

# Arrowhead-Shaped Monument Seriously Damaged Overnight At Piasa Park

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ALTON - The arrowhead-shaped monument in Piasa Park on the Great River Road in Alton was seriously damaged overnight. The much-written about Piasa Bird painting rests on the bluffs in Piasa Park and is an attraction for visitors.

The Alton Park and Recreation Department takes care of that area and Director Michael Haynes said Wednesday morning, there was a sense of shock in city circles at what happened overnight to the monument.

“The monument was fine in the late afternoon on Tuesday because we had people who saw it,” Haynes explained. “Unfortunately, someone got enough leverage to knock it over and this time, they broke the statue in half. This has happened two or three times before in the last three or four months, but it did not break the monument. We were able to reset it before.”

Haynes said the monument was “heavy” and would not have been easy to pull over. He speculates it could have involved multiple people in this act of vandalism and likely some type of vehicle.

Haynes said this was very sad to people in the City of Alton because the Piasa Park where the Piasa Bird painting is showcased on the bluff is considered a “special place.”



“The monument itself depicts the story of the Piasa Bird,” he said. “We probably won’t be able to fix it this time because it was broken in half and pieces came out. The Arrowhead Monument was about five-foot tall and was made of marble granite. It told the story of the Piasa Bird painting and Piasa Bird legend.”

Chances are a new monument will have to be re-produced and Haynes was uncertain of the cost and at this time, the process. It would have to go to the City Council and mayor's office for guidance on how to replace it.

The Piasa Bird Mural is 50 feet wide and 20 feet tall. People come from around the United States to visit the park and see the famous artistic display of the bluffs. Alton painted a Piasa Bird on steel in 1984 and bolted it to a cliff, but it had to be taken off its perch in 1995 and now rests at the Southwestern High School football field.

In the 1920s, the brothers repainted a modern-day version of the bird, but that was destroyed in the 1950s with River Road construction. In 1999, Alton’s Dave Stevens repainted the Piasa Bird on the bluffs in its present location and it was 22 feet high and 48 feet long. The community was heavily involved in this process.

French explorer Jacques Marquette provided the earliest account of figures painted on the bluffs near what is Alton today, which he and Louis Jolliett saw on their trip down the Mississippi in 1673. He wrote they came upon two monsters painted on the bluffs: “as large as a calf; they have horns on their heads like those of deer, a horrible look, red eyes, a beard like a tiger’s, a face somewhat like a man’s, a body covered with scales, and so long a tail that it winds all around the body, passing above the head and going back between the legs, ending in a fish’s tail. Green, red, and black is the three colors composing the picture.”

Routinely, there have to be touch-ups done to the Piasa Bird painting. However, thanks to these vandals, there is now no information available at the site to explain the legend of the Piasa Bird.





### **The Legend Of The Piasa Bird In Alton (Words On Arrowhead Monument)**

*MANY THOUSAND MOONS before the arrival of the palefaces, when the great magolonyx and mastodon, whose bones are now dug up, were still living in this land of green prairies, there existed a bird of such dimensions that he could easily carry off in his talons, a full grown deer. Having obtained a taste of human flesh, from that time he would prey upon nothing else.*

*He was as artful as he was powerful, would dart suddenly and unexpectedly upon an Indian, bear him off into one of the caves of the bluff, and devour him.*

*Hundreds of warriors attempted for years to destroy him, but without success.*

*Whole villages were nearly depopulated, and consternation spread throughout all the tribes of the Illini.*

*At length, Ouatoga, a chief whose fame as a warrior extended even beyond the great lakes, separated himself from the rest of his tribe, fasted in solitude for the space of a whole moon, and prayed to the great spirit, the master of life, that he would protect his children from the Piasa.*

*On the last night of the fast, the great spirit appeared to Ouatoga in a dream, and directed him to select 20 of his warriors, each armed with a bow and poisoned arrow, and conceal themselves in a designated spot.*

*Near the place of their concealment, another warrior was to stand in open view, as a victim for the Piasa, which they must shoot the instant that it pounced upon his prey.*

*When the chief awoke in the morning, he thanked the great spirit and returning to his tribe, told them of his dream. The warriors were quickly selected and placed in ambush, as directed Ouatoga offered himself as the victim. He was willing to die for his tribe.*

*Placing himself in the open view of the bluff, he soon saw the Piasa perched on the bluff eyeing his prey. Ouatoga drew up his manly form to its utmost height and planting his feet firmly upon the earth, began to chant the death song of a warrior.*

*A moment after the Piasa rose into the air, and, swift as a thunderbolt darted down upon the chief.*

*Scarcely had he reached his victim when every bow was sprung and every arrow sent, to the feather, into his body.*

*The Piasa uttered a wild, fearful scream that resounded far over the opposite side of the river, and expired.*

*Ouatoga was safe. Not an arrow, not even the talons of the bird, had touched him. The master of life, in admiration of the generous deed of Ouatoga, had held an invisible shield over him.*

*In memory of this event, the image of the Piasa was engraved on the bluff. Such is the Indian tradition.*