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PRELIMINARY NOTE ON AN ABORIGINAL STONE ALIGNMENT AND
ASSOCIATED FEATURES

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(with four text-figures)

ABSTRACT

Only one substantiated Aboriginal stone alignment in Tasmania has been described. Pebble heaps adjacent to the site appear to be of Aboriginal origin. Similar pebble heaps from other coastal areas are reported.

ABORIGINAL STONE ARRANGEMENTS

The only Aboriginal stone alignment in Tasmania which has been substantiated (fig. 1) is discussed here with a survey of the site. Jones (1965a, b) briefly described the feature and excavated a small area. The excavation revealed two superimposed alignments.

The top feature, a stone alignment, was embedded in midden deposits. Buried under this alignment, was a similar alignment running roughly parallel to it. Chronologically, the lower row of stones were placed along the crest of the dune at the time with everyday occupational debris eventually burying it. When the level of this debris reached about 0.4m above the lower stones, the top alignment of stones was then constructed (Jones 1965a). The alignment follows the ridge of an aeolian sand dune. East of the ridge is the Tasman Ocean, and, to the west, there are extensive freshwater swamps. The dunes in the immediate vicinity are stabilised with coastal heath vegetation but dunes nearby lack vegetation and have become unstable. Sheep and cattle graze in the area but the main threat to the stability of the area is rabbits.

An alignment plan (fig.2) and cross-section (fig. 4) demonstrate the relationship of the alignment to the dune and its surroundings.

Five stone features are also associated with the alignment. They were described by Jones (1965a, p. 78) as follows: "Near the northern end of the feature, and on the surface of the pebble bank, can be seen a few piles of stone, about one or two feet high. Although they could be of Aboriginal origin, the possibilities of their construction by surveyors or hunters cannot be ruled out." Figure 2 illustrates the relationship of these to the alignment. Figure 3 shows the cross-sections of these features taken on an E-W compass bearing. They include pits with raised walls, simple pits and simple cairns. On the same pebble beach 150m to the south of feature "E" several more of these features occur.

Numerous stone constructions have been noted on another pebble beach approximately 0.8 km to the south. Over thirty were noted in a distance of approximately 200m. Common features in this area were 'birdnest' shapes, pits and simple heaps of stone. The diameters of these features ranged from 800mm to 4m. One 'birdnest' shape had walls over one metre high. Large oval depressions and a cairn with an attached tail reminiscent of a tadpole were also noted in the area. The stones which make up the features generally weigh between 2 kg and 5 kg, which is the average size of the stones in the pebble beach which is obviously the source of the pebbles. Average mass of the stones in the alignment feature is considerably greater than those just

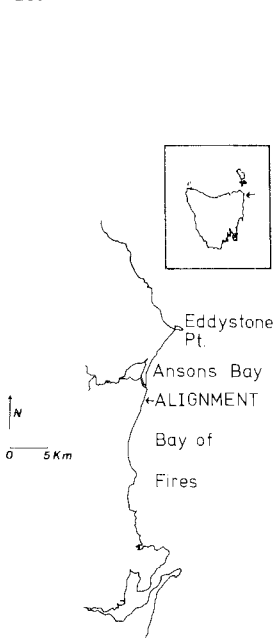


FIG. 1 - Locality map

Aboriginal Stone Alignment

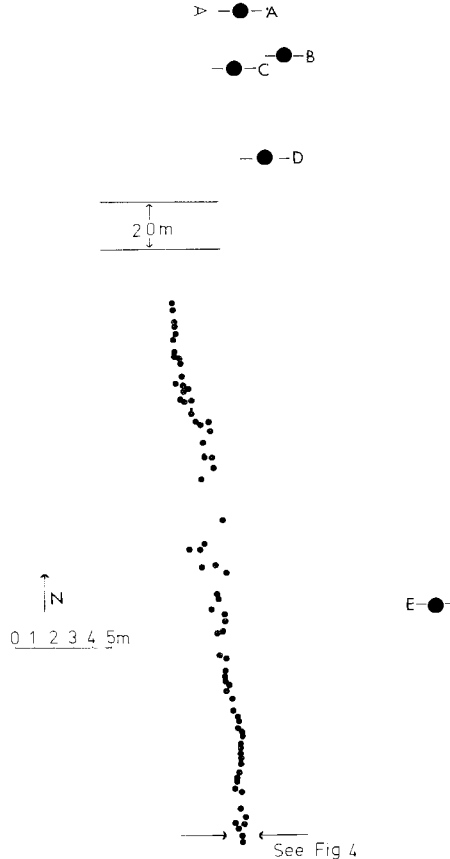


FIG. 2 - Plan of Bay of Fires stone alignment and associated features

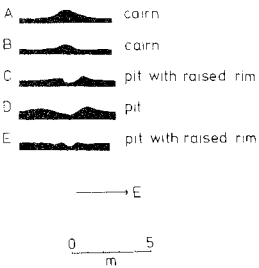


FIG. 3 - Cross-sections of cairns and pits associated with stone alignment

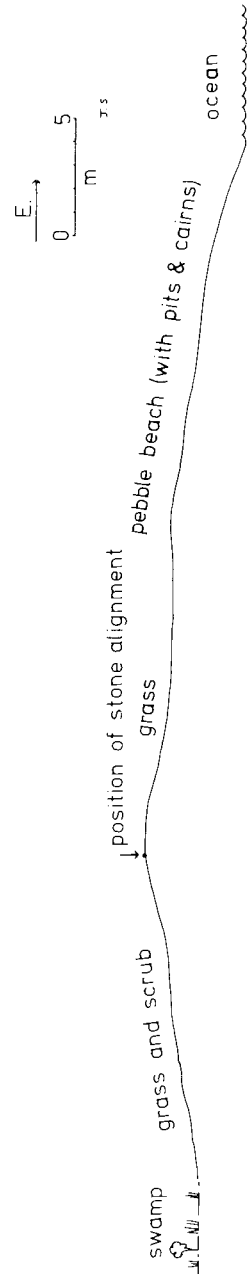
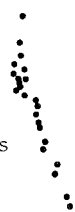


FIG. 4 - Cross-section through ridge from ocean in the east to swamp in the west



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noted. Vertical size grading or deliberate packing does not appear to be present in the stone features. The size and mass of the stone feature negates the possibility of the formation of the present configuration by natural forces. Their number, density, and lack of apparent function make it unlikely that they are of European construction.

Similar heaps of stones on raised pebble beaches were reported as being on southwest, west and northwest coasts during the first six months of the A.I.A.S. Site Recording Programme in Tasmania.

Some reference to such features has been made in the past. During Robinson's 'Friendly Mission', he passed along the West Coast near Sandown Point (now called Sundown Point) on the 8th June 1830. Noted in his diary was the fact that he "passed a heap of large pebbles. The natives had placed them in different forms, some resembling rooms, gardens and passages". (Plomley 1966, p. 170). Robinson dismissed the structures thinking that "probably it was the work of children" (ibid). These are similar, in structure and design, to the stone configurations reported in other areas. (southwest, west and northwest coasts) during the first six months of the A.I.A.S. Site Recording Programme in Tasmania. What these strange constructions were used for, and what they signified to the Tasmanians, we will probably never know.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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