



NEW ZEALAND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



This document is made available by The New Zealand Archaeological Association under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

A SUBMERGED PETROGLYPH SITE AT PUPUKEA, O'AHU

Earl Neller
 State Historic Preservation Office
 Honolulu, Hawaii

On the north shore of O'ahu, at the mouth of Kalunawai Ka'ala Stream in Pupukea, is a beachrock shelf covered with Hawaiian petroglyphs. However, not too many people have seen the site, because it is almost always covered with sand. The rock carvings are only seen on rare occasions, when high surf removes the sand from the beach, exposing the beachrock and the petroglyphs. January 1983 was such an occasion. The petroglyphs were exposed for more than a week. The author made a reconnaissance of the site, and took photographs. There are similar, tide level, beachrock petroglyph sites on the Waianae coast of O'ahu at Kea'au and on the south shore of Kaua'i at Maha'ulepu.

The petroglyphs at Pupukea depict human and animal figures (Figs 1 and 2). There are no historic period motifs

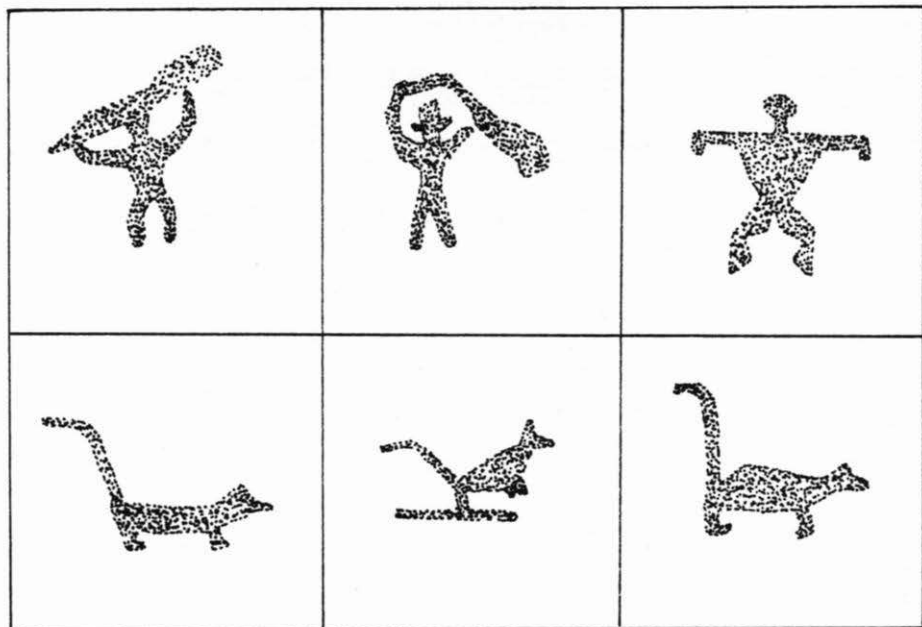


FIGURE 1. Petroglyphs at Pupukea, O'ahu.

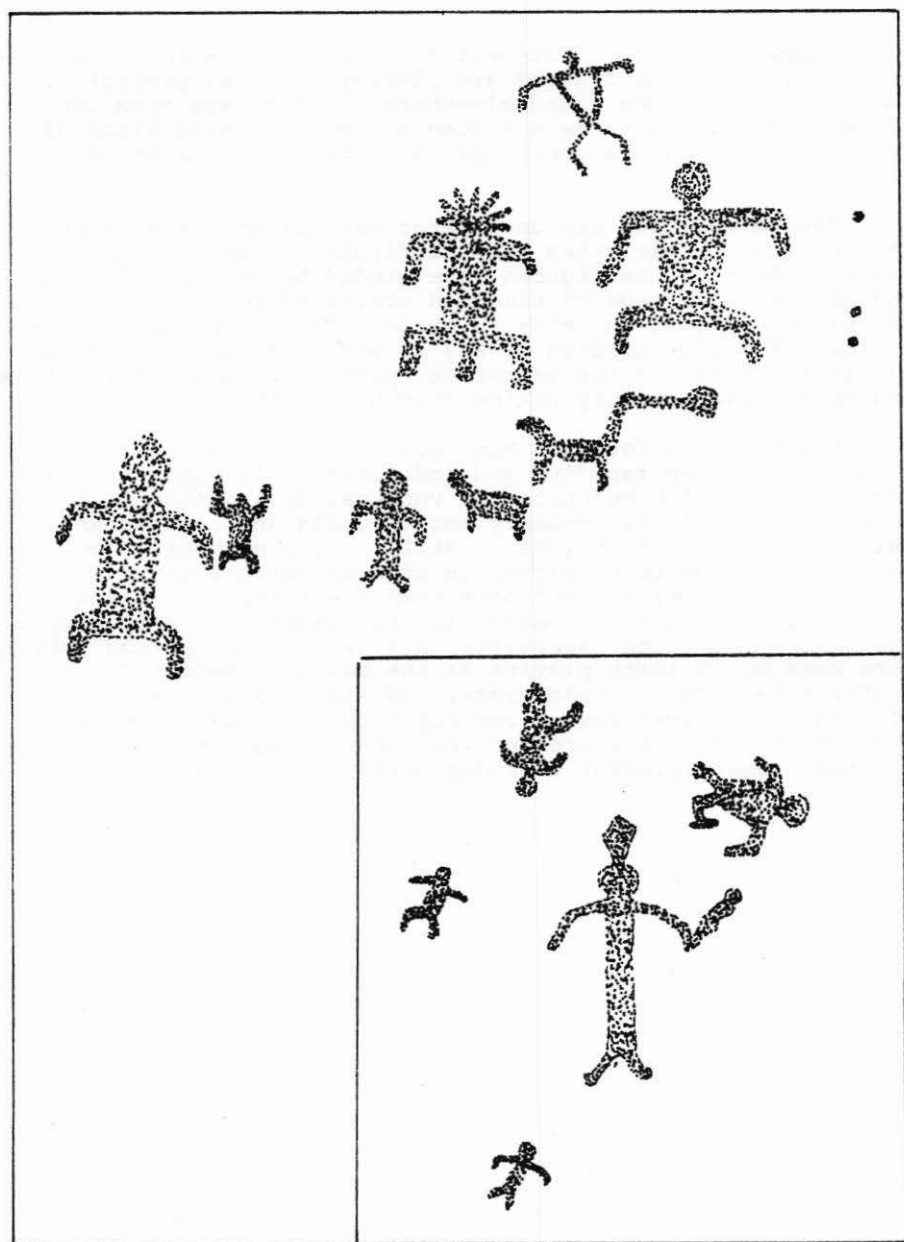


FIGURE 2. Petroglyphs at Pupukea, O'ahu.

or alphabetic script to suggest the carvings are from the historic period. The figures are similar to other prehistoric Hawaiian petroglyphs found elsewhere. There are some men throwing nets, and there are some men with unusual kinds of headgear. There are some dogs, and one figure might be a whale.

The petroglyphs are underwater most of the time, even at low tide. This makes them difficult to see, or photograph. Some of the figures have eroded beyond recognition. The beachrock is made of cemented grains of coral sand and it is relatively soft and easy to carve. The author once observed a group of small children at Kea'au who, upon discovering the carvings already in the beachrock, picked up some basalt stones and toiled away merrily making drawings of their own.

Beachrock is found in many places along the coast of O'ahu. It forms rapidly, and sometimes modern objects are found in it. The beachrock at Pupukea, having formed at modern sea level, is probably not very old and, consequently, neither are the petroglyphs. Still, it is a mystery how petroglyphs came to be carved in such an extraordinary location, and why they are not more common elsewhere in O'ahu. Exposures of basalt and beachrock are common, but petroglyphs are rare. One might speculate that the Pupukea petroglyphs were made by children playing at the beach. Modern day graffiti is common on beachrock, and almost all of it can be attributed to juveniles. One might further speculate that some of the figures represent well known Hawaiian folk heroes, and that some represent everyday activities at Pupukea.