

Priest Rapids

From John M. Campbell notes in possession of Tom Stockdale, Vantage.

Site 45 YK 1 represents one of the most outstanding examples of petrographic art to be found in the Columbia River watershed and possibly in the whole northwest. For this reason, these detailed notes are included herein in the hope that more than superficial attention be paid to this site in future field expeditions.

Whale Island as the site is known, is impossible to reach except by boat and hazardous by this means unless considerable caution is used. Because of the difficulty involved in reaching the site, few whites have visited it and no vandalism or defacing has taken place. The site was first brought to our attention in the fall of 1949 by Mr. Thomas Stockdale of Vantage, Washington. Mr. Stockdale had visited the site a number of times and remarked that although he had traveled the river extensively and had observed a great number of petrographic sites, these were by far the best he had seen. On August 20, 1950, we visited the site by means of a canvas boat in the company of Mr. Stockdale.

The island consists of a portion of a basalt dike which intersects the river at right angles at this point and causes the swiftest run of water in the series of ripples and falls known as Priest Rapids. The island is named for a large block of conglomerate granite which lies on the west side of the island. This rock has a natural prow or point caused by erosive factors and this prow has been deeply incised into a rough resemblance of an animalistic head. The eyes, mouth, teeth and nostrils are easily discernable.

The rock measures 134 '' x 58 II x 68 II with the carved portion measuring 23 inches x 14. This rock, together with a large uncarved rock lying near it are the only two large pieces of granite that were seen on the island. All of the other examples noticed were on basalt.

Seventy boulders containing petrographic examples were counted on the island. A good many more were not located because of lack of time. No pictographs were observed, and all of the petroglyphs found were executed on boulders ranging in size from a few hundred pounds to several tons. No examples were noticed on solid or bedded basalt.

The most unique and outstanding features of these petroglyphs are the depths of the incised lines and the unusual forms and types of design. A good majority of the petroglyphs seem to be generally unlike most examples found in the middle Columbia area. Animalistic forms are common but often the edge or corner of a boulder has been used in executing the final effect. Ribs and vertebrae are commonly depicted. The desired effect has been achieved in these cases by utilizing a natural ridge or fracture edge on the stone along which the design is carved. Geometric examples take the form of elaborate and deeply pecked circles, dots and lines which exhibit a mastery of technique superior to any of the other sites recorded in the area.

It is of course uncertain and a matter of conjecture whether this site represents something of radically different significance in plateau petrography or merely an example of more painstaking artistry. A number of the petroglyphs showed a great deal of erosion. This factor compared with the unusual depth present in the lines and design leads us to believe that this site may be at least considerably older than many of the region. At any rate, it is an outstanding example of the art.

The island as seen on the site map is roughly an obtuse triangle, the longest side of which parallels the west bank of the river. To reach the island a good boat of considerable maneuverability should be launched in the Priest Rapids power plant canal a mile above the plant. The boat can be carried this far by automobile as shown on the map. By crossing the canal and gaining the top of a high dike on the river side the island can be seen lying directly east across a deep channel. It can be

identified by the large block of granite, "ale Rock, which lies just across the above mentioned channel of the west side of the island. By portaging across the dike and over three hundred yards of bedded basalt, the channel can be reached and the crossing easily accomplished. Under no circumstances should the island be attempted by any other approach than the one just described, as the rapids in this area are extremely dangerous and any crafts swept into the main current would probably be ~~captured~~ capsized.

The island is never completely covered by water except in extreme stages of flood. During late summer, fall and winter, the ~~low~~ highest point on the island is approximately twenty feet above the river level. During these seasons the island is most easily reached and all of the petroglyphs are out of the water.

When Whale Rock is reached numerous petroglyphs on large boulders may be observed by following the west bank of the island downstream to its lower end. Scattered examples are evident along the east bank upstream to a point slightly above and opposite to Whale Rock. Here a ~~large~~ large number of petroglyphs occur in a small area. This concentration exhibits the best examples of form and technique found on the island. The area lying above this point on both sides of the island was not explored. Approximately two full days should be devoted to a thorough search of the island. It is suggested that Mr. Stockdale be contacted for further information regarding access to the site. John M. Campbell.