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15. Notes on Aboriginal Stone Axe Discovered in West Maitland, N.S.W.

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Geological evidence as to the antiquity of the Australian aboriginal is scanty. The earliest brought to light of which I have found any record is the discovery, in Maryborough, Victoria, in January, 1855, of a fragment of a well-formed stone axe resting on the metamorphic schistose bedrock, about 5 feet beneath the surface. It was overlain by the compact gravel drift (called by the miners "cement"), and by a layer of hard iron-stained sandstone. The fragment was discovered by Mr. A. C. Swinton and Mr. Macworth Shore, one of the discoverers of the gold-field, before any rush took place. It is referred to by Dr. A. R. Wallace.⁽¹⁾

At Shea's Creek, near Sydney, in the course of digging a canal, a stone tomahawk was found,⁽²⁾ and at Tamia Hill, Victoria, footprints were found under volcanic ash.

A stone axe was found a few feet below the surface near Lake Connewarre, Victoria.⁽³⁾

The discovery of the Talgai (Queensland) skull was the latest and most important.

Stone implements have been discovered in the Hunter district, New South Wales, at a considerable depth, either on alluvial banks of the river or in sand dunes; but the nature of the soil where they were found, and the circumstances under which they were found, gave no indication of any antiquity.

The stone axe, the subject of this paper, is of a primitive class, but possesses an edge that has been produced by grinding. No importance can be attached to its primitive condition. Axes equally rough have been found at sites of old camps, which have been used since the first settlement of the Colony.

This axe was found at a depth of 11 feet from the surface in the course of the sinking of the Maitland Colliery Shaft, near West Maitland, New South Wales. The first layer met with consisted of 8 feet of reddish clay, and the next stratum underlying that of ferruginous clay, 7 feet 9 inches in thickness. The axe was found at a depth of 3 feet in the latter bed. The beds are on the edge of a block of land with a maximum elevation of less than 200 feet with an area of over 2,000 acres. The land is gently sloping, and no conditions exist which would permit of a sudden deposition of the clays. The top of the sur-

(1) *Island Life*—3rd Edition, page 47. (2) *Memoirs of Geological Survey*. (3) Daley—page 502.

face clay would not be more than 20 feet above sea-level. Raised beaches, containing marine shells, are found along the base of the elevated mass of land referred to on its north, east, and south sides. One was found in sinking an air shaft of the Maitland Colliery.

The uppermost of the overlying strata consisted of 3 feet 6 inches of black soil, which would be very near, the next of 4 feet of yellow clay, and underlying that was a bed of 3 feet of bluish clay, which overlaid a bed of marine shells, 18 inches in thickness. The two beds of clay overlying the marine shells appear to correspond with the beds passed through in the main shaft.

The raised beach, which is the only guide as to the antiquity of the axe, is that referred to by Professor David in *Memoirs of Geological Survey*.⁽¹⁾

The top of the bed is about 11 feet above sea-level, and is distant about 20 miles from the present sea-shore.