

FURTHER DISCOVERIES OF ABORIGINAL ROCK CARVINGS IN TASMANIA

by

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(With six figures.)

The Remarkable Cave Area, south of Port Arthur on Tasman's Peninsula, now a tourist attraction, was once frequently visited by the aborigines. The locality is of interest geologically as the molten rock in the form of dolerite was forced into horizontal layers between the sedimentary rocks of Triassic Sandstone. This horizontal action formed a sill. At the same time some molten rock found its way into vertical cracks creating a dyke. The molten rock baked the sedimentary rock coming in contact with it causing it to be metamorphosed. It was this baked rock that the aborigines used for the manufacture of many of their artefacts.

In 1950, accompanied by my son, I set out to investigate an aboriginal workshop and midden on the western side of the Remarkable Cave opposite the stairway. Due to a high tide and heavy southern swell it could not be approached from the cave. We, therefore, climbed a steep hill above the gulch where the sea pounded in, and forced our way through a ti-tree gutter, dense bracken ferns up to six feet in height and masses of stinging nettles, on to a ridge at the lower end of which was the workshop and midden. To make progress more difficult there were extensive areas of dense shrubs among the undergrowth lying parallel to the ground about knee high.

The workshop site is on a sandy ridge or small promontory, the less solid parts of which are being blown away or slipping into the sea. The "blown" area revealed a considerable number of flakes of baked sandstone up to twelve inches in length. Some showed evidence of chipping, while others were in their natural state. Very small chipping flakes were plentiful. The best specimens were two discoidal scrapers three inches in diameter pounding stones and a hand axe. On the returning climb traces of rock engravings were seen. As portion of the figures appeared to be covered with earth and leaf mould we returned next day with a spade and removed an overburden of approximately six inches to reveal a maze of carvings.

Like those near Billy Blue between Nubeena and Roaring Beach, the method of production appears to have been the grooving and scraping technique. However, unlike those at Billy Blue where the workings have been made on large flat surfaces, these near the Remarkable Cave are generally on undulating or vertical surfaces. Scarcely any of the heavily engraved areas exceed six feet in width. The vertical faces would be easily worked by an aborigine standing on the ground.



FIG. 1.—Bird and animal tracks. The figure on the left may be a kangaroo. It is 6 inches in length.

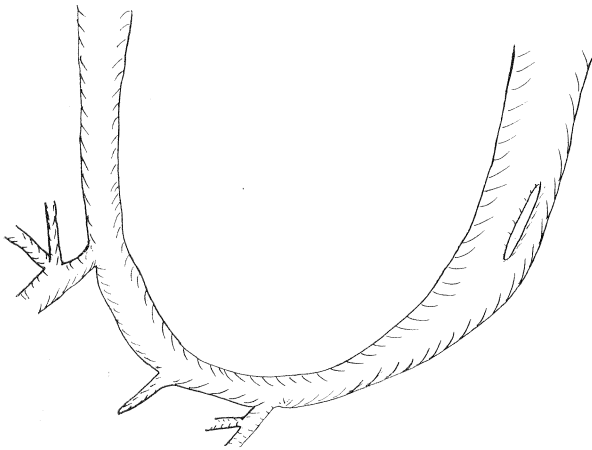


FIG. 2.—A semi-circular figure common among early stone age patterns. The diameter is approximately 10".

The actual figures vary in depth from a slight depression to two inches while the width ranges from mere scratches to an extreme of three inches.

On some of the more easily accessible surfaces it would appear that some figures had been superimposed upon others. Prominent among the engravings are emu tracks approximately six feet in length.

An interesting figure bore a strong resemblance to an ancestral animal pad having five toes found in the Carnarvon Ranges and recorded by R. H. Goddard. This pad had three toes each 2 inches, 2½ inches and 1½ inches respectively placed in relationship to a ball 2 inches in diameter. The depth of each was a quarter of an inch.

Two figures, approximately 16 inches and 18 inches in length, 1½ inches in width and 2 inches deep, appeared to be waddies or digging sticks.

Bearing a strong resemblance to the figure of a human leg and foot, recorded at Billy Blue near Nubeena, is a figure three feet long on a steep rock face.

There are hundreds of figures scattered over about a dozen rock faces in this area. On some of the more exposed surfaces exposure to the weather is having an eroding effect.

The Broad-Derwent Rivers Junction Areas.

Situated at, and just below the junction of the Broad and Derwent Rivers, three miles from the Ellendale-Dunrobin Road, the area holds particular interest. It is a few hundred yards below a dolerite intrusion. The swift-flowing Broad River, with its cool, crystal clear water enters the Derwent through a shallow valley. This river valley is interesting because on its descent from the National Park Area there is evidence of glacial action.

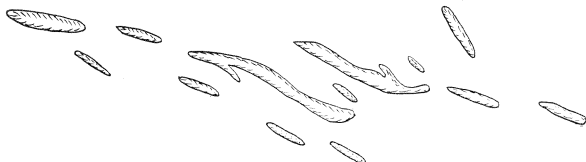


FIG. 3.—These figures resemble the recording of a corroboree.

Aboriginal rock carvings I found on large sandstone rocks bordering the river and on a ledge immediately above the strongly flowing stream. These I first found in 1957. Subsequent searches revealed further figures.

It is known that large numbers of aborigines inhabited this area. This was reported by Dr. Ross in the records of his visits to the Ouse district. Bonwick further supported this evidence by describing corroborees about which he had written. These aborigines would most likely be members of the Big River Tribe.

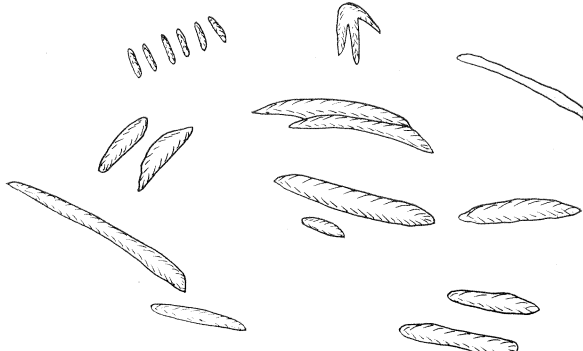


FIG. 4.—Animal and bird tracks and digging sticks. The longest figure is 12" long and ½" deep.

Stone implements are to be gathered in quantity throughout the locality. All along the river banks nosed scrapers, flake knives and concave scrapers are to be found. In a rock shelter near the junction a chipped water-worn pebble in the form of a hand-axe was collected. This variety of evidence of aboriginal occupation either for food gathering, corroborees or rock art indicates that the area had a particular significance to them.

A short distance (south) down the Derwent River from this spot, stencilled hands on the walls of a sandstone cave have been recorded by Dr. Bryden and S. de Teliga. There is some dissimilarity between these rock carvings and those on Tasman's Peninsula. Here is one of the first examples of what appears to be a corroboree (fig. 3). There are several figures of a similar kind where objects seem to be moving in procession or chain formation.



FIG. 5.—The large irregular figure probably represents some four-legged creature such as a lizard or a kangaroo. It is approximately 6" long and ¼" deep.

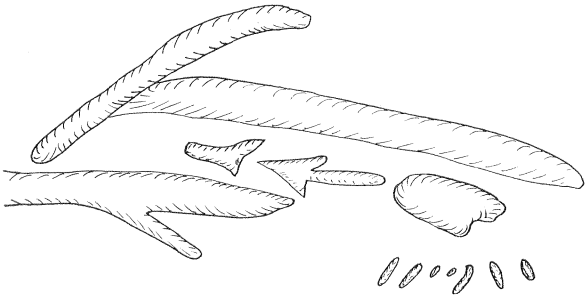


FIG. 6.—These markings have the appearance of large scratches such as could be made by the rubbing of spear points for sharpening. The longest figure is approximately 4" long and $\frac{3}{16}$ " deep. Note the bird track.

The largest engraving is a three-foot curve with a depth up to two inches. Its significance is obscure. These newly recorded rock engravings are, however, in general conformity with others found to date in southern Tasmania.

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