

The Spirit Figure Group at Gum Tree Valley

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LORBLANCHET, MICHEL. 2018. The Spirit Figure Group at Gum Tree Valley. In *Archaeology and Petroglyphs of Dampier (Western Australia), an Archaeological Investigation of Skew Valley and Gum Tree Valley*, ed. Graeme K. Ward and Ken Mulvaney, chapter 3, pp. 191–282. *Technical Reports of the Australian Museum, Online* 27, pp. 1–690.
<https://doi.org/10.3853/j.1835-4211.27.2018.1691>

The Spirit Figure Site

The Spirit Figure Group (or ‘Spirit Group’, GTVS) is located at the entry to Gum Tree Valley, more precisely at the entry to the gorge, alongside and following the stream to the Eagle Group (GTVE), which is 250 m to the east (Fig. 3.1). The site consists of a large broken steep slope, about 15 m high, oriented to the north, where the gabbro boulders are covered in petroglyphs (Fig. 3.2). This slope towers over the creek side of Gum Tree Valley. Here the creek bed is dry for about ten months of the year, while the hollows and basins of the gorge, 150 m to the east, usually retain water for most of the year.

The GTVS Group is located at the confluence of Gum Tree Valley with two other shorter valleys of small seasonal creeks, one oriented north-south (aligned with the Damper Salt road), and the other, almost east-west (Fig. 3.3).

Two shell mounds of about 15 m in diameter and about one half-metre in maximum height (Fig. 3.4: Middens A and B), both consisting of an accumulation of *Anadara granosa*, are located on either side of the confluence. Midden B, while more extensive, is less elevated and less important than Midden A.

Midden A is positioned in front of the greatest concentration of petroglyphs on the slope. An abandoned grinding stone is conspicuous at the foot of the slope beside the stream. It is this concentration, comprising 161 carved surfaces and 382 images, lying within a rectangle of 30 × 32 m, which has been named ‘GTVS’. To the south, high up on the slopes, petroglyphs are almost absent (Fig. 3.4: cross-section). To the east, at the gorge entrance, the petroglyphs extend almost continuously towards GTVE, but are many fewer than at GTVS. In this sector (named ‘GTVSO’), eight

particularly interesting motifs have been identified and studied although they are outside the original sample area (Fig. 3.4: GTVSO-1 {p. 277} to -8 {p. 281}).

Ultimately, the location and the distribution of the petroglyphs, which become more numerous in front of Midden A, show a direct link between the habitat and the petroglyphs. As at SKV and GTVE, many of these petroglyphs therefore were made by the shellfish collectors.

The map of relative densities (Fig. 3.5) shows that the petroglyphs are more numerous at the base of the slope in Zone B while they are clearly fewer at the top of the slope in Zone H (Fig. 3.5). Finally, within Zone B, a more concentrated cluster of rocks is evident; this has been named ‘Group C’ (Fig. 3.5).

The Spirit Figure Group petroglyphs

Depictions of humans

Representations of humans are the most numerous motifs of the Spirit Group (Table 3.1). A total of 112 has been recorded; these represent nearly 30% of the total petroglyphs. The image dimensions are relatively small (Table 3.2).¹

The histogram of heights is clearly bimodal; on the abscissa (horizontal, Y-axis) there are 15 height categories of 5–9, 10–15 cm etc., and on the ordinate (vertical, X-axis) are the percentages of the different classes of motifs (Fig. 3.7). The two peaks are well separated. The population of ‘human’ motifs at GTVS is thus heterogeneous. Two groups are apparent, one composed of motifs of heights between 21 and 25 cm and the other of 36–40 cm in height. As in other parts of Gum Tree Valley, these two groups’ dimensions correspond to two different types: