



(L-R) Betsy Johnson, Sherry Click and Erica Blankenship sit on the side of a cliff beneath pictographs painted by their ancestors. The rocks are on private property owned by the Lodge at Painted Rock and are being protected.

Michael Batelaan/Kern River Courier

## Picture Perfect

### Valley residents see ancestors' pictographs for the first time

Mike Devich  
Kern River Courier

Tuesday was a special day for Betsy Johnson, her daughter Erica Blankenship and her niece, Sherry Click. Tom and Debbie Teofilo, owners of the new Lodge at Painted Rock across the river from Highway 178 in Lake Isabella, invited them to come over and see the Indian pictographs on the lodge's property for the first time in their lives.

"It's your legacy, and we're trying to protect it for you," said Debbie Teofilo. The pictographs on the rocks along the river are 500 to 1,000 years old, maybe even 2,000 by some accounts. The Teofilos are going to build a barrier so that the pictographs

cannot be accessed by people from the river.

"Some people have even built campfires just below, putting smoke up on the walls," said ranch manager (and new Kern River Valley Chamber of Commerce President) Barrie Mann. "We're very serious about trying to protect them," Mann said of the pictographs.

Johnson, Blankenship and Click are descended from the Tubatulabal people, who have lived in this area for hundreds and maybe thousands of years. "Our ancient name is the Pakanipul," Johnson said. That is also the name of their language, which Johnson is trying to preserve. She is

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the team coordinator for the Pakanipul Language Program, with their office in Mt. Mesa. Click is a teacher in training. Blankenship currently lives in Colorado and was visiting on Tuesday.

Mann escorted the party, which included Johnson's husband, Dale, as well as independent cameraman Chuck Barbee and the Courier, down a steep rocky cliff to the pictographs.

"This is so exciting," said Johnson, as the party observed the primitive drawings up close. "Now I know just a little bit about where I came from."

She added, "I don't know that any of this generation (of Tubatulabals) have seen anything like this. We've seen the petro-

glyphs (at China Lake) but we don't know who did them. This is ours. There's no question," she said.

"We have to thank Debbie and Tom," she added. "There wouldn't have been any other way for us to see them."

The Teofilos are turning Butch Kelley's former hunting lodge-style home on Pearl Harbor Drive into an executive retreat and convention center on 70 acres in the Keyesville area. The property is undergoing an extensive transformation to accommodate visiting conventioners who wish to have an exciting Old West-style experience.

The Lodge at Painted Rock is scheduled to open in January 2009.

For more information, go to [www.lodgeatpaintedrock.com](http://www.lodgeatpaintedrock.com).