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Wartook Lookout 1 (WO-1) and the Gariwerd rock art sequence, Victoria

R.G. Gunn¹ and J. Goodes²

Abstract

A recently located rock shelter in Gariwerd (Grampians National Park, Victoria), Wartook Lookout 1 (WO-1), which at first glance appeared innocuous, was found to contain a number of unique or unusual features that extend our understanding of Gariwerd rock art. These include the first example of a pounded motif; an unusually high number of drawn motifs; and a superimposition sequence that elaborates on the previously proposed sequence of Gariwerd rock art. This shelter highlights the need for specialised assessment of all rock shelters before a statement of archaeological significance can be prepared for a cultural heritage assessment.

Introduction

Much of the rock art within rock shelters in Victoria is notoriously difficult to see without careful and close observation on account of its generally poor state of preservation. For example, a survey of the Mt Talbot Scenic Reserve in the southern Wimmera in 1985 failed to identify a group of white paintings on the rear wall of the main occupation shelter, despite rock art being a primary focus of the survey (Gunn 1985). It was not until excavation of the shelter was undertaken that the art was noticed directly behind the excavation pit (Bird 1995; Gunn 1987a).

Following more recent re-examination of other rock art sites within Gariwerd (**Figure 1**), particularly using the image-enhancement programme DStretch (Harman 2015), additional artwork is now being recorded that has been overlooked previously. In addition, some reported art sites have now, on closer examination, been dismissed as having natural rather than cultural markings. This paper presents an overview of a recently discovered rock art site in Gariwerd, Wartook Lookout 1 (WO-1), and what insights it reveals about the rock art sequence in the broader region.

¹ Monash Indigenous Studies Centre, Menzies Building, Monash University, Clayton Vic. 3800; gunnb@activ8.net.au

² Grampians National Park, Halls Gap Vic. 3381

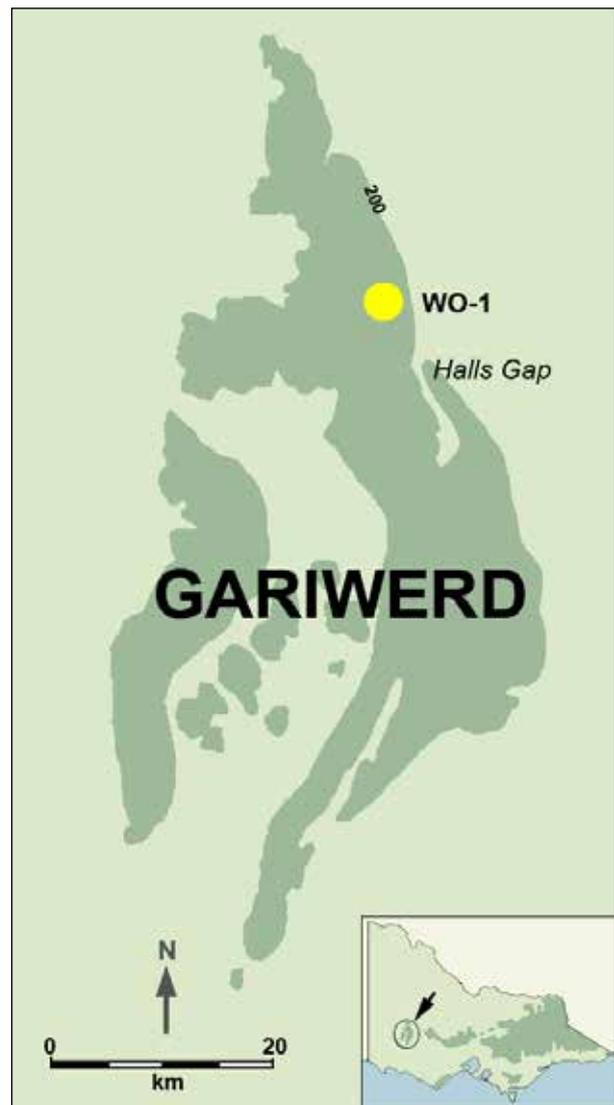


Figure 1: Location of Gariwerd and site WO-1

Gariwerd rock art

Gariwerd (including Grampians National Park) is a prominent physical feature of the Western Victorian landscape, with steeply sided ranges that rise over 800 m above the surrounding plains (**Figure 1**). The ranges contain a broad range of environments including

wetlands, heathlands, woodlands, forests, and large areas of exposed bedrock. They contain a similarly varied range of archaeological site types listed on the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register (VAHR), including the densest concentration of rock art in the State, with smaller and more dispersed foci also occurring in northeastern and southwestern Victoria (Bednarik et al. 1995; Gunn 1984;).

Gariwerd is of major cultural significance to Aboriginal people from the surrounding regions, with several important Dreamings focusing on the ranges (Calder 1987; Clarke 2017; Dawson 1881; Parks Victoria 2003; Wettenhall 1999). It is also of high significance to non-Aboriginal people, being now incorporated into the Grampians National Park for both its conservation and tourist values (Day et al. 1984).

The oldest dated Aboriginal place in Gariwerd was occupied 22,000 years ago, although the occupation of most dated shelter deposits does not extend beyond 4,000 years ago (e.g. Bird and Frankel 2005; Coutts and Lorblanchet 1982). Throughout Gariwerd, none of the rock art has been dated (Gunn 1987b). However, previous studies have shown that the art comprises three distinct sequential phases, each of which has been identified on the basis of colour and technique (Gunn 1987b:52–55):

1. Red paintings, hand stencils and prints (earliest; most poorly preserved);
2. Red and black drawings, and
3. White paintings (most recent; generally best preserved).

This rock art sequence is based on studying isolated instances of superimposition from individual sites across Gariwerd. Previously, only a single instance involving the superimposition of all three phases had been recorded (Gunn 1983:111, 115).

Site WO-1 (VAHR unassigned)

In recent years, three devastating bushfires ravaged 90% of the Gariwerd region: in the centre and south (2006); west (2011); and north (2014). Since these fires, archaeological site assessment teams have recorded a number of previously unreported rock art sites. In addition, rock art sites have been located by other Parks Victoria staff and local rock-climbers. Rock shelter site WO-1, located by Kyle Hewitt (Parks Victoria) in 2016, is one of these recently located sites. WO-1 is a small and inconspicuous shelter measuring 4.5x2.5x2.5 m on the Mt Difficult Range, some 600 m above the surrounding plains (**Figure 1**). This site lies near the traditional boundary of the Djab Wurrung and Jardwadjali peoples (Clark 1990).

The shelter is located within an eroded niche of fine to coarse felspathic sandstone (Cayley and Taylor 1997) surrounded by a dense and scrubby Heathy Forest and Woodland eco-system (Mike Stevens, Parks Victoria,

pers. comm. 2017) (**Figure 2**). The shelter was recorded by the authors with the assistance of Leigh Douglas and Ryan Duffy (then with Parks Victoria) in June 2016 (Gunn 2017) using conventional methods: plan and section mapping, close visual inspection, sketches, photography, and the use of DStretch on an iPad (cf. Harman 2015). DStretch is an image-enhancement programme that uses a set number of filters and enables an interpretation to be readily repeated by others. Illustrations of the artwork were produced by photo-tracing from standard and enhanced photographs.

The rear wall of the shelter contains an exceptional array of mostly poorly preserved rock art images. An inverted grindstone (with a smear of white pigment) was found at the base of the wall, and six quartz flakes were noted along the dripline. The floor consists of consolidated sand of unknown depth and archaeological potential.

The rock art includes an unusually high number of dry pigment drawings, and two notable superimposition sequences. The art occurs on eight separate rock panels on the rear wall which contain a total of 128 art elements, including 86 red-drawn bars (within nine bar-set motifs), 31 paintings, a hand stencil and a unique pounding (**Tables 1–3**). The only visually outstanding motif is a well-preserved painting of a simple linear design, 94 cm long, which dominates the centre of the wall. The other motifs vary in their preservation, ranging from good to very poor. This paper focuses on the art on two of these panels: panels 2 and 5.

Panel 2 contains 11 motifs, all in red pigment, which form three groups on the basis of their preservation and superimposition:

1. Left-hand stencil and group of four painted bars (earliest);
2. Painted anthropomorph and four painted emu tracks; and
3. Scribble-area drawing (most recent).

Panel 5, however, provided the greatest surprises. A total of 19 motifs were identified on this panel: a row of nine red painted bars, nine red linear drawings, and a pounded design (**Figure 3**). The pounding is an unpatinated, figure-eight shaped design, measuring 20x5 cm. This is the first pounded motif (and the first petroglyph) identified in Gariwerd. Although the constituent pounded marks are unpatinated and well-defined, the marks are loosely clustered and delineation of the image overall is unclear, suggesting that the artist was either not confident in the use of a pounding hammer or was more concerned with the process of pounding than with the form of the motif. The pounding occurs in superimposition with three other motifs: an overlying drawing and two underlying paintings. This provides a basis for presenting the pounding within the existing sequence of Gariwerd rock art.



Figure 2: The shelter interior from the south

Technique	Red	Black	Unpatinated	Total
Painting	31			31
Drawing	82	8		90
Pounding			1	1
Stencil	1			1
Total	114	8	1	123

Table 1: WO-1 motif elements by technique and colour

Motif	Underlying motifs
Drawing #57	Drawing #63
Drawing #60	Drawing #63
Drawing #67	Drawing #68
Drawing #13	Painting (#4)
Drawing #57	Paintings #53–55
Drawing #58	Painting #47
Drawing #60	Paintings #48–50, 52
Drawing #63	Paintings #51–54
Drawing #80	Painting #69
Drawing #60	Pounding #56
Pounding #56	Paintings #48–49
Painting #5	Stencil #3

Table 2: Individual motif element superimpositions

Sequence	Colour/technique	Major motif types
Earliest	Red stencils	Hands
	Red paintings	Three-toed bird tracks, bar sets and elongated static anthropomorphs
	Pounding	A simple design
	Red drawings	Anthropomorphs, bar sets, lines
	Black drawings	Anthropomorphs, fauna, bar sets and lines
Most recent	White paintings	Active anthropomorphs

Table 3: A revised sequence of Gariwerd rock art

WO-1 and the Gariwerd sequence

A distinct sequence of techniques was identified using a Harris Matrix (Harris and Gunn 2017) to interpret the superimposed motifs within panels 2 and 5 (Figure 4):

1. Red stencil (earliest);
2. Red painting;
3. Unpatinated pounding; and
4. Red drawing (most recent).

The red drawings show internal sequencing (red drawing over red drawing), indicative of more than one art event, although because of preservational differences

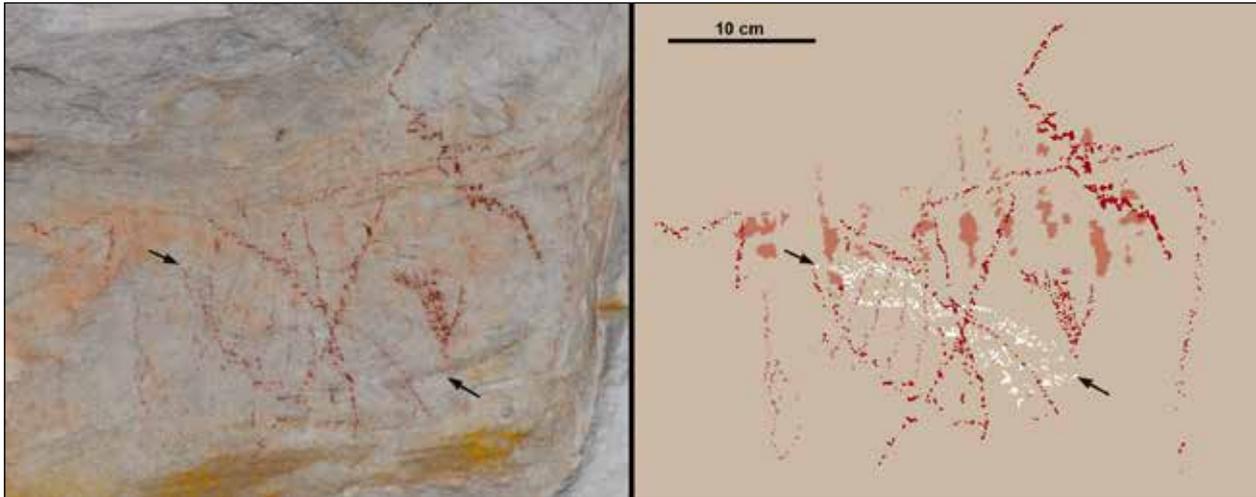


Figure 3: Art Panel 5 showing pounded motif (arrowed) that underlies red drawings and overlies red paintings. Flash photograph left, photo-tracing right

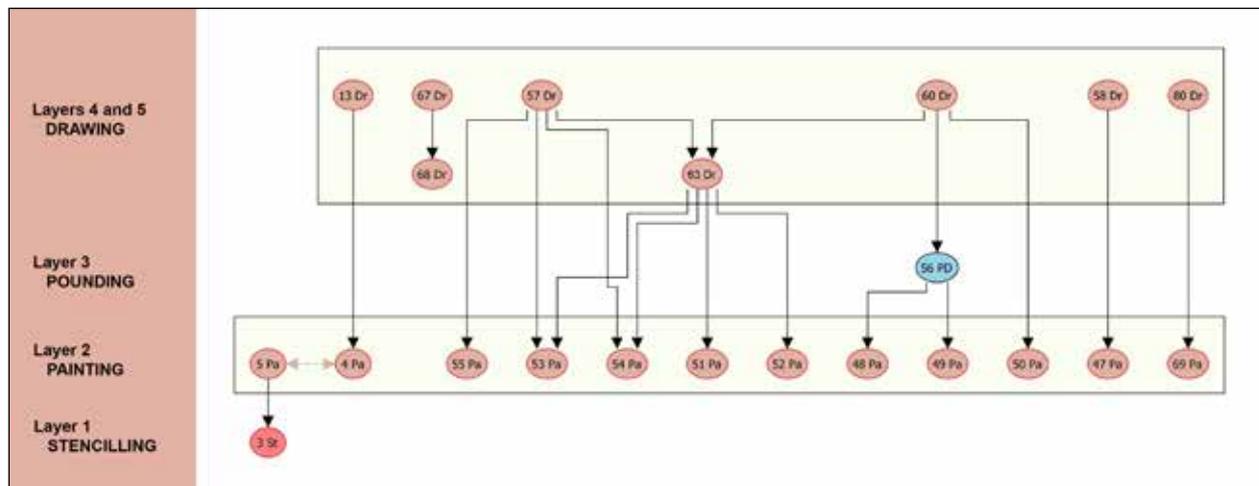


Figure 4: Interpreted Harris Matrix of the WO-1 motif element superimpositions from panels 2 and 5. Dr = red drawing; PD = pounding; Pa = red painting; St = red stencil

amongst them, no sequencing of the drawing layers can be proposed at this stage. While the WO-1 shelter also contains black drawings, none are involved in superimposition and therefore this site does not assist in determining the relative sequence of the two drawing colours (red and black).

Previously, only a single instance involving the superimposition of all three phases had been recorded—at Jananginj Njau in the Victoria Range (Gunn 1983:111, 115). Combining the art phase sequences from WO-1, Jananginj Njau and Cultivation Ck 15a (where white paintings overlie black drawings and black drawings overlie red drawings; Gunn 1987c) suggests that, at this stage, Gariwerd rock art comprises a five-phase art sequence. While the reasons for the changes in colour/technique are unknown, the sequence has parallels with some other areas of Australia, such as early red hand stencils and paintings, and/or late drawing and white painting (cf. Chaloupka 1993; Frederick 1999; McDonald

1998; Walsh 1997a, 1997b). If it can be shown that these sequences are roughly contemporaneous throughout Australia, a regional or continental explanation may exist for these changes which has yet to be elucidated.

Discussion and conclusion

The small and innocuous art site WO-1 is similar to others located throughout Gariwerd. Through careful detailed recording, however, the faint artwork identified at this site has introduced a further technique—pounding—into the Gariwerd rock art assemblage. This is the first petroglyph reported in Gariwerd, and the superimposition sequence at WO-1 indicates that it was made more recently than the paintings but earlier than the drawings within this shelter.

This sequence, and that of painting over hand stencil on an adjacent panel, reiterates the drawing/painting/stencil sequence previously identified at Jananginj Njau, and supports lesser sequences at other sites, suggesting

that the sequence is indeed general for all Gariwerd rock art.

What is important for cultural heritage consultants working in rocky landscapes, however, is the need to record rock shelters carefully, including closely examining all aspects of a wall–ceiling surface so that important features, such as those identified at WO-1, are not overlooked due to hasty site recording. In some cases, the expertise of rock art specialists should be utilised prior to determining the archaeological significance of a rock shelter.

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