

PRELIMINARY NOTE UPON THE DISCOVERY OF  
A NUMBER OF TASMANIAN ABORIGINAL  
REMAINS AT EAGLEHAWK NECK.

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On the eve of this issue of the Papers and Proceedings going to press a singular discovery of Tasmanian Aboriginal remains was made. Its importance appeared to the Council of the Society to warrant the publication of a short preliminary note, and I was accorded the honour of placing a few facts relating to this discovery on record.

On January 15, 1919, Mr. T. I. Brister called at the Museum in order to have several pieces of bone identified. These proved to be human, and as far as could be judged from the small fragments they appeared to be aboriginal. Owing to the fact that Mr. Brister stated that there were numerous similar bones buried in the sand hills where he had obtained the fragments it was resolved to pay an immediate visit to the site.

Upon arrival at Eaglehawk Neck, in company with Mr. Brister and Mr. W. H. Clemes, I found that a slight sandslip had occurred on the south-eastern face of one of the large sand dunes forming Eaglehawk Neck. A number of small bones appeared on the surface, and after collecting these a start was made to examine below the surface. Upon excavation a number of larger bones and several skulls were revealed. Owing to the fact that the dune in question was covered with *Boobialla* (*Myoporum insulare*) and the roots in many cases completely filled the cavities of the bones, the task of exhuming these relics of a by-gone race was one of considerable difficulty. The work was made more so as we were excavating along the slope of the sand dune, which caused periodical downfalls of sand. Added to this, the bones, owing to their burial in the sand for probably a century, were exceedingly brittle. Many were completely decayed, but others were in a perfect state of preservation. Until the task of relegating the various fragments to their correct positions is completed and a detailed examination is made it is impossible to enter into details. A superficial examination

discloses that the bones are certainly those of aboriginals, evidently of a whole party, probably numbering a score, who met their death at this spot.

All ages are represented, there is a clavicle of a child barely two years old, a lower jaw of a child of between seven and nine years, others denoting the age to have been still young at the time of death, while there are other various grades through to old age. As regards the skulls, two immediately attract attention. The first on account of its abnormal size, and the second because of its exceptional thickness. One lower jaw recovered shows enormous development. The teeth, with the exception of two which are missing, are in a remarkable state of preservation and are worn down in an exceptionally level manner.

Exactly what the discovery will lead to remains to be proved by subsequent detailed observation, but there can be no doubt of its extreme value from an ethnological standpoint. In a comprehensive list of Tasmanian crania, published in 1909, \* the number of such skulls known to science was shown to be 120. Since that time several additional skulls have been acquired by the Tasmanian Museum from hitherto unknown sources, and the present discovery will add very considerably to the previous total. Further, taking into consideration the paramount importance to science of the study of the Tasmanian aboriginals, the need for a complete and detailed examination can be realised and its value assessed.

Before closing this short note I would like to express my thanks, as Curator of the Tasmanian Museum, to Mr. T. I. Brister, of Hobart, first for bringing the matter under my notice, and secondly for his enthusiastic assistance in the work of the removal of these valued osteological specimens to the Museum.

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\*Berry and Robertson. Proc. Roy. Soc. Victoria 22 (N.S.), Pt. I, 1909, p. 47.