

Rock Carvings in Hong Kong and the New Territories

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LANTAU ISLAND

WHEN the Shek Pik district on Lantau Island (Fig. 1) was being surveyed in 1954 before the construction of a reservoir, the University of Hong Kong Archaeological Team seized the opportunity to trench across the sandy raised beach and collect artifacts. During this work a rock carving was found behind the beach about 200 yards from the seashore, on the east side of the valley. The carving was cleaned up, and in 1958 the government was persuaded to build a protecting wall around it. It is now located below the reservoir at the east end.

According to local legend and history, the valley contained another rock carving. Although numerous searches were made for this second carving, it was not until Christmas 1962, when the spur in the middle of the valley at about the 400-foot level was explored, that the carving was found on a large boulder. This carving is geometric, with an extremely simple design. The other carving at the reservoir is also geometric, but much more sophisticated.

Both these Shek Pik carvings have been cut in fine-grain volcanic rocks and belong to the Repulse Bay formation. Approximately 154 million years old, this is almost Hong Kong's oldest rock series.

PO TOI ISLAND

For many years local legend, passed on by villagers and fishing folk, had it that Po Toi Island (Moss Terrace Island) had several rock carvings on cliff faces. However, many visits to the island over the years failed to locate their whereabouts.

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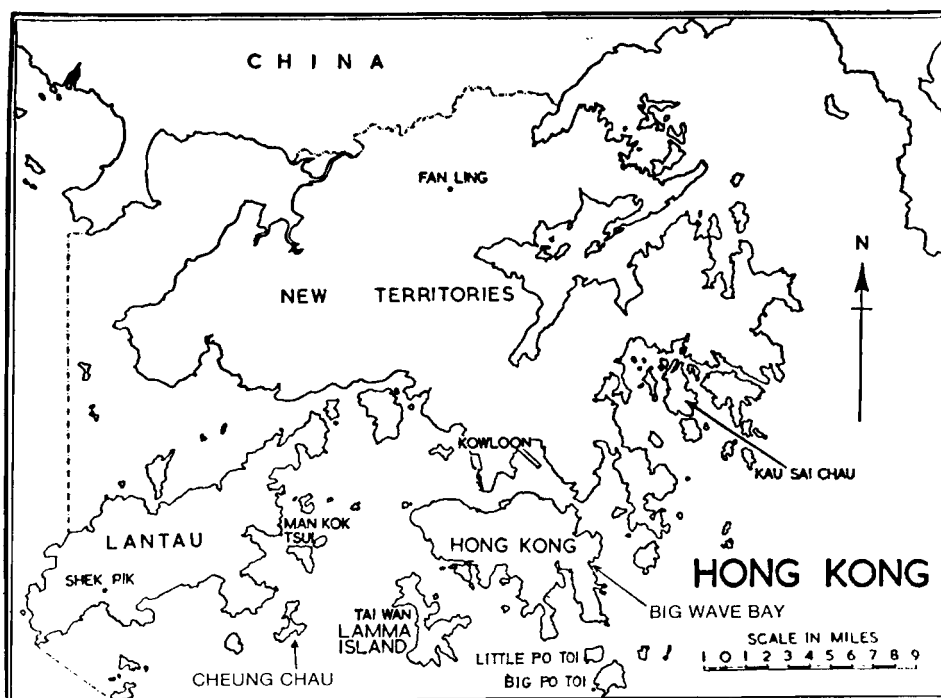


Fig. 1 Hong Kong and the New Territories.

In April 1972 a team from the Hong Kong Archaeological Society visited the island. Preparations were under way to celebrate the fishermen's festival (Tin Hau, Goddess of Heaven). Some workmen were busy in the temple repairing and painting, while others outside were erecting an open-air theater. No rock carvings could be found in this vicinity. The workmen were asked if they knew of any around the bay, Tai Wan, which has the island's largest village around its beach. It was suggested that Lee Hing Hong, headmaster of the village school, be asked, as he had lived on Po Toi for more than thirty years. Good fortune came from this advice. Mr. Lee knew of the carvings and the approximate area where they might be found.

A student teacher, Mr. Lui, was recruited to act as guide. After a climb of several hours duration, the carvings were found above a ledge on a steep cliff face (Pl. I).

There are two principal carvings, 2 feet 6 inches apart. The one on the east side is 6 feet high and 2 feet 6 inches wide. The one on the west is 4 feet 6 inches high and 2 feet 6 inches wide (Fig. 2; Pl. II, *top*).

It would appear that several rock faces were tried out by the carvers to find the most suitable grains and the location of fractures and joints. There is evidence of carving on fractured faces (Pl. II, *bottom*) 7 m to the east of the sophisticated designs. Rubbings were needed to examine these patterns.

The ledge below where the carvings are located is approximately 4 m above the beach. Near the carvings on the west side is a gully that might have been shaped



Plate IV Rock carvings in Big Wave Bay, Hong Kong Island.



Plate II Po Toi Island rock carvings: *top*, left and right; *bottom*, carvings 7 m east of location pictured above.

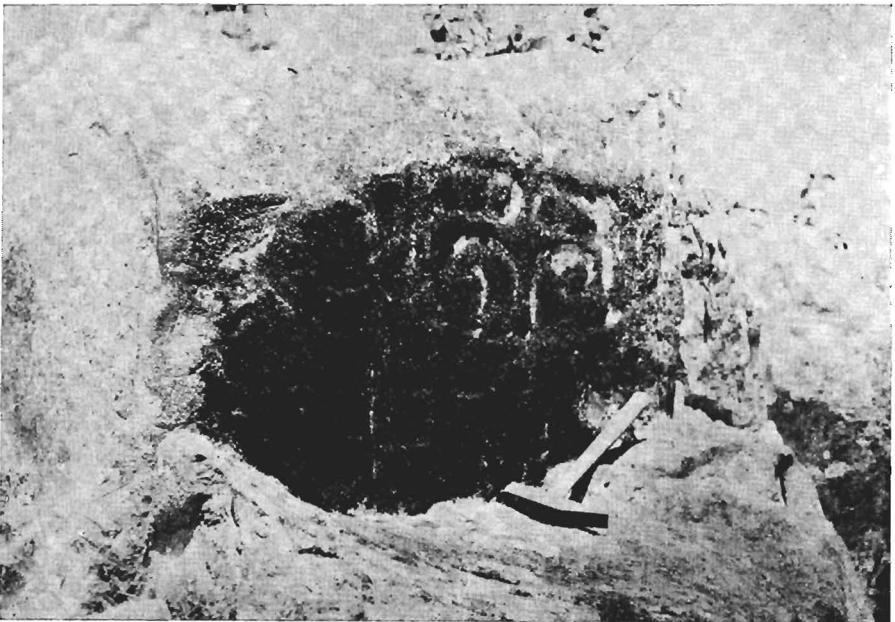


Plate III Rock carving on Cheung Chau Island, Hong Kong.

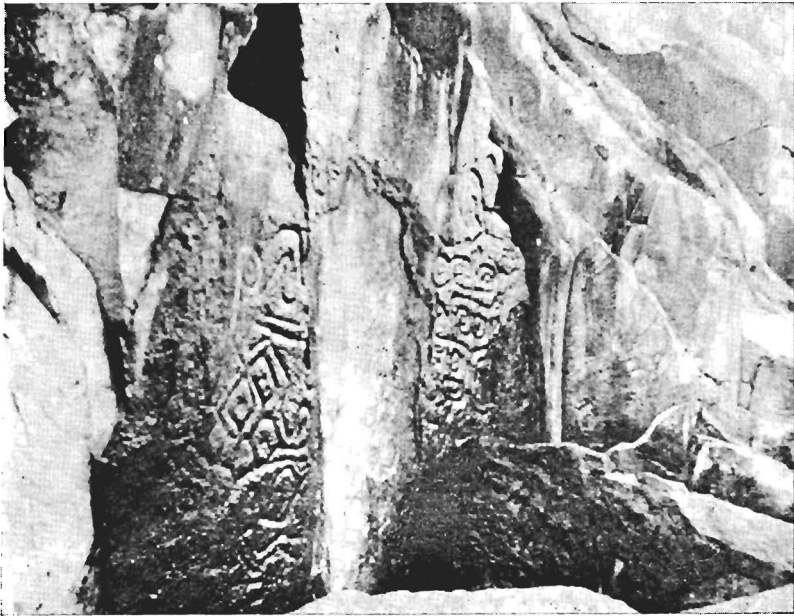
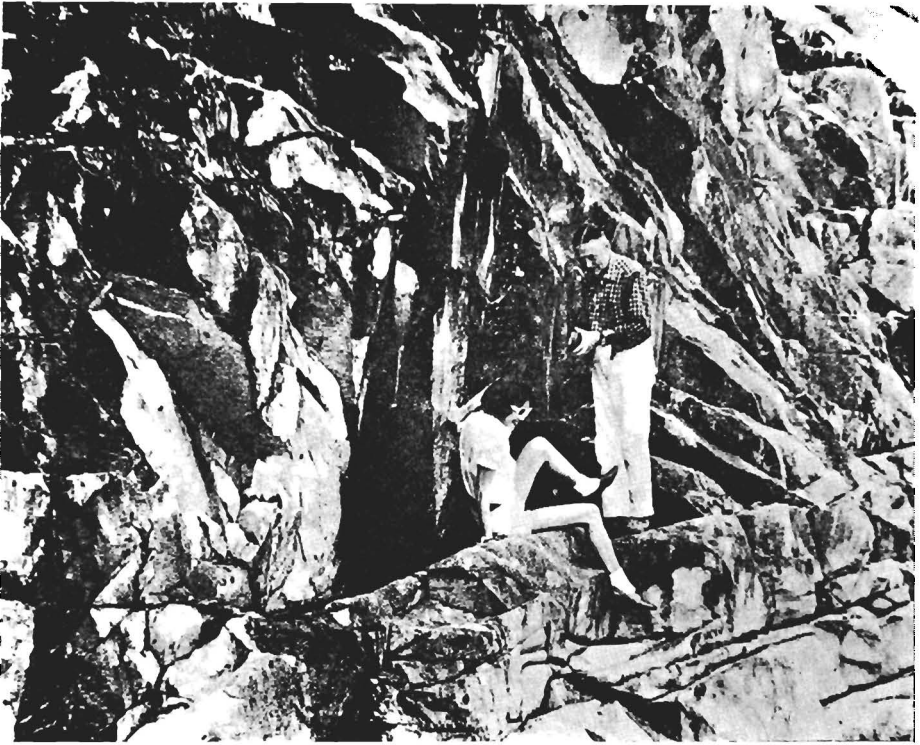


Plate I *top*, ledge on Po Toi Island, Hong Kong, with pair of rock carvings just to left of S. G. Davis; *bottom*, the carvings.

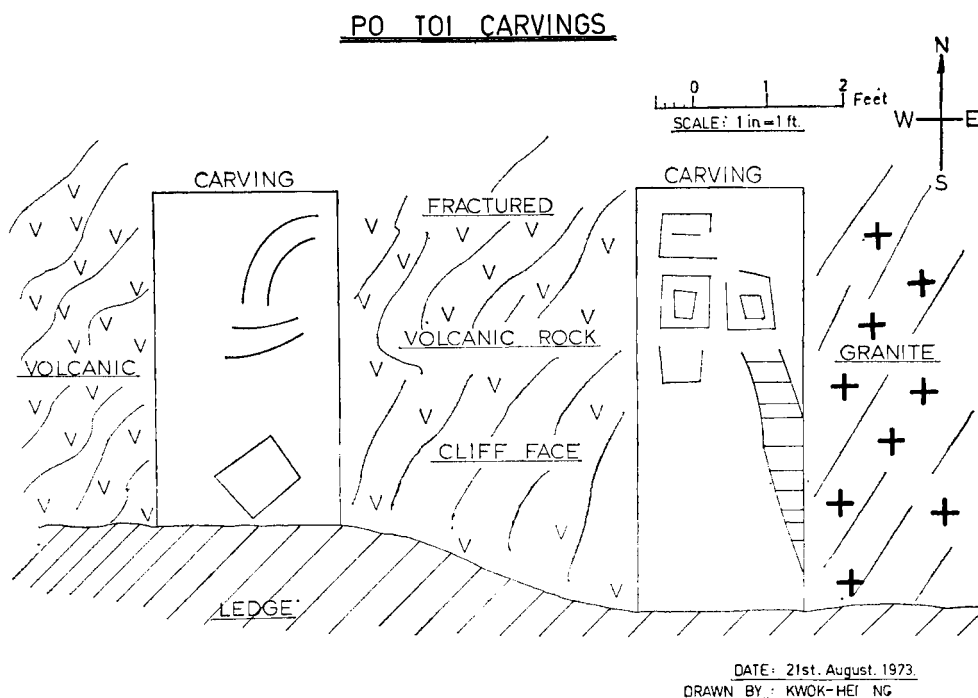


Fig. 2 Positioning of the pair of Po Toi Island rock carvings.

by man, as it cuts across the ledge and at beach level is deep enough to allow a sampan to enter and land people.

All the carvings are engraved in very fine-grained volcanic rock. This type of rock has a very fine regular grain which is of great help to a skilled mason.

CHEUNG CHAU ISLAND

In 1970 a new carving near the hospital on Cheung Chau Island was reported by Charles Pang, a geologist in the University of Hong Kong, and was visited by a party from the Society (Pl. III).

There is one major difference with this carving. The rock used is a coarse-grain porphyritic granite that has large crystals which can easily be identified. The pattern has some slight resemblance to the two carvings on Lantau Island.

BIG WAVE BAY, HONG KONG ISLAND

This carving is located at the eastern side of Hong Kong Island on the northern shore of the bay. It was reported to the Archaeological Society by Mr. B. Haigh, a police officer, after he had seen newspaper pictures of the carvings on Po Toi Island. In his letter he wrote, "I have enclosed a photograph of the carvings at Big Wave Bay that I took in the summer of 1970. As you can see these rocks have been subjected to fairly intricate carving and appear to be of the same style as described in the newspaper article" (Pl. IV).

The likeness of the patterns suggests that they were carved by the same people. They were possibly boat people in migration, as no housing sites have been found either in Big Wave Bay or on Po Toi Island. Another similarity is that the carvings were cut in the same fine-grain volcanic rock series. Again, both locations of the carvings are about 4 to 6 m above the high-water datum.