

# 9

## Rock Art and Spatial Variability

When practices continue at the same locations over many generations these places and their surrounding landscapes become increasingly symbolically charged, patterned, and contextualised—traditions of landscape experience and enrichment are perpetuated and expressed as ‘Ancestral Law’. (Taçon 1999:41)

In previous chapters, the analyses revealed trends in the structure of the distribution of rock markings in the Upper Nepean catchment. All site types and the abundance of their contents decline in numbers as one moves from north to south. This pattern is a southerly extension of a broader trend on the Woronora Plateau (cf. Sefton 1988). Significantly, two rock-marking practices—the engraving of images and groove channels on open sandstone platforms—did not occur south of the central Upper Nepean.

In Chapter 6, differences in the distribution of the abundance of grinding grooves in open context and rock art in shelters were identified. The incidence of high groove counts in certain open grinding groove sites has been interpreted to reflect spatially focused nodes of grinding activity. Likewise, the analysis of the distribution of rock art motif counts indicates that a small number of rock shelters were crucial locales in which extensive rock marking occurred. Higher density grinding groove and stencilling activity in the Cataract catchment contrasts with higher densities of graphic rock art in the Avon and Cordeaux.

The distribution of open context grinding grooves, engraved groove channels and engraved rock art, in respect of spatial organisation and environmental variables, has been addressed in Chapter 6. Apart from broad-scale geographic patterns in the location of these sites, it was established that all grinding groove sites with large groove counts, engraved rock art and engraved groove channels have an environmental signature. These sites are preferentially situated on upper valley slopes or crests and on, or very near to, ridge and watershed divide landforms. These rock markings frequently co-occur in discrete locales or within proximity of each other. Except in the Cataract catchment, the majority of rock shelters that contain large motif counts are preferentially situated on the same landforms.

Over time, it can be expected that the motivations and referential contexts for the production of rock art change. In Chapter 7, a relative temporal sequence for the rock art of the Upper Nepean catchment has been defined. In Chapter 8, abundance and density, shelter-specific locational signatures, and the nature and variability of the rock art, in each of the defined phases, has been examined. In this chapter, the analyses will look at the environmental and geographic distribution of rock art, in each of the defined phases. The analyses seeks to explore changes in the way people engaged with the land, via the practice of inscription on stone, throughout the late Holocene. The focus is to explore change via a consideration of the geographic and environmental signature of each temporal phase. The analysis is premised upon the proposition that the rock markings are elements that represent patterns of social life (cf. Thomas 2008). The distribution of specific shelters and their contents will be explored in order to discriminate different cultural contexts

in which rock art was produced (cf. Layton 2000a). By examining the locational patterning of shelters and rock art, and how this changes over time, the analysis explores the dynamics of the social geography made materially manifest by the people of the Upper Nepean.

The discussion will address the topic according to the following criteria:

- abundance and the nature of rock art locales
- distribution and environmental location
- clusters and site associations
- motif distribution
- trends in Phase 3 additions, or otherwise, compared with Phase 2 shelters.

The analysis is based on tabulations presented in Appendix 11 of Dibden (2011). In these tables, the location of each rock art shelter and its contents is described in respect of its location on or adjacent to major watershed and ridge landforms. The focal patterns relating to site type, contents, site clusters and associations are summarised. The location of the major landforms are numbered and shown on the key map in Dibden (2011:Appendix 11) and are referred to here. The geographic distribution of various site types shown in maps in Chapters 6 and 8 illustrate many of the trends that are discussed.

The textually based analysis seeks to describe general trends in the spatial and environmental signature of each of the temporal phases. In particular, the discussion aims to identify the specific preferences relating to rock-marking distribution that may be inferred from the location of site and rock mark type. This analysis forms the primary basis for conceptualising the nature and transformation of the social geography in the Upper Nepean.

## 9.1 Phase 1 Rock Art

In Chapter 8, it was argued that the nature of shelter morphology was largely incidental to the choice of location for the production of Phase 1 rock art on the Woronora Plateau. By contrast, geographic and environmental variables appear to have strongly influenced the choice of places marked. In the Upper Nepean, the shelters Cad5 and Bet37 are located on the periphery of the plateau, at its southern and western margins, respectively. They are situated on, or immediately adjacent to, broad crest landforms and in upper valley slope contexts. The shelter Cad5 is on an east–west thoroughfare between the coast and the Southern Highlands, which is coincident with the southern margin of the Woronora Plateau. Bet37 is on a major north–south thoroughfare between the Cumberland Plain and the Southern Highlands, and flanks the western margin of the plateau. Further north, the two shelters in the Woronora River catchment are on a major divide/watershed between the Georges/Woronora and Cataract river catchments and, hence, on an east–west thoroughfare between the coast and the interior. They are also situated in upper valley slope contexts. To the south, the Phase 1 shelters in the Southern Highlands are all similarly located on broad, relatively flat and accessible landforms.

The spatial and environmental signature of these sites is characterised as geographically widespread in a low-density distribution, and preferentially on landforms that are readily accessible. Other than the two shelters located in the Woronora catchment, the areas located within the interior of the plateau were not chosen for marking the land with Phase 1 rock art.

## 9.2 Phase 2 Rock Art

In the following sections the geographic and environmental signatures of Phase 2 rock art are discussed on a catchment basis.

### 9.2.1 The Cataract Catchment

The Cataract catchment is bounded to the north and south by two major watershed divides (Watersheds 1 and 2), and these are major thoroughfare landforms between the coast and its hinterland. Two minor divide landforms (Minor Divides 1 and 2) extend from the escarpment westward into the heart of the Cataract. Three minor divides (3, 4 and 5) extend north to the Cataract gorge from the Cordeaux/Cataract divide. Unlike the southern catchments, the main river valleys of the Loddon and Cataract rivers are also likely to have been utilised as thoroughfares in this catchment.

In the Upper Nepean, almost half the grinding groove sites and 54 per cent of grooves are in the Cataract catchment. Two major clusters of grinding groove sites, engraved groove channels, and engraved rock art occur in the north-east sector of the catchment. The eastern end of the Watershed 1 landform is notable for its absence of rock shelter sites. However, this is likely to be determined by a general absence of shelter exposures. A large number of grinding groove locales occur in this area, some of which have significant groove counts. An open engraving site (Lod47) in this cluster has a single motif that is unique in the Upper Nepean: a human figure with a hatchet. In Chapter 6, it was noted that ground-edge hatchets were significant items of material culture in the south-east. It was proposed that grinding groove sites may over time become meaningful locales and mnemonic of individual and group history. The strong spatial association between grinding groove locales and the engraving in this area may reflect a mutually constituted dialectic, in which the significance of hatchets was expressed.

The eastern end of Minor Divide 2 also contains large numbers of grinding groove sites. Several have high counts, including BMS1, which also has engraved rock art. Open engraving sites BC3 and BC4 are located within 500 metres of each other at the western end of this divide near the Cataract River, and are associated with four grinding groove sites. BC3 and BC4 each contain a single engraved image: a macropod and an emu. These are the only animal motifs in the engraved rock art of the Upper Nepean catchment. Macropod and emu motifs occur in obvious association in individual shelters in Phase 2 and Phase 3 rock art, and their inscription in this pair of open sites supports an interpretation that they are conceptually related.

In Chapter 8, the analysis of Phase 2 stencil shelters and their motif abundance revealed that, similar to grinding groove sites, they occur in relatively higher density in the Cataract catchment. Across the Upper Nepean, they are frequently associated with open sites that have large grinding groove counts. The following associations occur in the Cataract:

- Lod8 with Lod5 (45 grinding grooves)
- AF11 and AF12 with AF8 (28 grinding grooves)
- BC49, BC51 and BC6 with BC7 (67 grinding grooves)
- Wall37 with Wall39 (32 grinding grooves)
- Wall13 with Wall15 (52 grinding grooves)
- Gill38 with Gill29 (19 grinding grooves)
- Gill45, Gill50 and Gill56 with Gill51 (54 grinding grooves)
- LizCk17 with LizCk19 (45 grinding grooves).

These clustered associations suggest a relationship between the two types of rock-marking locales. The grinding groove sites may have accumulated in size over considerable time, and long after the practice of Phase 2 stencilling ceased. Whether or not the motivation to continue to grind hatchet heads in these locales over time was inspired by their proximity to stencil sites, or that the relationships resulted from some other behaviour or purpose, is unknown.

Of the 160 rock art shelters in the Cataract, Phase 2 rock art occurs in 58 shelters. A total of 46 contain stencils, and this represents almost half of the Phase 2 stencil locales in the Upper Nepean. Phase 2 graphic rock art occurs in 26 shelters. In the Cataract, Phase 2 rock art was geographically widespread, and produced in shelters located on the ridge crests and valley slopes and bottoms, and this contrasts with patterns in the southern catchments. However, some geographic patterns exist in respect of where each of these different rock markings were produced, and the intensity of their production. Other than the engraved image in Lod47, the watershed divide (Watershed 1) between the Cataract and Georges/Woronora rivers does not contain graphic rock art. Yet, hand stencils were made in five shelters. One in the central area contains relatively large stencil counts (Lod8), and AF13 in a cluster of three at the west end of the divide does also.

In the Upper Nepean generally, Phase 2 stencils were normally produced at the extremities of thoroughfare landforms, as well as throughout each catchment, and this pattern of geographic distribution is evident in the Cataract. In the Cataract, Phase 2 stencilling also has a strong environmental signature. It was undertaken most frequently on crests or upper valley slopes, and in highly accessible locations. This contrasts with the graphic rock art, particularly all significant Phase 2 sites, which are located in interior locations in the main valleys and lower slope contexts.

Stencil counts vary between sites and several nodes of stencilling activity are represented by site clusters across the catchment. Other than the cluster referred to above, several others are notable. Minor Divide 2 contains a cluster of three, BC49, BC51 and BC6, and the latter contains relatively rare early Phase 2a graphics (various trident forms). The relatively short Minor Divide 1 landform contains only stencils in its suite of Phase 2 rock art. A short spur that extends north into the Cataract from near the east end of the watershed between the Cataract and Cordeaux (Watershed 2) contains a cluster of five stencil sites. Of the 46 shelters with stencils, 33 do not contain Phase 2 graphics, and 13 do. This structural pattern in the distribution of the two rock art types in shelters is repeated across the Upper Nepean.

In chapter 8, the analyses revealed that shelters with only stencils, and, in particular, those with high counts, are normally small and possess no living area. By comparison, those that also have relatively high numbers (>10) of Phase 2 graphics are typically large and have large living floors. Several of these sites are in the Cataract catchment, including BC6, BC41 and Gill50. What is notable about BC6 and Gill50 is that they contain formally simple motifs, likely to be representative of the earliest graphic rock art (Phase 2a). These sites are each located close to the valleys of the Loddon and Cataract, respectively. The choice to mark these sites with stencils and graphics may have been based on an interplay between their ability to accommodate relatively large numbers of people, the large size of their rock art panels and their geographic and environmental location. This relationship is also evident in comparable sites in the southern catchments.

Other shelters in the Cataract catchment contain Phase 2 stencils and graphics in low motif counts. They differ from those described above in that they do not exhibit patterned trends in respect of shelter size or location. However, the majority of these sites with Phase 2 graphics (irrespective of graphic numbers) and stencils do appear to have influenced the nature of their subsequent Phase 3 rock marking (discussed below).

### 9.2.2 The Cordeaux and Avon Catchments

The Cordeaux and Avon are discussed together in this section primarily because the watershed (Watershed 3) between the two catchments is a significant and focal area of Phase 2 graphic rock art.

Of the 114 rock art shelters in the Cordeaux, Phase 2 rock art occurs in 42. Eighteen sites contain stencils and 31 shelters have graphics. The Avon contains 140 rock art shelters, 45 of which have Phase 2 rock art: 29 have stencils and 22 have graphics. Compared with the Cataract, in these catchments the production of Phase 2 graphic rock art was undertaken in relatively higher frequency than the making of hand stencils.

Also in contrast to the Cataract, in the Cordeaux and Avon, valley bottoms generally do not contain Phase 2 rock art shelters. The exception is in the Avon, where two occur in lower slope contexts in its upper reaches near Gallahers Creek, where the valleys are broad and accessible. Like the Cataract, both catchments exhibit strong geographic patterns in respect of where Phase 2 rock markings were produced, and the intensity of their production.

Unlike the divide between the Cataract and Georges/Woronora rivers, the Watershed 2 between the Cataract and Cordeaux catchments was the focus of relatively intensive and significant Phase 2 rock art production. As noted in the discussion regarding the Cataract, a cluster of Phase 2 stencil sites is located immediately to the north of the Cataract/Cordeaux divide (at c. 3.5 kilometres west from the escarpment). A large cluster, likewise, is located on and adjacent (south-west side) to this landform, at a distance of c. 7.2 kilometres north-west from the escarpment. The large stencil site G23 is also located close to this cluster on the Cataract side of the divide. Notably, this cluster includes EC2 and EC12, the southernmost open engraving sites in the Sydney Basin. EC12 contains a single whale motif and EC2 has what the IPG describe as a female sex symbol, and large numbers of grinding grooves. The cluster includes three shelters with Phase 2 stencils, two of which (EC1 and EC5a) contain graphic motifs. EC5a is located adjacent to EC5b, a major Phase 2 shelter that has trident-form graphics (Phase 2a), comparable with those in Gill50 and BC6 in the Cataract. EC5b is also morphologically similar to Gill50 and BC6 (commodious with a large living floor area). This cluster represents a significant Phase 2 node of rock-marking activity, including both graphic production and gestural marking. A small Phase 2 graphic site with a pair of anthropomorphs (EC17) is located approximately 1.5 kilometres further west. What is notable about this cluster of sites is the absence of animal imagery in the Phase 2 suite of graphics.

In the central area of Watershed 2 and near to the Cordeaux River, a small cluster of minor Phase 2 graphic sites occur. These do contain animal motifs including, notably, EC36 with macropod and emu imagery. While not immediately associated with a Phase 2 rock art shelter, the largest open grinding groove site in the Upper Nepean catchment, EC34, is located in the central area of this major thoroughfare landform.

The watershed (Watershed 3) situated between the Cordeaux and Avon rivers contains a significant suite of Phase 2 graphic sites, including several mentioned in Chapter 8. The south-eastern end of this landform was a focal area for grinding hatchets. This clustering at the eastern end of watershed landforms is a locational pattern, noted above in respect of landforms in the Cataract catchment, and the watershed divide between the Cataract and Cordeaux. One of the most significant rock art shelters in the upper Nepean, SCR10, is located at the south-eastern end of Watershed 3. Similar to Gill50, BC6 and EC5b (in its association with EC5a), SCR10 contains early Phase 2a graphics and stencils, and is commodious with a huge living area floor. UA1 is located approximately 600 metres to the west in the cluster of large numbers of grinding groove sites, including UA3 with its high groove count of 41. UA1 is one of two significant Phase 2

animal motif shelters on this major thoroughfare. The other, UA47, is located approximately 12 kilometres north-west of UA1, on a minor divide landform (Minor Divide 12). These two shelters may have been the focus for the visual expression of a totemic geography in the Upper Nepean. Minor stencil and graphic sites are distributed along the remainder of Watershed 3.

A minor divide (Minor Divide 8) that extends northwards between Wongawilli and Sandy Creek contains a cluster of Phase 2 graphic shelters in its central area. The most notable of these is BR29, with its anthropomorphic and eel motifs. Shelters with stencils are distributed along the length of this thoroughfare landform. The remainder of the minor divides between the Cordeaux and Avon rivers contain a sparse, continuous but unfocused distribution of shelters with stencils and graphics in low numbers, all of which are on, or immediately adjacent to, crests and, hence, are accessible. However, a large stencil site, RL11, located in close proximity to a relatively large grinding groove site in the central area of Watershed 3 is loosely associated with two other stencil sites. Similar to the Cataract, Phase 2 stencil sites in the area between the Cordeaux and Cataract rivers are geographically widespread and present at their terminal ends.

In the Avon catchment proper, a minor divide landform (Minor Divide 14) extends northward from the escarpment into its upper reaches. Two Phase 2 shelters are located on the crest in the central area of this ridge. A12 is a significant Phase 2 graphic site, and contains both early Phase 2a motifs and Phase 2b animal imagery. It does not contain stencils, but its counterpart, A16, located 1 kilometre further to the north, does. Similar to the other shelters with Phase 2a motifs (Gill50, BC6, EC5b and SCR10), this shelter is commodious and has a large living area floor. A12 is the southernmost shelter in the Upper Nepean of this type. A16 contains stencils at one end, and Phase 2 eel motifs at the other. At the terminal end of this ridge and adjacent to the Avon River, two shelters, A29 and A26, are in a cluster, and each contains a small suite of Phase 2 graphics, including animal imagery.

The watershed between the Avon and Nepean rivers (Watershed 4), and a short minor divide, which extends to the north-east from near its southern end, does not contain any major Phase 2 graphic or stencil shelters. Shelters with generally very low stencil counts occur along the length of the landform in a relatively continuous distribution. Three small clusters of Phase 2 stencil sites occur, and one is in close association with a large grinding groove site.

Major Phase 2 graphic rock art sites in the Avon and Cordeaux catchments are clearly tethered to major thoroughfares and crest landforms, and are highly accessible.

### 9.2.3 The Nepean Catchment

The Nepean catchment contains 95 rock art shelters, 13 with stencils only, 8 with graphics only and 5 with both stencils and graphics. The Nepean is characterised by a relative dearth of Phase 2 graphics shelters and motifs.

The Nepean side of the long watershed landform (Watershed 4), between the Nepean and Avon rivers, has only two Phase 2 shelters, both of which contain a single red stencil. A minor divide landform (Minor Divide 16) extends north between Burke and Explorers creeks from the Nepean and Avon watershed. From Minor Divide 16, a shorter ridge (Minor Divide 17) extends north between Explorers Creek and Little Burke River. Shelters with Phase 2 stencils occur at either end of both landforms, and several are loosely clustered. One shelter on each minor divide contains relatively high stencil counts: Ana28 has 14 stencils, and three rare handprints, and Ana15 has 17 stencils. Both minor divides each have a single Phase 2 graphic site containing only eel imagery: Ana28 has one eel motif, and its association with hand stencils and prints is notable; Ana20 has two. All Phase 2 shelters on these minor divides are on crests or elevated slope contexts. Infrequent and minor grinding activity occurred. On Minor Divide 16, those locales with higher groove counts are located in the central area of the ridge.

Two short minor divides (18 and 19), separated by a minor tributary, extend north from the southern boundary of the study area. Minor Divide 18 has two rock art shelters only, both of which contain Phase 2 stencils. *Ana1*, located at the southern end, is a major stencil site. The other site has two stencils and a single Phase 2 graphic of uncertain figurative model. Minor Divide 19 contains two grinding groove sites, both of which have relatively high groove counts. These peripheral landforms, at the edge of the catchment, display a similar spatial association between Phase 2 stencil and grinding groove sites with that of the eastern end of major watersheds, in the Cataract, Cordeaux and Avon catchments.

Minor Divide 20 is a significant, long landform extending north from the southern boundary of the study area, between the Nepean and Burke rivers. It contains a relatively high number of grinding groove sites, but very little Phase 2 rock art. Grinding groove locales occur at the southern end of the ridge, and a cluster in the central area has two large sites, including one with 53 grooves (Sab24). Two shelters contain counts of two and three indeterminate graphics, and two clustered shelters contain minor counts of stencils, one of which has one indeterminate graphic.

The major watershed (Watershed 5) that forms the western boundary of the study area has very little Phase 2 rock art, and low numbers of grinding groove sites. The rock art sites cluster in the central area. Five contain stencils, mostly in low counts, and four shelters have graphics in very low counts.

The Nepean catchment contrasts significantly with its northern neighbours, in terms of the abundance of Phase 2 graphic-marking activity; there is a paucity of Phase 2 graphic production in the Nepean. However, it is broadly comparable in its geographic and environmental structure of site distribution. Grinding groove and stencilling locales are widely distributed. Several open sites contain high groove counts, and some site clustering occurs. Their environmental signature is also comparable with the other catchments; all Phase 2 sites are located on obvious thoroughfares and in accessible locales. The absence of significant grinding groove and Phase 2 rock art sites along the western margin of the Upper Nepean Catchment is notable, and suggests that interior locations were preferred areas of rock-marking activity.

### 9.3 Phase 3 Rock Art

The geographic and environmental signatures of Phase 3 rock art are described in the following sections. The majority of rock shelters used for the production of Phase 2 graphic rock art were reused for Phase 3 marking. As noted in Chapter 8, additions made to rock art panels during Phase 3, typically, did not obscure earlier graphic rock art, but Phase 2 stencils were not preferentially avoided. In Phase 3, Phase 2 animal and anthropomorphic graphics were frequently redrawn (re-marked) with charcoal. These trends strongly indicate that the relevance of the referential properties of early graphic rock art remained in place during the most recent period of rock marking. Because of this, it is inferred that the separation in time between the production of Phase 2b graphic rock art and Phase 3 may not have been significant.

In Chapter 8, it was noted that Phase 3 stencils were geographically circumscribed compared with Phase 2 stencils, and restricted generally to the interior of the Upper Nepean. The location of shelters with Phase 3 stencils, in respect of major landforms, reflects this pattern. While the majority of Phase 3 stencils do occur on the main travel route landforms, 35 per cent are on spurs off minor divides that are interior locales in the catchment. This contrasts with the locational patterns relating to Phase 2 stencils, and indicates a retreat away from major thoroughfares into more secluded locales within the catchment for the production of Phase 3 stencils. It is in the

Cataract that this pattern contrasts most obviously with Phase 2. Of the 20 shelters with Phase 3 stencils, 11 occur on spurs off minor divides and are in shelters that are close to the river. This differs significantly from Phase 2 stencil-only sites in that catchment, where only seven of 33 occurred in this context.

The inter- and intra-site spatial separation evident between Phase 2 stencils and graphics does not occur in Phase 3 rock art. In contrast, Phase 3 stencils and graphics frequently co-occur on an inter- and intra-site basis, and the patterns suggest a strong mutual association. It is in this sense that they may have functioned within the same social context, and '[t]hey may therefore, ultimately be linked in reinforcement or in dialectic' (Rosenfeld 1999).

In Phase 3, the production of graphic rock art was predominant and stencilling was a minor practice. This suggests a greater emphasis on the use of rock art in the pursuit of corporate or supra-individualised social strategies. However, the character, nature and environmental and micro-topographic location of some Phase 3 graphics and other marks is suggestive of individualised activity. It was suggested in Chapter 8 that the non-graphic pigment marking in rock shelters (charcoal embellishment of natural features and so on) may have functioned to unite people and place in a manner comparable with stencilling.

During Phase 3, rock art was produced in 449 shelters; this abundance contrasts significantly with shelter numbers used for Phase 2 rock art production. Typically, shelters used previously were reused in Phase 3, although this is not always the case. Phase 2 shelters with relatively large graphic counts were normally reused for Phase 3 rock art, and sometimes this was extensive. While the majority of Phase 3 rock art was produced in very low counts in 'new' shelters, some of these sites contain high numbers, and this indicates that corporate pursuits required the use of sites that were additional to those previously used.

### 9.3.1 The Cataract Catchment

Of the 160 rock art shelters in the Cataract catchment, Phase 3 graphic rock art occurs in 137 of those shelters. Stencils were produced in 20 shelters and, except for Lod8 located on Watershed 1, stencilling occurred predominantly in the interior of the catchment in close association with the main river valleys. Two shelters located close together at the western end of this watershed contain remarkable and rare suites of Phase 3 graphics. The rock art panel in AF3 is dominated by a line of macropod motifs that face in one direction and are drawn in an animated and fighting stance. This composition suggests the expression, via narrative, of new concerns that may relate to stress. The panel in AF4 is dominated by a large wombat, with a clutch of circle motifs. While the pose of the macropods in AF3 is novel, the wombat and its association with circles in AF4 exemplifies a referential continuity between Phase 2 and 3 graphic rock art. The location of these sites on a prominent thoroughfare and near Appin at the north-west corner of the Cataract catchment is notable. Appin is a site of early contact, conflict and violence between European settlers and Aboriginal people.

Phase 3 graphic shelters mostly contain very low graphic counts, and are geographically widespread across the remainder of the Cataract, with no obvious environmental patterns in distribution. Because of the generally amorphous nature of the terrain in the Cataract, this is not unexpected. The intensive Phase 3 rock marking appears to have occurred in larger shelters that contain Phase 2 rock art. In these shelters, Phase 2 graphic forms were reproduced, and novel forms were introduced. As well as the production of Phase 3 graphics, new forms of gestural marking were undertaken, including gestural non-graphic pigment marking and rubbing, pecking and scratching of rock art panels. Shelters that exemplify this trend in the Cataract include LizCk17 and Wall13. This pattern, which occurs in the southern catchment also, suggests that shelters with

older graphics may have been influential in regard to their reuse and the nature of subsequent rock marking. In particular, there is a tendency for gestural marking in these sites, which suggests that during the production of Phase 3 rock art they were symbolically charged locales.

### 9.3.2 The Cordeaux and Avon Catchments

In the Cordeaux and Avon catchments, 217 of the 254 rock art shelters contain Phase 3 graphic and stencil marks. Significant Phase 2 shelters were reused, and the patterns identified in the Cataract exist also in the Cordeaux and Avon. The prominent Phase 2 shelters, SCR10, UA1 and UA47, located on Watershed 3, were each used differently during Phase 3, suggesting the expression of a greater complexity of concerns on this major thoroughfare. In SCR10, early Phase 2a graphics were superimposed by large and imposing animal motifs—an emu, macropod and whale. These are formally comparable with the three rare animal motifs in the Upper Nepean's open context engraved sites. While other Phase 3 graphics occur in this major site, the addition of these motifs indicates not only their continued relevance, but a shift away from open to 'closed' contexts. UA1 is located in a prominent position on the crest and at the eastern end of the Watershed 3 thoroughfare landform. The Phase 3 imagery in this site is comprised primarily of large imposing anthropomorphic motifs, and these are superimposed over the early Phase 2b animal imagery. This contrasts with its counterpart UA47, which is located adjacent to a ridge crest but away from the thoroughfare itself. Here, the Phase 2 animal imagery was redrawn in charcoal and carefully curated during Phase 3. SCR10 and UA47, located slightly away from the main thoroughfare area of Watershed 3, appear to have been used to reaffirm traditional themes. In contrast, UA1, located in a very obvious thoroughfare locale, exhibits a dominant new referential system, which appears to have been used to express more contemporary concerns.

In the Cordeaux and Avon catchments, rock marking at this time was not tethered to major thoroughfares and accessible landforms. In the rugged terrain located away from ridge landforms, Phase 3 shelters are distributed in a geographic and environmental pattern that is widespread and diverse. This pattern corresponds with a greater diversity in shelter types used for the production of Phase 3 graphics. While many graphics produced in these more marginal landforms and shelters include motifs, which are formally structured and referential in a manner comparable with those in accessible places, typically graphics and gestural rock marking exhibit a greater diversity in their form and nature. This suggests a retreat from the restrictions of corporate strategies to a more individualised expression and relationship to land.

### 9.3.3 The Nepean Catchment

In the Nepean catchment, the environmental patterns of Phase 3 rock art do not differ significantly from those in Phase 2. This similarity is likely to be environmentally determined, and a reflection of the nature of the terrain (the significant gorge and cliff lines that dissect the plateau in this catchment). Phase 3 stencilling is largely absent in the catchment and occurs as a single motif. Of the 95 rock art shelters, 85 contain Phase 3 graphics, most of which were produced in low counts. Similar to Phase 2, rock art production was not a high-level activity, despite the existence of suitable shelters (Sefton, pers. comm., 2003).

## 9.4 Discussion

The archaeological implications of the geographic pattern of diminishing site densities, as one moves from north to south along the Woronora Plateau, is not easily understood or explained. The higher densities of grinding groove sites and groove counts, and Phase 2 stencilling in the Cataract, may indicate a greater intensity of occupation in that catchment. However, this

inference is by no means axiomatic. Cultural choice made in response to the increasingly rugged environment encountered south of the Cataract, or purely social factors relating to social and technological organisation, may have resulted in this pattern. It is possibly a product of a nexus between both. However, other indicators suggest that a social parameter may have existed. These include the cessation, south of the central Upper Nepean, of the production of the Sydney–Hawkesbury open context engraved imagery and engraved groove channels, and the paucity of Phases 2 and 3 graphic rock art, south and west of the Cordeaux and Avon divide. While these locational patterns demand an explanation, they are outside the empirical basis and thrust of this monograph.

The geographically widespread practice of Phase 2 stencilling contrasts with the spatially focused signature of Phase 2 graphic rock art sites and motifs. The engagement with this pattern from a perspective of rock art as praxis indicates that Phase 2 graphic rock art was produced in a highly organised social milieu. Very few graphic motifs were produced, and their careful inscription and ordered arrangement on rock art panels within shelters reflects a highly structured productive and social context. Phase 2 rock art shelters are in environmental contexts that are accessible. They occur on landforms that are likely to have been those normally, if not habitually, used for movement through country and base camp habitations. The earliest Phase 2 graphics occur exclusively in shelters that have the capacity to accommodate relatively large numbers of people. These situational contexts, in which Phase 2 graphic rock art was produced, suggest that fundamentally the inscription of corporate signatures on the land at this time may not have been governed by any meaningful significance of the specific locale. The location of Phase 2 rock art may instead relate to the opportunities and amenity presented by the morphological attributes of shelters and their location on landforms that people habitually occupied.

This scenario is significantly different in respect of the locational and environmental signature of the later Phase 3 rock art. However, a tendency for rock art production and new expressions of gestural marking, to have taken place in Phase 2 shelters indicates that these locales may have possessed highly charged symbolic properties and resonances. The spatially widespread, diverse and abundant rock marking that took place in the recent past suggests that rock art as practice was of increased importance.

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