METHOD OF MOUNTING STONE TOOLS ON KOONDI. TRIBES EAST AND NORTH-EAST OF LAKE EYRE.

By

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(Communicated by R. W. Legge, Cullenswood.)

Plates VI.-IX.

(Read 12th August, 1929.)

The gum used for mounting constituted a very important article of barter. The natives with their usual queer dislike for anything that could be obtained in their own country would collect and make into balls the gum that was most useful in their country and barter it away at their periodical markets for gum collected in some other part of the country.

They very jealously guarded the secret of the origin of any of the various gums, so that any stranger coming to the country would have to search until he could find for himself. Although all of the camp would know what he was looking for, no one would give him the slightest hint.

A boy, who entered my employ some years ago, came from about Alice Springs, and being energetic wanted to make some weapons for himself, but first he had to find the materials to make tools. I well remember his hunting, first for suitable stone, then for the right sort of wood, and finally his search for gum for mounting. In his country the proper gum was obtained by burning the spinifex. He tried that here and got nothing. This nearly disheartened him, but he persisted until I told him of the mindry bush, and acting on my hint he succeeded in getting the necessary gum. In my opinion, mindry was the best of all of the gums used for tool mounting; it is tough, hard, will stand practically unlimited re-heating, and can be found almost anywhere in this country. The Salt Creek branch of the Wonkonguru pinned their faith on beefwood gum. This was very easy to work, but was susceptible to climatic conditions; damp weather made it sticky, and hot weather made it soft. If left out of use for a month in hot weather it would crack to pieces.

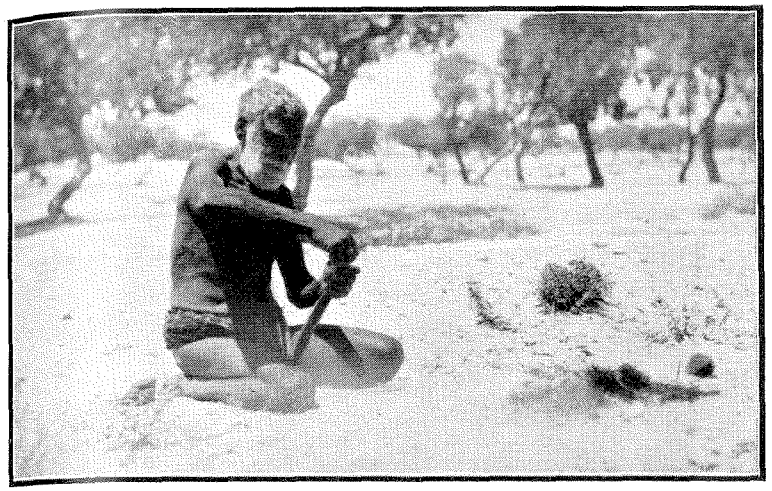


Fig. 1. Mounting Stone Tools on Koondi, Lake Eyre Region.

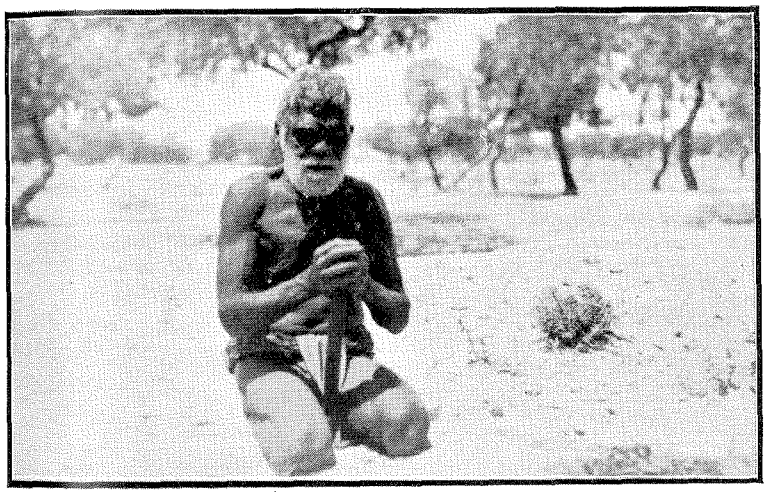
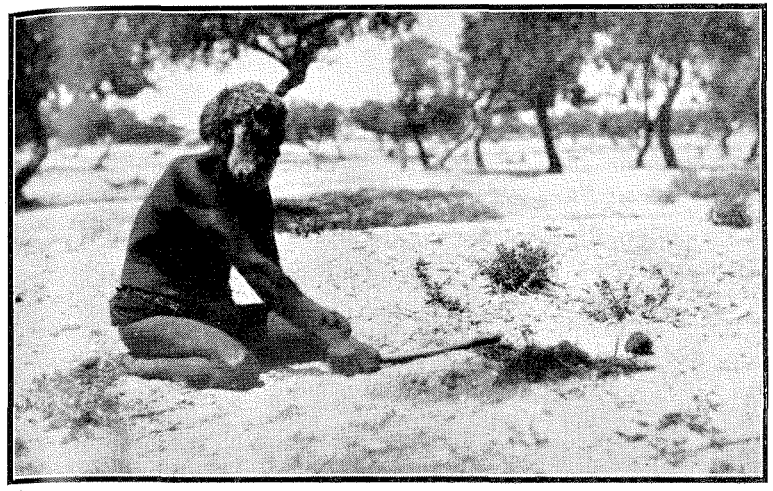


Fig. 2. Mounting Stone Tools on Koondi, Lake Eyre Region.



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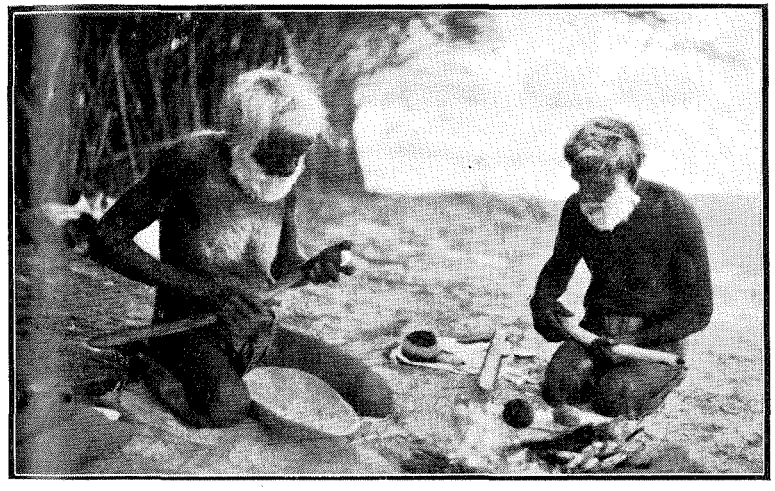

Fig. 2. Mounting Stone Tools on Koondi, Lake Eyre Region.

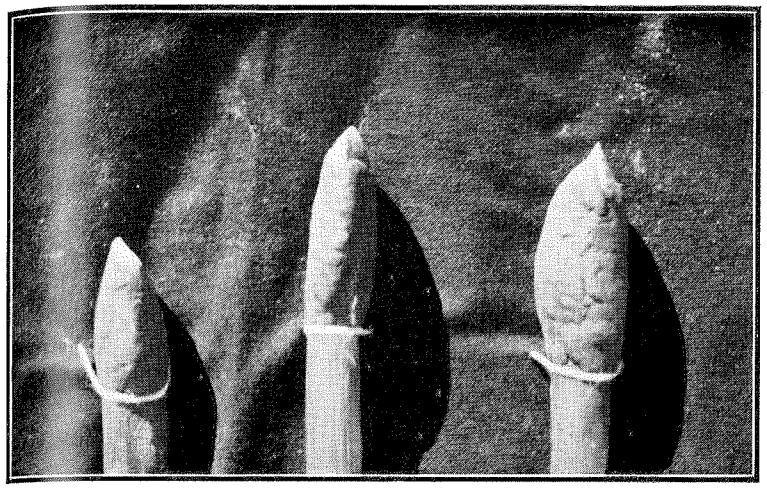

Fig. 1. Mounted Tuhlas, Lake Eyre Region.

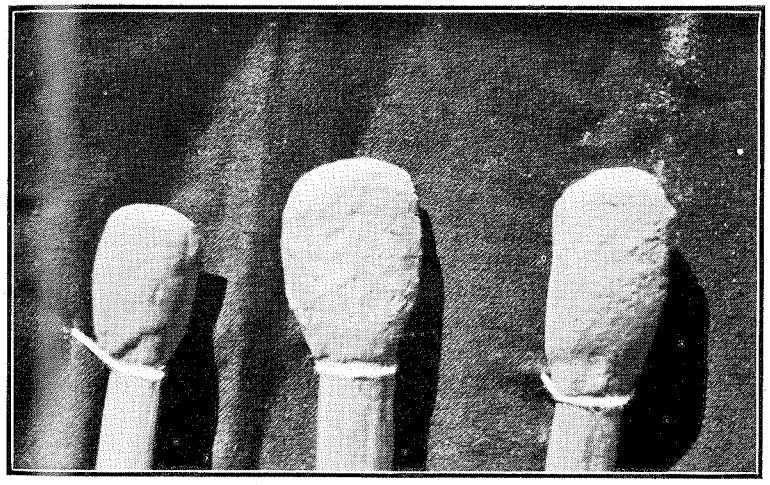

Fig. 2. Tuhlas, Lake Eyre Region.

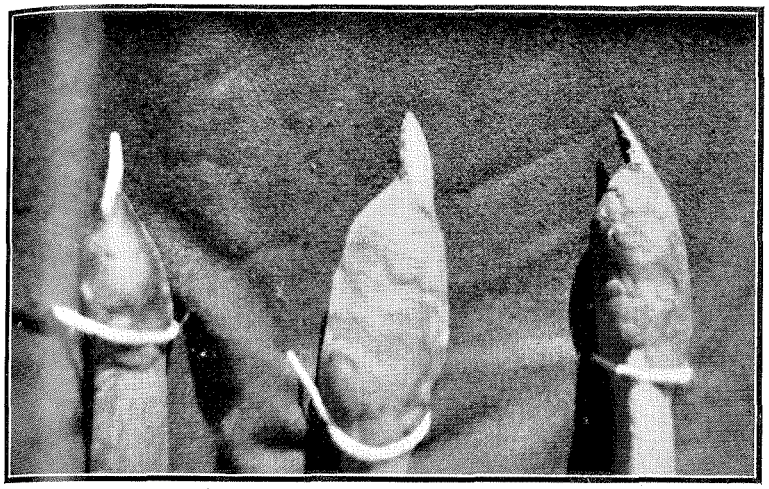

Fig. 1. Mounted Pirries, Lake Eyre Region.

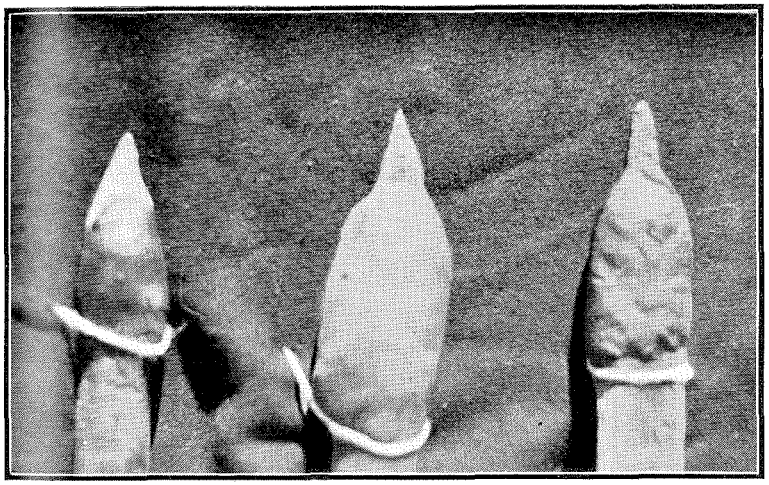

Fig. 2. Mounted Pirries, Lake Eyre Region.

Spinifex gum, known locally as "pooya," was very hard a tough, but would only stand re-heating two or three times; after that it would set hard and would burn before it melted.

The mindry roots went down to great depths to water. Well sinkers have told me that they have come across green mindry roots at a depth of forty feet from the surface. This possibly explains why the mindry grows at practically all times. Just at present, although we have not had more than thirty points of rain during the last nine months, the mindry in places is still green and fresh.

It was the women who usually collected the mindry roots. They would sink a hole slanting down to a depth of about three feet, near the mindry bush, until they uncovered the roots, which are usually about an inch thick, and always going straight down. They would work in a face into the bush, breaking the roots off in lengths of about two feet. When they had a load big enough to satisfy them they returned to camp. Here the mindry roots were sliced or scraped up into a pirrha, and afterwards placed on the hot ashes. This caused the gum or resin to melt out and run into the ashes. It was then collected, and rolled into a ball with the hands, the worker continually licking his hands to prevent the hot gum from sticking. It was then rolled up with a mixture of kangaroo dung to increase its toughness, and was then ready for use.

The accompanying Plates and figures will illustrate the method of use. The ball of gum is re-heated near a fire, a piece is then pinched off, the fingers being kept wet by licking all of the time. The piece is then stuck on one end of the koondi, as shown in Plate VI., fig. 1. By this time the gum has set, so it is re-heated over the fire, and then is pressed firmly on to the end of the koondi. At this stage (Plate VI., fig. 2) it has the appearance of a knob.

It is then re-heated and the tool is pressed firmly into the gum, care being taken that the base of the tool rests on the end of the koondi.

It is again re-heated, and the tool is finally smoothed into place.

In Plate VII., fig. 1, will be noticed the little bank of sand built to protect the worker's hand from the heat of the fire.

Plate VII., fig. 2, shows the workman on the left in the act of finally smoothing off a mounted tuhla, and the figure on the right is waiting for a tool, visible in the fire, between the two figures, to soften enough to put it through another stage. He is holding in his hand a koondi on which he afterwards mounted pirries. Between his knees will be noticed a coolkie or hammer stone, and opposite his right knee can be seen the ball of gum. A wadna or digging stick is visible between the two figures towards the back ground, and a ball made of the fibres of the sand hill broom bush. The man on left has a pirrha (bowl) between his legs.

Plate VIII., fig. 1, shows a close up of mounted tuhlas, side view.

Plate VIII., fig. 2, shows the same tuhlas, back view.

Plate IX., fig. 1, shows side views of mounted pirries. The one on the right was mounted with beefwood gum. I picked this up in a deserted hut on the Diamentina River in 1913. The tool on the other end of the koondi was a piece of steel bound on with emu sinew.

Plate IX., fig. 2, shows front views of the same pirries.

MAGIC STONES OF THE TRIBES EAST AND NORTH-EAST OF LAKE EYRE.

By

George Aiston, Maree, South Australia.

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Plate X.

(Read 12th August, 1929.)

Any stone that was unusual was picked up by the tribesman and sooner or later was endowed with magical qualities. Probably when first brought in, no notice would be taken of it, but some chance would perhaps ensure a plentiful supply of food soon after the stone was found, and a conference of old men would be called to try and ascertain why it was that this supply became available.

To the native there was no effect without a cause, and it would be only a little while before some one remembered the strange stone that had been found. No one could give any reason for the strange stone, and no one could account for the unexpected supply of food; therefore the two unexplained things must have some relation to each other, and the stone became a magic stone.

I have not the slightest doubt that the use of clear gypsum as rain stone and the many attempts to dissolve it into water are caused by the fact that at some remote time a piece of clear ice was found, left over from the very infrequent frosts that occur in this country. A rain probably followed the finding of the piece of ice, possibly while the natives were handling it. There were the two things unexplained, the hard water, or clear stone to the native mind, and the unexpected rain. A rain is nearly always accompanied by a rise in temperature in this country, so the ice would be melted before the rain stopped, therefore to the native mind the clear stone that melted must be responsible for the rain, and ice being hard to obtain and clear gypsum plentiful they have ever since been trying to dissolve it and make rain.