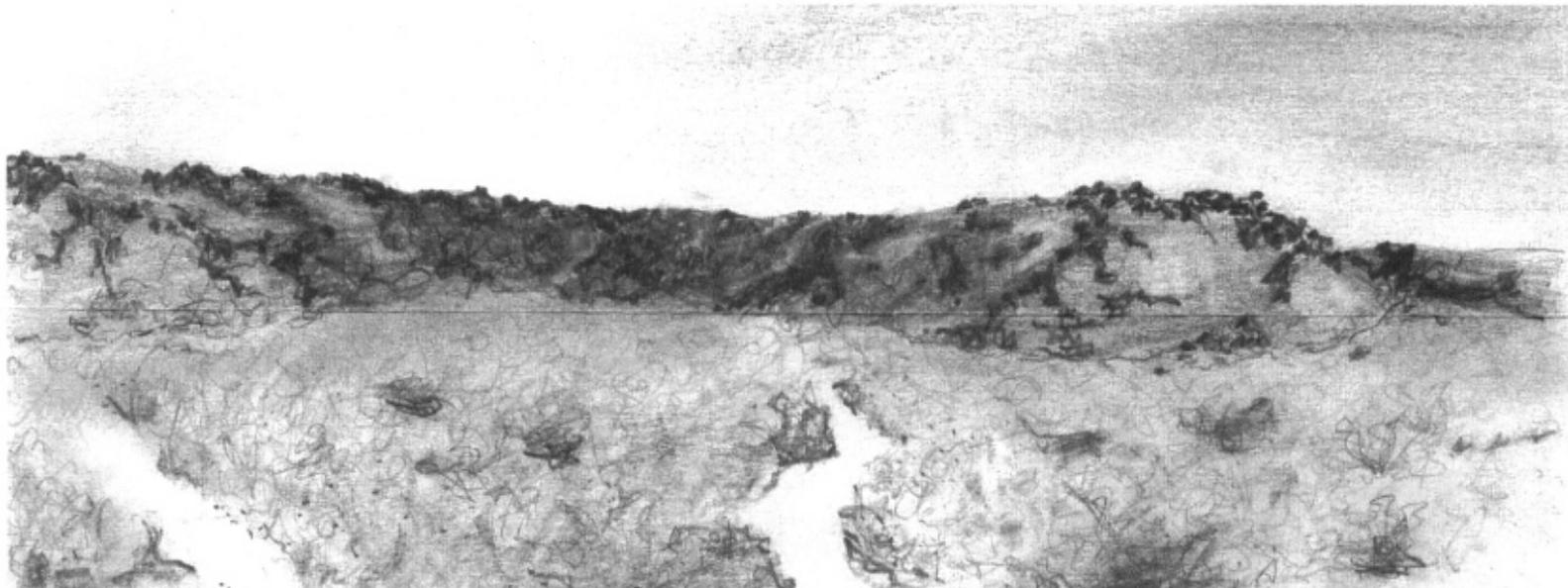






## Piedras Marcadas Canyon



### Introduction

The northernmost area of the Monument is called Piedras Marcadas Canyon, which means “canyon of marked rocks.” Although urban development is quite near, take a short walk and you’ll find yourself far away from the city. Piedras Marcadas Canyon is home to the densest concentration of petroglyphs along the Monument’s 17-mile escarpment, with an estimated 5,000 or more documented images of the monument’s total 20,000.

### A Cultural Landscape

Most of the images you see were created between 400 and 700 years ago by the ancestors of today’s Pueblo people and other native groups traveling through the area. Early Spanish settlers also left their images on the rocks. These petroglyph images were carefully pecked on the dark boulder surfaces with stone tools; they were deliberately planned and

very important to traditional peoples. Archaeologists believe that groups traveled near and far from pueblos established on the Rio Grande and elsewhere to offer prayers and carve images sacred to them. This entire area, including the volcanoes, mesa top, arroyos, canyons, cliffs, and surrounding views, is part of a living cultural landscape.

### Geology and the Petroglyph Images

200,000 years ago, a series of volcanic eruptions created the mesa top and the dark basalt rocks onto which the petroglyphs are pecked. Piedras Marcadas Canyon is the northernmost point that these flows reached. The walls of the escarpment in Piedras Marcadas are the lowest in the park, reaching only about 30 feet in some areas. This is because lava flows spread four to five miles from the volcanoes and flowed around low hills to create this canyon. The Rio Grande then eroded away the hills and left the low cliffs we see today.

On mostly east- and south-facing slopes you will be able to see geometric forms, reptile and mammal images, masks and human figures, hand and

footprints, historic inscriptions, and many other petroglyphs whose complicated meanings were known only by their makers. These images were grouped in important areas depending on views, orientation, other nearby images, and features such as drainages.

On the rocks here, you will notice colors other than dark black or gray—usually spots of white, green, or orange. The white is a calcium carbonate buildup called caliche, which forms when water evaporates beneath the rocks. The green and orange spots you see are growths of lichen, which is a plant complex that lives on rock surfaces. Much of the area is covered with a layer of sand blown in from the west.

### The Trail

The flat sandy trails winding from the Las Marcadas parking lot through Piedras Marcadas Canyon are rated as easy to moderate. You can follow these trails over a half-mile back into the middle canyon.

There you will find you have left behind the homes, the roads, and the sounds of the city. Look for numbered signs along the way to indicate the location of several major petroglyph concentrations.

### Reminders and Safety

While you are in Piedras Marcadas, please respect this special place. Pets must be leashed at all times and you must pick up after your pet. Do not touch or otherwise harm the rocks, and don’t remove anything from the park. Remember that non-compliance violates federal, state, and city laws.

For your own safety, please stay on the trails and bring your own water because there are no facilities.

Don’t forget to apply sunscreen and to dress in layers. Watch out for snakes and if you see lightning, stay away from the escarpment. The basalt rocks are full of iron and other metals, and they do get struck!

Most of all enjoy yourself when you are at Piedras Marcadas, but please help us preserve this park for future generations to enjoy.