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Errors and omissions:

At the foot of page 23 where there is a reference to the modern petroglyph DgRw225, it may be of interest that the carver was Barrie Lawrence, in his time a well-known artist on the island. His grandmother was Tsimshian. The Beth Hill reference is “Indian Petroglyphs of the Pacific Northwest”, University of Washington Press, 1974, pp.180-181. Myers Passage is in or very close to Tsimshian traditional territory.

References:

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# Visions cast on stone

## a stylistic analysis of Gabriola's petroglyphs

by Amanda Adams

*This is an edited summary of a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of British Columbia in December 2003. The complete work has 78 pages including an extensive bibliography.*

### Introduction

One sunny July afternoon, I sat beside a Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> Elder, in her early 90s, at an Elders' Picnic on Newcastle Island. I told her a bit about my research over a lunch of ham sandwiches and Kool-Aid, and I asked her if she knew anything about the petroglyphs on Gabriola Island. Her eyes, if I may say so, sparkled brightly, and she sat up a bit straighter, keen on sharing her knowledge of such things. Aside from the petroglyph on Jack Point and its well-known oral history, she knew very little about why the carvings were made, or by whom they were carved. As she explained to me, "I always wished I had paid more attention to things then. I wish I had asked my grandmother what the pictures were for."

Knowledge of the purposes that the petroglyphs may have served at both the moment of their creation and/or in pre-contact times has been largely lost. The power, sacredness, and cultural weight of the carvings, however, have not.

Until recently, use of the petroglyphs has been a source of friction and, at times, contentious debate, between the Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> and some of the residents of Gabriola. The Snunéymux<sup>w</sup>, rightfully angered and concerned that the sacred images produced by their ancestors were

being disrespectfully used for commercial purposes took steps to curb such usage. With regard to the Gabriola Museum and its collection of outdoor petroglyph casts, an agreement was forged, whereby individuals are allowed to make rubbings for personal use, but not for sale or profit.

While the Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> regard the petroglyphs as belonging unequivocally to them, some Gabriola residents, but by no means all, feel that the rock carvings belong, again unequivocally, to the present-day landowners. This contemporary social context provides an important framework within which my archaeological research was situated; inquiries into the location, significance, antiquity, and so on of the petroglyph sites were never divorced from the above issues. Thus it was one of the rare situations where people outside of both the indigenous community and the archaeological community possessed a charged and piqued interest in the fate and interpretation of the carvings. This, of course, influenced my fieldwork.

### ***Rock art research on the Northwest Coast***

Research on the petroglyphs and pictographs of the Northwest Coast has been left largely undone. Very few, if any, professional field-based investigations have been conducted on Northwest Coast rock art since the early 1980s<sup>1</sup> and no systematic survey of

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<sup>1</sup> Beth & Ray Hill, *Indian Petroglyphs of the Pacific Northwest*, Hancock House Press, 1974. Doris Lundy, *Rock Art of the Northwest Coast*, unpublished MA thesis, SFU, 1974. Florence Joy Bell, *Rock Art*

the Gabriola petroglyphs has ever been conducted by a member of the anthropological community.<sup>2</sup> This dearth of research is due in part to lack of secure context, as petroglyphs and pictographs can rarely be associated with any certainty or precision to depositional layers of nearby or local sites. Furthermore, as no means currently exist for the absolute dating of petroglyphs, all attempts to establish chronological sequences have been based on loose groupings of style and distribution, the presence or absence of historic period artifacts (sailing ships, guns, etc.), and ethnographic information once obtained from Native peoples. Faced with these limitations, archaeologists have largely abandoned the task, leaving the territory to enthusiastic amateurs.<sup>3</sup>

In all past academic studies, authors have placed emphasis on broad regional trends in rock art distribution, variation, and by extension, their generalization. The “unit of analysis” has been the entire coastline stretching from southeastern Alaska to northern California. Exhaustive and invaluable inventories of Northwest Coast petroglyphs and pictographs have been created, but while these compilations are a necessary first step in researching them, and as such are extremely useful, they tend to

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*of the Coast Salish—An analysis of style, form, and function*, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 1982.

<sup>2</sup> Although for Quadra Island there is: Joy Inglis, *Spirit in the Stone*, Horsdal & Schubart, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Most notably Mary & Ted Bentley, *Gabriola—Petroglyph Island*, Sono Nis Press, 1981, rev. 1998. Also Edward Meade, *Indian Rock Carvings of the Pacific Northwest*, Gray’s Publishing, 1971; Douglas Leechman, *The Nanaimo Petroglyph*, Canadian Geographical Journal, 44, pp.266–8, 1952; Francis J. Barrow, *Petroglyphs and Pictographs on the BC Coast*, Canadian Geographical Journal, 24, pp.94–101, 1942; C.F. Newcombe, *Petroglyphs in BC*, Victoria Daily Times, Sep. 7, 1907.

sacrifice localized specificity in exchange for regional synthesis and generalization.

Building on the work of my predecessors, I aimed to incorporate this existing body of knowledge into a study of much smaller proportion. Furthermore, unlike earlier works which examined the petroglyphs and pictographs “as individual and isolated”, my study took a very different approach, one which stresses the inter-relatedness and connectivity of the Gabriola petroglyph repertoire.

The aim of my work was to comment on, and provide an in-depth analysis of, the impressive and intensely localized stylistic diversity as expressed in Gabriola’s petroglyphs. Specifically, my goals were:

- to better situate the petroglyphs within a chronological framework relevant to Northwest Coast artistic traditions and their change over time
- to determine, to the extent possible, if the petroglyphs were produced contemporaneously and if so, what the social implications of this might be
- to put forth some tentative interpretations as to the petroglyphs’ meanings and functions.

This last point is dependent upon the available ethnographic literature as well as on conversations and interviews with Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> Elders.

### ***Ethnographic context***

The Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> First Nation is one of several Halkomelem (*Hul’qumi’num*) speaking groups on the east coast of Vancouver Island and the Fraser valley. Boas described their traditional territory as embracing Nanaimo Harbour and its islands,

the watershed of the Nanaimo River, and Mudge and Gabriola Islands.<sup>4</sup>

During the coldest months of the year, many nights were devoted to winter ceremonies and “spirit dancing”. Participation in these winter dances was conditioned by the acquisition of a guardian spirit or supernatural “helper”. The seeking of such power constituted a key event—demanding both courage and familial training—in the lives of young men and women.

Having reached puberty, young men were made to endure rigorous exercises in preparation for and during their spirit quest. Barnett describes the process wherein a “boy stayed in lonely places, fasted and took emetics, and scrubbed himself with boughs.”<sup>5</sup> An essential part of his quest involved swimming and diving, often to the point of exhaustion or unconsciousness, in which he received a vision, a song, a spirit cry, and a promise of help....”

Once a spirit helper had been encountered and obtained—guardians that were almost exclusively “birds, animals, and fabulous spirits or monsters”—newly acquired powers were kept private and alluded to only within the context of an individual’s song, which he or she performed during the spirit dance. The possession of a spirit power was believed to bring wealth, protection, and success to its owner.

The vision quest—its seclusion, secrecy, and search for tangible power—may have some relation to petroglyphs. Current knowledge of the *raison d’être* for the petroglyphs may well be so scarce due to the once hushed and confidential nature of their existence. It is probable that the location and original

meaning of petroglyph sites was neither common nor everyday knowledge amongst the general public. As Doris Lundy notes, “...any shamanistic rock art sites, like those concerned with whaling ritual, or secret societies, would be secretive in nature as well as location, their meaning hidden from the uninitiated”.<sup>6</sup> The same was probably true for the Coast Salish spirit quest.

Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> Elder, Bill Seward asserts that many petroglyphs were made by shamans, hunters, and vision seekers, while Elder Ellen White maintains that the carvings were places where people both sought and gained power. She explained that “men would be stripped even in cold weather and laid on top of each petroglyph—learning the spirit world, connecting to the area”. She also noted that the pitted “dots” surrounding the carvings were “points of access”, places where one could dip their fingers into pools of “energy” and reservoirs of strength.

Perhaps a petroglyph image was carved to represent some newly acquired spirit power. The majority of the Gabriola petroglyphs are found in remote and isolated areas, places where individuals might have ventured to seek their vision. And furthermore, in his discussion of the Central Coast Salish, ethnographer Wayne Suttles notes that house posts were often decorated with humans, animals, and birds; transformed into culturally potent objects representative of spiritual and material wealth. Suttles suggests that while the carvings of humans may have represented ancestors, it was the nonhuman entities that portrayed and stood for vision powers.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Franz Boas, *Notes on the Snanaimuq*, American Anthropologist, 2, pp.321–8, 1889.

<sup>5</sup> Homer Barnett, *The Coast Salish of Canada*, American Anthropologist, 40, pp.118–40, 1938.

<sup>6</sup> Lundy, *ibid*, p.314, 1974.

<sup>7</sup> Wayne Suttles, *Central Coast Salish*, in *Handbook of North American Indians*, 7, pp.453–75, Smithsonian Institution, Washington: 1990.

Social stratification has great antiquity in many parts of the Northwest Coast and mid-nineteenth century Coast Salish society was no exception. At the top of the social classes rested a small number of adult males with great prestige and wealth; below them, a wide band of “good people”, characterized by strong lineages linked to traditional village or resource sites and possession of wealth in the form of spirit powers and ritual knowledge; further down, a smaller group of “worthless people”, defined as such by being “refugees and tramps”; and lastly, at the bottom, a handful of war captives turned slaves.

The distinction between classes was sharp and opportunities for upward mobility were few. Within the upper classes, however, no ranked social order prohibited an individual’s aspirations to obtain more wealth, power, or prestige; and it was generally assumed that he or she would make every effort to do so.

### ***Archaeological context***

The Gulf of Georgia region has witnessed a broad span of human history and occupation, encompassing at least nine thousand years. Archaeological investigations have produced a chronological framework of five historical sequences, referred to commonly as “cultures”, each defined by variations in technologies, artifact type, inferred social organization, and subsistence patterns.<sup>8</sup> These are:

- Old Cordilleran culture (7000–2500 BC)
- Charles culture (2500–1300 BC)
- Locarno Beach culture (1300–400 BC)

<sup>8</sup> See the original thesis or *SHALE* 15, pp.36–43 for an overview.

- Marpole culture (400 BC–1000 AD)<sup>9</sup>
- Gulf of Georgia culture (1000 AD–contact).

Margaret Holm notes that it is within the Charles culture period that the first evidence of artistic activity on the Northwest Coast emerges.<sup>10</sup>

## **Materials and methods**

### ***Site reconnaissance***

The bulk of all fieldwork was conducted during the summer months of 2002. Relying on provincial archaeological site reports, a copy of Mary and Ted Bentley’s book *Gabriola—Petroglyph Island*, and information gleaned from local residents on undocumented sites, site reconnaissance proceeded steadily, and relatively unhindered throughout my stay.

Many sites are accessible and well documented. For example, the Church site (DgRw 192) is a popular tourist destination, complete with a large sign indicating a trail leading to the extensive collection of petroglyphs located there. Locating all 70 (or more) of the carvings, however, is another matter entirely; most are so faint they are all but invisible in the dry conditions of summer. Subsequent visits to this site on wet, overcast days brought many previously unseen images into view. The

<sup>9</sup> Although the Marpole culture type is conventionally defined as ending around 500 AD, my feeling is that this temporal bracket marking a “transitional period”, is somewhat arbitrary and should be extended to 1000 AD. See Brian Thom, *The Marpole-Late Transition of the Gulf of Georgia Region*, *The Midden*, 30: pp.3–7, 1998. R.G. Matson & Gary Coupland, *The Prehistory of the Northwest Coast*, Academic Press, San Diego: 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Holm, *Prehistoric Northwest Coast Art: a stylistic analysis of the archaeological record*, Unpublished MA thesis, UBC: 1990.

majority of carvings, however, remain so visibly diminished they have almost vanished. Were it not for the rubbings and sketches produced by the Bentleys in the late 1970s the images would, undoubtedly, have been irretrievably lost.

A large number of registered petroglyph sites are on private property, and these were visited only with the landowners' permission. I was also guided to, or told about, a handful of, at-the-time, unregistered sites by some interested residents. Despite my best efforts, there were some petroglyphs that could not be seen, as some individuals on the island are averse to having heritage sites on their property.

### ***Data collection***

I photographed the petroglyphs over the course of eight months. Photographs of particular carvings were taken many times in attempt to capture the engraved motifs under optimal conditions (morning light, evening light, wet surface, dry surface, midsummer, autumn, etc.).

I had originally hoped to use Doris Lundy's classificatory scheme of "major stylistic categories"<sup>11</sup> but I found that these categories lacked the desired specificity for my analysis as none of them relate directly to archaeological culture sequences and their temporal parameters. Note should be made, however, that Gabriola Island's petroglyph repertoire fits best within the "basic conventionalized style" type with some motifs finding resonance in the "classic conventionalized rock art style" and the "abstract curvilinear rock art style".

According to Lundy, the "basic conventionalized style" is indicative of great antiquity, as it is widespread on the Northwest Coast.

<sup>11</sup> Lundy, *ibid*, 1974.

### ***Comparative analysis***

Most (64%) of Margaret Holm's existing sample of portable objects decorated with representational motifs was collected from the Gulf of Georgia region. It thus provides a strong and meaningful sample of design elements, motifs, stylistic variation, and distribution patterns with which to compare the Gabriola petroglyphs. But although Holm's work provides an invaluable framework, it is not relied upon exclusively. Other forms of analysis take into account both inter- and intra-site variability, geographic placement, and consideration of how the Gabriola petroglyphs relate to the False Narrows site and artifact assemblage.

## **Petroglyphs on Gabriola**

### ***Overview***

There are approximately 120 known petroglyphs on Gabriola Island. This number was obtained through a count of what I determined to be self-contained images. The large panel consisting of anthropomorphs at the Brickyard Hill site (DgRw 201), for example, is counted as three separate figures despite the fact that all images are clustered together on a single boulder face. The same holds for the "sea-wolf" panel at Stokes Road (DgRw 198).

What follows is a brief overview of site content and general characteristics for all of Gabriola's petroglyph locales. Before beginning, however, the provenance of some of the nomenclature applied to petroglyph motifs requires attention. Many of the petroglyphs have acquired long-standing "names" as a result of the Bentleys' identification system and through popular reference amongst locals and tourists thereafter, for example, "kingfisher", "dancing man", "killer whale", "eagle", "donald duck". These names or labels,

although useful, should not be viewed as either accurate or definitive.<sup>12</sup>

### ***North sites***

Only four carvings are registered on the northwest end of the island (DhRw 2, -5, and -13), all of which are at Lock Bay. Of these, I was not able to re-locate DhRw 2 although I have been told that the carving consisted of a “simple face lying flat on the beach” by nearby residents. Another petroglyph depicting a stick figure chasing a deer is atypical in its obvious visual narrative (DhRw 13) and its authenticity and antiquity have been questioned.

The third Lock Bay petroglyph consists of two faces carved on a large beach boulder; one face is quite faint and eroded while the

<sup>12</sup> This is especially true of the so-called “sea-wolf”, also commonly spoken of as “lightning snake” or “hai’itlik” (the Church site, DgRw 192, and Museum both use this title in their information boards) and sometimes as “wasgo” or “wasco”. Certain Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> individuals were quite irritated by this apparent misnomer.

The former terminology derives from a specific Nuuchah-nulth figure (the “hai’itlik” or Lightning Serpent is associated with the Thunderbird and becomes the Thunderbird’s harpoon when it takes whales). The term really shouldn’t be used outside the Nuuchah-nulth area and that specific context.

The same holds for “wasgo”, which is a Haida word and describes an important image in their art: a dorsal fin added to a wolf figure with occasional whales in the mouth or paws, showing that this was a major predator of the sea. Again, the label is misleading because the cultural context is wrong.

It is difficult, however, to find an appropriate descriptive designation for the peculiar “sea wolf” creature. Certainly a label such as “sinuous beast with hunched limbs, long tail, ferocious teeth, and fiery mouth” is cumbersome and inconvenient. I employ the name “sea-wolf” here for descriptive purposes—as the creature does possess wolf-like features and a sea-serpent’s form—yet I do so with awareness that the label lacks ethnographic specificity. Several Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> refer to the creature simply as “mythical”.

other, a near cookie-cutter impression of the other, appears to be much more recent and sharp-edged. A deep bowl-shaped feature is located on top of the boulder.

### ***South sites***

Along the southern coastline, five petroglyphs have been recorded. Of these five, only two remain intact and situated in their original location. The “Hilarius Farm” petroglyph consisted of a heartshape headed anthropomorph and two “feet” as well as an undetermined zoomorphic figure. The anthropomorphic figure was reportedly destroyed when the landowner mixed cement on it. The other petroglyph was described, according to the site inventory form, as “faint” in 1979. It has likely eroded away completely, as it could not be relocated during site reconnaissance.

One of potential interesting and unique petroglyph on Gabriola (DgRw 225) is found buried on a beach at False Narrows beneath several inches of sand during the summer months and storm/logging debris during winter. I noted in my thesis that this image is the only carving found on Gabriola that exhibits the classic ovoid design. What I did not know at the time this study was concluded, is that this is a late-20th-century work of a resident—which fully explains its unusual character.

Perhaps the most familiar petroglyph on Gabriola was first documented in 1874 by provincial surveyor John J. Landale, who noted on his map the “Indian carving of [a] seal on rock”. The solitary carving is most commonly interpreted as a “killer whale” by local residents (DgRw 2) and it is located in a reclusive corner of Degnen Bay below the high tide line on a smooth and sloping slab of sandstone. At first glance, the petroglyph appears to be in excellent condition. The late Frank Degnen, however, had “deepened

the lines of the killer whale because he feared the carving had become too faint to identify” in the early 1900s.

### *Inland sites*

Unlike the previous sites, which consist of essentially solitary carvings—isolated and relatively easy to describe—the petroglyph sites located further inland are more complex, both in the volume of their imagery and their intra-site variation.

#### *Brickyard Hill (DgRw 201)*

The character of this site was jokingly but aptly described by a local watercolour artist as a place where one finds “a classic Northwest Coast eagle staring at aliens!” Such a characterization derives from the dramatic difference in style types found at this site, namely: a finely carved bird-like zoomorph, which faces at a distance of about 20 metres a cluster of female (or hermaphrodite) anthropomorphic figures all of which are more “roughly” rendered. This apparent “scene” of human figures suggests, at the very minimum, a visual configuration of an adult and two children. One site report goes so far as to suggest that the panel represents “an earth mother with her human worldly children on one side and animal (?) children on the other”.

Other carvings at this site include a striking (and this time, I would argue, obvious) female form. A deep and naturally-occurring crevice in the stone’s surface is evocative of female genitalia and it is incorporated into the petroglyph as such. The figure is quite “skeletal” in appearance with x-ray-style ribs portrayed. The other four petroglyphs at this site are anthropomorphic—generally consisting of human faces—with one being dense and interwoven among serpent-like creatures.

#### *Stokes Road (DgRw 198)*

This site is located on the False Narrows bluffs, close to the large (now excavated) cave burials. Seven separate petroglyph panels are found here. Akin to DgRw 201, this site also contains a female or hermaphrodite figure carved on an upright boulder, and a finely-carved “sea-wolf” motif as well as what is now a mostly spalled off bird-like figure which appears to be giving chase. Between the two figures lies a series of pecked “dots”. Within the “sea-wolf” carving a natural fissure has been incorporated into the design as part of the mouth and this creature—like the one found at DgRw 193—has distinctively hunched limbs, large ears, and elongated eyes.

Other carvings at this site consist of a curvilinear motif barely visible on the underside of a displaced boulder; a simple “eye-form”; a series of pecked “dots” and an x-mark; an anthropomorph “stickfigure”; and a zoomorph rendered in a curvilinear style. It should be noted that the large panel depicting the “sea-wolf” and partially remaining bird-like form creates a type of corridor or wall along the small footpath. Other petroglyphs are distributed in a seemingly random fashion around the site, tucked around awkward corners and carved on widely dispersed rocks. Many prime rock faces are left bare, surely some type of spatial patterning is at work albeit one without any easily recognized manifestation.

#### *Boulton Site (DgRw 193)*

This site is situated on an expansive meadow underlain with sandstone bedrock. A large serpent-like creature is depicted, similar to that found in DgRw 198. Also in line with the aforementioned sites (DgRw 201 and -198), a female figure is included in the collection of carvings. Both anthropomorphic creatures at this site possess distinctive heart-shaped heads.



Other petroglyphs include a so-called “thunderbird”; two vulva-like forms; one large zoomorphic figure that has been sketched out in pecked pits; an unusual face with dangling legs; and an indeterminate shape, perhaps symbolic.

#### *Boulton Site West (DgRw 228)*

On land west of the Boulton site is a bowl-shaped feature ringed by four circles and seven large, petal-like rays. At the tip of one ray a small fish is carved.

#### *Church Site (DgRw 192)*

Gabriola Island’s “Church site” is without comparison the most petroglyph-covered locale on the landscape. At least seventy images are carved here and they range in type from what look like small and meandering “scribbles” to the peculiar and very curvilinear “kingfisher” motif.

The diversity of imagery at this site is outstanding. According to the Bentleys, approximately 22 anthropomorphic figures or features are present, 15 zoomorphs, and 27 “rayed suns”. The site also contains two deep “bowls” referred to by one Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> Elder, Ellen White, as “feeding bowls” wherein a small amount of dried food was supposed to be offered in hope of pleasing the spirits with an “aroma”.

#### *Cappon Site (DgRw 194)*

Locating these carvings proved to be difficult. Four out of five carvings were re-discovered beneath a trailer; the fifth was never found. A curvilinear bird-like creature is most easily recognized while other petroglyphs appear to be more abstract in design including: a series of five curvilinear lines; some type of zoomorph; and a “crab” form with radiating lines extending from the creature. A photocopied rubbing of the fifth carving (the photocopy is of very low quality and it is included in

the DgRw 194 site inventory form on file at the Archaeology Branch in Victoria) shows a remarkable anthropomorph with stick-like limbs and over two dozen “rays” cascading from the head. Again, the carving was not viewed, as it could not be relocated.

#### *Ferne Road site (DgRw 63)*

The Ferne Road site consists of a boulder, originally situated on the hilltop overhead, reported to be currently lying in a ditch. This single boulder could not be located with absolute certainty. Near invisible marks found on a boulder that I did examine, leave me unconvinced I was seeing the actual site.

#### *Other sites*

Three areas contain what were at the time of completion of my thesis unregistered sites. One, which I referred to as “Unregistered #1”, is DgRw 229 in the south central part of the island. It contains four petroglyphs, two of which are very clear and two, heavily eroded. A large and very well-defined anthropomorphic figure consumes much of the panel. Just east of this sprawling carving is a peculiar, perhaps heart-shaped, face with the familiar radiating lines and two deep-pecked “dots”. The other carvings are faint: one has an almost jack-o-lantern look to it, the other cannot be seen well enough to describe with any accuracy.

Similar in design, is another anthropomorphic petroglyph found northeast of the Church site. This solitary figure is in a very remote location (DgRw 224) and possesses a series of spiralling circles within the belly of the carving.

Another site—“Unregistered #2” in my thesis—exists near Chernoff Drive (DgRw 254). I was unable to view this petroglyph as it is on private property.

A third, at the time, unregistered site—“Unregistered #3” is only a five-minute walk from the Boulton site. This isolated petroglyph (DgRw 230) has an almost playful quality to it as it appears to be “smiling”. The zoomorph’s nose is rounded and three deep “dots” are pecked in between the creature’s eye and nostril. The rear of the image tapers away into nothing and it is possible that the carving was abandoned.

### ***Motif types***

The petroglyphs are divided into surprisingly even groups of motif-type: a total of 34 known anthropomorphic carvings are found on the island along with approximately 39 zoomorphic figures and 42 abstract/symbolic designs.

Most of these sites are found inland and cluster within a five-kilometre radius of the extensive False Narrows midden located on the southeast portion of the island. A notable range of variation and detail in carving craftsmanship is also readily apparent in the overall assemblage.

## **An analysis of style**

### ***Introductory remarks***

A large number of the petroglyphs are distinguished by their bold and curvilinear appearance. The line quality of many of the carvings, particularly the zoomorphic ones, is confident, fluid, consistent in both width and depth, and masterful, particularly with regard to use of symmetry and negative space. Some of the petroglyph motifs may have been painted onto the rock surface prior to engraving.<sup>13</sup>

Site	Anthropo morph	Zoo morph	Abstract	Total
DhRw 002	1	0	0	1
DhRw 005	2	0	0	2
DhRw 013	1	1	0	2
DgRw 002	0	1	0	1
DgRw 030	1	1	0	2
DgRw 063	0	2	0	2
DgRw 192	16	22	33	71
DgRw 193	2	4	3	9
DgRw 194	1	3	0	4
DgRw 198	1	3	3	7
DgRw 201	7	1	0	8
DgRw 224	1	0	0	1
DgRw 229	1	0	3	4
DgRw 230	0	1	0	1
Total	34	39	42	115

Another striking characteristic of many of the carvings is their “signature” look. Throughout my reconnaissance work, I was often left with the feeling of having encountered an individual’s “handwriting” over and over across a varied landscape. Other researchers have noted the same with regard to the carvings found at Petroglyph Park in Nanaimo. Douglas Leechman states that, “...of the whole petroglyph[s]... there is very little overlapping of figures. This fact and the quite evident similarities in style suggest that most of the figures shown were

<sup>13</sup> Michael Kew suggested this idea to me.

made by the same artist”.<sup>14</sup> I venture to suggest that an individual specialist or a small group/family of trained carvers produced the bulk of well-crafted petroglyph panels located on both Gabriola and Vancouver Island, that is in Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> traditional territory and possibly at the Sproat Lake site. Given the strong stylistic similarities found between the two and the fact that seasonal rounds encompassed both places, the idea is quite plausible.

This may be why the Gabriola petroglyphs—and by extension, their counterparts on nearby Vancouver Island—form such a stylistically unique collection of motifs and design elements when contrasted to other Northwest Coast areas. Although the array of motif types and degree of craftsmanship appear to defy summary, underlying consistencies maintained by a particular and stylistic and iconographic vocabulary found on Gabriola do emerge under closer scrutiny. As Margaret Holm states, “there is a wide variety of art forms, carving techniques, and quality of workmanship in Marpole phase art. At first glance, these factors mask the underlying coherence... but a closer inspection reveals a high degree of stylistic homogeneity both within and between sites”.<sup>15</sup> An underpinning “toolkit” of motifs and design elements is in place.

### ***Anthropomorphic petroglyphs***

Anthropomorphic petroglyphs on Gabriola are always rendered in a front-facing perspective. The single exception to this is found in the controversial “deer-hunter” petroglyph at Lock Bay. Anthropomorphic carvings generally do not display the finesse

and artful craftsmanship found in many of the zoomorphic panels. The carvings often appear to have been hastily executed, in contrast to the majority of zoomorphic petroglyph panels, which look like they have been lavished with both care and detail.

All anthropomorphic carvings share one or more of the following attributes:

- heart-shaped and/or over-sized, oval heads
- large ears depicted by half-ovals attached to the sides of the head
- stick-like limbs bent at the elbow and tapering into three to five articulated digits
- “unibrows” that arch over basic circle eyes and sometimes join to form a “nose” as well as simple engraved crescents brows
- skeletal and/or x-ray views of the torso
- pronounced genitalia.

Body forms are generally rendered by a sort of loose mango-shape: narrow towards the neck and broad along the bottom where legs are attached. Simple faces carved without bodies attached are uniformly sexless in appearance; it is generally only the eyes that are emphasized.

Seven of the anthropomorphic petroglyph figures display pronounced genitalia. Often, these carvings dominate a site in terms of size, and the sex of the figure is ambiguous. For instance, a petroglyph image that I quickly assumed to be female, my male colleague presumed to be “obviously” male. The confusion lay in whether or not an extended vulva shape was indeed just that or, conversely, an erect penis. Perhaps certain figures were intended to be hermaphrodites—gender-indeterminate beings instilled with powers both masculine and feminine. Some figures do, however,

<sup>14</sup> Douglas Leechman, *The Nanaimo Petroglyph*, Canadian Geographical Journal, 11, pp.266–8: 1952.

<sup>15</sup> Holm, *ibid*, p.188, 1990.

possess secondary sex characteristics such as breasts depicted by circles on the chest and in one unusual case (DgRw 201), a deep, naturally occurring crevice is used to form an expansive vulva lined with notches which appear to be indicative of the well known vagina dentate. These carvings look, unequivocally, to be of the female variety.

### ***Zoomorphic petroglyphs***

Zoomorphic figures are rendered exclusively in profile with only one major exception to this rule: the so-called “thunderbird” petroglyph at the Boulton site. Shared stylistic conventions include:

- the ubiquitous serpent-like “sea-wolves” that exhibit hunched limbs (normally two in profile) and, often, a deeply carved protruding line extending from an open and toothy mouth
- “x-ray” views of skeletal features
- feather motifs
- pronounced or over-sized ears and tails
- flared nostrils
- elaborate eye-forms which include secondary features
- a curiously rounded or “bottleneck-shaped” nose.

Another important design attribute consists of what I refer to as “lateral sectioning”, just as a bumble bee’s body is divided into bands of yellow and black, certain motifs possess gently curved sections or banded “stripes” over the primary surfaces of their form.

Linear and curvilinear “rays” are often incorporated into many images as well as an unusual “leash-like” detail.

### ***Abstract petroglyphs***

Those motifs classified as abstract encompass the following features: gourd-

shaped motifs often enhanced with emanating “rays”; explicit vulva forms; curvilinear masses of fluid lines; small carvings reminiscent of “suns”; and what look to be meandering “doodling”.

Deeply pecked “dots” are frequently encountered at most sites and should be viewed as an addition to, or perhaps as an integral part of, anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and abstract designs.

### **Archaeological connections**

My research suggests to me that the majority of Gabriola’s petroglyphs were carved in the Marpole period (400 BC–1000 AD). My rationale for saying this is threefold:

- a generally bold and curvilinear style type is evident that is not seen either before or after the Marpole period
- there are striking and strong similarities between petroglyph motifs and those found on portable artifacts recovered from Marpole contexts; and
- the large village at False Narrows indicates the population of Gabriola was high during Marpole times.

### ***Locarno Beach?***

My argument that the petroglyphs are *not* representative of, or included within, the Locarno Beach culture type (1300–400 BC) is somewhat circumstantial, but the fact is that none of the few portable art objects that have been recovered and associated with the

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	J	K	L	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	
DhRw 5	1	1			1		1												4
DhRw 13			2	2													1		5
DhRw 2	2	2			2		2												8
DgRw 194	4	1	4	3	3	2		3											20
DgRw 254	1	1	1			1								1					5
DgRw 201	8	6	4	1	7	2	3		3	3	2	1	1		1	1			43
DgRw 63	2		2	2															6
DgRw 198	6	1	2	3		2			1		2	2	2	1	1		1		24
DgRw 229	3	1	1		2	1	1		1	1									11
DgRw 230	1			1	1		1	1							1	1			7
DgRw 193	8	6	5	2	2	3	1	1	3	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	1		42
DgRw 224	1	1	1		1	1			1		1								7
DgRw 192	70	16	7	13	5	7	8	9	2	2	1	3	2	3	2	2	1		153
DgRw 30	2	1	1	1	1					1		1							8
DgRw 2	1		1	1	1						1				1				6
Totals	110	37	31	29	26	19	17	14	11	9	8	8	7	7	7	5	4	0	349

Style traits:

A	curvilinear form lines	F	limbs with digits	L	skeletal x-ray	T	lateral sectioning
B	frontal view	G	head only	P	elaborate eye	U	linear form lines
C	full figure	H	rays	Q	hunched limbs	V	ovoid
D	profile view	J	genitalia	R	eye with unibrow		
E	basic eye	K	heart-shaped	S	rounded nose		

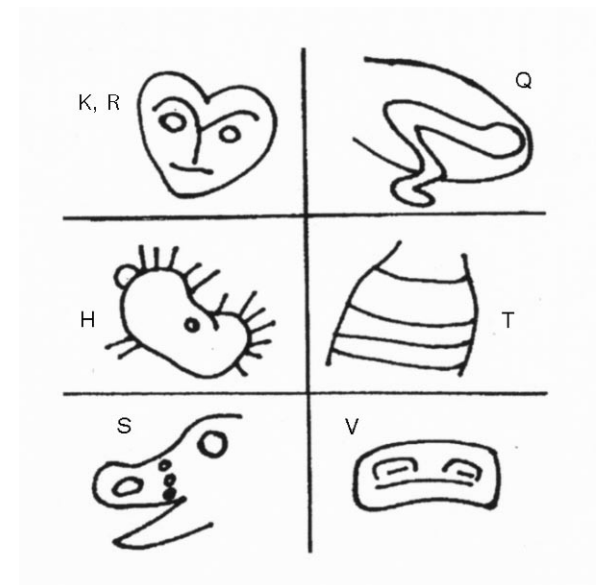
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	J	K	L	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	
Anthropo- morph	35	36	24	1	10	14	14	3	7	11	5		3	27			3		193
Zoo- morph	32	3	31	31	13	6	3	4	2	1	6	4	5		7	4	1		153
Abstract	43							7		1									51
	110	39	55	32	23	20	17	14	9	13	11	4	8	27	7	4	4	0	397

Style traits:

A	curvilinear form lines	H	rays	S	rounded nose
B	frontal view	J	genitalia	T	lateral sectioning
C	full figure	K	heart-shaped	U	linear form lines
D	profile view	L	skeletal x-ray	V	ovoid
E	basic eye	P	elaborate eye		
F	limbs with digits	Q	hunched limbs		
G	head only	R	eye with unibrow		

Note how some design elements are used for all three groups (A for example), but others are exclusive to a particular motif (D for example).

The ovoid form (V) is seen at DgRw 225 but this is a modern carving and excluded from this analysis.

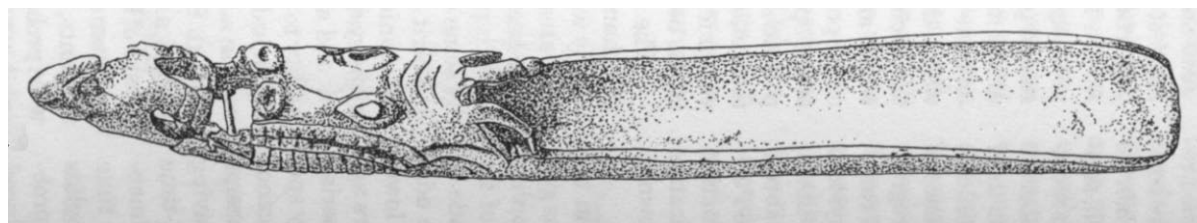


Locarno Beach period display any convincing stylistic features that might underscore some relationship to the petroglyph styles found on Gabriola. The minimal overlap in stylistic conventions that do occur, as expressed in two Locarno Beach spoons<sup>16</sup> and zoomorphic petroglyphs, could reasonably be taken to be, not a one-to-one contemporaneous relationship, but rather, an example of continuity in terms of motif styles. Of the Locarno Beach art objects that do exist in Holm's sample, the form and design is relatively simplistic and lacks the type of detail (skeletal features, internal curvilinear lines, rows of teeth, etc.) found in the majority of petroglyphs.

However, it has to be said that much of my reasoning depends upon the lack of evidence currently available to draw any other conclusion than that the petroglyphs do not date from Locarno Beach times. When compared to the later abundance of Marpole mobiliary objects, the paucity of the earlier archaeological assemblage is stark. This paucity of evidence suggests that the pace of aesthetic behaviour was still relatively slow, when contrasted to the Marpole period, and that the production of rock carvings was not yet in full swing and had perhaps not even started. Added to this is the fact that no Locarno Beach period sites have been found on Gabriola. Arguing for a Locarno Beach association is thus like gathering smoke and trying to stand on it.

### *Charles?*

All the arguments that can be mustered for the petroglyphs not being from Locarno Beach times apply even more so to the even earlier Charles period (2500–1300 BC). There would in fact be little or nothing to say about this possibility were it not for an extraordinary artifact recovered from the Pender Canal site.<sup>17</sup> This artifact consists of a carved antler spoon depicting a “rockfish and a wolf or sea-wolf mask” which Carlson suggests as being symbolic of “shamanic regeneration”. The spoon—which exhibits a “sea-wolf” creature complete with open mouth, teeth, flared nostrils and elongated eye—is remarkable in its likeness to some of the Gabriola Island petroglyphs. The object has, however, been associated with the date of 3600 C<sup>14</sup> years [2170–1740 BC], clearly outside of the Marpole period range, and even earlier than the Locarno Beach period. This object undermines any easy or linear chronology with regard to the evolution of Northwest Coast design elements and style. Certainly, the carving points to great antiquity for the “sea-wolf” motif. What is less clear is whether or not it has any direct relationship to the creation of similarly-styled petroglyphs. Carlson asserts that “coastal rock art is certainly part of the same art tradition as these early pieces of mobiliary art from the Pender Canal Site...” yet he doubts that petroglyphs belong to this period. In my opinion also, it is extremely unlikely that the petroglyphs pre-date



Pender Canal spoon, Roy L. Carlson

<sup>16</sup> Holm, *ibid.*, p.87, 1990.

<sup>17</sup> Roy Carlson and Philip Hobler, *The Pender Canal Excavations and the Development of Coast Salish Culture*, BC Studies, 99, pp.25–52, 1993.

500 BC. They are in other words, less than 2500 years old.

### ***Gulf of Georgia?***

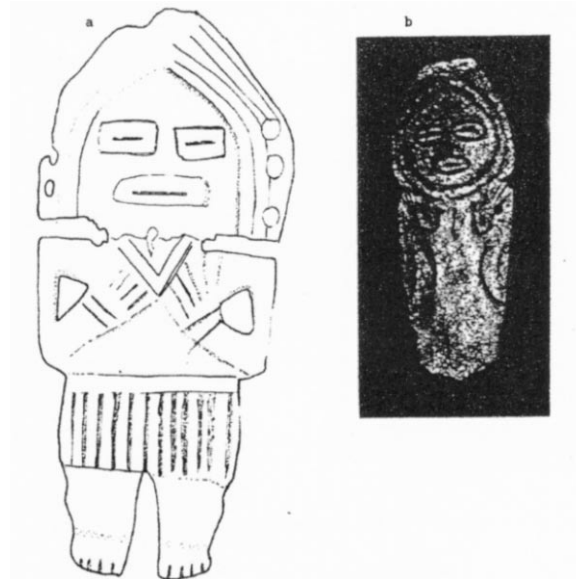
The style, design elements, detail, and general content of the petroglyphs and objects from the Gulf of Georgia period (1000 AD–contact) are so radically different in terms of appearance that any temporal connection between them seems nebulous.

Figurines from this late-prehistoric period collected from Puget Sound and the Georgia Strait are, as seen *above right*,<sup>18</sup> typically distinguished by their exaggerated pointed heads, necks defined by two notches which give the jaw a “squared-off look”, and rectangular-shaped eye margins. Many of these figures also sport “skirts” rendered by straight parallel lines and hair that is fashioned with the same angular symmetry.

Holm however does say that it was not until approximately 1000 AD that male and female genitalia are seen on decorated objects, specifically in antler figurines.<sup>19</sup> Despite this fact and that such genital features are indeed portrayed with frequency in the petroglyphs (isolated vulva forms are also found at several sites), I do not believe that there is a close relationship between the two.

### ***Marpole?***

One thing that stands out most amongst both Marpole phase mobiliary objects and the Gabriola petroglyph repertoire is curves. Curvilinear lines and design elements are widespread and incorporated into most images, especially zoomorphic ones. Unlike Gulf of Georgia period motifs, the



Late Prehistoric (Gulf of Georgia) period motifs are distinguished by a more linear and squared-off style than those from the Marpole period (after Holm 1990).

petroglyphs of Gabriola rarely, if ever, exhibit an angular nature or composition.

The parallel rate of motif frequencies between portable decorated objects and the petroglyphs is also a point of intersection. “There is great interest in the human figure, and in particular the human face” notes Margaret Holm with regard to Marpole phase objects, and “facial features are usually rendered in detail while the rest of the body receives perfunctory treatment”.<sup>20</sup> The same is very much the case for the Gabriola petroglyphs.

Also in accord with the rock carving subject matter is the second most common motif: the long-legged or long-beaked bird and the third most common motif: the “sea-wolf”. Holm describes this ubiquitous Marpole motif as a “sinuous creature with horns or feather tufts, an open mouth, protruding tongue and slender crouched limbs”. Fish

<sup>18</sup> ED. NOTE: See also Roy L. Carlson, *Indian Art Traditions...*, pp.123–4, p.201, SFU, 1983.

<sup>19</sup> Holm, *ibid*, p.231, 1990.

<sup>20</sup> Holm, *ibid*, p.311, 1990.



motifs are also popular in both the Gabriola petroglyph and Marpole repertoires.

The popularity of these three motif types during Marpole times—as rendered in both portable objects and petroglyphs—points to a stylistic compatibility or visual language (an iconographic vocabulary) bridging the two media. Birds, “sea-wolves”, and the human form were clearly figures of cultural significance and value at the time. What is more, it seems as though emphasis was placed on, not only the product—the petroglyph or antler spoon or pendant—but also on the process of creation. Although one may find many “unrefined” (if that word should be used) or “rough” anthropomorphic faces and figures, one does not encounter a poorly carved “sea-wolf” or bird anywhere. Holm speaks to this issue when she notes that the, “carving skill and the overall design of Marpole decorated objects show a great range of variation. There are finely-crafted and skilfully composed sculptures in wood and antler that suggest the handiwork of part-time specialists. There are also many roughly executed decorated items with uneven workmanship and a poor sense of design...” yet, “even these crudely executed pieces show conformity to a standard repertoire of art forms, design principles and motifs”.

So while the Marpole style (writ large) embraces a range of craftsmanship—expert and deft as well as untrained or, at least, less labour-intensive—the entire group of motifs adheres to a consistent pattern: zoomorphs are often elaborate and well-carved, anthropomorphs generally look to have been created with less effort and “flair” as petroglyphs but not necessarily as three dimensional sculpture, and abstract motifs haunt the middle ground. They are neither elaborate nor “scratchy” in appearance (like some anthropomorphs), if anything they

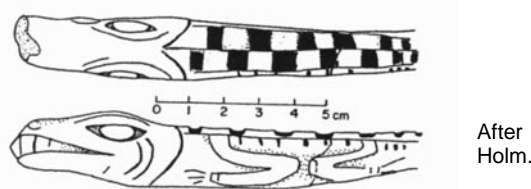
exhibit smooth, deep grooves and basic shapes.

## *The Marpole style*

### *General characteristics of artifacts*

David Burley, the author of the book, *Senewélets...the False Narrows Midden*, observes that “antler sculpture, in addition to that of stone, may be regarded as part of a general artistic emphasis in Marpole” and further that, “sculpture in antler is related to that undertaken in stone. It tends to be representational including both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs, although a few geometric forms are also known”.<sup>21</sup>

Given the relationship between these two “canvases”—antler and stone—the first artifact worth examining in the present context comes from the Marpole Site (DhRs-1). Excavations yielded a fragment from an undetermined antler object with an engraved creature carved upon it, possessing a long and thin body with tightly folded limbs under its body. This zoomorphic figure is portrayed with lenticular eyes and an open mouth filled with teeth. Under the head are two rows of three dots and on the top portion of its body is an unusual chequered pattern. And although certain features are not shared with the petroglyphs (large ears, tail, protruding tongue), this incongruity may have more to do with the



<sup>21</sup> David Burley, *Marpole: Anthropological reconstructions of a prehistoric Northwest Coast culture type*, p.27, SFU Publications, 1980.

limitations of the medium than stylistic convention.

Other zoomorphic antler harpoon point fragments collected from the Marpole site<sup>22</sup> reflect a persistent emphasis placed on the depiction of long-mouthed creatures from whose mouths project the barbed shafts (perhaps designed as such to represent the protruding “tongues” found in so many petroglyphs). Moreover, akin to the “sea-wolf” petroglyphs of Gabriola, Holm notes that with only one exception, all of the “sea-wolf” motifs inscribed on mobiliary objects in her Marpole sample are “well-made, deeply engraved compositions”.<sup>23</sup>

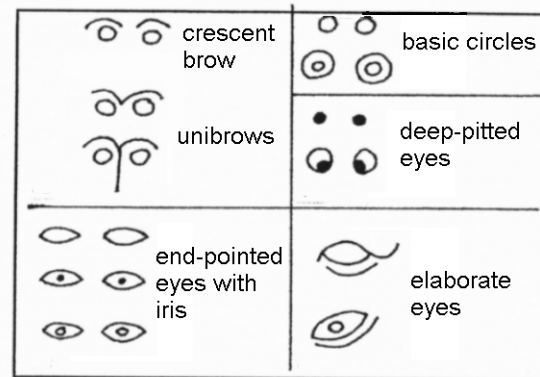
Morphological likeness is of course key when making these stylistic comparisons, but the consistent application of skilled craftsmanship to certain images, be they portable objects or petroglyphs, provides, in my opinion, an important subtext germane to how specific motifs were produced.

A significant correlation is found between eye-shape and motif type in the Gabriola petroglyphs and Marpole period artifacts. Zoomorphic figures tend to have both round and sharply pointed, down-turned eyelids with secondary elements while anthropomorphic figures are portrayed with basic circle-shape eyes, sometimes accentuated with eyebrows, but seldom with extended pinched ends or with large or point-form iries. Holm notes the same pattern in her study and concludes that during Marpole times an “increasing complexity in the way features are delineated” begins to emerge and, like the Gabriola petroglyphs, 75% of her sample

contains eye-shapes with “secondary and tertiary elements”.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Artifacts from False Narrows*

Turning to the False Narrows village site (DgRw 4), two artifacts in the assemblage provide further substance for claims of shared style traits with temporal implications. Site components have been



associated with a “classic” Marpole culture type occupation (FN-I); a Marpole transitional occupation (FN-II); a Gulf of Georgia culture type occupation (FN-III); and a historic Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> occupation (FN-IV).<sup>25</sup>

Two pendants, both recovered from mortuary contexts, a so-called “beetle” pendant carved on coal<sup>26</sup> and an anthropomorphic one carved on siltstone were recovered from FN-I deposits (dating from *ca.* 100 BC–100 AD).<sup>27</sup> The interment consists of an adolescent male clothed in what was probably a dance costume and the

<sup>24</sup> Holm, *ibid.*, p.136, 1990.

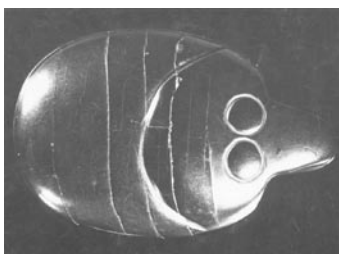
<sup>25</sup> David V. Burley, *Senewélets—Cultural history of the Nanaimo Coast Salish and the False Narrows Midden*, Royal BC Museum Memoir No.2, 1989.

<sup>26</sup> “Beetle” is not an agreed designation. Burley suggests a “beetle”, Holm a “face”. It seems to me to have most in common with the “killer whale” petroglyph at DgRw 2 (ED. ...and hence a porpoise?).

<sup>27</sup> For radiocarbon dating, see *SHALE* 16, pp.29–42.

<sup>22</sup> Holm, *ibid.*, p.111, 1990.

<sup>23</sup> Holm, *ibid.*, p.110, 1990.



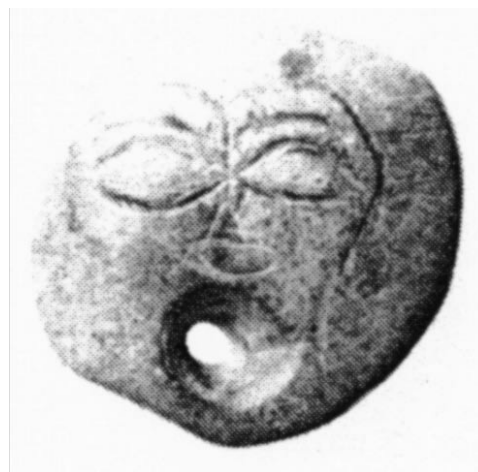
*Above:* False Narrows “beetle” pendant, David Burley.

*Middle:* Petroglyph at DgRw 192.

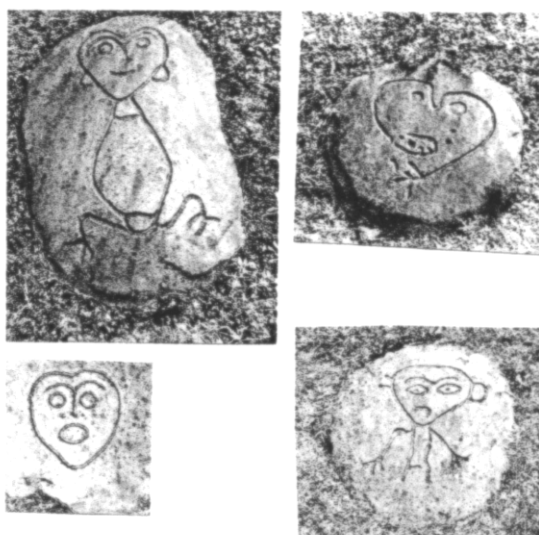
Note bulbous noses, eye circles, and lateral sectioning.

*Below:* Petroglyph at DgRw 2, flipped horizontally for comparison.

pendant, was recovered from the individual’s midsection. Burley also notes that further mortuary goods were included: 2506 disc heads, three dentalia, and two whalebone armlets. Hence, he suggests that this individual represented a person of high status.



False Narrows pendant, David Burley



Heart-shaped petroglyph replicas, Gabriola Museum

The “beetle” pendant exhibits two important stylistic features, which appear with some frequency in the local petroglyph repertoire: an elongated and rounded—almost bulbous—nose form and the aforementioned lateral sectioning found in some carvings. The eyes, often two simple concentric circles, are the same as many petroglyph eye-forms.

With regard to the nose-form, this unusual and distinctive feature is found in seven zoomorphic petroglyphs. Also widespread

is the lateral sectioning of zoomorphic figures. The internal decoration of parallel lines banded across the “beetle” pendant’s “body” is a form found in several carvings.

An anthropomorphic pendant, also recovered from FN-I, allows us to probe stylistic similarities in “human” imagery. This pendant (shown *top right opposite*) is, according to Burley “less well made” and depicts the ubiquitous “heart-shaped” head. Within the petroglyphs, I have counted a total of eleven heart-shaped heads (replicas of some are shown *opposite*). Also recognizable in the petroglyphs are the repetitious eyebrows consisting of either a unified brow-line that joins to form a nose or, two separate crescents arching over roughly circular eyes; the latter is exhibited in the False Narrows pendant.

Despite the fact that such “faces” are simple and their dispersion across both the landscape and archaeological assemblages is far from unique to the Northwest Coast, their “scratchy” quality and workmanship are notably similar to the petroglyphs and suggests that interest in and rendering of the “human” face was happening in both portable and permanent media at the same time.

## The purpose of the petroglyphs

The two questions that now remain are whether or not the petroglyphs were produced all at once and what the social implication of such action might be; and what kinds of meaning were infused into the petroglyphs in pre-contact times and what function(s) they might have served.

## Timeframes and social implications

As mentioned previously, many carvings look to be the work of an individual, or a small group of trained specialists, who produced them in a fairly short period using certain techniques that were exclusive to certain imagery. Had the petroglyphs been made over and over again for many decades and lifetimes, more variation in style, motif content, super-positioning, and design elements would be seen than is the case.

Some images were consistently well carved and their composition was particularly artful. Special techniques, or simply specialists in general, were probably called upon for their making. The more elaborate petroglyphs, for example the “sea-wolf” and bird panel at DgRw 198 may have been produced, or commissioned, to satisfy the spiritual needs of elite individuals who had access to, or control of, specific motifs.

This idea ties in nicely with Brian Thom’s archaeological hypothesis related to the manipulation by elites of symbols and “artistic expression”.<sup>28</sup> With regard to mortuary ritual practices during the transitional period from Marpole to Late Prehistoric times (500–1000 AD), Thom argues that when elaborate mortuary rituals were changed from mounds and cairns to above-ground graves, only those people with wealth and status could hire artisans to produce new symbols to connect to the spirit world.<sup>29</sup>

Wayne Suttles says of Northwest Coast art production that “...while some Central Coast Salish art may have been decorative, much

<sup>28</sup> Thom, *ibid*, 1998.

<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to note that while at one site with a Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> Elder, he referred to the large “sea-wolf” panel as the “main one” and feigned disinterest in the others.

of it can be related to four sources of power and prestige—the vision, the ritual world, the ancestors, and wealth”.<sup>30</sup> I suggest that this was—and still is—the case for Gabriola’s petroglyph sites. Elites may have commissioned the complex panels and commoners may have produced some of the lesser-quality images while training for or enduring the spirit quest.

### Meanings

As noted in the discussion on “winter ceremonies” and vision or guardian quests, the acquired “spiritual helper” often took the form of “birds, animals, and fabulous spirits or monsters”, precisely the types of creatures found depicted as petroglyphs. There is certainly no way of proving a connection between the spirit quest and the rock carvings, but the remoteness of many of the images combined with the prevalence of “spirit-helper” type motifs, forms an attractive hypothetical explanation of the function of petroglyphs in pre-contact times. A petroglyph, by design, vision, commission, or execution brought a person or a group of people closer to the spiritual world and perhaps also their ancestors.

Yet other meanings and purposes have been attached to the rock carvings too. Some may have served as indicators of place ownership and others linked to fishing and hunting activities or bountiful locations. In some sites near burial locations, “ribbed” or skeletal anthropomorphic carvings were considered by some Coast Salish groups to be guardian spirits of the dead.<sup>31</sup> Such views may hold relevance for the

petroglyphs located along the False Narrows bluffs and the cave burials situated there. Mary Jane Peters, a deceased Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> Elder, once explained that “the petroglyphs are fossils of what died there.... When it rains, the hill bleeds with the blood of animals that died there”, clearly, a reference to red ochre used at some petroglyph sites in a ritualized context. Not all meanings however were filled with profundity, as Douglas Leechman’s story tells us.<sup>32</sup>

Some years ago, when out in a canoe with an Indian friend of mine near Seattle, we had to go ashore to wait for slack water to let us through a narrow channel... We sat down on the beach and had a smoke and then my companion... selected a pebble from those at his feet and stood up. He began to peck at a large boulder which lay just behind us. I watched him and discovered that he was just finishing a face pecked in the stone. I asked him if he had made this face and he answered that he had carved this one and some of the others and that his father had done the rest. I asked what their purpose was and was told that they were done merely to pass the time while waiting for the tide to change.

### Conclusions

My conclusions then are that the majority of petroglyphs were made within a short period of time, perhaps over the course of a single lifetime if a single, prolific specialist were responsible for most of the imagery. The bulk were produced during the Marpole cultural phase (400 BC–1000 AD), and their primary *raison d’être* was the acquisition of supernatural power.

In their book, *Indian Petroglyphs of the Northwest Coast*, Beth and Ray Hill lament that archaeologists have left the subject of petroglyphs to amateurs. Uneasy about the subjective world of art, and unable to relate

<sup>30</sup> Wayne Suttles, *Productivity and its Constraints—A Coast Salish case*, in *Indian Art Traditions of the Northwest Coast*, Roy Carlson (ed.), SFU: 1983.

<sup>31</sup> Wilson Duff, *Prehistoric stone sculpture of the Fraser River and Gulf of Georgia*, Anthropology in BC, 5, Victoria: 1956.

<sup>32</sup> Leechman, *ibid*, p.267.

the carvings to the objective study of excavations, many scientists have just ignored them. And with a veritable sigh heard from within the text, they pronounce, “Our questions are too late”.

My study has aimed to show otherwise.

Archaeological inquiry into the petroglyphs remains a worthwhile and, in this case, fruitful endeavour. Yes, our questions are often “too late” as to why the petroglyphs were created (although I imagine one would find many answers to that single question, both then and now), but “answers” nevertheless still do abound and much remains to be teased out of both the archaeological and ethnographic record. Many Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> Elders recall being told not to go near petroglyph sites as young children—they were places of power, potentially harmful, and they remain as such to this day. Viewing the petroglyphs as only relics of a “forgotten” past denies the rock carvings their persistent spirit and portrays them as essentially lifeless; relegating their meaning (both present and past) to that of an empty fossil.

Future research suggestions are numerous. First, work needs to be done on the nearby

petroglyph sites located within traditional Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> territory. I have no doubt that these petroglyph sites are related. Second, research should be undertaken on the possible relationships between petroglyphs and pictographs. Third, there are wonderful opportunities available for sociocultural research with regard to the petroglyphs such as their contested usage; the fact that they are trademarked; that they are tourist attractions; and perhaps most importantly, that there is, at times, heated debate over to whom they belong.

I also advocate a “bottoms-up” approach to rock “art” studies. Thousands of petroglyphs from around and across the region have been recorded and well documented and for too long, researchers have tried to take on and make sense of a massive body of data. The groundwork has been laid out thanks to earlier scholars; what is needed now are smaller studies—tight and specific—which will, ideally, form a series of reliable stepping stones towards larger, more comprehensive and very thorough understandings of Northwest Coast rock “art”. It is my hope that this thesis sparks a renewed interest in the task at hand. ♦



Two Gabriola petroglyphs from the 20th century. A fish adorning a boulder on a driveway entrance. And, on the beach, usually covered by sand or logs, DgRw 225. Perhaps inspired by Beth Hill's “Myers Passage” rubbing at FdTd 5, but the carver doesn't admit to that. It took a full day to create with a mix of metal and (mainly) stone tools.

