

The Ingenious Australian Boomerang, That Has Long Puzzled Investigators



Boomerang Throwing—one of the aboriginals' chief pastimes. They are the sole inventors of these strange yet intricate weapons.

THE original Australian aboriginal, who first made a boomerang, deserves a place in the annals of the human race equal to that held by the greatest modern scientist, for he discovered a new principle in mechanics, which has had a most far-reaching effect.

The flight of a boomerang brings into play an extraordinary manifestation of natural force. A boomerang thrown by the hand of a skillful expert, in a flat line at the start, does not eventually describe the same curve before reaching the ground, that a rifle shot does. The boomerang starts in a horizontal line and curves upwards, not downwards, to a height proportioned to the initial energy supplied by the human arm.



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When it reaches its maximum height, as it does when the initial propelling energy is spent, the boomerang does not descend in a vertical line. It comes back again toward the thrower. A real expert can make a boomerang come back again to his feet, or over his head, if he wishes it.

The whole secret of the curious business is that the surface of the boomerang is not a flat plane, but is a slight angle upwards from the horizontal. As this angled surface impinges on the air, a lifting action takes place, which has exactly the same effect as if a strong wind were blowing upwards against it. The spin of the boomerang through the air produces just the same lifting effect as if a whirlwind were howling directly under the flying instrument.

What the boomerang was originally made for, no one knows. Exhibitions of skill in boomerang throwing from part of the "corroborees" at tribal gatherings, but this instrument was not used by any aboriginal tribe, either as a hunting weapon, or as a weapon of war.

The aboriginals of the west coast of South Australia fifty years or more ago, were expert boomerang throwers, and this instrument was highly prized by them, but for hunting purposes they used either the heavy barbed mallee spear, propelled by a womerah, or a straight mallee waddy, about two feet long, and an inch thick. These spears, waddies, and boomerangs were all fire-hardened, by being plastered with grease and baked in hot ashes.

These natives used to organize game drives, in which boomerang throwing was essential to the successful hunter.

Boomerang throwing is an art, and a rather difficult one. It was once thought that only an Australian native could properly manipulate the queerly shaped piece of wood, which may be a toy, or an accurate and deadly weapon. It is now known that this is untrue. Numerous white men are expert boomerang throwers. A famous Australian soldier used to excel in this pastime, and doubtless still retains the "knack."

Not many years ago there lived at Beaconsfield, Victoria, a man who had spent days studying the throwing methods of the West Australian natives. And he became an expert himself. He made the boomerang perform the most intricate evolutions while in mid-air. He declared that

strength was not required. Everything depended upon the manner of presentation, delivery and release of the boomerang. He disclaimed any particular difficulty in throwing, remarking that it was entirely a matter of practice.

There are two forms of Australian

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boomerang, the "returning" and the "non-returning." The latter is the war boomerang—as used by certain tribes.

In an article in the Australian



Museum Magazine, Wm. W. Thorpe gives many interesting facts concerning these weapons.

"To the casual mind," Mr. Thorpe writes, "all boomerangs seem more or less alike, yet on closer acquaint-

ance, one may observe sensible differences in degree of curvature, weight and size." Boomerangs from the Queensland coast are a bit different in shape from those of the western state, and the "war boomerangs" of western New South Wales, some writers declare, vary from those of Central Australian tribes; the heavy type, however, has a wide range in the interior.

Captain Cook, who discovered Aus-

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