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The Thunderbird

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Photograph from "Petroglyphs of the Kansas Smoky Hills"
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THE THUNDERBIRD

MAKER OF LIGHTNING, THUNDER AND WIND

The thunderbird is one of the oldest, most widespread and best known spirit beings of American Indians to be represented on rock, earthworks and clothing.

The Algonquian people described the thunderbird as capable of transformation into a man and able to cause lightning, thunder and wind, according to Kevin Callahan in his book, "The Jeffers Petroglyphs: Native American Rock Art on the Midwestern Plains." The book also said the thunderbird is considered the nemesis of the Great Horned Serpent of the underworld.

The thunderbird has been found across Canada and the United States, said Rex Buchanan, one of the authors of the book, "Petroglyphs of the Kansas Smoky Hills."

Buchanan said that Pawnee Indians, who hunted buffalo in the Flint Hills, likely created the thunderbird petroglyph pictured here, which is in Rice County in the Smoky Hills. "In my experience, thunderbird glyphs are rare in Kansas," he said. "Interestingly enough, when I went to visit the Pawnee Nation in Oklahoma while working on our book, I saw several thunderbirds in their tribal headquarters."