

## The Eagle Group at Gum Tree Valley

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### The Eagle Group Site

In the middle part of Gum Tree Valley, about equidistant from the upper reaches and the mouth of a gorge, the slopes diverge to form a kind of amphitheatre (*cirque*), the base of which is occupied by a large shell mound, 23 m in diameter and about 1.5 m high. The mound is formed by accumulations of *Anadara granosa* shells; most have not been disturbed and are intact (Fig. 4.1). The central midden of the middle of Gum Tree Valley (GTVE) thus resembles that of Skew Valley and most of shellfish mounds on the Dampier coast. This suggests that it is roughly contemporaneous with the Skew Valley mound about 1.2 km to the north.

The layout of the place, the presence of two major slopes surrounding a central midden (a habitation site), explains the high number of petroglyphs in the vicinity. The presence of a seasonal water source clearly played a role in this concentration of remains: large basins of potable water (although tending to be brackish) last for seven or eight months of each year in the gorge about 40 m to the west, downstream of the mound, beside a pathway that leads to the ocean shore. The petroglyphs are much less numerous in the gorge around the pools than in the amphitheatre where the gorge widens and the midden is located.

The amphitheatre is asymmetrical, and it is bisected by the stream, which is oriented east-west. The northern side of the valley, which backs the shell mound, has a height of 7–8 m. Its slope is relatively slight, whereas the southern side, which faces the midden, is 10–12 m in height and slopes steeply (Fig. 4.2). As throughout this part of Dampier Island, both sides of the valley are covered with large gabbro blocks, which sometimes bear petroglyphs on several surfaces.

In a rectangular area of 90 × 105 m, of which the midden occupies the centre, we recorded 364 blocks bearing petroglyphs and mapped them using a theodolite (Figs 4.3 and 4.4). As is my usual practice (Lorblanchet, 1977, 1980, 1983), they have been numbered on photographs of the site (Fig. 4.5).

A map of relative densities of the petroglyphs (produced by Jekhowsky's method) highlights these points (Fig. 4.6). The distribution pattern emphasises the relationship between the shell mound and most of the petroglyphs. Away from the midden, carved blocks become rarer and even absent, especially on the top of the northern hill, and to the west on the sub-vertical walls of the gorge that overlook the sources of semi-permanent water.<sup>1</sup> The density of petroglyphs also decreases sharply ascending the thalweg<sup>2</sup> towards the east and leaving the amphitheatre that contains the habitation area. Towards the south, the petroglyphs disappear almost completely at the top of the hill. However, a few motifs appear here and there on a kind of isthmus connecting GTVE to a small satellite grouping, at the edge of a grassy plateau, where the depiction of a kangaroo (GTVE-400 {p. 407})<sup>3</sup> is located.

As the density plot shows, the concentration of petroglyphs is much higher on the more sunlit Southern Slope than on the Northern Slope. A total 267 blocks decorated with 424 motifs was found in the south, and only 97 blocks with 162 motifs in the north. Thus, many motifs are displayed on a large regular steep slope, where they are highlighted. An observer standing on the shell mound enjoys a continuous spectacle of petroglyphs, progressively lit by the sun's path across the dark side of the slope. It is likely that the placement of the motifs was chosen so that