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ABORIGINAL ROCK CARVINGS IN TASMANIA.

PART II.

By

A. L. MESTON, M.A.

Plates I.-IV.

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On the 13th of July last year I read a paper before the Society in which I described some aboriginal rock carvings on the Mersey Bluff, near Devonport. In this paper I propose to describe another series of aboriginal carvings. These I discovered in December, 1931, on the west coast, 90 miles, as the crow flies, from those at Devonport.

These carvings are not only intensely interesting in themselves, but are important, in that they provide further evidence of aboriginal art. In many respects they differ from those near Devonport. The latter are in diabase, are cut on horizontal faces, and in the main exist as units; whereas the west coast carvings are in a friable calcareous sandstone, are cut without any respect to the surface plane, and are massed together, sometimes in rude geometric designs.

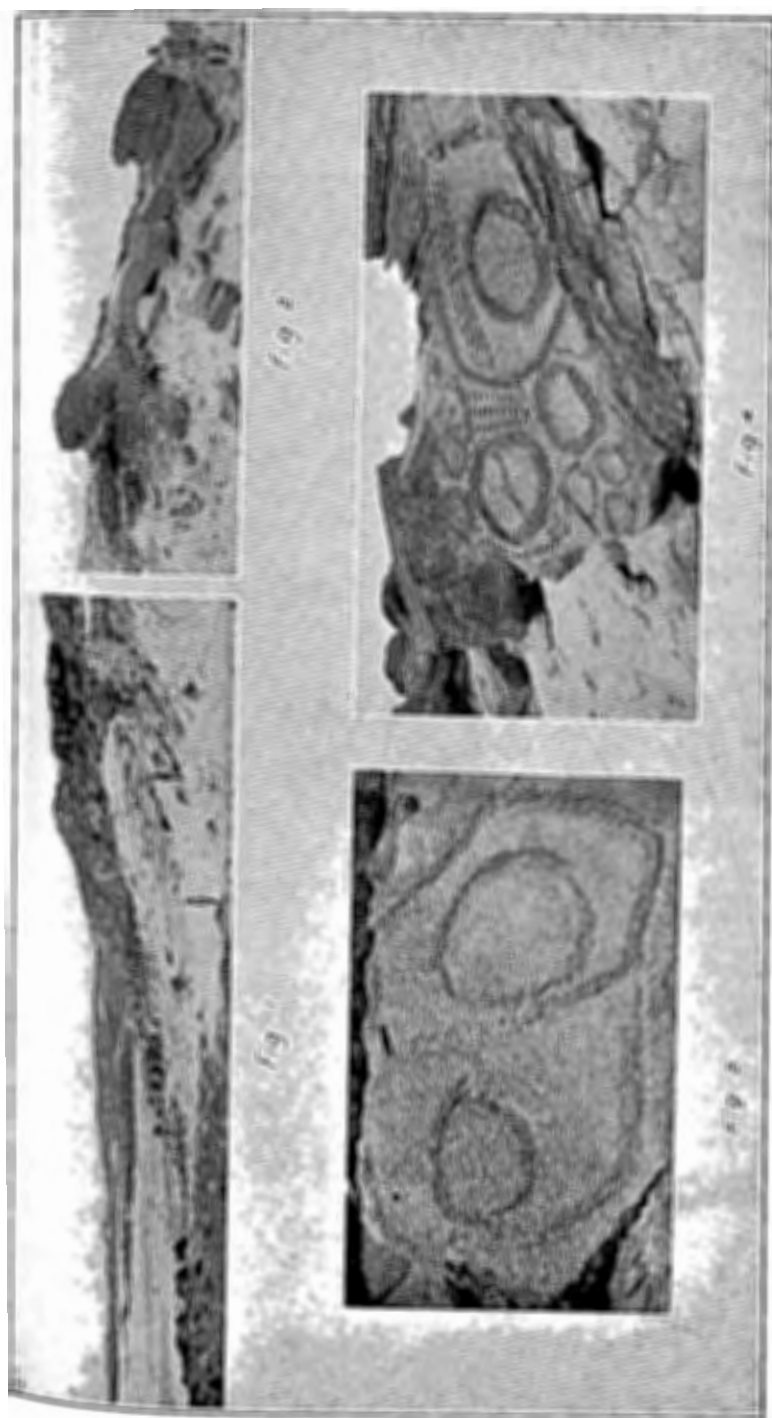
Twelve miles south of Cape Grim there projects into the sea a massive diabase headland, which, although only a little more than 500 feet high, rising, as it does, out of a country of low elevation, is so prominent a feature that it is called Mount Cameron West. Two miles north of this landmark are the two outcrops of friable calcareous sandstone, 150 yards apart, small in area, and of low elevation, on which the carvings are found. The rock is soft and easily worked, but hardens on contact with the air. In consequence of its friable nature many of the carvings are badly weathered, and all show marks of erosion. The circle,

a common form at Devonport, is here the motif of most of the designs. Here, however, are found features absent from the Devonport carvings, namely, groups of three straight lines roughly parallel with one another, and rows of indentations.

At the southern outcrop the natives have made use, not of the main mass, but of two detached blocks lying at its foot. On these, shown on Plate I., are the most striking of the carvings, which are clearly visible more than 200 yards away. Plate IV. shows the method employed in making them. Indentations or punch-marks are first made close together, apparently with a quartzite burin or punch, driven by a stone used as a hammer; then a continuous line is made by connecting up the holes so formed. A close search for any tools that may have been used in the work resulted in my finding a chisel-shaped piece of quartzite and another pointed stone implement admirably adapted for executing the designs. There is, of course, no evidence except proximity to show that these may have been used.

The northern outcrop, larger than the other, is just a mass of carvings. The cliff face and detached slabs, no matter at what angle they lie, provided there is a smooth surface, have provided a medium for the artist. In the main mass there is a shallow cavern, upon the roof of which, quite out of reach of one standing below, two circles have been carved. These are shown in Plate II., Fig. 1. One mass of approximately 12 feet square, tilted at an angle of about 60 degrees, is entirely covered with circles and concentric circles, some badly weathered, others in a good state of preservation. Some of these are shown in Plate II., Fig. 2.

This district, like the Bluff at Devonport, was a frequent haunt of the natives. The whole area is littered with shells, the remnants of their feasts, and with the cores and rejects from the manufacture of their stone implements. When the aborigines roamed along this shore it was a beautiful spot. Sand-banks covered with boobyallas and other native shrubs extended along the whole area, while immediately behind them were park-like spaces, the pasture ground of mobs of kangaroo. Here they found a place which lay open to the sun, and yet afforded them shelter from the bitter winds. The reefs nearby provided an ample supply of shellfish; the lagoons behind the beach teemed with black swan and wild duck; and the district



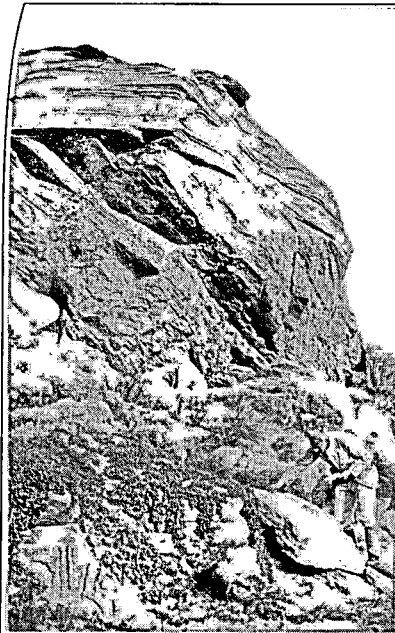


Fig. 1.

Fig. 2

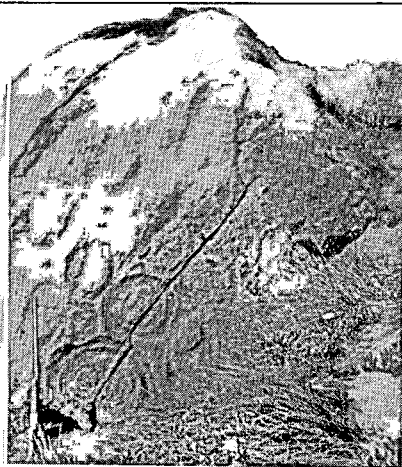


Fig. 3

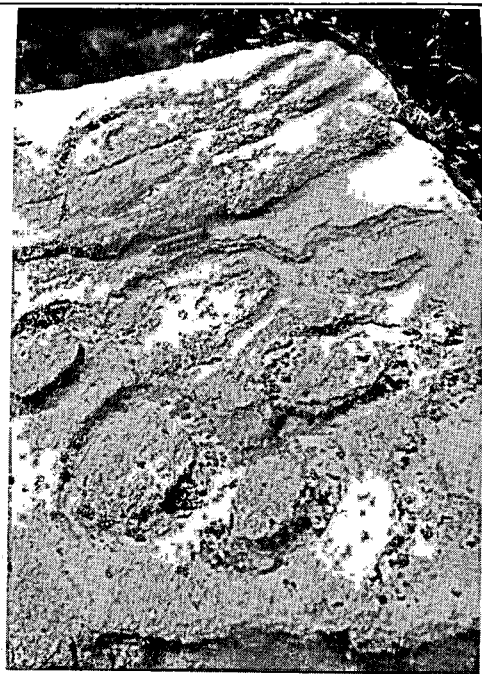
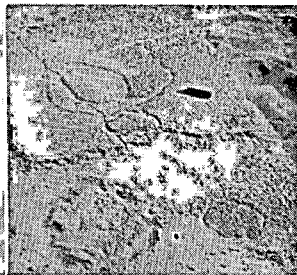


Fig. 4.

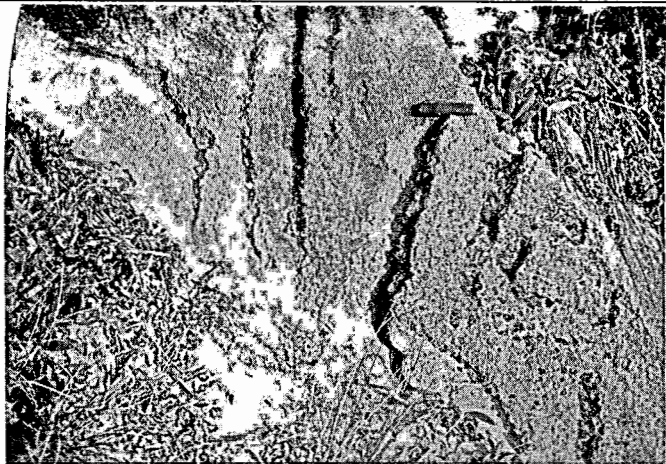


Fig. 1.

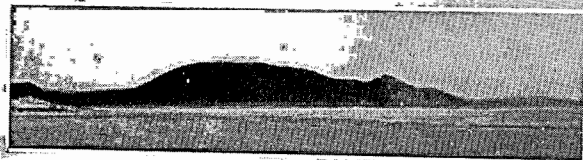


Fig. 2.

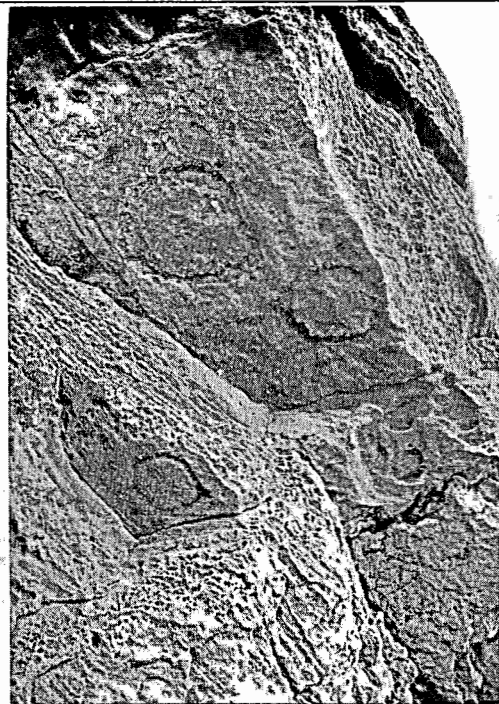


Fig. 3.



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abounded with wallaby, kangaroo, and opossum. Even to-day, although vast sand-blows, begun by cattle breaking down the banks and allowing the wind free play, have destroyed the face of the country in places for miles inland, the lagoons which are left still teem with wild fowl, and kangaroo, wallaby, and opossum are plentiful in the neighbourhood.

The occurrence of this small isolated sandstone outcrop, totally different in structure from the surrounding rock masses—quartzite to the north, diabase to the south—is remarkable. One feels that to a people in whose lives stones and rocks played such an active part, such an occurrence would be significant. Codrington, who spent twenty-five years in Melanesia, speaks of the superstitious regard for stones commonly shown by the Melanesians, and points out that "stones as they naturally lie," because they strike the fancy as being out of the common, are frequently the object of veneration. It may have been so here in Tasmania, for the opinion of many of the leading anthropologists is that our aborigines were of Melanesian origin.

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EXPLANATION OF PLATES.

PLATE I.

Figure 1.—A general view of the coastline in the vicinity of the carvings, looking north. The figures 3 and 4 on this plate are on the outcrop in the foreground on the extreme right.

Figure 2.—A view of the southern outcrop and both carvings, one near the human figure, the other at the foot and to the right of the extreme mass.

Figure 3.—This design is on the slab at the left of Fig. 2. When discovered the lower edge was covered with sand. It consists of an irregular figure 102 cms. long and 77 cms. wide, with a median line forming two lobes. The left lobe encloses an irregular circle with diameters of 30.5 cms. and 25.5 cms.; the right lobe encloses one with diameters of 44 cms. and 35.5 cms. The grooves are from 3.25 cms. to 4 cms. wide and 2.5 cms. deep. The edges are abraded by weathering.

Figure 4.—This is the most elaborate of the designs, and is on the slab near the human figure shown in Figure 2. A full description appears under Plate IV.

PLATE II.

Figure 1.—A general view of portion of the northern outcrop, showing the shallow cavern and a group of carvings in the left foreground.

Figure 2.—This rock face, 3 metres high, looking to the south, is completely covered with circles, most of them badly weathered. This figure shows the two carvings that are best preserved. The lower one consists of two concentric circles, the outer of which has a diameter of 71 cms., the inner of 53.4 cms. Inside the inner ring are two small circles; the left-hand one, 14 cms. in diameter, is made up of 12 punch-marks not connected, which surround a circular boss 9 cms. in diameter; the right-hand one is more irregular, and has diameters of 19 cms. and 11.5 cms. The upper carving is a circle of 46 cms. in diameter. The grooves of both these circles are 5.4 cms. wide. To the right of the lower of these carvings, and not distinctly shown, is an irregular circle with diameters of 46 cms. and 40.6 cms., enclosing a smaller irregular circle with diameters of 17.8 and 14 cms. Another distinct circle on this rock face is 33 cms. in diameter, while another irregular one has diameters of 58.4 cms. and 49.5 cms. Not only the southern face, but the whole mass, wherever it is clear of sand, is covered with circles, most of them badly weathered.

Figure 3.—With the exception of the lower left-hand carving, these, while quite distinct, are not so bold in out-

line as the rest. The total length of the irregular carving near the pocketknife is 57.2 cms. The irregular circle enclosed has diameters of 21.5 cms. and 17.8 cms. Close to this is an oval with diameters of 15.2 cms. and 11.4 cms. The wide grooved circle at the bottom has diameters of 31 cms. and 28.5 cms., while the narrow grooved circle at the bottom is 15.2 cms. in diameter. At the head of the irregular-shaped carving, but not shown in the photograph, are three straight lines, 29.2 cms., 33 cms., and 33 cms. in length respectively, meeting a fourth straight line at right angles.

Figure 4.—These carvings are on the rock that is shown as being measured in Fig. 1 of this plate. The slab is 102.9 cms. wide, 139 cms. long. Only seven of the ten circles carved on it are shown in this photograph. In the top right-hand corner are three straight lines, 21.5 cms., 22.8 cms., and 30.5 cms. in length respectively, the shortest being at the top. The circle near them has diameters of 36 cms. and 27.9 cms. To the left of this, but outside the scope of the photograph, is another with diameters of 31.7 cms. and 26.5 cms.; and immediately below it, but also not shown, is another with diameters of 20 cms. and 15.2 cms. From left to right in this photograph the diameters of the circles are 22.8 cms. and 20.3 cms.; 27.9 cms. and 26.7 cms.; 21.5 cms. and 18.9 cms.; 25.4 cms. and 22.8 cms.; 21 cms. and 16.5 cms.; 25.4 cms. and 20.3 cms. To the right of the lowest one is another of 30.5 cms. and 22.8 cms., but only a small part of it is seen in the photograph. The grooves in these circles vary from 5.1 cms. to 3.8 cms.

PLATE III.

Figure 1.—This is a nearer view of the slab shown in the left-hand corner of Plate II., Fig. 1, and shows how the sand has encroached on the carvings. Note the straight lines.

Figure 2.—A view of Mount Cameron West from the site of the carvings.

Figure 3.—A nearer view of the carvings on the roof of the shallow cavern. These are not so expertly done as those shown on the rock face (Plate II., Fig. 2). The contrast is remarkable. The lowest of the three circles distinctly shown has diameters of 30.5 cms. and 22.8 cms. The whole of this rock mass is covered with circles almost obliterated by weathering.

PLATE IV.

The total length of the slab which is entirely covered with the design is 177·8 cms., its greatest width is 142·25 cms., its least width 46 cms. The large irregular circle on the right is broken away at the top and bottom edges, and a large crack, clearly visible in the photograph, has developed, threatening to destroy the mass still further. Its greatest diameter is 91·5 cms., its least 73·6 cms. It encloses another almost perfect circle, 45·7 cms. in diameter, and a number of indentations in rows above the circle. The top row contains 16 indentations, the second 15, and the third 15. Above the fifth in the top row is a single indentation, while below the second in the bottom row is a line of three. To the left of this large circle are three vertical rows of indentations: the right-hand row consists of 19, the middle 11, the left-hand 10. Immediately to the left of these rows is an irregular barred circle with diameters of 55·9 cms. and 46 cms., containing two isolated indentations. Below the vertical row of indentations is another irregular circle with diameters of 35·4 cms. and 31·7 cms. In the bottom left-hand corner of the slab are two small irregular circles, the right-hand one with diameters of 12·7 cms. and 15·2 cms., the left-hand one 15·2 cms. and 16·5 cms. Above these lies a pear-shaped figure 25·4 cms. by 20·3 cms., and contiguous with it is another irregular figure 22·9 cms. by 11·4 cms. in part concurrent with the barred circle. These two figures make an irregular 8 with a projection from the middle. The top outer edge of the 8 is continued by a curved line of indentations, 13 in number, which is terminated by a horizontal row of four indentations. At the top left-hand corner of the slab is an irregular circle with diameters of 25·5 cms. and 24·8 cms. To the right of this lies another irregular barred circle with diameters of 46 cms. and 28 cms., the right lobe containing two indentations, the left, one. A single indentation lies between these two figures. The width of the grooves throughout the design varies from 7·6 cms. to 2·5 cms., the depth is 2·5 cms., and all are abraded by erosion. At the toe of the slab may be seen part of a circle which has broken off, and below it lie several other fragments that have broken away.