

The Kalinago and Landscapes of Refuge: A Petroglyph Site at Grand Fond, Commonwealth of Dominica

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A petroglyph site discovered in 2007 at Grand Fond on Dominica’s north coast contains parts of seven simple faces on a single stone situated near a freshwater spring. These markings resemble faces which have been recorded at several sites in southern Guadeloupe. Artifacts collected during archaeological excavations near the Grand Fond petroglyphs indicate occupations during the Saladoid period (circa AD 300-800) and the British colonial period after 1763. Grand Fond is a compelling prospect for an eighteenth-century Carib/Kalinago site because two British maps illustrate a Carib village in the region where the petroglyphs were found. The Grand Fond site suggests that the Kalinago sought refuge near these petroglyphs during the eighteenth century as European colonization began, as they were forced to relocate to Dominica’s mountainous interior and windward coast. Thus for the Kalinago of Dominica the experience of evading European encroachment may have been shaped by a pre-existing landscape of rock art sites and other rock formations.

In 2007 Dominica's first rock art site was discovered on the north coast, on a small rise above a ravine near an abandoned village called Grand Fond. The petroglyphs consist of seven simple faces which look north through the trees across the Guadeloupe Passage (Figure 1).¹ The rock art at Grand Fond can be linked to the indigenous Kalinago, or Carib, of Dominica because two maps show a Kalinago village in this location during the 1760s when the British were formally colonizing the island, which until 1763 had been a neutral territory.² I argue that the Grand Fond petroglyphs contributed to a "landscape of refuge" in the eighteenth century, as Kalinagos chose to live near this rock art as they concealed themselves to avoid sustained contact with colonists.

In exploring the idea of indigenous space as a "landscape of refuge" I use the available data to suggest that the petroglyphs at Grand Fond were a factor which influenced where groups of Kalinago chose to find refuge, among the many opportunities for concealment in the Commonwealth of Dominica. I also find that a second area of refuge around Salybia in the Kalinago Territory is characterized by unique geological formations which appear in Kalinago legends, in what the historian Lennox Honychurch calls a "mythic geography."³ These geological features also may have shaped the landscape of refuge.

As I explore in a 2012 article in *rnal Ethnohistory*, the violent opposition to Europeans which had previously characterized Kalinago resistance shifted to multiple strategies by the eighteenth century. Kalinago sites at this time could serve multiple functions. There were

¹ Lenik, Stephan (2010). Examining Refugee Peoples Living on Dominica during the Pre-Colonial Period: A Preliminary Report. In *Proceedings of the XXII Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology, July 23-39, 2007, Kingston, Jamaica*, edited by Dorrick Gray, pp. 456-472. Jamaica National Heritage Trust, Kingston, Jamaica; Lenik, Stephan (2012) Carib as a Colonial Category: Comparing Ethnohistorical and Archaeological Evidence From Dominica, West Indies. *Ethnohistory* 59(1):79-107.

² Lenik (2012).

³ Honychurch, Lennox. "Island Cosmology." <http://www.lennoxhonychurch.com/article.cfm?id=388>

coastal sites, such as the Indian River bordering Prince Rupert Bay,⁴ which permitted short-term settlement, surveillance, or trade, depending on the circumstances of an encounter. There were Kalinago sites in elevated areas which functioned as lookouts, such as Canna and Lahaut which overlook the Guadeloupe Passage. And there were sites of concealment in the least accessible coastal areas, such as Grand Fond, and a second area at Salybia which forms the core of the Kalinago Territory established in 1903.

Dominica's rugged terrain provides ample opportunities for refugees to settle, starting from the undulating coastline as the island emerges from the Caribbean Sea, and extending into the mountainous interior which features nine active volcanoes. In this setting there are many places to remain hidden for varying periods of time, and the evidence I collected suggests that the Grand Fond petroglyphs added to the appeal of the north coast as a refuge for the Kalinago.

In constructing such arguments about rock art within Dominica's landscape of refuge I follow those studies which consider the placement of petroglyphs within the physical setting of Caribbean islands. A few examples can be cited here. Dubelaar's *The Petroglyphs of the Lesser Antilles, the Virgin Islands and Trinidad* notes a strong correlation between rock art sites and water sources throughout the region,⁵ and this same correlation characterizes Grand Fond. Roe's recent compilation of Caribbean rock art examines image densities, site locations, image site and type data, and chronology.⁶ In addition to region-wide studies, some analysts focus on rock art from single islands. For example, in Jamaica, Atkinson's study of rock art considers associations with topography, elevation, and water sources,⁷ and in the Bahamas, Winter proposes that

⁴ Honychurch, Lennox (1997) Crossroads in the Caribbean: A Site of Encounter and Exchange on Dominica. *World Archaeology* 28(3):291-304.

⁵ Dubelaar, Cornelius N. (1995) *The Petroglyphs of the Lesser Antilles, the Virgin Islands and Trinidad*. Foundation for Scientific Research in the Caribbean Region, Amsterdam.

⁶ Roe, Peter (2009) The Mute Stones Speak: The Past, Present, and Future of Caribbean Rock Art Research. In *Rock Art of the Caribbean*, pp. 198-239.

⁷ Atkinson, Lesley-Gail (2009) Sacred Landscapes: Imagery, Iconography, and Ideology in Jamaican Rock Art. In

petroglyphs might mark boundaries among polities.⁸ Finding correlations between rock art and landscape attributes provides some insight into the meaning and use of rock art for indigenous peoples, primarily during the period before 1492.

Grand Fond suggests one way in which petroglyphs shaped the cultural landscapes of indigenous peoples after 1492. Until Dominica became a British colony in 1763, agreements between the French and British declared it a “Neutral Island” to be left to the Kalinago. But this neutrality was ignored, mostly by French-speaking families who built small-scale plantations in coastal areas. As squatter settlements gradually increased before 1763, this restricted the available areas for Kalinago habitation to the more remote areas of the coast and interior.

The rugged north coast offered refugees space for concealment near a petroglyph site. Establishing this association are two eighteenth century maps which mark a Carib village in the area of Grand Fond. In Dominica there are sufficient data to document the continued significance of a rock art site in the “historic” period, and archaeological findings from Grand Fond suggest dates of use in the late eighteenth and into the early nineteenth century. The use of rock art into the historic period is raised by Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique, who suggests that escaped Africans and the Taino utilized Haiti’s terrain and cave sites as hiding places, but she does not mention specific sites.⁹

Grand Fond suggests that rock art was in some way meaningful for the Kalinago after several generations of contact with Europeans. I do not speculate as to the precise meanings of the Grand Fond petroglyphs. By this I do not disregard or reduce them in significance, but it must be considered that there were many sources of disruption for Kalinago belief systems after

Rock Art of the Caribbean, edited by Michele H. Hayward, Lesley-Gail Atkinson & Michael A. Cinquino, pp. 41-57. University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, AL.

⁸ Winter, John (2009) Rock Art Within the Bahamian Archipelago. In *Rock Art of the Caribbean*, pp. 13-21.

⁹ Beauvoir-Dominique, Rachel (2009) The Rock Images of Haiti: A Living Heritage. In *Rock Art of the Caribbean*, p. 86.

several generations of encounter with Europeans and Africans. This process would disengage this rock art from the web of meanings in which it had formerly been enmeshed. Also, with only a single known petroglyph site in Dominica, there are better venues for interpreting the meanings of particular sites, such as Puerto Rico, where there is a substantial database of rock art with which to analyze types and varieties of petroglyphs.¹⁰ Rather, my interest is the role of petroglyphs in the eighteenth century, and because of the documentary evidence there is an opportunity for “contextual analysis”¹¹ at Grand Fond.

Understanding this “landscape of refuge” idea must account for how the rugged topography and thick forest cover has influenced human occupation of Dominica. Virtually all recorded settlement up to the present day falls within a narrow coastal band. Steep mountains and volcanic sites in the interior, such as “The Valley of Desolation,” prevent permanent habitation. There are some hard to reach areas where few people have ever visited, much less exploited for agriculture or inhabited. The remoteness of Dominica’s interior has offered refuge for people including: the indigenous Kalinago, or Carib; Maroons in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and Rastafarian groups from the twentieth century to today.¹²

In his study of the rise of Dominica’s peasantry the anthropologist Michel Trouillot models space in the island as a series of coastal “enclaves” because of the thick vegetation and mountainous topography. Each enclave possesses distinct ecological and topographic variables, which can be expressed in a variety of localized cultural manifestations.¹³ By the late

¹⁰ Roe, Peter G. & Michele H. Hayward (2008) *Rocks of Ages: Petroglyphs, Pictographs and Identity in Puerto Rico*. In *Archaeologies of Art: Time, Place, and Identity*, edited by Inés Domingo Sanz, Dánae Fiore & Sally K. May, pp. 51-78. Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

¹¹ Jönsson Marquet, Sofia (2009) *Contextual Analysis of the Lesser Antillean Windward Islands Petroglyphs: Methods and Results*. In *Rock Art of the Caribbean*, p. 147.

¹² Honychurch, Lennox (2000) *Carib to Creole: A History of Contact and Culture Exchange*. The Dominica Institute, Roseau, pp. 145-146.

¹³ Trouillot, Michel-Rolph (1988) *Peasants and Capital: Dominica in the World Economy*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.

seventeenth century European settlements were concentrated in bays on the leeward coast, or in other flat river valleys suited for agricultural enterprises.

This enclave effect allowed the Kalinago to remain outside of European influence in enclaves that are more difficult to access and thus physically separated. Drawing from Trouillot's enclave model of Dominican space, it is clear that agency-formed manipulations of rock and geological formations occur within known places of refuge for the Kalinago. This is evident in the north coast around Grand Fond where there is a rock art site, and in a second enclave at Salybia which has distinct geological formations. While Grand Fond permitted refuge at least during the mid-eighteenth century when records exist, the enclave of refuge at Salybia has continued to the present.

In making these arguments I explore two possible associations of the Grand Fond petroglyphs with the historical and the archaeological evidence. The first association is that this rock art is situated in the same location as the village marked on the maps, and based on my pedestrian survey of this region I have found Grand Fond to be the best candidate.

The second association I wish to explore is whether artifacts collected during my excavations near the petroglyphs¹⁴ confirm whether Kalinagos lived here, as the maps suggest. Caribbean rock art studies have used archaeological findings to date petroglyphs, or at least a period during which a site was in use. So even though it cannot be confirmed *who* made the Grand Fond petroglyphs, nor *when* the rock art was made, it is notable that the archaeological evidence consists primarily of European manufactured goods, which does not match what many would expect from a Kalinago site, as I explore in my *Ethnohistory* article.¹⁵

I begin with a brief description of Grand Fond, which is to my knowledge Dominica's

¹⁴ Lenik, (2012).

¹⁵ Lenik, (2012).

first documented petroglyph site.¹⁶ Because of the maps showing a Carib village, the region near Grand Fond originally emerged as a target for archaeological testing as part of my dissertation research, which was aimed at questions related to culture contact and exchange among the Kalinago after 1492.

Shown in Figure 2 is the anonymous “A Plan of the Island of Dominica” from the 1760’s which has the word “Caribes,” or Carib, written between the Tafia River and Reposoir, which is a spit of rock jutting into the sea where small boats may land.

Figure 3 comes from the Jefferys West India atlas, which has “Carabbe Indians” written alongside several shapes between the Tafia River and Reposoir.

Between 2004 and 2007 I explored this part of the north coast, recording a series of steep ridges and ravines which run north to south, down to the sea, and which terminate in cliffs rising above the Guadeloupe Passage. Such topography offers few locations for human habitation. The highest probability for settlement is the former location of Grand Fond, a village abandoned in the aftermath of the destructive Hurricane David in 1979.

Grand Fond is a flat area sheltered by steep ridges to the east and west. Today it takes less than one hour to hike to Grand Fond from the nearest village of Capuchin. In 2005, hiking north of Grand Fond down the Sibouli Ravine near a spring, I searched atop a small hill. On the slope and atop the hill itself, I noted scattered fragments of low-fired earthenware pottery which appeared to be of Amerindian origin, as well as British colonial period creamware and pearlware fragments. Since the map evidence suggested the possibility of a historic period Kalinago occupation, I began testing the site in 2007, but my intention was not to find rock art (Figure

¹⁶ Dubelaar, Cornelius N. (1995) *The Petroglyphs of the Lesser Antilles, the Virgin Islands and Trinidad*. Foundation for Scientific Research in the Caribbean Region, Amsterdam.

4).¹⁷

During fieldwork at Grand Fond in April 2007 I discovered seven individual petroglyphs, including six simple faces and one partial face, carved into a volcanic stone. Six of the faces are oriented north-northwest, and a seventh faces north. Weathering and cracking frustrate any determination of how the petroglyphs were made, and the rock has cracked in half. Examination of the detached fragment and nearby stones did not reveal additional markings. Again, I have not found any more options where the village on the maps could be located in this part of the island.

The occurrence of simple faces in Windward Islands petroglyphs is not uncommon. Opposite Grand Fond in southeast Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe, the sites of Parc Archéologique, Derussy Plantation, St. Julien, La Coulisse, Anse Duquery, Petit Carbet River, and Duplessis River have simple faces¹⁸ similar to those at Grand Fond. Sofia Jönsson Marquet's study of petroglyphs in Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, and Martinique finds that half of the anthropomorphic images in her sample are simple faces.¹⁹

It is also noteworthy that the Grand Fond petroglyph site's location is indicated by natural landscape features. The Sibouli ravine where the petroglyphs are found has a small cay immediately below where the ravine exits to the sea. Because of the small island, anyone in a canoe or ship could identify the Sibouli ravine, and presumably the petroglyphs located there.

East of this cay below Sibouli ravine is a stone outcropping called Reposoir, where small fishing boats may land. In this manner, refugees staying above near the petroglyphs could access the sea. Those approaching from the Guadeloupe Passage could land on this small niche in the rugged north coast to access the Sibouli ravine and the petroglyphs found there.

¹⁷ Lenik (2010).

¹⁸ Dubelaar (1995); Richard, Gérard (2009) *The Rock Art of Guadeloupe, French West Indies*. In *Rock Art of the Caribbean*, pp. 137-146.

¹⁹ Sofia Jönsson (2009) p. 148.

All of these factors indicate that Grand Fond is the best possible location for the Kalinago village indicated on the two eighteenth century maps.

The second association I explore is whether the data collected during excavations at Grand Fond relate to the petroglyphs. The use of archaeological data as a way to associate dates, or ethnic groups, with petroglyphs is possible in some instances. For example, James Lee suggests that “White Marl-style” pottery at Jamaican sites near the Canoe Valley petroglyphs suggests that these petroglyphs were made by “Arawak” artists during that time.²⁰ Roe and Hayward adopt this method in their study of Puerto Rican rock art sites,²¹ and Roe has done this with his Caribbean rock art survey.²²

At Grand Fond a surface collection, shovel test survey, and 1-meter by 1-meter test units searched for evidence of the Kalinago village in a 220 square-meter area. Archaeological testing revealed a layer of very fine clay above a dense deposit of stones. Neither housing areas nor middens were found. Excavation and surface collection recovered 239 ceramic sherds. The predominance of thin walls, burnished surfaces, and decorative styles on the ceramics suggests a late Saladoid phase, dating from AD 300–400 to 600–800.²³

No European-made artifacts from Grand Fond date before 1763. The European ceramics, all of which are British pearlwares and creamwares except for two undiagnostic tin-glazed sherds, range from circa 1760 to 1860. Two wheel-made vessels of probable French origin, including the base of a bottle resembling forms seen in Martinique, were collected. A grater created by piercing a non-ferrous metal piece was found on the surface. Glass bottle fragments

²⁰ Lee, James (2006) *The Petroglyphs of Jamaica*. In *The Earliest Inhabitants: The Dynamics of the Jamaican Taíno*, edited by Lesley-Gail Atkinson, pp. 177-186. University of the West Indies Press, Kingston, p. 182.

²¹ Roe & Hayward (2008) p. 57.

²² Roe (2009).

²³ Petersen, James B., Corinne L. Hofman & L. Antonio Curet (2004). *Time and Culture: Chronology and Taxonomy in the Eastern Caribbean and the Guianas*. In *Late Ceramic Age Societies in the Eastern Caribbean*, edited by André Delpuech & Corinne L. Hofman, pp. 16-32. BAR International Series 1273, Oxford, p. 25–26.

date from the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, and iron fragments are unidentifiable.

Grand Fond is a compelling prospect for archaeological evidence of the Kalinago in the eighteenth century because of the village on the two maps and the petroglyphs. But the archaeological data are frustrating. The burnished, thin-walled Saladoid vessels do not match historical accounts or known archaeological evidence of the Kalinago pottery, and only a few thick-walled undiagnostic bodysherds suggest later phases. Lithic objects are absent. European objects indicate occupation from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century.

A point that deserves some thought in relations to the historic period usage of Caribbean rock art is that it may have been Kalinagos who used the European pottery, glass bottles, and iron objects which were collected in archaeological contexts at Grand Fond. It may be that eighteenth century Kalinago sites do not consist of the ceramic, lithic, and shell artifacts which are typical of pre-Columbian indigenous sites. By the same token, it could have been squatters of mixed ancestry who concealed themselves on this hillside and used European-made objects. Grand Fond could also have hidden Africans fleeing plantations, and Dominica's landscape sheltered bands of maroons during the colonial period.²⁴ At Grand Fond, fresh water is available, food can be grown nearby, and marine resources are within reach, so that this site of refuge can sustain a small group of people. It is notable that the 1776 Byres map produced by the British government to sell land in the new colony, shows neither signs of human habitation nor surveyed land plots in this part of the north coast, as indicated in Figure 5.

This is a point I have made elsewhere, but it bears repeating here, is that the difficulty in associating the Grand Fond artifacts with the village on the maps relates to a broadly constructed

²⁴ Marshall, Bernard (1976) Maronage in Slave Plantation Societies: A Case Study of Dominica, 1785-1815. *Caribbean Quarterly* 22(2/3):26-32.

“Carib” or “Kalinago” category.²⁵ At present, the types of material culture used by Kalinagos in northern Dominica during the mid-eighteenth century cannot be confirmed, and associating this material culture from the petroglyph site with broadly constructed Kalinago, European, or African categories is difficult. So if we were to assume that Kalinagos did not adopt European manufactured goods in the eighteenth century, then this paper about how Kalinagos used Grand Fond within a landscape of refuge would be difficult to write. That is why the map evidence is so crucial. Grand Fond shows that there must be careful consideration of what objects are expected to be found at a site occupied by people known as Kalinago or Carib.

In light of the findings at Grand Fond, even though there are no other known rock art sites in Dominica, it is useful to think about other locations where Kalinagos sought refuge. The most obvious place to look is the windward coast near Salybia, which, like Grand Fond, is characterized by rugged terrain and the absence of a flat river valley.²⁶ Salybia is where the Kalinago found refuge during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and this region constitutes the core of the Kalinago Territory.

In the early twentieth century linguist Douglas Taylor recorded Kalinago mythology which relates to natural geological formations in the Territory. While there currently is no evidence that these sites were modified by humans, it is significant that rock formations are found where the Kalinago found refuge. To this list I add two examples:

The Escalier Tete Chien is a rock formation near the village of Sineku in the Kalinago Territory. The snake-like appearance of this geological formation resembles the Dominican boa called the Tete Chien, the head of which is similar to a dog’s head. In a 1952 *Journal of American Folklore* article Taylor transcribes four versions of a story about the Escalier Tete

²⁵ Lenik (2012).

²⁶ Honychurch (2000) p. 152.

Chien, in which a woman tries to avoid her threatening snake-child, which had a human head and snake body. Taylor records a second story about a boa which emerges from a cave to form the Escalier Tete Chien (Figure 6).²⁷

Douglas Taylor records a third myth about a cave atop a large rock near the Pagua River, in which a woman and her children hid after fleeing from her husband. The myth says that one day the woman will emerge from the cave and escape by sea, using a cay shaped like a canoe at the base of the Kasibuna River,²⁸ which today is in Londonderry Bay (Figure 7).

Here we have traces of the Kalinago “mythic geography” as Lennox Honychurch describes, in and around the Kalinago Territory, a landscape which resembles Grand Fond because there is a rugged irregular coastline with no flat river valleys. Again, though rock art has not been found in the Territory it is notable that there are myths associated with geological formations in this place of refuge. While the myths recorded by Taylor cannot be associated with the Grand Fond petroglyphs, what these stories show is that the landscape of refuge in Dominica was influenced by natural rock formations, in addition to rock art.

In conclusion, the purpose of my discussion has been to explore how rock art and geological attributes shaped the locations of refuge for the Kalinago in the eighteenth century. I have determined a very high probability that the Grand Fond petroglyphs are associated with the village on the maps. We can only speculate whether the Grand Fond petroglyphs were “sacred,” or if the Kalinago recognized the possible antiquity of this rock art.

Associating archaeological evidence with the petroglyphs is more tenuous, and as I have argued it may be that Kalinagos used European manufactured goods in the mid-eighteenth century. Grand Fond shows that attempts to link archaeological evidence with rock art sites in

²⁷ Taylor, Douglas (1952) Tales and Legends of the Dominica Caribs. *Journal of American Folklore* 65(257):267-279.

²⁸ Taylor (1952).

the period after 1492 must carefully consider assumptions regarding what constitutes acceptable archaeological evidence of the Kalinago.

In some Caribbean islands where native populations were decimated or expelled, questions related to rock art in the historic period may not be answerable. Likewise, Dominica has such a small rock art sample that it is not the best place for deciphering the meanings of petroglyph designs. But in Dominica the Grand Fond petroglyphs raise important questions about the role that rock art and natural formations played for indigenous peoples after contact with Europeans. With the discovery of the Grand Fond petroglyphs and the myths recorded in the Kalinago Territory, we can begin to understand some of the ways in which rock art was used by indigenous Caribbean peoples after 1492 in a landscape of refuge.

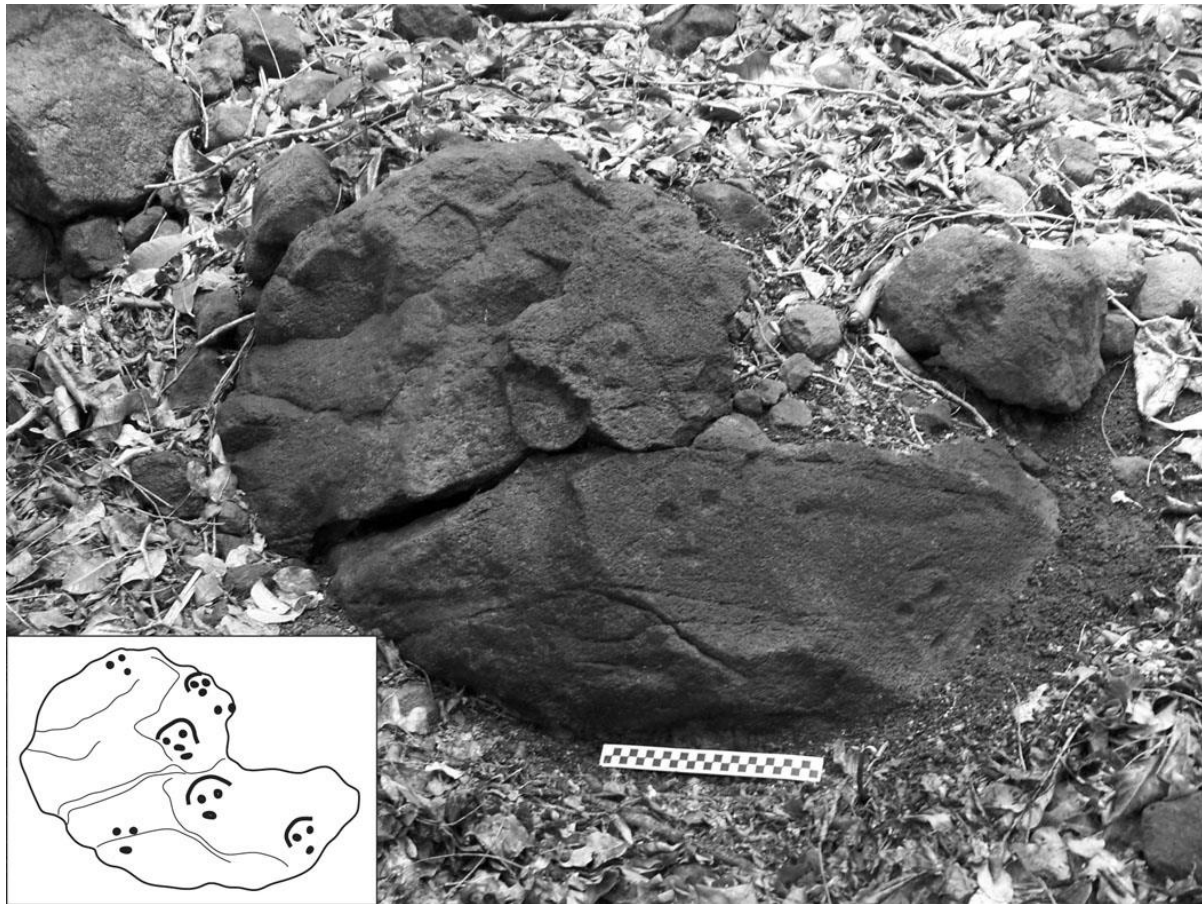


Figure 1: Grand Fond petroglyphs (Image by Stephan Lenik).

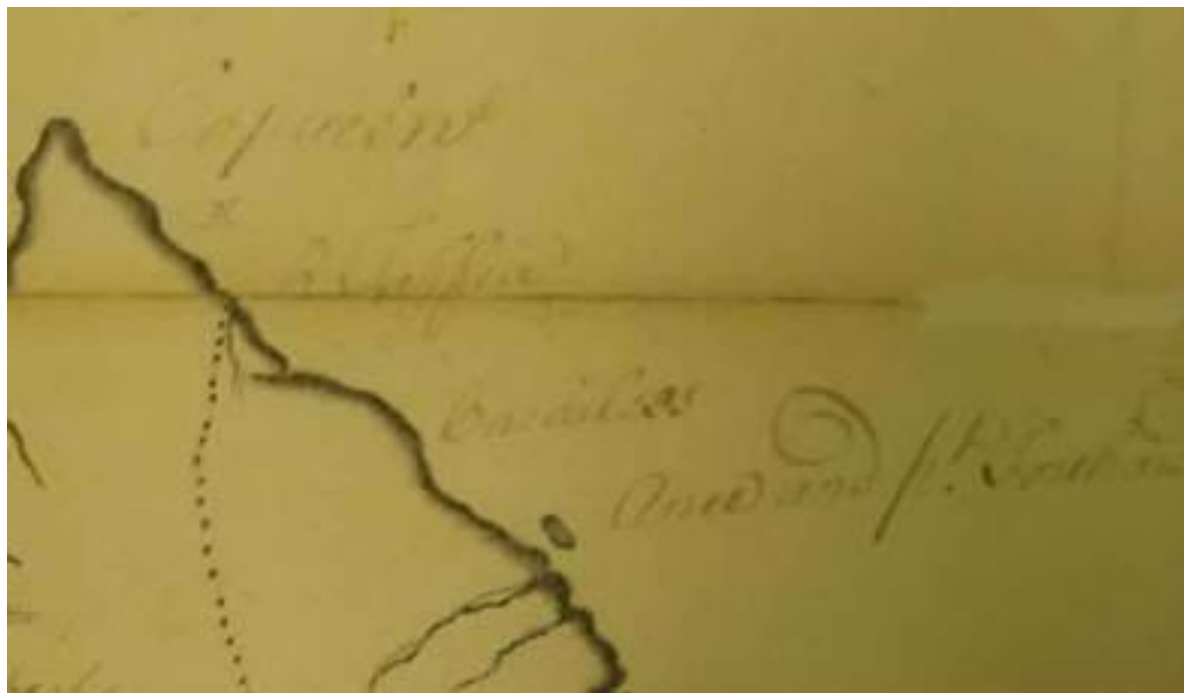


Figure 2: Anonymous, "Plan of the Island of Dominica" (The National Archives, MFQ 1 1173)



Figure 3: Map of Dominica, in Thomas Jefferys *West-India Atlas*.



Figure 4: Grand Fond site, Commonwealth of Dominica (Image by Stephan Lenik).

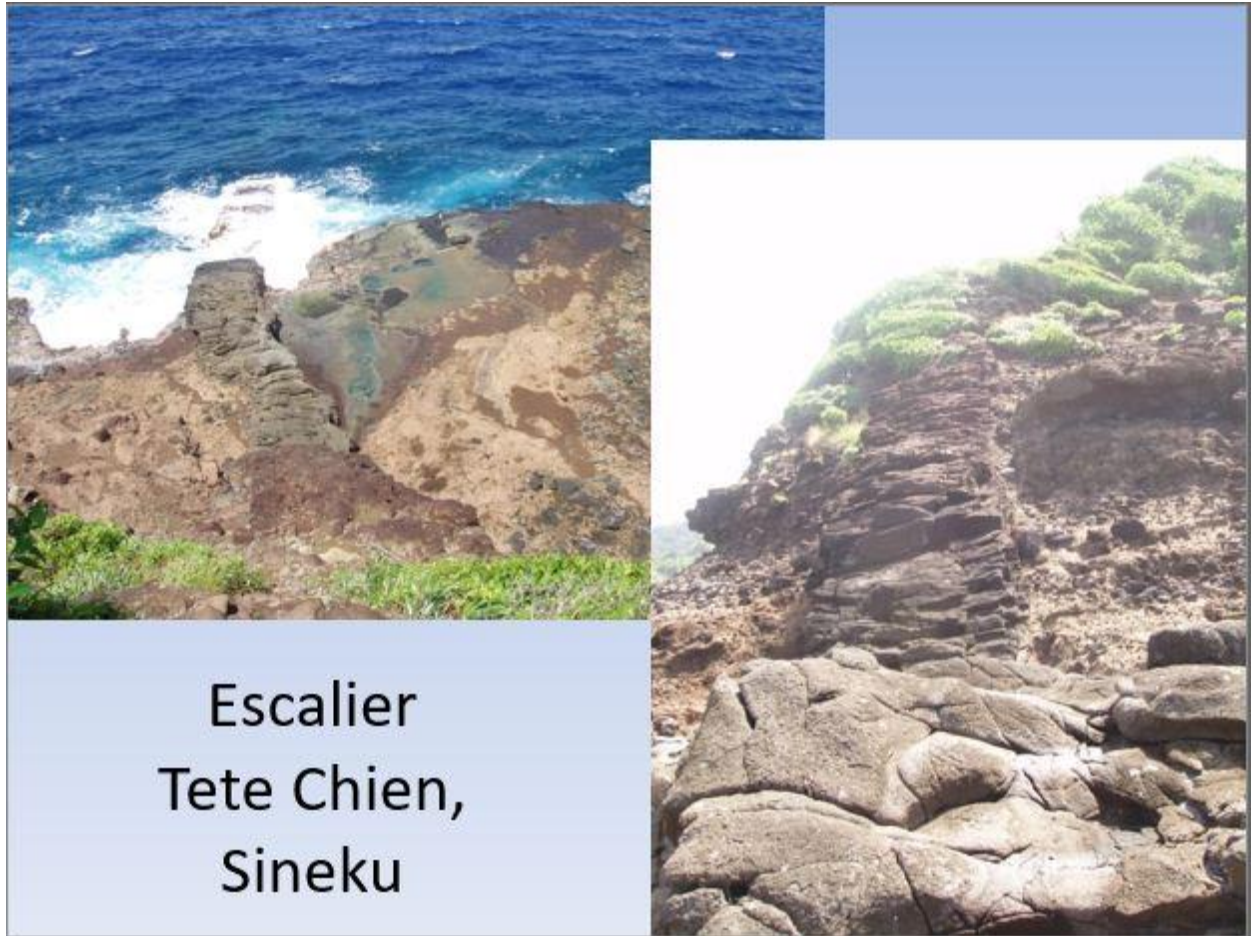


Figure 6: Escalier Tete Chien, Dominica (Image by Stephan Lenik).



Figure 7: Kasibuna, Londonderry Bay, Dominica (Image by Stephan Lenik).