

Yaamat Igait – PETROGLYPHS

Petroglyphs are designs pecked into boulders, cliff faces, and other stationary pieces of stone. This type of artwork is rare in Alaska. The Lingít of Southeast Alaska made such carvings, and a few pieces of rock art are known from other parts of Alaska. In the Kodiak Archipelago, there are at least 27 petroglyph locations that depict human figures, animal forms, geometric designs, holes, and cut lines.

HOW DID THE ALUTIIQ/SUGPIAQ CREATE PETROGLYPHS?

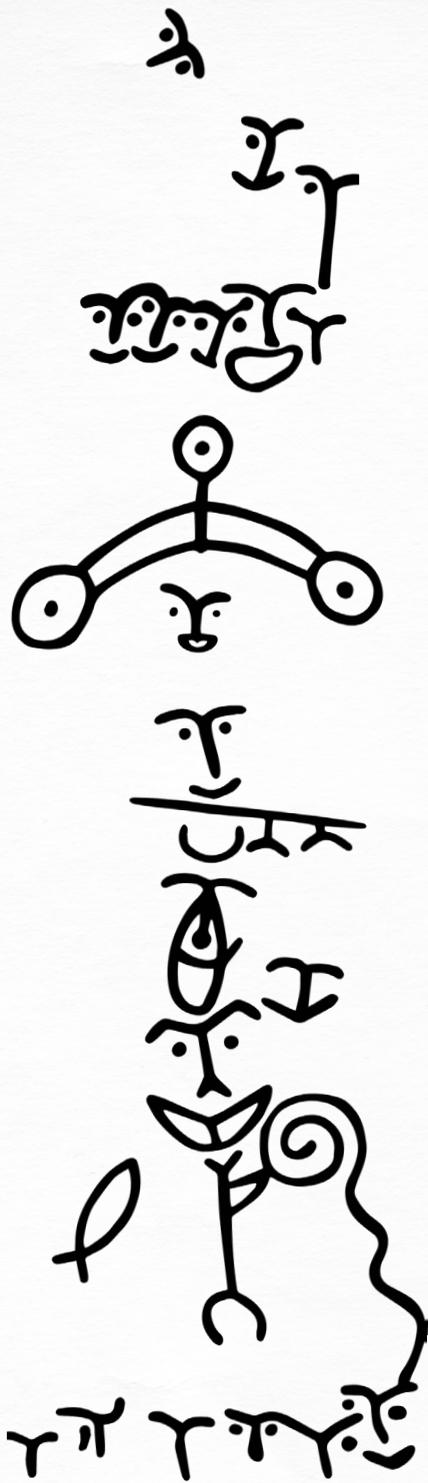
There are clues in other types of stone tools. Alutiiq ancestors made many objects out of hard greywacke and granite beach cobbles by pecking. Craftspeople used stone hammers to shape water-worn rocks into lamps, mauls, fishing weights, and even anchors. With similar tools, people probably pecked petroglyph images into Kodiak's bedrock. Experiments suggest that artists used two handheld stones to hammer away fragments of rock and create designs, perhaps employing a hammerstone to drive a pecking stone. However they were created, Kodiak's petroglyphs are finely made. Artists made deep, clean lines and carefully formed shapes and silhouettes. Some of these images are quite large, more than a meter (three feet) across. They must have taken a very long time to craft.

No one knows the precise age of this art form. Alutiiq people believe the petroglyphs are very old. Even a hundred years ago, Elders had no knowledge of this art form. Archaeologists suspect that some images date to the centuries surrounding AD 1000, as other types of stone carving flourished at this time, and many of the petroglyphs occur near village sites of this age. But why did Alutiiq people make petroglyphs?

Other Alaska Natives used rock art as territorial markers, permanent signs that linked families to particular subsistence harvesting areas. Perhaps the Alutiiq did the same. Some petroglyphs commonly occur at the entrances to bays, facing outward toward the open ocean, and would have been easy to see when freshly carved. It is also possible that the images are part of hunting or fishing rituals. Historic accounts report that whalers carved images into rocks to bring them luck before the hunt. At Cape Alitak, both explanations seem possible. Here, there are thirteen clusters of petroglyphs with more than 1,300 individual images. Petroglyphs showing faces tend to appear below old village sites. In contrast, petroglyphs showing whales appear at the tip of the cape, overlooking an area where whales swim past.

LEARN MORE:

Rock Art, 2018, by Amy F. Steffian and Sven D. Haakanson Jr. In *Igaruacirpet—Our Way of Making Designs*, Pp. 32-66. Alutiiq Museum, Kodiak.



*Petroglyphs from Cape Alitak, Kodiak Island.
From a drawing by Sven Haakanson Jr.*