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## Raging Fires in the Amazon Have Destroyed Rare Prehistoric Works of Bolivian Rock Art

Archaeologists say they won't know the extent of the damage until the fires are extinguished.

**Sarah Cascone**, September 4, 2019



A firefighter works during a wildfire near Robore, Santa Cruz region, eastern Bolivia, south of the Amazon basin, on August 22, 2019. Photo by STR/AFP/Getty Images.

It's not just Brazil's Amazon that's on fire. Eastern Bolivia is also being ravaged by wildfire, which has raged over forests, grassland, and, archaeologists have just announced, rare ancient rock art sites in Santa Cruz, which have been destroyed in the weeks-long blaze.

"We believe that the damage is big and wide in terms of our heritage of rock art," Danilo Drakic, the region's chief archeologist, told [Agence France Presse](#). In the eastern town of Robore, "a dark layer of soot has covered all the paintings," and the heat of the flames "has caused stones to break, even to collapse."

Santa Cruz boasts numerous examples of ancient rock art, with paintings and engravings that date back thousands of years. In May 2017, government officials declared Robore, home to engravings created around 1,500 BC, the "departmental capital of rock art."

The [Sociedad de Investigacion del Arte Rupestre de Bolivia](#), founded in 1987 to investigate and document the country's many petroglyphs and rock paintings, has voiced concern about Robore's rock art, asking on [Facebook](#) for a status update on the effects of the fires on the ancient art.



Rock art in Vallegrande in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. Photo courtesy of the Bolivian Rock Art Research Society.

At least some archaeological sites have escaped unscathed thus far, with a [CNN Español](#) report showing undamaged rock paintings in El Parque el Manantial. Nevertheless, archaeologists won't know the full extent of the damage until the fires have been extinguished.

The country's 2019 wildfires first began in May and saw a sharp increase in August. Conservative estimates say fires have destroyed 3.2 million acres of Bolivian forests and grasslands so far, and the risk to Bolivian cultural heritage continues to grow.



Aerial view of smoke billowing from a fire near Charagua in Bolivia, on the border with Paraguay, south of the Amazon basin, on August 29, 2019. Photo by Aizar Raldes/AFP/Getty Images.

According to Bolivia's culture ministry, the fires also pose a significant risk to the UNESCO World Heritage site at the Jesuit Missions of the Chiquitos, religious settlements built by the order in the 17th and 18th centuries.