

CASCADIA CAVE

Holds Significant Native American History



A group of Tribal members and Tribal Council members pose with a group of Willamette National Forest employees in front of an old-growth tree during the two-mile hike from Cascadia State Park to Cascadia Cave. A Tribal delegation went to Cascadia Cave to bless the area and share ideas about how to preserve the 8,000-year-old petroglyphs.

By Toby McClary

Should a dollar amount be put on the preservation of Native American history? That is a question that many have and will ask themselves when researching the Cascadia Cave, also known as the Indian Cave, near Sweet Home, Oregon.

On Friday, April 20, a delegation from Grand Ronde joined a group of Willamette National Forest employees on a two-mile hike that led them to the Cascadia Cave which houses petroglyphs dating back over 8,000 years. Petroglyphs are carvings on rock made by prehistoric people. These specific petroglyphs are believed to have been carved by the Kalapuya Indians. But the Molalla Indians are believed to have inhabited the Willamette Valley as well. Who actually carved them is unknown. It is known, however, that these historic and culturally rich carvings need to be preserved and their stories need to be told for the next 8,000 years.

Over the last century, tourists and other visitors to the site have

vandalized the rock carvings by painting them, carving into them, and even chipping some of them away for their own personal use.

"The Grand Ronde Cultural Resources Department has been visiting the site annually since 2003," said Tribal member and Cultural Protection Specialist Eirik Thorsgard, "to determine looting from visitors, damage to the petroglyphs, and to maintain a connection to one of the oldest known areas of the valley where our people have been."

The carvings have been investigated intermittently since 1924 when Dr. Horner of Oregon State University took students there to do some archaeological work. Other major investigations were done by Dr. Cressman of the University of Oregon in 1937 and in 1963 Bob and Virginia Howard of the Oregon Archaeological Society researched the site. In 1964, the National Parks Service hired Thomas Newman of Idaho State University to excavate the site turning up various arrowheads,

scrapers, choppers, knives, drills, and deer and elk bones among many other artifacts.

There are many beliefs as to why the cave exists and what it was used for. It could obviously have been used for a shelter during the winter months. There are many theories behind the reasoning of the pictures of which are inscribed on the rock walls. Some believe that they are ceremonial while others believe that was just a means of standard communication.

While on the two-mile tour, led by Willamette Forest Service Archaeologist Tony Farque, the doors of archaeological mystery and history were opened. Farque helped explain the support behind many of the theories. For instance, there are many bear claws carved into the wall of Cascadia Cave. In Native American culture, the bear represents the power to heal, thus supporting the theory that Cascadia Cave was a ceremonial place of medicine. However, in support of a standard communication theory,

the inscription of a bear claw could have been to warn others that there were bear in the area and how many bear were present was dependant on how many claws were carved



Photos by Toby McClary

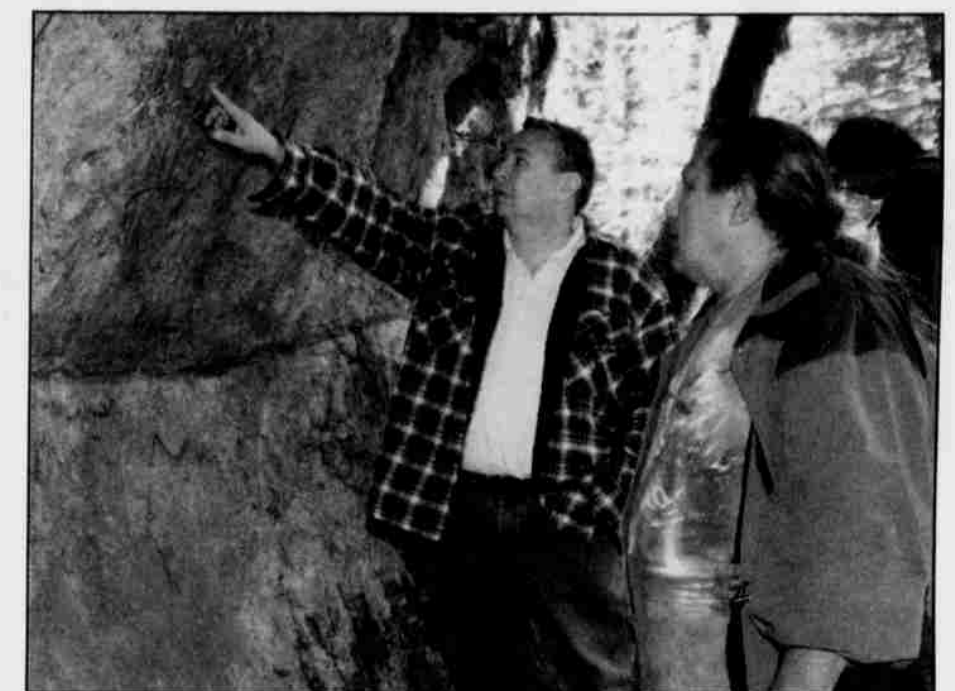
into the wall. Unfortunately, these many theories might remain just that, theories. Nevertheless, there is a very rich history carved into the wall of Cascadia Cave. And its

need for preservation may be just as important as the inscriptions themselves.

"I think it was used as a hunting camp," said Thorsgard. "We are also led to believe that it was used for ceremonial purposes."

Cascadia Cave sits on privately-owned land just outside of the Cascadia State Park property about 14 miles east of Sweet Home on Highway 20. According to research done by Farque and the Willamette Forest Service, it could cost up to \$3 million to preserve Cascadia Cave. The property in which the cave is housed would need to be either purchased or traded for. The paint that vandals have polluted the walls with would either need to be very carefully removed or painted over using a microscopic

◀ Archaeologist for the Willamette National Forest Tony Farque explains the history behind a popular fishing area (seen in the background) used by the Kalapuya Indians.



Tribal Council member Reyn Leno (l) and Tribal Elder Don Day.

procedure that could be extremely expensive. Also, the plant life and vegetation that have found a home on the petroglyphs would also have to be carefully removed in another expensive procedure. The floor that was dug up during the excavation in 1964 would need to be replaced. Finally, the cave would need some form of protection. Whether that is a fence around the area to keep out

vandals or, as Tribal Council Chair Chris Mercier explained, to hire someone to keep a full-time watch of the cave and shoot the people who dare to vandalize it. Either way, the preservation of Cascadia Cave could prove financially costly. But in another sense, there can be no dollar amount that would equal the need of the preservation of Cascadia Cave. ■

