

Surveys of the Flinders Ranges, 1905 to about 1913

Herbert Basedow published an article on the rock engravings of the Flinders Ranges region of South Australia in 1914. It was the first time these 'relics of the unique type of aboriginal art', as he referred to them, had been brought to the attention of the scientific world. Basedow had undertaken research for this article, which was published in the *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* of Great Britain, on several trips he had made to the Flinders Ranges in the years 1905–07 and 1910–11, as well as one undated trip between early 1911 and about 1913. He initially visited the region to carry out geological examinations on behalf of the South Australian Mines Department. The later visits may have been solely to continue his earlier investigations into the engravings.

Basedow first came into contact with the rock engravings during a geological exploration trip in the Yudanamutana district in 1906. However, one of the few dated photographs taken by Basedow in the Flinders Ranges — a lantern slide showing rock engravings at Balparana, north-east of Leigh Creek — is labelled in Basedow's hand with the year 1905. This apparent confusion is compounded by the dearth of available information on Basedow's activities in the Flinders Ranges. There are no known diaries for these trips. The dates for Basedow's visits to the Flinders Ranges have been assessed from geological reports and newspaper articles.

Another photograph, which exists only as a lantern slide labelled in Basedow's hand, shows that Basedow was in the region during February 1907, when he was photographed (or took his own photograph) at a place

east of Lyndhurst. Lyndhurst, on the plains just west of the Flinders Ranges, is the next main centre on the North–South Railway north of Leigh Creek. Basedow's purpose in being there in 1907 is unknown but it was most likely to undertake geological work. On this trip he photographed engravings at Wilkindinna, about 15 kilometres from Balparana and 69 kilometres east-north-east of Leigh Creek. Again, the identification is from a label in Basedow's hand on a lantern slide. His next documented visit to the Flinders Ranges occurred during the latter part of 1910, followed by another early in 1911.

As was generally the case with Basedow's discussions on Aboriginal rock paintings and engravings, the information he provided was largely descriptive. He did not record any details about the significance of the engravings to Aboriginal people. Instead he claimed that the people he spoke to knew nothing about them. A more plausible explanation, perhaps, is that the Aboriginal people he encountered were reluctant to communicate on such matters with a stranger.

Basedow was convinced the engravings of the Flinders Ranges were of some antiquity. As with all scientists and researchers of his time, he was hampered by the lack of direct dating techniques available. However he did find evidence that he felt justified his claim; for example, where engravings had become misaligned through faulting and the entire rock surface later coated with silica deposits, as is typical with rocks in arid areas. He was also convinced that some of the engraved track marks represented those of long extinct animals.

**Red Gorge, South
Australia** 1905 –
about 1913

reproduced from glass
plate negative