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# ROCK ART OF SOUTHEAST CAPE YORK PENINSULA: BONNEY GLEN STATION

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The rock art of nine archaeological sites from Bonney Glen Station (north Queensland) are described. The motif types and colours identify this art as a previously unknown variant of a predominantly figurative tradition. □ *Rock art, north Queensland, Australian prehistory.*

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Southeast Cape York Peninsula is renowned internationally as one of the world's great rock art regions. To archaeologists and the public alike, it is often associated with Quinkan Country, whose geographical focus is the Laura sandstone outcrops. The rock art of Quinkan Country is characterised by a broad range of motif forms dominated by anthropomorphs and zoomorphs, including anthropomorphs with exaggerated body parts, ethnohistorically identified as 'Quinkan' Dreaming beings (e.g., Cole, 1988).

Until recently, such an association between the rock art of southeast Cape York and Quinkan Country was prevalent (e.g., Trezise, 1971). During the last few years, however, rock art surveys in various parts of the Peninsula have shown that it contains a number of relatively distinct, regional sets of artistic conventions. Many of these differ significantly from the art of Quinkan Country.

This paper briefly documents an archaeological survey in traditional Kuku Yalanji country. Its focus is Bonney Glen Station, located c.60km south of Laura (Fig. 1).

## THE SURVEYS

The recording of rock art from Bonney Glen Station began in 1988 when Mr Bruce Butler, then Ranger for the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement, filed site recording forms for a number of archaeological sites on the Station with the State authorities. Although Butler's recordings were preliminary in nature, they demonstrated that rock art existed to the immediate south of Quinkan Country, and that this rock art was different from the latter.

In 1991, traditional Kuku Yalanji owners of the Bonney Glen area approached the author to undertake systematic recordings of rock art sites known to exist in one part of the station. The aims of these surveys were:

1, to document the rock art sites located around grid references 319074 (Maytown 1:50,000 topographic map sheet), and to undertake further, systematic surveys in the immediate area to determine whether or not other rock art sites occurred there;

2, to undertake a preliminary analysis of the rock art so as to enable an assessment of:

a) its research and scientific importance; and  
b) its artistic characteristics, relative to rock art from other parts of southeast Cape York Peninsula; and,

3, to identify management issues for the rock art sites of Bonney Glen Station, including the rock art's educational potential as well as its cultural value. Given the sensitivity of rock art sites to human visitation, it was important that protocols be defined concerning the visitation of sites (for educational, recreational or cultural reasons) in order to minimise visitor impacts.

## THE SITES

Nine rock art sites were identified within a small area, 500m long by 200m wide (Fig. 2). This area consists of open woodland on the north-western slopes of a range known as 'The Granites'. It is dissected by small, seasonal creeks, with large granite boulders occurring throughout the area. Some of these boulders contain shallow overhangs sheltering rock paintings (Fig. 3).

Granite boulders and long granite cliffs border tributaries of Granite Ck to the west beyond the surveyed area, but these were not checked for art.

SITE 1. The largest site seen in the area. It consists of a large, flat, near-vertical surface on a massive granite boulder, protected from rain by a shallow overhang (Fig. 4). Twenty-three paintings may be discerned in various states of preservation on the rock surface (Table 1), although many more faded, indistinct traces of pigment could also be detected (Fig. 5).

TABLE 1. Paintings from Site 1.

Motif	Yellow	Red	White	White & Red
Anthropomorph: horizontal up-side down upright	1	2  1	1	1
Trident/bird track		1		
Non-figurative linear		12		
Indeterminate		4		

The main painting here is a large, upside-down anthropomorph. Most paintings are in monochrome infilled red, white or yellow, although one anthropomorph is painted in white infill with red outline (Table 1).

One of the notable features of the art of Site 1 is its numerous superimpositions; seven distinct cases were identified:

1. A red, non-figurative linear design over a white up-side down anthropomorph.

2. A white outlined, red infilled horizontal anthropomorph over a red infilled horizontal anthropomorph.

3. A white infilled, up-side down anthropomorph over a trident.

4 & 5. A white infilled anthropomorph over two red linear designs.

6 & 7. A yellow infilled anthropomorph over two red linear designs.

There were other cases where the patterning of superimpositions was not clear. The fact that red non-figurative linear designs occur both above and below the white, up-side down anthropomorph implies that the site probably witnessed at least two episodes of painting involving linear designs (unless the entire panel is a single event). Non-figurative linear paintings were followed by the painting of a white anthropomorph, followed by further non-figurative linear paintings.

It is also apparent that the yellow infilled horizontal anthropomorph was painted after the majority of the red non-figurative linear paintings were done (superimpositions 6 & 7). That is, red non-figurative linear designs appear to be both amongst the earliest and most recent paintings at this site.

SITE 2. Contains a single painting of a white horse under a small overhang on a granite boulder (Figs 6 & 7). This painting is believed to have been undertaken by a member of the Lee Cheu family (Ceaser or Henry), sometime around 1965-1970. This was claimed by both Mr. Lester

Rosendale, a member of the Kuku Yalanji community, and Mr. Trevor Weir, the current pastoral manager of Bonney Glen Station (pers. comm. 1991). This knowledge is claimed to have been handed-down from Mr Tommy Edmonds, a past lessee of some 30 years standing of Bonney Glen Station, and Mr. George Ahlers, owner of nearby Maitland Downs Station.

SITE 3. Contains seven paintings in a medium-sized overhang under massive granite boulders. These paintings include six infilled red anthropomorphs and one indeterminate red painting (Fig. 8). There is a single case of superimposition, where a red anthropomorph is partly painted over another.

SITE 4. Consists of a granite boulder with a shallow overhang which contains five faded paintings, all of which are red and infilled. The forms of only two of these are identifiable — a dog and an anthropomorph (Fig. 9).

SITE 5. A small rockshelter formed by a shallow overhang under a granite boulder, in which two infilled red anthropomorphs were painted (Figs 10 & 11). One of these has been almost entirely obliterated by water percolating down the rock face, while the other is a painted male figure in fairly good condition.

SITE 6. Consists of an overhang created by a number of boulders leaning against each other. Painted figures include an anthropomorph, a zoomorph and two indeterminate red infilled figures (Fig. 12). All paintings are faded and it is possible that other figures, now too indistinct to be clearly made out, once occurred at the site.

SITE 7. Consists of a small rock surface on a boulder, containing very faded, indistinct traces of pigment.

SITE 8. A large, flat rock surface under a granite boulder overhang (Fig. 13), with two white outlined and red infilled horizontal anthropomorphs, one red infilled horizontal anthropomorph, and three indistinct red paintings. Although some of the paintings are faded, the site also contains some of the best preserved rock paintings from the area. The two horizontal anthropomorphs are in particularly good condition.

SITE 9. Consists of an infilled red anthropomorph and an indistinct red painting under an overhang created by two leaning boulders (Fig. 14). The paintings are very faded.

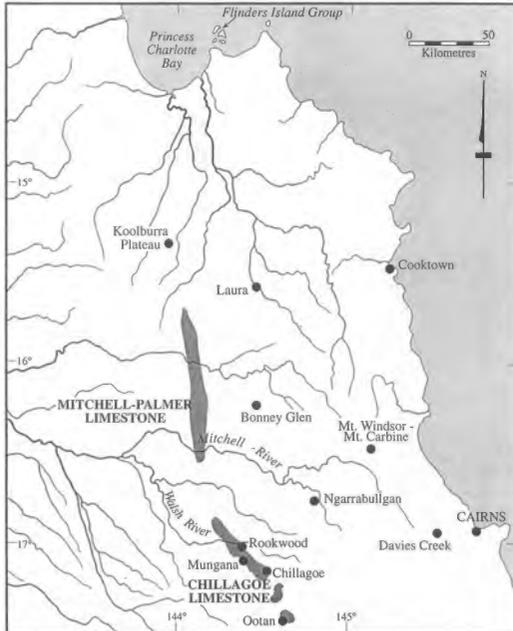


FIG. 1. Southeast Cape York Peninsula, showing location of Bonney Glen Station and other places mentioned in text.

### SITE LOCATIONS

All sites are located within 100m of a temporary water source, on the upper slopes near small creeks. Available rock surfaces protected from rainfall and water wash often exhibit rock paintings. There is no obvious preference for the painting of surfaces facing particular directions only (although the sample size is small) (Table 2).

### SITE PRESERVATION STATUS

All of the sites possess some form of damage. Eight contain wasp nests, while seven sites show evidence of natural rock disintegration in the form of mineral staining or exfoliation. The various sources of damage are outlined in Table 3.

### ANTIQUITY OF THE ROCK ART

It is likely that all of the rock art reported here dates to the late Holocene. Indeed, it is probable all are considerably less than 1,000 years old, for the following reasons:

1. The granite appears to be continuously exfoliating, militating against the long-term survival of painted surfaces.

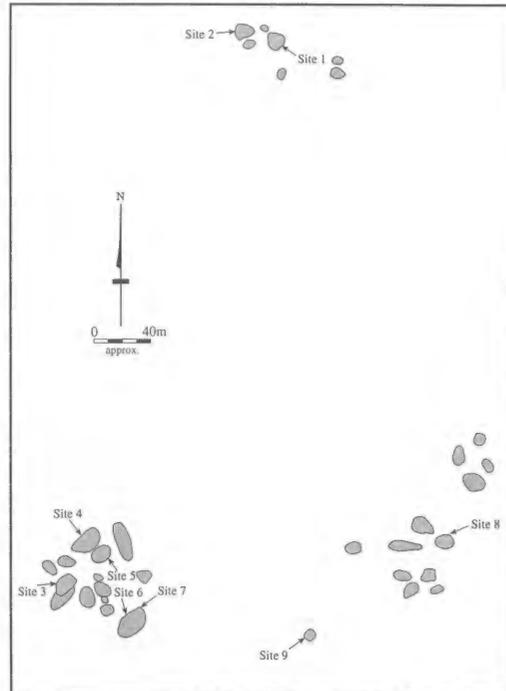


FIG. 2. Relative location of boulders and sites, Bonney Glen Station. Not to scale.

2. Water runs across the face of a number of painted surfaces. All painted surfaces are relatively exposed to the elements, and therefore any art dating to thousands of years ago would be expected to have been washed away. This is particularly so of early-to-mid Holocene art, when conditions were considerably wetter than today. Furthermore, it could be expected that environmental changes during the last few thousand years resulted in the migration of percolating water across rock surfaces. If the art had any great antiquity, various parts of the painted surfaces would be differentially damaged following changes in the patterns of water-flow. Instead, paintings on rock surfaces are either intact, or sections are totally obliterated. There is little evidence of migrating water flow across painted rock surfaces.

3. A significant number of paintings are of unstable white pigments (presumably kaolinite). This pigment is known to deteriorate relatively quickly. Some of the white pigment is still flaking off the walls.

4. Site 4 contains a painted dog. Dingoes were introduced into Australia *c.*4,000-3,700BP, indicating

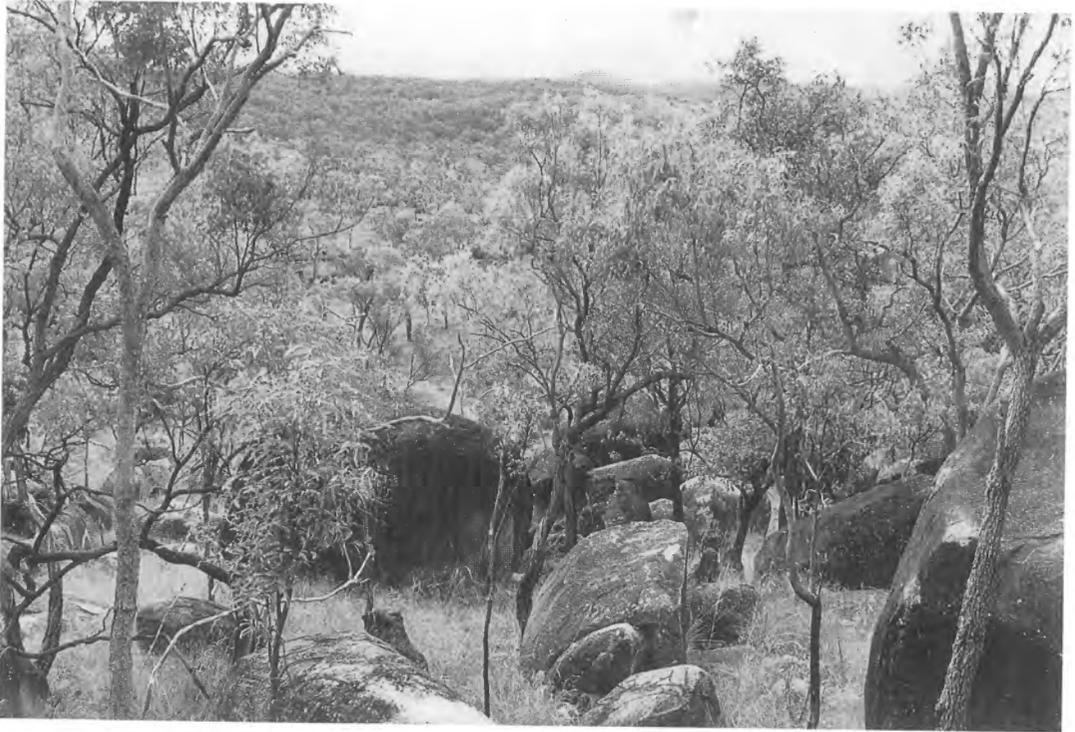


FIG. 3. Granite boulders containing the Bonney Glen sites.

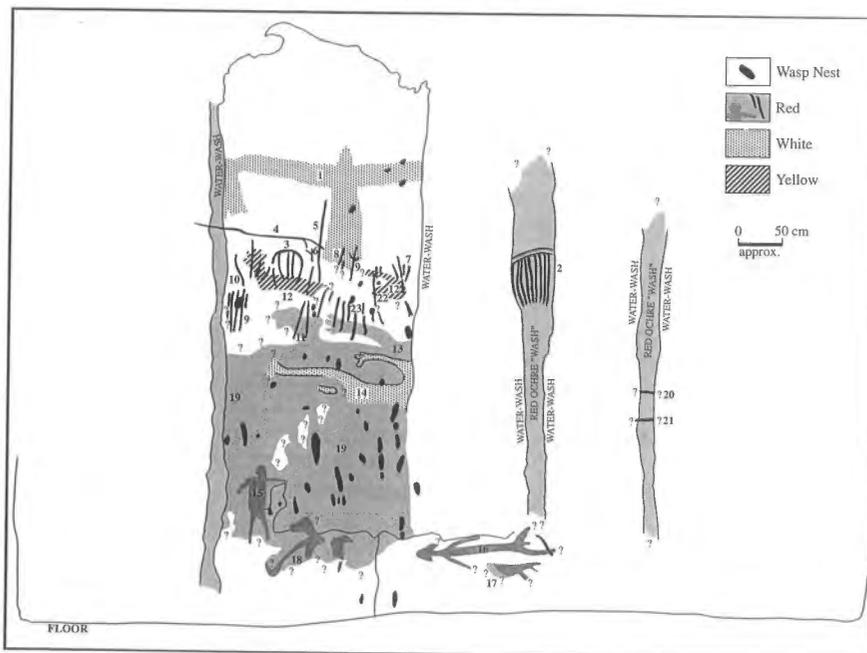


FIG. 4. Sketch recording of the paintings from Site 1. Not to scale.

TABLE 2. Site aspects.

Dominant Aspect (°)	Number of Sites
0-44	2
45-89	1
90-134	1
135-179	1
180-224	0
225-269	0
270-314	2
315-359	2

TABLE 3. Sources of damage, by site.

Type of Damage	Number of Sites
Insect nests	8
Pig rooting (on floor)	6
Macropod faeces (on floor)	1
Exfoliation	7
Mineral staining	7
Fungus/algae/lichens	4
Other plants	1



FIG. 5. Site 1.

that at least this painting must be more recent than this.

### CONCLUSION

The Bonney Glen rock art sites are the first documented sites from this part of Cape York Peninsula. They demonstrate a previously unknown variant of a predominantly figurative artistic tradition where anthropomorphs predominate. The latter are usually painted in red, although white and yellow figures also occur. Zoomorphs are present but less common. A single animal track and a number of non-figurative, linear figures are also present.

The stylistic conventions used at Bonney Glen Station are highly reminiscent of the Mitchell-Palmer paintings to the immediate west (and also in Kuku Yalanji country), although the high proportions of horizontal anthropomorphs at Bonney Glen distinguishes them as a local variant. For comparative purposes, Table 4 lists the proportions of paintings from various parts of north Queensland by motif types.



FIG. 6. The white horse painting, Site 2.

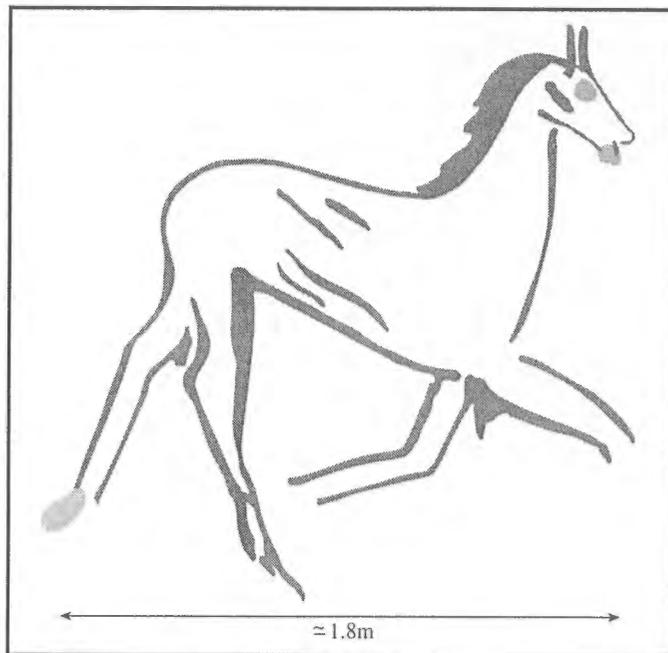


FIG. 7. Sketch recording of white painting, Site 2. Not to scale.

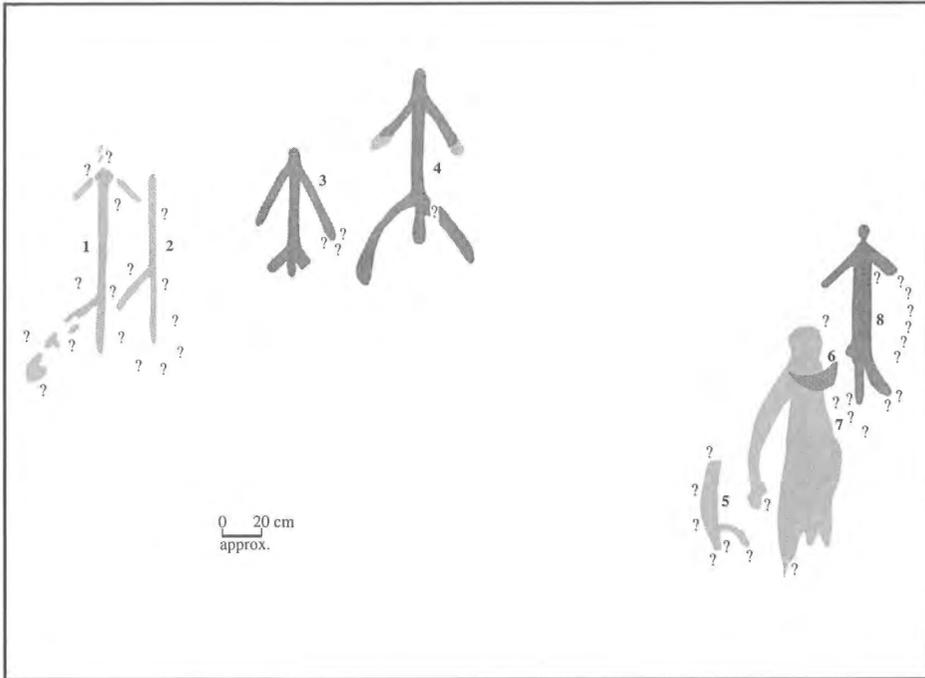


FIG. 8. Sketch recording of paintings, showing various shades of red, Site 3. Items 6 and 8 are most likely from the same picture. Not to scale.

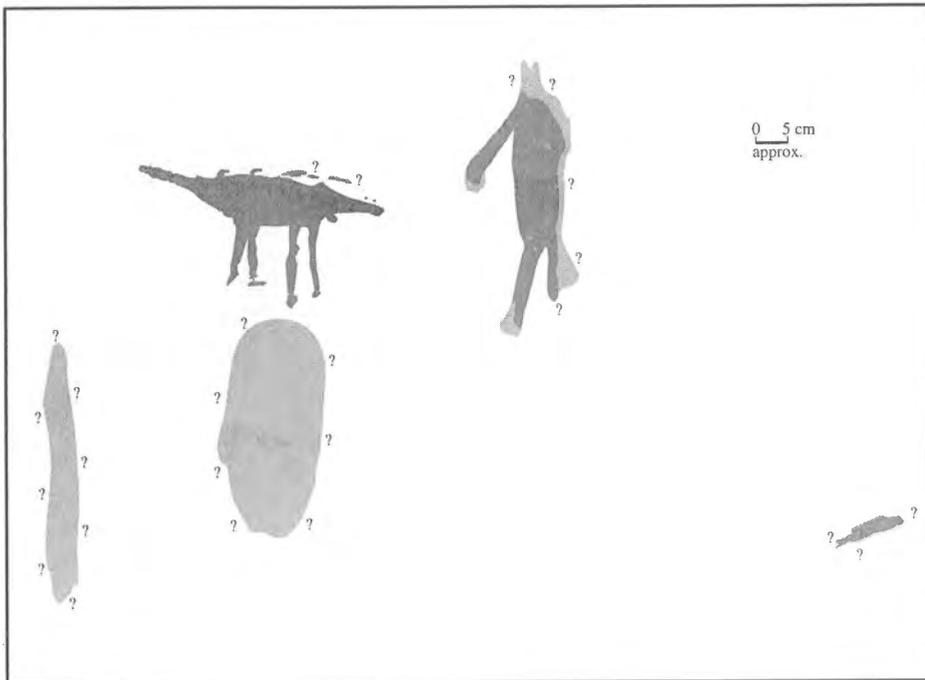


FIG. 9. Sketch recording of paintings, lighter shade of grey = faded red ochre, Site 4. Not to scale.



FIG. 10. Red anthropomorphs, site.

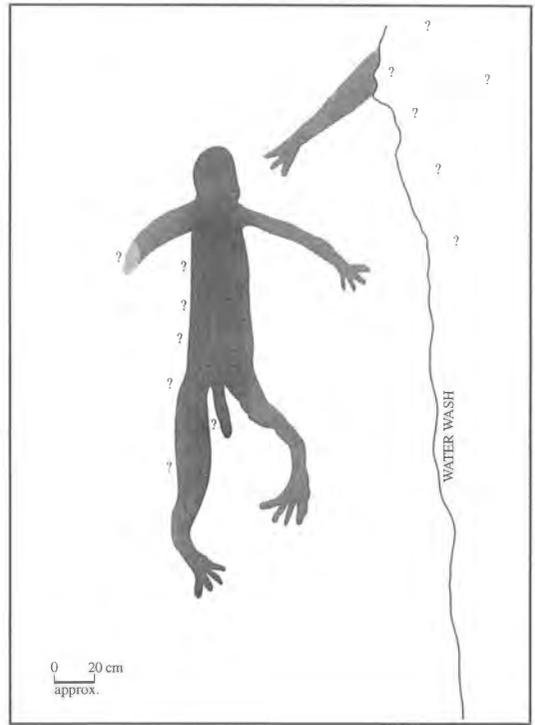


FIG. 11. Sketch recording of paintings, lighter shade of grey = faded red ochre, Site 5. Not to scale.

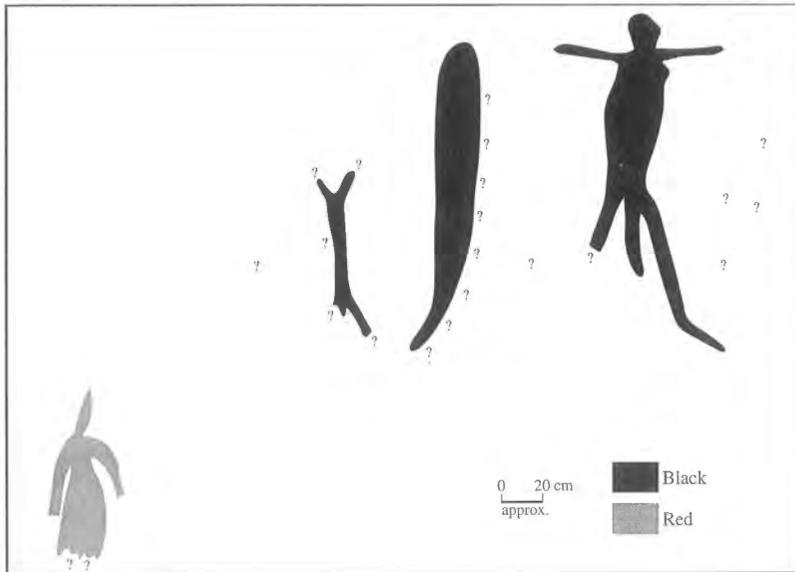


FIG. 12. Sketch recording of paintings, Site 6. Not to scale.

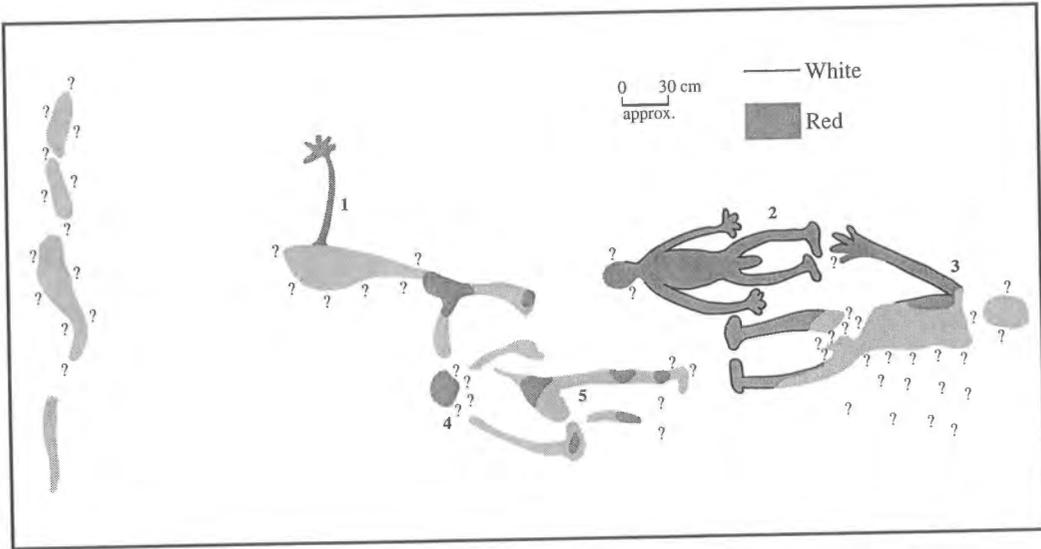


FIG. 13. Sketch recording of paintings, lighter shade of grey = faded red ochre, Site 8. Not to scale.

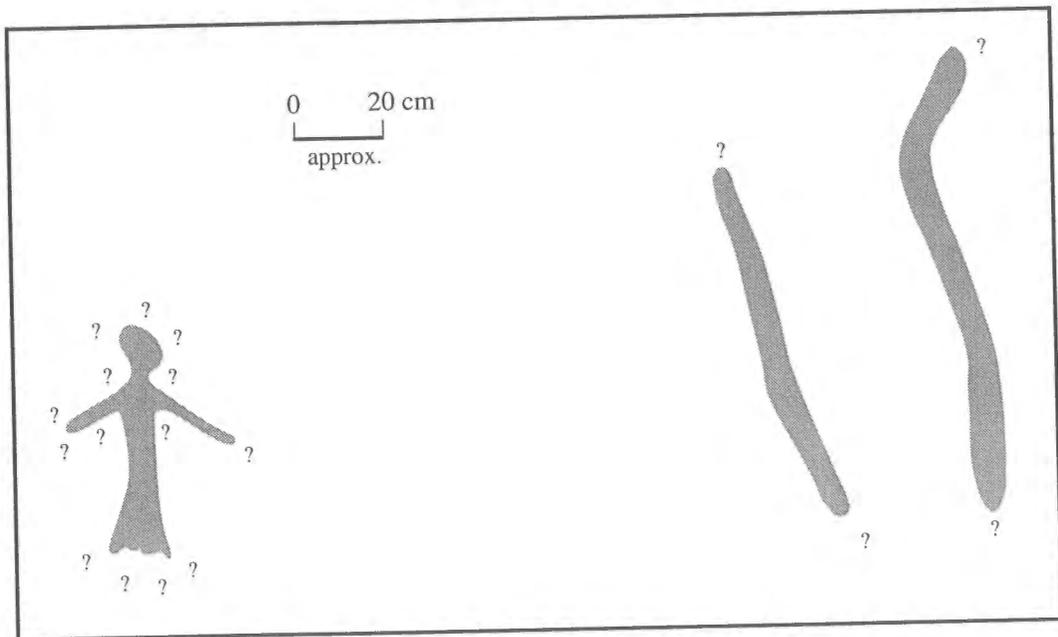


FIG. 14. Sketch recording of paintings, Site 9. Not to scale.

TABLE 4. The percentage distribution of north Queensland painting types, by region (see David &amp; Chant, 1995 for details).

Region	Humans	Animals	Plants	Weapons	Tracks	Sets of dots/ circles	Other non- figurative pic- tures
Bonney Glen Station	57	6			3		34
Mitchell-Palmer	71	8		9			12
Laura	55	31	5	1	1		7
Koolburra Plateau	48	17	5	1	14		16
Bare Hill	60	6		7	4		24
Mt. Windsor/Mt. Carbine/Cooktown	49	5		3			44
Chillagoe	1	2		<1	13	2	82

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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