

Recently Recorded Aboriginal Art Sites in the Barossa Region

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Abstract: During 1995 to 2000 Aboriginal heritage surveys were completed in the Barossa Region. Investigations resulted in the location and recording of seventeen rock art sites. The most recently discovered art is described and shows images of humanoid, animal, reptile or abstract motifs. They are painted, drawn or engraved on rock shelter walls. Most were located near the Tanunda Creek, River Marne and Sanders Creek. The rock art consists of a variety of styles. A summary of the motifs is given and possible links to their regional association with different Aboriginal groups in the Barossa Valley.

Introduction

Aboriginal painting sites have been reported in the Mount Lofty Ranges since 1902 when a description of motifs on the walls of two rock shelters on the South Para River was recorded (Stirling, 1902). Ongoing survey work around known Aboriginal archaeological sites has resulted in the description of 70 art sites in the Mount Lofty Ranges. More recently nine newly located painting sites were recorded in the eastern Barossa region (Coles, 1992; 2000). These are described and in addition some of the earlier discovered paintings are referred to. Many of the paintings are attributed to the Peramangk nation who existed in the eastern Mount Lofty Ranges. Those recorded in the Eden Valley and Springton areas were probably done by a splinter group of the Peramangk, the Merrimeyunna tribe (Schemmeld, 1991). Other paintings and engravings found near the Peramangk's northern tribal border are probably associated with the Ngadjuri tribe while paintings to the western border have linked with the Kurna tribe (Tindale and Sheard, 1927). The most common motifs illustrated at the painting and engraving sites are human stick figures, but animals and birds are occasionally depicted as well as non-figurative designs such as dots, circles and lines. The motifs have been painted in red, white and yellow-ochre.

1. South Para River

Tindale and Sheard (1927) have provided some information about the group of Aboriginal people who lived near the South Para River in the Gawler district:

The Wirra tribe or local group of the Adelaide tribe (Kurna) ranged over the country between Angaston, Lyndoch, Port Adelaide, Yatala and Tea-Tree Gully, and its members were probably responsible for the rock painting (along the South Para River). The name Yatalunga (a property in the Hundred of Munno Para) is probably derived from the words yertala unga, meaning "flood place," and the name Yatala has evidently a similar derivation.

Source: Tindale and Sheard (1927), p19.

A description of motifs on the walls of two rock shelters on the South Para River has been recorded (Stirling, 1902). Paintings had been the subject of research since initial recording in 1901 by P. Ilford (Preiss, 1961). In 1902 an artist, a photographic reporter and numerous anthropologists visited and inspected the paintings for preservation purposes, and there was discussion of possibly removing the shelters to a site at the South Australian Museum.

On the floor within one of the shelters fresh water mussel shells, bone fragments and charred wood were found (Stirling, 1902). In another shelter fragments of emu shell, fresh water mussels and the jaw of a bandicoot in ashes was found on the floor (Zietz, 1917). Red ochre paintings in the upper shelter that were recorded by early anthropologists have been outlined in chalk, to enhance their reproduction in early black and white photographic plates (Stirling, 1902). Captain S. White of the Royal Society of South Australia highlighted the need to preserve these paintings, and a motion was passed “that the Council be requested to consider what steps could be taken to protect these interesting relics of Aboriginal art” (Zietz, 1917).

The two art sites recorded by Stirling in 1902 have been listed as South Para Paintings 1,2 and some of the art details are shown in Fig. 1. These were later re-recorded in their space context on the shelter wall by Gunn (1981).

Tindale from the South Australian Museum re-visited the South Para River sites and located another two paintings further down stream (Tindale and Sheard, 1927). No further site recording work was carried out because these locations could not be found again until the mid 1980s. The Aboriginal Heritage Branch of South Australia relocated the paintings described by Tindale and Sheard, and they are now referred to as South Para Paintings 1, 2, and 3. A fourth site remained unfound until 1995, when Luke Freeman from the Anthropological Society of South Australia relocated a further unrecorded site. These are referred to as South Para Painting Sites 4 and 5 as shown in Figs. 2, 3 and 4. North East of the South Para River art sites is another site located in the Cockatoo Valley. Luke Freeman first described it in 1999 and further recording was made (Coles, 2000), Fig. 5.

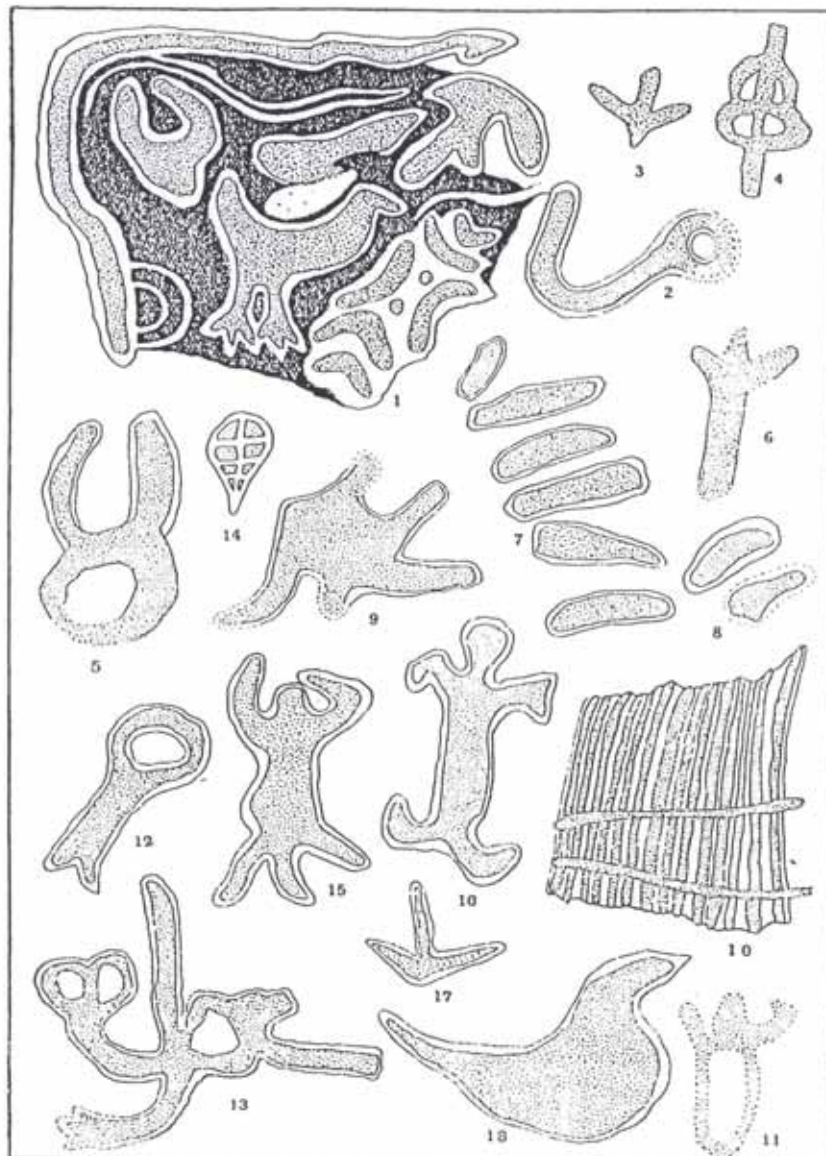


Figure 1. Illustration of the art from South Para River Paintings Sites 1, 2. Source: Tindale and Sheard (1927).

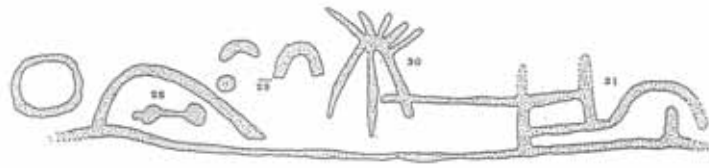


Figure 2. Illustration of the painted figures in a shelter at South Para River Painting Site 4. Source: Tindale and Sheard (1927).

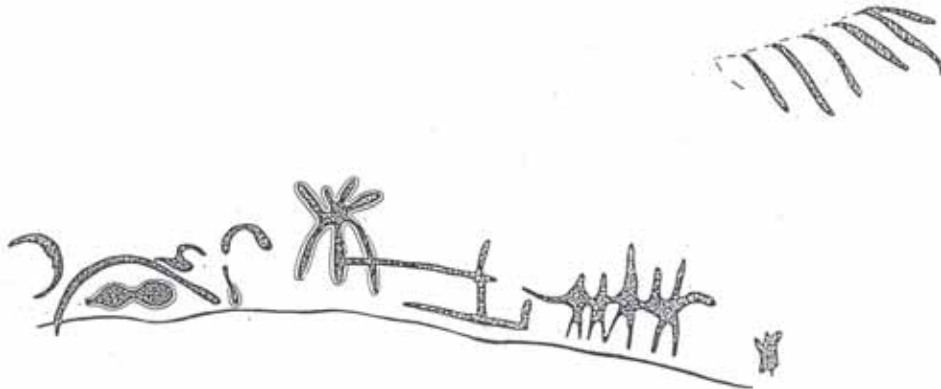


Figure 3. Illustration of the same painted figures as above by Coles (2000).

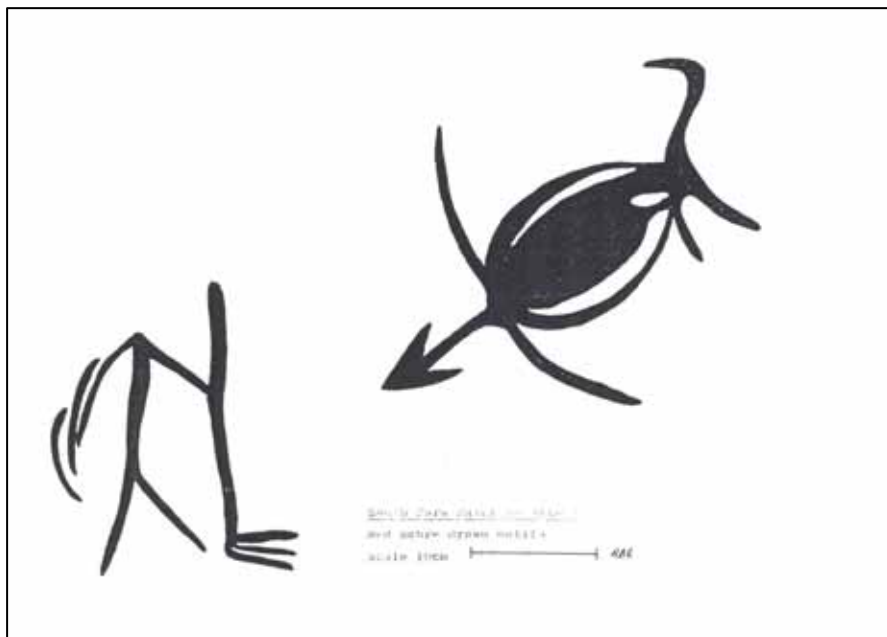


Figure 4. Motifs in the shelter at South Para River Painting Site 5.

(Left) Drawn red-ochre humanoid figure holding a spear or digging object. (Right) Drawn red-ochre image that may present a tortoise or a prostrate humanoid figure. Scale 10cm.



Figure 5. Illustration of red-ochre figures in the shelter at Cockatoo Valley by Coles (2000).

2. Kaiserstuhl

In 1990 and 1991 a painting and engraving site was located in the Kaiserstuhl Conservation Park and was later recorded (Coles, 1992). Both are on granite boulders and are aligned NNW to SSE in direction. The style of this art is distinctly different from those painting styles observed in the shelters south and east of this region. It may indicate a different Aboriginal culture once existed in this location. The engravings (Fig. 6) have been completed on a near vertical surface of a large granite formation, and the main figure appears to represent a coiled spiral or serpent. The individual engraved lines of the figure vary in depth from 1.5 to 2 cm and 1 to 5 cm wide. Most of the engraving is approximately 2 m above the present ground level and some form of scaffolding may have been used to complete the work. Left and right of the serpent-figure are a number of arcs and forked lines. The work of engraving these figures would have required considerable physical effort, possibly with the use of a hammer stones and smaller quartz punches to produce the required level of surface etching. The engravings were probably worked over many seasons and could have been associated with ceremonies and rituals within the northern Peramangk region and the Ngadjuri whose tribal boundary was slightly to the north.

In 1990 a painting site in the Kaiserstuhl Conservation Park approximately 1.5 km SSE of the above described engravings was located near the Tanunda Creek. This shelter has resulted from erosion on the underside of a large upright boulder and is precariously balanced on a quartz rock. The shelter has similar mural motifs as some of those at the engraving site. Long arcs and curves are either painted or drawn with red-ochre and surrounded by accompanying parallel white-ochre lines (Fig. 7). Some metres distant from

the boulder a large granite platform has been exposed by erosion. On its surface are three flat granite stones approximately 30 cms across and 5 cm thick and in alignment in a NNW direction. They were placed individually, approximately 3 metres apart a long time ago since each is covered in lichen growth whilst several have eroded into the bedrock surface. It is thought they may have functioned as a direction marker because their alignment coincides exactly with the direction of the Kaiserstuhl engraving site that is 1.5 km to NNW.

The engraving and painting sites in the Kaiserstuhl Conservation Park are located close to the tribal-boundaries of the Peramangk to the south, the Ngadjui to the north and the Kurna to the west (Tindale, 1974). The art in this remnant-bush park may represent the Ngadjuri's style rather than that of the Peramangk. The Ngadjuri visited the northern Peramangk people on a seasonal basis as recorded in the 1800s near Angaston at Duckponds Creek (Nitschke, 1991). The Ngadjuri were responsible for producing the numerous rock engravings located in the north east of South Australia near the Yunta Creek system (Berndt, 1987). It is a possible that the tribal groups to the north may have brought their engraving skills to the south and into Peramangk territory.

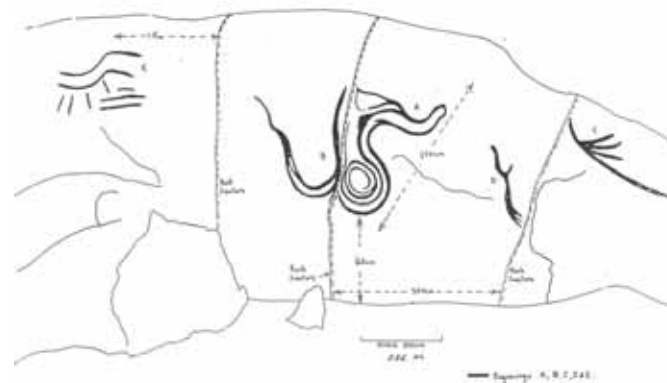


Figure 6. Illustration of the engraved figures on the boulder at the Kaiserstuhl Conservation Park. Source: Coles (1993).



Figure 7. Illustration of the drawn red and white-ochre symbols in the shelter at the Kaiserstuhl Conservation Park. Source: Coles (1993).

3. Mount McKenzie

In 1994, a group of three separate painting sites was found near Mount McKenzie that lies 8 km east north east of the Kaiserstuhl Conservation Park. The paintings at Mount McKenzie are more typical of the red and white-ochre art style of the Peramangk and consist of painted and drawn “stick figures”, while some humanoid forms appear to be in motion. Accompanying them are parallel lines, circles and abstract motifs (Figs. 8, 9).

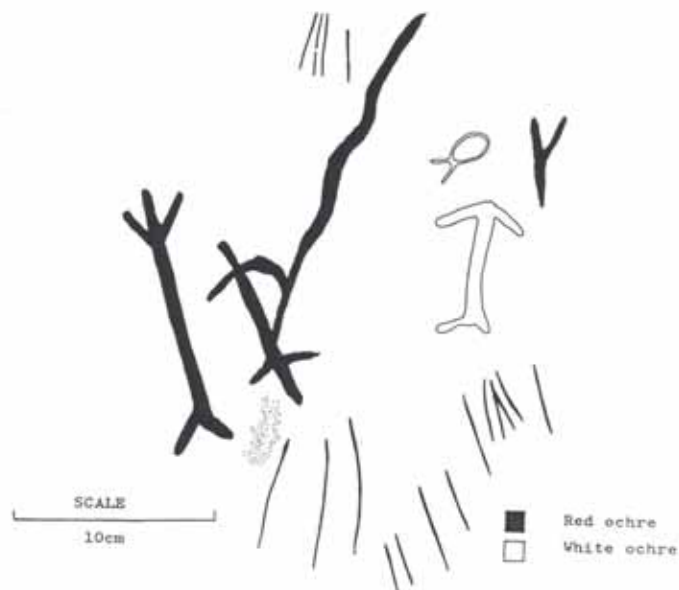


Figure 8. Illustration of the motifs at Mount McKenzie. Source: Coles (1993).

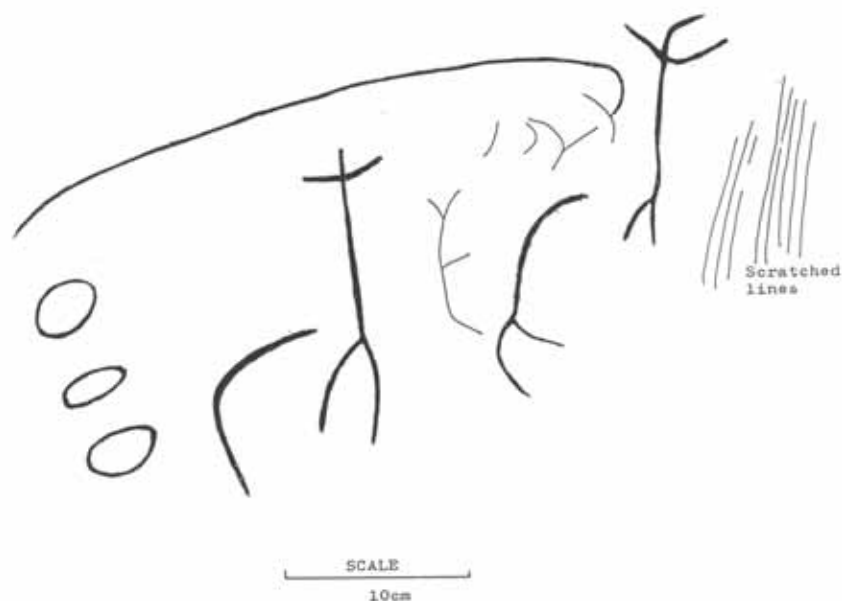


Figure 9. Illustration of the drawn white-ochre motifs in the small shelter north of Mount McKenzie. Source: Coles (1993).

4. River Marne

In the mid 1920s Paul Hossfeld a geologist with the University of Adelaide wrote of three painted and drawn art sites in shelters near Eden Valley on the River Marne (Hossfeld, 1926 and 1928). They are referred to as Eden Valley 1, 2 and 3 (Figs. 10, to 12). In 1963 another researcher, Rodger Teusner documented a fourth site nearby site at a distance of approximately 100 m from the Eden Valley 1 painting site (Teusner, 1963) Fig. 13. During the recent survey work a set of painted red-ochre stick figures was located in a small shelter approximately 30 m from the shelter described as Eden Valley 3 (Fig. 14). It is unusual that Hossfeld in his earlier surveys could have overlooked these painting sites. The similarities between art in both the shelters have been noted (Coles, 2000). They depict white-ochre figures in active movement. The positioning of the figures on the walls in both shelters is associated with separate groups of white-ochre splatters. These patterns resemble sprayed paint that might have been ejected from the artist's mouth. The same artist might have been responsible for painting the white-ochre figures in both shelters.

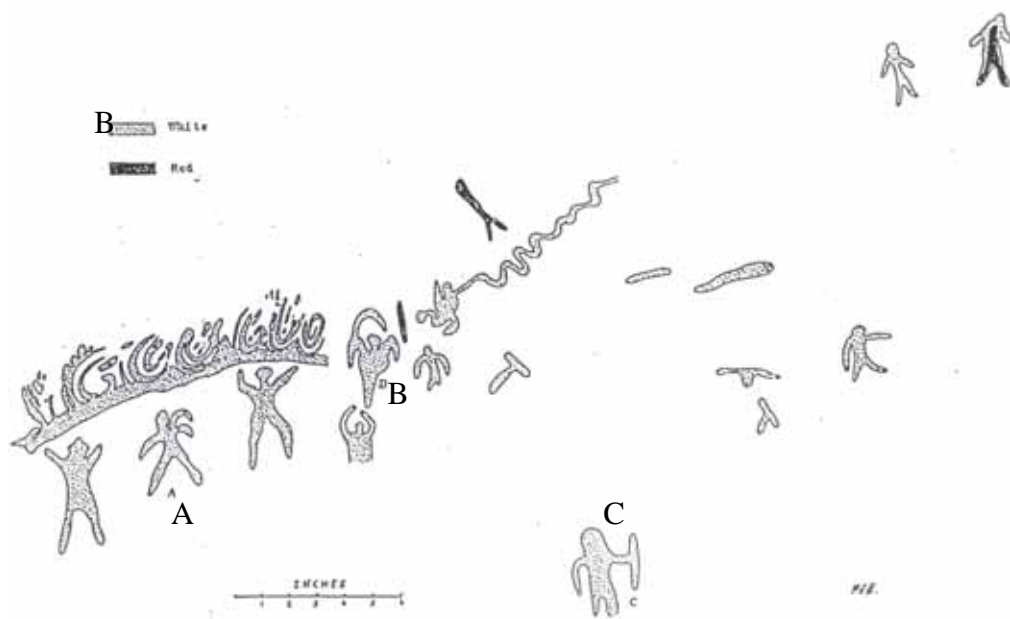


Figure 10. White and red-ochre figures at Eden Valley Shelter 1. Source: Hossfeld (1926). A,B, probably represent people with boomerangs and C a person holding a shield. Scale in inches.

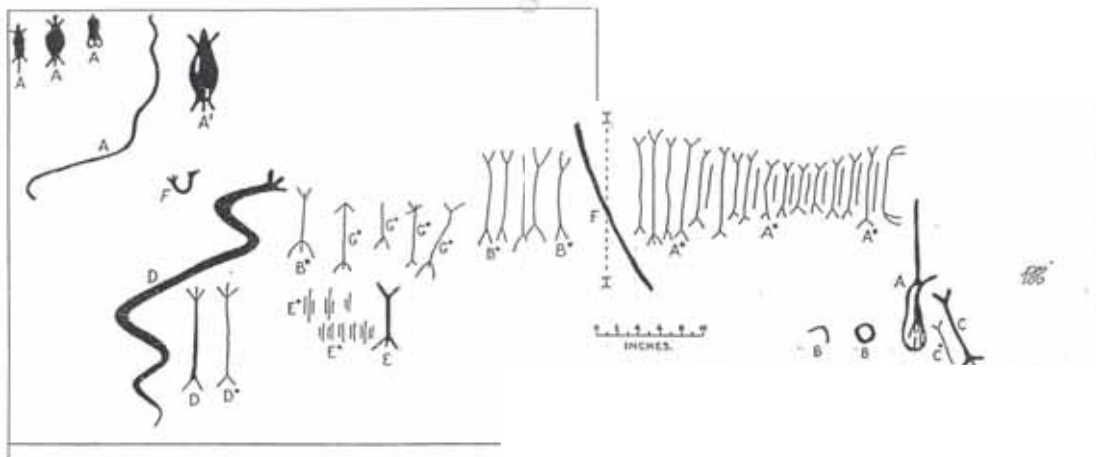


Figure 11. Composite image of the various figures seen in the Marne Shelter 3. Source: Hossfeld (1926). Note the diversity of stick figures, some with heads (D, D*), and those without heads (B*, G*, A*, E, C). The figures on the right (A*) are in a parallel row and may represent the dance pattern of a corroboree. The figures to the upper left (A,A,A), from left to right might represent a lizard, an animal and a phallic symbol. The large red-ochre figure (D) has been referred to by early anthropologists as a “three headed serpent”. It also may be an iconic figure of the Peramangk, representing part human, and part serpent. Scale in inches.

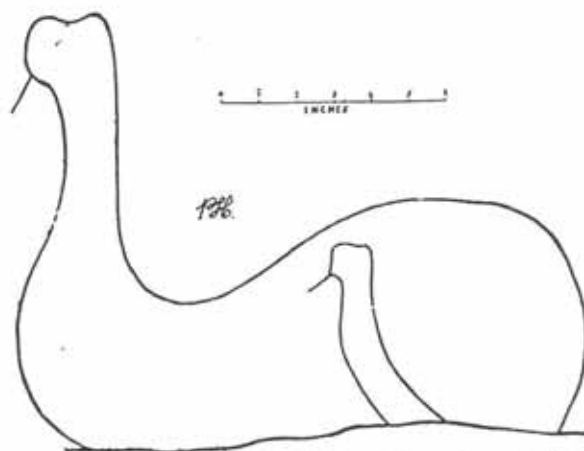


Fig. 1. Drawing from Cave B, River Marne (South Rhine). South Australia.

Figure 12. Drawing of emu figures in a small cave near Eden Valley painting site 4. Source: Hossfeld (1928). Scale in inches



Figure 12. Interior wall of Eden Valley Shelter 2. White, red and yellow-ochre figures with paint splatters centre. Scale 15 cm.



Figure 13. Painted white-ochre figures in Eden Valley Shelter 2. Figure on left may represent a lizard, to the right probably a man with two boomerangs and far right a tortoise.

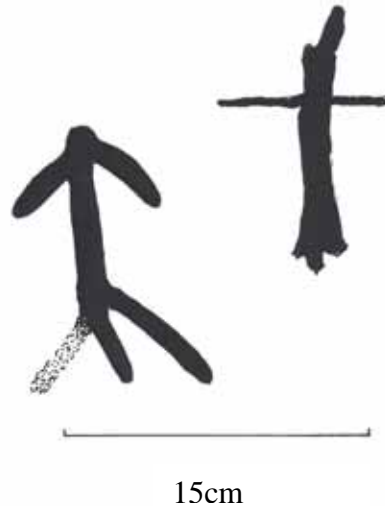


Figure 14. Red-ochre stick figures found in a small shelter near Eden Valley 3 painting site. Illustration of paintings by Robin Coles.

In 1993 nine additional art sites near the River Marne were documented (Coles, 1993). These have been recorded as Eden Springs, Boehm Springs River Marne Paintings 1 to 6, (Figs. 15 to 18).

At both the Eden Springs and River Marne Painting site 3 white-ochre dots have been used to surround some of the paintings. The use of rows of white-ochre dots has not been recorded for any other painting site within the Mount Lofty Ranges (Coles, 2000). The distance apart for these two painting sites on the River Marne is approximately 9 km. These findings suggest that the same artist may have been responsible for the completion of both motifs in the two painting sites (see Figs. 15, 16).

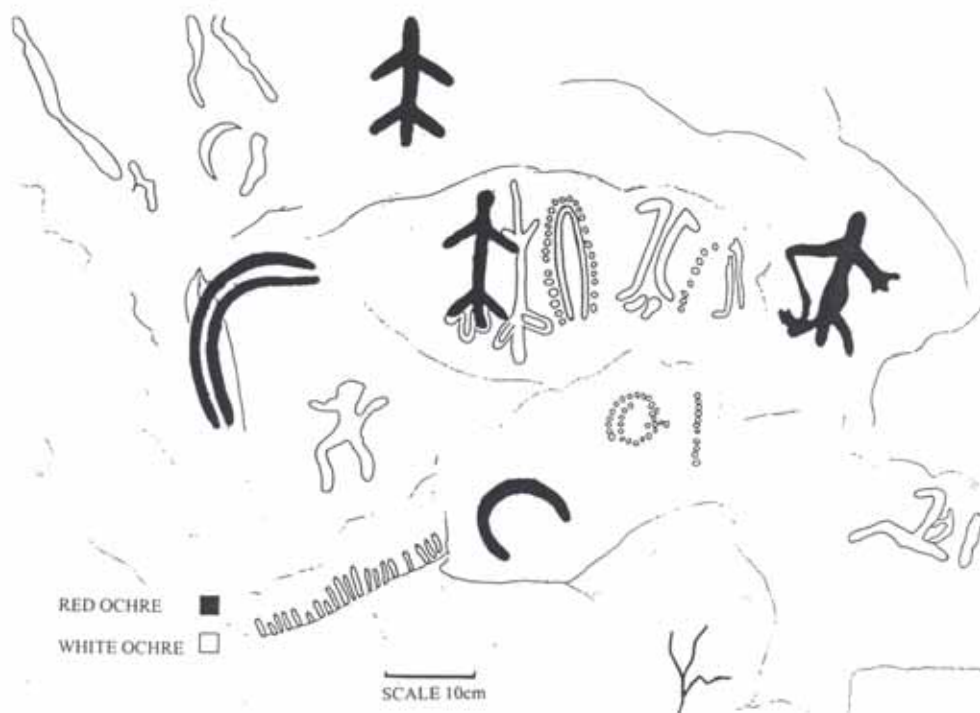


Figure 15. Red and white-ochre figures in the Eden Springs painting site. The use of white ochre dots to border several figures is similar to the paintings in the River Marne painting site 6. Illustration of paintings by Robin Coles.



Figure 16. River Marne painting Site 6. Red, yellow and white-ochre painted figures. The unusual use of white-ochre dots to border several figures resembles the art in the Eden Springs painting site. Illustration of paintings by Robin Coles.



Figure 17. Boehm Springs painting site. A red-ochre figure painted on a rock slope. The figure is approximately 85 cm high and may represent a human with an elaborate headdress (T. Gara, pers.comm.). Illustration of paintings by Robin Coles.

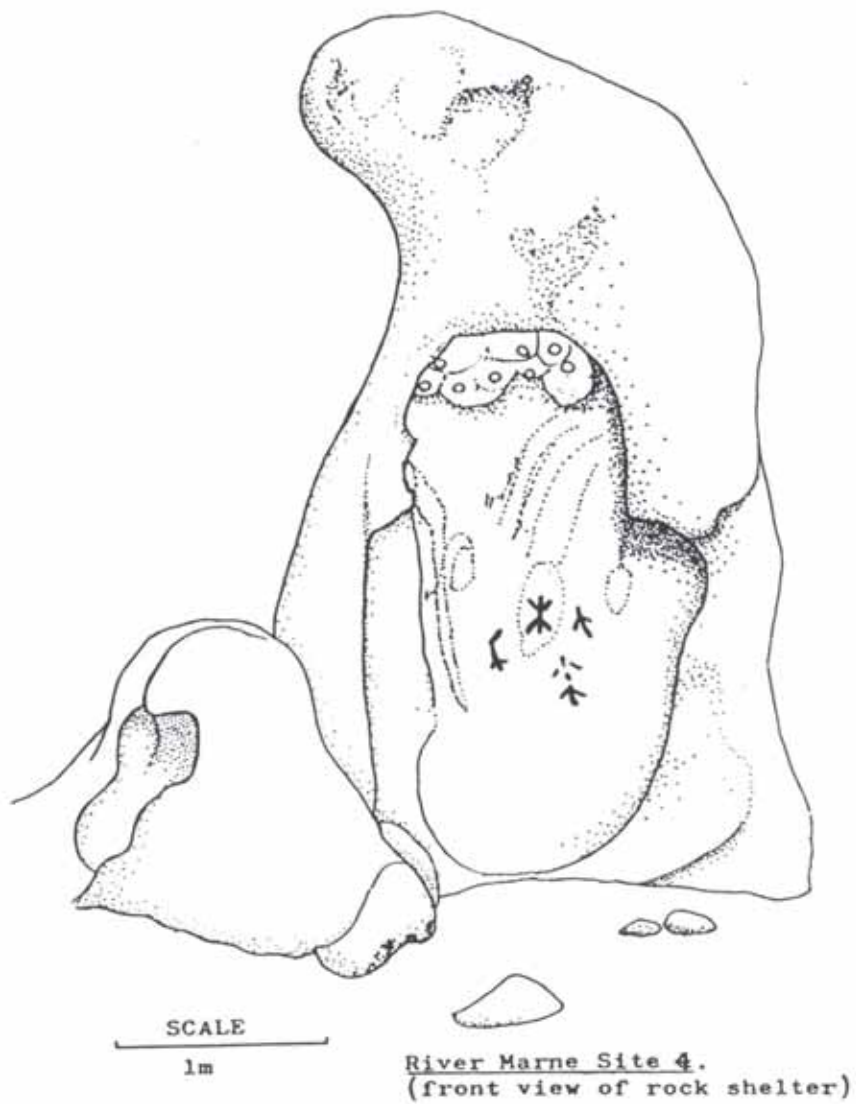


Figure 18. Marne painting site 4. A weathered granite column, red-ochre figures are painted on the front cavity. Mud nests constructed by birds are above the paintings. Illustration by Robin Coles

In 1986 a painted and engraved art site on the River Marne, was recorded and is referred to as Marne River Painting and engraving site (Gara and Turner, 1986), Fig. 19.

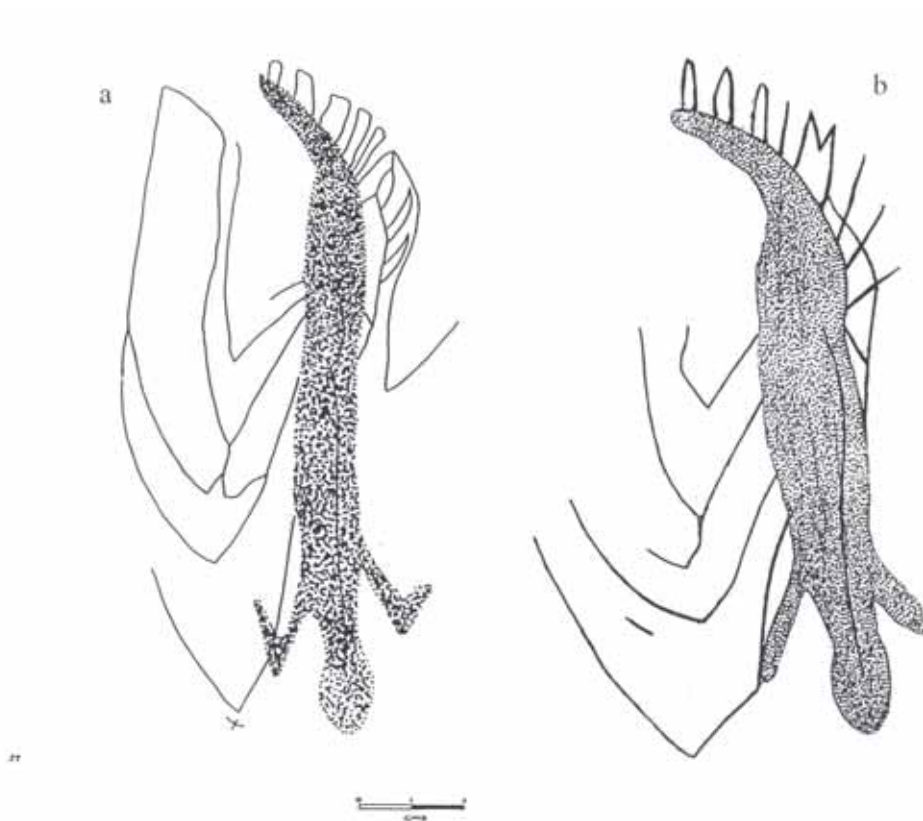


Figure 19. River Marne painting and engraving site. Engraved figures that may represent a lizard and part humanoid figure. The illustration on the left (a) was made after Gara and Turner (1986) first described the site. On the right (b), an illustration done after re-examination of the site during 1998. The dark curved lines are rock-scratchings that surround the engraving. The scale bar at lower left is 2 cm. Source: Coles (2000).

At head waters of the Saunders Creek in a large shelter 2 km SE of the Eden Valley Painting sites are a further set of paintings and finely scratched set of figures (Coles, 1992), see Fig. 20. Amongst these paintings and others the more recent art style of scratched lines has been recognised and is generally superimposed on the older red and white-ochre figures. These often occur as groups of vertical and parallel strokes connected by a horizontal line. It has been suggested that these lines may represent the number of people attending a ceremony, or depict groups of people in a dance formation.

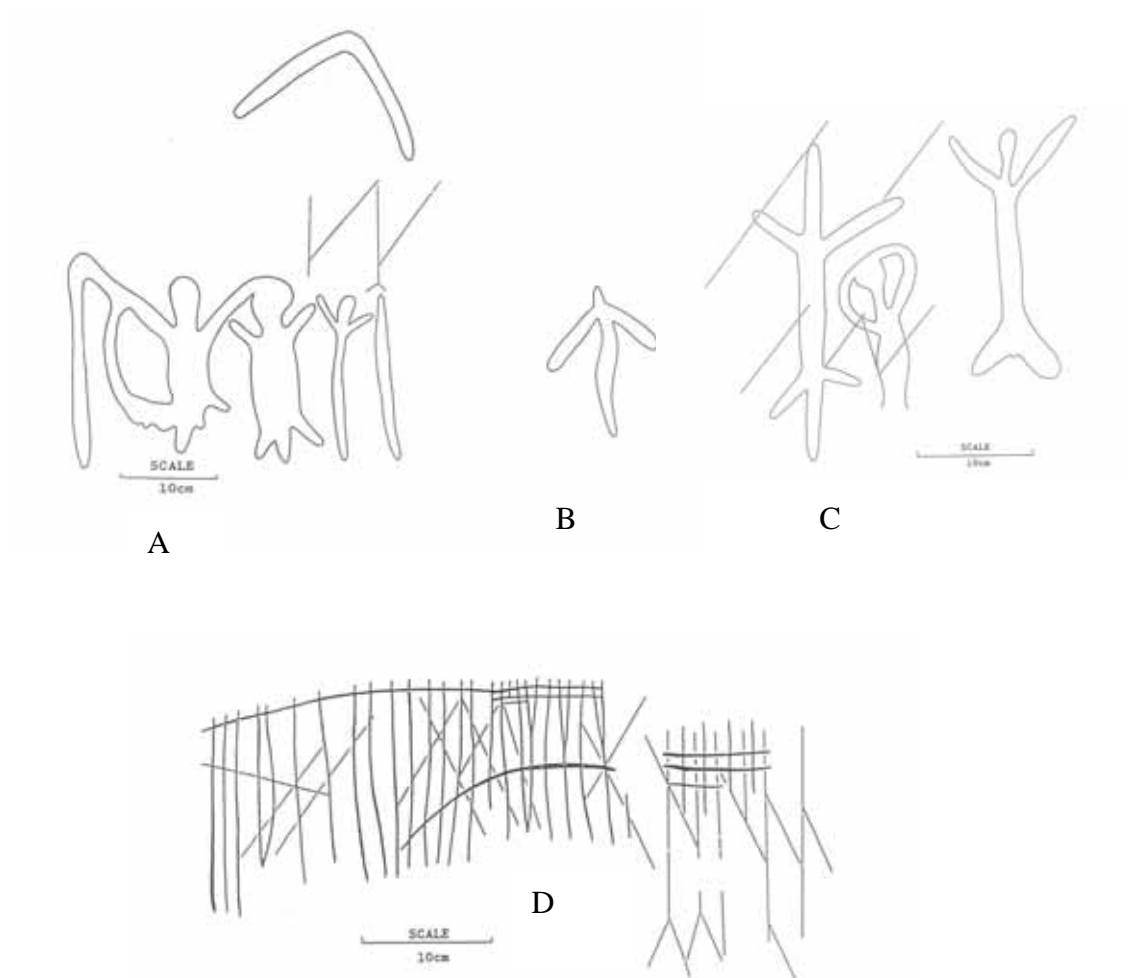


Figure 20. Illustration of faint white-ochre figures in the Saunders Creek Shelter. (A) white-ochre humanoid figures, (B) white-ochre bird track or part humanoid figures, (C) white-ochre reptile and humanoid figures, below black parallel lines forming a comb design, (D) scratches both diagonal and vertical overlaying the white-ochre figures and black lines. Source: Coles (2000)

Charcoal obtained from one hearth site exposed near the head waters of Sanders Creek was dated using carbon 14 and 13 isotope analysis at 800 years with a standard deviation of ± 80 years before present (Coles, 1995). We can estimate from this one dating that cultural meetings would also have taken place in this area after this time because the charcoal for the dating was obtained from an exposed vertical soil profile approximately 1.5 m deep. Above this level there are at least two hundred other exposed hearths in the surrounding region. This site appears to be the extensive semi-permanent campsite described by Hossfeld (1926). Near Rolland Flat in 1991 an Aboriginal burial site was exposed during road works. Charcoal associated with the skeletal remains was dated at 1,491 BP ± 86 years. At Eden Springs the shelter floor of a painting site was excavated to a depth of 55 cm where artifacts and charcoal were recovered in situ. The charcoal at this site was dated at 1,940 BP ± 86 years (Coles, 1995).

The trading partners of the Peramangk were the Ngangaruku who visited the eastern hills near Springton, on a seasonal basis (Hossfeld, 1926). They travelled upstream from the Murray River along the Saunders Creek and the River Marne. These water courses were trade routes (Coles, 1991) that flowed across the Murray Plains approximately 6 and 12 km to the north of the Cooke Hill. Clear views of the trading groups' campfires would have been visible from their shelters and its occupants could prepare in advance for large ceremonies to take place at nearby campsites. Their gatherings took place probably on the upper banks of the Sanders Creek and the Marne River, both near Springton and Eden Valley (Hossfeld, 1926). Adjacent to these semi-permanent campsites there is a network of painting sites that formed a major cultural exchange centre involving the Merrimeyunna tribe and visiting River Murray tribes (Schemmeld, 1991). It was at these campsites that they probably settled inter tribal grievances, traded and performed ceremonies. While at nearby painting sites other ceremonies and teachings were carried out relating to their beliefs and ties with the land.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements go to the Peramangk descendants in completing this work, in particular the late Richard Hunter and the present custodian Isobelle Campbell. Thanks also go to the staff of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the previous Aboriginal Heritage Branch.

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