

Field Trip to Examine Rock Art Sites in Western Australia

Following the one day Seminar in Perth, over 40 delegates joined a ten day field trip in Western Australia to examine rock paintings, engravings and stone arrangements, and in particular to discuss conservation problems on-site. (See Fig. 1). This was organised by John Clarke, Research Officer in Rock Art Conservation at the W.A. Museum.

It was a most rewarding aspect of the Workshop. There was plenty of opportunity during the long drives between sites for discussion, and many of the warm evenings were pleasantly spent round a camp fire accompanied by slide talks of the fascinating rock art from around the world.

Itinerary

The party on a safari bus, accompanied by on occasions up to four other 4-wheel drive vehicles, left Perth on Sunday 11th September. The first site visited was at Bolgart, a granite outcrop where tests on lichen control and removal are being conducted by John Clarke, (see Fig. 2), and which are described in one of his papers¹. Then the beginning of many long drives through the gravel back roads of W.A. Fortunately, wild flowers were in abundance and carpeted the landscape in blues, yellows and reds.

The night was spent near Mt. Magnet and an early rise saw the party examining some stencil painting sites at "The Granites" near to the camping area. The main sites of interest on this day were Walga Rock, followed by the Wilgie Mia ochre mine. The Walga Rock painting site is the largest site in the region. It consists of an Archean coarse grained granite and is weathering by exfoliation. Although the process is slow it is affecting a large painting site which is aggravated by rain water wash across the surface. A fence has been erected to prevent cattle rubbing on the paintings and also to enable the controlled use of herbicides to keep the rock face clear of vegetation. During the inspec-

tion, Leo Rivett² carried out a photogrammetric survey of the site.

The Wilgie Mia ochre mine in the Weld Range is a very impressive site and has been used by Aborigines for many centuries. The use and properties of its red ochre have been described by Clarke³. Although being coated with the red dust, delegates found this site one of the most fascinating of the field trip.

Following an overnight camp north of Meekatharra, and a long and somewhat boring drive on rough dirty roads, the party reached the Bawn Bawn Spring sites on Waldberg Station. This site is about 1000 m. long and consists of a gorge where the spring is situated and a parallel belt of loose stones running along the foot of the ridge. The whole site is covered with tumbled dolerite stones, many of which are engraved (Fig. 3). There is also a heavy scatter of artifacts — fortunately the isolation of the site and proximity to Waldberg Station is a deterrent to vandals and souvenir hunters.

The following day, the most boring of the trip, was spent in travelling to a camp site near Tom Price — a green oasis in iron ore mining country. The first site examination the next day was at Turtle Pool and the opportunity was taken for the traditional group photograph (Fig. 4). Turtle Pool is a good example of what happens with uncontrolled access and a disinterested local population. The site was once a pleasant place with turtles in the pool, and shady trees. Museum signs have been repeatedly destroyed and rock art defaced. Here, as at many of the sites, John Clegg took tracings of the engravings⁴, (see also Fig. 5).

The next site on the itinerary was the spectacular Dale Gorge which not only required a steep climb into and out of the gorge to observe paintings and engravings but also provided the opportunity for swimming and the washing of a dirty dusty mob.

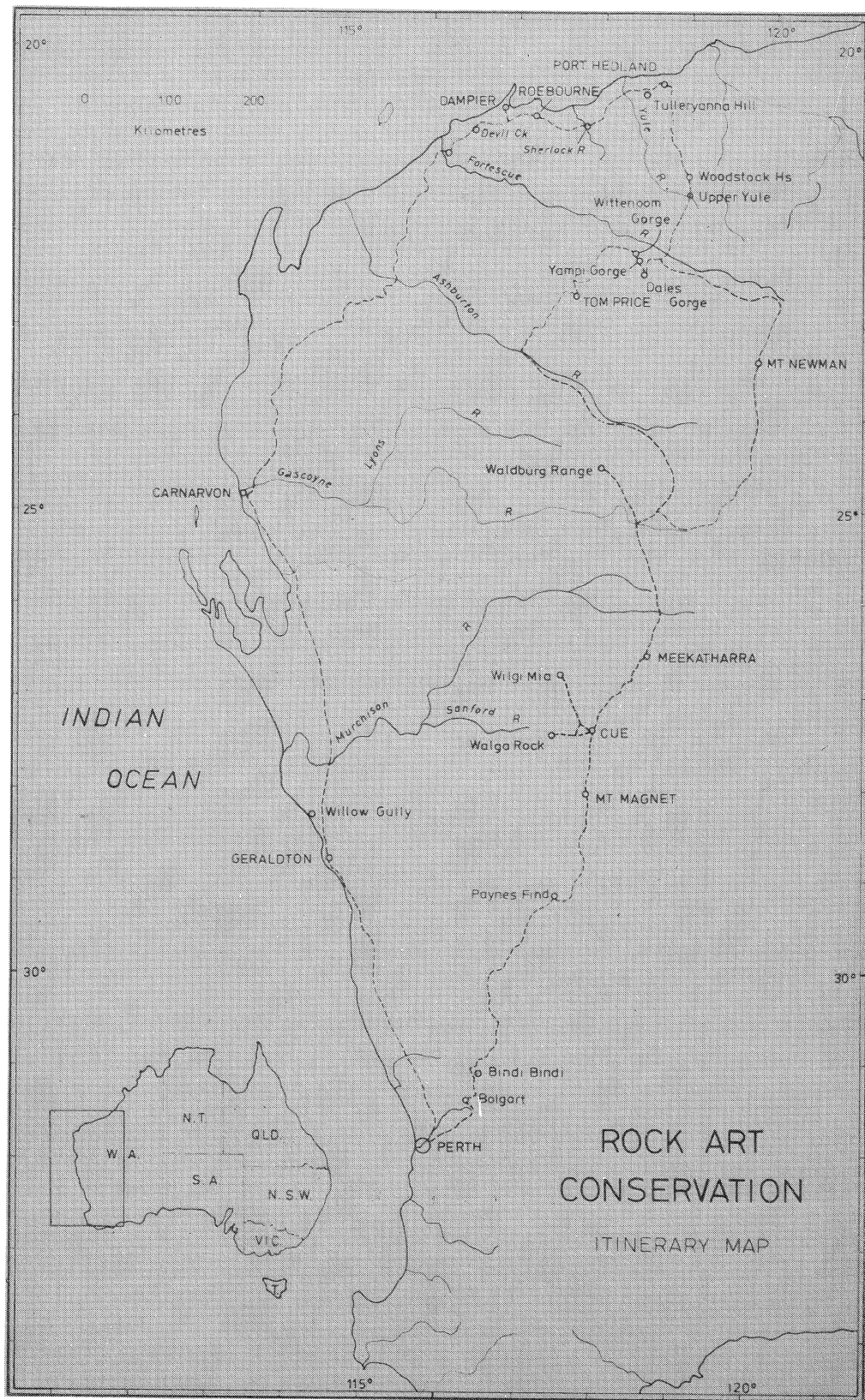


Figure 1. Itinerary Map of the Rock Art Conservation field trip.

Following an overnight stay at Woodstock Station, two very important rock engraving sites were examined, Gallery Hill and Egina Granites (Fig. 6). The engravings which are very prolific are situated on granite rocks, (Figs. 7 and 8). Cameras were clicking left, right and centre. Woodstock Station has recently been vested in the Western Australian Museum and the problems of land management with these important sites has now arisen.

From Woodstock, a rapid run to Port Hedland. Before delegates could sample the luxury of a motel, an inspection of the Two Mile Ridge in the centre of the town was carried out (Fig. 9). This has been subjected to vandalism and industrial pollution and the W.A. Museum is carrying out a conservation project on the site^{1, 5}.

Following the very welcome overnight stay in the motel, the early risers (few in number), visited the South West Creek sites which are in good condition. Unfortunately, sand flies prevented a prolonged examination of this site. Off again to other sites at Tulleryanna Hill, a granite outcrop, and the meta gabbro outcrop at Sherlock River. Here the differences in the weathering processes of the two sites were discussed — also the problems of vandalism (Fig. 10).

From Sherlock River the party travelled, now on sealed roads — a luxury — to the Dampier area and were shown over the site by the Dampier Salt Company Projects Manager, Enso Virili, who has been recording this art for some years. The sites, close to the coast, are very extensive, prolific and also contain very early art (17,000 years B.P.) (Fig. 11). Problems here again of pollution from the adjacent iron ore loading jetties, and tourists — many of the engravings are portable.

A pleasant night was spent in a field of red Sturt Desert Peas, on the beach near Dampier (Fig. 12), unfortunately the tide was too far out to allow swimming.

More engraving sites were visited the next day on the journey towards Carnarvon and the following day the 'long distance' section was completed to bring the party to the beach again, this time near a painting site at Willow Gully which was examined the following morning.

The last day was the drive back to Perth. Apart from two blown tyres and a bogging, the safari ran like clockwork and arrived home within minutes of the scheduled time. From all accounts it was a most rewarding and enjoyable field trip.

References

- 1 Clarke, J. (1973). Conservation and Restoration of Painting and Engraving Sites in Western Australia. *Conservation of Rock Art ICCM*, Canberra, p 89.
- 2 Rivett, L. (1978). Photogrammetry — Its Potential Application to Problems in Australian Archaeology. *Conservation of Rock Art ICCM*, Canberra, p 15.
- 3 Clarke, J. (1976). Two Aboriginal Rock Art Pigments from Western Australia. Their Properties, Use and Durability. *Studies in Conservation*. 21. 134-142.
- 4 Clegg, J. (1978). Simple Field Techniques for Recording Petroglyphs by Casting and Stereophotography. *Conservation of Rock Art*. ICCM. Canberra p 22.
- 5 Clarke, J. (1975). Conservation Requirements of an Aboriginal Engraving Site at Port Hedland, Pilbara, Western Australia. *Conservation in Archaeology and the Applied Arts*, I.I.C. London. 79-86.



Figure 2: Delegates inspecting lichen control experiments at Bolgart.

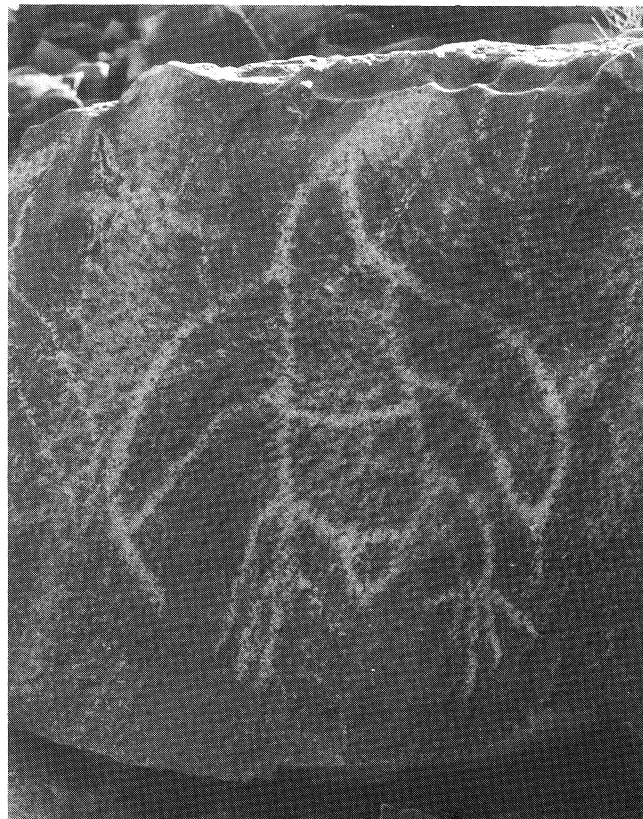


Figure 3: An engraving at Bawn Bawn Springs.



Figure 4. The 'Mob' at Turtle Pool, near Tom Price.

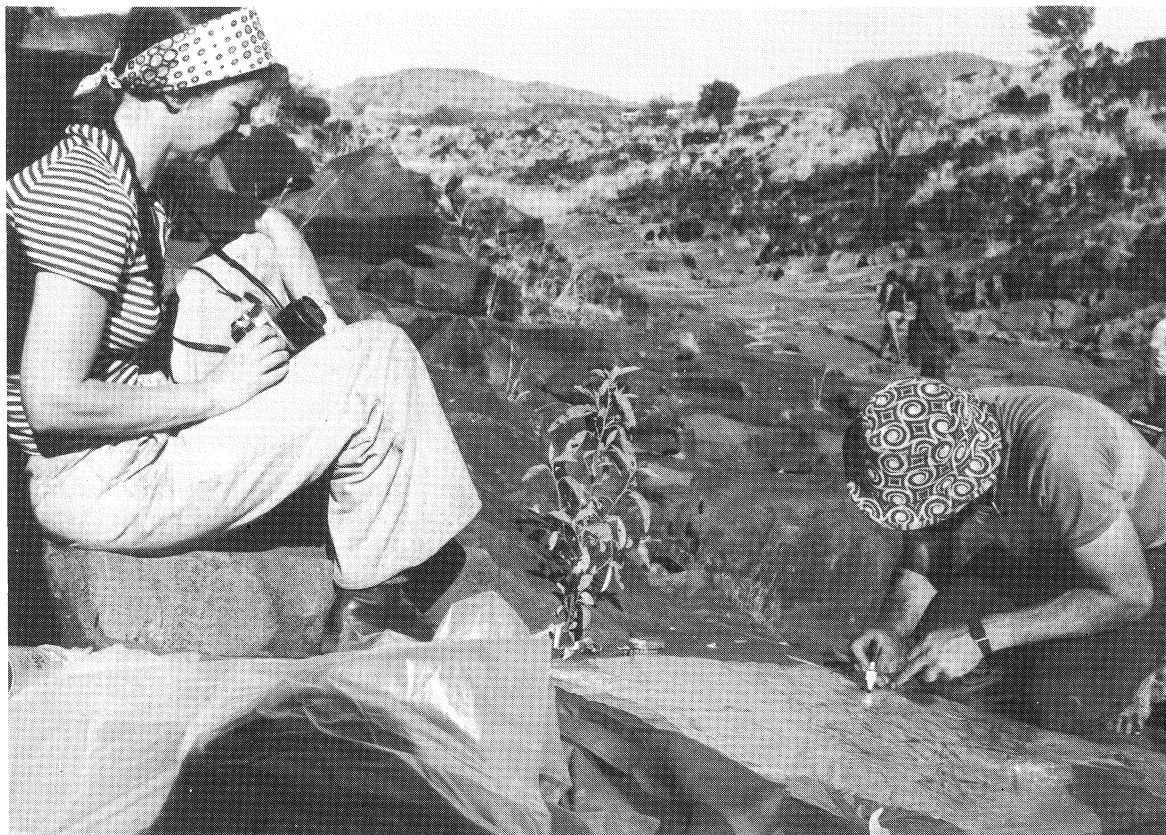


Figure 5. John Clegg tracing an engraving at Turtle Pool near Tom Price.

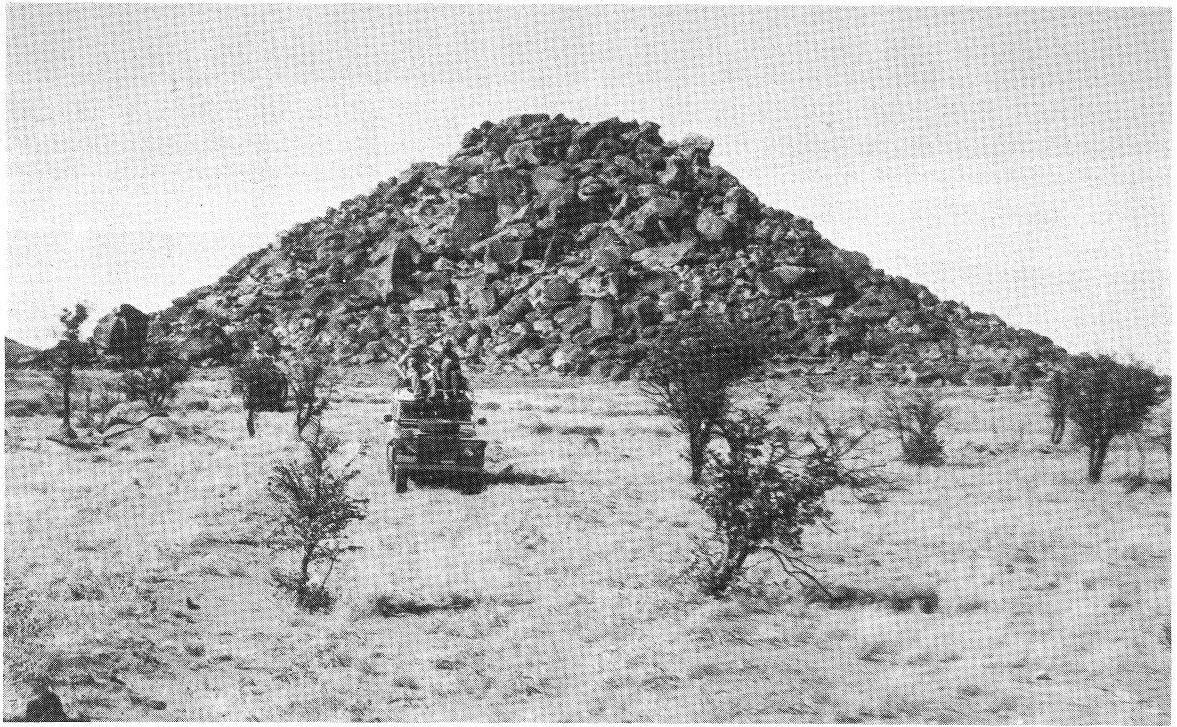


Figure 6. Gallery Hill on Woodstock Station.



Figure 7. Kurangara Figures, Gallery Hill.



Figure 8. Kurangara Figures, Gallery Hill.



Figure 9. Delegates examining the Two Mile Ridge site in Port Hedland. Note the proximity of civilisation, immediately behind the site is an iron ore treatment plant.



Figure 10. Vandalism – Tulleryanna Hill.



Figure 11. Delegates discussing the interpretation of engravings at Dampier.



Figure 12. Relaxation on the beach at Nicol Bay, Dampier.