The North Queensland Naturalist

The Journal and Magazine of the North Queensland Naturalists' Club

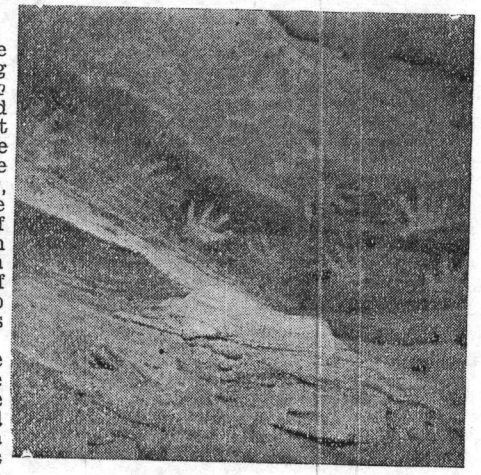
Vol. ~~XVIII~~ XVII CAIRNS, 1st MARCH, 1950. No. 93

SANDSTONE RIDGES OF THE ST. GEORGE

(By D. Veivers).

Twenty-three miles past the Palmer and across the Dividing Range along the route of the overland telegraph, the road crosses the St. George River at its confluence with the Little Kennedy. Several miles before the crossing is reached, a long, narrow ridge of bare sandstone can be observed to the left of the line, running parallel with it to the river, and reforming on the opposite side to run off gradually over several miles into low, grassy hills, with outcrops of exposed sandstone.

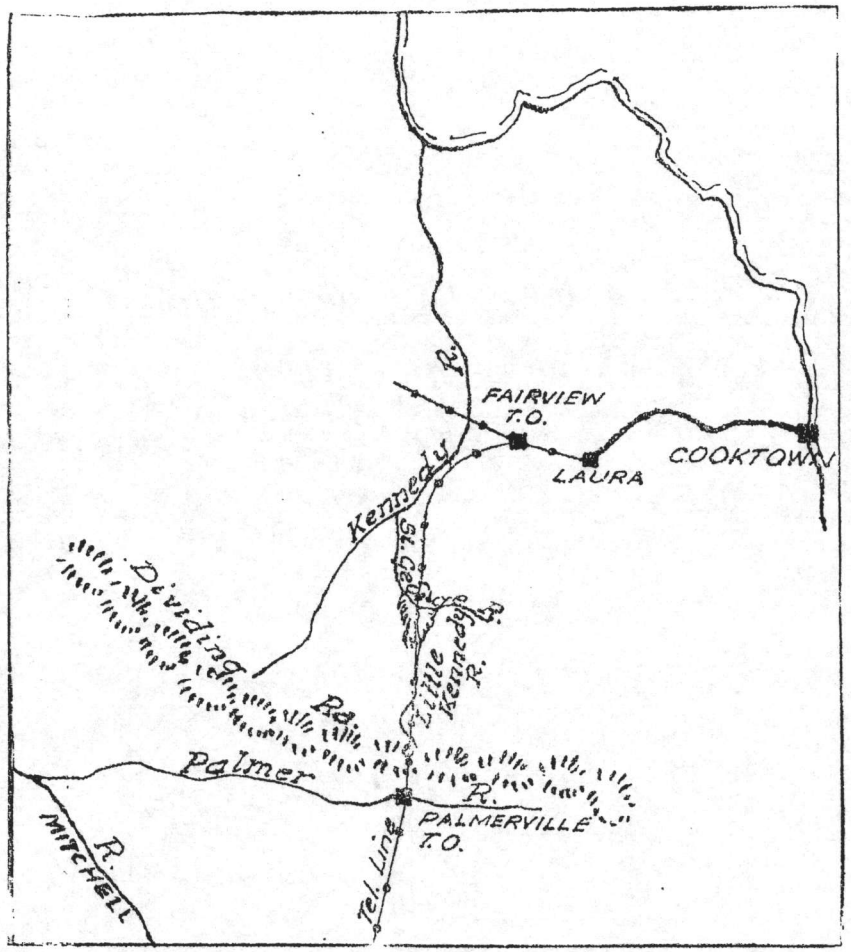
These are the "sandstone ridges of the St. George," where is preserved evidence of the existence of the early aboriginal ...es, who inhabited this region in years past. There the curious shapes and patterns of the sandstone outcrops, eroded by wind and rain, but still displaying in places examples of aboriginal art, are a monument to a race once supreme in this now dead land.



South of the River, the bare sandstone ridge rises abruptly to an elevation of one hundred to one hundred and fifty feet above the level of the surrounding country. Here the cliff face has been eroded by weather, resulting in many places in large overhangs. On these faces can be seen the remains of native stencilling, patterns of hands worked in a red-brown substance, apparently prepared from the dried sap of bloodwood trees. To as high as fifteen and twenty feet up the cliff face these designs extend, although in the higher portions the work of wind and rain has accounted for the erasure of many of them.

Below this section, towards the river, deep crevices run into and often through the ridge, usually from one to three feet wide. Apparently the ridge is the haunt of pigs, wild fowl and wallabies, as their tracks and droppings can be seen both on the summit and at the bottom of the crevices.

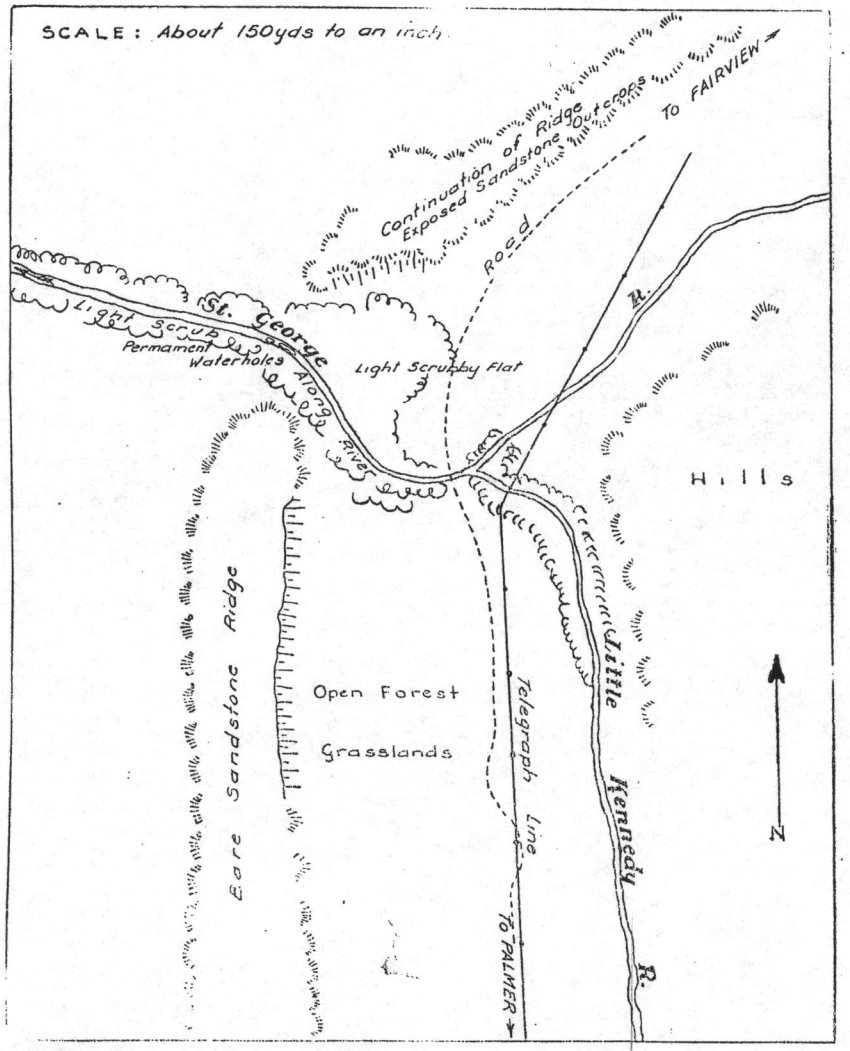
On the north bank of the river the ridge reforms. Here it is mostly a gradual rise to the summit, over grassland with outcrop exposed sandstone. Erosion here too



has played its part, and the result is a curious assembly of mushroom rocks, arches and caverns along the top of the ridge. Here on the faces of rocks and walls of caves, the evidence of native art and stencilling can again be seen. In unexposed places, in caves and sheltered crannies, are the remains of their campfires, often undisturbed.

In the area birdlife is plentiful. Of the many of the more common birds which exist in almost all sections of the Peninsula, by far the most striking is the big "plains" kingfisher, whose attractive blue colour can be picked out anywhere among the trees along the way. The galahs and other parrots of the Peninsula, which occur further South and North, are apparently foreign to this region.

In the scrubby regions several hundred yards downstream from the crossing, brush turkeys abound, not in ones and twos, but in flocks of dozens. Wild, and rapid on their feet, they do not fall easy prey to the hunter. The bower bird also exists in the area, and his skilfully woven playground, decorated with coloured pebbles and chips of rock,



can be seen quite frequently along the river bed. Although not a common bird in the region, the bustard or "plain turkey" may often be seen on the surrounding plains.

Here, too, is the home of wild pigs, their well-worn pads along the river bearing evidence of their numbers. Often they run in herds of thirty to forty, travelling upstream to their camping grounds in the early morning, and returning to the waterholes at dusk. Main item on their diet is the fallen fig from the many fig trees which grow on the bed of the river.

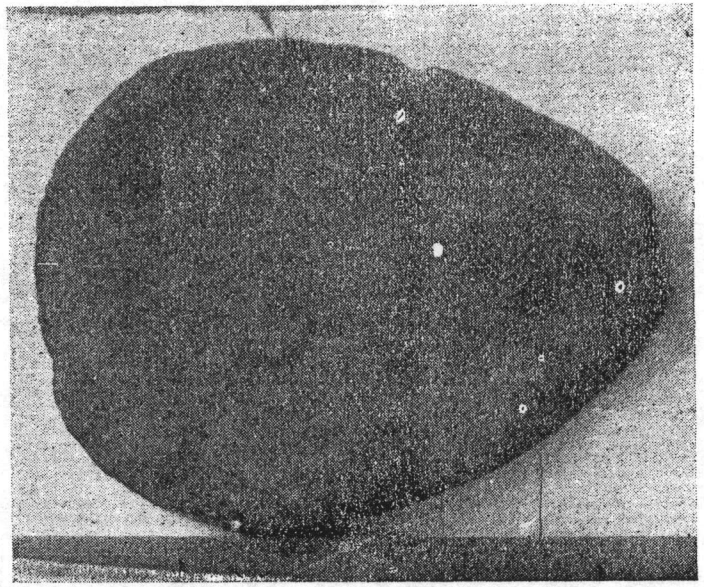
The area is situated in the thirty to forty inch rainfall belt. Although the rivers often rise to a height of thirty feet during the storm period, they flow for perhaps four months only, and dry up, leaving only scat-

tered permanent waterholes.

Today and tomorrow ,this is a dead land, for any hope of its development is a very unreal thing indeed. The centres of its civilisation are being pushed further apart and shortly its insignificant history will be entirely forgotten.

A LARGE GROOVED AXE HEAD

By Keith Kennedy, Curator, Museum Of Music, Townsville



Some of the largest stone axe heads made by the Australian aborigines are to be found on the Tableland of North Queensland, and the examples from the Tully Falls, shown in the illustration, is an exceptionally large specimen of the grooved variety. An idea of its size can be ascertained by comparison with the foot rule in the photograph.

The finder, Mr. J. Campbell, who has kindly presented it to the Townsville Museum of Music, picked it up at the top of the falls after it had been unearthed by a bulldozer, while preliminary work was in progress during 1947 for the Tully Falls Hydro-Electricity Scheme.

The implement is lenticular in section—that is both surfaces are convex, and thin down to an edge at the margin. Its outline is ovate, the broad end being the ground cutting edge. The groove, around which was originally looped the handle, is shallow, averaging about 3 mm., and encircles both surfaces and the top margin, but not the lower margin, and the entire blade has been made by hammer dressing or "pecking," a technique by which the original stone has been shaped by continuous strokes with a hammer stone. A small portion of the butt end has been recently broken off, probably during the excavation, and the cutting edge has been blunted, evidently by use, for the fractures are as patinated as the rest of the blade.

As it has been unearthed by a bulldozer it is unfortunate that data as to how deep it was buried cannot be given.

Measurements are: Length 28 cm.; if the piece broken off at the butt be taken into consideration, the length would be 29 cm., greatest breadth, 22.5 cm.; thickness in centre 3.5 cm. Weight 5 lbs. 12 ozs.

It has been suggested that these large axes were too big for practical use, and might have been made for

(Continued on Page 5)

A LARGE GROOVED AXE HEAD

(Continued from Page 4)

ceremonial purposes, but the worn edge of the above specimen indicates that it had been used for chopping.

In Australia, the aborigines had two methods of hafting. One was to take a pliable length of wood, bend it around the stone head, tie it underneath, then tie or bind the ends which served as the handle. The second method was to use a split stick, between the forks of which was placed the stone head. The ends of the fork were then bound together. In both methods it was usual to add a certain amount of resin or gum, to help the fork or the loop grip the stone.

A groove for hafting stone hammers was employed during the Robenhausian culture of Neolithic Europe, but the axes of that period were not grooved. Instead they were wedged into a slot cut in the wooden handle—a method still in use in parts of Africa for hafting iron axes.

Technically, grooved axe heads are an advance on those without the groove, and according to the theory of the survival of the fittest, should have supplanted the latter. In practice, however, the ungrooved kind has held its own and probably for the reason given to Horne and Aiston (Savage Life in Central Australia, Horne and Aiston, 1924 p. 105) by Urabunna old men that when the aborigine desired to unhaft an axe for the purpose of packing it in a dilly bag for travel, or because the handle had become fractured, a few taps on the butt end would be sufficient to dislodge an ungrooved blade, whereas a grooved head would have to be unbound.

The groove seems to be associated with the "pecking" process ,and it is quite possible that the groove, which had to be pecked out by a hammer stone, suggested the idea of making the entire head by the same process, instead of the flaking techniques used in Palaeolithic times.

NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALISTS' CLUB

President: Dr. H. Flecker, Abbott St., Cairns.

Hon. Sec.: J. Wyer, "Lochinvar," 13 Sheridan St., Cairns.

Meets at School of Arts, usually on second Tuesday in each month at 8 p.m.

Next Meeting, Tuesday, 14th March, 1950.

MEETINGS. Annual General: 13th September, 1949. Annual Report by Retiring President, Mr. J. M. Gray.

Election of Officers: President, Dr. H. Flecker, Vice-Presidents, Messrs. J. M. Gray, A. Read,, A. B. Cummings; Hon. Sec., J. Wyer; Hon. Treas., Mrs. A. Read; Assist. Sec. (Organizing) G. Atkinson; Assist. Sec. (Correspondence), Gordon McLoughlin; Additional Members of Committee Messrs J. Courtney, E. F. Tree, D. R. Peinger; Auditor, Mrs. J. M. Gray: Librarian Mrs. Morley; Panel of Specialists: Botanist, Dr. H. Flecker: Mammalogist, G. B. Stephens; Ornithologist, Mrs. S. E. Stephens; Herpetologist, S. E. Stephens. Ichthyologist, V. Vlasoff; Conchologist, J. Courtney; Carcinologist A. Read: Coleopterist, J. G. Brooks: Lepidopterist, Gordon McLoughlin: Ethnologist, Behrendorff; Arachnologist, H. O. Barkus: Ethnologist, Behrendorff: Geologist, G. Atkinson; Astronomer, H. O. Barkus.

11th October, 1949. Address by Mr. Gordon McLoughlin on Butterflies, illustrated by specimens.

9th November, 1949. Address and display of Minerals from North Queensland by Mr. George Atkinson.

13th December, 1949. Lecture "Watsonville," by Mr. D. R. Peiniger.

10th January, 1950. Address on Marine Fauna Responsible for Injuries to Bathers, by Dr. H. Flecker.

14th February, 1950. Address by Mr. H. O. Barkus entitled "Astronomy."

NEW MEMBERS ELECTED. 11th October, 1949, Mr. Walter Schridde, Cairns; Mrs. C. C. Clauson, 309 Lake St. Cairns.

8th November, 1949. Messrs. John Orrell, Forest Avenue, Edge Hill: G. S. Lumley, Sweet Creek, Cook Highway; B. H. Cook. Kuranda Barracks, Cairns: J. L. H. Wassell, 16 Winifred St., Clayfield, Miss Marie Jean Winter (Junior Member), Cairns.

10th January, 1950. Messrs. T. Herdman. 122 Grafton St., Cairns: J. Hayward, Iron Range: Robert Rijkers, 203 Severin St., Cairns.

NEXT MEETING: 14th March. 1950.

TOWNSVILLE AND DISTRICT NATURALISTS' CLUB, LECTURES AND FIELD DAYS.

The September lecture was given by the Rev. Norman Cruttwell who spoke on his climb up Mt. Simpson in New Guinea with a party of native carriers and the District Officer. Mt. Simpson reaches an altitude of 9972 feet, and he said that until then, had not been climbed by white men. He told of the various zones of vegetation met with during the ascent from the tropical rain forest with its canopy of tree tops at the base to an alpine heath type near the summit. Photographs and some beautifully coloured botanical drawings made by the speaker were projected on the screen. Exhibits after the lecture were, a black and white ringed snake by Mr. Selvage and a piece of fossiliferous rock from Shelly Beach and a stone axe head by the President (K. Kennedy).

September Field day was to Mt. St. John Zoo to study the bird life there.

The October lecturer was Mr. A. Perkin who spoke on Mollusca and their shells. He said that people usually associated shells with the sea, but that they were widely distributed both on land and sea, from the polar regions to the tropics, and were found in salt water, fresh water, and on the land; some genera even lived high up on trees. The curve of the spirals of univalve shells he said was on a definite mathematical ratio, and increased in size as the animal grew. Recently it had been proved that the concentric circles on bivalve shells, also a sign of growth, could indicate the age of the mollusca. To illustrate the talk, pictures of shells of various countries were thrown on the screen. In addition to Mr. Perkin's collection there were exhibited specimens by Mr. and Mrs. Brock, Mrs. Freeman and Mr. Kennedy. Mr. Selvage tabled a twig of a tree on which were congregated numerous larval cases of the cup moth (Boratifera vulperans) and Mr. O'Sullivan brought a young plant of the poisonous milky mangrove.

The October Field excursion was to Cape Pallerenda where a party of members climbed almost to the top of Mt. Marlowe to a cave inhabited by insectivorous bats. Two bats were caught and examined and then liberated. The party then went on to Shelly Beach to study marin life.

Life in the Fiji Islands was the title of the November lecture given by Mr. Biddle. He spoke at great length on the means of transport on the Islands; the boats that run between New Zealand and Fiji and between Australia and Fiji. He spoke about the sugar industry, peanut, copra, banana industries and about the dairy farm that has its own butter factory on the farm. He gave some interesting sidelights on the Indian population and spoke of witnessing a fire walking ceremony by members of the Indian fanatics who, after weeks of preparation can run pieces of steel through their flesh and walk through hot embers and yet take no harm. Mr. Biddle illustrated his lecture with a large number of slides which showed all the aspects of Fijian life mentioned in his lecture .

The November field day took the form of a visit to the home of Mr. and Mrs. S. Brock to see Mr. Brock's large collection of Coleoptera.

The December lecture was given by Mr. Biddle on a trip he took up Cape York Peninsula in a waggon drawn by four horses. He told how he and his wife forded rivers, and how they climbed the mountain ranges until they come to the plains on the other side. He mentioned the fact that although the Burdekin Duck is supposed not to settle on water inhabited by crocodiles, he and his wife saw them swimming on the water, and that night they were both kept awake by the saurians bellowing. He spoke about the various ghost towns on the Peninsula and how the houses, shops, etc., have been abandoned, fully furnished and with crockery and pots and pans still standing on the stoves.

The December field day was to 3-Mile Bridge a short distance from Cape Pallerenda where bird and marine life was observed.

Mr. A. W. Daniels gave the lecture for January. He spoke on the experiences in nature study He spoke of the speed and manner of progression of snakes, and said that from his experience they do not attack, but if a person is between them and their place of refuge they do not deviate, which has given rise to stories of their

TOWNSVILLE AND DISTRICT NATURALISTS' CLUB
LECTURES AND FIELD DAYS.

attacking people. Mr. Daniels spoke of the thick rain forest around Mt. Bartle Frere, where he considers there is still an opportunity for naturalists to find strange animals. Here he saw what appeared to be a tailed frog, but could not catch any before leaving the district. He related stories of wedge-tailed eagles, bats and other wild life, and also told of witnessing when amongst the aborigines of a ritual trial, when one of them had to prove himself innocent by defending himself against selected spear throwers. At the end of the meeting the usual discussion took place.

The January field day was to the Townsville Botanical Gardens to study the trees, ferns, etc., growing there .

ELIZABETH KENNEDY.
Hon. Secretary.

ERRATUM:—This Volume is erroneously numbered Volume XVIII. It should be Volume XVII.