



# **ESRARA** NEWSLETTER

*Quarterly of the Eastern States Rock Art Research Association*

*30th member of IFRAO - International Federation of Rock Art Organizations*

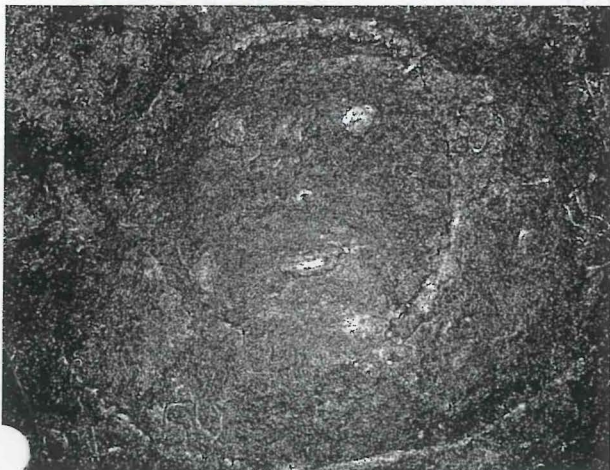
**Volume 13, Number 1**

**Spring 2008**

## **AN ANALYSIS OF THE FACE ON INDIAN'S HEAD ROCK**

*by Dr. Fred E. Coy, III*

The Indian's Head Rock is a large eight ton sandstone boulder that was in 16 feet of water in the Ohio River 40 feet out from the Kentucky shore. The boulder opposite the Ohio town of Portsmouth was the result of landslide deposits consisting of "unconsolidated angular boulders and finer debris; found at base of steep slopes along Ohio River." (Shepard USGS 1964). On the upstream side of the boulder was found the engraving of a round human face, almost one foot in diameter other numerous engraved names and initials dating back to the 1850s literally covering the exposed surfaces. The face on the rock was mentioned in documents as early as 1839 and has been seen from time to time as the river levels were low, however as a result of navigational dams along the Ohio River the rock had not been visible for the past century. On September 9, 2007 the Indian's Head Rock was removed from the river and stored in a municipal building in Portsmouth, Ohio where we were allowed to conduct our examine the rock on Friday, November 9, 2007.



*(Continued on page 2, Column 2)*

## ***President's Message...***

Greetings to all old and new ESRARA members:

Harry Smith and the CBS Evening News, Charles Osgood and Sunday Morning, a news article in the New York Times, and videos on YouTube including one where a carved human face sings "we will, we will rock you," where isn't there a story (including two in this newsletter) about the Portsmouth Indian Head Rock at the moment? The removal of this boulder, which contains a pecked human-like face as well as nineteenth century names and initials, from the bottom of the Ohio River opposite Portsmouth, Ohio, has resulted in a legal and jurisdictional firestorm involving the Kentucky and Ohio state legislatures, the Kentucky State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Kentucky has long claimed jurisdiction over the Ohio River, including any submerged cultural resources located on the river bottom such as ship wrecks and (in this case) rock art sites, due to the fact that Kentucky achieved statehood before the other states bordering the Ohio including Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. And, as I am sure the discoverers of the Portsmouth Indian Head Rock are by now most certainly aware, the state of Kentucky will act zealously to protect such resources.

I do not doubt that the actions of the parties who removed the rock from the river bed were well-intentioned. From what I have read in various newspaper articles and seen on television, they clearly believed that they had rediscovered and saved for future generations an important piece of long-lost local history. It is unfortunate that they appear to have been completely unaware that they needed to contact and obtain permission for the removal from both the federal (COE) and state (SHPO) agencies charged by law with the protection of all cultural resources contained within the Ohio River.

My personal feeling in regard to this matter is  
*(Continued on page 2, Column 1)*



*(Continued from page 1-President's Message)*

that the Indian Head Rock should have been left in place unless endangered by river traffic or some other form of disturbance. This opinion is based on my belief that Native American peoples (assuming the carving indeed is Native American in origin) created rock art designs at specific physical locations that they viewed as forming parts of sacred landscapes. Such landscapes often are believed to have been created in mythic time and serve to validate the spiritual beliefs of a group. The 18th century Cherokee, for example, told the colonial governor of Virginia that several gigantic foot impressions contained in the James River were "the Track of their God". The modern-day Tukano Indians of Brazil similarly interpret prehistoric petroglyphs they discover in their territory as the creations of mythical spirit-beings rather than having been made by humans.

Because rock art sites are inextricably linked with physical locations once viewed as having spiritual power, they should be left (in my opinion) at those locations if at all possible, even if that location is now at the bottom of the river. I would note that Dr. Fred Coy in his article contained in this newsletter concludes that the Indian Head Rock carving may have been created by non-Native American peoples (i.e., Americans or Europeans) at some point in the early nineteenth century. Even if this is the case, I still believe that the rock and the carvings it contains represent an important part of Ohio River history that should have been left in place unless endangered in some manner.

Hopefully, the states of Ohio and Kentucky will be able to reach a compromise in this coming year regarding the ownership of the Portsmouth Indian Head Rock that will be acceptable to all parties involved. I am sure that we will hear much more about this controversy in the near future as the SHPO offices in these two states try to work toward a solution regarding the preservation and ultimate disposition of this important aspect of the heritage of the upper Ohio River Valley.

Best Regards,

*Mark Wagner*

*(Continued from page 1 - Coy report)*

The who, when and why of the pecked engraving of the human face on the Greenup County, Kentucky Indian's Head Rock is a mute point. The first mention of the Indian Head Rock that we are aware of, recorded November 10, 1839, was in Volume I of the two volume History of Kentucky (1874) by Richard H. Collins:

In Greenup County, opposite Portsmouth, Ohio, is a water-mark called the "Indian Head," a human face rudely carved by the aborigines, many years ago, upon the eastern side of a large rock imbedded in the water of the Ohio River. The "log" kept in the neighborhood shows that the mouth of the figure was:

1839--Nov. 10, 10 1/4 inches out of water.

1846--Oct. 4, 17 1/4 inches under water.

1848--Aug. 15 4 1/2 inches under water.

1849--Sept. 23, top of rock 2 1/2 inches under water.

1851--Sept. 27, eyes to be seen--the lowest measure on record from 1839 to this date.

1854--Sept. 5, mouth just on the water-line--therefore lower than since 1839

In Oct., 1838, the river was lower than ever known by any reliable mark, before or since (up to 1872).

I have spoken with Nelson L. Dawson, Director of Research and Interpretation of the Kentucky Historical Society, about the possibility of Richard Collins' notes on the Indian Head rock being extant. He replied that it would be a long shot but he would research their archives and let me know if they had any of the Collins papers. He later replied by e-mail that they did have a Richard Collins file. A visit to the Kentucky History Center revealed only one small folder and the correspondence it contained was not relevant to the Indian's Head Rock. James J. Holmberg, Curator of Special Collections at the Filson Historical Society replied to my query: "If Collins' notes exist they might be with his papers at the University of Chicago as part of the Durrett Collection." The University of Chicago does have the some of the Richard Collins papers in their Durrett collection. Julia Gardner, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library searched the Collins papers and replied; "it may not be possible to trace the exact reference for his

*(Continued on page 3)*



*(Continued from page 2- Coy report)*  
information."

Squire and Davis mentioned a rock with a colossal human head cut in outline, in their chapter on "Sculptured or Inscribed Rocks" in *Ancient Monuments* (1848, pp 297-8), that is often quoted as the authority on the antiquity of the "Indian's Head."

There is however a very singular one still in existence a few miles above the town of Portsmouth, the southern terminus of the Ohio and Erie Canal, at the mouth of the Scioto. It consists of a colossal human head cut in outline, upon the vertical face of a large rock extending into the river. It is always under water, except when the river is at its very lowest stages, and is not exposed oftener than once in four or five years. It is familiarly known as the "Indian's Head," and is regarded as a sort of river gage or meter. When the water-line is at the top of the head, the river is considered very low.

Actually I do not believe that Squire and Davis ever laid eyes on the rock and probably obtained their information from other sources.

They located the rock as being a few miles above the town of Portsmouth when the location was directly across the river from downtown Portsmouth, they did not record on which side of the river the rock was located when it is just off of the Kentucky shore, and lastly they described it as a "colossal human head cut in outline" when actually the head was only 24 cm in diameter and it was not cut but pecked. Squire and Davis were familiar with the technique of pecking as they had referred to the technique before in their chapter on *Sculptured or Inscribed Rocks*. In an attempt to check the source of Squire and Davis statements Dr. David J. Meltzer (Editor of the recent re-published *Ancient Monuments*) was consulted about possibility of the Squire and Davis field notes being extant. Dr. Meltzer replied that field notes were scarce and that he could not find any that were relevant to the Indian Head. He did give a date of November 7, 1846 for the visit to Guyandotte Rocks and presumably this was when Squire and Davis were putting together one of the last chapters of *Ancient Monuments* but at a time when they were having personal differences.

From the 1850s until 1920 there were numerous newspaper accounts, postcards and other interests in the rock when it was visible until Ohio River navigational dams in the early 1900s permanently submerged the rock.

Perhaps here would be a good place to talk specifically about petroglyphs in general and on sandstone. Petroglyphs are engraved on rock surfaces in four ways or combination thereof.

1. Scratched. The patina on the rock surface is only slightly broken with a sharp pointed tool. Scratched petroglyphs are mostly found in the west and scratched into the desert varnish on the rock surface.
2. Incised. These are "V" shaped grooves, in cross section, with clean edges cut into the rock surface with a sharp tool.
3. Pecked. These are "U" shaped grooves, in cross section, with rough edges that are bruised into rock by percussion.
4. Abrading. These, again, are "U" shaped grooves, in cross section, with smooth edges made by moving a blunt object back and forth in the groove. Often abrading is used to clean up the pecked or incised lines.

Sandstone being quite porous and friable tends to weather by several methods including the usual surface abrading action of wind, rain and freezing and thawing. Probably the most important degradation effect on the surface comes from within the rock; water carrying dissolved salts migrates through the porous sandstone to the surface by capillary action, at the surface the water evaporates leaving the transported salt crystals. As the crystals grow and expand grains of sand are loosened and are eroded rather symmetrically across the surface of the sandstone keeping the configurations of the now more blunted and rounded contours. One can come to some conclusions as to the antiquity of petroglyph in sandstone by the sharpness or blunting of the edges of the engravings.

Our Portsmouth visit to examine the Indian's Head Rock was with a group of individuals that had a vested interest in the rock. The boulder was in the Portsmouth highway garage on some old vehicle tires to keep it from being damaged by the concrete floor of the building. The lower portion of the rock that had been in the river mud was obvious as the rest of  
*(Continued on next page)*



*(Continued from previous page)*

the rock was covered with names initials and a sketch of a building. Some of the initials and names were done with a fine hand others were rough scribbles. All of the names and initials were incised; some were cleaned up by abrading. These engraved names and initials often overlapped other names and initials but did not invade the engraving of the Indian's Head.

From the Collins History of Kentucky description of the head on the rock being used for a gauge of the river level you might expect that face of the rock would be almost vertical. Making an estimate from the mud lines, as the rock rested on the vehicle tires the slope with the engraving of the Indian Head was calculated to have been less than 40 degrees with the horizontal.

The Indian Head engraving, pecked into the rock, was 29 cm at largest diameter from ear tip to ear tip. The width of the pecked line outlining the face averaged 1.5 cm. The circle for the face was complete 22 cm in diameter with the exception of 10 cm gap in the bottom where the neck would have attached. The ears extended beyond the circle and were outlined with the 1.5 cm width line. The face's right ear measured 6 cm inferiorly to superiorly and 3 cm. medial to lateral, the left ear 8 cm inferiorly to superiorly and 3 cm medial to lateral. The mouth 8 cm wide and 1.5 cm open, there appeared to be some deepening in the center and the mouth appeared to be slightly smiling. The nose was 1 cm in diameter but in the center of the nose was a pit where perhaps a pointed tool or nail had been attached to a string with a pencil or charcoal on the end to outline the face before the engraving. The face outline is remarkable circular with the exception of left side of the face which is slightly flattened. The nose is 3 cm superior to the mouth, the eyes 9 cm apart, center to center, both 2 cm in diameter 6 cm above the nose. Above and lateral to the left eye is a 1 cm X .5 cm break in the face circle. Above and just outside of facial circle is 3 cm grove in line with the center of the nose. The entire face is pecked without any attempt to clean it up by abrading. The peck marks are sharp, which on ordinary conditions out of the water would indicate lack of antiquity. Five cm from the left ear of the Indian Head are the nicely engrave

initials E D C and under the initials the date SEP 1856. There does not appear to be any difference in the blunting between the edges of the engraved initials and the left ear both are quite sharp.

The above explanation of the weathering of sandstone certainly does not hold for a sandstone rock that is continually submerged. In our area there are only two petroglyph sites one here in Kentucky and the other in Indiana that are often submerged in water that I can use for comparison. The one site on Green River, Green River Turkey Rock (15Bt64) is frequently under water and when exposed is covered with the tenacious Green River mud. The pecking are similar in nature to those found on the Indian Head face, quite sharp, the marks in the center of the grooves are not as prominent at the Indian's Head Rock. The second site is the Roll Petroglyph Site (12Cr175) on the Ohio River in Indiana that is frequently under water but it also is scrubbed clean by the current of the river. The petroglyphs are so shallow that it is impossible to tell their original condition.

In an attempt to get a handle on circular, pecked, round face petroglyphs the authorities on rock art in the surrounding states were contacted and several publications were consulted. Dr. Carol Diaz-Granados, iconologist from Missouri: "Can't recall any 'round head' petroglyphs here. We actually do not have any petroglyphs that are specifically round human heads. The Indian Head's Rock head is probably historic, along with the initials and dates!" Ed Lenik from New York: "As you requested, I attached a drawing of a round head that I found in NY several years ago. It was carved by a Euro American in the early 20th century." Mark Wagner, Illinois: "There are no front-facing human heads in Illinois rock art." Jean Allan, Alabama: "I don't recall seeing any 'happy face' petros like that around here but I'll give the subject some thought." Dr. Kenneth Tankersley, Northern Kentucky: "there is the Leo Petroglyph in Irontown, Ohio, which has a similar individual, except it is wearing a headdress, perhaps of antlers." Note; The Leo Petroglyph does not have ears or a nose.

A chart was compiled listing the round face, skull figures, ears, nose, mouth, eyes with data

*(Continued on next page)*



*(Continued from previous page)*

obtained from James Swauger's, Petroglyphs of Ohio and Rock Art of the Upper Ohio Valley, Wellman's, North American Indian Rock Art, and Coy et. al, Rock art of Kentucky. A total of 71 faces were analyzed and recorded from , Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky. Of this total only one other than the Indian's Rock Head had the four components of eyes, ears, nose and mouth. This one was nicely abraded with paint remaining on the face in a rock house in West Virginia.

### ***My observations:***

Several observations were made after a careful examination of a full sized print image of the "Indian's Head."

1. The round head did include a nose, eyes, mouth and ears.

2. As mentioned above the head was remarkable circular with the center being in the pit in the nose, the circle stopped abruptly leaving a gap at the neck.

3. There was relatively little blunting on the "peck" marks and they appeared as sharp as some of the adjacent dated carved names and initials.

4. The beginning of the circular pecked outline of the head, on the faces' left side, was cut quite sharply the sides being parallel a sharp straight cut, the resulting groove measured 1/2 inch in width. The opposite side of the circular pecked outline of the head also ended with a straight line cut measuring 1/2 inch. There were at least three bruising tool marks that also measured 1/2 inches that were still visible.

### ***Summary:***

This large life sized head outline is pecked using a technique that was used extensively by the American Indian. Some authorities contend that a tool was struck with a baton to created the pattern other authorities suggest that the tool was used directly to strike the rock for the pattern. The engraving of the Indian Head probably proceeded and may have been the source of the popularity of the rock as evidenced by the large clear area in which it was located. In the rock art literature of

Pennsylvania, West Virginia, New York, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Alabama there are a large number of faces, at least 71, mostly oval in shape and many connected with torsos. All of the roundheads that were not attached to a neck or torso were complete circles. There are many face combinations containing eyes, and mouths few with ears or noses but only one other with all four, eyes, ears, nose and mouth plus a round head.

### ***In Conclusion --***

It is my thought that the Indian's Head Rock face has several features that make it unique. First, the fact that the sharpness of the pecking marks is about the same as that used on adjacent dated initials indicating they had about the same history. If the engraving of the Indian Head had some antiquity and was in an open exposed area, there certainly would have been considerable amount of blunting at the edges of the engravings. Second, it is unusual for ears and nose to be included with American Indian petroglyphs. Third, there is a pit in the center of the nose that may have been used to draw a circle for the outline of the face, a technique which the American Indian probably would not have employed. Fourth, when this is first shown to individuals the usual response is that it does not look like American Indian. Fifth, and I believe the crucial point, is the precisely cut 1/2 inch starting groove with straight parallel sides at the beginning of the outline of the face on the right side (the face's left side) . On the opposite side the outline stops abruptly also with a relative straight edge. This observation is significant in that the American Indian pecked petroglyph lines are shallow and rounded at the start and at the terminus rather than being deep, straight and square as found on the Indian's Head. These two areas strongly suggest the use of a metal tool; throughout the entire pecking it appears that the tool used was about 1/2 inch wide. There are at least three bruised marks that too are 1/2 inch in length.

From the evidence at hand it would appear to me that there is a strong possibility that the face on the Indian's Head Rock was engraved with the pecking technique using a 1/2 inch metal tool and predating the other carvings on the rock, at the most, by only a few years.

*(Continued on next page— see Postscript)*



(Continued from previous page - Coy report)

## Postscript

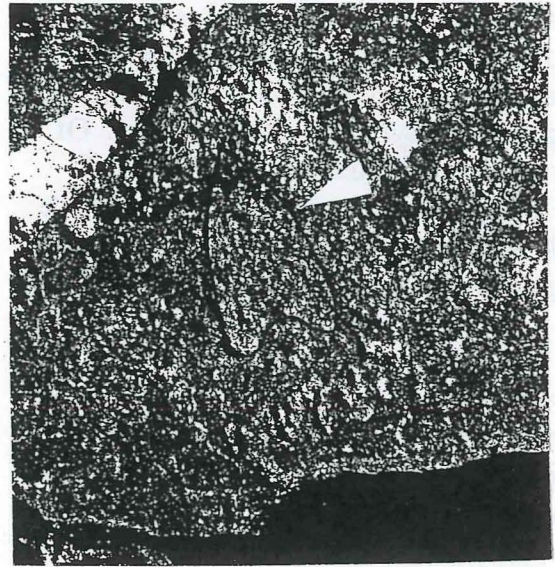
The Portsmouth Daily Times (October 8, 1908)

### WOULD PRESERVE THE HISTORIC INDIAN ROCK:

Henry Lorberg is going to communicate with the light house department with a view to having the snag boat Woodruff pull up the Indian rock, the idea of Mr. Lorberg being to have the city place the historic boulder in York park, in a position overlooking the river, with an iron railing around it and a history of the rock, as far as obtainable engraved or painted on the face. The wonder is the government hasn't pulled the rock out of its place long ago and crushed it with dynamite as it is an undoubted menace to navigation with the river being between five and fifteen feet.

The bottom of many a boat and barge was torn out by it in the old days when steamboats were plentiful. It would doubtless not be difficult to have the snagboat pull out the boulder but the matter of placing it in the park would have to be attended to by the city and private subscriptions. Mr. Lorberg is sounding the sentiments of officials and citizens on the subject. Portsmouth is the River City, and to preserve the rock in the manner referred to, would be highly appropriate. That the rock rolled off the hill at some remote period seems assured, as it is of the same formation as the summit of the river hills. It is now smooth as a bowling ball, made so by the motion of the water for generations. Histories of the river as early as a date 1811 mention its presence. Formerly the features of a man's face were chiseled into the face of the rock fronting the Ohio shore, and this gave it the name of "Indian Head." The name "Indian Rock" is of much later origin. The human face, a ring some two feet in diameter, with eyes nose, mouth and ears chiseled in, was gradually worn away by the action of the water and has not been visible for many years. The man or boy, who did the carving is reputed to have been E. T. Book, an older half-brother of W. T. Book, of East English street. Book was a very adventurous boy and grew to be one of the best known citizens of the county and state was a captain in the Civil War and Killed in Battle. He carved the face some time in thirties It was very seldom the river became so low that all of the Indian face was visible. It was chiseled on at extreme low water. If the face were still intact it is doubtful if more than two-thirds of the ring would be visible at the present ....

## UNUSUAL IMAGERY AT THE HENSLER PETROGLYPH SITE IN WISCONSIN *Jack Steinbring, Mid-America Geographic Foundation*



Late last fall, at a time when grazing light nicely illuminated petroglyphs at the Hensler Petroglyph Site (47DO461), we spotted the image of a lanceolate projectile point with a concave base. Further scrutiny disclosed that by looking at it from the opposite direction, we saw still another one! The one appears to be superimposed over the other, and almost identical to it. Moreover, the size of the two images is virtually identical with similar lithic forms. In seeking a comparison to these petroglyph images, we found the closest match in the Clovis variants of the Debert Site in Nova Scotia. Of course, similarities do not guarantee a relationship, and a lanceolate biface is a lanceolate biface – wherever we go.

While other imagery at Hensler is patently Archaic, a fluted point was recovered within approximately 250 m. north of the Hensler engravings, and gravers, spokeshaves, burins, and snub-nosed scrapers with bilateral spurs have been recovered in the Hensler excavations. Some "food for thought" here!



Drawing at right, after MacDonald 1968:74

MacDonald, George  
1968 Debert: A Paleo-Indian Site in Central Nova Scotia  
Anthropology Papers No. 16, National Museums of Canada,  
Queens Printer, Ottawa