

An Aboriginal Devil Rock

(By W. J. WALTON.)

(The rock-carvings described in this article were visited, on August 21, by the Society in conjunction with Section F of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science.)

It is typical of the Australian Aboriginal that, like all primitive people, he is intensely superstitious. His religion is principally an intense belief in spirits. Everything of an uncommon nature that happens to him—a thunderstorm, an eclipse, death, or the hundred and one things we accept as a matter of course—are to him supernatural manifestations. Fire, water, the earth and sky, himself, everything in nature, are subject to spirit influence. He is a firm believer in sorcery and magic, so that it is not surprising that when, many years ago, the Great Northern Road to Newcastle, via Wiseman's Ferry, was being made, the remnant of the Aborigines who lived in the Maroota district always avoided a certain part of the country. It is said they regarded it as a "Debbil Debbil Rock." It is unlikely that any of the blacks living at the time had ever seen it, because in those early days the local Aborigines had been in contact with the white race for a number of years, and with the break-up of tribal life had discontinued many of their old customs, and, apart from, perhaps, a solitary survivor amongst the old men, had no direct instruction in their tribal lore. The time was a transition one for the native, whose knowledge of the place could only come down to him by tradition. The dread of spirits, ever present in his mind, would prevent him saying too much. The rock surfaces on the old ground, with their weird carvings of spirits, animals, and birds, would have an unenviable reputation, quite sufficient to keep any ordinary Aboriginal away. When the native speaks of a spirit, he always does it very much like the old

lady in England who, when she talked about the devil, always spoke in a whisper and very respectfully, because, as she used to say, "you never know what may happen."

The attention of the writer was first drawn to the Maroota series of rock carvings by an article in a Sydney newspaper. The ceremony ground was said to be an aboriginal devil rock, and one of the petroglyphs was even said to have horns and hoofs. While the statement may have had a certain amount of news value for the readers of the paper, it certainly had no foundation in fact. The Australian Aboriginal's conception of his spirits, are not ours, and, since representations of demons and spirits of evil are so seldom made by these people, and then only in a temporary way, it is necessary to accept with caution some of the statements made in newspapers. Four visits in all were made to study this particular art gallery, which must have been in the old days the most important ceremony-ground of a horde whose *tawi* included Maroota Forest, and extended down to the Hawkesbury. We find, carved on the rocks, several phases of aboriginal life. There are two unusual spirit forms, both well preserved. The one we saw on the first visit had on the top of an elongated body a projection which, to say the least, was peculiar. Two short forelegs, one of them faint, were what the Sydney paper described as horns; two hands were carved on the body; the hind feet, one of which was turned sideways, were in appearance like club feet. These are what the paper described as hoofs. As a matter of fact, the figure is neither human nor devil. A close

inspection on later visits showed it to be a representation of a "Goanna Spirit Ancestor." It is approximately 21 or 22 feet long; adjoining the spirit is a large emu, inside its outline is a shield or, maybe, a coolamon. There are other emus, but the most interesting is the one with eleven eggs. Birds with eggs are so rare on the old blacks' grounds that it is to be hoped no misguided vandal going that way will destroy it. Many other carvings are about—a bush turkey, boomerangs, fish, eels, and food animals—which suggest food ceremonies. Some distance from the main carvings are a number of sharpening grooves; it was here the aboriginal artists sharpened their stone tools. The other remarkable spirit deity is the "Male Native Bear Spirit." This is about 18 feet long. The waist is of generous proportions, about five feet across. The head is decorated with radial lines. The figure is complete with nose, eyes, feet, claws, and mouth. Both the Goanna and Native Bear Spirit deities have on their bodies a pleasing, wavy pattern of markings, extending from the neck downwards. They are the tribal marks which the natives, who belonged to these totemic groups, would have scarified on their

bodies. The Goanna and Native Bear Spirit deities are in all probability the ancestral fathers of two groups of Aborigines, the Goanna and Native Bear peoples.

Amongst the numerous large carvings of spirit forms, emus, and kangaroos, there is one that merits attention. The rock on which it is carved is perishing. It is a kangaroo; while in the act of running away it has been struck by several boomerangs. Checked in its bounding career, the animal is falling backwards. Food ceremonies, hunting dances, and totemic ceremonies, all seem to have their place in this interesting spot. On one of the visits a fine chert implement was picked up in the vicinity; no doubt a careful search would reveal more.

The road to Maroota Forest is through Parramatta, turning right at the silos at Windsor. Several miles before Wiseman's Ferry is reached, Maroota telephone office is seen on the right. A few yards further on the right is a clearing with a cricket pitch. From the posts of the old gateway it is only ten minutes' walk to where, on rising rock surfaces, the rock carvings are to be found; they are on the left of the track.

Anthropological Society of New South Wales

FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER, 1932.

Your Council has pleasure in submitting its report for the year ending September 30, 1932. The membership is now 91 ordinary members and 6 corresponding members, 22 new members joining during the year. This is very gratifying, and similar progress in the future ensures the success of the Society.

Your Council has to report the death of Mr. W. W. Thorpe, late Honorary Secretary to the Society.

Mr. Thorpe was one of our most enthusiastic members and the prime

mover in the foundation of the Society, and, although in ill-health during the past twelve months, he did not spare himself in furthering the interests of the Society.

Nine meetings were held during the year, at which the following lectures were given:—

October 20, 1931.—Presidential Address: "The Ancestry of Modern Man," by Dr. Chas. Anderson.