

### AUSTRALIAN ROCK PICTURES

BY R. H. MATHEWS

Aboriginal drawings, more or less artistic, have been observed throughout Australia, but until recently no systematic attempt has been made to copy and describe them in detail and to fix their position on public maps.

In the *Journal of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, volume xxviii, now in press, I have described and illustrated a number of rock carvings and paintings in New South Wales, and have also contributed an article on the same subject to the *Royal Society of Victoria*, which appears in their "Proceedings," volume vii, n. s., with illustrations and descriptions.

I have described the paintings contained in three caves, all of which are of an interesting character, containing a variety of figures, including men, women, animals, birds, fish, and other objects. Figures 1 and 3, plate i, are exact reproductions of the pictures on the rock, in their correct relative positions. In figure 2, as stated in the description, the different paintings have been placed close together, regardless of their position on the cave wall. All the objects shown are in black, the predominating color in native drawings, but they are also frequently found in large numbers in red and in white. In a few instances I have seen small objects, such as hands, drawn in yellow. For an average specimen of the different kinds of drawing, and the colors used, see plate viii of the "Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria," volume vii, n. s.

Plate ii shows 36 figures, all of which are described separately in the letter-press. Figures 1, 2, and 3 represent groups of several objects exactly as they appear on the surface of the rock. Figures 4 to 36 are placed on the sheet in such manner as to take up no more space than is necessary to exhibit them clearly, without regard to their relative positions.

All the paintings and carvings treated of in this paper are original, with one exception, and I have drawn attention to that

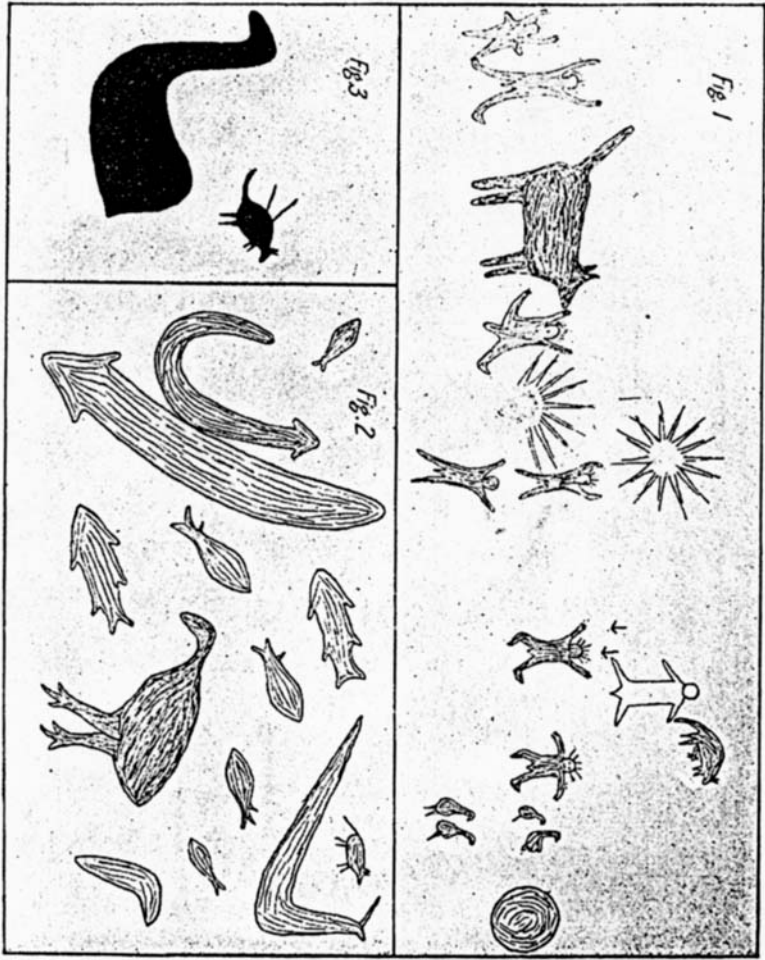


PLATE I—Rock paintings in New South Wales

(Scale, about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches = 1 foot)

exception in my description of it. The figures are drawn to scale from careful measurements and sketches taken by myself, and the position of each on the Government maps is also stated in the descriptions, so that they can be readily found.

Rock paintings are met with in all the Australian colonies, but rock carvings on an extensive scale have been seen only in New South Wales and West Australia.\* Regarding the latter, I will quote from Captain Wickham's "Notes on Depuch Island," published in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, London, 1842, vol. xii, pp. 79-83:

Depuch island, latitude 20° 38' S., longitude 117° 44' E., is one of a string of small islands called the Forrestier group, lying from one to three miles off the coast of West Australia. The island is connected with the main land by ridges of sand, which in many places become quite dry at low water and afford facilities to the natives for reaching the island for the purpose of procuring turtle, as well as for the exercise of their talent for drawing on the smooth surface of the rocks.

From the vast numbers of specimens of art, the natives seemed to have amused themselves in this way from time immemorial; and from the very hard nature of the stone and the accuracy with which many animals and birds are represented, they deserve great credit for patient perseverance and for more talent and observation than is usually bestowed on the natives of New Holland.

The method pursued in tracing the different objects appears to be by cutting the surface of the rock with sharp-pointed pieces of the same stone; and as the exterior of all parts of it is of a dark reddish brown color, the contrast becomes great when that is removed and the natural color of the greenstone is exposed. It is difficult to conjecture what many of their drawings are intended to represent, but others are too well done to admit of a moment's doubt. Probably many of the inferior performances were the work of the children. In some of the drawings the surface of the stone was entirely cut away; others were only in outline.

Captain Wickham forwarded to the Royal Geographical Society at London ninety-two specimens of these carvings, describing the various objects represented. Many of these are illustrated in the journal mentioned. Captain J. L. Stokes, in his "Discoveries in Australia," published in 1846, volume ii, pages 168-172, also mentions these carvings, but his description is not so full and exact as that of Captain Wickham.

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\* Some simple marks or scratchings have been observed on rocks in a few places in South Australia and Queensland, but nothing of this kind has, so far as I know, been seen in Victoria. In the latter colony, however, I know of some paintings in caves in the counties of Dundas and Borung.

As a remarkable instance of the small amount of inquiry hitherto bestowed on Australian rock pictures, I may point out that these carvings have been referred to as paintings. In Smyth's "Aborigines of Victoria," volume I, page 292, he says: "On Depuch island Stokes found a large number of paintings." The Rev. J. Mathew, in the "Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain," volume XXIII, page 42, speaks of "the paintings on Depuch island." I hope that this mistake will not again be made when referring to these native drawings.

In the papers which I contributed to the Royal Societies of Victoria and New South Wales, respectively, I have fully detailed the way in which paintings and carvings were executed by the native artists, the different styles of drawing, their geographic range, etc., so that it is unnecessary for me to treat of these parts of the subject in the following pages.

For the sake of clearness, aboriginal rock pictures should be described under two heads—paintings and carvings. In the former the pictures are painted on the walls and roofs of caves or rock shelters in various colors. In the latter the drawings are in the nature of outline engravings or carvings cut or ground into the surface of the rock. In my previous papers I have separated the subject under the two heads indicated, and will continue this distinction in the present memoir.

I will now describe the plates illustrating my original work, and hope that the information which I have collected may prove of some interest and value.

### *Description of the Plates.*

#### PLATE I—PAINTINGS.

Figure 1.—The cave or rock shelter in which these drawings appear is 29 feet long, 8 feet 6 inches from the front inward to the back wall, and averages about 8 feet high. The floor is sandy soil, and there are traces of smoke on the roof, showing that the cave has occasionally been used as a camping place by the natives. It faces the east.

As the spectator stands facing the paintings on the back wall of the cave, the first figures on his left are those of a man and a woman, the former 25 inches, the latter 17 inches in height. Next is an animal which appears to be intended for a dog, al-

though much larger than the human figures alongside of it. I have often observed this want of uniformity of scale in native drawings. Scattered along the back wall of the cave are six more rude delineations of men, all of which are in the attitude usually assumed by the natives when dancing the corroboree. A few feet in front of the dog are two objects which may have been intended to represent the sun. The upper one, averaging a little over two feet in diameter, has fourteen rays. The other one, which is not complete, has nine rays. Near the right-hand upper corner is a female kangaroo, 16 inches long, from the pouch of which a young one is in the act of jumping. This is an interesting drawing, and I have seen it in but one other instance. There are also four paintings of birds, apparently of the cursorial tribe, and two tracks of bird feet. The last object on the right is 16 inches in diameter, and may have been intended to represent the moon. All the above drawings are in black outline, and all are shaded within their margins with the same color, with the exception of one of the human figures and what I have supposed to be a representation of the sun. Interspersed among the other figures, and in some instances partially covered by them, are seven human hands, done in white in the "stencil method" of drawing.\* The only right hand amongst these is shown in the shut position, which is rather uncommon.

The escarpment of Hawkesbury sandstone in which this shelter is situated is about four or five chains west from Harris creek and about a mile and a half northerly from portion No. 17, of 40 acres, in the parish of Eckersley, county of Cumberland.

Figure 2.—This cave is a few yards northerly from the one last described, in a continuation of the same escarpment, and faces the same direction. It is 25 feet long and the average depth inward is about 8 feet. The back wall leans forward at an angle of about  $30^{\circ}$  from the perpendicular, and the height at the entrance is about 8 feet. Owing to the irregular way the figures are scattered over the wall, I have departed from my usual custom of showing them in their relative positions and have fitted them on the plate regardless of their position on the rock.

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\* For descriptions of the different methods of native painting and illustrative specimens, see *Proc. Roy. Soc. Vic.*, VII, N. S., pp. 144-6, plate viii.

The most interesting object in this figure is an emu 3 feet 9 inches long from the point of the bill to the end of the tail. The neck is too short and the legs too thick near the feet, but I feel certain the picture was drawn to represent the emu. There is a large eel 7 feet 2 inches long and 12 inches wide, with a smaller one in a bent position beside it. There are two fish with four fins, three with one fin, and two without fins. The large snake-like animal in the upper right-hand corner of the figure and the object near the tail of the emu I cannot further describe. There is a small quadruped which appears to belong to the rat or bandicoot tribe. Under two of the small fish, and produced previously to them, are two left hands stencilled in white. All the other figures are outlined in black and shaded with the same color within their margins. In this cave, as well as in that represented in figure 1, there are several other drawings, almost obliterated and too indistinct to be copied with certainty.

Figure 3.—The large cave containing these paintings is at the base of a precipitous escarpment of Hawkesbury sandstone about five chains easterly from the right bank of Georges river, within portion No. 1, of 640 acres, in the parish of Eckersley, county of Cumberland, and about 55 chains southeasterly from the north-west corner of that portion. Its length is 78 feet, depth from the front inward 20 feet, and its height about 30 feet. The roof is stained with smoke, and the shelter appears to have been used by the aborigines as a camping place for a considerable period. Fish were plentiful in Georges river, close by, and there were good hunting grounds all around.

The cave faces S. 70° W., and therefore the sun does not shine into it very much in winter; consequently the disintegration of the sandstone is more rapid than it would be in a dryer situation. Here and there throughout a considerable extent of the back wall traces of the former existence of paintings are discernible; but those shown on the plate are the only ones which can now be copied with any degree of certainty, and even these are becoming faint, owing to the natural decay of the rock.

An emu 4 feet 10 inches from the point of the bill to the tail, apparently sitting on its nest, is shown in solid black. There is a cavity in the rock just under the bird's breast which I think was there at the time the figure was drawn. About a foot above

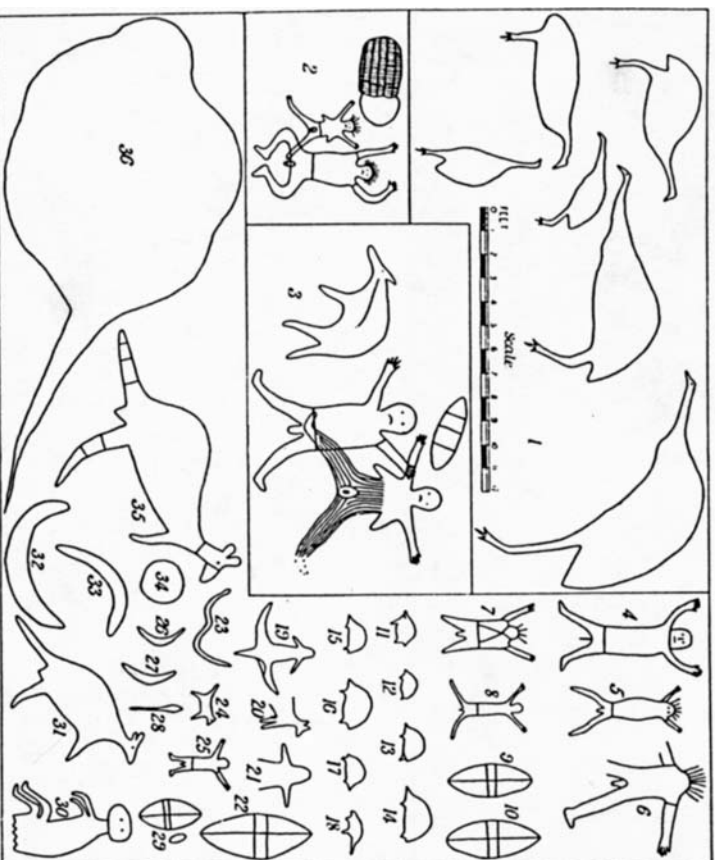


PLATE II—Rock carvings in New South Wales

the tail of the emu is a kangaroo, likewise in black, its whole length being 1 foot 9 inches, and having what appear to be intended for two spears sticking into its back. The same want of proportion in the relative sizes of these animals is observable as in the painting of the dog in figure 1.

#### PLATE II—CARVINGS.

Figure 1.—The group of six emus here shown appears to be intended for the cock and hen and four young birds. The cock, which is the largest figure of an emu which I have yet seen, is 10 feet 6 inches from the point of the bill to the end of the tail and 11 feet 3 inches from the bill to the end of the foot. What I have supposed to be the hen, or mother of the brood, measures 9 feet 3 inches from the bill to the tail. Similar measurement of the smallest bird of the group is 4 feet 3 inches. This figure is an exact reproduction of the group of birds as they appear on the rock. In all the native carvings of emus which I have yet seen only one leg is delineated, and the foot is a straight continuation of the leg. In paintings of this bird I have seen the two legs shown, but the foot has been depicted in the same way as in the carvings. See the emu in plate 1, figure 2.

This group is carved\* on a large flat rock of Hawkesbury sandstone, about two acres in extent, elevated only a few feet above the level of the surrounding land, in the parish of Spencer, county of Northumberland. It is situated on a bridle track (or trail) leading from Mangrove creek to Hawkesbury river, on the top of the range dividing the waters of these two streams.

Figure 2.—This group of carvings is situated on a flat sandstone rock, slightly elevated above the surface of the ground, on the western side of the road from Pymble to Cowan creek, a tributary of Hawkesbury river, about half a mile southerly from Bobbin trigonometrical station, in the parish of Gordon, county of Cumberland.

The carving represents a man and woman in the attitude assumed by the natives in performing a corroboree or native dance. The eyes and mouth are delineated, but the nose is missing in both. Each has a belt round the waist, and the man has a band

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\* For explanation of how carvings are executed, see *Proc. Roy. Soc. Vic.*, VII, N. 2., pp. 146-8.



round each arm near the shoulder. The male figure is very much the larger of the two, a disparity often found, but not universal, in native drawings. Seventeen ray-like lines rise from the head of the man and eight from the head of the woman, which may be intended either for hair or for ornaments stuck in it—probably the latter. There is a carving evidently intended to represent a native “dilly” bag, but the usual disregard of proportion between it and the human figures is observable. Close to the woman’s right hand is an object which may have been intended either for another bag or for a human foot-mark. There are three or four representations of human foot-marks above and close to this group which I have not included. They are about 1 foot 2 inches long by 6 or 7 inches wide, the distance between the strides varying from 4 feet 2 inches to 5 feet 9 inches. I have observed representations of human foot-marks among other carvings and also in native paintings.

I have reproduced this group and the description from my paper published in the “Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria,” volume VII, N. S., pages 152, 153, and plate IX, figure 8, for the purpose of enabling a comparison with other native drawings.

Figure 3.—The group here delineated is situated on the road from French’s forest to Pitt Water road, joining the latter at portion No. 64, of 640 acres, in the parish of Narrabeen, county of Cumberland. The carvings are on a flat rock on the eastern side of the road, a short distance southerly from the southern boundary line of the portion referred to, which line also forms the boundary between the parishes of Narrabeen and Manly Cove, the carvings being, therefore, just within the latter parish.

The central figure represents a man who, if the legs were straight, would measure about 7 feet 6 inches. He wears a belt, and there is a band round the left arm at the shoulder. Part of the right arm and hand, as well as the fingers of the left hand, are barely distinguishable. Beside him is the figure of a woman, about the same height, whose body is marked by a number of stripes extending from the breast to the feet, the left foot being rather indistinct. The *mammæ* are delineated in the way usually observed in native drawings. The eyes and mouth are shown in both figures. Above the heads of the man and woman is the representation of a shield 2 feet 4 inches long and a foot

wide in the middle, with three transverse bars cut upon it. On the right of the man is an animal somewhat resembling the kangaroo, but it may have been intended for a dog. It measures 5 feet 10 inches from the end of the tail to the nose. There is a line marked on the body of this animal, extending from the neck about 2 feet 6 inches towards the tail.

The man and woman are in the attitude of dancing, and the lines on the body of the latter may be intended to represent the stripes painted on the bodies of the natives on these occasions. This group, taken in connection with figure 2, is very interesting, as showing some of the positions assumed by the dancers. R. Sadleir, in his "Aborigines of Australia," page 19, says: "There are many kinds of Corroborees. All have the song and the dance; both are at times very libidinous, especially the dance of the women. . . . Their bodies are striped in white, and their heads fancifully adorned."

The tabular mass of sandstone containing this group is on a level with the surface of the surrounding land, from which the water oozes in wet seasons and in time of rain and flows over the rock, thus keeping it very damp, causing it to disintegrate more rapidly than if kept dry. The erosion caused by the action of the water has partly obliterated some parts of the figures and made the whole group somewhat indistinct. It was very fortunate that I discovered it and rescued it from oblivion, because in a few more years it will be altogether indistinguishable.

Figure 4.—This carving of a man 5 feet 7 inches tall, with an abnormally long body and short legs, appears on the same rock as figure 1. The eyes and mouth are shown, and also the nose, which is rare in these native drawings. There is a necklace and a belt round the neck and waist, respectively, both of which form part of the native dress.

Figure 5.—A rude figure of a man 4 feet 7 inches tall is depicted on a flat rock about 5 or 6 chains northwesterly from figure 3. There is a band round both arms, a belt round the waist, six ornamental lines rising from the head, and the eyes, but no other features. The feet are not shown, the legs terminating like the left leg of the woman in figure 2.

Figure 6.—This is another rude figure of a man, 5 feet 4 inches tall, carved on a southerly continuation of the same rock as that

on which the last-described figure appears. There are nine lines, averaging about 10 inches long, radiating from the head and bands round each of the arms near the shoulder. Part of a leg and part of an arm on one side have been obliterated by the natural decay of the rock.

Figure 7.—This unique little figure of a man 3 feet 3 inches tall is delineated on a large flat rock about half a mile south-westerly from Jones trigonometrical station, parish of Manly Cove, county of Cumberland. The fingers are shown, but not the feet, and there are four lines radiating from the head. There are bands across the arms, a belt round the waist, and two bands reaching from the belt to the shoulders, but crossing each other somewhat like a pair of braces.

Figure 8.—Another rude human figure, with a very long body and having the legs spread almost at right angles to it. The eyes are shown and there is a belt round the waist. This carving is on the same rock as figure 1.

Figures 9, 10.—These are two shields, the dimensions of the smaller being 3 feet 7 inches long and 1 foot 5 inches wide, and those of the larger 4 feet long and 1 foot 7 inches wide. Each has a longitudinal and two transverse bars cut upon it.

Figures 11 to 17.—These seven small objects are probably intended for the *echidna*, or hedgehog, the length of the smallest being 1 foot 3 inches, and that of the largest 2 feet 5 inches. They are on the same rock as figure 5, and each is within a few yards of the next.

Figure 18.—This small animal, 1 foot 10 inches long, which is on the same rock as the last described, may be intended for the flying squirrel or opossum, or perhaps for some of the rat tribe.

Figure 19.—It is difficult to decide whether this strange carving is intended for a man or for the skin of a kangaroo, but I think the former is the more probable. I have seen somewhat similar grotesque native drawings in which other detail showed unmistakably that they were intended for human beings. This carving is in one of the small gullies at the head of Deadman creek, within portion No. 19, of 960 acres, in the parish of Eckersly, and is about two miles northerly from Woronora river.

Figure 20.—This is a fairly well executed fore part of a kangaroo or wallaby, and is on the same rock as the last described.

The remainder of the figure has been carried away by the natural wasting of the rock.

Figure 21.—This is another rude carving of a man, but all the lower part has disappeared, owing to the decay of the rock. It is on the same flat rock as the last two figures.

Figure 22.—This shield, 4 feet 9 inches long and 1 foot 9 inches wide, is carved on the same rock as figure 5. There are one longitudinal and two transverse lines upon it.

Figure 23.—Represents a snake 4 feet 11 inches long and 2½ inches across the body. It is on the same rock as figure 1.

Figure 24.—This small figure, which is only 18 inches long, may be intended for a dog or a native cat, and is on the same rock as the last described.

Figure 25.—This small figure of a man is on the same rock as the last two figures and is 2 feet 6 inches tall. He wears a belt and a band round one arm near the shoulder.

Figures 26, 27.—These represent the Australian boomerang. The former is on the same rock as figure 1; the latter is near figure 5.

Figure 28.—This represents the aboriginal weapon known as the nulla-nulla. It is 2 feet 4 inches long and 4 inches across the widest part. It is on the same rock as figure 1.

Figure 29.—Another shield, 2 feet 8 inches long and 16 inches wide, with a longitudinal and two transverse bars. Near it is a small oval object, 9 inches long by 4½ inches wide, which I am unable to identify. These are on the same rock as figure 5.

Figure 30.—This curious figure, which I assume to be intended to represent a black fellow sitting down on a log or a rock, with his cloak made of opossum skins wrapped around him, is carved on the same sandstone rock as figures 19 to 21. It is 4 feet 10 inches from the top of the head to the wavy line, which I have supposed to represent the folds of the lower end of the cloak.

The legs, with the bent knees and feet, are fairly well drawn, but the arms resemble those seen in native pictures of kangaroos, except that in the latter there is usually only one limb delineated. The head is oval and two eyes are shown, but no other features. This is the only figure of this description I have yet met, and is therefore unusually interesting. If it is not intended for a human figure it may have been drawn to represent some monster of the native artist's imagination, connected with some tribal legend.

Figure 31.—A kangaroo 7 feet 10 inches from the nose to the end of the tail is here depicted. Only one fore leg and one hind leg are shown, the usual mode adopted by the natives in drawing figures of kangaroos. It is carved on the same rock as figure 1.

Figures 32, 33.—Native drawings of boomerangs are generally shown about the natural size, but those under notice measure 5 feet 1 inch and 4 feet 4 inches, respectively, in a straight line from end to end, which induces me to think that possibly they were intended to represent the moon. This is only thrown out as a suggestion. It is quite common to find drawings of men, animals, and other objects very much exaggerated in size. These carvings occur on the same rock as figure 7.

Figure 34.—This circular carving, 1 foot 10 inches in diameter, is on the same rock as figure 1, and unless it is intended to represent the moon, I cannot offer any other explanation. I have occasionally found such circular objects carved on rocks, and also in caves. See figure 1, plate 1, of this paper; also "Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria," volume VII, N. S., plate viii, figures 2 and 5.

Figure 35.—The large representation of a kangaroo here given measures 11 feet 1 inch from the end of the tail to the tip of the nose, and both as to correctness of figure and in detail is a great advance on similar drawings of this animal. Lines or bands are shown on the nose, neck, hind leg, and tail. Both ears are delineated and the eye is not forgotten. The animal is in the attitude of running. This carving is on a large mass of Hawkesbury sandstone, trending north and south, on top of the dividing range between Macdonald river and Webb creek, about where the boundary line between the parishes of Macdonald and Wonga, county of Hunter, crosses that range.

Figure 36.—This rude representation of what appears to be intended for a sting ray is carved upon the same rock as figure 1. The length of the body proper is 12 feet 9 inches, but, including the tail, the total length of the fish is 22 feet 1 inch, and its greatest breadth 9 feet 9 inches. The weight of some of these fishes may be readily understood by quoting from Captain Cook, when he visited Botany bay, New South Wales, in 1770. "I observed several large sting rays and caught one weighing 336 pounds after his entrails were taken out."