

ON AN UNUSUAL FORM OF STONE FROM A
TASMANIAN NATIVE CAMP.

By

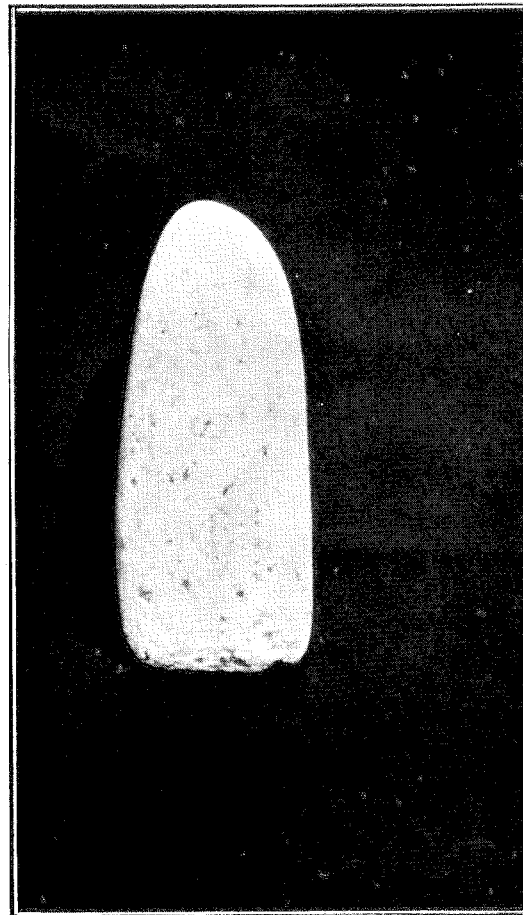
H. STUART-DOVE.

Plate III.

(Read 25th September, 1933.)

Until seven or eight years ago there existed a very interesting native camp-site just to the west of Mersey Bluff, a diabase headland which projects into the sea about a mile from Devonport town. This site comprised: a chipping-mound, where the implements were shaped from pebbles of various composition collected on the beach; a feeding-ground between the mound and a belt of sand which shut off the camp from the sea-winds; and a fresh-water lagoon on the other or land side of the camp, which lagoon was in former days overhung by tall swamp tea-tree. Thus the natives had everything at hand to make life pleasant—warm sand to bask in, fresh water to drink, plenty of shell-fish in the salt water and marsupials in the scrub, and an inexhaustible supply of large pebbles—chert, breccia, and quartzite—from which to fashion their hand-axes and scrapers. Before the site was destroyed by sand-carters, I collected there a number of neat little axes and knives, and a quantity of scrapers of various types; also a flat, circular pounding-stone, the top of which was protruding above the sand; when excavated, it proved to have in its centre some of the red ochreous material still adhering, which had been pounded by it, and used for decorative purposes by the men.

The most unusual find on this site was a stone of cylindro-conical type, which was lying on the surface; a number of these have been collected in the Darling Valley and other parts of New South Wales, and a correspondent in that State who has a large collection writes me that some have come to light in Africa and one in New Zealand. The specimen found at the Bluff camp appears to be the only one so far recorded from Tasmania, so that the distribution is strange and interesting.



[H. Stuart-Dove Photo.]

Cylindro-conical Stone Found on Site of Old Native Camp at
Mersey Bluff, N.W. Tas.

According to the Ethnological Guide to the National Museum, Melbourne, the New South Wales specimens are composed of either slate or sandstone, and a feature peculiar to them is the saucer-shaped base. The Tasmanian specimen has not this hollowed base, but an attempt seems to have been made to produce it, as a chip has been taken out at one side of the base and a slight indentation made on the opposite side, as if with the intention of lifting out a large flake, but the material, an intensively hard breccia-quartzite, resisted the crude implements of our natives, and the flake was not removed.

These cylindro-conical stones were almost certainly put to some ceremonial use, but to what exact form of ceremony has not been determined. The Guide already quoted states that they have been variously designated as ceremonial stones of some nature, pounders, phallic symbols, or grave-markers. Both the correspondent in New South Wales and myself consider it highly probable that they were phallic emblems, which were employed, in some form or other, by so many primitive peoples.

The dimensions of the Mersey Bluff specimen are—

Length, 180 m.m.

Diameter at base, 71 m.m. (approximately).

Diameter at centre, 65 m.m. (approximately).

Diameter near the blunt top, 46 m.m. (approximately).

Weight, 3 lb. 9½ oz.