

Hidden Thunder: Rock Art of the Upper Midwest

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Hidden Thunder: Rock Art of the Upper Midwest, by Geri Schrab and Robert F. Boszhardt. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2016, xi, 228 pp. Color plates and illustrations, map, reference materials, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

Reviewer David W. Benn is research coordinator and principal investigator for Bear Creek Archeology, Inc., Cresco, Iowa.

Hidden Thunder is a unique experience. In this beautiful book of original paintings and historic photographs, Geri Schrab and Robert “Ernie” Boszhardt take readers along on their exploration of petroglyph and pictograph (rock art) sites in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Their principal goal is to inform the general public about a type of fragile, non-renewable prehistoric site. Professional archeologists will also find useful information about site histories and destruction both past and present. Rock art sites are relatively rare yet are underappreciated because many are hidden in hard-to-reach locales on private land, and the images are faint or difficult to interpret. Despite a Wisconsin state statute protecting rock art from defacing, historic graffiti mars most rock art sites, so the authors are trying to foster preservation by explaining the sites’ significance and some aspects of rock art meaning and by honoring their prehistoric authors with the thoughts and beliefs of modern First Americans.

Hidden Thunder is divided into 11 chapters that describe 12 rock art sites or site complexes. The foreword by Mike Hoffman (Menominee and Ottawa descendant) introduces the profound spiritual significance of rock art sites for contemporary First Americans. Principal author Robert Boszhardt’s introduction sets the stage for the site descriptions by setting rock art in geological context and explaining problems with dating the images. He introduces the issue of landowner cooperation with regard to site access and preservation, and he confronts the problematic nature of modern interpretations about the “meaning” of some images.

Each of the 11 chapters of site descriptions is organized the same way. Wisconsin sites visited and described are Samuel’s Cave, Bell Coulee Rockshelter, the Silver Mound locality, Gullickson’s Glen, Roche-A-Cri State Park, Twin Bluffs, Indian Cave, Gottschall Rockshelter, Tainter Cave, and the Hanson-Losinski complex. The authors also visited Jeffers Petroglyphs Historic Site and Pipestone National Monument, two nationally famous rock art sites in Minnesota. Boszhardt begins each chapter with a personal view of the site, describing how he got there, the site environment, interactions with the landowner, or an anecdote about the site’s history. Several pages of site description follow, including history of discovery, professional investigations, description of the rock art images, the litany of historic abuses, and efforts to preserve what remains of the archeology and rock art. Boszhardt’s writing style

is that of a warm, friendly speaker at a public meeting, not that of a dry academic.

Geri Schrab, a professional artist, fills the second half of each chapter with very personal evaluations of the rock art. She offers her own artistic renderings of many images, not as an archeologist but as a member of the public seeing the sites for the first time. She often reflects on the archeological interpretations of images that she has learned from Boszhardt, then adds her own perspective. Her contributions to this volume are familiar (in a popular sense), introspective, and enlightening. Her feelings about the rock art balance nicely with Boszhardt's "professional" perspective, both viewpoints being integral to site preservation.

Each site chapter closes with a page of writing or a poem from a "Native Voice." First Americans Carrie McGhee Gleba (Poarch Creek), Dylan Jennings (Bad River Ojibwe), Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe), Elizabeth K. Fernandes-Arnold (Menominee), Diana Peterson (Menominee/Ho-Chunk/Oneida), Joey Awonohopay (Menominee), Dan Pine (Ojibwe), Patty Loew (Bad River Ojibwe), Truman Lowe (Ho-Chunk), Larry Balber (Red Cliff Chippewa), and Karen Ann Hoffman (Oneida Nation of Wisconsin) offer selections of their personal histories, spiritual beliefs, and feelings about rock art and its preservation. Their thoughts are uniquely profound perspectives on the spiritual presence of rock art images in today's secular society.

Boszhardt concludes that known rock art sites in Wisconsin are but a sample of diverse petroglyph and pictograph sites in the Midwest (indeed throughout the world). For example, professionals have recorded similar kinds of petroglyph sites in northeastern Iowa, but no statewide survey of rock art sites has been done and no book like this volume is available for Iowa rock art.

Boszhardt argues for rock art preservation through a procedure of reporting (discovery), recording in state files, public education, and extensive landowner involvement. He closes this volume with advice for visitors to ancient rock art sites: "Be respectful. Go where proper site protections are provided. Do not touch or harm. Honor the memory of the Old Ones, and allow them to bless and inform your life" (199).