

# Indian pictographs at Hens and Chicks defaced

- **February 25th, 2010**
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By Eric Barker of the Tribune

Graffiti painted over rock art south of Hells Gate park



Vandals recently spray-painted graffiti over ancient Indian pictographs at the Red Elk Rock Shelter ... Tribune/Eric Barker



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Indian pictographs at the Red Elk Rock Shelter south of Lewiston's Hells Gate State Park have been defaced with graffiti.

The basalt wall with red pigmented rock art including animal figures and geometric shapes dating back as far as 2,500 years was spray-painted at the shelter - a shallow depression in a cliff of columnar basalt that is part of a formation known locally as Hens and Chicks. Ken Reid, the Idaho state archaeologist at Boise, said the damage is a violation of the federal Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979.

"It was occupied just about the time Lewis and Clark came through and there are artifacts there indicating it goes back to 2,500 years ago," he said. "It's a significant site."

The graffiti, left sometime in the past two weeks, includes references to marijuana such as "Vote to Toke," and a pot leaf with "Ganga" written below. There are also peace signs, the initials T.C., and the names Freddy B and "Kotton Mouth Kings" - a marijuana-themed rap band - painted on the wall. What appears to be the name Gerad Knock is written across but not over a pictograph of an elk the shelter is named for.

The shelter is on land managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Corps officials just learned of the damage on Wednesday and are sending a team from Walla Walla to investigate on Monday.

"We view these violations as a serious matter and we intend to refer them to local law enforcement so they can determine who is responsible, and ultimately, bring these perpetrators to justice," said Joseph Saxon, a spokesman for the corps at Walla Walla. "In the meantime, we'll need to determine how to undo the damage that was done."

Carolynne Merrell, a rock art expert from Moscow said the shelter was used by the Nez Perce Tribe and could have been visited by other tribes from the Snake and Columbia river basins.

"It seemed to have been an area where people gathered," she said of the shelter and surrounding land.

The rock art includes a shape known as a rayed arch that Merrell said is a common motif from tribes in the Lower Columbia river basin.

"When we see rayed archs in this part of the country we know it probably had its genesis in the Lower Columbia."

She said it is possible to restore sites that have been defaced with graffiti but she had not yet seen the damage at the shelter and couldn't speculate on restoration possibilities.

"Depending on the paint we could bring in a conservator and we might be able to restore it but it is very expensive and there are very few people qualified to do the restoration."

Scott Jackson, owner of Ride On Bikes in the Lewiston Orchards visited the site on Sunday and saw the graffiti. He said he had also been there about two weeks earlier and there was no graffiti.

"It definitely bummed me out. It's bad," he said. "They pretty much took out 95 percent of it. Anything that was 6 feet or lower is completely ruined."

Jennifer Light, a Lewis Clark State professor hiked to the rock shelter with her family also on Sunday and saw the graffiti. She said she talked to other hikers there who said they had been at the shelter the previous weekend and the graffiti was there.

"I was sick, just sick," she said.

The graffiti was reported to the Nez Perce County Sheriff's Department Wednesday. The Nez Perce Tribe just learned of the damage on Wednesday and has not yet issued a statement.

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*Barker may be contacted at [ebarker@lmtribune.com](mailto:ebarker@lmtribune.com) or at (208) 848-2273.*