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NOTES ON FURTHER PREHISTORIC ROCK ART SITESRECORDED IN NORTH OTAGO

Brian Allingham
Seacliff

Two rock shelters containing previously unrecorded pre-historic art were located in outcrops of reddish-brown limonitic sandstone during an archaeological survey of the Herbert and Waianakarua State forests (Hamel and Allingham, 1986), commissioned by the New Zealand Forest Service. During June and July 1986, after completion of the State forest survey, two more unrecorded rock art sites were found on private property in the same district. Three of these newly recorded sites are in sandstone caves in the hills lining the coastal flat between Moeraki and the Waianakarua River mouth (Fig.1). The southernmost and latest rock art site found is on a bluish-grey marble (crystallized limestone) outcrop, half way up a small valley on the southern side of Blue Mountain, on the north side of the Shag Valley near Dunback.

The first site recorded (J42/95), is on the roof of a cave near the head of Swallow's Creek, a tributary of the north branch of the Waianakarua River (Fig.1). Both subjects in the composition (Fig.2) have been rendered with charcoal, although most of this has eroded away, leaving a black stain on the reddish-brown sandstone. The figure to the right could represent a human form, while that to the left appears to be a stylised dog although it is quite different from other 'dog' representations elsewhere in Otago and Canterbury. Reports of 'Maori art' in the cave date from the late 19th century according to Mr. J Anderson who has farmed in the Waianakarua area since the 1920s, and this site is probably the one already reported by Michael Trotter (1968:101).

A close examination of all accessible sandstone outcrops within the Herbert State forest blocks resulted in the location of one more rock art site (J42/101). This is in the central of three habitable caves entering the west side of the distinctive sandstone outcrop known as Cave Rock, 300 m above sea level on the main ridge between the head waters of the Kakaho and Kurinui (Big Kuri) creeks (see Fig.1). Remains of faded prehistoric red paintings and black drawings are spread at fairly regular intervals around the walls of the 4 m long cave.

Reproductions of the best preserved art in Cave Rock (Figs 4-8) were xerox reduced from tracings of enlarged colour photographs. These photographs were taken back to the site and retouched 'dot for dot' with chinagraph pencil from the original subjects where subtle colour differences between

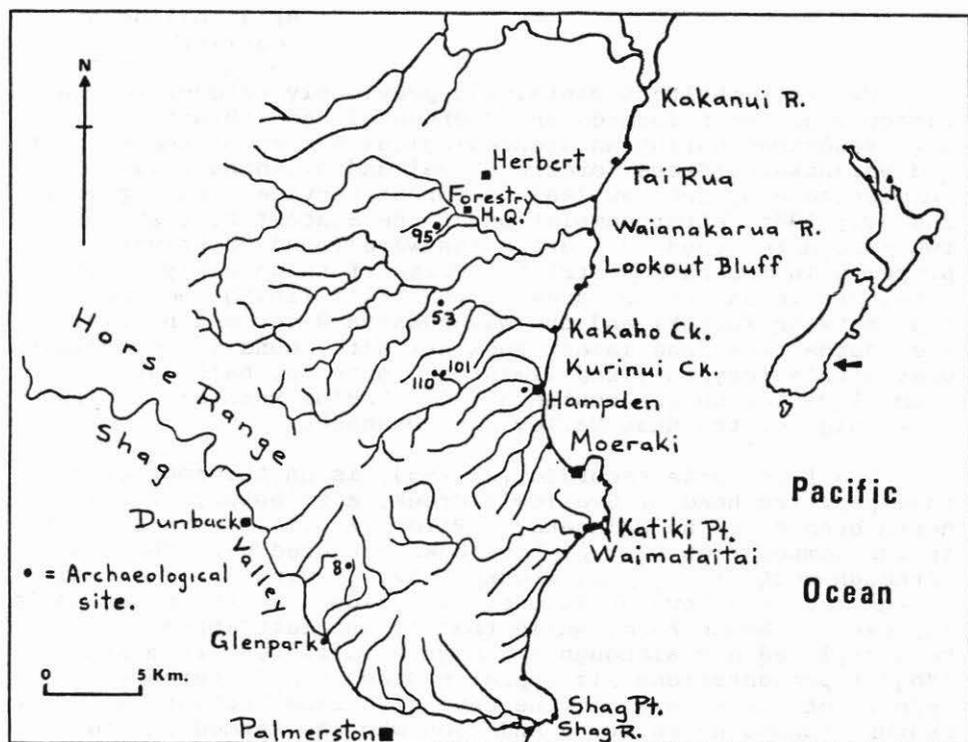


FIGURE 1. Part of the North Otago coast showing rock art sites (numbered) and the larger known prehistoric settlements.

the art work and rock surface were poorly defined. Some of the prehistoric art at Cave Rock was made on a white siliceous coating that has formed over the sandstone. Continuation of this coating process has obscured some of the art work, while seepage and modern graffiti have caused further damage, although not to any great extent. Most of the prehistoric drawings and paintings at Cave Rock are now faint markings, quite difficult to see on an overcast day or in poor light, even to a site surveyor. It took two visits for me to recognise the true extent of art in the cave, some of which is in shaded corners, or difficult to distinguish from the natural colouration of the sandstone. Pigment for the red paintings at this site appears to have been obtained from an exposure of powdery iron oxide on the wall just inside the entrance to the cave. Of interest are the elaborate initials in contact 'missionary-styled' Roman capitals (see Fig.4), drawn in charcoal near the roof of the cave - on the wall facing the entrance.

Following completion of the State forest archaeological survey, another prehistoric rock art site (J42/110), was found at the head of the valley about 300 m west of Cave Rock (see Fig.1). With permission from the landowner, Mr.W.Nicholson of Hampden, I cut a track through thick scrub to reach the largest sandstone outcrop of the group, which contained several caves. Only one charcoal drawing was found (Fig.3) about 20 cm above the present ground level in the rear part of a fairly dry, shallow cave containing natural pillar formations, towards the seaward end of the outcrop. Some of the caves in this outcrop are quite damp, and any other artwork that may have once existed on suitable surfaces may have been destroyed by seepage or other destructive agents.

The prehistoric drawing found near Dunback is on an isolated marble outcrop at an altitude of about 160 m up the southern slopes of Blue Mountain (142/8; Figs 1 and 9). This site was located in July 1986 during a private site survey I carried out in the Blue Mountain area. The charcoal drawing was made on a natural cleavage surface 1.1 m above the present ground level, and is partially sheltered by an over-hang of the outcrop. Located on the property of Messrs. J and P. Callaghan, this is the only prehistoric rock art site I have so far recognised amongst the marble outcrops in the Blue Mountain area in spite of suitable surfaces for rock art in more effective rock shelters nearby, possibly indicating art work in this locality has disappeared. Faint dark markings in a massive cave beside Blue Mountain Stream could be remains of prehistoric art, although the present damp conditions in the cave do not favour the preservation of rock art for a lengthy period.



FIGURE 2. Swallow's Creek drawing, J42/95.
Scale in centimetres and inches.



FIGURE 3. J42/110.

More than twenty earth oven depressions in the area appear mostly to be umu ti. They occur in the rich black soil of the Blue Mountain area where ti abounds. These ovens and the rock art site (I42/8) are well within the catchment of important early period settlements at Glenpark and the Shag River mouth (Fig.1), tending to indicate an association. There are, however, many known archaeological sites of more recent age on the coast between Shag Point and Kakanui River mouth that could be reasonably associated with any of the sites reported here, emphasising the need for reliable chronologies to be established before sound conclusions are made on any associations that may have existed between the various sites in this part of North Otago.

The prehistoric rock art briefly described in these notes is generally similar in style to examples elsewhere in the South Island, perhaps with the exception of the composition in the cave above Swallow's Creek (Fig.2). The 'dog' depiction here is a fairly unique rendering in the North Otago region, although the style is not entirely unusual when compared with other 'dog' representations elsewhere in New Zealand (see Trotter and McCulloch, 1981:74). Cave Rock was the only site where midden showed in the floor: a few pieces of unidentified sea mammal and small bird bone, with fragmentary marine shell including mussel.

Further searches I have made for rock art sites in likely areas of North Otago since the finds reported here have been unsuccessful so far, and the work is on-going as time and other considerations allow. It is important to note that the generally poor surface quality of sandstone and marble surfaces, compared with most limestone outcrops where rock art is far more common, has not totally deterred the prehistoric artist, although the predominantly rough outcrop surfaces in the areas I inspected would have placed obvious limitations on where rock art was possible. While this could account for the absence of rock art in some of the places I searched, the lack of art work on suitable surfaces could be accounted for by destruction through plant or stock rubbing, weathering, seepage, covering by lichen or moss, or failure of recognition by the field worker. Several large rock shelters in the Herbert State Forest were so heavily daubed with modern graffiti that any prehistoric art present would most probably be destroyed.. So far only one petroglyph site has been recorded in the area covered here (J42/53; see Fig.1), although many of the natural formations in the sandstone of the Waianakarua - Moeraki district look quite artificial.

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks are due to landowners, Mr Walter Nicholson of Hampden, and Messrs Allan Burgess, John and Peter

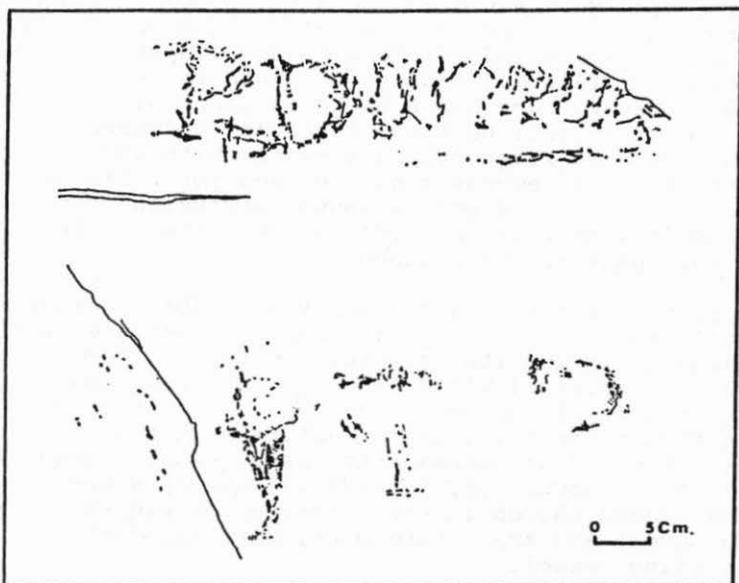


FIGURE 4. Missionary style capital letters 'PDW' (?) above prehistoric black drawings, part of a damaged series that continues to left. J42/101.

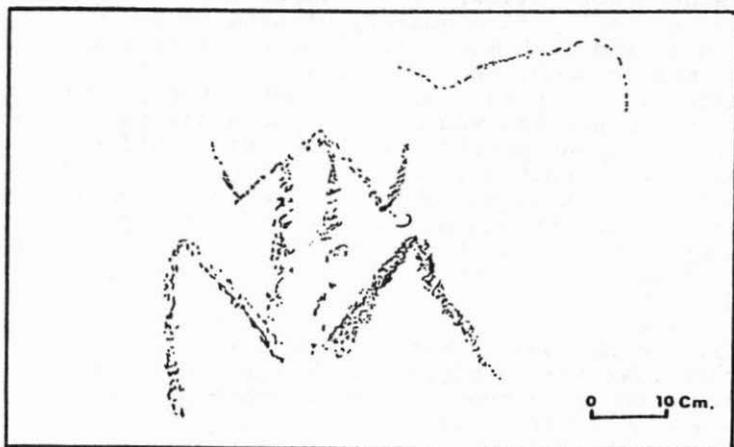


FIGURE 5. Human figure. J42/101.

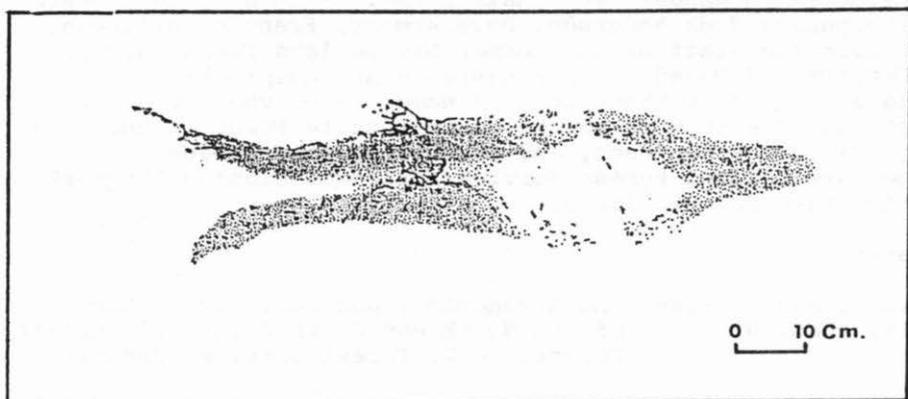


FIGURE 6. Red painting of fish (?) over charcoal form of bird with outstretched wings and head turned left (?). Right half damaged by water seepage. J42/101.

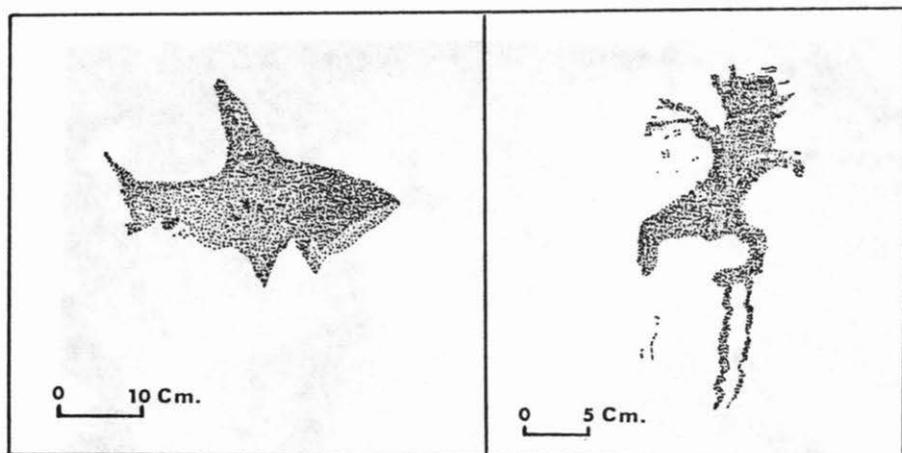


FIGURE 7. Worn red painting of sea form at shaded rear of cave. J42/101.

FIGURE 8. Red painting of human form near cave entrance. Rain has caused paint to run. J42/101.

Callaghan, and Peter Cooke of the Blue Mountain area, for allowing me to wander over their farms. I am also most grateful to Messrs Jock Anderson, Dave Armour, Francis Callaghan, Bert Moir and staff of the former New Zealand Forest Service at Herbert and Dunedin for assistance and hospitality. I would also like to thank Dr Jill Hamel, with whom it was a great pleasure to work on the Herbert State Forest archaeological survey contract, and acknowledgement is due to the former New Zealand Forest Service for commissioning the work in the state forest blocks.

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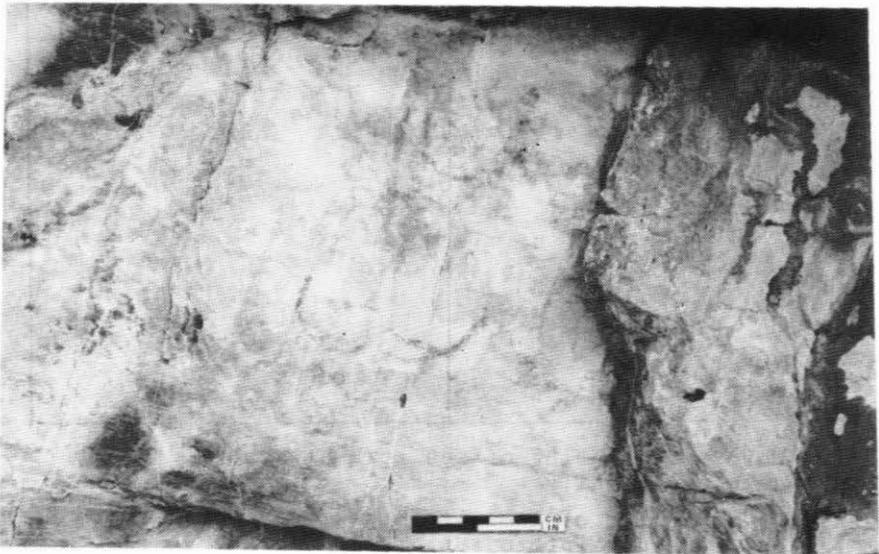


FIGURE 9. Charcoal drawing near Dunback, 142/8.