People may have chosen to record images here because the rocks face south and are lit by the sun throughout the day. However, the carvings seem to disappear at midday. They are most visible at dawn and dusk when the angle of the sun casts deep shadows that seem to raise the images from the rocks.

The Visitor Center
The visitor center offers a multi-media theater presentation and exhibits about American Indian culture and prairie ecology. Gift items and restrooms are provided for your convenience, and hands-on activities can help you experience the natural and cultural landscape of the site.

Important Trail Information
We ask for your help in preserving the carvings and their fragile environment. The carvings are a cultural resource that can never be replaced, and it can take up to 500 years for a prairie to be restored naturally. Please do not touch the images, make drawings or otherwise disturb the rock surfaces.

- Please stay on the rope, gravel or mowed paths.
- Please do not pick the wildflowers or other plants.
- Please dispose all litter in the garbage cans provided.
- Please do not smoke on the trails.
- Please watch for poison ivy.

Thank you.
Jeffers Petroglyphs is a special place built for visitors and American Indians. To the contemporary American Indians who reside in and around the site, it is a very spiritual place—one where Grandmother Earth speaks of the past, present and future. Modern day descendants of those who left these markings continue to believe that this is indeed a place of worship, a proper place to different than that of church, synagogue or mosque. Based on historical and archaeological evidence, scholars believe that ancestors of American Indians first made rock carvings, or petroglyphs, on this outcropping about 12,000 years ago. Some of these carvings may have been created as recently as 250 years ago. Among the many carvings found here are images of buffalo and deer, and throwing sticks. Artists and shamans used to hunt buffalo before the dawn and day were developed about 1200 years ago. One of these symbols, along with other images carved on the rock, such as thunderbirds and turtles, represent important in American Indian culture. The carving of deer, buffalo, turtles, thunderbirds and human figures are more than art or mimicry of the natural environment. They are powerful cultural symbols of the complex communities that inhabited the prairies of southwestern Minnesota and still inhabit today.

Minneapolis, at the southwestern edge of a timberland prairie that once covered 400,000 square miles of North America, today has less than one percent of that prairie remaining. All of the area of Jeffers Petroglyphs, 84 acres of active prairie and 90 percent of one of the first prairie formations in Minnesota, is a reserve of prairie land. This landscape is a mixture of flowers and grasses: More than 100 species of prairie plants can be found here. Each of these, some of which are rare. A Federal threatened species, prairie bush clover, thrives at Jeffers Petroglyphs. This landscape is unique in other ways. Prairie plants are classified as wet, mesic or dry. Because of the rock formation, all three types are found at Jeffers Petroglyphs. Wet prairie has water in the soil, dry prairie has little moisture, and the middle type is called mesic prairie. These different prairies are considered separate types of prairie.

In the mid-19th century, European and American settlers arrived, and they fenced the prairies to the landscape. Along the southern border of the site is a wagon trail created in the first years of settlement. The settlers planted the prairie and introduced exotic plants from Europe, Asia and Africa. The native prairie that surrounds the rock face became less. The soil was then used to provide water to the rock outcrop. To the benefit of the people who inhabited the prairie for thousands of years, American Indians traveled with buffalo herds, collected plant foods as they ripened, and fished in the rivers and lakes. They lived in trail-constructed houses, which floated on the river, and a number of the structures in their survival planting villages. Although we don’t know which cultural group of American Indians made the earliest carvings thousands of years ago, we do know from historical records which groups inhabited the area during the last 300 years. This region was home to Ojibwe and Ojibwe until around 1700. The Cheyenne were here until about 1750, when the Dakota began to live in this area. Today the Dakota live in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana and Canada. They, along with the Ojibwe, Cheyenne and Ojibwe, are helping the Minnesota Historical Society understand this sacred place.