

DAY TRIP LOOP via TONOPAH ARIZONA

Tonopah to the Painted Rocks Petroglyph Site is an easy trip. Plus, a loop can be made via the historic Old Highway 80 and maintained dirt road of Agula Caliente Scenic Drive. So pack a picnic, lots of water, and let's go!

Painted Rocks has been a known destination for travelers to, and along, the Gila River for thousands of years. This single cluster of weathered basalt rocks are one of Arizona's most important intersections over time and peoples.



Hundreds of petroglyphs record the passage of people and time at a key location along the Gila River.

Not painted, petroglyphs are actually meticulously pecked onto rocks using stone tools that carefully removed the top, dark-layer, on appliance-sized boulders. This craft reveals the light color of basalt under the dark weathered cover.

One way to describe petroglyphs is that no two are alike. The unique designs and symbols have recorded a long story of events by various cultures but the meaning of many of the symbols still remain a mystery today.

The site is so significant; it has been logged by historic visitors over 400 years including de Anza, Father Kino, Emory's Mapping Expedition, and the Mormon Battalion. Located near a low gap in a mountain range, it was described 'as providing good access to the Gila River and near a large meadow covered with forage plus large cottonwood and willow trees'. For west bound travelers it was near the first water after traveling 70 miles of a 'short-cut' that crossed the driest part of the Sonoran desert.

Pack a Picnic - Day Trip Loop

South on Old US80 to I-8 then west for 12 miles to Painted Rock Dam Road (Exit 108) then north 11 miles to the Painted Rock Petroglyph Road and the site. There the Bureau of Land Management provides shaded picnic tables in Ramada's plus vault toilets (\$2.00 fee per vehicle per day). Plus, there are educational displays and a short hiking trail that wraps the rock cluster of petroglyphs. Remember, touching can harm petroglyphs, so care for them by taking only photographs.

A return trip via the highway has many options. They are: stopping in Gila Bend for lunch (Space Age Café), or a stop at the shrimp farm to buy dinner, or stop on the hill and overlook Gillespie Dam and gain views of watchable wildlife.

The Agua Caliente Scenic Drive is about 50 miles of maintained dirt road between the Painted Rock Petroglyph site and Arlington*. This 'loop'

via the historic route begins (or ends) at Arlington. There are no services but this road crosses scenic terrain filled with colorful volcanic mountains, spring wildflowers, and wildlife.

A back county road atlas, like the *DeLorme Arizona Gazetteer*, is recommended for this route and for visits to ghost towns like Sundad.

***In backcountry regions cell phones may not work. Plan your trip, tell someone where you're going, and when to expected you home. Then go have fun!**

(Painted Rocks V 2)

