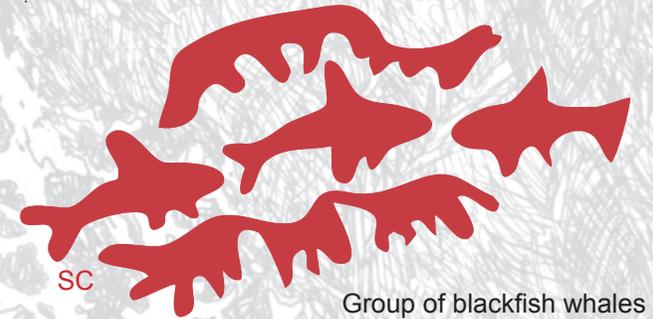
The best way to record rock art is to take photographs.



Holes in hands and in symbols of people represented a special ability to perceive spirits.



Circles and spirals and "O" and "Y" designs are the most universal of symbols and may be of great antiquity. Archaeologists have found similar abstract symbols along the coast of Siberia.



Group of blackfish whales and stylized animals.



Killer whale.



Wounded sea mammal.

This pictograph commemorates the death of several men whose canoe was overturned by a whale.

