

**Moab Area Rock Art  
Auto Tour**



**Moab Area Travel Council  
Internet Brochure Series**  
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**INTRODUCTION**

The Moab area has numerous examples of Indian rock art to enjoy. This page briefly discusses some types, dates, the artists and their cultures and how to take care of these irreplaceable sites. Directions are included to a number of sites which allow you to sample some of the easily accessible ancient rock art in the Moab area. All sites are accessible with a passenger car and a short walk!

**What Is Indian Rock Art?**

There are two types of rock art: petroglyphs (motifs that are pecked, ground, incised, abraded, or scratched on the rock surface) and pictographs (paintings or drawings in one or more colors using mineral pigments and plant dyes on the rock surface). Although many images may have originally been executed as a combination of both techniques, most now appear only as a petroglyph because

the paint material has faded or washed away over many years. On closer examination you might be able to see a painted design accompanying the pecked image. Examples of both types of rock art are found along the sites described in this guide. Each site is unique. The patterns and motifs may be similar, but are never quite the same. Styles vary from place to place, and from people to people.

**The People**

Rock art was produced by a number of prehistoric and historic peoples over thousands of years. Their histories in the area are very complex. A big game hunting people, known as Paleo-Indians, are considered to be the first human users in the area. Their game included now extinct Pleistocene fauna such as mammoths and mastodons. A later culture called Archaic, probably used central base camps during their seasonal round of activities based on harvesting wild plants and animals. They did not build permanent habitation structures, but lived in caves and in small brush shelters built in the open.

The Anasazi whose culture centered south of Moab in the Four Corners area, concentrated much of their subsistence efforts on the cultivation of corn, beans and squash. These sedentary people also harvested a wide variety of wild resources, such as pinion nuts, grasses, bighorn sheep and deer. The Fremont, who were contemporary with the Anasazi people, also grew corn, and were apparently more dependent on hunting

and gathering wild resources than were the Anasazi. Their territory was mainly north of the Colorado River, but overlapped with the Anasazi at Moab.

Both cultures had a complex social structure, and were highly adaptive to the extremes of the environment. The Anasazi and Fremont are classified by scientists as "Formative" cultures.

The most recent inhabitants, the Utes have been in southeast Utah since the 1200's. They were a very mobile hunting and gathering people who moved in from the Great Basin. They used the bow and arrow, made baskets and brownware pottery, and lived in brush wickiups and tipis. The Notah (Ute people) lived freely throughout western Colorado and eastern Utah until about 1880, when they were forced onto reservations.

**Dating the Rock Art**

Although it is difficult to establish an exact age of rock art, some dating clues are easily identified. For example, whenever a horse and rider is depicted, we know the date to be after A.D. 1540 when the Spaniards reintroduced the horse to the New World. The presence of bows and arrows is presumed to indicate a date after A.D. 500, the generally accepted time period for their appearance in this region. For purposes of this guide, time periods are broken into generalized categories relating to the people believed to have made them.

| CULTURE      | DATES                | EVIDENCE OF ROCK ART   |
|--------------|----------------------|--|
| Paleo-Indian | 10,000 BC – 5,500 BC | NONE (At sites described in this brochure.)  |
| Archaic      | 5,500 BC – 1 AD      | ABSTRACT (zig-zag and parallel lines, dots, circles, etc.) REPRESENTATIONAL (ghostlike body forms, headdresses, animal and plant forms, Barrier Canyon Style).   |
| Anasazi      | 1 AD - 1275 AD       | REPRESENTATIONAL - a variety of human forms (Anthropomorphic) with earrings, headdresses, handprints, paw prints, birds, spirals, bighorn sheep, shield-like images, deer, Kokopellis, etc. Some ABSTRACT designs. |
| Fremont      | 450 AD - 1250 AD     | REPRESENTATIONAL (broad-shouldered human forms, trapezoidal in shape with abstract interior body decorations, elaborate headdresses with ear bobs, facial decorations, sheep, deer, etc.).                         |
| Formative    | 1 AD – 1275 AD       | Overlap of Anasazi and Fremont styles.   |
| Ute          | 1200 AD – 1880 AD    | REPRESENTATIONAL (human forms on foot and mounted on horseback, hunting and warfare scenes, horses, and bison).  |

## Taking Care Of The Rock Art Sites

Rock art sites on federal lands are nationally protected areas. The art is extremely fragile, once damaged the site can never be repaired to its original condition. Please avoid even touching the rock surface. Surprising as it may seem, the oils in a single handprint can chemically affect the rock surface. Take care so that others may marvel at these fragile and beautiful remains of the past. You will see evidence of vandalism such as bullet impacts, names and dates incised on the rock surface, remains of latex molds and chalk marks. Do not attempt to remove any form of vandalism, including signatures, dates and names. Site repair requires technical expertise and can be made more difficult by the good intentions of those without highly developed skills.

## Rock Art Sites

If you have trouble locating the rock art once you are near the site, don't be discouraged. Remember: Check your mileages. You will develop a sense of which types of rocks and surfaces are appropriate areas to look for petroglyphs and pictographs. Petroglyphs are commonly found on the black or brown surface (called desert varnish) of rock cliffs. The straight, smooth, red sandstone found in the Navajo and Wingate formations is a good area to look for pictographs. As you spot one image, look carefully around the adjoining surface areas. Often there are numerous image at any given site. The main panel might have one or more sub-panels nearby. Some of the images may be very faint, having faded or eroded through the years. You will sometimes see one layer of images constructed on top of another.

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## GOLF COURSE ROCK ART

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Take Highway 191 south to the golf course turn off (approximately 4 miles from the corner of Main and Center in downtown Moab). Turn left and proceed to Spanish Trail Road approximately 1 mile just past the fire station located on the left-hand side of the road, turn right onto Westwater Drive. Proceed .5 miles to a small pullout on the left-hand side of the road (please do not block or go up the private driveway).

The panel runs from ground level up to approximately 30 feet on the high rock wall. Designs cover an area about 90 feet wide. The panel is from the Formative Period and you will be able to see human figures, such as the "Moab Man", elk, canines, and big and small bighorn sheep. Look to the far right of the panel and find what is popularly referred to as the reindeer and sled.

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## KANE CREEK BLVD. SITE

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At the corner of Main and Kane Creek Drive (McDonald's is on the southwest corner) turn west and proceed .8 miles to the intersection of Kane Creek Drive and 500 West. Stay left and continue along Kane Creek Drive approximately 2.3 miles to the mouth of Moon Flower Canyon. Along the rock cliff just beyond the canyon, you will see a rock art panel dating from the Archaic to Formative Periods. The site is behind the tall protective fence. There is a Barrier Canyon Style figure (a large triangular shape with headdress), desert, bighorn sheep and a number of abstract elements. The panel is from ground level to a height of about twelve feet and extending approximately 100 feet. You will see a blue residue left from an illegal latex mold on one of the bighorn sheep motifs. This entire panel is one of the most vandalized rock art sites in the Moab area.

Continue another 1.2 miles to another rock art panel. A huge rock surface covered with desert varnish faces the river from the cliff side of the road. Here, you can see bighorn sheep, snakes, human forms, and a trail, possibly indicating a route from the river up Kane Springs Canyon. Again, you will notice some vandalism. (If you miss this site, it may be seen more easily on the return trip.)

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## BIRTHING SCENE

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Continue on Kane Creek Drive past the cattle guard, where the road turns from pavement to graded gravel road. After traveling 1.7 miles from the previous site, or a total of 5.3 miles from the intersection of Kane Creek Drive and 500 West, you will see two small pullouts suitable for single vehicles. If you are traveling with a large group, continue up

the hill where more parking space is available and walk back to the site.

Approximately 75 feet west and down the slope from the road, is a large boulder with rock art on all four sides. Figures and designs range from the Formative to the historic Ute period. The well known "birthing scene" is found on the left-hand corner of the east side A the boulder (facing the road). Notice the feet-first presentation of the baby. Look for various animal forms, such as a centipede and a horse, bear paws and a snake, as well as triangular anthropomorphic (human) figures and a sandal trackway.

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## COURTHOUSE WASH

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Drive north from Moab on Highway 191 and cross the Colorado River Bridge. Proceed .5 miles to a parking area on the right side of the road. Walk back across the small bridge that crosses Courthouse Wash on the graveled foot path. At the east end of the bridge, face the 11:00 position and look up at the cliffs. Walk uphill to the base of those cliffs and look for an extremely faint rock art panel. The panel consists of a large pictograph and petroglyph panel along with associated petroglyphs on the rock slabs at its base. The panel is approximately 19 feet high by 52 feet long. The site, located in Arches National Park, was heavily vandalized in 1980, but conservation work has helped preserve and stabilize the site.

You will see large painted ghost-like illustrations typical of the Barrier Canyon Style Archaic figures on the red-orange surface. The numerous figures include human forms, bighorn sheep, shields, scorpion-like illustrations, possible dogs, a long beaked bird and abstract elements. You can see evidence of painted multi-colored figures superimposed on other pictographs. On the desert varnish surface you will see human and animal like figures as well as abstract forms. This site is on the National Register of Historic Places because of its representation of a Barrier Canyon Style rock art panel.

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## UTAH SCENIC BYWAY 279

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From Highway 191 take Utah Scenic Byway 279 south for 5 miles where you will find an "Indian Writing" interpretive

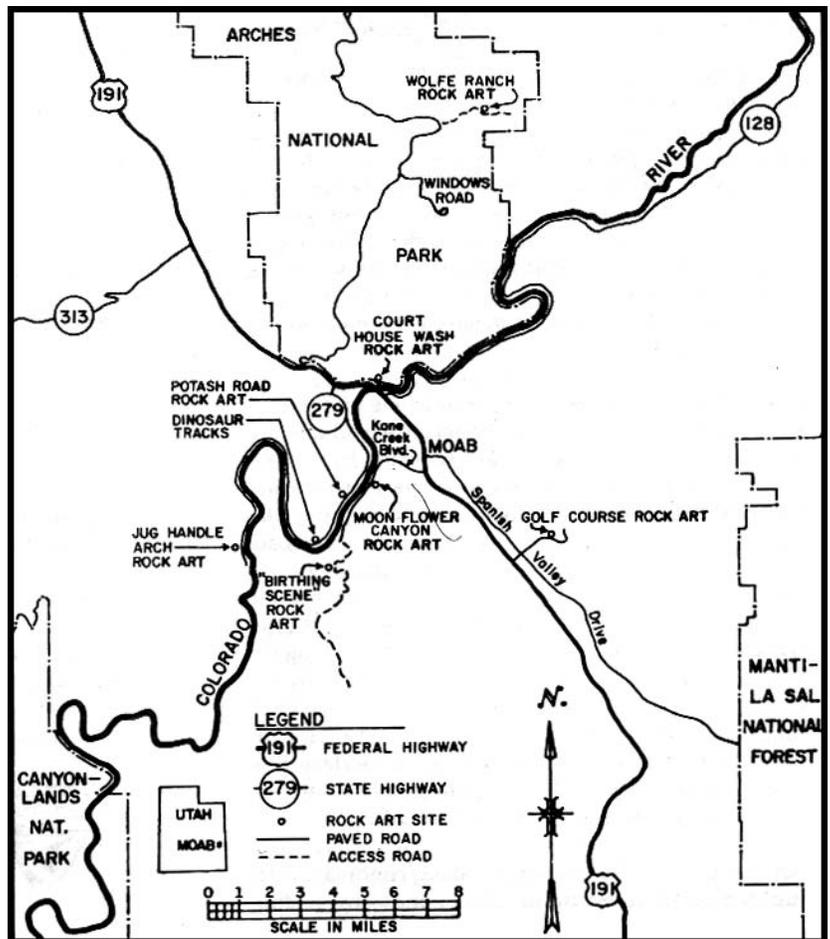
road sign and pull-out adjacent to the river. Caution: Watch for highway traffic. Looking 25 to 30 feet up the rock wall on the cliff side of the road you will see petroglyphs from the Formative Period. Look for the line of "paper doll cutouts" and horned anthropomorphs holding shields and abstract images, as well as a wide variety of other animal and abstract images. The panel extends along the road 125 feet

The round holes carved into the sandstone underneath the left side of the petroglyph panel once held the roof poles of a structure which was excavated by archaeologists prior to road construction. The structure and the rock art panel were easily accessible before the talus slope was cleared away to make room for the road. Continue south 200 yards to the next "Indian Writing" sign. You will find the large bear with a hunter at the bear's nose and another over its back. At an interpretive pullout approximately 0.75 miles further along the Utah Scenic Byway 279, you can see Indian rock art and dinosaur tracks. On the north side of the road two spotting tubes indicate the location of three-toed allosaurus tracks in the Navajo/Kayenta sandstone interface. Binoculars are needed to view the petroglyphs located to the left of the tracks at the base of the cliff.

Approximately 7.5 miles farther along Highway 279 is Jug Handle Arch (near the mouth of Long Canyon). Proceed to Jug Handle parking area via a dirt road that travels west from the highway. Looking back toward Jug Handle Arch you will see the rock art on a cliff to the north.

### WOLFE RANCH

Located in Arches National Park, the Wolfe Ranch panel is a fine example of historic Ute rock art. Follow the signs to Wolfe Ranch and Delicate Arch, 14 miles from the park entrance. At the Wolfe Ranch parking lot, walk east 600 ft. along the established trail past the cabin and across the wash. The Ute hunting panel site is on a trail that branches left off the Delicate Arch trail just past the bridged wash.



### Canyon Country Minimum Impact Practices

1. Tread Lightly when traveling and leave no trace of your camping. Drive and ride only on roads and trails where such travel is allowed; hike only on established trails, on rock, or in washes. Camp at designated sites or, where allowed, at previously used sites. Avoid placing tents on top of vegetation and use a camp stove instead of making a campfire. Unless signs indicate otherwise, leave gates open or closed as you find them.
2. Help keep Canyon Country clean. Pack out your trash and recycle it, clean up after less thoughtful visitors, and dispose of human waste properly.
3. Protect and conserve scarce desert water sources. Camp at least 300 feet from isolated water sources to allow for wildlife access. Where possible, carry your own drinking water. Leave potholes undisturbed and wash well away from pools and springs.
4. Allow space for wildlife. When encountering wildlife, maintain your distance and remain quiet. Teach children not to chase or pickup animals. Keep pets under control.
5. Leave historic sites, Native American rock art, ruins and artifacts untouched for the future. Admire rock art from a distance and never touch it. Stay out of ruins, leave artifacts in place, and report violations.

**Moab Information Center**  
Main & Center St, Moab

**Moab Visitor Information**  
(800) 635-6622

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