First Record of Painted Aboriginal Rock Art in a South-Western Australian Limestone Cave

Kate Morse*

In November 1982 Mr M. Herne and other local amateur speleologists reported the discovery of two Aboriginal painted hand stencils at Old Kudardup cave some 6 km north-west of Augusta in the Cape Leeuwin-Cape Naturaliste region. (Western Australian Museum Aboriginal Sites Registration Number S1942; National Map 1:100 000 grid reference, Series R611, Sheet 1929 243 058). A Western Australian Museum party recorded and photographed the stencils in March 1983.

Old Kudardup is one of many limestone caves developed in the aeolian calcarenite which caps the Precambrian crystalline rocks of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste block (Lowry 1967). The cave is situated on a limestone ridge densely vegetated with acacia and casuarina thickets, patches of blackboy and low peppermint woodland. Westwards, coastal heath with intermittent patches of open peppermint woodland and closed scrub extends some 4 km to the sea (Beard 1981). The region is well-watered and the forest-heath environment would have provided numerous resources for Aboriginal hunter-gatherers (cf. Dortch 1979: 275).

The two stencils are located on the north wall of the cave, near the entrance, and at the top of a talus slope leading down to a large vaulted chamber some 200 m in diameter. The stencils are approximately 70 cm apart and situated about 2 m above the present surface of the slope. The wall of the stencils is undercut and extensively weathered, and neither of the stencils is very distinct. Both are of a human left hand, possibly of the same individual, and each is made in reddish-brown ochreous paint (Figure 1).

Several artefacts of Eocene fossiliferous chert collected from the floor of the main chamber provide the only other evidence for Aboriginal use of the cave. The presence of the chert suggests that the cave was known and visited by Aborigines some time prior to the Middle Holocene. At this time, sources of the stone, thought to be located on the continental shelf, would have been submerged by post-glacial sea level rise (Glover 1975; 1979; see also Ferguson 1980; Pearce 1977). A partially collapsed pit, dug by persons unknown, and located in the large lower chamber, extends to a depth of some 2 m and reveals a banded sandy deposit but no archaeological material. No other pits have been dug.

Old Kudardup adds to the half dozen caves in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste region known to contain archaeological material, the most noted being the late Pleistocene deposit at Devil’s Lair (Dortch 1979 and refs.). It is unknown whether

* Department of Archaeology, Western Australian Museum, Francis Street, Perth, Western Australia 6000.
the stencils described here are contemporaneous with the fossiliferous chert artefacts. If they are, their probable Late Pleistocene to Middle Holocene age lends support to Maynard's proposal that stencils are used from an early phase in the development of Australian art (Maynard 1976).

The Old Kudardup hand stencils are the first known examples of painted rock art in a south-western Australian limestone cave, and are an important find as they occur in an area previously noted for its conspicuous lack of Aboriginal art sites (Crawford 1972; Davidson 1952; Hallam 1981; Merrilees et al. 1973; Serventy 1952). Nearly all of the very few known south-western art sites have been described or mentioned in publication. These include paintings in two granite rock shelters near York (Hallam 1975: 85, 94; Serventy 1952); enigmatic engraved markings in limestone in Orchestra Shell Cave north of Perth (Hallam 1974), and at Morfitt's Cave south of Mandurah (Dortch 1976: 41); at least two engraved or scratched limestone plaques from Devil's Lair (Dortch 1976), and the recently published animal track engravings on the Scott River near Augusta (Clarke 1983).

Figure 1 Two Aboriginal painted hand stencils, Old Kudardup Cave, south-western Australia. The matchstick is 4 cm long. Photographed by Douglas Elford.
References

Beard, J.S. (1981). The vegetation of the Swan area. 1:1000 000 Vegetation series explanatory notes to Sheet 7. (University of Western Australia Press.)


Guide to Authors

Subject Matter

Reviews, observations and results of research into all branches of natural science and human studies will be considered for publication. However, emphasis is placed on studies pertaining to Western Australia. Full length papers should not normally exceed 30 typed pages. Short communications should not normally exceed three typed pages and this category of paper is intended to accommodate observations, results or new records of significance, that otherwise might not get into the literature, or for which there is a particular urgency for publication. All material must be original and not have been published elsewhere.

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Numbers should be spelled out from one to nine in descriptive text; figures used for 10 or more. For associated groups, figures should be used consistently, e.g. 5 to 10, not five to 10.

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The original and two copies of manuscripts and figures should be submitted to the Editorial Committee, c/- Publications Department, Western Australian Museum, Francis Street, Perth, Western Australia 6000. They must be in double-spaced typescript on A4 sheets. All margins should be at least 30 mm wide. Tables plus headings and legends to illustrations should be typed on separate pages. The desired positions for insertion of tables and illustrations in the text should be indicated in pencil. Tables should be numbered consecutively, have headings which make them understandable without reference to the text, and be referred to in the text.

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In papers dealing with historical subjects references may be cited as footnotes. In all other papers references must be cited in the text by author and date and all must be listed alphabetically at the end of the paper. The names of journals are abbreviated according to World List of Scientific Periodicals. The use of ‘unpublished data’ or ‘personal communication’ is discouraged.

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Papers and short communications are reviewed by at least two referees and acceptance or rejection is then decided by an editorial committee.

The senior author is sent two sets of galley proofs (one to be retained) and one set of page proofs which must be returned promptly.

The senior author will receive fifty free offprints of the paper. Additional offprints can be ordered at page proof stage.
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