

**Australia: Archæology.**

**Records of Rock Engravings in the Sydney District: I-VII.** By F. D. McCarthy, *Dip. Anthr., Ethnologist, The Australian Museum, Sydney.\**

Since its inception in 1928, the Anthropological Society of N. S. Wales has taken a great deal of interest in the rock engravings of the Sydney district. From time to time successful action has been taken to have various groups set aside as permanent reservations, and many excursions have been held to visit some of the most interesting sites.

Successive Councils of the Society have realized the urgent need for accurate records to be made and published of the numerous groups not included in W. D. Campbell's monograph (*Ethnol. Series, No. III, Geol. Surv. N.S.W., 1899, now out of print*). It was felt that this field work was partly the responsibility of the Society, and offered it a splendid opportunity of making a valuable contribution to our knowledge of aboriginal Australian art and culture. With this aim in mind, and as attendances at the excursions gradually dwindled, it was decided to form a small working party to record groups instead of wasting time and money merely visiting and talking about them.

The field is an extensive one. It was covered partly by Campbell, who recorded groups in the area between Botany Bay and Somersby Falls, more especially on the ridges and coastal headlands. There still remains to be recorded numerous groups within the area worked over by Campbell, and also on Mangrove Mountain, National Park, and along the shores of the Hawkesbury River. The hundreds of groups yet to be recorded cannot all be done in week-ends, and it will be necessary to spend weeks at a time in some areas.

To date, twelve groups have been done and the results prepared for publication. Unfortunately, some of the charts are so large that they cannot be published at present because of the extensive area of the groups concerned. These will be kept until a sufficient series of them is available for publication in a special volume. In Campbell's monograph, groups too large for the page are broken up into sections, but no plan of their relationship is given, causing confusion and difficulty in their study. This arrangement was probably due to economy, and not the fault of the author.

\* The author is solely responsible for the description and diagrams of the rock engravings, whilst the recording is the joint effort of all members of the recording party given at the end of the description of each group.

## METHOD

Because of the extensiveness of many of the groups of rock engravings, and of many of the individual figures, an accurate record of them may only be made by the employment of a technique which will enable the recorder to surmount many problems peculiar to the various groups. Time, or lack of it, is an especially important factor. Thus, in our work on the first group recorded, the whole rock surface was marked out in squares with chalk. These squares corresponded to the squares on the graph paper used to make the record. This is a method which is only serviceable when certain equipment is not available, and is one which involves a considerable waste of time. It was therefore found necessary to devise a more rapid and flexible technique that may be standardized, and the result was as follows:

A square frame was constructed of four pieces of batten (1 in. x 1 in. x 5 ft. 2 in.) screwed (or mortised) at the corners so that it could be taken to pieces for purposes of transport. On the inside of each batten screw-eyes were set, 1 ft. apart, to which strings were attached connecting opposite battens. As the frames are 5 ft. square (inside), the strings form 25 squares of 1 ft. dimension, and the frame covers an area of 25 sq. ft. The frames and strings are marked at 3 in. intervals.

In recording a group, a zero point is established on the rock surface and from it a datum line (either north to south or east to west) is marked in chalk at 1 ft. intervals. In its place, a 60 ft. tape may be used. The datum line must be fixed with compass or theodolite, and it should divide the group evenly. Large groups often require one or more secondary datum lines, some at right angles to the principal one. The frame, or frames, are then placed in position on the datum line and the figures recorded to a scale of 1 in. to 4 or 8 ft., that is,  $\frac{1}{4}$  or  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. to 2 or 1 ft. respectively. A group, if necessary, may be sectioned off so that several individuals may record parts of it on different sheets of paper, thus saving time, and the sections subsequently transcribed to a final and complete drawing.

A further improvement was made in the technique by substituting a rope net 10 ft. x 5 ft. and covering 50 sq. ft. for the wooden frames, which are awkward to carry. The use of several of these squared nets has resulted in a further saving of time in recording both large and small groups, and enables one recorder to do even a large group in one day.

It is desirable to make the final scale plan direct, without sectioning, but this procedure is not possible with some groups. Detailed notes should

be made of the nature and characteristics of the outlines of the figures, of their state of preservation, and of the site and its surroundings and also any other data worth recording.

The above method makes it possible to record the figures in their correct relationship to one another, and to the cardinal points of the compass, thus producing a complete and accurate scale plan of the whole group. If the latter is destroyed at any time, the record is preserved, and this is an important point when the groups are adjacent to a city expanding so rapidly as Sydney. The method is suitable for recording stone arrangements.

It should be pointed out that reproductions of individual figures, or of all the figures on a group not in their proper relationship, are a waste of time and money. Recording should not be attempted unless it is to be done in a competent manner.

Thorpe (MANKIND, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1931, pp. 40-41) described a method in which a rubbing on paper is made of individual figures. From the rubbing a drawing is made on asphalt or on the floor, which is photographed from above. This method cannot be applied successfully to the recording of large groups such as those of the Sydney district. The rubbing method is suitable for groups of the hammer-dressed type, found in the interior of Australia, in which the rock surfaces and figures are so small that very often a rubbing on paper may be made of a complete rock surface—a method employed with success by C. P. Mountford, who uses semi-transparent paper (*Rept. Austr. Assoc. Adv. Sci., Hobart, 1928, p. 337*).

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE GROUPS

##### Group I

*Site.* This group is situated in Duffy's Forest, near the junction of Telegraph and Larool Roads. The group is engraved on a large rock surface forming part of the northern bank of a creek, and about a quarter of a mile to the west of Larool Road. The rock surface is undulating and slopes to the south-west.

*Description.* The group depicts a hunting scene. The hunter, wearing a rayed forehead band, is shown beside a large and a small kangaroo, a doe and its young or a buck and its doe. His footsteps (it should be noted that one is reversed) lead down the middle of the rock to his shield, which he had apparently dropped. His two wives are engraved on the eastern side of the rock. Three large, natural rock pools extend almost east-west across

[44]

October, 1941.]

MANKIND.

[PLATE G.

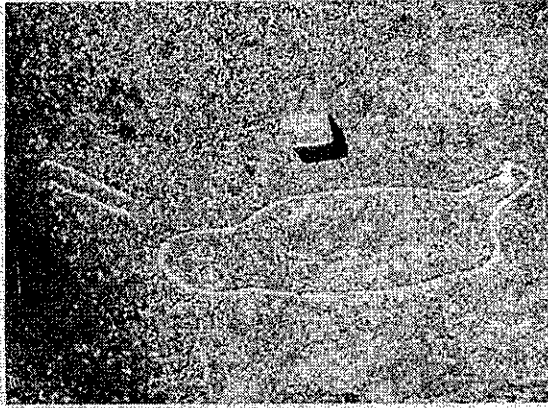


Fig. 2. Owl, with two parallel lines beside it, in group III.



Fig. 4. Smoothed grooves of culture here in group III.

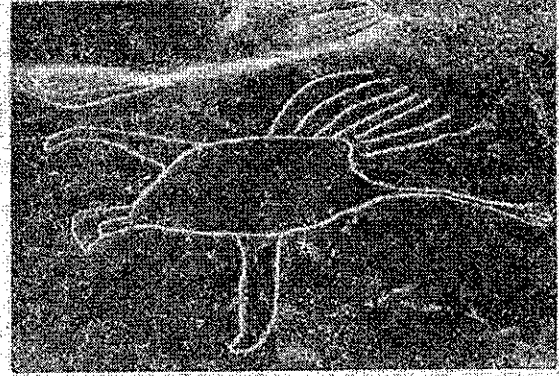


Fig. 1. Lay-figure in group I.



Fig. 3. Gashing technique, made figure in group II.

ROCK ENGRAVINGS OF SYDNEY DISTRICT.

[45]



Fig. 6. A typical rock engraving site in the Sydney district. (Toplum, Kuring-gai Chase.)

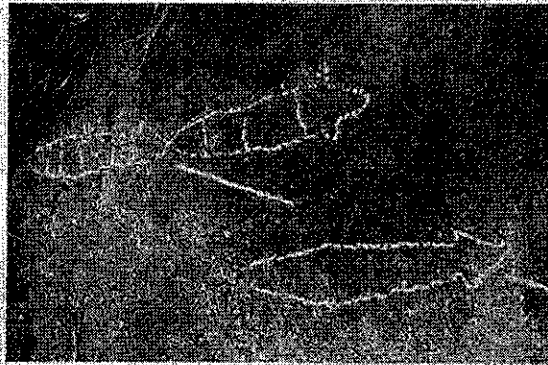


Fig. 8. Finishing technique of cuts in group IV.

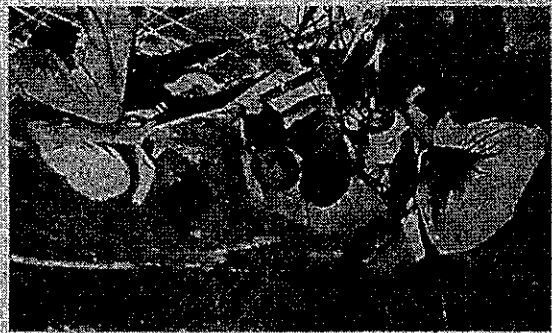


Fig. 5. Messrs. J. H. Cooks, Dr. H. Wright, and R. D. McCorry recording. Note one figure in position over the figure, and a second figure was inadvertently left lying over it when the photograph was taken.



Fig. 7. Kangaroo appearing scene in group II. (The two lines at right angles and the figure at the top are not engravings.)

October, 1941.]

MANKIND.

[Vol. 3, No. 2.

the eastern end of the rock, and beside them are some axe-sharpening grooves most of which have been destroyed by a vandal in the course of cutting canals between the rock pools.

*Technique and State of Preservation.* All of the outlines, except those of the shield, are "gashed" and not punctured, and the sharp undulating edges suggest the use of a hafted axe, constantly resharpened beside the pools. The outlines in the group are unusually sharply defined and show distinct facets, and it is not impossible that a steel axe was used. The shield is weathered and faint, due to the water from the pools flowing over it in rainy weather.

*Interpretation.* This group is a magnificent example of a pictorial composition and depicts an everyday scene of aboriginal life—the spearing of a kangaroo. It is fortunate that it is so well preserved.

*Recorded by* Messrs. F. L. S. Bell, W. H. P. Kinsela, F. D. McCarthy and G. W. Watkins.

*Date:* 10 August, 1940.

*Group II*

*Site.* This group is situated about 300 yards to the south of Group I, on the opposite side of the creek, and on an isolated rock surface about 100 yards up the slope from the creek bed. The rock surface is flat, but slopes to the east; part of its lower edge has broken away, and there is a sharp drop of about 10 feet to the ground below. In all, there are 26 figures engraved quite close together on the comparatively small rock surface.

*Description.* The group comprises (left to right): a wombat or porcupine, a wallaby, a flying phalanger, another wallaby; an echidna or spiny ant-eater, a noose; a third wallaby, a kangaroo, a fourth wallaby, a lyre-bird; a boomerang, a pubic girdle (of slit marsupial skin); a shield, and ten bird tracks.

On each side of the wallaby (top middle) are two figures which may be elaborate bird tracks, or alternatively the one on the right may be an insect. A variant (extreme left) of these tracks is engraved on an isolated rock.

The lyre-bird figure is, perhaps, the most important feature of the group, and is the finest portrayal among the few known of this bird. The tracks which encircle the group are those of the lyre-bird, while the noose on a stick was employed by the aborigines to catch birds of this type.

The echidna is shown in a unique manner (compare Group IV, which shows the usual method) and the kangaroo is splendidly drawn. Most of the figures were done by a very fine artist, but one or two of the wallabies were done by an inferior carver. The insect (?) is most unusual.

Two natural, elongate-shaped pools are present on the rock. They are up to 18 ins. deep.

*Technique and State of Preservation.* The grooves are smoothed by grinding and are considerably weathered. They are from  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. deep. They contrast strongly with those of the neighbouring group (No. 1).

*Interpretation.* It is probable that the site is a sacred one of the lyre-bird totem clan, but whether it functioned in increase rites or represents a folk-lore legend, it is not possible to say. The large number of other creatures depicted probably figured in the story.

A fantastic description of these two groups is given in Wm. Robertson's "Cooee Talks," pp. 86-88.

*Recorded by:* Messrs. F. L. S. Bell, W. H. P. Kinsela, F. D. McCarthy and G. W. Watkins.

*Date:* 10 August, 1940.

#### Group III

*Site.* This group is situated on Crown land, on top of a ridge one mile to the east of Beckstein Post Office, Macdonald River Valley, and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles east of Mr. Sternbeck's farm. The rock surface is about one acre in extent, and the view on either side is of sandstone ridges and gorges.

*Description.* The group comprises (left to right): two wallabies, two emus courting, the foot-tracks of a culture hero; a kangaroo or wallaby with young, a culture hero, a young mammal (wallaby?), a man and a set of emu eggs.

*Technique and State of Preservation.* The large culture hero and the representation of his footstep have outlines smoothed by grinding up to 2 in. wide and 1 in. deep. Most of the other figures have irregular gashed outlines, very clearly defined.

*Interpretation.* The group may be an increase site for the emu, as these birds are shown courting and a set of their eggs is included. On the other hand, the wallabies and the wallaby or kangaroo with its young and the pair of this marsupial's tracks, may connect it with the culture hero. A

third possibility is that the human figure may be the culture hero Daraulan, whose totem is the emu, and the site one at which he left spirits of kangaroos. Unfortunately, we will probably never know why the aborigines of this area depicted so many different animals in the one group, and it is not possible to discuss the matter in detail here.

Approximately half a mile to the south of the above group, on an isolated rock on the same ridge, is an engraving of an owl with two short parallel lines beside it. The figure is life-like and well done, and is unique among the engravings of birds. The groove is smooth and slightly weathered.

*Recorded by* F. D. McCarthy.

*Date:* May, 1940.

#### Group IV

*Site.* This group is situated a quarter of a mile due north of McCarr's Trig. Station, Kuring-gai Chase. The rock surface is long and narrow and runs north-west to south-east through a swampy slope at the rear of Coal and Candle Creek.

*Description.* The group comprises a large and varied assortment of figures as follows (left to right): a wallaby, 2 birds, 3 eels, a group of 5 circles, a wallaby, 11 axe sharpening grooves, a woman with a digging-stick, a death bird, a shield, 2 circles, fish (?), 2 circles, a set of 7 axe sharpening grooves, a shield, 2 fish, 2 men, an unidentifiable figure, 3 porcupines, 2 eels, a spear-thrower or garfish and 20 human footprints (the small ovals, one has toes). Note also the five circular indentations at the left.

Points of interest are: (1) three porcupines beside two men, one of the latter wearing a rayed forehead band; (2) the large number of circles, thought to represent camps; (3) the drawing of a bird with a twisted neck, probably a shag; (4) the woman holding a digging-stick; (5) the human footprints (represented by ovals) running through the group, one of which points to another group of engravings on tessellated rocks 200 yards up the slope, on top of a rise, from which there is an extensive view.

*Technique and State of Preservation.* The outlines of the figures vary considerably. Those of the eels, which are perfect examples of the punctured outline, have some of the punctures conjoined, while others are up to  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. apart. One of the wallabies has a smooth shallow groove up to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide. Some of the footsteps, the circles, bird, the two men and the porcupines

have smoothed and weathered grooves, up to 1 in. wide, and those of the shield are up to  $1\frac{1}{4}$  in. wide. The woman and digging-stick, the footsteps, the large shield and the elongate figure have "gashed" but weathered grooves. The axe sharpening grooves suggest that this implement was used in the making of the carvings with gashed outlines.

*Interpretation.* No particular meaning may be attached to this group, although it appears to illustrate a myth. Porcupines, wallabies, shags and eels are abundant in this locality, and it is one in which a digging-stick could be used profitably in the swamp. It may represent a picture of a very good camping place, although it is unusual for fish (from Coal and Candle Creek nearby) not to be represented. Again, portions of groups of this type may have distinct meanings.

*Recorded by* F. L. S. Bell, Miss E. Bramell, J. H. Cocks, F. D. McCarthy and E. J. Wright.

*Date:* 31 August, 1940.

#### Group V

*Site.* This group is situated beside a creek flowing into the head of Glade's Bay, Tennyson, Parramatta River. It is the only one which bears engravings of a number of sloping rock surfaces at the site, which must have formed an excellent camping place for the aborigines. The figures are on two rocks, both of which are undulating and slope in line with the ground. This is the only group of engravings known along the Parramatta River.

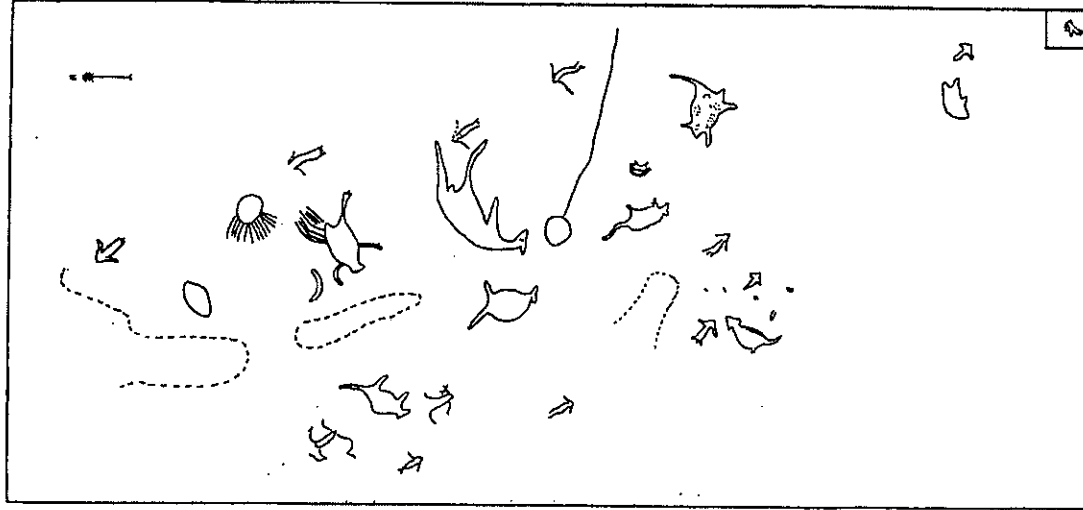
*Description* (left to right): two opossums, a man (object in hand unidentifiable), a large fish, a shield, a mammal (?), native water-rat, 2 wallabies, a boomerang, and a part of a fish (?).

*Technique and State of Preservation.* The outlines are smoothed grooves, some of which are very weathered and indistinct. Those of the two wallabies are very distinct, being  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. wide and  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. deep. Vandals have altered some of the outlines.

*Interpretation.* The man may be holding a weapon or sacred object and he may be connected with the two opossums. The other figures may be a record of game frequenting the vicinity.

*Recorded by* Mr. and Mrs. F. D. McCarthy and Mr. and Mrs. W. G. Preston.

*Date:* 27 September, 1941.

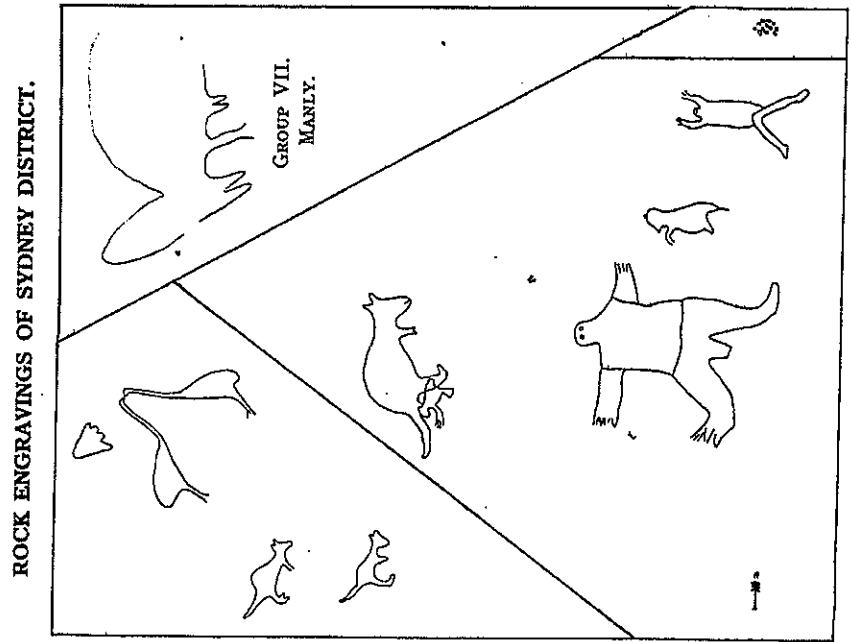


ROCK ENGRAVINGS OF SYDNEY DISTRICT.

Group I. DUFFRY'S FOREST.

Group depicting a Lyre-bird and other animals. Note the tracks of the Lyre-bird encircling the group and the noose used by the aborigines for catching birds of this type. The broken lines denote holes in the rock-surface.

Scale: 1 inch = 8 feet.



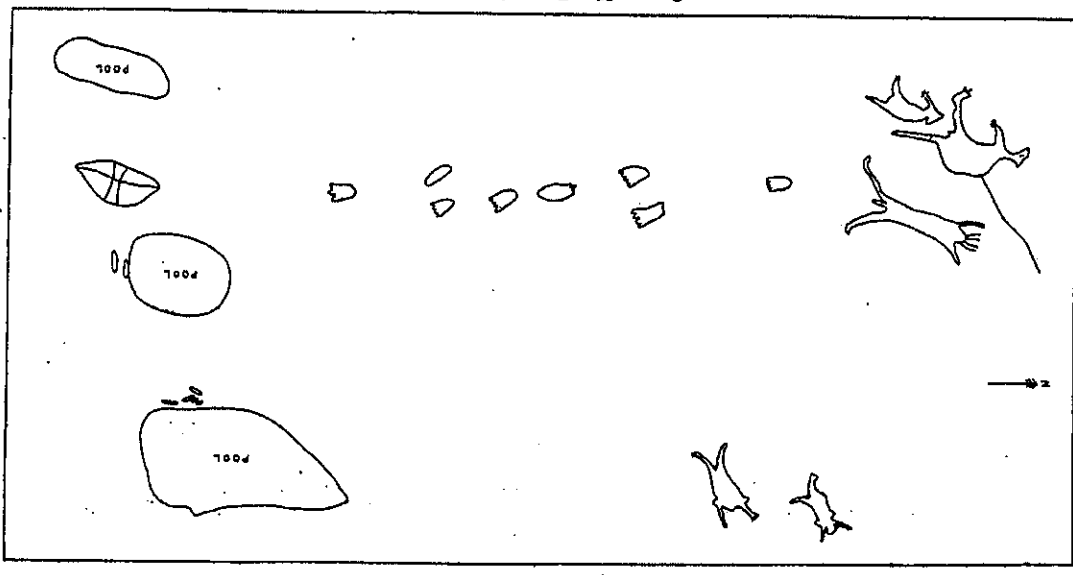
ROCK ENGRAVINGS OF SYDNEY DISTRICT.

GROUP VII.  
MANLY.

GROUP III. BECKSTEIN.

For the purpose of the block it has been necessary to divide the group into three sections. The series in the top left-hand corner is 15 feet further away from the kangaroo than shown, and the set of emu eggs in the lower right-hand corner is 75 feet from the man on the right.

Scale : 1 inch = 8 feet.



ROCK ENGRAVINGS OF SYDNEY DISTRICT.

GROUP II. DURRY'S FOREST.

Group depicting the spearing of a kangaroo. Note the hunter's footprints and his two wives. Axe-sharpening grooves are present beside the pools.

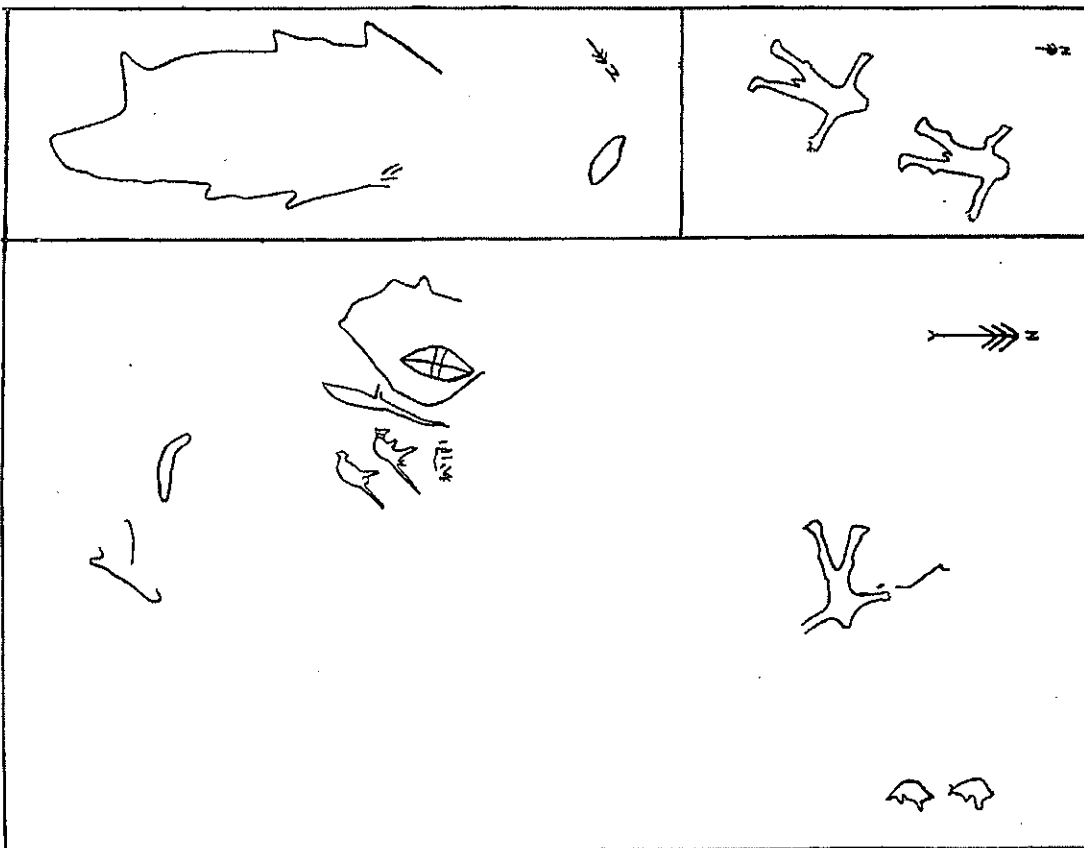
Scale : 1 inch = 8 feet.

ROCK ENGRAVINGS OF SYDNEY DISTRICT.

PLATE L.]

MANKIND.

[October, 1941.]



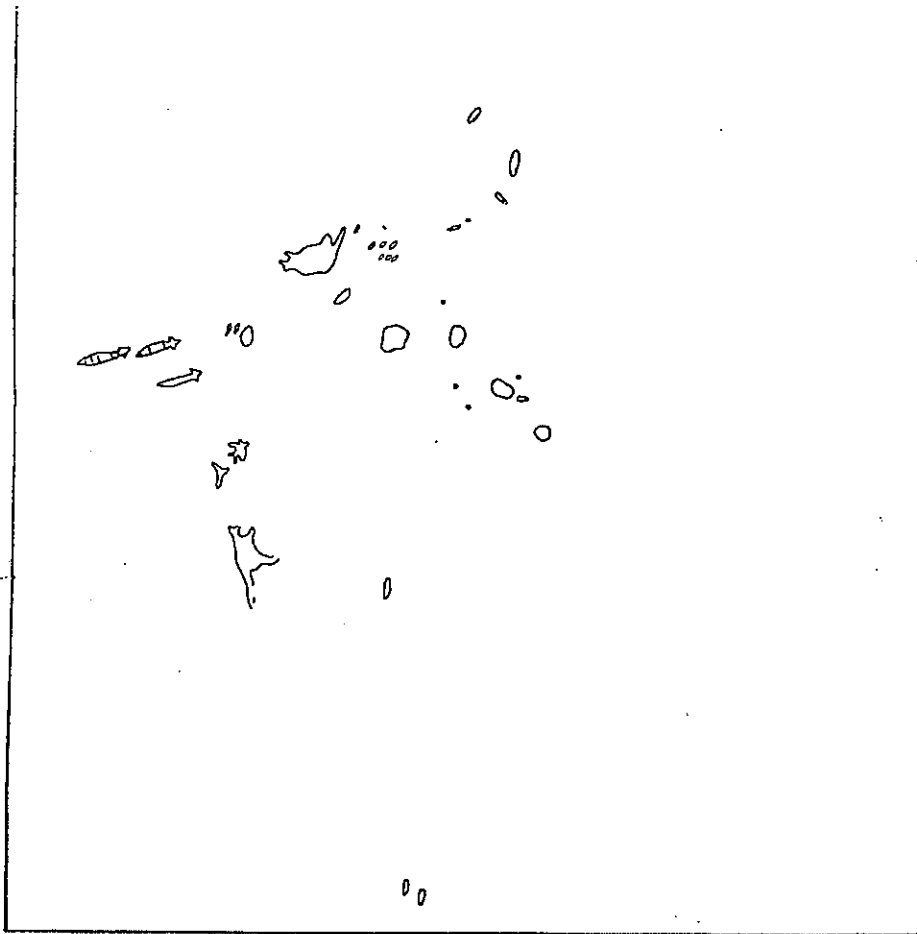
*Above is group V at Glade's Bay, Temnyson. Bottom left and right are two sections of group VI at Northbridge. Scale: 1 inch = 8 feet.*

[54]

October, 1941.]

MANKIND.

[PLATE M.



[55]

*Group VI*

The southern shore of Middle Harbour is a blank on Campbell's map, although he recorded a number of groups along the adjacent northern shore of Port Jackson. It is of interest, therefore, to draw attention to three small sites in Northbridge, a rapidly expanding suburb in which the carvings will be built over within a few months' time.

*Sites.* (a) This group is situated on an undulating rock surface at the corner of Dalmeny and Tycannah Roads, with an extensive view of Middle Harbour. There is a whale alongside of a shield. The grooves are smoothed by grinding, but as the rock is a very soft sandstone and water runs across it in rainy weather, the grooves have weathered rapidly.

(b) This group is situated on a large prominent rock on the side of a ridge, now beside Dalmeny Road on the eastern side. Two men, with grooves smoothed by grinding are well preserved.

(c) This group is situated on the Northbridge golf course on a rock near the club-house. It comprises eight human footsteps, with toes in a north-south line.

*Recorded by:* F. D. McCarthy.

*Date:* 30 September, 1941.

*Group VII*

*Site.* The group is situated on property No. 8 Osborne Road, Manly, on a large rock surface on the ridge overlooking Manly Cove from its eastern end.

*Description.* A large marsupial figure. It is evidently part of a larger group, there being indications of other figures, one of which is a man. The rock surface extends under a house, and may bear other well-preserved figures.

*Technique and State of Preservation.* The grooves are smooth, wide and deep, and very distinct.

*Recorded by:* Miss Elsie Bramell and F. D. McCarthy.

*Date:* 1939.

F. D. MCCARTHY.

