

Aboriginal rock markings

lutruwita is the Country of Tasmanian Aboriginal people and we all have a responsibility to protect Aboriginal cultural 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 sixty 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 also have been used as a marker for boundaries between nations or language groups; to signal the availability of nearby resources; 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 were 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.

Painted rock markings were made by adding pigment to the surface of a rock, which may have been applied using a finger or brush, or by stencilling (spraying paint from the mouth over

Summary:

- Aboriginal rock markings are extremely rare and culturally significant.
- There are two forms of rock markings, engravings and paintings.
- Engravings are commonly found in coastal zones.
- Paintings are predominately found in rockshelters.
- The specific meaning of Tasmania's rock markings is unknown. They may be an expression of art or they may indicate:
 - a ceremony;
 - a boundary or resource;
 - ideas or stories;
 - directions.



Aboriginal rock marking (painting/stencil)

an object, usually a hand, to create a negative image). The paint was derived from ground ochre (haematite or iron oxide) combined with animal fat, water, blood and/or saliva.

Where are Aboriginal rock markings found?

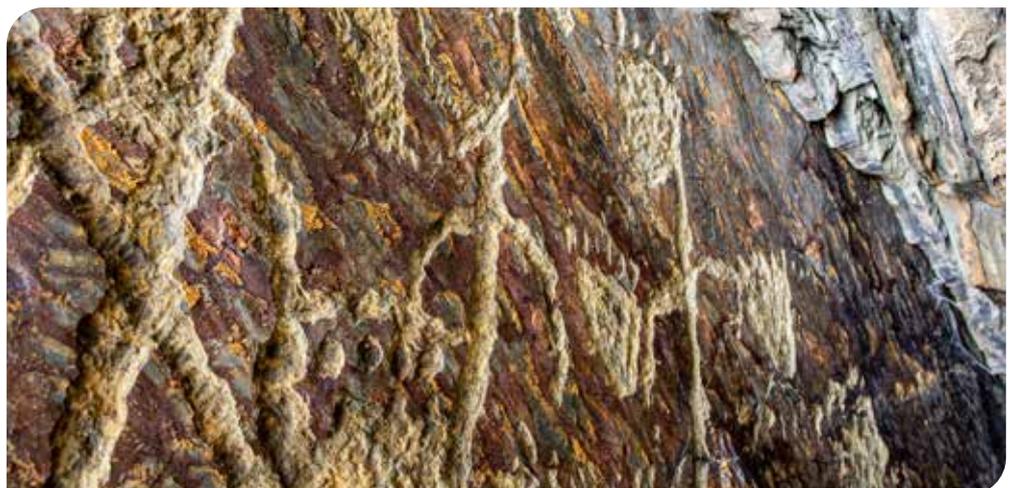
Rock markings can be found in any area that has rock surfaces suitable for engraving or painting. Many Aboriginal engraving sites in Tasmania have been found on granite, limestone and sandstone near the coast or a water source. Painting sites are mostly found within rockshelters. After centuries of weathering,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

Aboriginal or natural rock markings?

Aboriginal rock markings tend to show deliberate regular shapes or lines but can be confused with natural rock weathering caused by wind, water and plant erosion. They can sometimes be applications of pigment on the rock surface similar to non-Aboriginal markings made by surveyors and prospectors. A lack of weathering (exposure) over the marking may indicate recent, non-Aboriginal markings.

Why are rock markings important?

Rock markings are highly valued by the Aboriginal and scientific communities because of their rarity and ability to teach humanity about the past. It is not uncommon to find other Aboriginal site types in close proximity to rock markings. They can therefore provide a greater understanding of past Aboriginal cultural landscapes. Rock markings are extremely fragile and to avoid possible impacts to the rock surface, their location is rarely made known to the public.



Rock markings.

Aboriginal rock markings are protected

Aboriginal rock markings are defined as relics under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1975* and are therefore protected. 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. If you suspect that an Aboriginal rock marking has been discovered during your activity, do not interfere with the site.

Report the location and provide images of the site by using the Aboriginal Heritage Site Reporting Form at: www.aboriginalheritage.tas.gov.au

Forms can be forwarded to: aboriginalheritage@dpac.tas.gov.au

Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania staff will provide further advice in accordance with the legislation.

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

Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania
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Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania
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Telephone: **1300 487 045**
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