

Aboriginal Rock Markings

lutruwita is the country of Tasmanian Aboriginal people and everyone has a responsibility to protect our heritage.



Aboriginal rock marking (engraving)

What are Aboriginal rock markings?

Rock marking is the term used in Tasmania to describe the deliberate creation of marks or images on a rock surface by Aboriginal people in the past. There are over 60 recorded rock markings throughout Tasmania, which represent some of the oldest rock marking sites in the world. Most Tasmanian rock markings are similar to rock art found on mainland Australia. However their specific meaning and function have unfortunately been lost to time. It is possible that rock markings were created for a range of meanings and functions, such as for ceremonial places or initiations. They may have also been used as a marker for boundaries between nations or language groups; to signal nearby resource availability; to communicate ideas or stories of the Dreaming or to provide directions. There are two

broadly recognised categories of rock markings in Tasmania – paintings and engravings.

How were Aboriginal rock markings made?

Engravings are made by pecking, abrading, hammering or grinding away the surface of a rock to create a mark or image. Typically in Tasmania, engraved rock markings take the form of ovals, concentric circles, solid or dotted lines, cupules and speckled clusters. There are also registered rock marking sites that depict bird tracks, hands and human-like figures.

Paintings are made by adding pigment to the surface of a rock. The 'paint' used is derived from ground ochre (haematite or iron oxide) mixed with a variety of animal fat, water, blood and/or saliva. Painted rock markings may be applied using a finger or brush, or by stenciling - that is to spray the paint

- Aboriginal rock markings are extremely rare and culturally significant
- There are two forms: engraved and painted
- Engravings are commonly found in coastal zones
- Paintings are predominately found in rockshelters
- The specific meaning of Tasmania's rock markings is unknown, but they may indicate:
 - Ceremony
 - Boundary or resource markers
 - An expression of art
 - Communication of ideas or stories
 - Directions



Aboriginal rock marking (painting/stencil)

from one's mouth over an object, usually a hand, to create a negative image.

Where are Aboriginal rock markings found?

Rock markings can be found in any area that has rock surfaces suitable for engraving or painting. Many of Tasmania's engraving sites are located near the coast or a water source. Painting sites are mostly found within rockshelters. Rock markings have been found on granite, limestone and sandstone. After centuries of weathering some of these are not easy to see.

Aboriginal or natural rock markings?

Rock markings can be confused with natural rock weathering caused by wind, water and plant erosion. Rock markings tend to show deliberate and regular shapes or lines. They can also be applications of pigment on the rock surface. Rock markings are sometimes similar to non-Aboriginal markings made by surveyors

and prospectors. Recent (non-Aboriginal) markings made on rock can be determined through a lack of weathering (exposure) over the marking. If you are unsure or suspect you have located an Aboriginal rock marking, please contact Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania for advice.

Why are rock markings important?

Rock markings are highly valued by the Aboriginal community, and scientifically, on account of their rarity and ability to teach humanity about the past. It is not uncommon to find other Aboriginal site types in close association with rock markings. Rock markings can therefore provide a greater understanding of past

Aboriginal cultural landscapes. The style of Tasmanian rock markings are unique from those found on the mainland from the same period, and therefore are of world significance. Rock markings are extremely fragile, which is why their location is rarely made public, and why it is so important to avoid physically impacting rock marking surfaces.

Aboriginal rock markings are protected

Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural material or sites are defined as 'relics' and therefore protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1975* (the Act). It is an offence to destroy, damage, deface, conceal, remove or otherwise interfere with a relic. It is also an offence not to report the finding of a relic. So if you suspect that an Aboriginal rock marking has been discovered during your activity, do not interfere with the site. Report the site to Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania (AHT).

Provide the location of the site and images on the Aboriginal Heritage Site Reporting Form at www.aboriginalheritage.tas.gov.au/forms and forward to aboriginal@heritage.tas.gov.au. AHT will provide further advice in accordance with the Act.

Please help to preserve Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural sites by reporting their presence to Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania.

Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania
Natural and Cultural Heritage Division
Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment
GPO Box 44 Hobart TAS 7001

Telephone: **1300 487 045** email: aboriginal@heritage.tas.gov.au
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