

Additional Discoveries of Aboriginal Rock Carvings in Tasmania

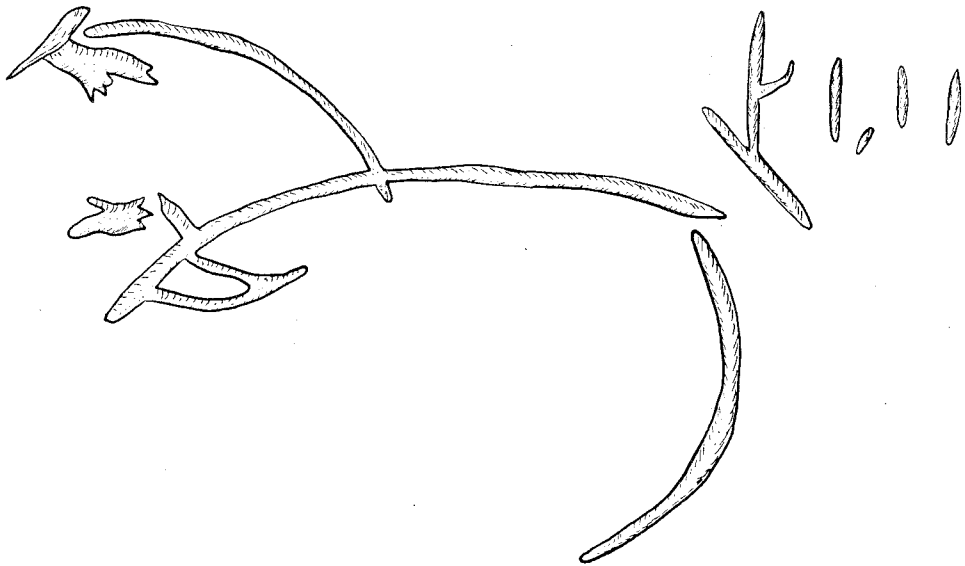
By

OWEN W. REID

(WITH 9 FIGURES)

In 1949 Mr. A. L. Meston informed me of the existence of aboriginal rock carvings near Nubeena on Tasman's Peninsula. He had visited the site some years earlier but had not been able to revisit them. As he had mis-laid his chart, only an approximate location could be given.

After several visits to the area rock workings were found on the southern slope of a high dolerite ridge known locally as "Billy Blue". They were on a large sand-stone rock measuring approximately sixty yards long and four yards wide. It faced west and was on the eastern bank of a creek bed which, though normally dry, has a permanent soakage at its mouth some fifty yards below the carved rock. At a distance of fifteen yards seawards from the main rock surface is a smaller one measuring about twenty feet square which has several carved figures on its upper surface. Some of these resemble kangaroo tracks while others are leaf-like depressions up to ten inches in length.



ROCK ENGRAVINGS NEAR NUBEENA

FIG. 1.—The parabola as the main motif. The large one in the middle is four feet in length with the remainder on the same scale.

Extending over an area of some ten acres to the south east of the outcrop remains of shells are scattered. Here a considerable number of stone artefacts have been found. This flat area, now overgrown with bracken, heath, eucalypts and casurinas, would have provided a suitable ceremonial ground.

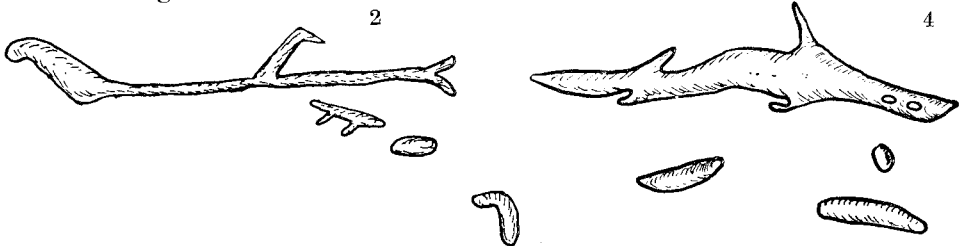


FIG. 2.—The predominant pattern resembling a human leg is two feet in length.
FIG. 4.—The main figure, bearing a likeness to a blue-tongued lizard has a length of twenty inches.

The standstone outcrop would have provided an easy working medium. Some of the patterns are being lost, as parts of the surface split off or are denuded by weathering. Like the majority of aboriginal rock workings the significance of the designs is obscure. They may be said to be archaeolithic. In the main group the chief motif is parabolic in form. Across the middle of the sloping worked face and connecting two heavily worked areas is an almost semi-circular depression four feet in length and varying in width from one and a half inches to two inches and from a half to two inches in depth. At right angles to its northern extremity is a similar shape three feet in length. Adjoining it one well worked pattern resembles a sting-ray with a well-finished tail-piece. Another clearly defined figure gives the impression of a human leg. Other designs bear a likeness to a young moon, to animal or bird tracks—kangaroo, wombat or emu—men in a canoe, snakes, &c.

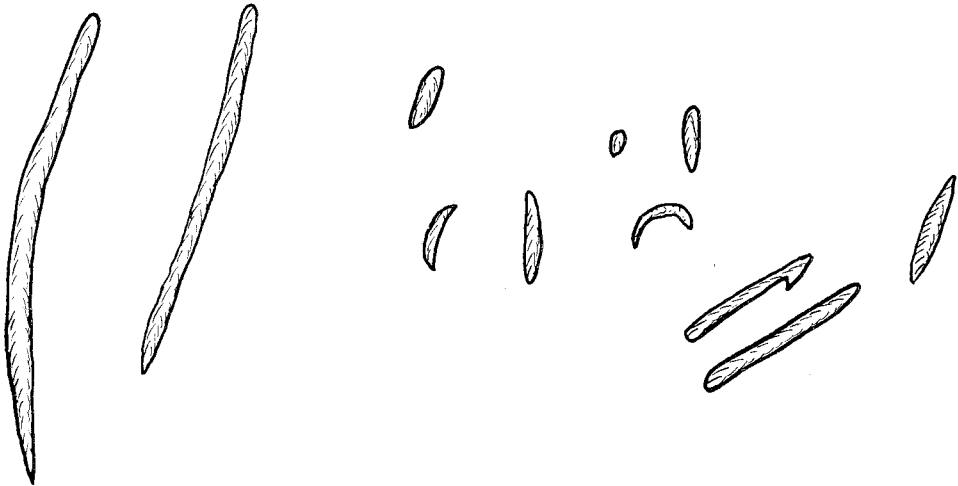


FIG. 3.—The figures on the right, resembling kangaroo tracks, are eight and six inches respectively, while those on the left with the appearance of waddies are twenty and twenty-six inches.

In a hollow on the same rock is a somewhat complicated pattern bearing strong resemblance to a blue-tongued lizard. It is twenty inches in length with four very life-like legs. Two other figures twenty and twenty-six inches in length and approximately two inches across, lying side by side, appear to be waddies as used by the natives. In all there are more than two hundred separate figures.



FIG. 5.—The large figure at the bottom, resembling a kangaroo, is two feet in length. The other patterns are correspondingly smaller. Note the similarity to young moons.

Mr. A. L. Meston, accompanied by Miss R. McCulloch, visited these workings with me in 1950. He said that they were a new group and not the ones he had found. A few weeks later I found those he had previously mentioned. Like the set just described they are on the south-western slope of the dolerite ridge of "Billy Blue". From a saddle in the hill, which is sprinkled with shell remains, a creek bed, usually dry, slopes down to a cove called "Creasey's Mistake". About three hundred yards from the sea on the western side of the depression of the creek is a sandstone outcrop sloping at an angle of twenty to forty degrees from the horizontal and facing the south-east. The lower edge of the rock ends abruptly in a sheer drop of twenty feet into dense dogwoods which are the chief vegetation of the gully. The topmost edge shelves off to a dense tangle of comasperma and bracken up to six feet in height. A permanent water soakage is to be found in the creek bed fifteen yards below.

The workings themselves were partly covered by earth which had moved down from the hillside. This I removed and uncovered three separate groups which were connected with scattered figures. As with the group already described, the method of production is debatable but apparently the depressions were made by friction with a hard stone implement. There are no signs of chipping or gouging of holes and joining them as with those on the West Coast. A close search revealed no tool which could be used to perform the work. This appears to have been characteristic of all rock carvings on the mainland of Australia. They bear a strong resemblance to workings in South Australia both in form and subject.

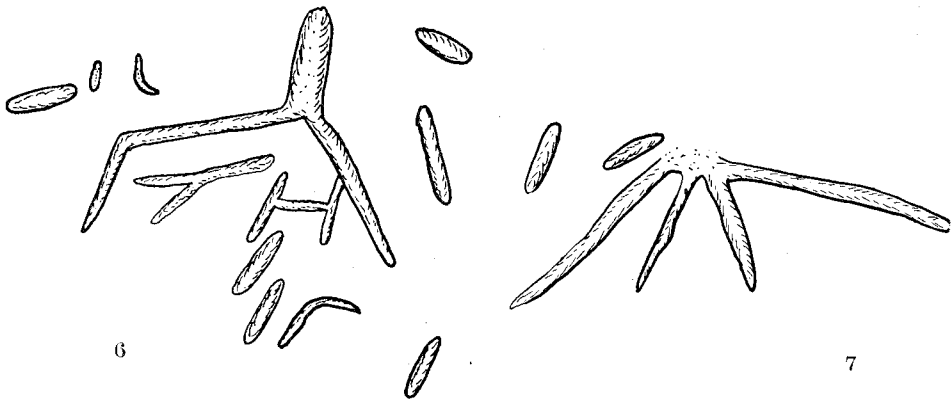


FIG. 6.—In the major figure the left arm to the fork is eighteen inches, the one on the right twelve and the thick trunk eight inches.

FIG. 7.—The two longest arms measure twelve inches.

The depth of depression varies from one quarter up to two inches. Some figures approach the edge of the declivity so closely as to cause wonder at the skill of the aboriginal in maintaining a secure foothold. It is certainly not safe in ordinary footwear.

One area of surface approximately nine feet square is covered with innumerable patterns closely spaced and frequently crossing each other. As in the first group the designs resemble bird and animal tracks. Some are merely groups of straight lines of varying lengths. Others are reptilian in character. The rock surface is gradually weathering away. There are no visible signs of shell or animal remains in the vicinity, though both must have been abundant.

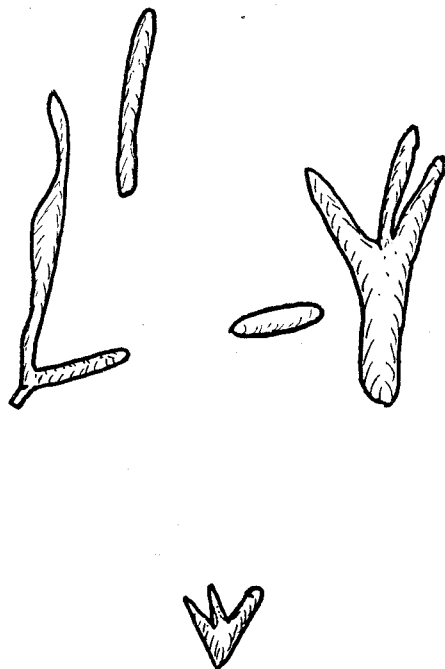


FIG. 8.—The figure to the right, like a birds foot, is eight inches long.

BOND BAY

These I found on a visit to the Port Davey area in 1950. They are situated on the north-western side of Bond Bay near the entrance to Kelly's Basin. The surface bearing the workings is an almost vertical wall of schistose slate which would form a comparatively easy medium to work. It is approximately fifteen feet high and leans outwards at an angle of about ten degrees. High water reaches to within thirty feet of the wall which is partially obscured by very tall bracken.

At the base of the cliff is a mound of shell-fish remains, of which the larger proportion are mutton fish. Implements collected were manufactured from quartzite and were crude in form. However, this hard material would be suitable for punching or gouging holes in such a soft surface. The site is protected from the coldest winds. As some of the patterns are eight feet from the ground, the native must have used some type of platform.

For the most part the carvings are a series of indentations from three to eight feet from the ground. At the top is a double row of punctures,

one directly below the other and approximately two inches in diameter. Eight pairs of holes are clearly visible but there were originally probably considerably more as the rock face to the left has begun to fall away on to the shell heap below.

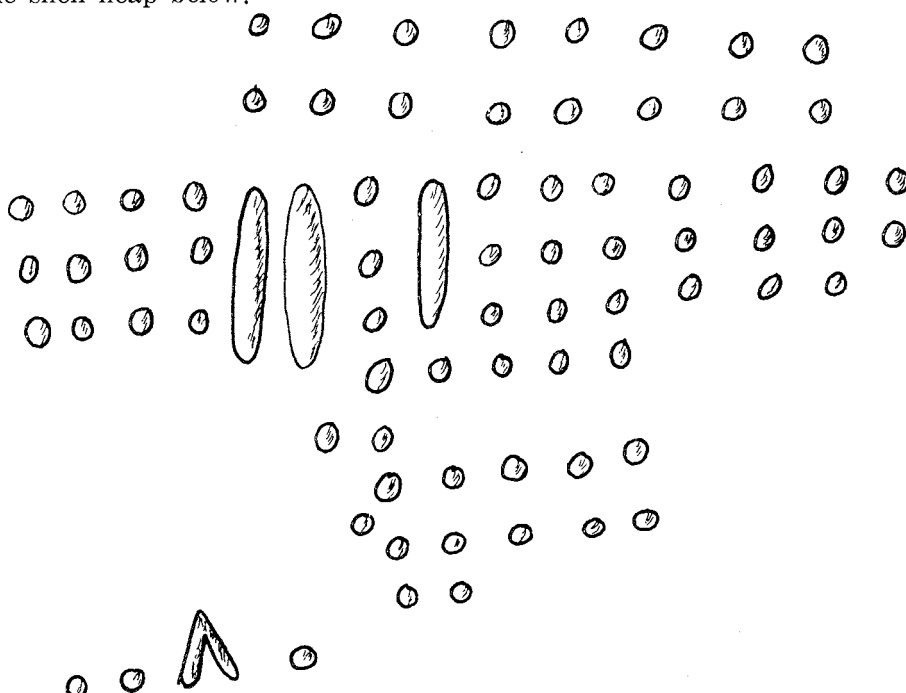


FIG. 9.—Rock engravings at Bond Bay near the entrance to Kelly's Basin.
Note the indentations joined by bars.

The second series consists of three lines of holes one below the other with fifteen in each row and the eighth from the right is joined by a vertical bar. The same applies to the tenth and eleventh where the bars are more clearly defined. These bars are roughly seven inches in length. Below this group are rows of five and six holes respectively with three inches between each row. At the fifth from the right triple holes replace the usual pair. The series of indentations continues down the cliff face to within three feet of ground level.

The methods used by the Port Davey Tribe was evidently similar to those used by other West Coast Tribes further north. Possibly they had not reached the same stage of completion as those just mentioned.

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