

FEATURES OF NEBRASKA

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SECTION C

Eventual Interpretation of NEBRASKA PICTURE ROCKS may mean this state home of very early peoples

Student of These Odd Carvings Near Table Rock Sees Sociological Phase of Prehistoric Dwellers In His Study of Stone Drawings.



Upper left: The rain and rock, with a figure, has been camping in Van Fleet park in Table Rock and its vicinity. Lower left: Upper right: Ceremonial stone, resembling a water buffalo with a man on its back. Center right: Buffalo cow's face, with horns and the eye. Lower right: Sun burst or turtle back with horns. Map shows route of reaching park and the sites.



Editor's Note: Thomas N. Russell, the author, has been camping in Van Fleet park in Table Rock and its vicinity. Lower left: Upper right: Ceremonial stone, resembling a water buffalo with a man on its back. Center right: Buffalo cow's face, with horns and the eye. Lower right: Sun burst or turtle back with horns. Map shows route of reaching park and the sites.

BY THOMAS N. RUSSELL. THE picture rocks of Table Rock are silent witnesses that have kept, through many hundreds of years, perhaps thousands of years, in beautiful drawings and marvelous sculpture, chiseled and engraved by skilled artisans, the thoughts and ideals held before the youth of that far distant age.

Man in that prehistoric age evidently had dominion over the birds in the air, the fishes in the streams, the buffalo on the range, and the ferocious tiger in the jungle. But with all his knowledge and powers over his environment, he felt a need for a still higher power. Vividly the evidence in stone proves his admiration for and reverence to a supreme being. A supreme being, higher even than his rain god.

The picture rocks of Table Rock are located on the Dr. Peter Van Fleet farm a half mile east of the lower part of the village. To visit them and to attempt to understand the queer hieroglyphics is a treat. They are reached by leaving No. 4 highway on the east side of the Nemaha river just across from the Burlington pump station and following the river upwards a few rods into the woods and up to the sandstone cliff.

Table Rock first was laid out in 1835 on the hill above those rocks. The members of the townsite company, including Governor Robert Furnas, James Hinton, and John Pennington, according to F. H. Taylor, editor of the Table Rock Argus, named their town after one of the balancing rocks found on the hillside. Rock here from the combination grit and saw mill may be seen yet at the foot of the bluff on the Nemaha river.

TWO SITES RIVALS. A short time later, a Pennsylvania company bought out the old company and laid out a new townsite near the location of the present town. The two sites became rivals in the first election for a county seat for Pawnee county. As is the usual story of such cases, Table Rock became a community divided against itself and Pawnee City won the coveted position.

Soon after coming to Table Rock in 1908, while hunting a natural park as a playground for the young folk, I was told about "a cave." Investigation and succeeding events led to my discovery that these rocks had been designed. The sharper markings of the outlines offered by photographs confirmed my discovery.

When the opportunity offered itself, I made a trip to New Mexico with a visit to the cliff dwellers of Puye in the northern part of the state. We also saw the corn dance at two pueblos, Taos and Espanola. At Puye, the guide, Chief Tomo, pointed out what he called the picture of the rain god. In whose honor they danced. I had photographs of the park rocks from Nebraska, and one is almost identical with what he had called the rain god. Being interested by this similarity, I showed him the picture, and among other things, he said that I had found where his ancestors, or their relatives, had trained one generation of boys after another for the chase and for manhood. Each group would add to the art of the preceding generations.

Carvings Revealed. He explained the different parts of my photograph. I had not discovered that the picture of the rain god is surrounded by other stone pictures. Above it, a turtle and a lizard are visible. Two Indians are carved near the head and neck of the turtle. In the back part of the turtle shell is a group of two more Indians.

With this information adding to my mounting interest, I showed another photograph. It is a rock on which is a convenient place for a person to recline on his back. This guide determined it to be a rock of many ceremonies, and particularly, a place for the closing part of the initiation of boys into manhood. This ceremonial stone in the photograph resembles a water buffalo with a beautiful fox on his nose. Others have read into the

shape of the rock, a large frog, a turtle, a Rocky Mountain highorn, and possibly other animals. At a convenient distance is a seat, an elephant's ear for the chief observer.

Only a few feet from the rain god is a much disfigured mass that is the remains of a rock that once had a crown. Some called it "the cabbage head," others the table rock, and a third group, the load stone. Near the spine is a highly decorated stone that has all the appearance of a kneeling camel. Near it is a large ape with a fish in his hand. A short distance below, on the hillside, is a stone 10 feet 10 inches long and 7 feet tall. This stone, while rather definitely outlined, bears different aspects from varying viewpoints, and has been described as a buffalo, an elephant and a camel.

Some Stones Hidden. Because the park is a natural park, some of the pictured stones are hidden by low growing bushes. Not so long ago, when some of the brush was cleared away, a manlike ape, rather a common creature in some parts of the world, but less numerous in Nebraska, was revealed in the stone, as well as an elephant. Near this stone is the top of what we show as the Table Rock, but its stem is destroyed completely.

Below and north of the ceremonial stone is another about 5 feet in height, which, when photographed, shows the face of a buffalo cow. Chief Tomo turned the picture about, and showed her calf and its sire. A man wearing a turban centered this rock, but it literally is covered with designs, many of them easily discernible.

On the cliff above the buffalo cow's face is a great stone face, even though not the one written of in a short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne. I had thought of it as a large man, but the chief in New Mexico set me right

on that. "No," he said, "Our only way to express our ideas of a supreme God is in terms of a good, big man. He is above all others. That is the supreme God."

"Lover's Draw" Nearby. Not so distant from this figure of the supreme God is Lover's draw, lined on either side by picture rocks. One forms a bath tub for birds, because it has a well chiseled basin. Chief Tomo called the basin, as seen in the photograph, a sun burst, used long ago, as he related it, for catching holy water—rain water that had not touched the ground. We, in less picturesque fashion, had been calling it turtle back wash basin. A study of the rock or of the picture will show either name to be suitable. Near the sun burst is a big dog and a cat of some sort, probably a tiger.

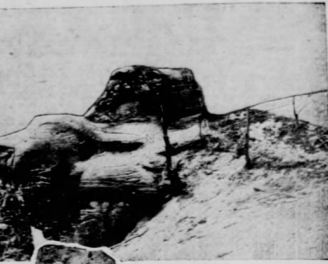
I can't go into details and describe each of the many rocks found here. In order to appreciate the art displayed here, it is necessary to study the rocks at different hours of the day. The ever-changing of the lights and shadows help us in the study that it takes to reveal the skill with which these rocks have been designed.

What strange people may have wandered through the forested stretches of this country long before its grasses had been trampled by white men hasn't been determined. How many millennia gone men and women and children, with their small houses, hold gods, lived their odd lives here hasn't been told yet. Old potteries and utensils of only surmised purpose, when unearthed from the ground where they have been buried for century on century, tell of a long ago life, even

though they bring no actual tales with them.

Pueblo Built Adobes. The Pueblo Indians, a name first used by the Spaniards, and later adopted by the Americans, designated the semi-civilized agricultural Indians of the Utoe or stone-built communal houses of the southwest. Their homes rose had a dozen and more stories from the ground.

How long they had formed a race to carry on their own pursuits goes back far beyond history. A priest first made record of them in 1539, and they were seen by the Coronado expedition the next year. His army camped among the Pueblos for the winter, living near their little mud houses, watching them wave and mold. However, the Spaniards from Mexico and the Indians failed always of agreement with the result that many of the Indians were killed, others captured and tortured.



he is believed to have visited. Four hundred years ago, in August, 1541, the Spanish marched back to their sunny sides, having been brought on the long journey by foundationless tales of enormous wealth, but one might cogitate whether or not they brought any Indian captives and whether they returned south.

Sheldon Skeptical. In June, 1922, I brought Dr. A. E. Sheldon, secretary of the Nebraska State Historical society and editor of the Nebraska History magazine, to see these rocks. Although Dr. Sheldon was rather doubtful and played the role of a skeptic, he exclaimed at the sight of the rain god stone: "There is no doubt about that being genuine." Later, he pointed out a well-designed bear that had escaped my notice.

His article in the history magazine last fall gives his estimate on the prehistoric significance of the ground. An excerpt from the story follows: "...Some of the forms had undeniable evidence of human handicraft. Many of them seem to be wholly or partly the work of nature. But the larger one studies this remarkable open air art gallery, the more evident the touch of the human hand appears."

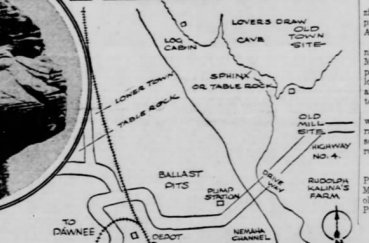
"...Visitors to the park will be well rewarded by a camping ground of rare beauty as well as by a study of some of the most remarkable picture rocks in the land."

See Circle "Glyph." The visit to the cliff dwellers at Puye and the corn dance in New Mexico gave me the opportunity to see old circle "glyph" of the rain god at Puye.

The picture rocks of Table Rock are the achievements of sculptors and artists whose descendants or relatives or both live in the position of New Mexico and are scattered elsewhere, as in Oklahoma. A day spent watching the corn dance, performed to please the rain god who will send enough rain for a bountiful corn crop, with photographs from here, after visiting the Puye cliff dwellers will convince the most skeptical that animals no extinct, sculptors of rare skill with the hiker's instinct, and with religious fervor, once lived in this part of Nebraska, or lived here and followed the chase.

The study is just begun. These hills and valleys contain hidden evidence of that ancient civilization. Their modern relatives hold the traditions that will, or would, if gotten aid in the rebuilding of ancient homes and customs.

However the study is not to be all by one man. E. H. Bull of the university has indicated a desire to see these rocks and intends to visit the park in April. E. E. Blackman, curator of the state historical society museum, plans to study the rocks, and Dr. Sheldon, now that the Coronado heard of Quivira, a rich city far to the north. History makes no record of it, and there is no cause for belief, but only for wild speculation as to whether the Spanish general brought any of these Indians far into the north with him, and into the future Nebraska, which



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