

METRICAL FEATURES OF ABORIGINAL CRANIA FROM COASTAL NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

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Figures 1-5

Manuscript received May, 1963

INTRODUCTION

The racial origin of the Australian Aboriginal is still the subject of much controversy, despite the considerable number of studies which have been made over the last 100 years. Past investigations have included many aspects of physical anthropology, archaeology, linguistics and social anthropology, but different approaches, techniques and interpretations have resulted primarily in two basically opposed hypotheses. These are: (a) The Aboriginal Australians are the descendants of a single basic stock which invaded the virgin continent. Local differences found to-day in the frequencies of some of their physical features are primarily the result of chance variations which became established in semi-isolated populations (cf. Abbie, 1951). (b) Successive waves of immigrants of different basic stock colonized the Australian continent. The frequency variations of certain features found between Aborigines inhabiting the different parts of the Australian continent are closely related to the varying proportions of the contributing stocks in these populations (cf. Birdsell, 1949 and 1950).

The current study deals with the variations in certain metrical features of Aboriginal crania from various parts of coastal New South Wales. With this as a basis, it is hoped to record, analyse and compare cranial data from Aboriginal populations of various other localised areas of Australia in an attempt to test, and possibly help resolve, the differences between the two currently held divergent views.

MATERIALS

The material studied includes the crania of 65 males and 44 females recovered from various parts of coastal New South Wales, Australia. This area includes a strip up to 40 miles wide along the entire length of the coast of that State. The specimens thus all come from a region east of the Great Dividing Range. Figs. 1 and 2 show the localities from which the specimens come and it can be seen that, with very few exceptions, the crania actually come from places on or very close to the shore line.

The specimens used are all considered to come from fully adult individuals. In all of the crania the basioccipital-basisphenoid suture is synostosed. In addition, both M₃ teeth are fully erupted in both jaws or, where one or more is absent in either jaw or on either side, the attrition of the other teeth and the amount of suture closure generally indicated the congenital absence (or very considerably delayed eruption) of these teeth.