

## **Boma Petroglyphs**

The petroglyphs atop the rock to your right are part of a series of four mysterious rock carvings that dot the eastern slope of Mt. Inokawa, the island's tallest mountain. To date, no one has been able to decipher who made them or when—or what they mean. The images on this rock, though faint, are the most detailed of the four, with shapes suggesting an arrow and possibly a ship. The second stone, further down the slope, has barely visible engravings; the third is carved with altar-like steps; and the fourth has a fairly complex design that is as baffling as the rest.

Local historians think this area was once the domain of a *noro*, one of the priestesses of the indigenous religion. One of their beliefs was that *kami michi*, sacred “paths of the gods,” led from the mountain peaks down to the sea. These rocks are thought to be sacred sites where the *noro* prayed for good harvests.

There is another story associated with the petroglyphs: a legend of an enormous *habu*, the poisonous snake feared throughout the Ryukyu Islands, who made the mountain its habitat and devoured hapless islanders. Villagers had to maintain total silence while scouring the forest for firewood, as the slightest noise could attract the prowling snake. The mountain was then called Mu (nothingness), perhaps a warning to avoid making any sound in the forest. This myth may inspire viewers to interpret the image on the third stone as a coiled snake, rather than steps.