

A NOTE ON TASMANIAN ABORIGINAL DRAWINGS

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(With 1 Plate)

Relatively little has been recorded of the Art of the Tasmanian Aborigines. The last of this race disappeared from the scene in 1876 but from the time of white settlement in the State until that date a number of rock carvings and drawings were found, many of them as a result of collaboration with the natives.

In 1802 Péron gave an account of drawings—possibly one of the first recorded accounts. The drawings he described were on bark and showed “. . . characters crudely marked, similar to those which the aborigines tattooed on their forearms”.

Bunce in 1857 described drawings performed by aborigines in the Surrey Hills district of Tasmania—drawings on bark depicting carts drawn by oxen with drivers nearby.

Bonwick mentioned “the red hands marked on trees and rocks alike in Tasmania and Australia”. Other reports have also been made but there has been little evidence of drawings on a large scale. Calder, Hellyer, Ling Roth, Meston and Ross have all made contributions.

Some months ago we received a report that in a cave on the banks of the River Derwent there were signs of aboriginal drawings. Our investigations showed that in the sandstone cave there were a few rough outlines, but what they were supposed to represent we could not determine. There were however a number of impressions or drawings of hands, both right and left. Red ochre had been smeared across some of the sandstone and the hand

traced or drawn by using what appeared to us to be marl or limestone. It was difficult to get good photographs—neither was there enough natural light to get good definition nor would a flashlight show the details we would like to show. The accompanying plate shows the outline of a hand; in the cave a number of these were evident as were some other markings and drawings.

The locality was on the River Derwent about six miles from Ellendale, which is approximately 45 miles north-west of Hobart.

We are grateful to Mr. E. Bannister the owner of the property on which these caves are situated for the invitation to visit the caves and for his hospitality during our visit.

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