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ANOTHER PETROGLYPH AT OMATA, TARANAKI

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Subsequent to the discovery of a petroglyph (P19/147) at the northern end of Tapuae [sic - Tapuaeharuru (Smith 1910:103)] Beach in March 1981 (Prickett 1981:113-7) a number of reports of a second, more complex, decorated boulder in the vicinity were made to the Taranaki Museum. Several intensive surveys at various times over the next seven years failed to locate the second petroglyph.

In early January 1989, following a brief period of accelerated beach degradation, the mystery was resolved. Destructive wave action had heavily scoured sand from the inter-tidal zone, uncovering the petroglyph (P19/240).

For a period of approximately ten days the boulder remained visible at low tide, before being progressively covered over again with sand. By mid-January the boulder was again beneath a considerable depth of sand, approximately at the mid-point between the high and low tide lines on the restored beach.

The constraints imposed by the tidal cycle frustrated recording. The boulder was never exposed when low angle light, ideal for photographic definition was present. Other recording techniques were restricted by seawater, strong wind and mobile sand. It is obvious that some geomorphological change has occurred since the petroglyph was 'pecked', stranding the boulder beneath a prograded beach profile. When the boulder is next exposed it may be possible to take tracings and other more adequate design records.

The petroglyph (P19/240) is situated approximately 250 m due south of P19/147 and 60 m south of Okurukuru Stream (NZMS 260 map reference: P19/955343, 1st edition).

The design has been 'pecked' by the hammerdressing process on a smooth waterworn andesite boulder, situated 19 m below the mean high tide line. The dimensions of the exposed boulder when first visited were length 1.6 m, width 1.3 m, and height .75 m. The decorated surface covers an area of 850 mm long by 480 mm wide and is aligned due south.

Because of differential weathering and variation in depth of the original motif, some areas of the design are now indistinct and particularly difficult to follow. The seaward or westerly face in particular has been abraided by the combined actions of wave, wind, and sand.

The range of decipherable design elements generally match those previously described for the region (Best 1927:137-40, Day 1980:113-7, Phillips 1927:135-6, 1948:179-80, 1962:400-2, Prickett 1981:198-201) and include spirals, an 'eyebrow' motif, one abstract stylized human face, with some 'one-off' elements intended to accentuate the former.

The motifs have been carefully placed to utilize the boulder's distinct longitudinal crest and so enhance the design composition. Another Taranaki petroglyph, P20/80, also appears to employ the same artistic convention. This deliberate division of the decorated surface into 'design fields' is directly comparable to the procedure for the application of the male spiral facial tattoo (Simmons 1986:25, 131). Similarly many of the motifs employed in male facial tattoo appear also to be employed in petroglyph and whakairo designs. The only factor limiting complete duplication of motifs is apparently the nature of the medium into which the design is applied. The validity of the observation may have far reaching implications for our understanding of the meaning and function of at least some examples of petroglyph.

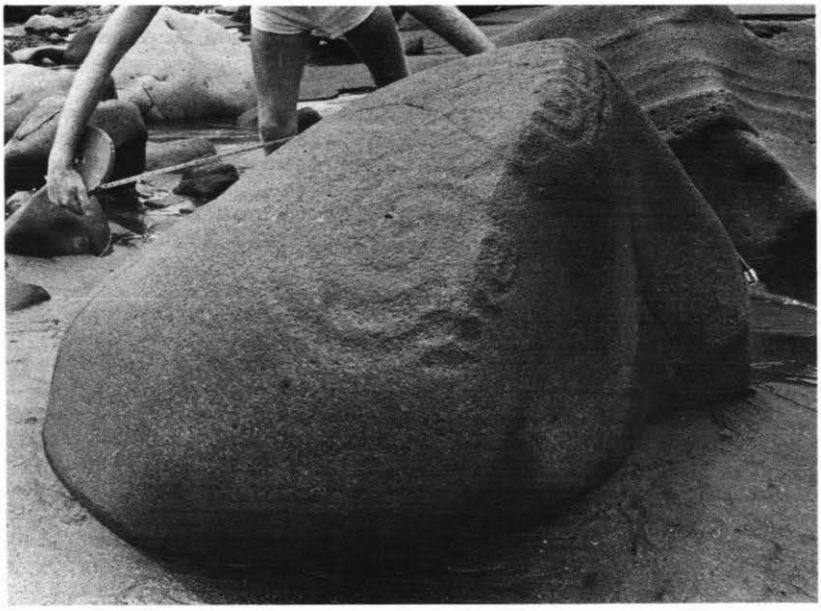
P19/240 consists of six double spirals. Five radiate clockwise, and one anti-clockwise, from the centre. The largest, on the lower right hand extreme, has a diameter of 300 mm, radiates clockwise, and is linked on the left to a much smaller, approximately 80 mm diameter, anti-clockwise radiating spiral. This combination forms the 'eyes' and 'eyebrows' of a stylized human face. Beneath this pair of spirals are a group of design elements representing features of a nose and mouth (all elements are described as viewed from the south)(Figs. 1 (cover), 2, and 3).

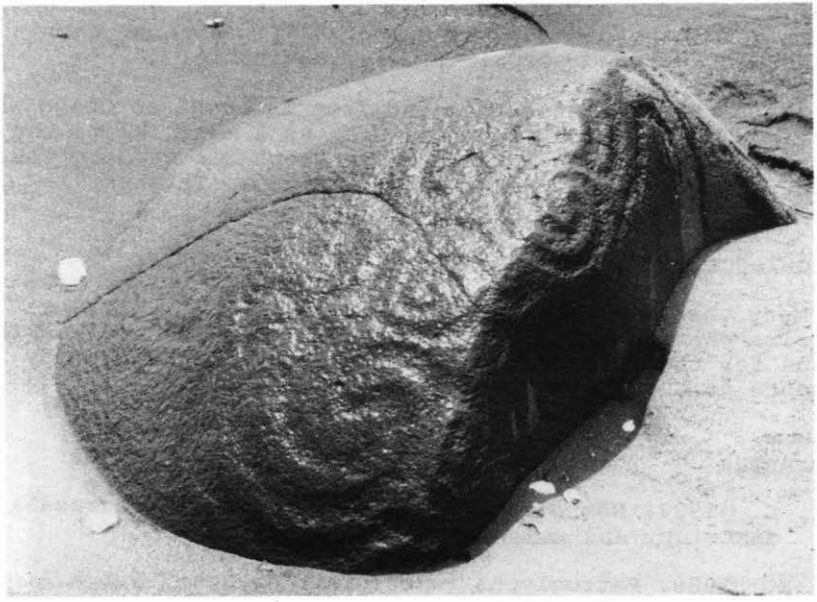
The remaining four spirals all appear to radiate clockwise but because of surface erosion the design created by the interrelationships between spirals is more difficult to determine.

However, it appears that the uppermost three are interlinked to form a second stylised human face motif, that is linked to the first by the remaining spiral.

The diameter of those spirals varies from 140 mm to 160 mm. Beneath the spiral linking the two motifs is a very indistinct, triangular-shaped design element.

The lower spiral of the second facial motif is 'flanked' by a 240 mm long ribbon-like motif, described in a previous publication as an 'eyebrow' because of its characteristic shape. A cluster of three small circular depressions, in a triangular distribution complete the design. The spiral sizes





within the range of other recorded Taranaki examples (Day 1980:113-7, Prickett 1981:199).

The present discovery contributes to the growing pattern of distribution of petroglyphs within Taranaki, but as yet adds little to our understanding of their meaning or function. Sixty years of published ethnological speculation has been reviewed by two previous authors without the addition of significant new functional information (Day 1980, Prickett 1981).

Unfortunately, without more detailed descriptions of recorded designs and motifs, the suggestion raised earlier in this paper comparing the design and layout of P19/240 with the 'design-fields' concept, motifs and systematics employed in the application of male facial tattoo and whakairo, only opens new avenues for speculation. The hypothesis ventured by Prickett (1981:200) that the size of spirals and their relationship to other spirals and design motifs conveys information concerning people may yet prove to be correct, however it seems ironic that designs that employ so few motifs should regularly generate such a volume of conjecture. Perhaps the error has been to treat ta moko, whakairo and petroglyphs (kohatu?) as unrelated fields of artistic endeavour.

A previous call for a more thoroughly documented descriptive catalogue of recorded sites, now fifteen in number (twelve recorded and three reported but as yet unrecorded), has so far gone unheeded (Prickett 1981:200). Without such a catalogue continued speculation is inevitable.

(Note: P20/80 has been moved from Taranaki to Otago where it stands at Andersons Bay, Dunedin, as a memorial to the incarcerated followers of the Maori prophetic leaders Tohu Kakahi and Te Whiti-o-Rongomai of Parihaka, Taranaki.)

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