



Indian Education Division  
Montana Office of Public Instruction



Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks

**Indian Education for All Units related to Montana State Parks**  
**Pictograph Cave State Park**  
January 2010 (revised)

**Title**

Pictographs: Images of Art and History

**Content Areas**

Art, Reading, Social Studies

**Grade Level**

3<sup>rd</sup>-4th Grade

**Duration**

Two 55-minute periods and one 15-minute homework assignment. (Alternatively, you may complete this lesson in a 2 - hour block).

**Montana Education Standards and Benchmarks**

***Indian Education for All***

**Essential Understanding 1:** There is great diversity among the 12 tribal Nations of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories and governments. Each Nation has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

**Essential Understanding 3, part 2:** Each tribe has its own oral histories which are as valid as written histories. These histories pre-date the “discovery” of North America.

**Essential Understanding 6:** History is most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from an Indian perspective frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell.

***Montana Content Standards***

**Social Studies Content Standard 4:** Students demonstrate an understanding of the effects of time, continuity, and change on historical and future perspectives and relationships. *Rationale: Students need to understand their historical roots and how events shape the past, present and future of the world. In developing these insights, students must know what life was like in the past and how things change and develop over time. Students gain historical understanding through inquiry of history by researching and interpreting historical events affecting personal, local, tribal, Montana, U.S. and world history.*

**Benchmark 4.1** Students will identify and use various sources of information (e.g., artifacts, diaries, photographs, biographies, paintings, architecture, songs) to develop an understanding of the past.

**Art Content Standard 1:** Students create, perform, exhibit and respond in the Arts. *Rationale: Students understand and express themselves in depth through an art form by: generating original art; participating, re-creating and exhibiting; and reacting and placing value. As a result, they arrive at their own knowledge and beliefs for making personal and artistic decisions.*

**Benchmark 1.3** Students will present their own work and the works of others.

**Benchmark 1.4** Students will collaborate with others in the creative process.

**Art Content Standard 2:** Students apply and describe the concepts, structures and processes in the Arts. *Rationale: The ability to use and to share knowledge is fundamental to human experience. The arts provide many of the tools for students to successfully interact with their world.*

**Benchmark 2.1** (Composition) Students will ally the elements of line, shape, form, color, space, value and texture to compose works of art and the principals of design-pattern, balance, contrast, rhythm, proportion, economy, movement and dominance.

**Benchmark 2.4** (Function) Students will identify examples of cultural, political, communicative, expressive, commercial and environmental visual arts.

**Benchmark 2.5** (Style) Students will identify examples of historical, contemporary, and traditional visual arts, including American Indian art.

**Art Content Standard 3:** Students develop and refine arts skills and techniques to express ideas, pose and solve problems, and discover meaning. *Rationale: Artistic express is a critical form of self-expression and communication requiring specific skills, knowledge and techniques.*

**Benchmark 3.5** Students will recognize and use symbol language appropriate to media used to create works of art.

**Art Content Standard 5:** Students understand the role of the Arts in society, diverse cultures, and historical periods. *Rationale: It is important for students to be knowledgeable about the nature, value and meaning of the Arts in the context of their own humanity with respect to community, environment, and culture, including the distinct and unique cultural heritage of Montana's American Indians.*

**Benchmark 5.1** Students recognize ways in which the Arts have both a historical and distinctive relationship to various cultures (e.g., American Indian) and media of expression.

**Benchmark 5.2** Students will identify and describe specific works of art belonging to particular cultures, times and places.

**Benchmark 5.3** Students recognize various reasons for creating works of art.

**Benchmark 5.6** Students explore their own culture as reflected through the Arts.

**Reading Content Standard 1:** Students construct meaning as they comprehend, interpret and respond to what they read. *Rationale: Readers actively engage with text to build their own understanding. Readers understand what they read as it relates to what they know. As readers construct meaning they interpret what they read, selecting important ideas and details.*

**Benchmark 1.2** Students will incorporate new print and non-print information into existing knowledge to draw conclusions and make applications.

**Benchmark 1.3** Students will provide oral, written, and/or artistic responses to ideas and feeling generated by the reading material.

**Benchmark 1.4** Students will accurately retell key elements of appropriate reading materials.

**Reading Content Standard 4:** Students select, read and respond to print and non-print material for a variety of purposes. *Rationale: Readers require a purpose to read related to personal, academic and civic needs and*

*respond in a variety of ways, including writing and discussion, as well as through artistic express, formal presentation, etc.*

**Benchmark 4.4** Students will read and provide oral, written and/or responses to diverse perspectives, cultures, and issues in traditional and contemporary literature.

## **Overview and Objectives**

*Pictograph Cave State Park is an archaeological site of indigenous peoples of Montana. For at least 5000 years, tribes used the caves at this location for a variety of purposes. Artifacts from these caves, which are located near Billings, include stone and bone tools, numerous pictographs from several centuries, fire pits and animal bones. Ancient human remains were also found at Pictograph Caves when it was excavated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although not all of the tribes who used this site are identified with certainty, it is likely that the Apsáalooke (Crow) tribe, which has occupied the region since at least 1700 or earlier, is one tribe that has an affiliation with the pictographs at this site. In this lesson, students will learn about the history of Pictograph Caves and study some of the images from these pictographs. They will develop a vocabulary of archaeological, anthropological and art-related terms related to pictographs and indigenous peoples. As a critical thinking activity, students will discuss the importance of what is commonly called “rock art” and determine if pictographs are art or historical accounts and why that distinction might matter. They will learn that certain symbols and shapes are frequently used motifs in pictographs, and that pictographs often have historical meanings related to actual events. Students will also discover that other pictographs are the representations of images from visions or dreams of tribal individuals and that these images also have historical significance. To assist students in the process of recording history through images (as opposed to words, as in Western society), students will read an Apsáalooke story and interpret its meaning by using pictograph-style imagery and symbols, so that the story is retold through images and students can appreciate the repetition of particular motifs and themes common to the pictographs of this region.*

*This lesson seeks to help students gain an appreciation of the historical, cultural and archaeological value of pictographs and petroglyphs as they learn to distinguish between the two. Students will understand why these images were created and why it is important that the sites be preserved. Students will learn that some pictographs have direct connections to tribes of this region while others are assumed to have been created by earlier peoples who may or may not be related to the present-day tribes of our area. Through studying pictographs, students will gain a better understanding of and appreciation of the traditions and histories of indigenous North American peoples and Montana’s tribes.*

## **Materials and Resources Needed**

- ✓ Pictograph Cave poster, available from Pictograph Cave State Park at 406-245-0227 or 406-247-2940. A photo image of this poster is attached to this lesson in case you are unable to obtain the poster, but you will need to enlarge it before printing so that students can read the print and clearly see the images.
- ✓ Brown or black construction paper (1 per student)
- ✓ Vocabulary list (attached) and related worksheet (also included)
- ✓ White chalk

- ✓ *Brave Wolf and the Thunderbird* (book) by Joe Medicine Crow. ISBN 0-7892-0160-7. Available from Oyate at [www.oyate.org](http://www.oyate.org) or at (510) 848-6700. Only one copy of the book is needed.
- ✓ Recommended optional resource: Montana Historical Society’s educational footlocker called “Prehistoric Life in Montana” contains a slide show for Pictograph Cave. This slide show has about 60 slides from Pictograph caves, including pictograph images and artifacts from this site. Slide show is accompanied with text (pages 49-51 in the footlocker lesson plans). You can end at #58 of the slide show. The entire slide show will take about 12 minutes. You may order the footlocker materials in advance from the Montana Historical Society by calling 407-444-4789 or by filling out a footlocker request/reservation form online at <http://mhs.mt.gov/Education/Footlocker.aspx>. The contents and lesson plans for this footlocker may be previewed online at <http://mhs.mt.gov/Portals/11/education/docs/footlocker/Prehistoric.pdf>. If you are unable to use the slide show, you can still complete this lesson with the other materials listed above and included in this lesson plan.
- ✓ A slide projector and screen if using the above-listed slide show materials.
- ✓ Hallway or wall space to display students’ work in sequential order (see Class Period 2).

## Activities and Procedures

**Teacher Preparation:** Read the attached article, “Pictograph Cave State Park” from *Montana the Magazine of Western History*. Obtain all the materials and resources listed. Put up the poster from Pictograph Caves State Park so that all of your students may look at it and study the images on it. If you are using the recommended slide show, print the text for the slides. Prepare for the art activity (second period) by typing in large font on strips of paper the text from *Brave Wolf and the Thunderbird* or by photocopying the text from each page. These will be used as the focus of each individual student’s illustration(s) in the art activity. Each section of the text from this story will be assigned to a student for “illustration” in pictograph-style, so it is necessary that each student have his or her text available while completing the activity. Make sure you number the sections of text in order that they appear in the story, so that students can later display their images in the same order.

### **Class Period 1: What are pictographs?**

For this class period you will need to refer to the article you read for the teacher preparation. You will also need the Vocabulary List included in this lesson and the poster from Pictograph Caves State Park. If you are using it, you will need to have the slide show and the accompanying text and a slide projector ready for use in this period.

1. Introduce your students to Pictograph Cave State Park, using the article you read for teacher preparation. You may want to use a map of Montana to show them where it is located and to demonstrate which tribes are currently living in southeastern Montana (Crow and Northern Cheyenne). Point out to your class that the traditional territory of the Crow tribe encompassed what is now Pictograph Cave State Park. Other tribes who used this region include the Lakota, Arapaho, Hidatsa, Mandan, and Gros Ventre (White Clay). (5-10 minutes)
2. Using the Vocabulary List included in this lesson, begin a discussion with your students using the following questions: (15 minutes)

What is a pictograph?  
What is a petroglyph?

What does “indigenous” mean?  
Who are some of the indigenous people of our region?  
Why did indigenous people make pictographs and petroglyphs?  
Why did they make these images on the walls of caves or sides of cliffs?  
What kinds of images are in pictographs?  
What is interpretation and how/why are the images interpreted?  
What is preservation and why is preservation of cultural artifacts important?  
What is a motif?  
What is a symbol?  
What is art?  
What is history?  
Are pictographs and petroglyphs “art” or “historical record”? Or both?

3. Draw your student's attention to the poster and the individual images shown on it. Point out to them the large picture across the top of the poster, where each individual pictograph image has been re-imposed onto the cave wall. Let them know that these images were made by different people and different groups of people over the course of about 2500 years. Facilitate a discussion of these images, pointing out some symbols, themes and motifs that are used in these pictographs. (10 minutes)

4. Present the slide show from the MHS footlocker or continue the lesson with a longer examination of the poster and discussion of how images might be interpreted, using these questions: Which images are newer, which are older, and how can you tell? Why might some of the people have shields? What kinds of animals are identifiable in the pictographs? Why is a cave a good place to create pictographs, why better than an open cliff? Who might have made these images and why? Are they specific events that seem to be portrayed? (12-15 minutes)

### **Class Period 2: The Apsaalooke tribe and translating a story into imagery.**

For this period, you will need the construction paper, chalk, story text already divided for your students, the book, *Brave Wolf and the Thunderbird* and copies of the Worksheet included in this lesson plan. You will also need a stretch of wall (hallways work well) for displaying the pictograph-style drawings.

1. Introduce your class to the Crow tribe, using pages 28-29 of *Brave Wolf and Thunderbird* as a guide. Then introduce them to Joe Medicine Crow, the author of *Brave Wolf and the Thunderbird*. (See “About the Author” in the book, inside back cover or on last page of the book.) (5 minutes)

2. Read the story of *Brave Wolf and Thunderbird*. This is the story your students will be translating into pictograph-like imagery and retelling in picture form, so you might want not to share the illustrations with your class, or they might be inclined to repeat these images. (10 minutes)

3. As a class, look at the symbols and images on the poster from Pictograph Caves. Make a list of some of the primary characters or events from the *Brave Wolf* story and decide on symbols and images that students will use for their illustrations. Remember, these should be in a style similar to the pictographs, and there may be images or parts of images from the poster that students can refer to while doing their illustrations. Talk about the style of the pictographs—e.g., no scenery, very few complex details, repetition of symbols or shapes, abstract symbols, seemingly simplistic but meaningful designs, essential elements drawn, use of symbolism, etc. Students need to understand that they are not just “drawing an illustration of the story,” or they will have missed the point of the lesson, which is that images are a kind of language of symbols. (10 minutes)

4. Pass out the numbered segments of text to your students, along with the chalk and the construction paper. Instruct them that each one is going to recreate a segment of the story using pictograph-style images and symbols. Have each student write his or her name on the back of the construction paper in pen or pencil, along with the page number of the text he or she is going to illustrate. Then, each student should complete the illustration, being mindful of the stylistic components and the use of symbols. Not all of the story's elements are ones that the pictograph poster images depict, so students will have to choose what to draw and how to keep it simple and meaningful. If you have fewer students than segments of text, choose beforehand which consecutive pages of text can be combined so as to end up with the same number of illustrations as there are students. (15 minutes)

5. When your students are finished with their "pictographs," have them post each one, in order, along a wall. Beneath each one, you can post the text, if you choose. If it helps to expedite the displaying process, you can tape up numbers corresponding with each of the text segments in advance, so that students know where to place their illustrations as they complete them. (5 minutes)

6. (or for homework) Assign the Worksheet attached to this lesson. If students finish their drawings with time to spare, they may begin the worksheets in class. (Worksheet will take about 10-15 minutes)

## Evaluation

Listening, participation, art activity, worksheet.

## Possible Extensions

Visit Pictograph Cave State Park and take a guided tour with an interpretive specialist. For more information, call 1- 406-245-0227 for the park's interpretive specialist and tour guide.

For more information on pictographs and petroglyphs in Montana, visit this website:  
[www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/resources/heritage\\_resources/prehistoric\\_rock\\_art.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/resources/heritage_resources/prehistoric_rock_art.shtml)

## VOCABULARY LIST

**Artifact:** An artifact is a piece of material evidence of human activity from an earlier historical period. Artifacts may be two dimensional, like pictographs, or three dimensional, like an atlatl (tool used for throwing a long spear). A song or a story might also be considered an artifact.

**Excavation:** The process of carefully finding the artifacts at an archaeological site.

**History and oral history:** History is a record of past events. We often think of history as being something that is written down, such as history books, public records, diaries and historical documents. However, not all historical records are in a written form. Many of the indigenous peoples keep oral (spoken) historical accounts, called **oral histories** or oral traditions. These historical accounts are in the form of songs, stories, historical legends and even place names. Oral histories are passed down from one generation to another, sometime through story telling and other times through ceremonies or formal instruction. Some tribes used other forms of record-keeping along with their oral histories. These other “records” may be imagery like those you see in petroglyphs, pictographs, or hide-paintings, while others are contained in the tribes’ unique linguistic (language) tradition—for example, tribal place names often reveal or refer to historical events and serve as reminders of tribal oral histories.

**Indigenous:** Indigenous means “born to” or “originating in” a particular place and is used to refer to groups of people. The indigenous inhabitants of Montana and North America, for example, are the tribal people who were here when Europeans arrived in 1492 (or earlier) and, according to most oral histories, have been present here since time immemorial. Indigenous peoples usually have an origin story (cosmogony) that tells of their creation at or near their traditional homeland. There are hundreds of indigenous tribal groups in North America, and each one is unique, even though some of them are related.

**Interpretation:** What does a particular symbol or image in a petroglyph mean? How we understand it is a matter of interpretation: the process of determining the meaning of something. Archaeologists, anthropologists and tribal members all interpret the meaning of pictographs using the information they have to do so. When we see a pictograph, we begin to interpret it just by identifying what it looks like it represents. Sometimes, it is difficult for historians to interpret the images in pictographs, because the historians might not understand the symbols used or the events or cultural meanings attached to the images. When tribes are able to retain their indigenous languages (own languages) and histories, tribal members can interpret their tribe’s imagery and provide a more accurate understanding of the meanings of those images.

**Motif:** A motif is a theme or image. For example, at Pictograph Cave State Park, some reoccurring motifs are a man with a shield, bison, and hunting images.

**Petroglyph:** A petroglyph is an image that is etched or carved into a rock’s surface. Often, petroglyphs are made in soft rock faces, such as sandstone cliff like those in eastern Montana. Some of the petroglyphs in Montana are many thousands of years old.

**Pictograph:** A pictograph is an image that is painted or drawn onto the surface of a rock. Cliffs and caves are common sites where pictographs have been made. Like petroglyphs, pictographs have been made for a variety of reasons: to illustrate an historical event, to create a record of an individual or groups’ experiences, to record observed data (information) or to depict a person’s dream, vision or prophesy. Most of the pictographs in Montana are between 200-10,000 years old. They include images of tribal life before and after Europeans came to this continent. The paints used to create these pictographs may be made with mineral pigments, animal fats, plant materials and/or blood.

**Prehistoric:** The word “prehistoric” does not really mean before history, as it seems to mean. It is a word that refers to the time before Europeans or Euro-Americans made their own written records of the history of this continent and its people. Tribes have their own histories which go back many thousands of years before the history of Europeans. When archaeologists use the term “prehistoric” they are generally referring to the time before 1800 and as long ago as 1000 years. Most tribal people object to the use of this term, as it excluded their own histories that pre-date the Euro-American historical record.

**Preservation:** Preservation is the process of saving something from loss or destruction. Preservation of archaeological or historical cultural sites and/or artifacts is important, because these sites and artifacts are the records of past events and are important to the histories and cultures of tribal/indigenous peoples today.

**Restoration:** Restoration is the act of repair. A pictograph that has been damaged by thoughtless vandalism, for instance, or by natural forces, may need to be restored or repaired. Photography can be an important tool for accurately recording an image so that if it is damaged the restoration can be more accurate. Restoration is very difficult, sometimes impossible, and requires special knowledge of the image and how it was first made.

**Rock Art or Pictorial History?** Not everyone agrees that pictographs and petroglyphs should be called “rock art” although this phrase is usually used to refer to these forms of image-making. Can you think why tribes and some historians object to (disagree with) calling petroglyphs and pictographs “rock art?” One of the reasons is that “art” often refers to images that are created for purely esthetic or personal reasons, whereas the images in pictographs and petroglyphs many times illustrate historical events or occurrences. In this sense, pictographs and petroglyphs are less like “art” as we often think of it and more like historical photographs or documents.

**Site:** An archaeological site is a location of artifacts or human activity. A site may be where artifacts such as tools or other objects are found, or where they were made, or even where resources were obtained. Fire pits, buffalo jumps, campsites, stone quarries and rock walls with pictographs are just a few of the examples of archaeological site types in Montana.

**Symbol:** A symbol is a shape or form used to represent something else. Symbols may be understood cross-culturally (from one culture to another) or only within the tribe or culture that uses that symbol. Pictographs often use symbols to convey or imply meaning. For example, a circle is often used to illustrate a shield. Guns might be actual guns, or they might be symbolic of soldiers, Europeans, or even battles. Triangles could be symbolic of lodges or mountains. A horse-shoe shape might symbolize a horse. Symbols allow the painter to create efficient records of events without having to paint all of the details. Some symbols are very abstract and others are obvious. Many pictographs contain symbols that are difficult to interpret today, as the knowledge behind these symbols has been lost or is not available to non-tribal historians.

**Themes in pictographs:** What kind of events or images do pictographs portray? Some pictographs show daily or annual activities, such as hunting or warfare. Others illustrate specific dreams or visions of a tribal member. Still other pictographs may illustrate events in the tribe’s past or from their oral traditions, including legends and oral histories. Some pictograph images are of a particular entity or animal, such as a bear, and may be symbolic of a power associated with that animal. Some pictographs and petroglyphs in Montana and nearby states are actually maps of hunting areas and routes to different geographic locations used on a seasonal basis.

**Tools used to make pictographs:** Paints, dyes, pigments and tools to apply them, such as hands, reeds or twigs, pieces of bones or brushes made from plant and/or animal materials.

## Pictograph Cave State Park



by Ann Kooistra-Manning

From *Montana The Magazine of Western History*, 51 (Winter 2001), 79-81; this article is presented courtesy of the [Montana Historical Society](#). All rights reserved, © 2001.

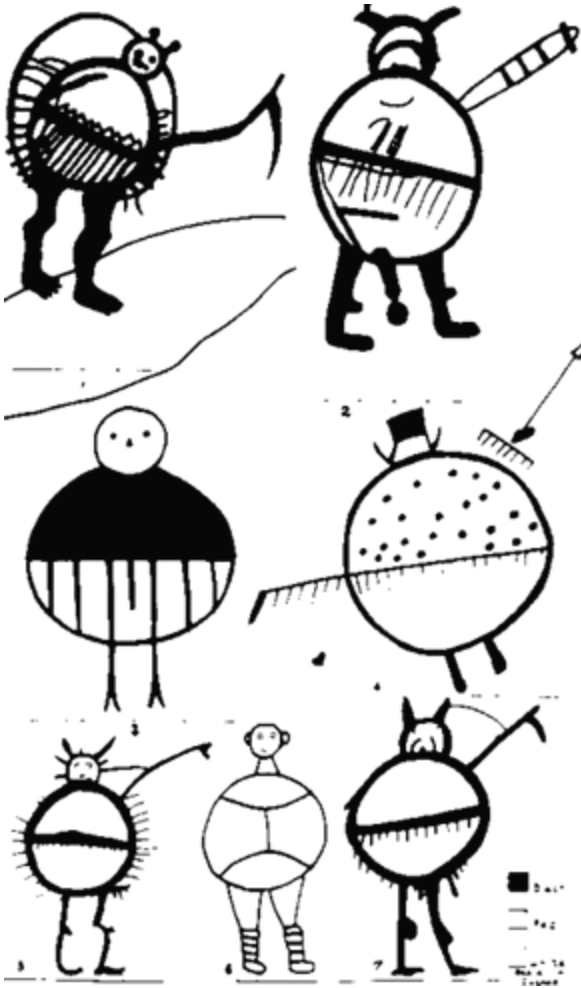


Not far from Billings at the end of a winding ribbon of pavement is Pictograph Cave State Park, a cluster of caves where for five thousand years prehistoric hunters and their historic American Indian counterparts left behind a legacy of painted images and artifacts.

Flanked by Ghost Cave and Middle Cave on one side and a spring on the other, Pictograph Cave is the largest of three rock shelters nestled into sandstone bluffs overlooking Bitter Creek. In the early 1900s the "Indian Caves," as the locals often called them, were a popular stopping place along the stage route between Billings and the town of Coburn on the Crow Indian Reservation. The curious often stopped to explore the caves, while others found the fresh spring water and cool shade of the nearby box elder trees a welcome respite from the dusty road.

Although the paintings of Pictograph Cave were well known to early residents of Billings, the site attracted national interest in 1937 when amateur archaeologists discovered deep deposits of prehistoric artifacts in the cave's floor. Within months the Montana Highway Commission acquired the site and a Works Progress Administration (WPA) excavation was underway, directed by H. Melville Sayre from the Montana School of Mines. Sayre documented 106 pictographs inside the cave. The walls were a collage of red, white, and, occasionally, yellow figures over earlier designs painted in black. Images of coup sticks and warriors in full regalia mingled with turtles, bears, and bison.

Sayre hired Oscar Lewis, an archaeologist from a Glendive WPA crew, to supervise the archaeological excavation at Pictograph Cave. The dig uncovered an assortment of stone and bone tools, projectile points, a carved amulet, pottery shards, and burned bone. The deeper deposits revealed artifacts from the Middle Prehistoric Period (3000 b.c. to 500 a.d.) when roving bands hunted game with stone-tipped spears and atlatl darts but also relied heavily on wild plants and seeds for food. Levels closer to the surface indicated a series of Late Prehistoric occupations (500 a.d. to 1800 a.d.) by nomadic buffalo hunters armed with bows and arrows. Archaeologists discovered a number of perishable items from this period-basketry, a hafted knife, roasted turnips in hearths, and beds of woven twigs and leaves-that would have been lost in an exposed site. Evidence indicated that nomadic hunters abandoned the shelter of the caves in favor of camping in tepees on the terrace below at about the time the horse was introduced on the plains in the 1700s. "The importance of Inscription Cave [Pictograph Cave], archaeologically," Walter Vanaman,



a surveyor for the Montana Highway Commission, wrote in a 1938 report, "is more in the completeness of the picture it presents than in being spectacular in any one phase."

When the archaeologists began investigating the other caves and the surrounding area, they found that late prehistoric groups had also lived in Ghost Cave. Middle Cave, however, had no evidence of inhabitation. On the terrace below the caves, the crew unearthed historic artifacts and remnants of a prehistoric lodge. They also found the remains of at least nine individuals in and around the caves, including those of one who had been crushed by falling rock. Some human bones had the same burn and teeth marks as bison bones found in the caves, leading to speculations of cannibalism.

National media reports carried news of the excavation, and thousands of tourists flocked to the caves to see for themselves the ancient pictographs and the

archaeological operation. Vanaman and others acted as guides, recounting their findings as they led visitors along newly made trails linking the caves. An unexpected attraction in 1937 was the summer field camp inside Ghost Cave. "I don't know which was the biggest curiosity to these tourists, the Indian relics and the excavation, or the 'Cavemen of 1937' and their home in the rocks. At times they would stand around and stare at us as though we were animals in the zoo," wrote Vanaman. The following year more than ten thousand tourists visited the caves. A sandstone museum was built below the caves in 1939, and a few years later a concession stand opened.

World War II brought an end to the WPA archaeological excavation at Pictograph Cave in 1941. By that time more than eight thousand cubic meters of dirt had been dug up and sifted and over thirty thousand artifacts uncovered from the distinct cultural occupation levels. Many of the artifacts, as well as field notes and sketches made during the excavation, are now preserved at the University of Montana in Missoula.

After studying the artifacts, William Mulloy, the archaeologist who replaced Sayre as project director in 1940, suggested that the longest occupation at the site was by ancestors of the Crow Indians, who were in transition from an agricultural economy to a nomadic buffalo-hunting culture. Mulloy later used the findings at Pictograph Cave to develop a chronology of prehistoric northern plains cultures, which, for the most part, has withstood the test of time.



In the post-war years Pictograph Cave suffered. Vandals burned down the museum and defaced the pictographs with graffiti. Litter cluttered the landscape, and vegetation choked the trails. In the early 1960s the Billings Archaeological Society and city boosters started a movement to protect and promote Pictograph Cave as a tourist attraction, and in 1963 Billings mayor Willard Fraser signed an agreement with the state to manage and develop the site. Fraser declared Pictograph Cave a city park and spearheaded an effort to have it designated a National Historic Landmark, which it became in 1964. Fraser also established the Indian Caves Commission to clean up the site and design a development plan for the park, but the city council refused to allocate funds for a park outside the city limits and volunteer efforts could not quell the vandalism. In 1968 the federal government threatened to rescind Pictograph Cave's landmark status due to its continued degradation. The following year the city of Billings surrendered management of the caves to the Parks Division of the Montana Department of Fish and Game, and the

site was renamed Pictograph Caves State Historic Site.

The state agency launched a program to improve and protect the park in 1972. Crews built trails, outhouses, and picnic facilities, and they installed interpretive signs, sandblasted away the graffiti that marred the pictographs inside the cave, and took steps to protect the park from further damage. Although the park continued to be a popular local picnic spot, it also began to attract a growing number of tourists. Pictograph Cave became a state park in 1991.

In the years since, growing concern over the loss of pictographs to fading and sloughing has spurred conservation efforts. Studies conducted in the 1990s identified only 44 of the 106 images that archaeologists recorded in the 1930s. Some have been obscured by a patina of mineral deposits. Others have been lost to erosion, vandalism, and earlier attempts to remove graffiti from the cave walls. The more striking pictographs visible on the cave walls today are a red deer, bear tracks, and shield-bearing warriors. Black images of a turtle, painted nearly 2,050 years ago, and a bison under attack from a wolf are among the older pictographs still visible. A row of coup sticks and a set of seven smoking guns painted in bright red are more recent. Park administrators are currently investigating methods to stabilize the cave and remove the mineral deposits that cloud the pictographs.

Pictograph Cave State Park is open from April 15 to October 15. The park is closed to overnight camping, but visitors are welcomed to tour the park and picnic under the box elder trees during daylight hours. There are guided tours through the park in the summer months. Those on self-guided tours will find brochures and interpretive signs recounting the history of the caves and the prehistoric people who camped there. Visitors are advised to stay on the paved trails to avoid falling rocks, rattlesnakes, and prickly pear cactus. The steep, winding trails may be too challenging for some.



To find the park, exit i-90 at Lockwood (Exit 452) and turn onto Coburn Road, which skirts the Interstate to the south before winding into the hills. The entrance to the park is six miles from the Interstate. Admission is \$4.00 per vehicle or \$1.00 per bus passenger. Call (406) 245-0227 or 247-2940 for more information.

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Retrieved on August 27, 2009, from  
[http://www.visitmt.com/history/Montana\\_the\\_Magazine\\_of\\_Western\\_History/caves.htm](http://www.visitmt.com/history/Montana_the_Magazine_of_Western_History/caves.htm)

## Worksheet for Pictograph Caves State Park Lesson

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Define the words in the list below. Then answer the questions.

**Pictograph:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Symbol:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Motif:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Petroglyph:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Excavate:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Oral History:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Artifact:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Site:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Preservation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Indigenous:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why did people create pictographs?**

**What materials did people use to make the paints for pictographs?**

**In your own words, describe how pictographs are similar to or different from art? Also, how are pictographs similar to or different from historical written documents?**

**What kinds of information might be important to know if you were going to interpret the meaning of a pictograph? Where or from whom might you get this information?**

**What is one image you liked from those at Pictograph Cave? What do you like about it?**

# PICTOGRAPH CAVE STATE PARK

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK ■ BILLINGS, MONTANA



Image by The Librarian, 2008

## LOOKING BACK

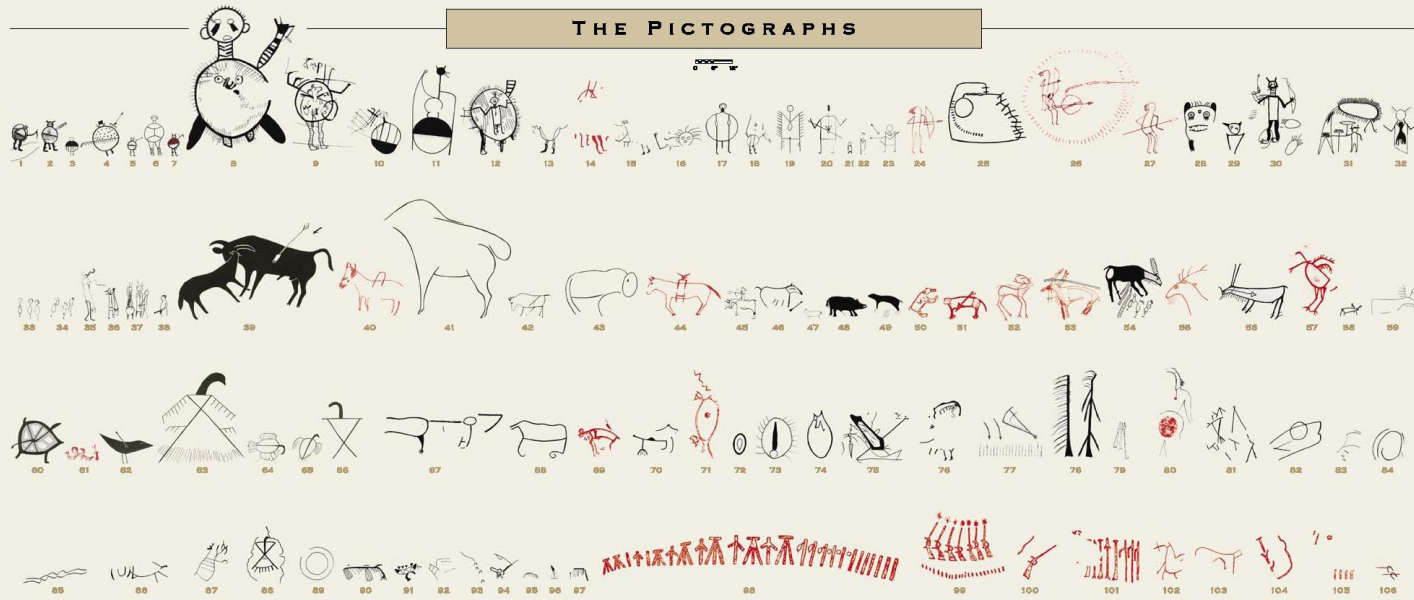
For over 4,500 years, people have visited Pictograph Cave, and for over 2,200 of those years, pictographs have been visible on the back wall. The black dotted line that horizontally marks the cave indicates the original level of material that filled the cave when a detailed archaeological survey took place between 1938 and 1941. During the survey, over 30,000 artifacts were extracted and catalogued.

At the time of the excavation, 106 motifs from the main cave were drawn to scale and assigned reference numbers. It is mentioned in the excavation notes that an overall drawing was created locating the figures, but none has ever surfaced.

Over the years, the pictographs faded and were damaged by vandalism. The artwork also was affected by well-meaning efforts to cleanse the panel by sandblasting and by moisture seeping through the sandstone.



## THE PICTOGRAPHS



## VIEWING THE ARTWORK TODAY

While many of the images are faded or barely visible, the composite image above helps the visitor locate the existing artwork more easily. Red pigment remains at the extreme left and right sides of the cave, and many figures in the central panel can be located.

This composite image was created by digitally photographing a panorama of the cave interior and overlaying figures extracted from the original drawings. The locations of the figures have been verified through historic photographs held by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Yellowstone County Museum, the Custer National Forest, private individuals, and the State Historic Preservation Office. Research continues today to determine the original location of pictographs not represented in the composite image.

The pictographs of Pictograph Cave connect us to our heritage. When cultural and historic sites like this are damaged or misused, we lose important links to our past. Please help us protect these places by treating them respectfully when visiting and reporting vandalism and artifact collecting to the managing agency.

For more information, visit: [www.pictographcave.org](http://www.pictographcave.org)