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RECENTLY-DISCOVERED ABORIGINAL PAINTING SITES IN THE MOUNT LOFTY RANGES

R. B. Coles

Introduction

This paper describes ten Aboriginal painting sites that have been found in the Mount Lofty Ranges since 1989, and also provides a description of another site first recorded in 1982 but which has not previously been described in the literature. Some of these sites were first located and recorded by this writer; others were initially reported to the Aboriginal Heritage Branch by landowners, bushwalkers etc. Over the last several years, this writer has visited most of the known art sites in the Mount Lofty Ranges, and recorded the motifs with 35 mm and video film, as well as tracings and sketches.

Aboriginal art in the Mount Lofty Ranges

Aboriginal paintings were first reported in the Mount Lofty Ranges in the early years of this century by Stirling and additional painting sites have been located over the years by Hossfeld, Tindale & Sheard, Teusner and other researchers. ¹ More recently, Gara & Turner reported two sites with both engravings and paintings at Marne River and Mount Barker Creek and Coles & Draper described three new painting sites in the Rockleigh area. ² Including the sites described in this paper, there are now about 40 known art sites in the Mount Lofty Ranges. The majority of these sites are in the Rockleigh - Tungkillo area but clusters of sites also occur in the South Para River area, along the Marne River and at Macclesfield. The most common motifs are human stick figures, but animals, birds and reptiles are occasionally depicted and non-figurative designs such as dots, circles and lines also occur. The motifs have been painted in red, white and yellow ochre.
Map 1. Map of Fleurieu Peninsula and Mount Lofty Ranges, showing location of the painting sites.
Description of sites

The eleven sites are described below. Their locations are shown on Map 1.

(1) Macclesfield
This site is located near the Angas River in the southern Mount Lofty Ranges, about 1.75 km south-west of the Anthony Hill site described by Mountford. It was first located and recorded by this writer in 1990. The paintings are in a rock-shelter in an outcrop of metamorphic schist that overlooks several deep pools in the Angas River. Commanding views of the Strathalbyn and Lake Alexandrina districts can be obtained from further up the slope. The shelter has a northerly aspect; the entrance is 5.6 m wide and 1.9 m high and the shelter extends back to a depth of 2.3 m. The back wall and ceiling are partially stained by water and algal deposits. Three faint human stick figures painted with pinkish-red ochre motifs are just visible on the ceiling; the tallest of these figures is about 10 cm high (Fig. 1). Several other figures, also in pinkish-red ochre, occur on a lower part of the wall. Two of the latter probably represent humans, the other may be a mammal or a lizard.

The paintings have deteriorated due to the action of weathering and water seepage through the roof of the shelter. Some names and other graffiti have been scrawled with white chalk across the back wall but have not directly impinged upon the art. A wasp nest is also situated close to the art. The motifs are less 'spirited' than those at Anthony Hill nearby, but it is interesting that the same pinkish-red ochre seems to have been used at both sites.

(2) Workanda Creek
This site is situated high on the western scarp of the Mount Lofty Ranges, on Workanda Creek in the Belair Recreation Park. The scarp of the ranges was the boundary between the Kaurna and the Peramangk tribes, according to Tindale; Workanda Creek may have served as a convenient route for Aborigines travelling back and forth between the hills and the plains.
Figure 1. Macclesfield Painting Site. Detail of pinkish-red ochre stick figures.
The painting is situated in a small overhang on a sandstone cliff near the base of a waterfall. European vines have become established on the cliff-face and there are other introduced plant species in the area. On the vertical wall of the overhang there is a single faint emu figure in profile, drawn with charcoal (see Fig. 2). The figure measures about 37 cm from head to feet. Part of the emu appears to have been retouched recently as some charcoal fragments were still adhering to the exfoliated rock surface. It is uncertain whether the original motif was of human origin or merely a fortuitously-shaped black water-stain. Close to the base of the waterfall there is a small rockhole that is said to have been a place where Aborigines bathed their babies, according to local legend.

Figure 2. Workanda Creek Painting Site. Detail of emu motif.
This site was reported to the Aboriginal Heritage Branch in 1990 and was recorded by this writer in the same year. Damage to the site was noted during a subsequent visit in July 1991; graffiti, consisting of initials and other marks, have been drawn in red over the feet of the emu. As it is situated in a popular recreation park, the site is vulnerable to further damage. This is the only painting site known close to Adelaide, although there are doubts as to its authenticity. There are unconfirmed reports, however, of other sites in the foothills e.g. near Greenhill and in the hills behind the Waite Institute.

(3) Salt Creek Site 3

This site is located close to the source of Salt Creek, near Rockleigh. Two other painting sites on Salt Creek, described previously by Coles & Draper, are located about 2 km downstream from the new site, and Pym's Painting Site, described by Ross & Ellis, is 2.5 km distant. The new site was first recorded early in 1989 by staff from the Aboriginal Heritage Branch and was visited by this writer a few months later.

The paintings are located in a small rock-shelter on the southern bank of the creek. The shelter, in an outcrop of schist boulders, faces north. The paintings consist of two human figures on a boulder on the floor of the shelter (Fig. 3). The larger figure is about 20 cm tall and the other, which is incomplete, is about 60 cm tall. Both figures have their arms raised above their heads. The art is in 'crayon' style, the figures probably having been drawn onto the surface with a piece of yellow ochre. Also on the floor is a small circle of rounded stones but it is uncertain whether this is of human origin or a natural feature.

Several hundred metres upstream from the painting site on the northern bank of the creek there is an extensive scatter of stone artefacts and hearthstones in a deflated, sandy area. The artefacts include flakes of quartz and quartz crystal as well as chert, probably from sources along the Murray River, and some historic items including retouched green bottle-glass and fragments of willow-pattern china. Human skeletal material was found at this site during the Monarto Survey in the early 1970s and one human tibia was noted during a recent visit. As the name suggests, the creek is now salty but this was probably
not the case in prehistoric times. A dam has been constructed near the
campsite and the cattle and sheep that regularly drink from the dam cross the
site to get there, and are causing the site to be eroded. It seems likely that a
significant amount of archaeological material remains in situ beneath the
present ground surface in this area.

Several old cottages, now in ruins, are situated several hundred metres to the
west of the campsite. The presence of glass artefacts and other European items
on the campsite may represent historic contact between the local Aboriginal
people and early European settlers in the area.

Figure 3. Salt Creek Painting Site 3. Detail of 'crayon style' motifs.
(4) Eden Springs

This site was first recorded by officers from the Aboriginal Heritage Branch in 1982. It was revisited and recorded by this writer in 1990. The site is located close to Boehm Springs, near the source of the Marne River, about 9 km west of the well-known sites at Lartunga, which were described by Hossfeld in 1926. The surrounding land is principally used for vine-growing but in the vicinity of the springs the terrain is dotted with rock outcrops and some native vegetation remains.

The paintings are in a small rock-shelter, facing north, in an outcrop of metamorphic sandstone. The interior walls of the shelter have been stained black by water and algal deposits which have formed the surface on which the art has been executed. The main set of motifs on the upper wall consists of painted red and white ochre stick figures, arcs and dots (Fig. 4). The human figures are about 30 cm tall. A small set of red ochre lines done in crayon style occurs near the base of the shelter and there are also several red ochre smudges in this area. On the floor of the shelter there is a flat rock surface with red ochre bands and arcs staining the upper edge, and a large red ochre smudged area. This rock may have been used to grind and mix the ochre pigments used in the paintings.

A recent trial excavation of the floor of this shelter revealed some evidence of Aboriginal occupation. A small trench measuring 1 m by 0.5 m was excavated to a depth of 0.55 m. A number of quartz artefacts were recovered as well as small animal bone fragments. Charcoal probably from bushfires was also found in the excavation. The excavation was back-filled with clean white sand.

Near the painting site is a trench about 3 m deep excavated for sand. On the sides of this trench at a depth of about 0.5 - 0.75 m a number of artefacts were clearly visible, including fragments of a reniform slate scraper, numerous milky quartz flakes and cores, a chert flake and a fractured pebble hammerstone.
This site is relatively well-known to local people and, indeed, is situated only a few hundred metres from the main building complex of the Eden Valley Winery. It is one of the few sites near Adelaide accessible to visitors. The Aboriginal Heritage Branch, in conjunction with Peramangk descendants, has provided interpretive signs for display in the winery salerooms, which provide some general information on Aboriginal occupation of the area and other sites in the district. An interpretive sign has also been erected at the site itself.

\[\text{Figure 4. Eden Springs Painting Site.}\]
(5) *Boehm Springs*
This painting site is located about 450 m from the Eden Springs site described above. The paintings occur on the rear wall of a small, north-facing rock-shelter in an outcrop of metamorphic sandstone. The motifs are painted onto a blackened area of the rear wall. The largest motif is a complex, elongated design in red ochre, about 90 cm long (Fig. 5). A small red circular design occurs to the right of the large figure while some faint white ochre motifs occur to the lower left. Approximately 2 m to the left there are a number of red ochre lines done in crayon style on the wall of the shelter.

The location of the Eden Springs site has been known to local people for many years. However, probably due to dense bracken which obscured the entrance to the shelter, the Boehm Springs site was not known until discovered by this writer in 1990. Numerous rock outcrops occur in the vicinity of Boehm Springs and it is likely that other painting sites remain to be found in this area.

(6) *Kaiser Stuhl*
This site was reported to the Aboriginal Heritage Branch in 1990 and recorded by this writer shortly afterwards. It is located near a tributary of Tanunda Creek in the Kaiser Stuhl Conservation Park, about 12 km east of Lyndoch. The painting site on the South Para River described by Stirling in 1902 and the other sites located nearby in the 1920s by Tindale & Sheard are about 20 kms west-south-west of this site. 6 The conservation park is 399 hectares in extent and consists of relatively undisturbed eucalypt and casuarina scrub dotted with numerous rock outcrops and dissected by several small creeks and streams.

The paintings occur on the inner surface of a concave overhang on the northern side of a large metamorphic conglomerate sandstone boulder, about 3 m high. The paintings consist of a number of red ochre lines, arcs and circular designs, each outlined with white ochre (Fig. 6). The lines on the right-hand side of the shelter are about a metre long.
Figure 5. Boehm Springs Painting Site. Detail of motifs on rear wall of shelter.
The long curved lines and broad elliptical designs resemble some of the motifs used in Aboriginal body paintings or on shields and woomeras. The motifs at this site are also similar to some of the engraved motifs that occur in the Yunta area. Whether or not any relationship exists between the art styles of the Peramangk and the Ngadjuri, who occupied the Yunta area, remains a subject of further research.

*Figure 6. Kaiser Stuhl Painting Site*
(7) River Marne Site I

This site was first located by a local researcher, Roger Teusner, in the 1970s and relocated by this writer in 1991. The paintings occur in a sheltered cavity in a prominent rock column, composed of sandstone and micaceous schist. The site, and the two other Marne River sites described below, are approximately 5 km south-east of the township of Eden Valley and about 2.5 km north-east of the sites at Lartunga, described by Hossfeld. The River Marne in this area is lined with large river red gums. The surrounding pasture land is dotted with rock outcrops.

The column stands 4.5 m high and, from some angles, resembles the head of a rearing serpent. The cavity in which the paintings occur is near the top of the column. Numerous nests of fairy martins occur near the paintings (Fig. 7). The motifs are painted in a rusty red ochre which appears to have interfused with the mineral components of the rock. There are four motifs, two of which clearly represent human stick figures, the tallest being about 15 cm in height (Fig. 8). The other two motifs are less complete but probably also represent human figures; the lower figure shown has suffered damage from exfoliation. Some faint red ochre stains between the two stick figures on the left may represent another motif now unrecognisable.

A dense concentration of hearths occurs in a sandy area by the River Marne about 180 m north of this site. Within the area of the hearths there are two circular stone arrangements, approximately 2 m in diameter, and there is also a scatter of stone artefacts including quartz cores and flakes and a number of blades and scrapers made from opalescent fossilised wood.
Figure 7. River Marne Painting Site No. 1
(8) River Marne Site 2

This site is located on the eastern bank of the River Marne about 200 m north of the previous site, close to the large campsite described above. It was first found by this writer in 1991.

The paintings occur on the water-stained surface of a boulder about 2.5 m long and 1.9 m wide, which is located on the floor of a small rock-shelter. The motifs are shown on Fig. 9. The central motifs, a series of short strokes and lines, are drawn with red ochre in the crayon style, as are two circles to the right of the central motifs. To the left are a series of incised lines which are associated with an elongated figure about 15 cm long. This figure is composed of lightly incised lines apparently scratched into the rock surface with a sharp stone. Similar incised lines occur at the engraving site further downstream along the Marne River, described by Gara & Turner.
Figure 9. River Marne Painting Site No. 2. Detail of crayon style and incised motifs.
River Marne Site 3
This site is located a further 300 m north of River Marne Site 2. The paintings occur in a rock-shelter about 2 m high and 3 m wide, near the river. Numerous painted motifs occur on water-stained sections of the southern wall of the shelter. The motifs on the left of Figure 10 are near the floor. They consist of three human stick figures in red and orange ochre, associated with several red arcs and lines of white dots. To the right of these motifs on a sloping wall there are two incomplete human figures in orange ochre and lines of large white elliptical dots. Some red ochre lines done in crayon style occur near these white dots. A faint white 'U'-shaped motif is located to the upper right. On a small water-stained rock surface to the upper left and approximately 1.6 m from the back wall are a group of motifs in red ochre, possibly representing human stick figures holding boomerangs. To the right of these figures a small

River Marne Site 3.

- Red ochre
- Orange ochre
- White ochre
- Red ochre (faint)

Figure 10. River Marne Painting Site No. 3. Detail of motifs.
circular hollow in the rock has been painted in with red ochre. Several crayon style red ochre lines occur nearby. A number of large cores of milky-coloured quartz were noted in a grassy paddock about 30 m west of the shelter.

The paintings at this site are similar to those at the Eden Springs site in the use of white ochre dots, two different coloured pigments and the crayon technique. The three Marne River sites described here are separated from each other by distances of only about 200 m and are aligned along a north-south axis. Evidence of Aboriginal occupation occurs close to each of the three sites.

(10) Saunders Creek
This painting site was found by the writer in 1991 while examining a campsite first recorded by Hossfeld in the 1920s. The paintings occur in a rock overhang in an outcrop of schist boulders that overlooks a tributary of Saunders Creek, about 6 km east-north-east of Springton.

The overhang, which has a southerly aspect, measures about 2 by 2 m and extends back about 6 m. Painted and incised motifs occur on three of the walls (Fig. 11). On the rear wall about a metre above the floor is an elliptical concavity measuring 120 cm long and 70 cm wide. On the surface of this concavity are several very faint white human stick figures, with arms raised above their heads. Some of the figures are joined together in an arrangement similar to the human figures described by Hossfeld at Lartunga. Near these motifs are a group of criss-crossing vertical and diagonal lines which have been lightly incised into the rock surface, apparently with a sharp stone.

On a rock surface near the base of the eastern wall of the shelter there are three faint white ochre human stick figures, one with its arms joined above its head and the others with arms outstretched. Several fine incised lines have been scratched over these figures. On the same wall but nearer the entrance to the shelter there are about 25 black vertical, parallel lines, the longest being about 12 cm. Several vertical black lines cross the others. All these lines have been drawn onto the wall with charcoal. Overlaid onto these drawn lines are a series of diagonal, criss-crossing incised lines (Fig. 12).
Fairy martins have constructed their nests on the upper surfaces of the
overhang but have not encroached upon the art areas. The preservation of the
art is poor, owing to the southerly aspect of the shelter and its frequent
exposure to winter rains. There is no graffiti or other evidence of previous
European visitation to the site. It is surprising that this site was not located
during Hossfeld's examination of the area in the 1920s. However, the paintings
at this site were only identified by this writer on his second visit there when
recent light rain had moistened the surfaces and highlighted the white ochre
figures, making them more visible.

![Diagram of Saunders Creek Rock Shelter](image)

*Figure 11. Saunders Creek Painting Site.*
11) Mount McKenzie

This site, first recorded by the writer in 1991, is the most northerly painting site known in the Mount Lofty Ranges. It is located on the banks of a creek about 600 m west of the North Para River, about 1 km west of Mount McKenzie.

The paintings occur in a micaceous sandstone shelter which faces north. The shelter is 10 m long and 2.7 m high but only 1.6 m wide. Numerous paintings and drawings occur on the sloping walls of this shelter. Most of the motifs have faded and weathered to a considerable degree and only a few are recognisable (Fig. 13). These include a painted human stick figure with arms raised and another human figure. A faint wavy line extends upwards from the right-hand figure and a number of thin red ochre lines occur above and below
the two human figures. A faint white ochre stick figure and a circle with two projections occurs closeby. Some ochre lines done in crayon style also occur below the human figures and on a narrow ledge to the right. Several circular designs and arcs drawn with white ochre occur on a water-stained surface further along the shelter wall.

A number of eroding hearths and a possible burial site occur about 500 m to the south of the site, near the North Para River.

Figure 13. Mount McKenzie Painting Site.
Discussion

All the known painting sites in the Mount Lofty Ranges are located within the territory of the Peramangk tribe, as defined by Tindale \(^7\), except for the Workanda Creek site. As was noted previously, there is some doubt over the antiquity and authenticity of the latter site. It is possible that the motif is merely a fortuitously-shaped natural mark, recently 'touched up' by one of the many visitors to the park to enhance its emu-like appearance. The Mount McKenzie and Kaiser Stuhl sites, the most northerly painting sites known in the Mount Lofty Ranges, are just south of the border between the Peramangk and their northern neighbours, the Ngadjuri. The motifs at the Kaiser Stuhl site are similar to those represented at the painting sites in the Olary region and it is possible that the paintings at the former site reflect Ngadjuri cultural and spiritual symbols. The Mount McKenzie site, on the other hand, is similar, both stylistically and in types of motifs, to other sites further south; it is surprising that these two sites, although only a few kilometres apart, display widely diverging motifs and styles.

The Eden Valley area has been known, since Hossfeld's work in the 1920s, as being relatively rich in Aboriginal rock art. More detailed investigations in this area indicate that a dense cluster of art sites occurs along the River Marne and the upper reaches of Saunders Creek. The River Marne, in particular, has numerous campsites as well as scarred trees along its course and it seems likely that this river was an important route for Aboriginal people moving back and forth between the River Murray and the Mount Lofty Ranges.

The occurrence of criss-crossing incised lines superimposed upon painted motifs at both the River Marne Site 2 and the Saunders Creek site is interesting. At the Saunders Creek site in particular, the criss-cross designs resemble those that the Aborigines cut into possum skins to make them flexible, prior to sewing the skins together to make winter cloaks. \(^8\) It seems that these incised lines more commonly occur at sites in the northern ranges.
All the art sites in the Mount Lofty Ranges are deteriorating to varying degrees. Erosion and weathering and other natural processes such as insect and bird nests, algal growth etc have affected some sites; other sites have been damaged by sheep that shelter in the overhangs and smear the art surfaces with grease. A number of sites have been vandalised by thoughtless individuals, others have apparently been destroyed or hidden by land-owners who mistakenly fear land claims from Aboriginal people if the sites were to become known. In recent years a new threat to painting sites has emerged, that of the moss-rock collectors who, armed with bulldozers and other heavy equipment, remove rocks from outcrops for gardens and landscaping. However, the balance has been redressed to some degree in recent times by a project funded by the Aboriginal Heritage Branch. A specialist in rock art conservation, David Lambert, from the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, was engaged to remove graffiti and wasp nests from two of the Lartunga sites. Studies elsewhere in Australia have indicated that when graffiti is removed from a site the incidence of new graffiti appearing there is dramatically lowered. Since the work at the Lartunga site, and the provision of a visitors’ book within the shelter, little new graffiti has appeared. It is hoped that similar restoration work will be undertaken in the future at other sites in the Mount Lofty Ranges, and elsewhere in the state.

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Endnotes


6 Stirling, op. cit.; Tindale & Sheard, op. cit.

7 Tindale, op. cit.; 217.
