

## A Petroglyph Artist Leaves His Mark on a Phippsburg Nature Preserve

International stone carver Kevin Sudeith's intricate renderings should last for thousands of years.



By Susan Conley  
 Photographed by Benjamin Williamson  
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The artist [Kevin Sudeith](#) stood next to a long, high ledge of grayish feldspar and milky quartz in Phippsburg Land Trust's [Ridgewell Preserve](#), maybe 300 yards along a narrow spur from the main trail. Kevin Sudeith was staring at a life-size great blue heron, which he had recently carved in shallow relief in the flecked stone. His meticulous rendering of the bird makes it feel nearly alive, its variegated four-foot wingspan captured mid-flight. "It's all about the feathers," he noted.

For tens of thousands of years, and probably more, humans have been leaving petroglyphs — from the Latin *petra* ("rock") and the Greek *glyph* ("carving") — scattered across the landscape. The oldest known examples in Maine were engraved along Machias Bay several thousand years ago. For much of his adult life, 56-year-old Sudeith was a painter, showing in galleries in San Francisco and New York. Then, 15 years ago, he carved a large petroglyph on Manhattan's Upper East Side: bicycles he'd see passing by, planes he'd watch flying overhead. After that, he was hooked. He'd found a way to make artwork that could live on its own terms — "independent of the gatekeepers and whims of the art world," he said. The carvings could find their own audience and would exist for thousands of years. He began traveling the world, going from rock to rock, from North Dakota to California to the Eastfjords of Iceland.



When he begins a petroglyph, he composes the design on the rock with chalk, then makes several detailed drawings on paper, which he later transfers onto the rock. To sculpt the shallow relief without disturbing the surrounding surface, he uses saws with spinning discs made of a diamond composite that can cut through just about anything. He chose the site in Phippsburg in part because it's not far from his wife's family's place in Georgetown, but more specifically because of the pleasantly shaded knoll that surrounds the ledge and because the sheer size of the stone allowed him to do something that would feel epic. He approached the [Phippsburg Land Trust](#), which gave its blessing, and he got to work three years ago.

His objective with petroglyphs is, generally, to create an environmental portrait of a place at a moment in time — a halibut on Cape Breton, an ancient lake sturgeon in Michigan, a horseshoe crab in the Rockaways. In Phippsburg, at both the [Center Pond](#) and [Ridgewell](#) preserves, he focused on birds: eider ducks, a belted kingfisher, a tree swallow, a red-winged blackbird, a loon, a hermit thrush, a northern cardinal, and more. Using an ancient art form, Sudeith wanted to represent Phippsburg's ecosystem as it is today. "They are what is here now. Will there still be eider ducks and herons here in 1,000 years?" he wondered. "Who knows?"

Walking along the dirt path, past the heron and the swallow, he came to a carving of a different sort of flier: NASA's Ingenuity helicopter, which has been flitting around Mars since last year. Sudeith believes space exploration is humanity's most exciting ongoing endeavor. Elsewhere in his travels, he has carved the Hubble Space Telescope, the Chandra X-ray Observatory, and several space shuttles. He is still on the hunt for the perfect rock upon which to carve a life-size astronaut.

In Phippsburg, the Ingenuity sits a couple of paces from the eider duck, which is next to a series of elemental-looking concentric circles that could just as well be holdovers from prehistory. It's Stone Age meets Space Age, under a canopy of pines in the Maine woods. Sudeith's hope? That the carvings create an overarching narrative about the mystery and wonder of the world, or as he puts it, "about things that cannot be said in words."

*Kevin Sudeith leads a free walking tour of his petroglyphs on September 1, starting from the parking area at Phippsburg's Center Pond Preserve, on Parker Head Rd., about a half-mile after turning off Rte. 209.*