

This month's theme:  
**Ancient Art**



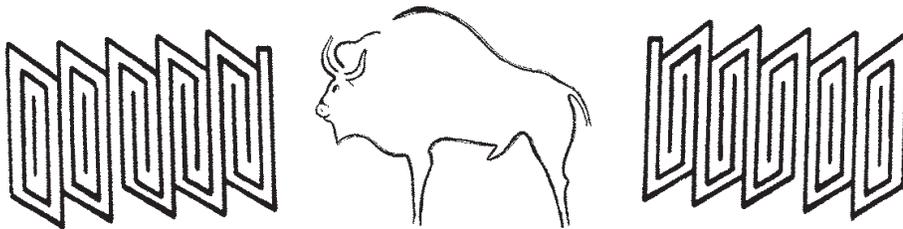
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The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society's Junior Historian Program

# PROSPECTOR

October, 2006



## Rock Art

**H**ave you ever been asked to draw a picture of one of your favorite things, or maybe even an event or place that you experienced while on summer vacation? Do you love drawing with chalk on the sidewalk, hoping the rain or sprinklers won't wash it away too quickly? When picking a book to read do you choose a book with fun pictures to go along with the story? Artists try to transform things they experience and love into a way others can also enjoy. The early artists of Idaho were no different, and even though the direct meaning of

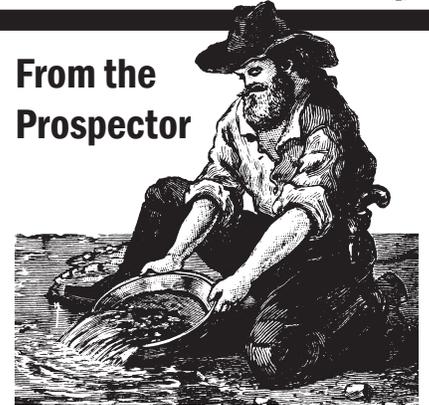
their art may be lost, we can still get a tiny glimpse into their culture and way of life through their creative artwork.

Although no one knows for sure, some archeologists believe the early inhabitants of Idaho first arrived here as long as 14,000 years ago. During this long history these native people developed a distinct 'rock art'. Archaeologists recognize two types of these prehistoric art forms, petroglyphs and pictographs. Both forms are generally seen on large boulders, cave walls or cliff faces.

Petroglyphs are incised or

*Continued on next page*

### From the Prospector



#### Howdy Prospectors!

**W**elcome to the fourth grade and the Prospector Club Junior Historian Program. My name is Lucky Noah and I'm in charge of writing your monthly newsletter. Although most of the time I'm out in the mountains looking for gold, my mule and I have an office in the basement of the state historical museum, which is located in Boise. This is the first of eight newsletters you will receive as a Prospector. Each issue will have exciting stories on a different Idaho history topic and fun activities for you and your class to do. For this month's theme, prepare to go back in history to learn about an ancient form of art. Have fun!

*Lucky Noah*

## Rock Art Continued

pecked images that are carved directly into the rock. One of the places you can easily see this art is on basalt lava rock along the Snake River. Typically, the boulders chosen for art along the Snake had been rounded and deposited on the canyon floor by the great Bonneville Flood, which occurred around 14,000 years ago. Perhaps the boulders had a special sacred meaning for the artists. The locations were certainly hard to get to, which may be why the art work has survived this long undisturbed. Sadly as many more people have access to the boulders some artwork has been destroyed by vandals.

The patterns used in the petroglyphs are very detailed and unusual.

While we don't know what the petroglyphs mean, some think they might originally have been maps. At the Weiss Bar petroglyphs site, located on the south side of the Snake River four miles downstream of Swan Falls near Boise, there is artwork believed to be over 2000 years old etched into 90 boulders. The patterns include triangles, dots, loops, circular or diamond shaped lines, and flying birds that become M's and on occasion W's and T's.

Some of the crisscross and diamond shapes are amazingly complex. Some scientists believe that the lines and rows of dots are used to show directions like a signpost would today.

Pictographs are not carved, but are images that have been painted onto rocks. They are most often found on limestone and granite surfaces in the eastern and central mountains of Idaho. Some images

were done over a long period of time. Many believe the location was used as a meeting spot or place of worship. Some of the figures painted onto the rocks seem to be in a dance scene, which is unusual for Idaho rock art since most of the stick-like figures in the state stand straight. At Indian Head Canyon located in the Birch Creek Valley of eastern Idaho, there is a large panel of rock paintings on a large over-

hang in a narrow mountain canyon. It overlooks the Lemhi Mountains and the Birch Creek Valley floor. One really unique thing about the overhang is that during a full moon the canyon is set aglow with moonlight. This might have been why this particular location was picked to create artwork.

Although we don't really

know why the artists created these pictures, we can certainly still enjoy the amazing scenes they left behind. Looking at petroglyphs and pictographs can be a reminder that there were people living in this land long before we were born. Although their world was very different from ours, their art can help connect the ancient past with Idaho's modern world. ♦



look like patterns and shapes, while others are easily recognizable as figures or specific symbols. Like an old family quilt designed for beauty as well as to tell a story, the pictographs spread across the rock in a wonderful display. Parts of the Big Lost River Valley canyon were used as a giant canvas for rock painting. You can see the painted panel from some distance away. The number of paintings as well as the different types of paintings show that they



# The Fun Page

**Find your way through the rock art maze!**

**Start**



**Finish**

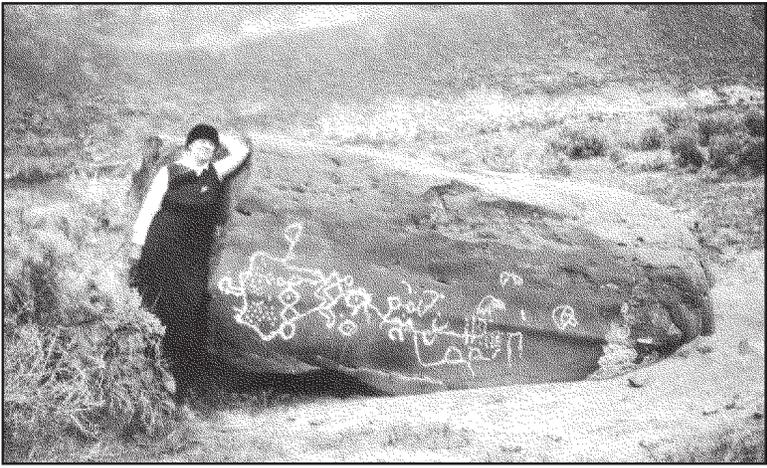


## Next Month's Activities

I love sharing Idaho's rich history with all you Prospectors, but writing a newsletter is hard work. That's where you come in. Each month, I'll ask for submissions for the next issue. As official Junior Historians you can write stories, draw pictures, and turn in projects that we'll print right here in the magazine. This month you can pick from one of the activities listed below or make up your own ancient art project and send it to our Prospector Headquarters. We'll take some of your best work and print it in next month's magazine. Remember to include your name, the town and school where you are from, and the name of your Prospector Club. We can't wait to see what you come up with!

**Other Ancient Art:** Petroglyphs and Pictographs are the art forms most associated with ancient people because there are relatively abundant around the world. Did ancient people create other types of art too? One possibility is music. Since

people have enjoyed music as far back as written history, it is probably safe to assume that ancient people also enjoyed music. Pretend you are a resident of the Idaho area 5,000 years ago. Write a song celebrating something in your life. Will you sing about buffalo hunts or salmon fishing or some other unique aspect of your life?



**Modern Petroglyphs:** The ancient people drew pictures of things that they saw in their everyday lives. A lot has changed since the ancient people walked the land. Pretend you are an Indian from Idaho's past who is magically transported to our time for just a day. When you return to your normal life you want to find

a way to show your friends the wondrous sights you experienced. Draw a series of pictographs, but instead of ancient pictures like spears and elk, draw things from our world that you think would have most impressed a visitor from the past.

**Around the World:** Idaho isn't the only place that has rock art. Ancient people from almost all parts of the world drew pictures on boulders and cave walls. Do a little research and tell us about rock art in another place. What did people in other parts of the world draw? Did they use the same techniques that the Idaho people did? Help us learn more about this fascinating subject.

Send in your work by  
November 16th to:  
  
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Lucky Noah  
Idaho State Historical Museum  
610 North Julia Davis Drive  
Boise, ID 83702  
Or email it to us at  
kzwolfer@ishs.state.id.us.