Modern society relies heavily on geologic materials for survival. Many of these materials are processed so that their natural form is no longer evident and their geologic origin not apparent. Prehistoric Native Americans also depended on geologic materials for survival. However, their use of various minerals, deposits, and landscape elements did not alter these materials to the extent that modern technology does. Ancient Iowans used geologic materials for everyday tools as well as in symbolic and ceremonial contexts. In many instances, these uses reflect a pervasive Indian view of unity with the environment.

Native Americans have lived in Iowa for more than 11,000 years. Until about 2,500 years ago, small bands lived by hunting game and gathering wild plants. These people, referred to as Archaic cultures, relied on stone, bone, shell, and wood for tools, and they made containers, rope, and clothing from vegetation and animal hide. Some Archaic groups built hide or mat-covered huts with floors dug into the earth.

About 2,500 years ago, Native Americans (Woodland cultures) began cultivating native plants in the rich soil along Iowa’s streams to supplement their hunting and gathering. They also began to make pottery from local clays, and soon afterward they established trade networks for exotic items such as marine shell, obsidian (volcanic glass), copper, and mica. This brochure shows some of these imports as well as local geologic materials used by Native Americans.
Images of humans, animals, and other forms were carved on sandstone cliffs and cave walls, and on resistant outcrops of reddish Sioux Quartzite. A notable figure found on rock faces across northern Iowa is that of a thunderbird or a human portraying a hawk or eagle. Petroglyphs such as these probably had ceremonial importance (1100-1200 A.D.).

Ceremonial and religious objects were made from a variety of materials. The platform pipe below, dating to ca. 100 A.D., is a bird effigy from southeast Iowa made from a northern Illinois claystone.

Images of humans, animals, and other forms were carved on sandstone cliffs and cave walls, and on resistant outcrops of reddish Sioux Quartzite. A notable figure found on rock faces across northern Iowa is that of a thunderbird or a human portraying a hawk or eagle. Petroglyphs such as these probably had ceremonial importance (1100-1200 A.D.).

Ceremonial and religious objects were made from a variety of materials. The platform pipe below, dating to ca. 100 A.D., is a bird effigy from southeast Iowa made from a northern Illinois claystone.

Images of humans, animals, and other forms were carved on sandstone cliffs and cave walls, and on resistant outcrops of reddish Sioux Quartzite. A notable figure found on rock faces across northern Iowa is that of a thunderbird or a human portraying a hawk or eagle. Petroglyphs such as these probably had ceremonial importance (1100-1200 A.D.).

Ceremonial and religious objects were made from a variety of materials. The platform pipe below, dating to ca. 100 A.D., is a bird effigy from southeast Iowa made from a northern Illinois claystone.

Images of humans, animals, and other forms were carved on sandstone cliffs and cave walls, and on resistant outcrops of reddish Sioux Quartzite. A notable figure found on rock faces across northern Iowa is that of a thunderbird or a human portraying a hawk or eagle. Petroglyphs such as these probably had ceremonial importance (1100-1200 A.D.).

Ceremonial and religious objects were made from a variety of materials. The platform pipe below, dating to ca. 100 A.D., is a bird effigy from southeast Iowa made from a northern Illinois claystone.

Images of humans, animals, and other forms were carved on sandstone cliffs and cave walls, and on resistant outcrops of reddish Sioux Quartzite. A notable figure found on rock faces across northern Iowa is that of a thunderbird or a human portraying a hawk or eagle. Petroglyphs such as these probably had ceremonial importance (1100-1200 A.D.).

Ceremonial and religious objects were made from a variety of materials. The platform pipe below, dating to ca. 100 A.D., is a bird effigy from southeast Iowa made from a northern Illinois claystone.

Images of humans, animals, and other forms were carved on sandstone cliffs and cave walls, and on resistant outcrops of reddish Sioux Quartzite. A notable figure found on rock faces across northern Iowa is that of a thunderbird or a human portraying a hawk or eagle. Petroglyphs such as these probably had ceremonial importance (1100-1200 A.D.).

Ceremonial and religious objects were made from a variety of materials. The platform pipe below, dating to ca. 100 A.D., is a bird effigy from southeast Iowa made from a northern Illinois claystone.

Images of humans, animals, and other forms were carved on sandstone cliffs and cave walls, and on resistant outcrops of reddish Sioux Quartzite. A notable figure found on rock faces across northern Iowa is that of a thunderbird or a human portraying a hawk or eagle. Petroglyphs such as these probably had ceremonial importance (1100-1200 A.D.).

Ceremonial and religious objects were made from a variety of materials. The platform pipe below, dating to ca. 100 A.D., is a bird effigy from southeast Iowa made from a northern Illinois claystone.

Images of humans, animals, and other forms were carved on sandstone cliffs and cave walls, and on resistant outcrops of reddish Sioux Quartzite. A notable figure found on rock faces across northern Iowa is that of a thunderbird or a human portraying a hawk or eagle. Petroglyphs such as these probably had ceremonial importance (1100-1200 A.D.).

Ceremonial and religious objects were made from a variety of materials. The platform pipe below, dating to ca. 100 A.D., is a bird effigy from southeast Iowa made from a northern Illinois claystone.

Images of humans, animals, and other forms were carved on sandstone cliffs and cave walls, and on resistant outcrops of reddish Sioux Quartzite. A notable figure found on rock faces across northern Iowa is that of a thunderbird or a human portraying a hawk or eagle. Petroglyphs such as these probably had ceremonial importance (1100-1200 A.D.).

Ceremonial and religious objects were made from a variety of materials. The platform pipe below, dating to ca. 100 A.D., is a bird effigy from southeast Iowa made from a northern Illinois claystone.

Images of humans, animals, and other forms were carved on sandstone cliffs and cave walls, and on resistant outcrops of reddish Sioux Quartzite. A notable figure found on rock faces across northern Iowa is that of a thunderbird or a human portraying a hawk or eagle. Petroglyphs such as these probably had ceremonial importance (1100-1200 A.D.).

Ceremonial and religious objects were made from a variety of materials. The platform pipe below, dating to ca. 100 A.D., is a bird effigy from southeast Iowa made from a northern Illinois claystone.

Images of humans, animals, and other forms were carved on sandstone cliffs and cave walls, and on resistant outcrops of reddish Sioux Quartzite. A notable figure found on rock faces across northern Iowa is that of a thunderbird or a human portraying a hawk or eagle. Petroglyphs such as these probably had ceremonial importance (1100-1200 A.D.).

Ceremonial and religious objects were made from a variety of materials. The platform pipe below, dating to ca. 100 A.D., is a bird effigy from southeast Iowa made from a northern Illinois claystone.

Images of humans, animals, and other forms were carved on sandstone cliffs and cave walls, and on resistant outcrops of reddish Sioux Quartzite. A notable figure found on rock faces across northern Iowa is that of a thunderbird or a human portraying a hawk or eagle. Petroglyphs such as these probably had ceremonial importance (1100-1200 A.D.).

Ceremonial and religious objects were made from a variety of materials. The platform pipe below, dating to ca. 100 A.D., is a bird effigy from southeast Iowa made from a northern Illinois claystone.