

I.

ROCK SCULPTURINGS ON TRAPRAIN LAW, EAST LOTHIAN.

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Traprain Law, so well known by the important archaeological discoveries made there in recent years, has provided yet another notable find. Where the north-east shoulder of the hill falls sharply away large



Fig. 1. Rock Sculptures on Traprain Law: view from east.

outcrops of rock (a phonolite) can be seen protruding through the turf. For a considerable period great quantities of stone have been removed from this part for supplying material for road metal. In October 1931, when preparations were being made for taking in a new area for quarrying, which entailed the removal of some 2 feet of superimposed earth and turf, there was laid bare a portion of the rock-surface almost entirely covered with sculpturings of an unusual character (fig. 1). The discovery of the first part (Area A), which measured about 6 feet square, was soon followed by the exposure of two similarly carved but smaller portions (B and C), while a fourth (D), the smallest of all with a single design only, was found some weeks later about 15 yards west of the first exposed area and just below the north-east corner of the rampart of the fort on the top of the hill. By good fortune our late Fellow Major W. A. Baird happened to be in the vicinity at the time when the discovery was made, and on his attention being drawn to what Mr A. G. Robertson, the quarry superintendent, recognised as something unusual he advised that the Museum authorities should be communicated with. This was done and I visited the site. Photographs were taken and rubbings made, but owing to technical difficulties, high winds and bad weather, these were not so satisfactory as desired. The work of the quarry had to go on, however, and finally, thanks to His Majesty's Office of Works, plaster casts were made under the direction of Mr James S. Richardson, H.M. Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Scotland. These, after being transferred to the Museum, were treated in a manner so that all marks on the surface, both natural and artificial, should show clearly, and it was from these prepared casts that the photographs illustrating this paper were made. The relative position of the inscribed rocks is shown in fig. 2. For purposes of facilitating description the largest of these (Area A) has been photographed with a series of white tapes so adjusted as to divide its surface into nine different sections, each of which will be described separately so far as it is possible to do so, but in the main the illustrations will have to speak for themselves.

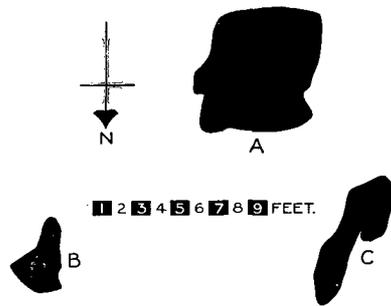


Fig. 2. Rock Sculptures at Traprain: relative positions.

AREA A.

Area A (fig. 3) measures 6 feet 4 inches from north to south and 6 feet 6 inches from east to west. The surface is irregular, as there are



Fig. 3. View of Area A divided into sections.

hollows in the centre and at the north or lower end, a stepped portion at the north-east corner, and numerous channels at different places. In

spite of these natural hindrances the surface, though much weathered, had so many smooth places that the greater part is covered with incised designs.

*Section 1* (fig. 4).—Here there are only a few incised lines, but the chief point of interest is the stepped cross of fourteenth-century date. It is thus apparent that the sculpturings, or part of them, were exposed at that time, and it may be that they, though of pagan origin, were still being resorted to by the inhabitants of the district to carry out rites

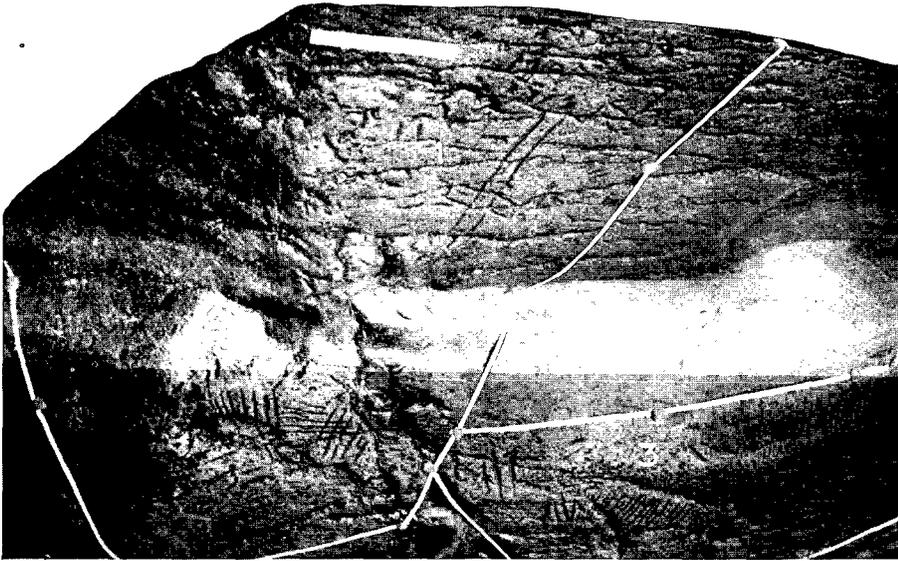


Fig. 4. Area A, section 1, showing Calvary Cross.

which had come down from prehistoric times, and that for the purpose of exorcism the local clergy had carved the Christian emblem.

*Section 2* (fig. 5).—There are no markings on this portion, but one side of a natural hollow in the rock has been worn smooth as if metal blades had been sharpened on it.

*Section 3* (fig. 5).—Groups of parallel lines, grid and ladder-like designs, cover the greater part of the surface. Near the right-hand bottom corner is a small cup within three incised rings, the diameter of the outermost, which is incomplete, being  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches. From the centre of the cup two diverging lines run to the left and continue outside the rings until they ultimately merge into parallel lines. Another line, deeply incised, crosses these at right angles, and from the lower side a number droop from the rings.

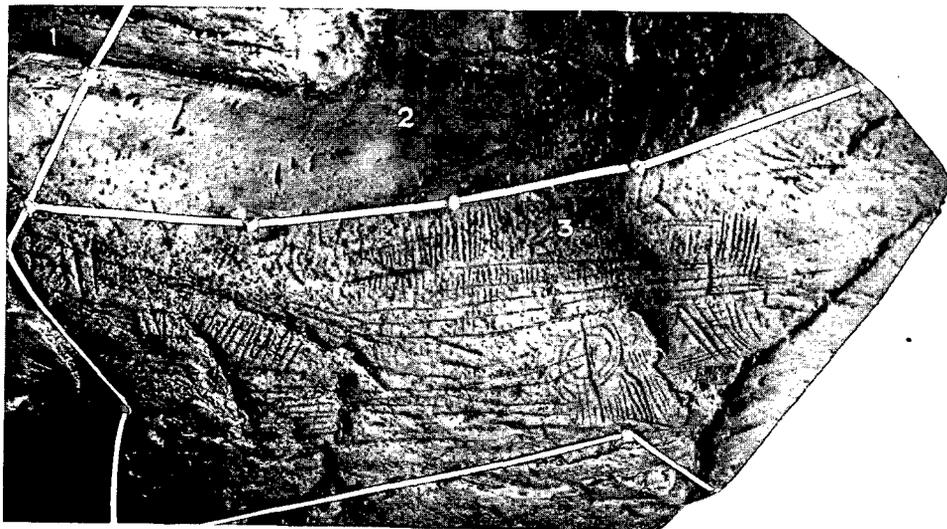


Fig. 5. Area A, sections 2 and 3.



Fig. 6. Area A, section 4.

*Section 4* (fig. 6).—The surface is much weathered and portions of the skin have broken away. In the centre is a rudely formed grid. Above the grid there are other roughly parallel incised lines, but the continuity of many of them has been interrupted by disintegration

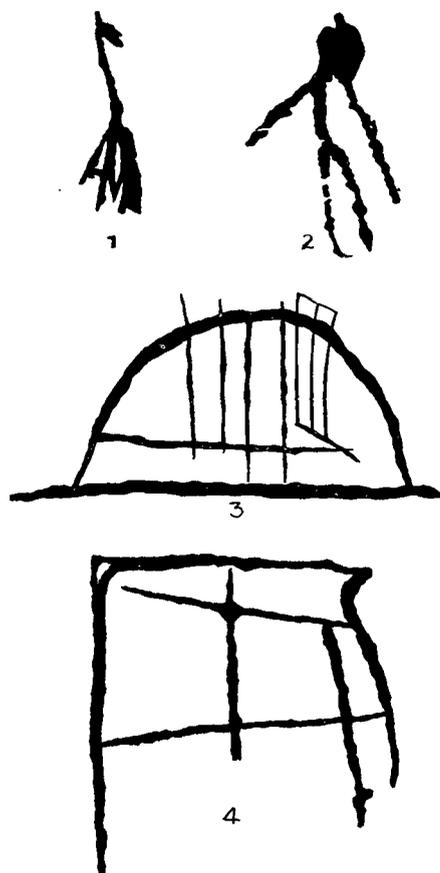


Fig. 7. Nos. 1 and 2, Conventionalised figures of human beings. Nos. 3 and 4, Signs resembling so-called tectiform symbols. ( $\frac{1}{2}$ .)

of the rock. Near the right-hand corner is a small design 2 inches in length, marked by a white cross which may represent a conventionalised human figure (fig. 7, No. 1).

*Section 5* (fig. 8).—At the extreme right is a natural cavity in the centre of the rock practically covered with incised lines running at various angles. More striking, however, is the area to the left, isolated on one

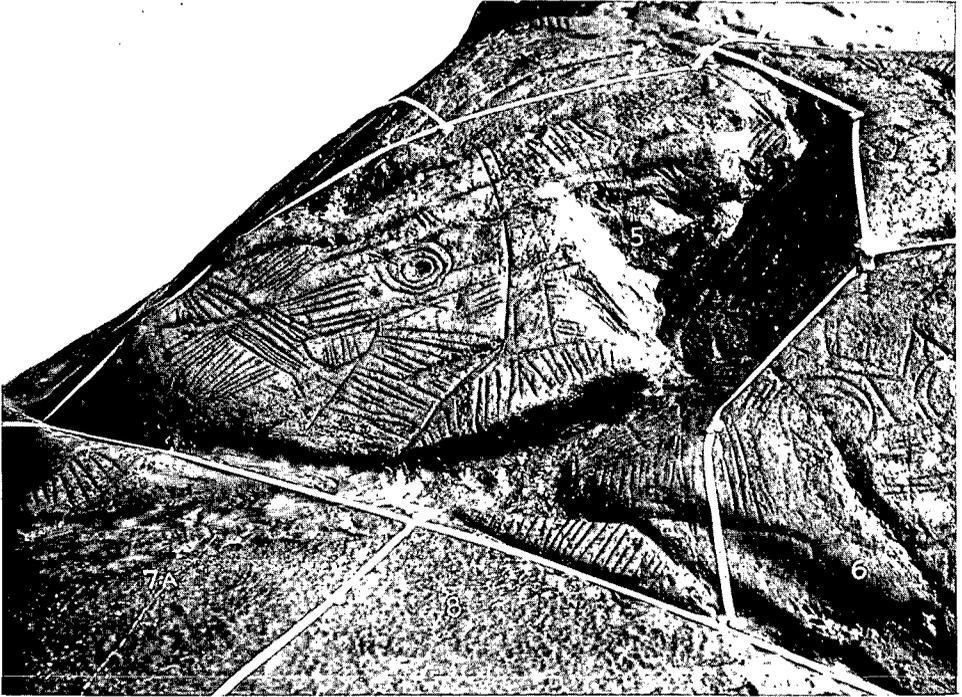


Fig. 8. Area A, section 5.



Fig. 9. Area A, section 6.

side by a curved line and on its other sides by natural fissures, the one at the bottom having been artificially enlarged. In this portion there can be seen a cup surrounded by three incised rings rather coarsely executed, the outermost measuring  $2\frac{7}{8}$  inches in diameter. To the left and a little below the cup- and ring-mark is a figure which has a resem-



Fig. 10. Area A, section 7.

blance to a tectiform symbol of the palæolithic and later periods on the Continent (fig. 7, No. 3). Still farther to the left is a design consisting of a number of nearly parallel lines which converge a little at one end. From the sides of this group others diverge outwards at slightly different angles. There is here a similarity to the pectiniform or comb-like symbol found in caves and rock-shelters on the Continent. Below, in the right-hand corner, like an island in the gutter, a pointed oval portion of the rock has been scored with transverse lines.

*Section 6* (fig. 9).—In the lower part is a grid with slightly convex sides

at the lower end of which a ladder-like design is tacked on at an angle. Above the grid and a little to the right are a number of deeply cut lines approximately parallel. Both to the right and left of these are other lines running at right angles but more finely engraved. Near the centre of the picture and marked with a white cross is a small design which may

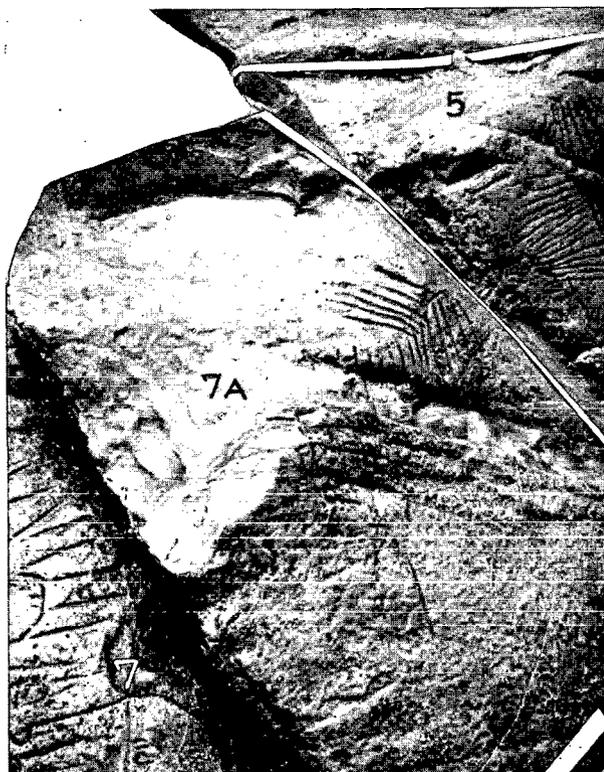


Fig. 11. Area A, section 7A.

represent a human figure highly conventionalised (fig. 7, No. 2). It is formed by a small hollow, which represents the head, and single strokes for the arms and one for the body. The latter bifurcates to form the legs. In the upper left-hand corner (but upside down, as seen in fig. 9) is what may be described as a sign having a resemblance to the tectiform symbol, representing perhaps a hut, tent, shelter, or trap. In the centre between the outer uprights of this symbol are several incised lines (fig. 7, No. 4). Below are two cup- and ring-markings, each consisting of a small pecked hollow within two concentric incised circles, the outermost

rings measuring  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches in diameter. Breaking the continuity of the rings is a rudely pecked line which joins the two cups. To the right and nearer the centre is at least one other cup- and ring-mark made similarly. The other portion of the pecked design may also be a cup- and ring-mark roughly executed.



Fig. 12. Area A, section 9.

*Sections 7 and 7A* (figs. 10 and 11).—The north-easterly and lower corner consists of a ledge 5 inches below the general level of the rock. Near the centre is a pecked hollow surrounded by an irregularly incised ring. Depending obliquely from this is a sub-oval design, the whole resembling a swaddled human figure, the total length of which is 10 inches. On either side of the upper part of the figure are approximately parallel incised lines. From the middle of the left side and extending downwards and round the foot are a number of radiating lines.<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Compare with the incised drawing on a stone from the Azilian de Sordes, Landes, France, published in the *Congrès International d'Anthropologie préhistorique*, Geneva, 1912, and reproduced in *La Pileta*, fig. 24, p. 59.

surface on the right side has disintegrated. On the upper portion of this section there is a herring-bone design (fig. 11, No. 7A).

*Section 8.*—In this section there are only a few indistinct lines.

*Section 9* (fig. 12).—This appears to have been covered with grid-like patterns. The best one shows clearly in the illustration. It measures  $7\frac{3}{4}$  inches in length and 6 inches in greatest breadth. Five bars running one way are crossed about right angles by twenty-one others.

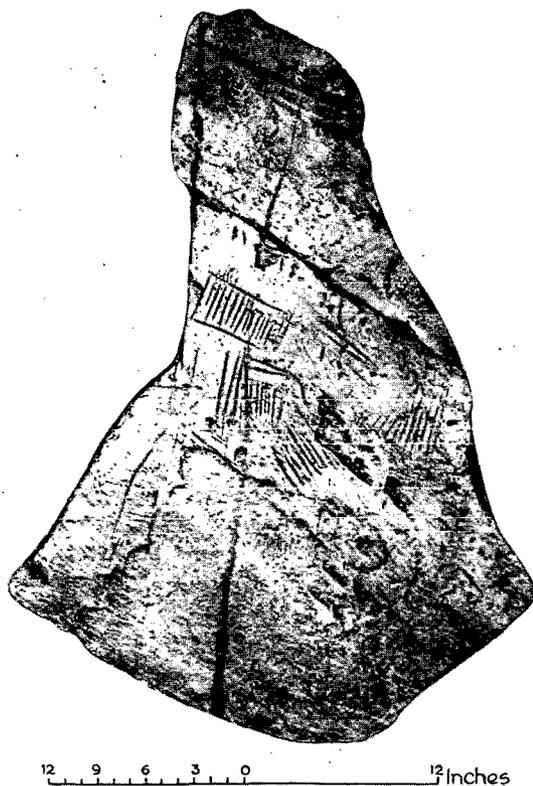


Fig. 13. Area B.

#### AREA B.

Area B (fig. 13).—This area measures 4 feet in length by 2 feet 11 inches in greatest breadth. On the left-hand side below a natural channel is a ladder-like pattern and near the right-hand corner at the bottom

a cup- and ring-mark. A few inches to the right is a curved line which appears to connect with the ring. Both cup- and ring-mark and the curved line have been made by pecking, but it cannot be said definitely that the two are conjoined.

#### AREA C.

Area C (fig. 14).—This part measures 8 feet 3 inches from north to south and 2 feet 10 inches from east to west at its widest part. The natural channels on its surface have been artificially enlarged, and on the left side, just above the second channel from the top, there is a cup- and ring-mark formed by pecking. The diameter of the outer ring is  $3\frac{5}{8}$  inches. The other designs are roughly formed grids, incised lines nearly parallel, and others which converge at one end to form a tuning-fork figure.

#### AREA D.

Area D (fig. 15).—This portion is well preserved and measures 1 foot  $11\frac{1}{2}$  inches by 1 foot  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch. It contains a single design consisting of a small cup contained within seven incised and roughly concentric circles, the outer going only half-way round. From the cup depend three lines, through which the rings do not pass.

The markings on the rocks at Traprain, although unusual, are not unique. There is in the Museum a small boulder of greenstone from Harelawside, Grantshouse, Berwickshire,<sup>1</sup> which bears a small cup- and ring-mark and a rectangular grid similar in technique and design to those at Traprain (fig. 16). Also, from the lower end of the grid there hang two pecked lines which converge slightly. At the end of the one on the left near the grid is a small pecked hollow, and another is placed centrally between the lines. The distance between Harelawside and Traprain is not far (about 20 miles), but the combination of cup and ring and the grid is so striking that the drawings at both places might have been made by the same artist, or by another who was familiar with the meanings of the emblems. In England at the Harrow Hill flint mine excavation, grid markings, analogous to those at Traprain but unassociated with cup- and ring-marks, were found inscribed on the walls of the shaft of one of the galleries, and a study of the excellent reproduction of these in the *Sussex Arch. Coll.*, vol. lxxvii. p. 123, No. 6, pl. vii., will show how close the resemblance is. The mine workings date to the

<sup>1</sup> *Berwickshire Naturalists' Club*, vol. xxvii., pl. xxi., p. 390.

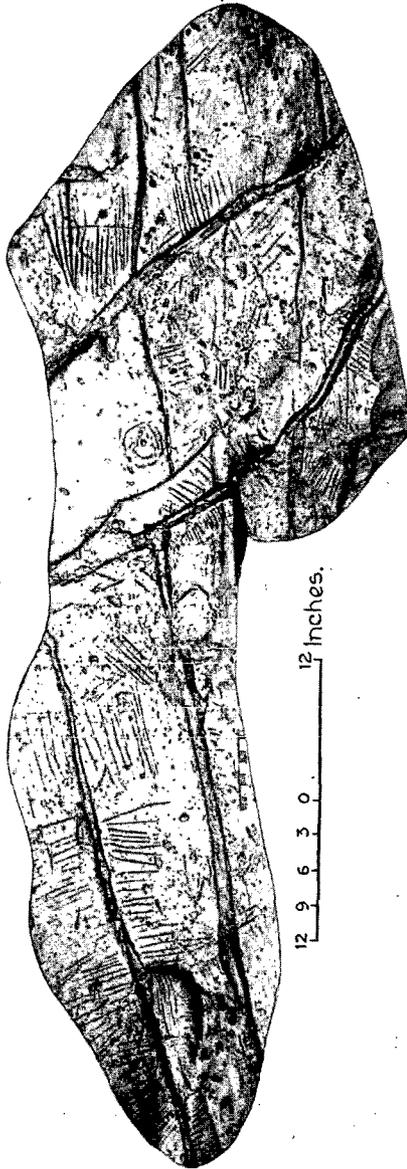


Fig. 14. Area C.



Fig. 15.

late Neolithic Period. At Ilkley in Yorkshire, where there are a number of sculptured rocks with cup- and ring-marks and other designs, certain of the cup- and ring-markings are conjoined with a ladder-like pattern



Fig. 16. Sculptured Block from Harelawside, Berwickshire.

and some have ladder patterns depending from the rings.<sup>1</sup> In Ireland, at Slieve-na-Calliaghe, near Loughcrew (on stones which form part of the interior chambers of the cairns there), a few of the incised designs have a likeness to some of the geometrical patterns at Traprain, but spirals, cup- and ring-marks, discs, and other curvilinear designs greatly

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of the British Arch. Assoc.*, vol. xxxv. pp. 15-25.

preponderate.<sup>1</sup> To go farther afield, however, there is in France, carved on rocks in the region of the Grès de Fontainebleau, a number of geometrical figures comparable with ours, although I have been informed by the Abbé Breuil that the technique is different. There is some doubt as to the date of these, but it is not earlier than Neolithic and may be later.<sup>2</sup>

Comparisons could also be made between the patterns on the Traprain rocks and the carved and painted signs in other countries dating from the Palæolithic Period to later times. For instance, there are at La Pileta, Malaga, Spain,<sup>3</sup> painted in coal black on the walls of a cave, a number of geometrically conventionalised signs comparable with our carvings. In the same cave there are others assigned to earlier periods, but the *signes noirs* are the latest of the series. This particular phase of art comes under the heading of the Spanish third group of paintings which persisted in that country through the Neolithic Period and into Chalcolithic times. But these are resemblances only and do not betoken an early date for our inscribed rocks.

How the actual cutting and scoring was done it is difficult to say. The weathered skin of the rock could have been cut equally well with either a sharpened flint or a metal tool. The cuts vary from  $\frac{1}{8}$  of an inch in depth to a mere scratch. The section in some is V-shaped and in others the bottom of the V is flattened. Occasionally the implement appears to have been applied more than once to the same cut until the desired effect was produced, and from the appearance of some of these one is inclined to favour the use of a metal tool. Such pecking as there is on the stone could have been done equally well with a stone or a metal implement.

To deal with the vexed problem as to what these petroglyphs mean is not the purpose of this report. One can hardly believe that they are but meaningless figures made in some idle moment by a primitive artist. The work of inscribing the rock-surface was in itself laborious, and certain well-known elements of design have entered into its composition, such as the familiar cup- and ring-mark of the Bronze Age, the symbol which gives us our clue to the date. These carvings and paintings are often found in the darkest corners and recesses of caves and on exposed rocks not easily accessible. Among archæologists who have made a special study of this art<sup>4</sup> the general consensus of opinion is that they may

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings*, vol. xxvii, pp. 294-338.

<sup>2</sup> *Bulletin de la Société Préhistorique Française*, vol. ix., 1912, pp. 537-551.

<sup>3</sup> *La Pileta*, chap. vi., Institut de Paléontologie Humaine, Breuil, Obermaier, and Verner, Monaco, 1915.

<sup>4</sup> For bibliographies on this subject see Burkitt's *Prehistory* and Obermaier's *Fossil Man in Spain*. Also Steward, *Petroglyphs of California and Adjoining States*, and Afrikanische Felszeichnungen, in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 1911, p. 141.

have belonged to some particular cult and used for purposes of magic or the performance of traditional rites, and that these caves and rocks with their peculiar delineations may have been sanctuaries or sacred places.

I have to express my thanks to those friends, too numerous to mention here, who have suggested various solutions for the elucidation of the carvings. The Society is indebted to the County Council of East Lothian for presenting such portions of the original rock as it was possible to cut out, and to Mr A. G. Robertson, quarry superintendent, for his invaluable help. We have also to thank His Majesty's Office of Works for presenting casts of the marked rocks, so that we have now in our Museum a permanent record of one of the most extraordinary petroglyphs ever discovered in Scotland, and on which perhaps more light may be shed in the future.