PAINTINGS IN CAVES BY ABORIGINES

Primitive Designs of Hands

Seen at Congewai

(By RENE CROUCH)

Evidence of the existence of aborigines in Maitland and surrounding districts is to be found in numerous rock paintings in obscure caves at Wollombi, Millfield and Congewai, and a recent visit to two caves at Congewai proved interesting.

In both caves the walls were covered with several designs, the accompanying photograph depicting types of stencilled hands.

To visit the first cave we walked through thickly timbered bush, where possibly many a corroboree had once been held. Reaching the summit of the spur of the mountain we commenced descent of a precipitous path.

At this stage of the journey our guide was nearly "bushed." After a lengthy search we found our goal. The cave, situated about half way down the side of the spur of the mountain, was about 30 feet long, 12 feet wide and 9 feet high.

The walls were covered with markings of various types, including about 30 or more hands, clearly defined, some average size, others miniature, none large, and all with very thin wrists. A wallaby, an iguana and other unidentified markings were also to be seen.

The second cave at Congewai we visited later in the day. It was smaller, had paintings of numerous hands of a similar type, but,

In reply to a question regarding the motive for the paintings, Mr. Enright referred to the following paragraph in his writings:

"No doubt many of these figures are fanciful and many representing objects familiar to the aboriginals may have been drawn merely for pleasure, but it is hard to believe that the hands which we find stencilled in groups varying in number and in the relative positions of the individual member of the group, and the series of lines called tribal marks to be seen varying in number and length are without meaning."

METHODS OF PAINTING

"Aboriginal rock paintings were executed in three different ways," stated Mr. Enright.

"In stencilling figures of the human hand or other objects on the walls of caves a smooth surface was selected. The palm of the hand was then placed firmly on the rock with the fingers and thumb spread out and the re-

A photograph of aboriginal rock paintings taken in a cave at Congewai recently. Depicted are clearly defined hands stencilled on the side of the cave.
A photograph of aboriginal rock paintings taken in a cave of Congewai recently. Depicted are clearly defined hands stencilled on the side of the cave.

Owing to swarms of hornets nesting there, our stay was short.

Mr. W. J. Enright (well-known Maitland solicitor), who made an extensive study of aboriginal life, stated he visited the first cave described over 40 years ago, and it is apparent there has been little defacement over the years.

Following is a quotation from a report written by Mr. Enright some years ago:

"In October 1893 I happened to see in the newspapers the report of some aboriginal drawings by the Aborigines in caves on Bulga Creek near Singleton," which was read by Mr. R. H. Matthews before the Royal Society of New South Wales.

"I then commenced to study aboriginal drawings and having been informed that there were several caves in the Wollombi district I determined to visit, that locality immediately I had time at my disposal."

DRAWINGS AT MILLFIELD

In describing drawings found in a cave at Millfield Mr. Enright stated:

"The cave in which these drawings were found is situated in a cliff of Hawkesbury sandstone on the right bank of Bally's Arm, a tributary of Cedar Creek, and about 25 chains westly from the north west corner of Portion No. 6 of 40 acres in the parish of Millfield, County of Northumberland.

"The length of the cave is 46 feet, height about 12 feet and depth 20 feet. The roof of the shelter faces N 20 degrees W and is covered with one foot depth of sand lying about, together with flakes of smoke-blackened stone which have dropped from the roof, while slight traces of smoke are still to be seen.

"There are nineteen figures drawn in solid black and they consist of a large fish, surrounding the small figure of a man, with the beak of a seagull in its mouth; a laughing jackass; a figure of a woman, the lower portion of which is somewhat weathered and one leg has entirely disappeared; a figure of the sun; a small fish; a bird which appears to be a member of the cormorant family, in the grasp of a mud-turtle; an ellipsoid shaped figure of a porcupine, with various rays projecting, which may be intended for a porcupine rolled up; or possibly a moon in its third quarter; a small figure like a snake in the act of striking; one which bears a resemblance to a foot; four which may be dilley bags, or the light bark shields of the natives, are shaped like a waddy, except that the thick end is disproportionately wide; also a figure somewhat triangular in shape."

"I then commenced to study aboriginal drawings and having been informed that there were several in the Wollombi district I determined to visit, that locality immediately I had time at my disposal."

"Objects to which neither of the preceding methods would be applicable were drawn in outline in the required colours. In some cases the objects were merely outlines, in other instances they were shown in solid colour all over, whilst in others the space within the margin of the outlines was shaded by strokes of the same colour or a different one."

"Judging by the appearance of the lines in several of the figures drawn by this method I think it likely that, before commencing the drawing, the surface of the rock was dampened with water or moistened with animal oil, and then a piece of the required colour such as a lump of red ochre or pipe clay or charcoal was held in the hand of the operator and the necessary lines drawn."

(Next week some historical and geographical details will be given in connection with caves, also some characteristic of the Australian aboriginal.)
light bark shields of the natives, are shaped like a waddy, except that the thick end is disproportionately wide; also a figure somewhat triangular in shape."

The location of another cave Mr. Enright gives as “400 yards from the Wollombi Brook.”

A second cave in this district, he states, “is only a short distance from the Wollombi-Maitland road.”
PRIMITIVE PAINTINGS
BY ABORIGINES
Wideiy Distributed Throughout
Australian States

PRIMITIVE PAINTINGS

Among the most primitive races in the world, the Aus­
tralian aborigines, is being relegated to inland missio­
nal stations, the history of civilisation in this continent proving
an absorbing painting, information was given regarding the existence of aborigines in
Maitland and surrounding districts over a century ago.

A visit to observe caves at
Cornwall Park produces a
result in an observation of primitive rock paintings and a
photograph of painted hands on
the face of a cave was published.

Rock paintings, however, have
a much wider geographical range
than this fact is exemplified
in the following quotation

"The first from an article en­
titled "Rock Paintings and
Cave Drawings in New South
Wales," written by Mr. R. H.
Marriage, L.R., N.W.S., E.R.A.

They are widely distributed
over New South Wales and
in Queensland. They are scattered
from Cape York Peninsula, at the
limits of the colony, rock paint­
ings have been seen in the
Fitches at glades far apart. They
are found in a most extensive
number of aborigines from
Australia's southern position to
in the Northern District of
Port Darwin.

Mr. Thallon, who are found
on the Western side of the
Victoria Ranges, in the south­
ernmost side of the Grand
Canyon, and probably exist in
other parts of the Colony.

EARLY DISCOVERIES
Addressing a meeting of the Australian Association for the
Advancement of Science held at Bathurst in
1895, the president, Mr. T.
Trueeman, stated that
a century years after Australia was first
settled by the European race, several
are known of aboriginal art, includ­
ing ancient rock paintings and
carvings.

The first to call attention to these were Captain Cook, Gov­
ernor Phillip, Surgeon
James, and the offi­
cers of the first government
in the establishment of the colony of New South Wales.

These were followed by Mit­
chall, Grey and the officers of the Imperial Navy when survey­
ing the eastern, northern and
western coasts.

Subsequently Lachard, Sta­
uart, Giles, Forrest, King and
Gregory and others wrote of
these. The following is a
description of arts, paintings and
carvings of the aborigines.

They have been discovered
distributed, as caves, in rock
shelters, on rocks, and on
the most inaccessible
parts of the coast.

The difficulties of breathing in
the aborigines are almost beyond
our comprehension but an idea
may be gleaned from the follow­
ing remarks made by Mr. War­
ningham.

"There were certainly a con­siderable variety of objects
indigenous to the country and
people, but amongst them all
not one useful for labour, for
their purpose or value, so
there was there a lack of cereals
able to sustain food.

PROTIVINE RACE

"Equally as peculiar and isola­
ted as its flora and fauna
are the aborigines, whose only
possession as a race stands strange to
the developed villages.

"They had no implements to
do all their work. But they
were ignorant of the art of making pots
and their art was very
of a most limited character.

The aborigines painted on this primitive mnesth... to tell
that the aborigine family was
for the discovery of these arts and
stated that this was
of a most limited character.
ABORIGINAL PAINTINGS AND CARVINGS

Sir.—As a native of the Wol·

lombi district, and having taken

an interest in the life, history

and

habits

of the aboriginal as we

knew him in my boyhood days, I

was much interested in an excel·

lent written article in your

Mercury" of the 26th January

last on the aboriginal rock paintings

in sandstone caves in the Maitland
district, and par·

ticularly those so well known

near to the town of Wollombi.

These were

referred to years ago

by the well known authority

(Mr. Walter Enright) who—at a

much earlier date than this went

farther afield to "Mogo" and

Blaxland's Ridge on inspections

of

rock·arvings

of more recent

discovery.

Mr. Enright's theories as to

how and why these strange

markings were made would be

very interesting. When shelter­

ing from the rain or the extreme

heat or cold, we can assume

that the aboriginals of the

locality would make these caves

or "gibber-gunyahs" their homes,

and the younger members of the

family with a natural desire to

do something would

plaM'

the

palms of their hands in some pre­

pared ,dye known at that 'time

only to themselves, and then

press them to the roof and sides

of the 'Caves. These figures could

also be effected by using the

boon.nang or spear, which are

also seen. From my recollection

there was

a.

a.

striking similarity

in the size and shape of these

figures on the roof of the cave,
su;O;gesting

that the artists were

few

in

numbers.

The rock carver on the other

hand must have practised his

art on the tribes' return inland

from their annual summer-visit

to the coast or where fish­

iny and oystering

produced food

in abundance. On finding rocks

flat and otherwise SUitable he

would let his imagination loose

on these rough outlines of things

so recently seen (fish of various

kinds, birds, marsupials and such

ike).

These rock 'carvings are fre·

quently found through the valley

of the Hawkesbury and close to

Sydney Harbour. Those found on

the old Berry estate within a

fri

miles of Milson's Point and

before the railway and closer

settlement submerged them were

taken over by the Crown by

acquiring the small' areas on

which they stood. They are per­

1ently

protected from the de­

stroying hand of the vandal. The

significance of these rock carv­

ings, it is alleged by some, is to

convey some method of "bush

telegraph" to friendly , or un-

friendly nomads.

Miss Crouch is to be com·

plimented on her article, the

subject of which is familiar to

so many readers of the "Mer­

cury," and those like

myself

110W

living outside your district.

Many members of the Historical

Society are greatly interested in

this subject, Professor Elkin of

the Sydney University, and

familiar with the Wollombi

caves, would, I am sure, be glad
to make a contribution to this subject.—Yours, etc.,

F. J. LYNCH.

Edward-st., Bolwarra.