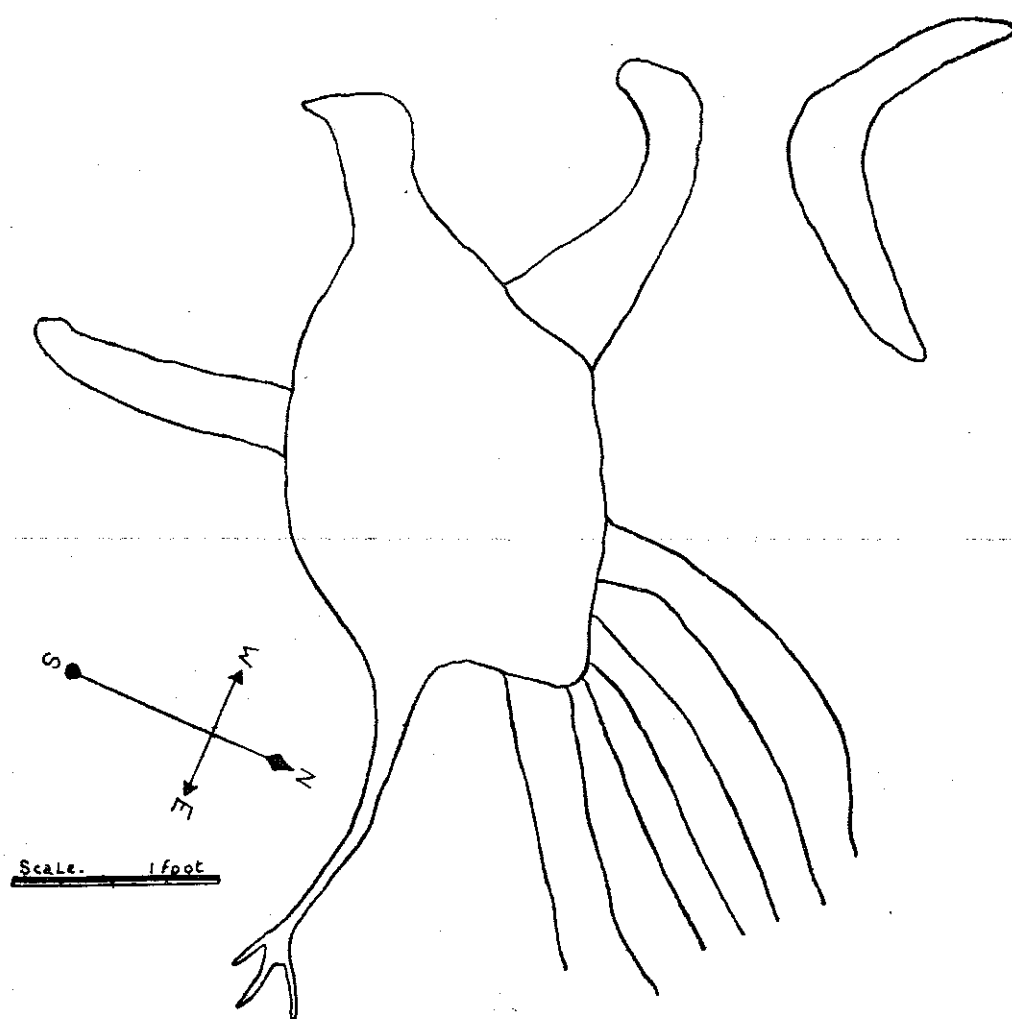


An Interesting Aboriginal Rock-Carving

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Long before the white man settled in Australia the aboriginal inhabitants were engraving images on rock surfaces. These rock-carvings are the story books of the aborigines, and from them we glean something of the life of the blacks.

Throughout the sandstone areas of the Sydney district many carvings are to be observed. Quite a number of the



Plan of rock-carving of Lyrebird, reduced by scale from a tracing.

figures relate to initiation rites, or else are concerned with some special ceremonial. Others have to do with incidents of the chase, and in that group various animals are depicted with considerable accuracy and not a little artistic ability; representations of fish occur commonly, but birds are rare. With a few exceptions the Emu (*Dromaius novæ-hollandiæ*) is the bird depicted, therefore a delineation of a Lyrebird (*Menura novæ-hollandiæ*)—the only known carving of that

species—is not without interest, both to anthropologists and ornithologists.

The first reference to this unique petroglyph appears in a paper contributed to *Mankind* (Vol. I, 1931, pp. 14-15), the journal of the Anthropological Society of New South Wales. Under the title "An Old Ceremony Ground of the Cammeray Tribe," the author, W. J. Walton, states:

"About ten minutes' walk from the basin, in the swamp, is what can safely be described as the most interesting group in the district. The native art galleries for the first time record the Lyre Bird. The place may be, as far as we know, quite unknown. It is a food ceremonial group in which the Lyre Bird is the most unique figure. Its measurement is four feet two, a small boomerang is alongside, the bird is shown as flying from the hunters."

Through the kindness of Mr. W. W. Thorpe, Ethnologist of the Australian Museum, Sydney, I was able to visit this ceremony ground and secure photographs and a tracing of the Lyrebird carving. From the tip of the bill to the extremity of the tail-feathers it measures four feet seven inches, and from the bill to middle toe, four feet five inches. This is somewhat larger than a male Lyrebird in the flesh, the length of which would be about forty inches. In certain lights the figure is difficult to see, and it is but a matter of a decade or so before it will be entirely obliterated, unless in the meantime it is covered with a solution which would stay the hand of time for a few more years at least.

The carving is situated in Duffy's Forest, a part of the French's Forest reserve, some ten miles north of Sydney. Lyrebirds still haunt the timbered gullies nearby.

It is impossible to estimate the antiquity of rock-carvings as the natural erosion of the rock surface varies with the prevailing weather conditions and the substance of the rock. Another factor to be considered would be the original depth of the carving. The method generally adopted in cutting figures was to punch a series of holes in the rock, each a few inches apart; the area between these holes was then grooved out. The process must have been a lengthy, tedious one, for the artist worked with small sharp-pointed stones only.

A complete set of *The Emu* (partly bound and the balance with covers for binding) and of Mathews's *Birds of Australia* are available for sale. These were the property of the late Tom Carter, R.A.O.U. Will anyone wishing particulars write to the Hon. General Secretary.



Aboriginal rock-carving of Lyrebird, outlined in chalk. Locality, Duffy's Forest, near Sydney, N.S.W.
Photo. by K. A. Hindwood, R.A.O.U.