

THE ROLL SITE (12-Cr-175): AN ABORIGINAL PETROGLYPH IN CRAWFORD COUNTY, INDIANA

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INTRODUCTION

To date, the Roll site contains the only verified aboriginal petroglyphs in Indiana (Swartz, 1985; Wellman, 1979). The site, located near Alton, Crawford County, Indiana, on Hoosier National Forest property, was discovered by Mr. Tom Roll during an outing on the Ohio River. Mr. Roll reported the site to the Indiana State Museum, and the site was recorded by the authors during July of 1988.

DESCRIPTION

The Roll site consists of nine glyphs (Figure 1) pecked into the surface of a large sandstone boulder that is immediately adjacent to the modern shoreline of the Ohio River. The boulder is located below a steep bluff on the outside margin of a large meander of the Ohio River and the location offers a clear view to the east, southeast, and south. The glyphs are being eroded by fluctuations in the river level. The western end of the boulder is covered by soil and loose rocks and additional glyphs may yet be located at that end of the boulder.

The nine glyphs are arranged along the long axis of the boulder on a line that is generally 36° east of north. The visible portion of the sandstone boulder measures approximately 4 m long by 1.5 m wide. The glyphs are composed of irregular lines 10 cm to 15 cm wide and 1 cm to 5 cm deep. All lines are pecked. The glyphs are principally composed of curvilinear lines, but the three western glyphs incorporate relatively straight lines. Glyphs C and E in Figure 1 show the most damage from weathering.

A variety of methods were used to record the site. Initially, a sketch map was made showing the relative placement of each glyph. Rubbings were then made of each glyph and subsequently outlined in charcoal. Some weathered glyphs, and photographs were taken. Due to poor reproduction by some of the rubbings, each glyph was subsequently outlined in charcoal. Some weathered glyphs were defined by reflecting sunlight with a compass mirror across the surface of the glyph. Following additional photography, each glyph was measured and mapped.

DISCUSSION

The glyphs recorded at the Roll site are of the Woodland Pit-and-Grove style most commonly found in the Tennessee Valley area of the Southeast, although the style also occurs at petroglyph sites in the Midwest (Wellman, 1979). Wellman

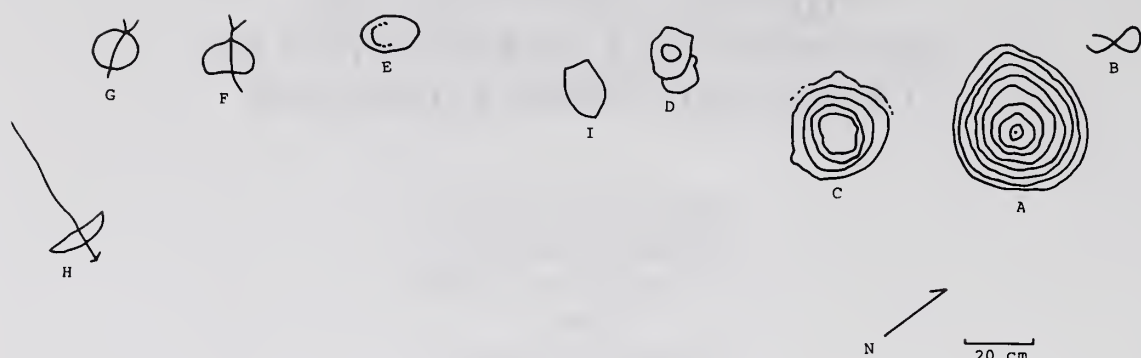


FIGURE 1. Arrangement of glyphs at the Roll site.

(1979) reports that the circle motif and its elaborations predominate among the elements in this style. Pit-and-Groove style petroglyphs have been interpreted as representing fertility symbols (Wellman, 1979), although other interpretations are possible.

Dating of the site is suggested by the bow and arrow glyph shown in Figure 1H. The glyph is similar to others reported from the Midwest and the Southeast (Wellman, 1979) and corroborates the proposed dating of A.D. 900-1750 for Midwestern and Southeastern petroglyph sites (Grant, 1967; Swauger, 1984; Wellman, 1979), since this span covers the range of bow and arrow use.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Roll site represents the first verified aboriginal petroglyph site documented in Indiana. The site is related to petroglyph sites more common in the Tennessee Valley and may represent the northern boundary of the Woodland Pit-and-Groove style. Although interpretation of the site is currently unclear, its importance to the prehistory of the Ohio River drainage in Indiana is self evident.

LITERATURE CITED

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