THE NATIVE QUARRY OF SYNDAL, NEAR ROSS. (PL. III. AND IV.).

By Fritz Noetling, M.A., Ph.D., etc.

(Read August 10th, 1908.)

In the monthly notices of this Society for June, July, and August, 1875, page 41, the late Mr. J. R. Scott describes the locality of a "native quarry" as follows:—

"It has long been desirable to fix upon a spot where the Aborigines obtained their flint or stone implements. I am now able to fix upon two places, viz.:—First, about 10 chains immediately in front and to the north-east of the stone hut in Stocker's Bottom, County of Somerset, Parish of Pell. The second is about one mile more to the south-west, on Lot 443, on a branch of Dismal Creek running out of Stocker's Bottom. These two places are about six miles distant from the Macquarie River."

I think the wording can only be interpreted in one way, viz., that the Aborigines obtained the rock which they used in the manufacture of their stone implements from two localities, about six miles from the Macquarie River, at a place called Stocker's Bottom. In other words, that there exists what is commonly called a "Native Quarry" at Stocker's Bottom. It is in this meaning that Stocker's Bottom has been quoted in Johnston's Geology of Tasmania and Ling Roth's Aborigines of Tasmania.

When visiting Mt. Morriston, in June, 1908, I was anxious to see this locality, but Mr. Bennett, of Mt. Morriston, informed me that the story of the native quarry at Stocker's Bottom was a myth. However, I thought it better to convince myself whether there is any truth in Scott's statement or not, and accordingly I set out, in company with Mr. Vere Poullet-Harris, and

under the guidance of a man who knew Stocker's Bottom well, who had kindly been placed at my disposal by Mr. Eustace Cameron, of Mona Vale, to hunt up the native quarry at Stocker's Bottom. It was a long and tedious ride; but we found the stone hut right enough. "Ten chains immediately in front and to the north-east" we went, but there was not a sign of an outcrop of chert or any suitable rock, not to say of a native quarry. There was only black alluvial soil. We went further—20, 30 chains, half-a-mile—no sign of a quarry. We went in a wide circle round the hut; nowhere the slightest indication of even a small fragment of chert or a native implement. This careful examination of the locality which Mr. Vere Poullet-Harris and myself made, with the assistance of a man who knew almost every inch of ground, has conclusively proved that the native quarry near the stone hut in Stocker's Bottom is a myth. We then set out to hunt for the second locality, but, except a few pieces of dark chert on the slope of a low hill, I found nothing, and it seems pretty certain that there is no quarry at the place described by Scott.

It then struck me that another interpretation might be given to Scott's statement. Can it be that he discovered some outcrops of chert, and that he only wanted to say that he discovered two localities where rock suitable for the manufacture of Aboriginal implements occurs, leaving it an open question whether the Aborigines did exploit that locality or not? This view would in some way account for this otherwise inexplicable statement. However that may be, it is certain that there exists no native quarry in Stocker's Bottom, and this locality must therefore be struck off the list of places whence the Aborigines obtained the material for the manufacture of their implements.

Though disappointed in Stocker's Bottom, I had the good luck to hear of another native quarry which had been discovered by Mr. George Hutchison, of Beaufront, on Syndal Estate. Mr. Hutchison kindly showed me the place, and I feel greatly indebted to him, because it is doubtful whether I would have found this rather remote locality without his guidance. We proceeded from the road that leads from Ross to Trefusis in an eastern direction along the wire-netted boundary

fence between Syndal and Charlton Estate, till a hut near an artificial lagoon, which is somewhat north of the boundary fence, was reached. Passing it, we eventually reached a wire-netted cross fence running north and south, and, passing through the hurdle gate, we turned towards right (south), and, following the cross fence for about a quarter of a mile, we came on the slope of a low hill right on to the quarry. The run where it occurs is known as the "Front Shelves Run."

At first it did not seem very extensive; but further examination showed that it extended for at least half-a-mile in an eastern direction. The sight is really a remarkable one, and the photographs give only a very poor idea of it. Hundreds of thousands of fragments of rock are lying about, sometimes in large heaps, sometimes more scattered. No better comparison could be made than with a road recently covered with fresh broken metal, and every one of the fragments we see has once passed through human hands.

Unfortunately, the bush is rather dense, and this made a closer geological examination impossible. A short distance towards south-east there are sandstone cliffs, in which now and then a little cave has been hollowed out. The relationship of the chert which was used for implements and the sandstone is not quite clear; neither did I see any volcanic rock close to the outcrop of the chert. As far as can be made out, the chert forms a band of about 120 feet in width and half-a-mile in length, striking almost due east-west. Perhaps a closer examination will reveal more with regard to the geological features. For the present it is impossible to say anything more in particular with regard to the origin of the chert, whether it is metamorphosed or an original sedimentary rock. The extremely fine bedding would almost suggest that it is a true siliceous shale.

At the western part the chert is of dark blue colour, and of very fine grain; it is very evenly striated, and darker and lighter-coloured bands are irregularly alternating. At the eastern end, however, a chert of light greyish colour occurs. It would be interesting to see the passage of the dark blue into the grey chert; but I am afraid this is impossible without a good deal of digging and blasting. However, this occurrence proves

that there is no fundamental difference between the dark blue and the grey chert. It seems that this chert breaks up into irregular lumps of varying size, which are covered with brownish crust. These lumps have been broken by the Aborigines into irregular angular fragments, most of which were rejected; but suitable pieces were worked then and there into implements, while others were apparently taken to the camping grounds. All the specimens that have been handled by the Aborigines are covered with a whitish patina, which sometimes, particularly at the angles, wears off, disclosing the dark black colour of the rock.

It is very remarkable that only a small number of implements were found that show a considerable amount of chipping. Though there is an enormous number of angular fragments, I think that hardly one in a thousand is extensively worked. And there is another notable fact, all the specimens, which show either a well-worked indical face or careful trimming of the edges, invariably show a nice smooth pollical face. I already dwelt on this peculiar fact in my description of the Native Quarry on Coal Hill (Melton-Mowbray), and I can only account for this in one way. The quarries were not working places—they were quarries pure and simple—that is to say, places from which the stone used for implements was obtained. The Aborigines visited these places simply to obtain a supply of suitable flakes, most of which they took away in order to shape them at their camping grounds. Had they made their implements at the quarry, we might certainly expect a large number of unfinished rejects or broken specimens.

Another fact struck me also as very remarkable, and I may say that this equally applies to the Coal Hill Quarry. In my search for well worked specimens, I naturally turned over and examined a large number of fragments, and numerous of these seemed by size, shape, and sharp edges conveniently suitable for a cutting implement; yet they were apparently rejected. On the other hand, specimens which are well worked and trimmed appear to be much less suitable than the rejected fragments.

I already noticed, at the June meeting of this Society, a similar fact when describing the nucleus and the flakes struck therefrom; flakes that were very suitable were disregarded, and at last one, which does not appear to have more advantages than the others, was obtained, and further work was stopped. One can only wonder at the enormous waste of labour, and, as all the lower races are notoriously lazy, it is astonishing to note that they must have spent a vast amount of their labour in vain. It is very difficult to give a satisfactory explanation of this unquestionable fact; I can only suppose that every time when an Aborigine required an implement he wished it to be of a certain size. He commenced striking off flakes till one of the desired size was obtained, disregarding all the others that fell off, however suitable they might otherwise have been, because they did not have the size, or perhaps better said, the required weight. It cannot be the shape, because all Tasmanian implements are true amorpholithes—that is to say, devoid of all intentional form. It can therefore only be the size or the weight of the desired flake that came into consideration. If this view be correct, it would certainly account in a satisfactory way for the otherwise puzzling fact that numerous flakes which are evidently suitable for implements have been rejected, while others less suitable have been worked into implements.

At present a fairly thick bush grows all over the quarry, and the traces of a great bush fire are still visible. These bush fires had a remarkable result on some of the fragments; a large number are superficially cracked; as a further result, irregular splinters break off, and the originally smooth surface assumes a rough, jagged appearance. I have a most striking example of this action of the fire in a well-chipped specimen, from which a number of splinters have already been detached, while others are ready to break off at the slightest shock. It is obvious that if this specimen had been exposed for a longer time to the action of fire and rain, the originally well-chipped archaeolithe would have changed into an angular fragment, devoid of any signs of working, but perhaps showing still the cracks produced by fire.

In conclusion, it is advisable to give a revised list of the native quarries known up to date (2). These are—

1. A quarry on Coal Hill (1), near Melton-Mowbray (Johnstone's Quarry)—(Noetling, The Native Quarry on Coal Hill, near Melton-Mowbray, The Tasmanian Naturalist, 1907, Vol. I., No. 2, pp. 14-19). Chert-quarry.

2. Small quarry near the railway station of Pontville. Porcellanite-quarry. (Weston's Quarry.)

3. Quarry on Front-shelves run, Syndal Estate, near Ross. Chert-quarry. (Hutchison's Quarry.)

4. Quarry on the boundary line between Glenleith and Charles Hope Estates, River Plenty, about 2 miles from Plenty railway station. Chert-quarry. Walker's Quarry.) (H. Ling Roth, The Aborigines of Tasmania, 2nd edition, 1899, p. 149.)

5. Quarry in the neighbourhood of the Great Lake, between Split Rock and the western shore of the Great Lake, according to the late Mr. Scott. This place is quoted in Johnson's Geology and in Ling Roth's Aborigines of Tasmania. Mr. Harold Bisdee has also mentioned to me that a quarry exists near the Great Lake, but whether this is the same locality as that mentioned by Scott I am unable to say.

6. It is certain that the Aborigines used the Breccia, which occurs in large, loose boulders on the beach of Droughty Point for their implements, though there is no regular quarry. The numerous implements picked up

(1) Only a few days ago Mr. R. V. Nicholls, of Melton-Mowbray, kindly informed me that he had found another quarry, about four miles to the west of the railway station. I have just seen this locality, and I can fully confirm Mr. Nicholls' discovery. The quarry is the largest and most extended I have hitherto seen, and I will describe it in a subsequent paper. I may only mention here that it is a chert-quarry, in which the treasured kind of grey chert was obtained. As there are now two quarries near Melton-Mowbray, and as the locality where this quarry is situated has no particular name, I propose to call it Nicholls' quarry, in honour of its discoverer, in order to distinguish it from the quarry on Coal Hill, which I now distinguish under the name of Johnstone's quarry.

(2) The number of quarries having increased, I think it advisable to distinguish each by a special name. Geographical names not being always suitable, I think it will be best to name the quarry after its discoverer.

on Droughty Point are, however, of the same kind of rock as occurs on the beach.

7. A quarry is said to exist on the road from Campbell Town to Swansea, near Lake Leak. As I have not visited this place, I am unable to say whether this is correct or not.

8. Hunter's Hill, Native Point, on the South Esk, near Perth. The name implies that it must have been a favourite resort of the natives. If I am right, Mr. Johnston has first discovered this place, but it does not appear to have been a regular quarry.

9. Pipe Clay Lagoon, South Arm (Johnston, Geology of Tasmania). Though there is no doubt as to the occurrence of metamorphosed rock, I do not think there exists a regular quarry.

10. On the Tamar River (Johnston, Geology of Tasmania). Nothing is known to me about this locality.

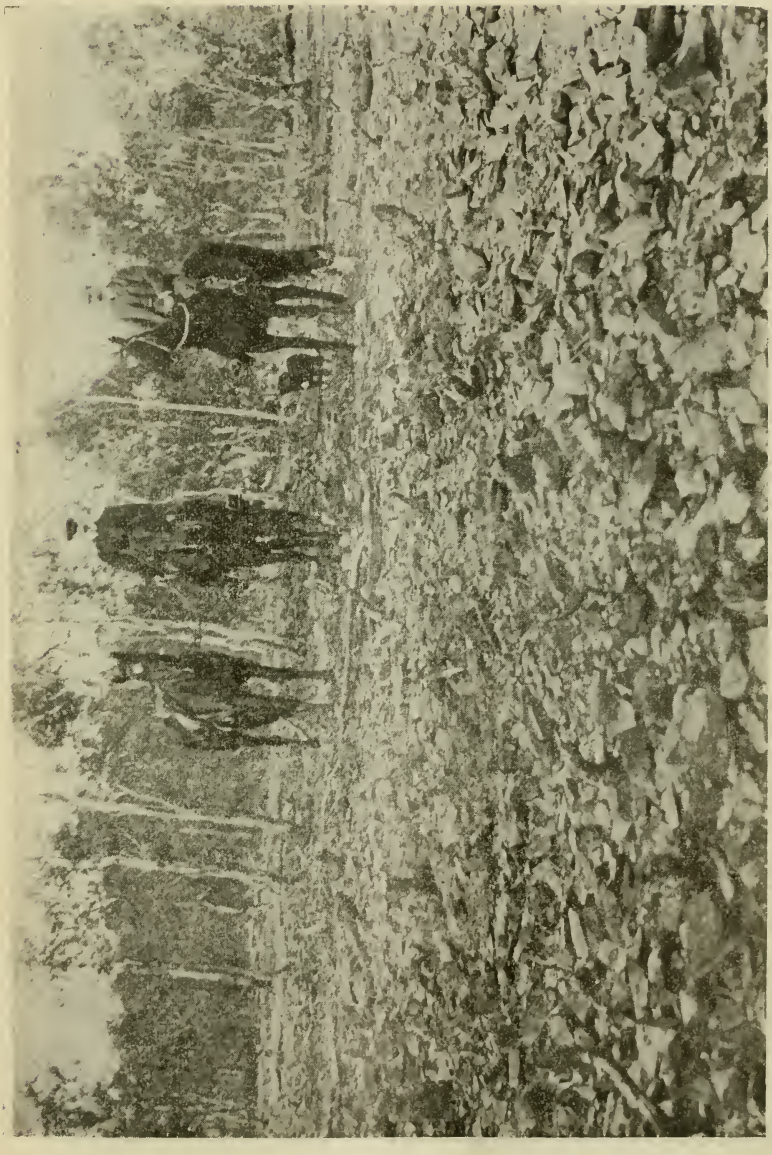
11. Mount Communication, Saltwater River, Tasman's Peninsula (2). (Clark's Quarry.)

Out of this number we may take it that Nos. 1-5 and 11 are regular quarries—that is to say, localities frequented by the Aborigines, perhaps for a long space of time, in order to obtain suitable fragments of rock to be shaped into implements.

The locality near Droughty Point is not a regular quarry in the meaning of those above mentioned; it is very probable that Nos. 8, 9, 10 come under the same heading, though, not having seen these localities myself, I do not wish to express an opinion.

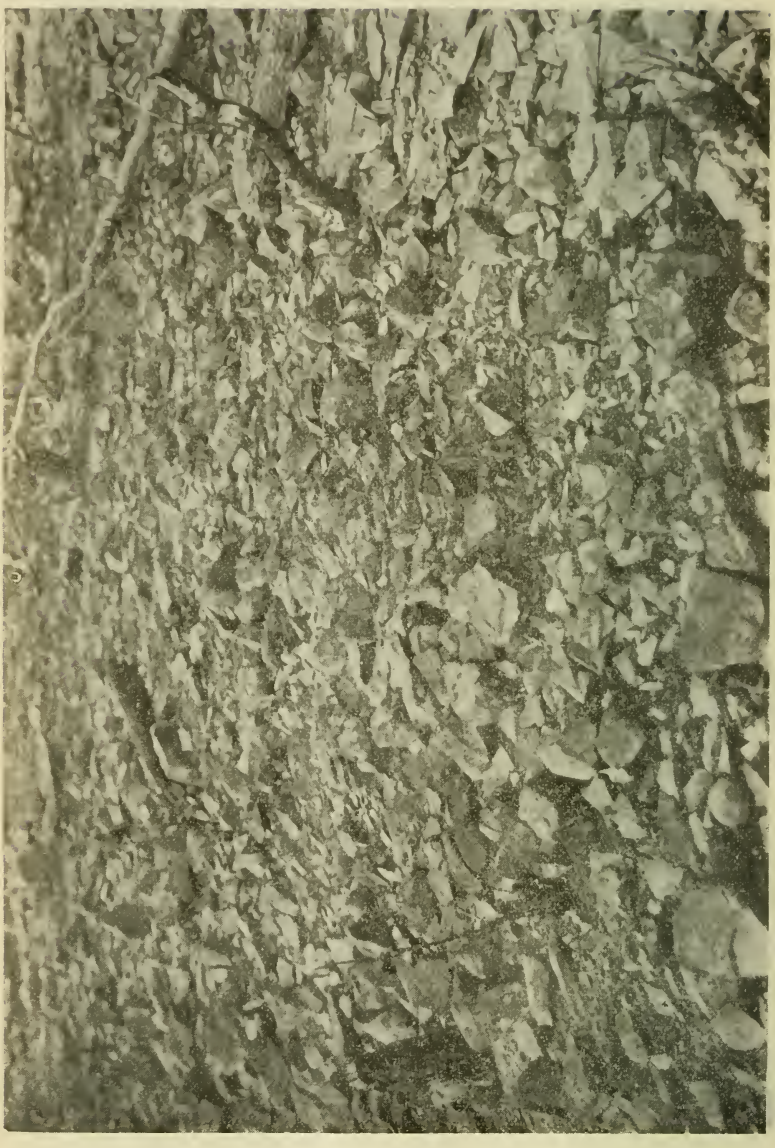
No. 7, the quarry near Lake Leak, will have to be included in the list of regular quarries, provided that the information is correct. I therefore leave it as doubtful for the present, but I hope that later on I shall be able to give more information about it. There are therefore up to date (November, 1908) seven places known in Tasmania which have been habitually frequented by the Aborigines in order to obtain the material for their stone implements.

(2) Since the above was written I have been able to examine this quarry, which is situated in a very remote place. Mr. George Clark kindly showed me the place, and I am greatly indebted to him for guiding me. I will describe this quarry, together with Nicholls' quarry, but I may mention here that it is of the chert type.



NATIVE QUARRY, Syndal.

Dr. Noetling, Photo.



NATIVE QUARRY, Syndal.

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