Plan of some Drawings carved or painted on Rock by the Natives of New South Wales, Australia

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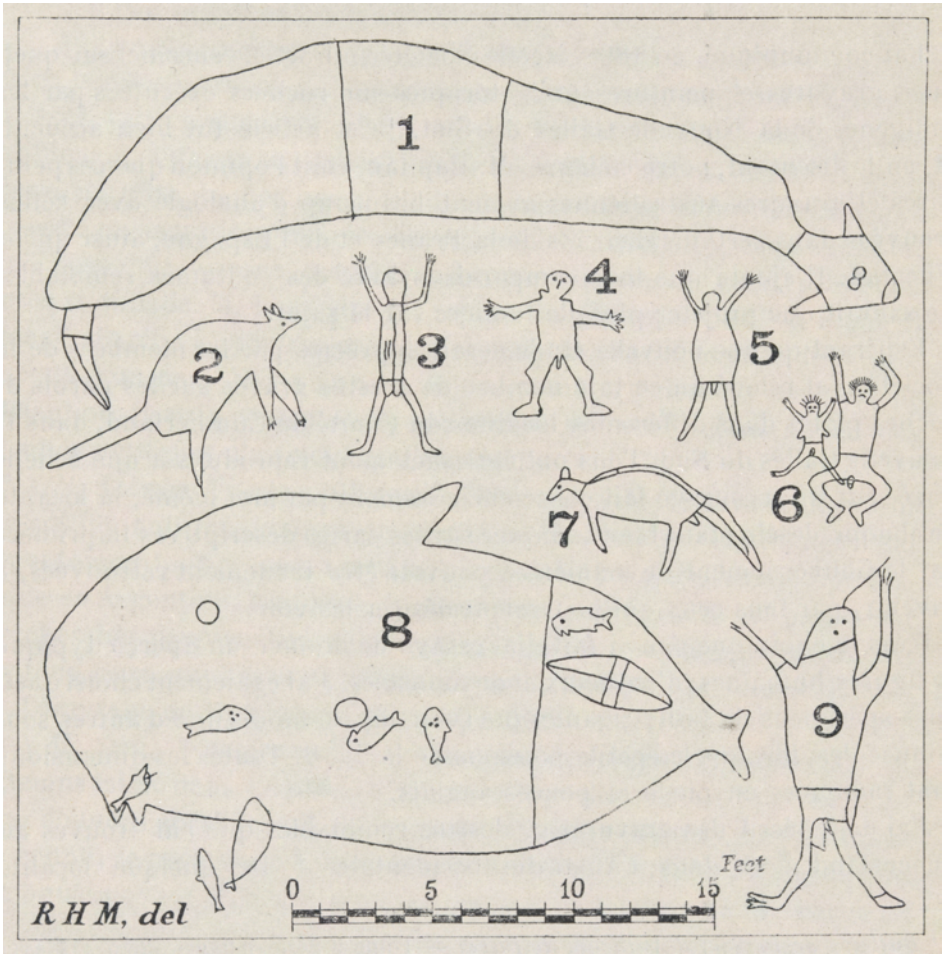
In 1898 I sent to this Society a short article on a few prehistoric rock carvings and paintings, executed by the natives of New South Wales.[1] This article was well received and, in discussing it, our colleague, M. Capitan, expressed the opinion that these paintings and carvings bore great similarity to those found in certain districts of France and Spain, as well as the Yucutan. He added that their comparison with similar customs could only serve to shed more light on the subject.

In the hope that a new study would be appreciated by the members of the Society, I have laid out a certain number of drawings, engraved on the faces of flat rocks at different locations in the County of Cumberland, New South Wales. All of them have been reproduced exactly to scale, based on measurements taken conscientiously by myself, the location of each drawing being well indicated on the descriptive maps printed by the Government, so that they may be easily found again in the future by all who might wish to see them.

With the examples chosen, I have tried to give an idea of the typical human figures, animals and monsters. Likewise, I chose some gigantic specimens (see Figure 1) while others are minuscule, like those of the small fish in Figure 8. All the dimensions are given in English feet and inches.

I have already described similar carvings and drawings which I found in Queensland[2] and Western Australia.[3] No matter where in Australia they have been found, they have all been made in the same manner. Firstly, a row of holes was pierced with a piece of pointed stone, establishing the outline of the drawing, after which the intervals between these holes were cut in such a way as to produce an uninterrupted groove. This tends to prove that either all indigenous artists came from common ancestors, or that the same practices evolved in similar areas.

It would perhaps be useful to point out, for those who have not attached much importance to these Australian artists, that they used two processes: one by *cutting into the surface of the rock*, as is the case for the drawings described in the present article; the other by *painting* the designs on smooth rock surfaces with white, red or black pigments, as I described in the previous article.[4] These paintings can be found scattered across extensive parts of all the Australian states, while the carved drawings are found only in a few rare locations, far removed from each other. That is why I have chosen a few specimens for the current paper.



Rock carvings from the Sydney basin. Reprinted from *Bulletins et Mémoires de la Societé d'Anthropologie de Paris*, vol.11.

FIGURE 1. This remarkable drawing is carved on a large overhanging ledge of Hawkesbury sandstone, elevated only a few feet above the surrounding ground and near the southern border of Portion 99 of 100 acres, in the Parish of Maroota,

County of Cumberland. It is close to the well known rock Lovers Leap, a steep precipice on the banks of the Hawkesbury River. The total length of the beast, taken from the tip of the nose, right along the middle of the body, up to the point of the appendage, in the form of a tail, is roughly 37 feet. The eyes are very close together and there is a band around the neck. Two similar bands or belts are carved across the body and there is another one on the tail. The largest part of the body measures 6 feet 3 inches.

FIGURE 2. This excellent reproduction of a male kangaroo is engraved on a sandstone rock at Point Piper, on a fairly low promontory on the south side of Port Jackson, between Rose Bay and Double Bay, in the Parish of Alexandria, County of Cumberland. Its total length, from the nose to the end of the tail, is 10 feet 5 inches. The two front paws are shown, but each of them has only three digits, instead of five. In 1847 G. F. Angas published an inexact drawing of this animal which he described as being 'nearly nine feet long'. His drawing also shows it on the move in a direction contrary to that which appears on the rock—that is to say moving to the left instead of to the right.

FIGURE 3. This human form, quite unique, is carved on a flat rock, at ground level, within Portion N°. 40 of 600 acres, in the Parish of Maroota, County of Cumberland. It is 6 feet 7 inches in height, from the top of the head to the heels. Apparently, it is the back of the man, the buttocks and the dorsal spine being marked. This type of depiction is rare because it is nearly always from the front that a man is drawn.

FIGURE 4. This grotesque sketch of a man is found on a flat rock, about 5 yards from Figure 2. He is 5 feet 2 inches tall and, with his arms extended, he measures nearly 5 feet from fingertip to fingertip. Mr Angas also laid out this engraving in 1847. He gives it a height of 5 feet and adds a few other details which are not entirely exact.[5]

FIGURE 5. Another sketch of a man, 5 feet 4 inches tall, carved on a sandstone rock within Portion N°. 32, of 60 acres, in the Parish of Maroota, County of Cumberland. The trunk is very large in relation to the limbs.

FIGURE 6. This group can be found on a nearby flat rock, to the west of the road which goes from the train station of Turramurra to Cowan Creek and roughly half a mile south from the surveyor's benchmark at Bobbin, in the Parish of Gordon, County of Cumberland. It shows a man about 5 feet high, if his legs were straight, and a woman of about 3 feet. The eyes and the mouths are shown, but the nose is missing from them both. They wear belts around the smalls of their backs and the man has a band around his arms, near his shoulders. 17 lines rise from the head of the man, like rays, and eight from the head of the woman. They could represent either hair or an ornament which has been attached there. Mr R. D. Hay was the first to publish, in 1892, a basic sketch of this group.[6]

An inexact drawing was later published by Mr R. Etheridge, his principal error being to have put the woman on the wrong side of the man.[7]

I published an exact drawing of it in 1895[8] and Mr W. D. Campbell published one in 1899.[9] I thought it a good idea to reproduce the group in this present treatise, it being difficult to access the different works cited.

FIGURE 7. Shows another male kangaroo, measuring 7 feet 10 inches, in a direct line, from the nose to the end of the tail. A double line is seen going from shoulder height, down the length of the back, until about 8 inches from the bottom of the tail, seemingly there to add to the size of the animal, although it would have significantly added to the work of the native artist. This kangaroo is found in the same Portion as Figure 3 and only a short distance from it.

FIGURE 8. A large fish, measuring 25 feet 3 inches long, cut into a slightly convex sandstone rock, three quarters of a chain northwest of Figure 2. The body is 12 feet at the largest part; 5 feet from the nose, we see a circular incision of 9 inches in diameter, marking the eye. Seventeen feet from the nose, in the direction of the tail, a band or a type of belt is engraved across the body and is 9 feet 8 inches long. Between this belt and the tail we see a shield 4 feet 8 inches long and a small fish, a little over 2 feet. Between the band and the nose four small fish can be seen and to the side of one of them, an engraved disc, about one foot in diameter. On a part of this whale's stomach, and going beyond its outline, there is a fish 3 feet 4 inches long and to the left of that, another smaller one. Mr G. F. Angas published in 1847 an inexact drawing of this whale; in it, he noted the length as 27 feet.[10]

Although the sketches of Figures 2, 4 and 8 made by Mr Angas have a number of flaws in the details, they are good enough, after 63 years, to identify them, without hesitation, with my own.

FIGURE 9. This enormous and rudimentary reproduction of a man is carved on a fairly large rock, at ground level on the side of the old road from Peats Ferry to Sydney, about half a mile north of the surveyor's benchmark at Vize, in the Parish of Cowan, County of Cumberland.[11] Its height, from head to toe, measures 10 feet 8 inches. The eyes are marked and we see a point that could indicate either the mouth or the nose. There are lines on the lower part of the figure, at the waist, across the body, on each arm near the shoulders, and across the left hip and ankle. An oblique line runs off the top of the head, going up beyond the index finger of the outstretched left arm. This image is one of many drawings on the same rock, reported by Mr W. R. Govett in 1836, that is to say 64 years ago. He said of them: 'The summit of the bank is a large, flat rock, on whose surface different figures are carved or dug out, representing a strange assembly of hands, arms, legs, men and animals.'[12] Since Mr Govett, other authors have reported these native carvings.

ENDNOTES

[1] RHM 1898, 'Gravures et peintures sur rochers par les aborigènes d'Australie', *Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*, vol. 9 (series 4), pp. 425-32 with illustrations. Reproduced this volume.

[2] RHM 1901, 'Aboriginal Rock Pictures in Queensland', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 40, pp. 57-8.

[3] RHM 1903-04, 'Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of Western Australia', *Queensland Geographical Journal*, vol. 19, pp. 46-50, table 1.

[4] RHM 1898, 'Gravures et peintures', pp. 429-31, fig. 4. Reproduced this volume.

[5] Angus, George French 1847, *Savage Life and Scenes in Australia and New Zealand*, Smith, Elder & Co., London, vol. 2, p. 275, table 1, fig. 2.

[6] Hay, R. D. 1892, 'Native Carvings', *Journal of the Institute of Surveyors, New South Wales*, vol. 5, p. 193 with drawing.

[7] *Records of the Geological Survey of New South Wales*, vol. 4, 1894, p 57, table 9, figs 14 and 15.

[8] RHM 1894-5, 'Aboriginal Rock Pictures', *Proceedings and Transactions of the Queensland Branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia*, vol. 10, p. 68, table 5, fig. 4.

[9] Campbell, W. D. 1899, *Aboriginal Carvings of Port Jackson and Broken Bay*, Government Printer, Sydney.

[10] Angus, *Savage Life and Scenes*, vol. 1, p. 24, table 1, fig 9.

[11] A very disappointing reproduction of this drawing appeared in the *Records of the Geological Survey of New South Wales*, vol. 3, p. 80, table 15, fig. 12. The observer missed many of the lines engraved on the rock, and others were reproduced inexactly, the outcome being that this native drawing of a man was taken to be a drawing of a fish.

[12] *Saturday Magazine* (London), vol. 9, 3 December 1836, p. 223.