

Changing Perspectives in Australian Archaeology, Part XI

Rare and Curious Thylacine Depictions from Wollemi National Park, New South Wales and Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

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ABSTRACT. Thylacines have long fascinated both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Ancient rock art depictions and recent attempts to clone thylacines with DNA from preserved specimens are good examples of this interest, with the Australian Museum involved in both the documentation of thylacine rock art and DNA sequencing. In this paper we report on a curious rock drawing from a site within Wollemi National Park, NSW and another rock art panel with superimposed paintings from Arnhem Land, NT. Both sites were found in recent years and documented as part of larger regional studies. Val Attenbrow has long argued that we should be cautious when interpreting archaeological evidence and assigning age, so with this in mind we offer a scientific assessment of these rare and unusual thylacine-like images. We conclude that images of thylacines were likely made over both a longer period of time and across a more geographically diverse area than previously realized.

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In early 2001 an investigation was initiated into the rock art of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, with a focus on Wollemi National Park. Wollemi had not been studied for rock art until then and little was known about its cultural heritage. However, the southern part of Wollemi National Park contains much Hawkesbury sandstone, ideal places for engraved platforms and adorned rock shelters. As

Attenbrow (2002: 145–146) notes,

[t]oday, the most numerous images that survive in the Sydney region are the striking engraved figures on rock platforms, and the drawings, paintings and stencils (pigment images) and a lesser number of engravings in rock shelters. These images are part of a regional style that stretches from the southern rim of the Hunter Valley in the north, to the Woronora Plateau in

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