

DAKHLEH OASIS

PETROGLYPH UNIT

NEW ROCK ART SITES, SEASON 2005

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Research on petroglyphs in Dakhleh Oasis was continued in February 2005.¹ As in previous years, the Petroglyph Unit was an integral part of the Dakhleh Oasis Project (D.O.P.) and was organized by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University in association with the Poznań Archaeological Museum.² The key objective of the season was to begin systematic work in the central part of the Oasis.

1 Cf. L. Krzyżaniak, *PAM XV, Reports 2003 (2004)*, 181-189, with earlier references.

2 The fieldwork was carried out by Ms Ewa Kuciewicz and Ms Eliza Jaroni, both from the Poznań Archaeological Museum, and coordinated by Prof. Dr. Michał Kobusiewicz from the Polish Academy of Sciences, Poznań Branch. The project received financial support from the following institutions: Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University, Poznań Archaeological Museum, Patrimonium Foundation in Poznań. The members of the field party wish to express their gratitude to the Director of the Dakhleh Oasis Project, Professor Anthony J. Mills, and to the Director of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, Professor Michał Gawlikowski.

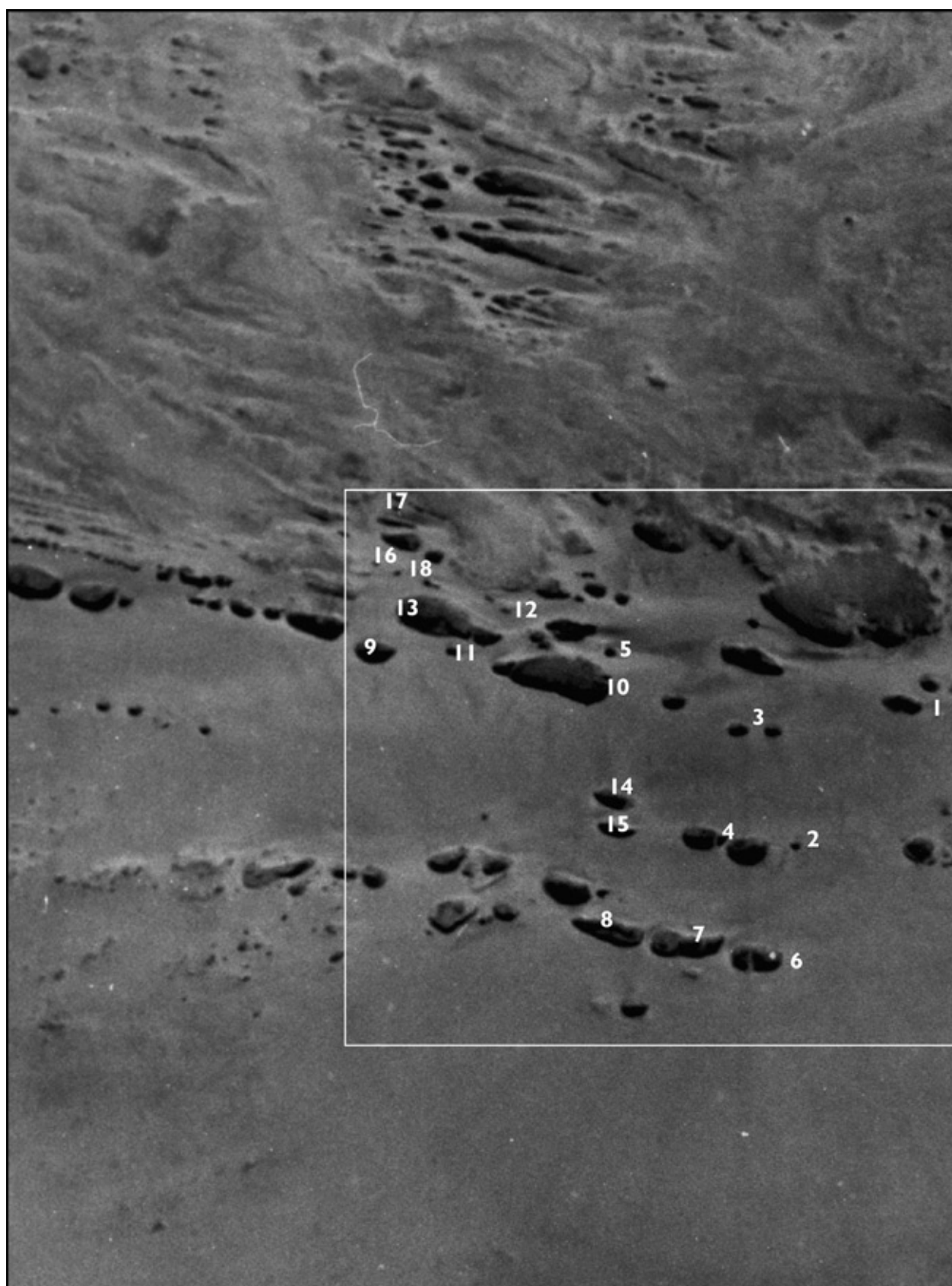


Fig. 1. 'Painted Wadi'. Area of concentrated research in 2005 area (outlined). Numbers correspond to rock-art sites (D.O.P.)

“PAINTED WADI”

Work concentrated in an area explored for the first time in 2003 when note was taken of the abundance of rock art found there. The present season brought more discoveries, but the primary goal of the continued survey was a prominent wadi in the area of the Central Oasis (aerial photos covering the entire 8 km of its length nos 70/32-38). Time limitations prompted the team to concentrate on the central part of this “Painted Wadi”, as it has come to be called [Fig. 1]. About one-sixth of its length was surveyed this year.

The main purpose of the season was to complete full documentation of all the manifestations of human activity in the area. Every hill in the zone was surveyed, as well as surrounding features and the wadi itself in search of data for dating the rock art and for establishing patterns of petroglyph distribution over the ages.



Fig. 2. Vestiges of a but on a hill



*Fig. 3. Remains of a seasonal camp site surveyed on the wadi surface
(Photo E. Kuciewicz, top and bottom)*



Fig. 4. Two examples of petroglyphs from the Neolithic period from site 4 (top) and site 15 (Photo E. Kuciewicz)

Until more sophisticated methods become available, our investigations will have to rely on such straightforward spatial connections between existing rock art and living sites found nearby.

The area is known to be rich in flint material, mostly of Middle Paleolithic, but also of Neolithic date, but not distinctive enough to define the culture. Fire places and pieces of grinding stones suggesting temporary camp sites were also located during the survey, as were huts on top of the more prominent hills [Figs 2, 3], sometimes quite numerous, even reaching twenty in number, and at least one watch post of Old Kingdom date. An analysis of these finds in connection with the distribution of rock art should hopefully give positive results.

Eighteen sites with rock art have been recorded [cf. Fig. 1]. All were photograph-

ed, traced on transparent foil and described in petroglyph sheets. Special attention was paid to all observed superimpositions of petroglyphs and variations of execution technique. Accumulated data of this kind can possibly help to identify those responsible for the carvings. A preliminary stylistic analysis of this year's finds has distinguished petroglyphs created in Arab times (tribal signs, animals typical of the period, inscriptions), in the Dynastic period (cows executed in a certain style, stylized human figures etc.) and earlier, probably Neolithic in origin. The last category is the most impressive, maybe not in quantity, but in quality for sure [Fig. 4].

A new method of recording rock art tested this year was orthophotography [Fig. 5]. Site 4 was chosen for the pur-

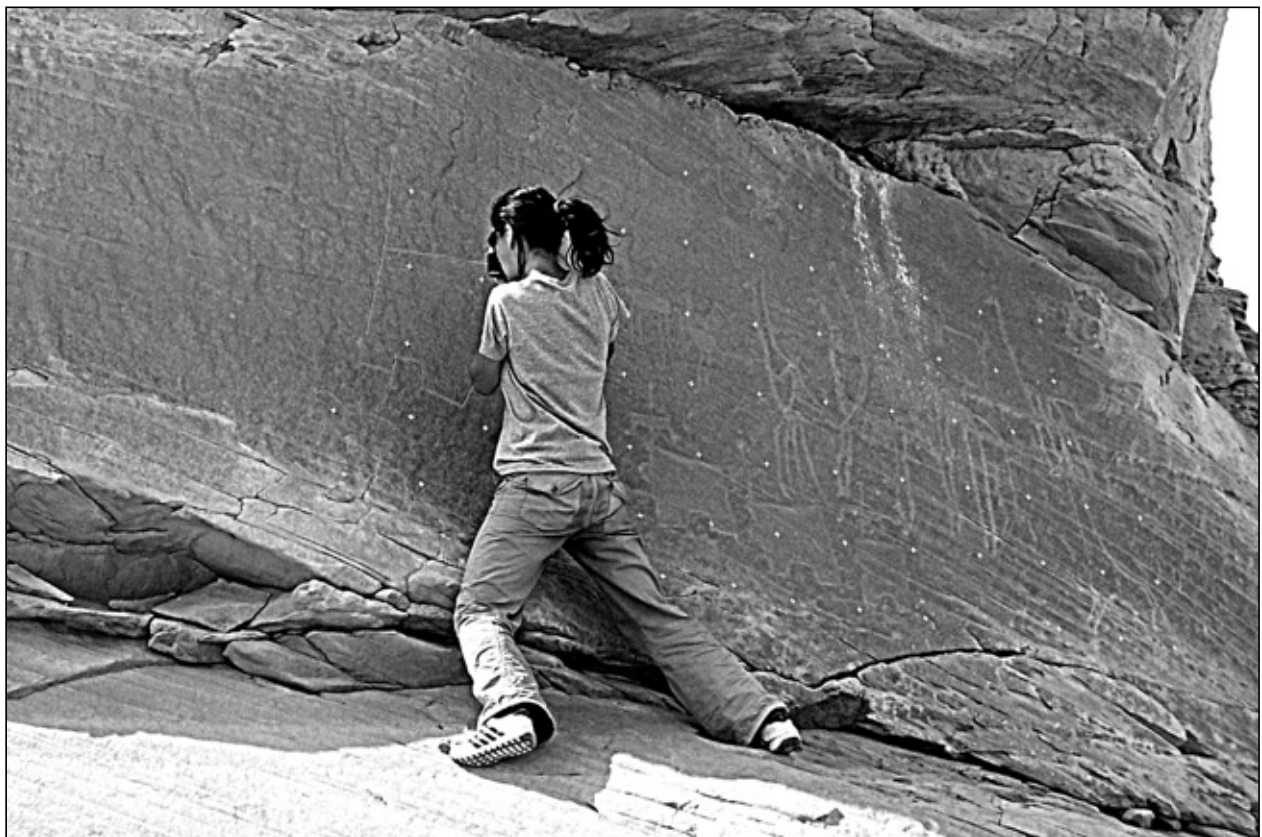


Fig. 5. Testing orthophotography as a method of recording rock art (Photo E. Jaroni)

pose. The resulting photos should present high-quality images of large panels of rock art without any perspective distor-

tions. An added value of the method is the possibility to make photo enlargements suitable for exhibition purposes.

ROCK PAINTING EXPERIMENT

The experiment with ochre-painting of petroglyphs, described in a previous report,³ proceeded according to plan. The rock paintings made by team members in 2003 were now inspected by the Unit. Digital

photographs consistent with the IFRAO (International Federation of Rock Art Organizations) Standard Scale were taken and will be compared to data from the previous season using appropriate software.

3 *PAM XV*, op. cit., 189.