

Petroglyph Investigations at the Pilot Rock Site (13CK101), Cherokee County, Iowa.

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ABSTRACT

Pilot Rock is a large Sioux Quartzite boulder located along a high bluff in Cherokee County, Iowa. Previous investigations have focused on a single turkey track petroglyph located on the top of the boulder. Subsequent investigations have identified a series of additional petroglyphs located along the upper surface of the rock. Detailed recording of these petroglyphs, including black and white and color photography, maps, tracings and measured drawings, was conducted to document the current condition of the petroglyphs and provide a baseline with which to monitor deterioration and vandalism.

Pilot Rock is a large Sioux quartzite boulder located on a high bluff overlooking the Little Sioux River valley south of the present town of Cherokee, Iowa (Figure 1). A small picnic area and interpretive sign have been placed along the highway by the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (Figure 2). The massive boulder measures approximately 61 feet long, 40 feet wide and 20 feet high, and is believed to be the largest glacial erratic in the state (Figure 3). Early explorers used the stone as a meeting place and navigational aid, and it was an important landmark for early travelers heading west into Nebraska and the Dakotas.

Petroglyph boulders such as Pilot Rock were sacred places to Native people who inhabited the region before the arrival of Europeans. The stone was a focal point in the cosmological landscape of the valley, as shown by the traditional name of the Little Sioux River, inyan yanka wakpa, which can be translated loosely as "River Where the Rock Is." Pilot Rock is still known to contemporary Native Americans as an important and sacred place.

The rock was an important local landmark for early explorers and settlers in the region. Robert Perry, the first settler in the county, remarked on finding the stone while

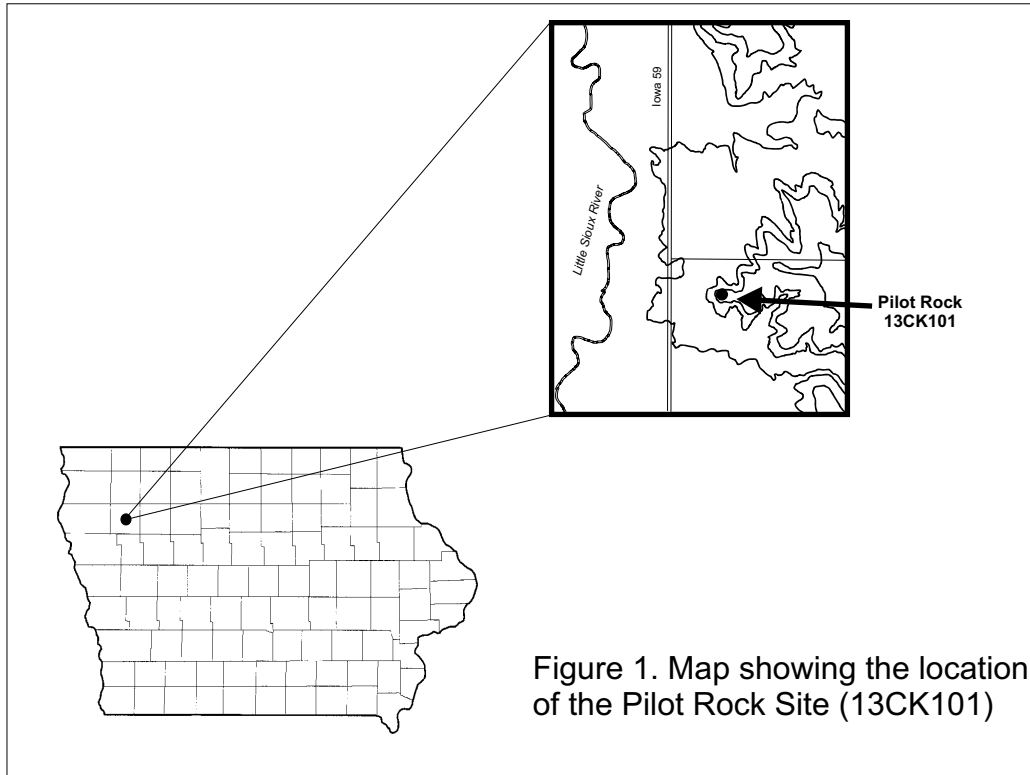


Figure 1. Map showing the location of the Pilot Rock Site (13CK101)

following an Indian trail en route to Sioux City in 1856, but failed to mention any evidence of petroglyphs, painting or offerings. In 1882, A.R. Fulton (1882:176-177). described his experiences regarding Pilot Rock and the Little Sioux River:

“The little river called by the French, Petite des Sioux (Little Sioux), was called by the Indians of that nation E-a-ne-ah-wad-e-pon, or Stone River. They applied to it this name from the fact that upon one of the elevations bordering this stream, there lies an immense boulder, from the top of which they could overlook the country for many miles. This boulder, known to the people of Cherokee county as "Pilot Rock," is in the south part of that county and about a quarter of a mile from the Little Sioux River. It was long a noted landmark and guide to travelers across the prairie. Some years ago the author visited "Pilot Rock" as one of the noted objects of interest in that part of the State, and upon ascending it to command a view of twenty-five miles of the grand valley of that little river, could well understand why the Indians should call it "Stone River." This boulder is a reddish granite, and is sixty feet long, forty feet wide, and lies with about twenty feet in height exposed above the surface of the ground. The top is nearly a flat surface, with a small basin near the middle. Near the south end; on the upper surface, are several small indentations, or depressions, evidently worked out by some artificial process by the Indians. It is said that the Sioux have left no monuments, but "Pilot Rock," in Cherokee county, will carry down to coming generations the evidences upon its surface that the Sioux regarded it as an object of interest, if not of veneration.”



Figure 2. View of the Pilot Rock rest area showing sign placed by the local DAR chapter. Note the rock in the background.



Figure 3. View of Pilot Rock facing south.

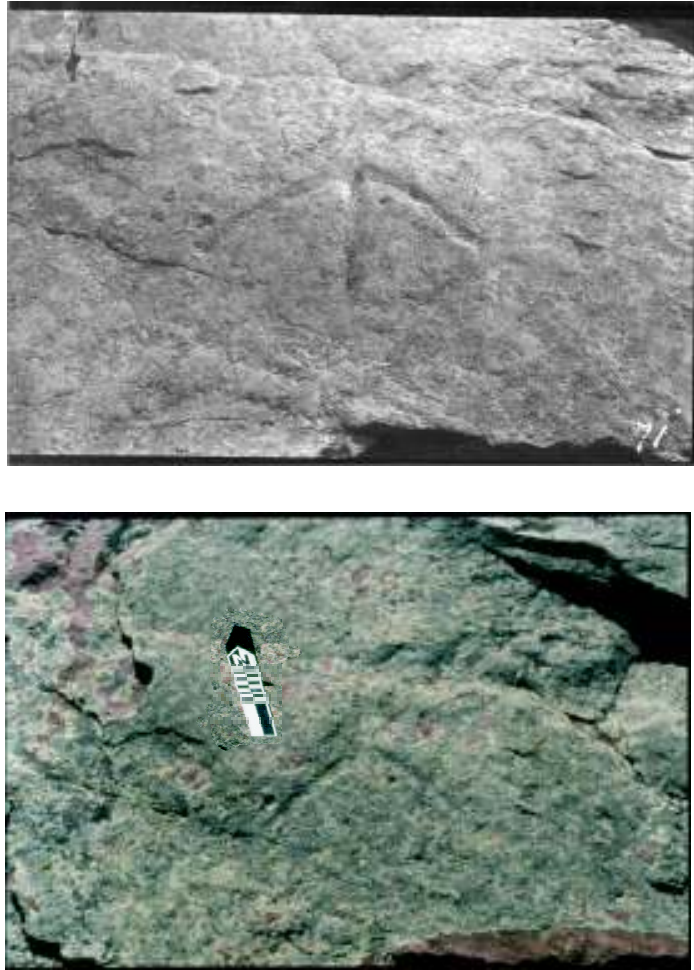


Figure 4, The top photograph was taken by Ellison Orr in 1934 while the photo on the bottom is a view of the same glyph taken during a 2001 field survey. Orr photo courtesy Charles R. Keyes Archaeological Collection, Iowa Office of the State Archaeologist and State Historical Society of Iowa.

In 1934, archaeologist Ellison Orr visited the site and took a photograph of a single "turkey track" petroglyph located on the top of the rock (Figure 4). At the time, no further petroglyphs were noted, and no additional research was conducted at the site for some time. In the Spring of 2000, additional field and documentary research began on Pilot Rock. In addition to relocating the original petroglyph photographed in 1934, other petroglyphs were noted, including two additional "turkey tracks," and a deeply grooved crescent shape which has been partially destroyed. All petroglyphs discovered were deeply grooved into the top of the large boulder. Petroglyphs on the rock were divided into two panels on the basis of their spatial locations: Panel 1, consisting of the turkey track originally described by Orr, and Panel 2, which consists of a small cluster of glyphs found during the recent survey.

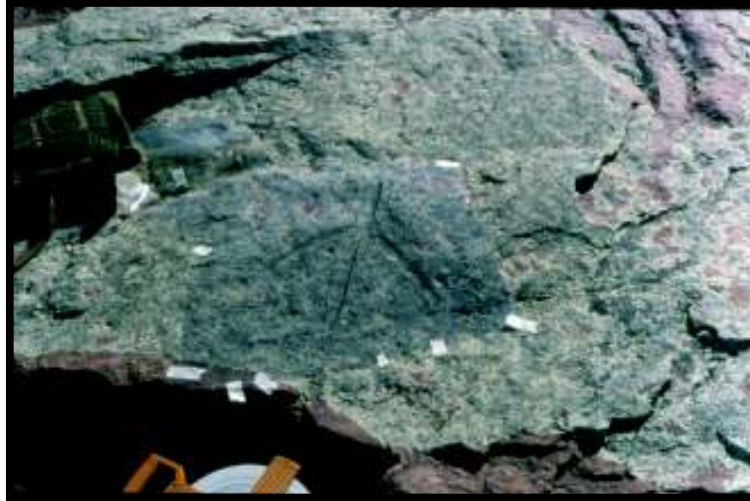


Figure 5. Photograph showing the recording technique used in tracing the petroglyphs. Note the placement of tape well away from the petroglyph surface.

Each panel was initially field sketched and photographed using color and black and white 35 mm film. Tracings were also made of the petroglyphs using large sheets of clear vinyl acetate. Care was taken to tape the acetate to the rock surface away from any petroglyphs to prevent damage (Figure 5). After taping the acetate sheets to the rock surface, the petroglyphs were carefully traced along the edges with permanent markers. Field notes were written directly on the acetate sheets, and a life-size scale was drawn on the acetate surface to aid in reducing the images. This recording method is much preferred over traditional techniques, such as chalking or charcoal rubbing, both of which have been shown to damage rock surfaces and interfere with newly developed petroglyph dating methods (Loendorf 1998:34). A detailed map was made showing the location of the petroglyphs on the rock surface (Figure 6). The field notes, maps, tracings, photographs and other related material are archived at the Iowa Office of the State Archaeologist, Iowa City.

Panel 1 consists of a single “turkey track” petroglyph measuring approximately 35 cm in length (Figure 7). This is the glyph was initially recorded by Ellison Orr and relocated as part of the recent survey. Portions of the rock surface surrounding this glyph show comparatively less lichen growth. Other petroglyphs associated with this figure may have been destroyed.

The largest petroglyph in Panel 2 measures approximately 19 centimeters in length, and is a classic representation of a “turkey track” (Figures 8 and 9).

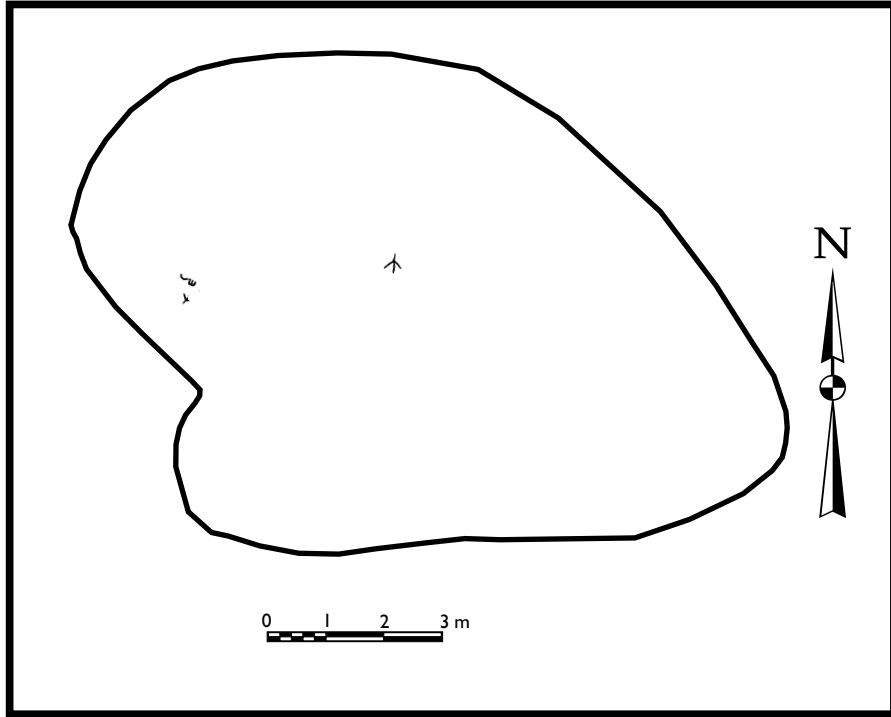


Figure 6. Map showing the location of petroglyphs on the upper rock surface.

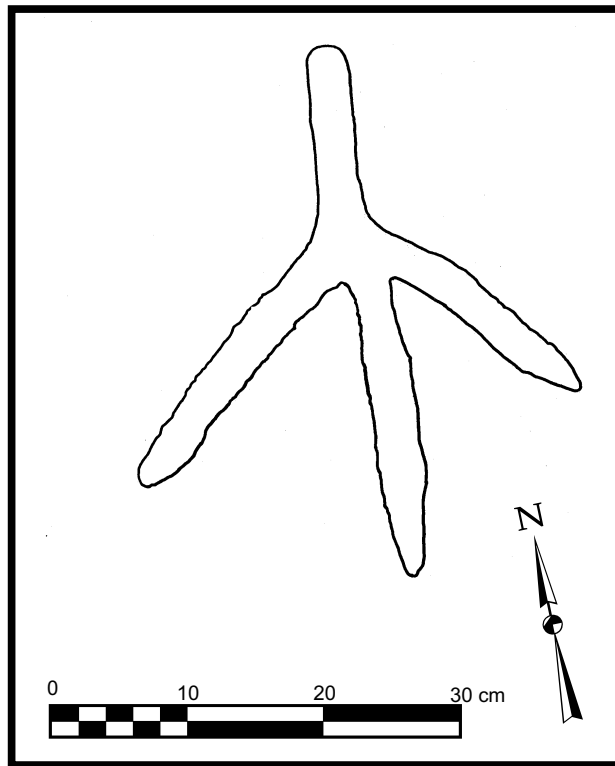


Figure 7. Scanned tracing of "turkey track" petroglyph designated Panel 1.



Figure 8. Photograph of Panel 2 facing southwest.

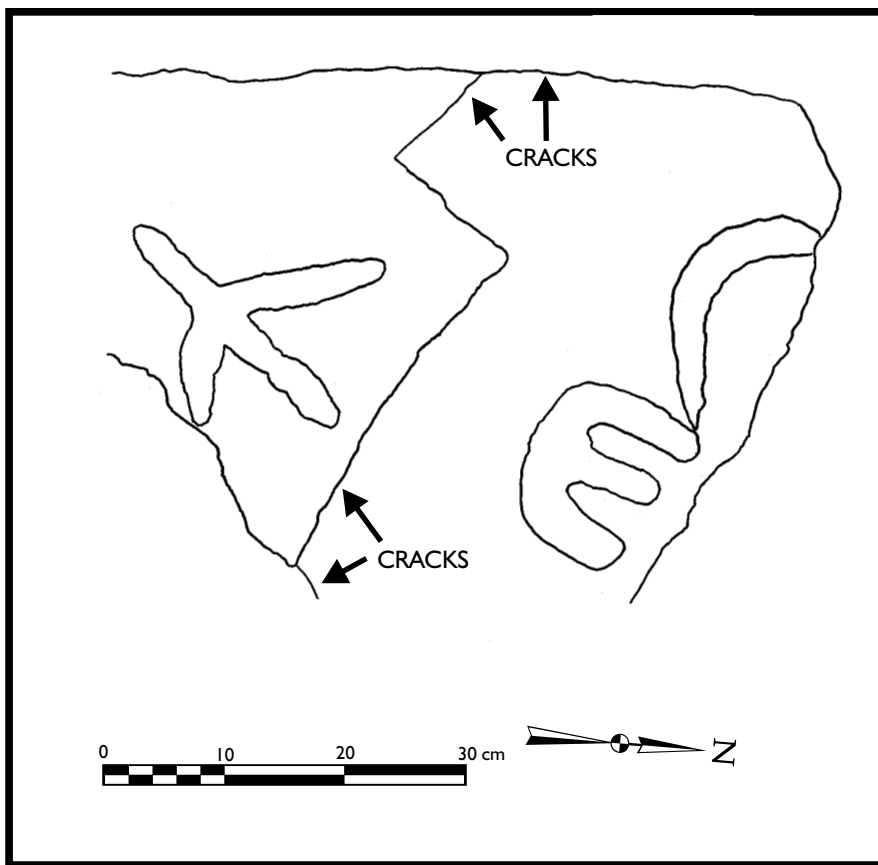


Figure 9. Scanned tracing of Panel 2.



Figure 10. Photograph of Pilot Rock taken in 1927. Courtesy Charles R. Keyes Archaeological Collection, Iowa Office of the State Archaeologist and State Historical Society of Iowa.

Such turkey track glyphs are commonly found at rock art sites throughout the Midwest from Saskatchewan south into Illinois and Missouri and are often interpreted as depictions of thunderbirds. The second petroglyph appears as a semi-circle with an intersecting line similar to a lower case "M." Generally, this type has a more northern distribution. Strikingly similar petroglyphs are found at the Jeffers petroglyph site in southwestern Minnesota. The third petroglyph, a crescent shape which may be largely destroyed, is more difficult to identify due to its incomplete state of preservation.

Pilot Rock has suffered from erosion, spalling and vandalism. Blasting of the upper portion of the rock surface to produce building stone occurred in the early part of the 20th century (McCulla 1914:44). A photograph taken in 1927 shows the rock to be considerably larger when compared to modern photographs (Figure 10). Graffiti is prevalent on all sides of the stone, some of which appears quite recent (Figure 11). Local residents stated that the rock is occasionally spray-painted by vandals, and that the surface has been periodically sand blasted to remove the paint. There is no way of knowing how many petroglyphs have been destroyed due to natural decomposition, blasting and vandalism. Early descriptions of the boulder suggest that many more glyphs were likely present, and there is some archival evidence suggesting that the rock may have also been painted by Native Americans, although no physical evidence of



Figure 11. Photograph of vandalism on the upper rock surface. The presence of recent graffiti is a good indicator of potential site destruction.

Pilot Rock is one of three known petroglyph boulder sites in Iowa, the others being the Newton Stone, located in Jasper County and the Radcliffe Sacred Rock in Allamakee County. High numbers of petroglyph boulders occur throughout surrounding states, suggesting that more petroglyph boulders are likely to be found in Iowa. In addition, cup-marked boulders are present south of Ellicott in Montgomery County and in Blood Run State Park in northwestern Iowa. Examination of geologic maps showing the locations of glacial erratics may be of use in locating other prehistoric boulder sites.

Boulder sites such as Pilot Rock have long been important and sacred places to native groups in the Upper Midwest. Of special importance were glacial erratics, which were associated among the Dakota with Taku-Skan-Skan, the “mover of everything.” Pond (1986:87) notes that “Stones were the symbol of this deity, and sometimes at least his dwelling place. The Indians believed that some stones possessed the power of locomotion or were moved by some invisible, supernatural power; and intelligent men affirmed that they had seen stones which had moved some distance on level ground, leaving a track or furrow behind them.”

Callahan (1999) notes that petroglyph boulders were also associated among the Dakota with the symbolic embodiment of stone, known as Toonkan, or “grandfather.”

boulders were usually painted red, and offerings and sacrifices were often made in the vicinity. The color red is of particular importance to this spiritual being, and it is not surprising that boulders of pinkish Sioux Quartzite were often associated with him.

Future work at Pilot Rock will consist of a detailed examination of the rock surface to attempt to locate and identify cup-marks and other surviving glyphs. A detailed study of the topography surrounding the boulder will also be conducted in hopes of locating aboriginal trails, earthworks, mounds and other landscape features. Public awareness and periodic site monitoring should help to prevent further vandalism and protect this important place for future generations.

Acknowledgements

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