

Coahuiltecan, the First People of Texas

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Description

The Coahuiltecan people are believed to have been the first inhabitants of what is now Texas. Jacob Aguilar is a member of the Coahuiltecan tribe and is traveling to a remote site where his ancestors left a large rock art painting known as the White Shaman Panel. Coahuiltecan elder Dr. Mario Garza tells Jacob what the White Shaman Panel means to their heritage. This story is produced by NBC Learn in partnership with Pearson.

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Transcript

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JACOB AGUILAR: My name is Jacob Angel Aguilar, I'm eighteen years old. We're going to some place where our ancestors lived and everything and they painted something called the White Shaman. It's a cave painting of what-- how they lived and what they did and everything.

MARIO GARZA (Coahuiltecan Elder): I'm Mario Garza from, you know, one of the Coahuiltecan tribes from Texas. It's important to show Jacob the White Shaman Panel because it documents our existence by documenting our creation story.

AGUILAR: When I was little, like five years old, my dad told me we have some Native American blood. He found out we were actually Coahuiltecan. I wish to be more informative of my culture.

GARZA: The White Shaman Panel had been carbon-dated to be over four thousand years. To go to the actual panel, we have to hike along the edge of the canyon. The hike is going to be a little rough. The total trip going there and back it's 1.7 miles. And it's not an easy hike.

GARY PEREZ (Indigenous Cultures Institute): That's for the snakes. Every so often we do that to tell the snakes we're coming.

LUIS AGUILAR, Jacob's father: They hear the vibration-- feel the vibration.

PEREZ: My name is Gary Perez, and I am the sacred sites director for indigenous cultures institute in San Marcos.

When our ancestors were out there, OK, when the Spanish arrived in Texas, they were hunter-gatherers. This is a sotol plant. And what our ancestors did with it was they made floor mats out of them and sandals.

The rock art that we're looking at right now is what's commonly known out here as monochrome. It's got one color. One red color all the way across.

L. AGUILAR: This was our ancestors' type of writing. They're telling a story, the story of creation, the

story of the underworld.

GARZA: Of the rock art around here we consider this the most important to us because it shows our creation story as we have been told for hundreds of years, thousands of years. You cannot read this going from left to right or right to left or top to bottom, or whatever. You have to see it in more in a global form. Here in the middle, you see that white figure? And they call that the White Shaman and that's what gave this panel the name. But he lost his head and that became the moon. And this figure represents to us mother earth.

AGUILAR: It's a way of preserving our culture and how we-- like showing how we live, what we did and like what—and who we are.

PEREZ: Now the story begins a little further back from the creation of our people, there's the creation of the universe. And what happened is one day the cold, dark, wet sun went into the underworld, and then rode the deer through the underworld and then the full moon rose and acted on mother earth's body and mother earth's water broke and we were born from these springs.

This is the constellation of Taurus, okay? And what happens is this comet every 548 years this comet will fly, but in 2018 that comet is going to fly through Taurus at midnight at the time that the moon is full and at the time that we are born.

AGUILAR: It is almost like a calendar, right?

PEREZ: It's a calendar.

GARZA: It is a calendar.

PEREZ: It tells you where to be, what to see, you know, also what to sing, what to say, everything. You can live your life entirely by this calendar, son.

GARZA: When I come here, I feel, you know, that it's alive, that it's still telling us a lot of things. And we have been able to study and interpret some parts of it and-- but every time I look at it, we notice new things. It has been said that we did not have a written language, but I mean, the proof is right there. And we lost it for a lot of times, but, we are being able to interpret the rock art. And we pray in our language. (praying in indigenous language)

AGUILAR: Preserving culture is a big part of humanity and everything. The more cultures that we know about the more we know about us humans, how ancestors lived, what they did and how-- and where we come from.

GARZA: (praying in indigenous language)