

Archaeology and Petroglyphs of Dampier Editors' Introduction

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ABSTRACT. Dampier Archipelago, on the northwestern coast of Australia has perhaps the greatest number and concentration of petroglyphs any where in the world. In this introduction to Lorblanchet's pioneering investigation of the archaeology of the Dampier petroglyphs, we provide an outline of the region's history, drawing on records of European exploration and settlement and the evidence from some early accounts and ethnographic investigations that emphasize its status as indigenous country. We consider the history of archaeological research into the Dampier petroglyphs, and describe how Michel Lorblanchet, an expert in French Palaeolithic cave art, came to make Aboriginal Australia, and Dampier in particular, his major research focus between 1975 and 1984.

In discussing Lorblanchet's legacy, we set his Dampier investigations within the context of Australian rock-art research at that time, discuss his field methodology and the analytical rigour that he brought to his study of the Dampier petroglyphs and their archaeology, his development of an appropriate typology, one drawing upon form, patination, carving techniques and other attributes. He emphasized the importance of recognising re-marking, seeing the carvings as 'living surfaces' contributing to a dynamic culture. There is another part of Lorblanchet's legacy, for he not only brought new research perspectives to his Australian studies but, on his return to France, allowed his Australian Aboriginal experience to influence his study and perceptions of the European Palaeolithic.

We note more recent research into the Dampier petroglyphs, especially the archaeological recording and salvage operations and cultural landscape surveys of the last few decades; we reflect on the variously successful or otherwise attempts to promote recognition of the Dampier petroglyphs' significance and protection. Recent initiatives seek to emphasize the 'Potential Outstanding Universal Value' of the Dampier Archipelago, while the role of native title settlement and the establishment and administration of the new Murujuga National Park is changing the dynamics of the place. Effort is being focused upon securing the status and the provision of protection of the petroglyphs and their archaeological settings.

Finally, we note our editorial and authorial stances on terminology, on descriptions of marks, and the sources of the many illustrations provided in these reports.