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A REMARKABLE ROCK-SHELTER IN THE MILTON
DISTRICT, NEW SOUTH WALES.

By R. ETHERIDGE, Junr., Curator.

(Figs. 8-13.)

The geographical distribution of the once frequented Rock-Shelters, with their pictographs, the petroglyphs or Rock-Carvings, so plentifully scattered throughout our metropolitan coastal area, and the more widely distributed arborglyphs, or Carved-trees, are amongst the few remaining subjects of investigation relating to our almost totally extinct Aborigines, left to us.

Through the interest taken in the study of these remains by Inspector E. Milne, of the Railway Department, Goulburn, and Capt. James Cork, J.P., of Milton, and under their guidance, I was able, by instruction of the Trustees, during February last, to pay a visit to a fine example of a Cave-Shelter situated on a branch of Coal Creek, in the parish of Little Forest, Co. St. Vincent. Coal Creek flows into Lake Conjola, a salt water sea lagoon, a short distance to the north of Milton.

There are three Shelters on this branch creek, within a short distance of one another. The principal opening is situated near its head, at a point where the scarp of Hawkesbury Sandstone is but a few feet above the level of the water course, and on its west bank. On the east bank, but somewhat lower down, are two smaller cavities, also containing pictographs.

The principal Shelter has been known for twenty-two years, and was discovered by Messrs. A. Cork and F. White when on a shooting excursion. After a lapse of fifteen years, a search was again made for it by Messrs. Milne and White, without success, but subsequently Capt. J. Cork, Inspector Milne and Mr. J. Higgins succeeded in locating it. The difficulty in fixing the exact spot arose from the extremely rugged and scrubby nature of the locality, typical coast brush country. There is still living in the Uladulla Aborigines Camp an old full-blooded black, known as "Berrima Jim," who was "made a man" at the last

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Bora ceremony held in the Milton District, about forty years ago, and when questioned about this Shelter and its pictographs, he knew nothing of them, or professed not to, as the case may be.

The opening is one hundred and thirty feet long, fourteen feet in depth from the overhanging brow to the innermost recess, and at about the entrance is nine feet from floor to ceiling, shelving inwards. The floor is formed by a wide sandstone bench, extending nearly the whole length of the Shelter, and on this there is a widely-spread fire refuse heap, consisting of very fine greyish coloured dust, containing fragments of burnt bones and a few stone chips; at the point we excavated this bed was one foot in thickness. Outside the Shelter, at the upper end, is a block of stone with several good examples of tomahawk-head rubbing grooves.

The back of the Shelter is broken up into a series of retiring narrow vertical faces, and on these the pictographs are delineated, but now all are faint, and, excepting a few, are decipherable with difficulty. The principal group seems, so far as we could decipher it, to represent a corroboree, and extends for a distance of twenty-six feet. The figures are small compared with some I have seen in shelters on other parts of our coast.

The more important objects delineated are numerous conventional outlines of the human form, some (males) in the position known as the "corroboree jump" (fig. 8.), the arms elevated above the head and the legs drawn up, and a particularly good outline of a female figure, with the characteristically attenuated lower limbs. There is a good representation of a dog, the three-pointed figure usually ascribed to that of an Emu foot, and numerous outlines of conventional animals that it is impossible to suggest names for. In all, the drawings extend over a length of sixty feet, the corroboree group, or the assemblage we took to represent such, alone reaching a length of twenty-six feet. The wide geographical distribution of the Emu foot design is shown by the fact of its discovery, amongst many other instances, by Mr. R. Helms,

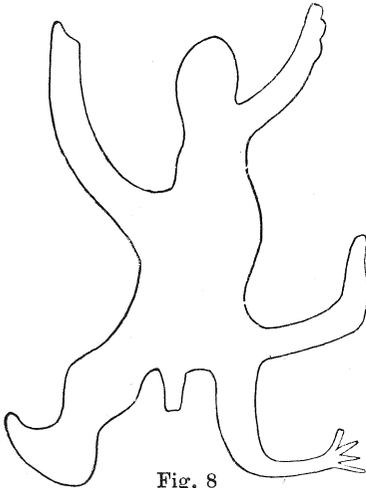


Fig. 8

during the progress of the Elder Exploring Expedition in 1891, at Arcolillinna Wells, eighty miles east of the Everard Ranges. It is there delineated in red on the walls of a Rock-Shelter.¹ Again, it is a frequent petroglyph on the so-called phallic conical stones met with throughout the sandy wastes of Western New South Wales.²

Prominent amongst the representations is an elongated worm or eel-like object (fig. 9.), with a long body and sagittate head, or a

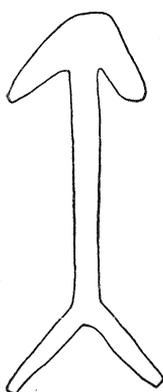


Fig. 9.

double sagittate head (fig. 10.). One of the latter is nine inches long and five inches across the barbed head. Another figure appears to represent a double more or less heart-shaped body, fifteen inches in height by sixteen inches in breadth (fig. 11.). I think this is intended for a very highly conventionalised human male figure, for at the top of the central double line is an oval outline, possibly intended for a head, and from it proceed two v-shaped prolongations that may be arms conjoined to two other upwardly curved outlines from the base representing legs. Another figure, certainly a male, is provided with a remarkably slender body, the arms

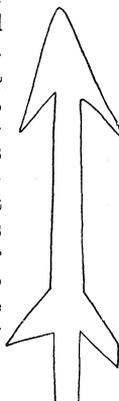


Fig. 10.

upwardly spread, one with three finger-like terminations, the other with only one, and the legs spread horizontally at right angles to the body (fig. 12.); this figure is eleven inches in height and ten inches across the spread legs. Fig. 13 represents another object depicted in this shelter; I am not able to offer any solution of it.

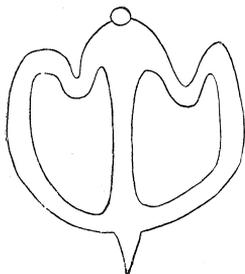


Fig. 11.

Some of the pictographs are in black outline only, others similarly delineated but infilled with white, and others again in red only, such as the Emu feet. Here and there one of the red figures is defined by a black outline, but none, so far as my observation went, in black splash work alone. Strange to say, no trace of the open

hand, either black or red, nor of foot imprints could be found.

¹ Helms—Trans. Roy. Soc. S. Austr., xvi., 3, 1896, p. 261, pl. ix.

² Harper—Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S. Wales, xxiii., 3, 1898, p. 420; Williams—*Ibid.*, xxvi., 4, 1901, p. 515.

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The representation of the human foot is met with both in our pictographs and petroglyphs. The former was excellently figured by Mr. P. T. Hammond amongst the drawings

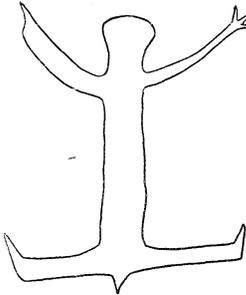


Fig. 12.

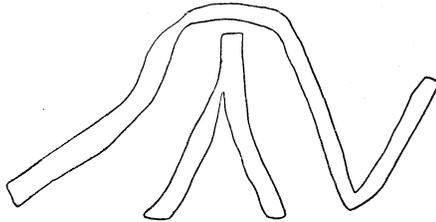


Fig. 13.

taken in a large Rock-Shelter on Wollombi Creek, Hunter River District,³ and the latter was recorded by myself from the Cockle Creek group of petroglyphs, Cowan Creek, a branch of the lower Hawkesbury River.⁴

The first smaller Shelter down the creek and on its east side, discovered some years ago by Inspector Milne and Capt. Cork, is very much higher up on the steep creek bank. The size of this recess is limited, and the drawings are again on the narrow vertical rock faces at the back of the opening. There is a remarkably well drawn "Iguana," three feet long, two well executed, although small, boomerangs of the "come-back" type, and a large object on the roof, possibly representing a whale. The mouth of the latter is open and heavily toothed, with a large flipper protruding from one side. It is not to be overlooked that the sable artist who drew these pictographs formed one of a community of Coast Blacks, so there is nothing improbable in this figure being meant for that of a whale, and from the presence of teeth in the mouth, it is not unlikely that the Sperm Whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*, Shaw) is intended. This giant is at times met with on our coast, the Museum containing the skeleton, fifty feet long, of one stranded on the not far distant shore of Wollongong. The Iguana is black banded, and may be intended to represent *Varanus varius*, Shaw. Not the least interesting amongst this set of figures, is the outline of a very small shield of the same type as that figured by Professor T. W. E.

³ Hammond—Rec. Geol. Surv. N.S. Wales, ii., 4, 1892, pl. xv.

⁴ Etheridge—Rec. Geol. Surv. N.S. Wales, iv., 2, 1894, pl. ix., f. 13 *a* and *b*. Other petroglyphic representations of the human foot will be found throughout Mr. W. D. Campbell's "Aboriginal Carvings of Port Jackson and Broken Bay" (*Mem. Geol. Survey N.S. Wales, Ethnol. Series, No. 1, 1899.*) To those interested in this subject, I cannot do better than recommend a perusal of this exhaustive work.

David and myself, found on a promontory of Hawkesbury Sandstone, near Forty Baskets Bay, North Harbour, Port Jackson,⁵ and again by Mr. G. H. Barrow and myself at the head of Bantry Bay, Middle Harbour, Port Jackson.⁶ A similar type of shield was also met with in the group of petroglyphs at Flat Rocks, near Manly.⁷ On the roof is also delineated an undoubtedly phallic object—a rudely executed penis and scrotum. The superior execution of the drawings in this Shelter suggests that the draftsman was not identical with the depicter of the figures in the larger Shelter. The drawings are all in black outline.

The second smaller Shelter, found by Inspector Milne during our visit, is still lower down the creek, but in a similar position to the last. The figures in this instance are either in black outline, infilled with white, or in white or red alone, of the last colour is again the Emu foot.

Not the slightest doubt exists that the pictographs in these Shelters are the work of Aboriginal artists. No trace whatever of "touching up" is visible, similar to that seen in the large recess on Harris' Creek, a tributary of George River, near Liverpool, explored by Dr. J. C. Cox and myself some years ago.⁸

A more primitive form of the eel-like figure, already referred to, was observed in the group at Flat Rocks, near Manly,⁹ and regarded by Dr. A. Carrol as a Catfish.¹⁰ In the latter instance, the petroglyphs were very much larger, without either the fish-tail end or double barbed appendages.¹¹

Whales are often represented in rock carving groups throughout the metropolitan area, and several illustrations will be found in Mr. Campbell's Monograph already mentioned, but I had not previously seen a representation of a toothed whale.

I did not notice in the Coal Creek pictographs of the human form the peculiar angulation of the knee and elbow joints that

⁵ David & Etheridge—Rec. Geol. Surv. N.S. Wales, i., 2, 1889, p. 144 pl. xxi.

⁶ Etheridge—*Ibid*, ii., 1, 1890, p. 29, pl. ii., f. 8 and 9.

⁷ Etheridge—*Ibid*, ii., 4, 1892, pl. xvi., f. 4.

⁸ Etheridge—*Ibid*, i., 2, 1889, p. 146.

⁹ Etheridge—*Ibid*, ii., 4, 1892, pl. xvi., f. 9 *b-e*.

¹⁰ Carrol—Centennial Mag., i, No. 3, p. 193, f. 7.

¹¹ In a very interesting Cave-Shelter on Pigeon Creek, between Tenthill and Pilton, Queensland, Mr. Henry Tryon found many petroglyphs closely resembling this "cat-fish" (?), both single and double barbed; this shelter contains a very remarkable series of petroglyphs. (*Proc. Roy. Soc. Q'land*, i., 2, 1884, pl. xi., f. 2).

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forms so conspicuous a feature on some of the petroglyphic figures around Port Jackson, for instance those forming a portion of the group above Bantry Bay, at Flat Rocks, or on the low headland east of Point Piper. Nor is there any trace of eyes as represented in the human figure at the last-named locality,¹² or above Cockle Creek, Cowan.¹³

Possible explanations of some of the pictographs and petroglyphs have been given by Dr. Carrol¹⁴ and myself,¹⁵ and by inference the same may be applied to the drawings at Coal Creek and other similar localities.

¹² Etheridge—*Rec. Geol. Surv. N.S. Wales*, iii., 3, 1893, pl. xv., f. 11.

¹³ Etheridge—*Loc. cit.*, iv., 2, 1894, pl. ix., f. 15.

¹⁴ Carrol—*Centennial Mag.*, i., Nos. 1 and 2, pp. 53 and 89.

¹⁵ Etheridge—*Rec. Geol. Surv. N.S. Wales*, ii., 1, 1890, p. 34; iii., 3, 1893, pp. 82-85; iv., 2, 1894, p. 59.

CORRECTION TO EXPLANATION OF PLATE XIV

For fig. 10 read fig. 9.

SCAPHITES ERUCIFORMIS, *Eth. fl.*

Fig. 10. Back of limonite cast showing sutures and sculpture.— $\times 2$.