

ARIZONA'S HO'OK GEOGLYPH

BY

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Giant figures were created on the surface of the earth by ancient man in many diverse locations. The desert southwest of the United States is no exception where nearly two hundred such figures are known to exist.

Figures created on the earth's surface have been described and identified by different names. Some nomenclatures are indicative of the methods employed in the figure's construction, for example, an intaglio is a figure, or design that is incised beneath the surface as opposed to a cameo where the background is cut away leaving the figure raised. Sometimes figures were constructed with some features being tramped into the earth, an intaglio, while other features were fashioned by raising heaps of earth, or piles of stones, a cameo. Whether to call such a combination figure an intaglio or a cameo becomes a problem, therefore, names such as earth figure, geoglyph, and geofom were coined as all inclusive terms. For the purposes of this paper, I will use the term geoglyph since the figure I will discuss was constructed using both intaglio and cameo features.

The purpose of geoglyphs is only speculative in many cases, however, some are known to represent a mythological entity, serve as a shrine, or act as a mnemonic for some significant event. About five miles northeast of Sacaton, Pinal County, Arizona on the Gila River Indian Reservation, there is a geoglyph, a representation of Ho'ok, or Ha'ak, who is a significant character in the mythology of both the Papago and Pima Indians. The legend of Ho'ok, is so prominent in these cultures that Martineau (n.d.), has located a series of petroglyph stones which he interprets as recording this legend. Ted DeGrazia (1975), the famous artist, also created a series of paintings that depict the events of this legend.

The legend of Ho'ok begins with Pia-Konikam-of which means "Woman With No Husband", who was the mother of Ho'ok, hiding a kick ball under her skirt. The kick ball entered her womb and made her pregnant. When Pia-KonikamOof gave birth to a female, she had claws on her hands which were ugly. They named the child Ho'ok. Ho'ok rapidly grew into a giant. Some versions say it took four days and other versions say it was overnight. First Ho'ok began to slash other children with her claws. Later she began to gather them in her burden basket, take them to her cave, and eat them. She also ate the animals the Indians hunted. The people finally discovered what was happening to their children and the game animals they hunted. They called on a deity named I'ittoi, or Elder Brother, to help them solve the problem with Ho'ok. I'ittoi, or Elder Brother, decided they should hold a great celebration to trick Ho'ok. At this celebration Ho'ok was kept dancing and was also given all the cactus wine she could drink until at last she fell exhausted into a drunken sleep. The people then carried her to her cave and set it on fire. Ho'ok awoke and tried to escape, but I'ittoi, or Elder Brother, put his foot over the entrance to her cave which prevented her escape and she burned to death.

The name of the geoglyph near Sacaton is Ho'ok va'ak which means Ho'ok lying, since she supposedly slept at that spot. The geoglyph is shown as Figure 1. Nobody knows when this geoglyph was constructed. It is composed of

three stick figure anthropomorphs. The largest figure is laid out in a north-south line with the feet of the figure to the north. Piles of stones represent the head, hands, pelvic girdle, and feet. The body, neck, arms, and legs are little more than footpaths tramped into the earth. All three figures that compose the geoglyph are constructed in this manner. The largest figure is 54 meters long. There is a much smaller figure, 8.5 meters long, whose head rests on the chest of the largest figure. The neck, arms, hands, body, legs, and feet of this smaller figure lie off at an angle to the west of the larger figure. The third figure diagonally crosses the stomach of the largest figure. The legs of this third figure lie to the west-southwest and the body, arms, and head are to the east-northeast. This third figure is 19.8 meters long. The other dimensions of the three figure that compose this geoglyph are given in figure 2.

It is well documented that this geoglyph represents the legendary Ho'ok. Why there are three figures involved in this geoglyph nobody can explain. Perhaps the largest figure is Ho'ok's mother and smaller figure is Ho'ok as a child. The third, intermediate sized, figure may be I'itoi, or Elder Brother, who helped to destroy Ho'ok. Another possibility is that the larger figure is Ho'ok, the smaller figure is the children she ate, and the third figure is I'iltoi. However, this is all speculation since no one seems to know.

This third intermediate sized figure presents more problems than simply trying to determine who it represents and how it fits into the legend.

The earliest record I can locate describing this geoglyph is the Twenty-sixth Annual Report of The Bureau of American Ethnology to the Smithsonian Institution (1904-1905). This reports only two figures described as making up the geoglyph. The largest figure is described as having a body furrow 35 meters long with the legs extending another 11 meters. The smallest figure is described as being 4.5 meters long and lying beside the large figure. This same description is quoted in part by Setzler (1952). Whether Seltzer actually visited the site or just described it from the literature is not known. The measurements from these two sources give the geoglyph body furrow dimensions, but not overall length, of both the largest and smallest figures.

In 1985, Boma Johnson of the BLM in Yuma, Arizona published a book on geoglyphs through the Arizona Archaeological Society. On page 23 of this publication he discusses the Ho'ok geoglyph and on page 78 he presents a drawing of it. In his discussion of the geoglyph he gives a brief synopsis of the Ho'ok legend and suggests the two figures are Elder Brother and Ho'ok. On his drawing of this geoglyph he notes the largest figure is 35 meters long. This is the same length the other authors give for the body furrow of the largest figure. Mr. Johnson, like the other authors, does not acknowledge the presence of the third figure, however, his drawing does show what he calls a "foot trail", which bisects the largest figure, and "trail shrines" located beside the "foot trail". See Figure 3.

Mr. Ernest Ellis, who for forty-eight years ran the trading post at Olberg, Arizona, (which is about 3 miles from the geoglyph) was kind enough to share with me what knowledge he had of the geoglyph. He said it was protected by a wire fence when he first saw it. At that time there was the larger figure which he said represented Ho'ok, and a smaller figure, representing the children Ho'ok ate. He said there was also an arrow that passed through the body of Ho'ok, which represented the Indians killing her. Although Mr. Ellis knew of the geoglyph, and lived near it for forty-eight years, he only went to the site a few times. In September of 1987, Mr. Ellis and I visited the geoglyph together. At that time, Mr Ellis said the smaller figure seemed to be more organized and distinct that he remembered it. The piles of stones in

the main figure were larger, and what he thought was an arrow passing through the body of Ho'ok was indeed a third stick figure anthropomorph. He also stated that he had never carefully inspected the geoglyph on his previous visits and that his interpretation of the geoglyph as being Ho'ok, the children she ate, and an arrow passing through Ho'ok to kill her was based on what others had told him.

The wire fence once surrounding the geoglyph was replaced about fifteen years ago with a sturdier enclosure made of three rails supported by adobe pillars 2.3 meters high and spaced about 3.5 meters apart, the north end was left open and fenced off with barbed wire so the geoglyph can be viewed. The adobe pillars are now crumbling and the enclosure is beginning to collapse. When it was constructed there was a deliberate jog made in the east wall to enclose the head and neck of that questionable third figure. Therefore, we can assume that fifteen years ago when this enclosure was built, the presence of the third figure, or arrow, was recognized.

Mr. Johnson, trying to help me resolve this question of the third figure, sent me a letter dated September 30, 1987. In his letter Mr. Johnson stated he had never visited the geoglyph. His drawing and conclusions were based on two aerial photographs, one taken prior to the building of the adobe and rail enclosure and the other taken about 1982. Mr. Johnson's earlier photograph does not show the legs of the third figure, but they are easily seen in the 1982 photograph. The earlier photograph is not clear enough to define a head or arms of the third figure. The 1982 photograph, likewise, does not show their presence, however, this may be due to the angle of photography and/or the play of shadow.

I do not know if the report by the BAE to the Smithsonian Institution in 1904-1905 was correct and the third figure did not exist at that time, or, if they simply did not recognize its presence. The same conclusion can be made about Mr. Setzler's article in the 1952 National Geographic. However, Mr. Johnson's letter to me, and his photographs, seem to substantiate Mr. Ellis' conclusions that the smallest figure is now more distinct than it once was and that some work had been done on the geoglyph since he last visited it. Although Mr. Johnson's drawing omits the furrows and piles of stones that presently make the arms, head, and hands of the third figure, he does show features the others omitted. What Mr. Johnson describes as a "foot trail" is really the body of the third figure and his "trail shrines" are piles of stones representing feet of this third figure. Today there is no evidence the "foot trail" continued past the pelvis of the third figure, as Mr. Johnson's drawing indicates.

It is not by purpose to challenge the virility of the other authors' descriptions of what the geoglyph once looked like. However, I do know from personal inspection this geoglyph has been composed of three, not two, stick figure anthropomorphs. Since the late 1970s, as my drawings labeled Figure 1 and Figure 2 show, Mr Johnson's aerial photographs are somewhat inconclusive. However, they do show features the earlier authors omitted. It is possible the geoglyph was altered sometime between the dates these two reports were published. Mr. Ellis' comment that some features of the geoglyph were more distinct than they were many years ago when he last visited the site lends credibility to this theory. I do not know if deliberate changes were made in the geoglyph, nor can I discover who made them. The Indians who own the land the geoglyph is on, and whose history the geoglyph represents, could have made the modifications, or a well meaning visitor, who in an effort to clean up and sharpen the geoglyph, could have unknowingly altered its appearance forever. Clearly, education is the key to prevent the latter from happening. The

public must be taught these figures are a fragile heritage and should not be walked on or tampered with.

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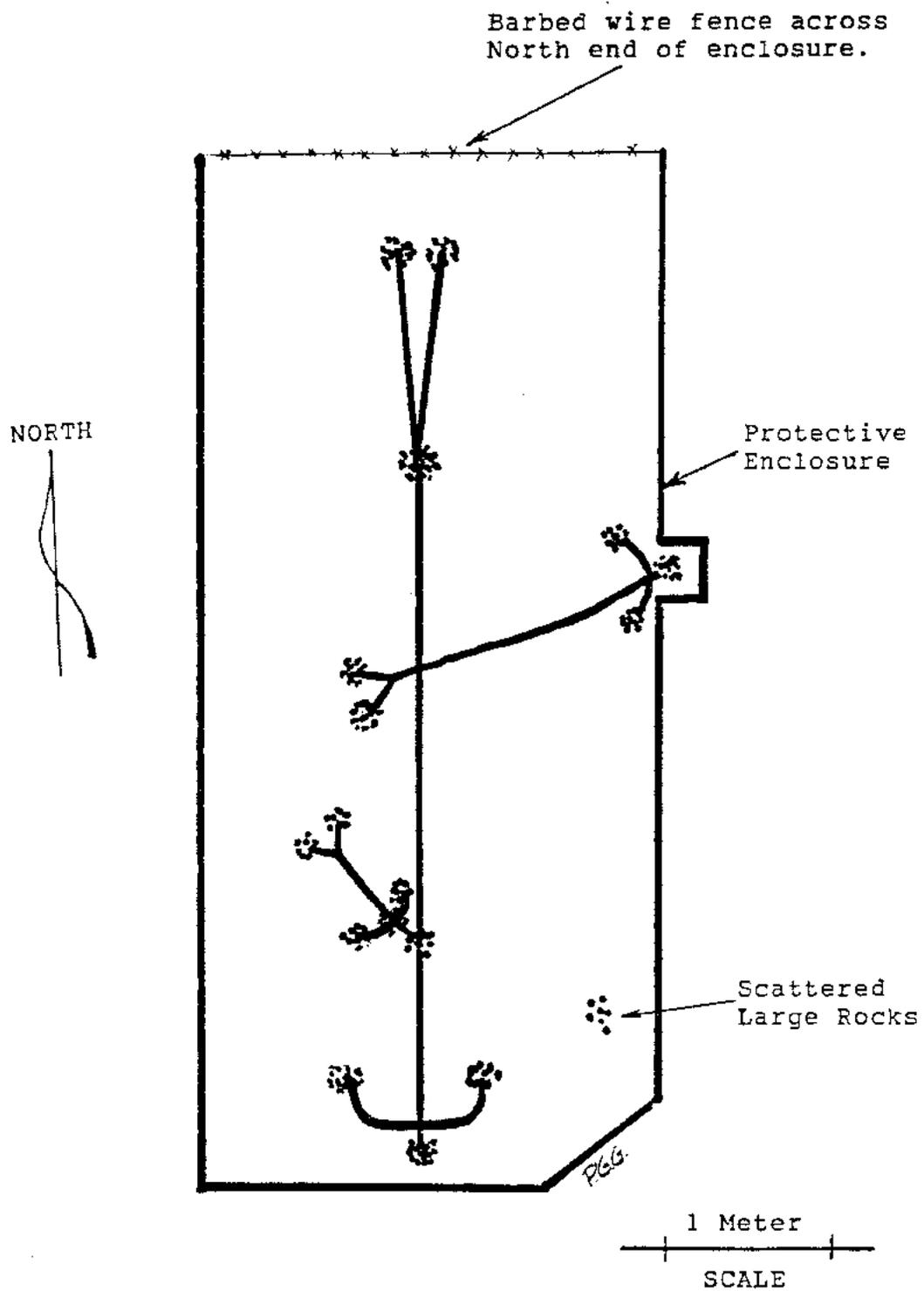
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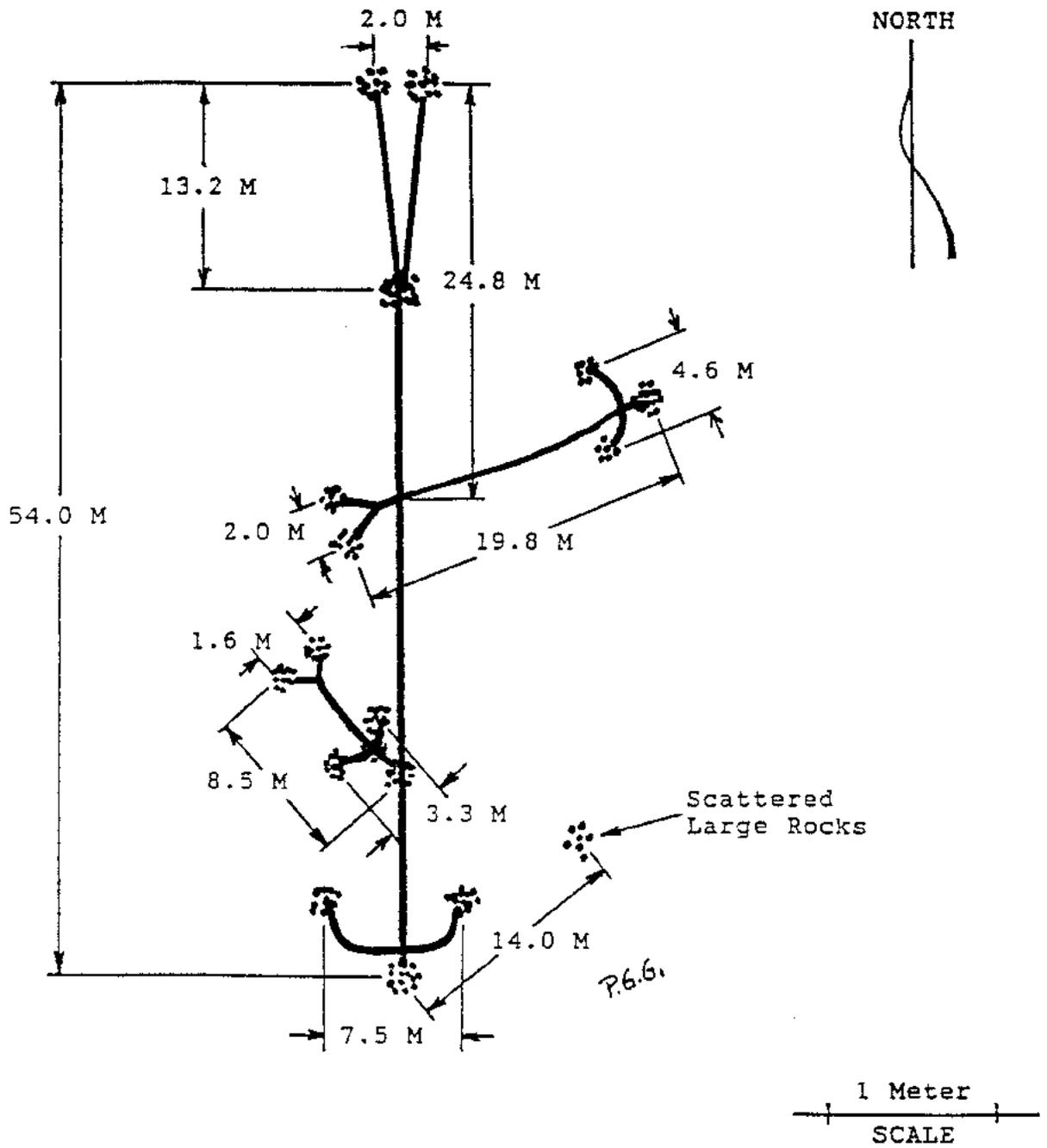
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Ho'ok va'ak Geoform

Figure 1



Dimensions of Ho'ok va'ak Geoform

Figure 2