

## **Plains Bighorns Script**

The Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep has been Colorado's official state animal for almost 40 years. First described by Spanish explorer Francisco Coronado's in the late 1500's, bighorn rams, with their massive curled horns and majestic bearing, are awe inspiring to say the least.

Like many species of wildlife, bighorn populations were depleted in the 1800's. But over the years their recovery was made a priority, and more than 100 transplants later, we now have some 75 herds and more than 74-hundred animals.

Most of us picture bighorns on the snowcapped granite crags of the high country, but it was ancient archeological pictures of sheep in the low-elevation canyons of southeast Colorado that helped establish three herds well east of the Rockies. These animals can now be found in the Carizzo Creek, Pugatoire, and Apishapa river drainages.

As evidenced by this particular rock art, elk were also in the neighborhood and they still are. The sheep and other wildlife utilize both public and private property. As long as you stay on county maintained roads, you can watch the animals all you like. You can also ask for landowner permission, or you can make an effort to find out what lands are, indeed, open to the public.

While much of this area is considered the Comanche National Grassland, it is really a land of mesas, buttes, and rugged canyons. No new herds are planned for this area, but some smaller transplants could take place to add some genetic diversity.

With the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Jeff Butler, News Four