ON THE CORDOO—AND ELSEWHERE:

Sunday, August 4, saw our most venturesome excursion yet, when twenty-two cars ventured into the mulga in the Water Board territory over the mountain, in the teeth of a howling westerly. The unexpectedly large number of cars on rough bush tracks with few places for passing or turning, the difficulty of communication under the prevailing weather conditions, and the novelty of the circumstances, gave the organiser (Mrs. Shaw) and her offsiders plenty of headaches; but they are to be congratulated on the originality of the idea, their readiness to try something different, the effort put into it and their resourcefulness. We are especially grateful to Mr. Frank Todd, one of the Water Board rangers, who gave up his Sunday to be our guide—without his local knowledge the trip would have been impossible. There can be few, if any, who made the trip who do not think it was well worth while, for we saw many and various things that we would have no chance to see in the ordinary way—the aboriginal drawings on the upper Cordeaux, the sharpening stones on the Cataract, the last remains of the once flourishing settlement at Sherbrooke, and the Loddon Falls, once famous as a beauty-spot.

The notes on the Cordeaux drawings which follow are reprinted from the excursion notes prepared by Mrs. Shaw—and for these too the Society is grateful to her.

ABORIGINAL ART, CORDEAUX:

The aboriginal art cave at Cordeaux is in the territory of a group from the Wodi Wodi tribe. This tribe had a secure economic life in a well watered environment stocked with game and fish, and a varied supply of plant food. Life’s main worries lay in the constant danger of raids by other groups and in the evil of sorcery. They were a forest dwelling group but the large marine creature drawn there indicates that either they visited the coast for barter and ceremonies, or it was done by coastal visitors to their sacred cave.

Although the cave is remarkably commodious and comfortable for habitation purposes, an archaeological investigation of the black ashy sand floor only yielded several dozen unused stone flakes and one or two implements, no more than would be left by the casual visits of the men for ritual purposes. It was a religious section of their territory and therefore not visited by the women or young men of the tribe.

The art preserved in the Cordeaux cave is typical of a style or type of cave art found throughout the Great Dividing Range and coastal scarp from south eastern Queensland to south of the Shoalhaven River.

The cave is remarkable in that it represents four phases of art. Art was part of their religious life, and they felt the constant retouching of the paintings and carvings kept them in touch with their ancestors’ spirits and ensured success in their hunting. It is in this study of superimposed drawings that experts are beginning to work out the interesting background of the pictograph. It enables them to answer in part the commonly asked question of the age of the paintings. It is obvious that they extend from the time of the white settlement back into the remote past, believed to be many thousands of years for the beginning of the stencil period. It is possible that stencilling is as old as man himself in Australia.

Hand stencils represent the earliest form of primitive art. A second stage is in the red ochre figures forming a frieze. For some reason red lost its popularity. Then the third stage was added, a black charcoal and white ochre combination. Yellow ochre paintings represent the most recent addi-
tions to these precious works.

To make a stencil the native blew the paint from his mouth over the object placed on the rock. A small number of hand stencils may be seen.  
The series of black and white drawings is unique in eastern N.S.W. The top series decorated with line designs range from typical human figures on the left to frog-like figures on the right, and it is impossible to decipher just what they represent.

The plump bird, almost 4-ft. high, embodies the kind of emu the aboriginal hunters always desired to kill. This could be media for hunter's magic. It is interesting to note that the emu was once a familiar creature in the area.

The large marine creature, almost 12-ft. long, is the biggest charcoal drawing yet found in eastern N.S.W.

Commonly regarded as an eel, the long black and yellow figure is a subject well known among the rock engravings in the Sydney Hawkesbury district, and is regarded by experts as probably a rainbow serpent.

Also pictured are snakes, seed pods or fruits, a leaping wallaby 5-ft. long and a number of human figures.

The preservation of these cave drawings is an extremely difficult problem. Not only do natural weathering agencies like summer heat and winter cold affect them, but water seeping through cracks in the cave walls softens the rock and results in pieces falling off or the whole surface crumbling away to sand. The water also washes out the drawings. Added to these destructive agencies are the human vandals who engrave and scribble among the drawings. To prevent them being obliterated in this way the Water Board, at the request of the Illawarra Natural History Society, has erected a strong wire screen across the rock shelter.

AUGUST MEETING:

The August meeting took the form of a Members' Night. The first speaker, Mr. Fred Healy (Councillor) gave us a quick run-down, well illustrated with slides, on some of Australia's most eminent bushrangers of the old school—Australia's Robin Hoods, so called because that is what they were, but still gentlemen to some of their modern successors.

He was followed by Mr. H. J. McDonnell (Member) who in dealing with currency problems in the early days, gave us some new information on the bewildering variety of coinage and unofficial notes in circulation, on the first attempts (in the 1820's) to introduce decimal currency, and on the methods by which the ingenious Mr. M'Arthur converted five shillings worth of Spanish dollar into six shillings plus the two slices of silver cut out of the centre. (Inflation at work even then; and, though it is too late to do anything about it now, why did they have to call ten shillings a dollar when in the Australian language, from time immemorial, a dollar meant five shillings?).

Mrs. Shaw followed with a number of slides from the Society's collection which had stumped the experts. In some cases the audience were able to do better—though it was hardly expected when one group was identified as Mortdale Methodists, pre-first-World-War vintage (if one may use that word in such a connection, except, of course, for medicinal purposes). As previous Members' Nights have shown, we don't always need a visiting speaker; and, if some more of our members would try their hands at these short talks, they might surprise themselves and discover talents they themselves never suspected.