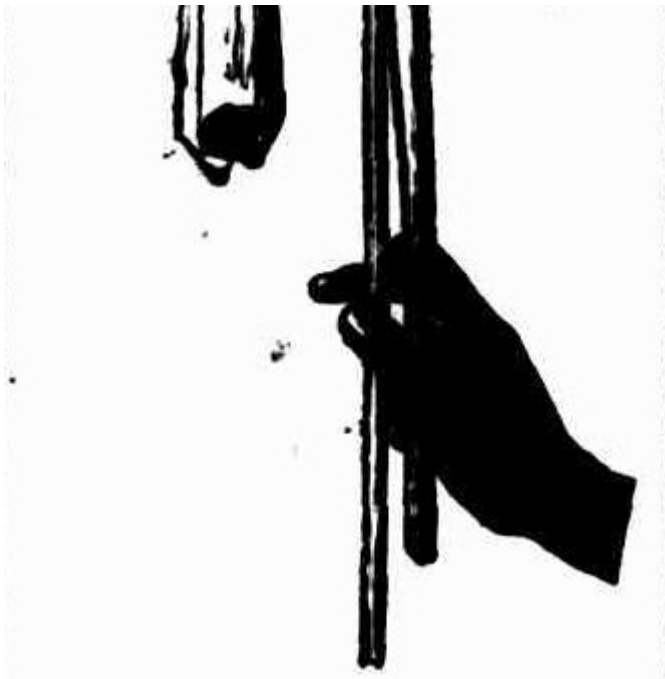


THE BLACK HUNTER. HIS WEAPONS AND WAYS.

By DONALD MACDONALD.

The weapons of the Australian black are those of the primitive peoples all the world over. The stone axe, generally regarded as a weapon, but wholly an implement, and the most valuable of all the blackfellow's possessions, is the same stone axe both in its shape and fittings that the primitive man used in all countries. The Maori and the Papuan used it before Western enlightenment gave them steel or iron as a substitute. The same stone axes with the same handles that were wielded by the

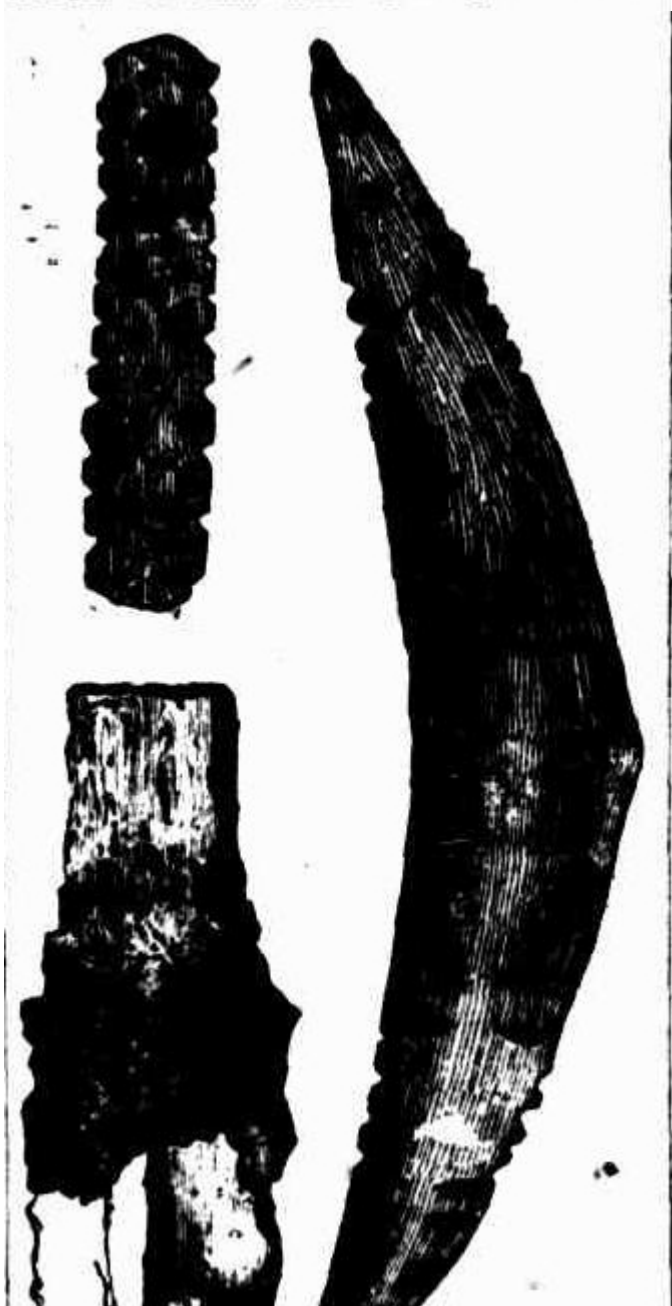




The implements are the native stone axe or tomahawk and knife, which is more correctly a small saw. The third diagram shows the position in which woomera and spear are held at the moment of the cast.

Australian blacks when the first navigator saw Australia are those sometimes picked up to-day in European caves, the only traces of tribes that have become dust and mould ever so many venturies ago. So the Australian black, as we discovered him, was in all things the primitive man. Most Australians of the white kind are familiar with his weapons, yet very few still know the uses of them. The boomerang, as we see it thrown for public entertainment in the interval of a winter football match—with the civilised formula of a collection of small coins in a weather-worn felt hat—is wholly a toy. It was used as a weapon by aboriginals of ancient Europe, and the Australian black wields it with effect, too, in his hunting. It is a very different kind of thing, however, to the come-back boomerang. The hunting boomerang is generally made of exceptionally heavy wood, such as the brown Mulga of the north or the Currawang of the interior, both as hard and as heavy almost as iron. For the

and as heavy almost as iron. For the making of almost every weapon in which strength was a consideration the Yarra blacks used the black wattle, *Acacia decurrens*, or "currong" as they called it. A weapon to be hurled by hand was the best thing in mechanics that the Australian black was capable of encompassing. With the addition of the woomera, or throwing-stick, he gave extra range to his spear, and there his ingenuity halted. But the merit of the boomerang in its true form, as a weapon for hunting or fighting, is that it reaches the maximum in range with the





Message sticks or passports used by native runners carrying messages between the tribes. The third is the stone chisel.

minimum of effort. As a weapon it is seldom curved to the same extent, or in exactly the same style, as the toy boomerang. Its shape, curved slightly in outline, flat on one side, convex on the other, was, as a matter of fact, the first suggestion of a flying-machine. So, in effect, we couple up the prehistoric with to-day, and more especially with to-morrow.

The hunting boomerang was not intended to return to the thrower. It was probably thrown rather with an underhand action than overhead, as we know it. The blackfellow would cut his boomerangs from the natural curve of the tree, so that the grain should run with the bend, giving it strength. One day perhaps a black artificer found something with an exceptional curve—for nature has no two curves exactly alike—and so discovered the toy boomerang, which cast the flat side towards the thrower, up into an angle of the wind, and, with something of the same action that a righthand bowler in cricket tries for a breakback, took an eccentric flight. It is easy to understand that a century or so ago, when undrained Australia was covered with swamps and lagoons, and these frequented by great flights of waterfowl, the heavy boomerang was a very effective hunting weapon. Whizzing through a flock of widgeon or wood duck, its sharp edges cut like a knife, wings were broken, heads severed, and the black sometimes got as many birds at a shot as the modern sportsman with both barrels "into the brown." Throwing the boomerang as a plaything is,

Throwing the boomerang as a plaything is, with practice, not at all a difficult art. Dr. Harvey Sutton, of the Victorian Education department, who makes his own composition boomerangs, and has carefully studied the lines and angles of flight, is very

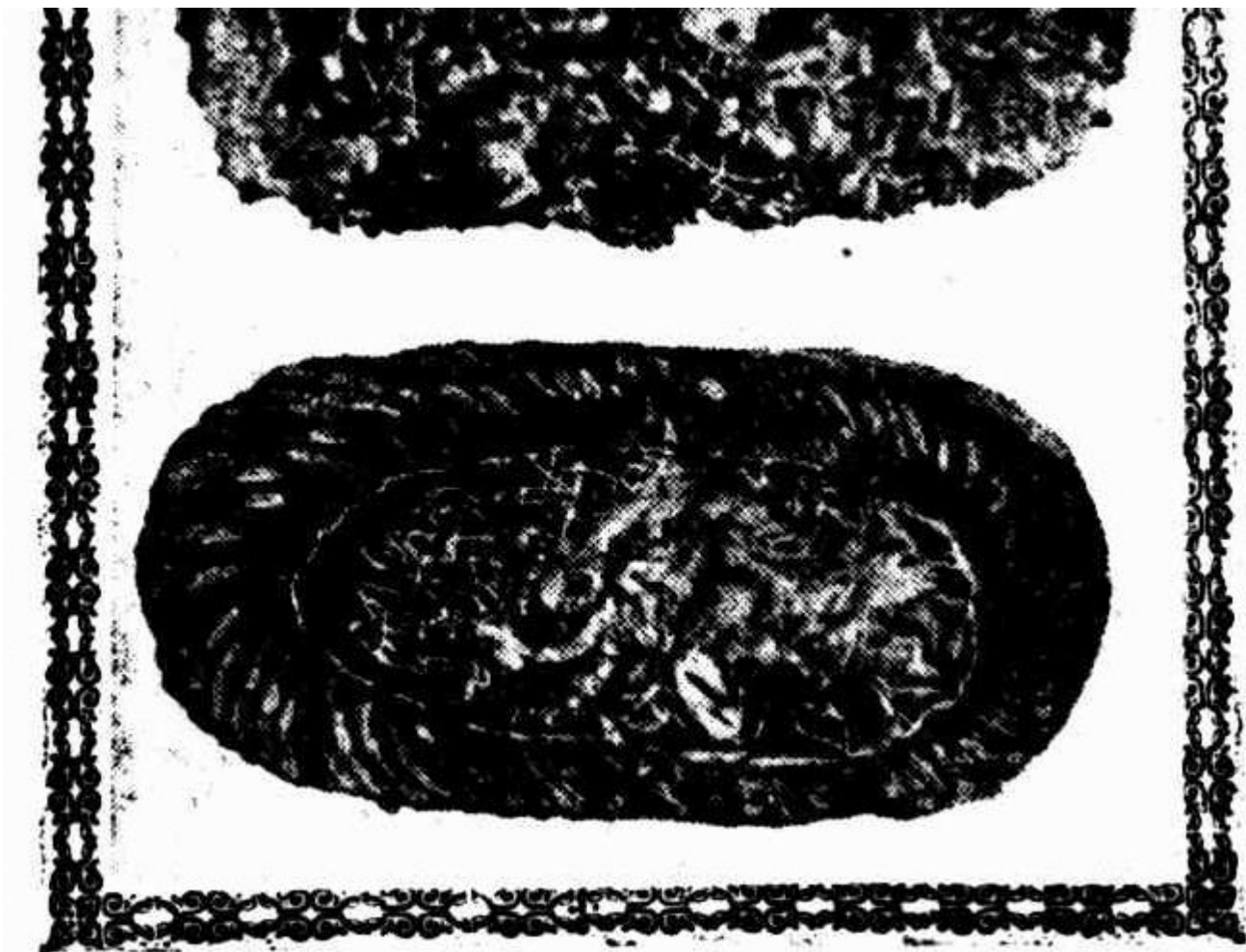
expert in using them. The noticeable point about a blackfellow's throw is that he does it with so little effort.

The popular weapon of the blackfellow all over Australia was the spear and the nulla-nulla—the club for in-fighting. The pattern of the spear varies slightly throughout the tribes. In the Melbourne Museum, amongst the collection of native weapons, we see spears of heavy wood, as illustrated in this article, with a succession of long barbs reaching from the point to 1ft. or 16in down the shaft. In another spear, and with infinite trouble, a terrible looking head was formed by letting in bits of flint or volcanic glass blown out of ancient chimneys, which are now the cold green landmarks of the west. These splinters were set in a groove cemented with wattle or grass-tree gum, and lashed with the tendons of the kangaroo. You can understand that, with simple tools such as the stone axe and chisel, the making of these particular spears was a work of difficulty and infinite patience. They were much too valuable in the owner's estimation to be used either in war or in hunting. They were generally set upright in front of the blackfellow's gunyah, wholly for decorative purposes. But the mere sight of them has exaggerated in the white man's mind the ferocity of savage warfare.

The hunting and fighting spears were generally of three distinct types. The heaviest of them, about 9ft. in length, used both as a javelin and a lance, has the barbs occasionally fairly well defined, but in most cases little more than notches. An example is shown in the diagram. In the death struggles of an animal as large as an emu or kangaroo, when transfixed with a lance, the shaft was frequently broken, so the hunter

shaft was frequently broken, so the hunter put himself to as little trouble as possible in the making of it. There was just enough barb to keep the spear in the wound. That liability to breakage is one of the reasons why these very elaborately carved spears are never handled for hunting. Occasionally he may have killed his gin or one of his intimate friends with such a spear, but that would be in a sudden fit of temper, before he had time to consider the risk of breaking it. Using his every-day spear as a javelin, the black hunter was wonderfully expert at a running mark up to a distance of about 26 yards. It is curious to find the aboriginal hunter adopting exactly the same method as the crack shot of to-day, who will only shoot game when flying or running. But the blackfellow's idea was not the chivalrous one of giving his game a chance. If he had to wait for a standing shot he would frequently go hungry, so as soon as the little black boy was able to run about, and started to throw his toy spears, he practised always at a running mark. By the time he grew up he had become so proficient in judging pace and distance that he was able to hit an object with more certainty when it was in motion than at rest. These heavy javelin spears are made of all kinds of tough wood—mallee in one part of the country, tea-tree, perhaps, in another, wattle sapling elsewhere. The blackfellow used the best that came to his hand without searching very far for it. His plan was to dress a sapling into a spear before cutting it. It was more rigid as it grew; softer to work with his rough implements. So the





Kooditcha or Raider's Shoe.

spear was fashioned in the ground before it was cut, trimmed down first with the stone axe, then scraped with mussel shells or flints.

The spears thrown with the woomera were always of two kinds and in two pieces. Reeds, long and strong enough for a spear, are not easily obtainable in the south of Victoria, but they were to be had in the cumbungie beds of the north-west, or in the rich black mud of lagoons. These reed spears had a wooden blade shaped dagger fashion, or rather in the outline of the Zulu assegai. This blade, cut from the toughest and straightest timber obtainable, was further hardened in the fire, then let into the hollow of the reed, glued there with gum, the universal cement of the blacks, and lashed round with tendons. These cords, always obtainable from the tail or hind leg of a kangaroo, were strong enough for almost any strain. When his object was

of a kangaroo, were strong enough for most any strain. When his object was hunting or war every blackfellow carried quite a sheaf of these spears

The other light spear thrown with the woomera was wood for the greater part of its length, the plain point fire-hardened. The question of balance, which meant



Boomerangs. The alightly curved, heavy boomerangs are used for killing game, and do not return to the thrower.

longer shots, had to be considered, and this difficulty was overcome by having a grass-tree stem for the butt of the spear. It had the same effect as the feathers in the bowman's arrow. The grass-tree, which blooms generally on low, sterile, rugged ridges all over Australia, carries its flower on a long, light, but fairly tough, stem. Sometimes, in order to lighten it still further, the pith core was picked out, and generally a small knot of wood let in at the end to take the tooth of the woomera, or spear-thrower. A short spear or lance, about 5ft. in length, was used for fishing, but never thrown.

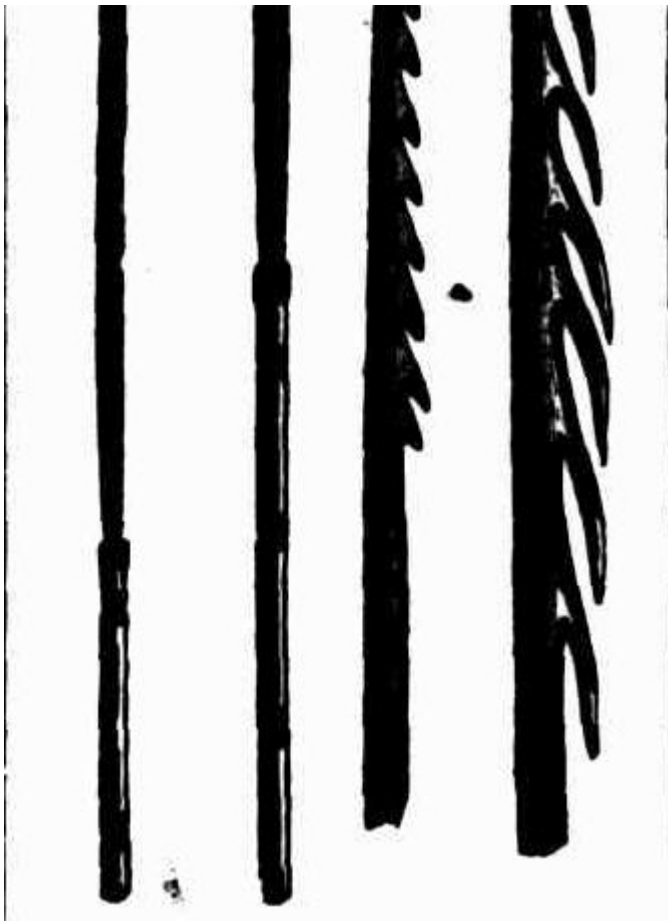
An illustration is given of the woomera and the blackfellow's manner of using it.

AN ILLUSTRATION IS GIVEN OF THE WOOMERA and the blackfellow's manner of using it. It was universally held with the forefinger and thumb on the spear shaft, the other fingers gripping the thrower. The tooth of the woomera was generally a bone, fixed like a barb, and it is remarkable how firmly these teeth hold even when the woomera has been knocked about, almost rotted away with age. I have one now which must be 50 years old. The hard wood is becoming pulpy, but the bone tooth is as firmly set as ever. At the grip end the woomera was always rounded, and about an inch in diameter. Midway it curved slightly upward

and flattened, so that the spear when in position and held by the bone tooth and the fingers also rested on the thrower. The blackfellow fixes his spear by the sense of touch alone. Taking it in his right hand, he fixed the tooth in the notch deftly, and runs his hand lightly back to the point of grip. If he were fighting he had to keep his eye on his enemy, with his light wooden shield in his left hand ready to receive a spear. The distance that a spear will carry depends, of course, a good deal upon the strength and dexterity of the thrower. One hundred yards was not an uncommon cast, while at seventy yards men were frequently hit. Generally speaking, the effective range of the spear was sixty yards.

When we look at the shields used for protection against spears, we realise the wonderful keenness and accuracy of the blackfellow's vision. As a rule they are not wider than two columns of "The Argus," and are of two types. That used





Spear heads. The barbed spear on the right is wholly ornamental. The two on the left are the hunting and fighting spears thrown with the woomera. The lesser barbed spear is thrown by hand, javelin-fashion.

against spears is generally about three feet long, curving slightly inward at top and bottom, very light, sometimes nothing more than a strip of bark. A heavier form of shield, illustrated in the diagrams, and with three or four inches of solid timber just above the grip, was used to ward off a blow from a club.

Both the aboriginal clubs and shields are almost invariably carved in squares and angles, but, though these tracings are nearly always alike, they have even on the message sticks no significance. These message-sticks, of which we give illustrations, were generally a stright piece of wood not more than six inches long, curiously lined and carved. At other times they took the

carved. At other times they took the shape of small boomerangs, and were invariably carried by the black runner in the netted band worn about his forehead. They were a sort of passport, giving the messenger sanctuary, and the right-of-way under all circumstances. These tribal messengers, constantly moving about, arranged all the preliminaries for great meetings, feasts, and corroborees. Sometimes they had to travel 150 miles with a message, but even in hostile tribes they were always hospitably treated. There seems to have been a sort of distinction in the position of tribal messengers, for men who started as runners in youth kept on until they were no longer able to travel. They were often without food or water for long periods, and received no payment or reward of any kind. All blackfellows seem to have narrow, supple, shapely hands. Very few white men can get their hands through the grip opening of the ordinary shields. The team of aboriginal cricketers formed many years ago used to give demon-

strations of their skill in using the narrow shield. Two or three men with cricket balls were allowed to stand within a few yards, and throw them in quick succession as fast as they pleased. With a single, well-judged movement of the shield the blackfellow took them one after another, rarely if ever missing, or he dodged by a sharp movement of head or body. "Dick-a-Dick," one of the team, was marvellous quick at this "play." The aboriginal fighting club nearly always took the shape indicated in the illustration, but there was also a "waddy," with rounded points, about three feet in length and two and a half inches thick. With these the smaller game were killed at short range with wonderful accuracy, and the heavy hunting boomerang quite possibly had its evolution from this form of simple throwing club.

The stone axe, or tomahawk, chisel, and knife were wholly implements. The knife is strictly a saw, the teeth being formed with chips of flint let into a groove, and used chiefly for cutting up meat. The

with chips of mint set into a groove, and was used chiefly for cutting up meat. The chisel supplemented the work of the tomahawk in the cutting out of canoes, the dressing and trimming of spears and clubs. A remarkable resemblance, not merely in the

shape, but the colour, of the stone axes is noticed throughout Victoria. They are not pebbles to be picked from every beach. The diorite from which they are almost invariably made is only obtained in a few places in Victoria. There is a well-known blacks' quarry at Mount William, near Lancefield; another at Berrambool, Mr. W. Moffat's station, in the Western district. The old quarry site at Mount William is an interesting place. The little hillocks of stone chips where blacks squatted century after century fashioning and grinding their axes are still dotted about the hillside, and the tribes in that locality were able to carry on a trade in stone axes that extended far across the Murray into New South Wales. Usually they are not more than a pound in weight, but specimens have been found up to nearly 5lb., which were, no doubt, intended to be used like our axe, with both hands. The handle was always lashed round the stone head. Wattle, clematis, or any supple sapling was split down the centre, then steamed in the fire, and when the rough handle had become so pliant that it could be doubled about the head of the axe, it was cemented and lashed into position with gum and tendons.

The blackfellow used his tomahawk for so many purposes that it was seldom out of his hand, but it was rarely, if ever, used in fighting. When we hear of men being



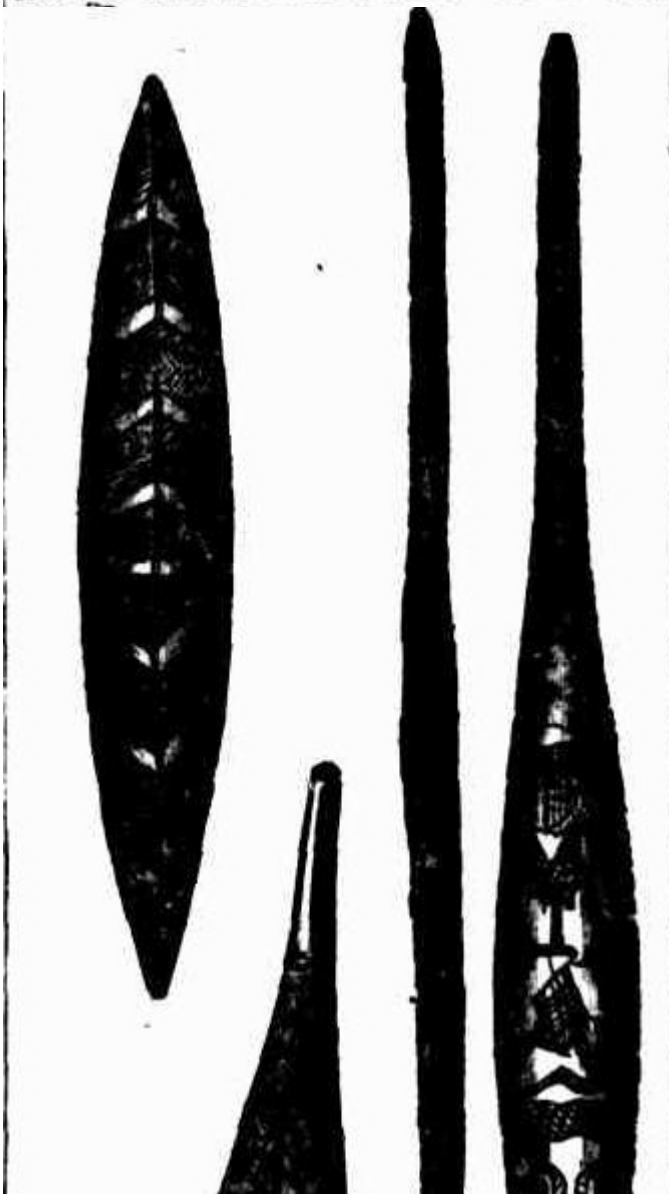


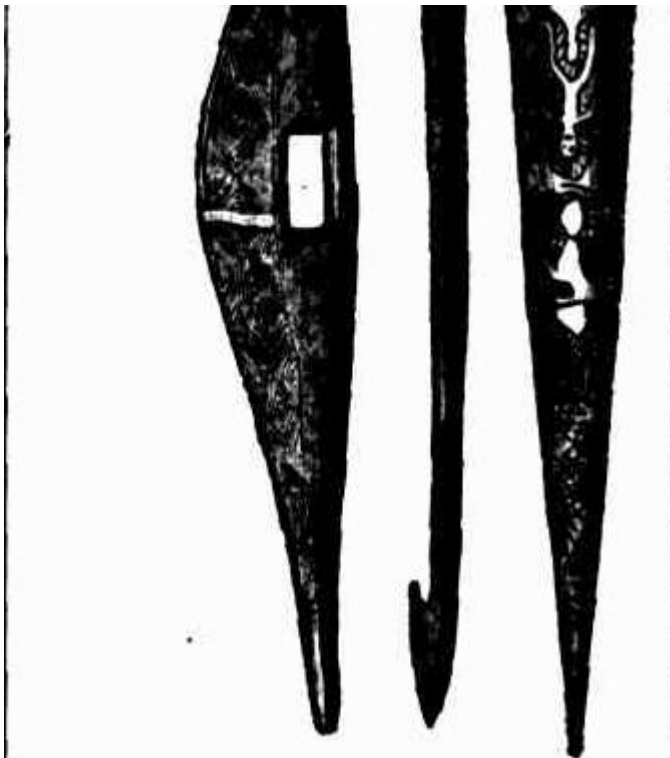
**Nulla nullas or native clubs,
sometimes called waddies.**

tomahawked by the blacks it invariably means that they were clubbed, the cut from the sharpened edge of the club-head suggesting, no doubt, in its shape and effect a tomahawk wound.

Moving generally in small tribes, with perhaps 30 able-bodied fighters, besides from old men, women, and children, the blacks lived in almost constant enmity and fear of each other. Apart from the competition for good hunting ground, tribal animosities were kept alive by superstitions, fomented by the Bangals, or "black doctors," who, as with the Zulus and most other savage na-

with the Zulus and most other savage nations, carried h~~u~~mbug to extremes. Thus death was rarely a natural occurrence—nearly always the result of a charm put upon the victim by an enemy in some other tribe. This led to revengeful raids, constant fighting, and every device for quick and stealthy retaliation that aboriginal ingenuity could suggest. Their gifts in tracking are well known. In the interior of Australia, raiding blacks very often wore a shoe or slipper called the kooditcha. It was made of netted fibre and emu feathers matted together, with, as a finishing touch, a little blood from the owner's arm. The shoe left no mark on the ground—nothing that even the keenest tracker could follow. Of the best





Aboriginal shields, both simple and in a compound form, where they serve the double purpose of a shield and a throwing stick for spears.

trackers, it has often been said that they can follow anything on earth excepting a bird or a black wearing the kooditcha.