

EXPLORATION OF PREHISTORIC SITES IN EAST DERBYSHIRE.

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DURING the past year the excavation of two small caves situated two miles north-west of Creswell Crags, in the vicinity of Whitwell, has been undertaken and work is in active progress there by Mr. Leslie Armstrong, Dr. Arthur Court and Mr. W. H. Hanbury, who have completed the excavation of Whaley Cave and Rock Shelter, No. 2. During the final stages of the latter, archæological evidence of an entirely unexpected character was obtained and is described below. Facilities have again been given for students of archæology to participate in the work of excavation and obtain experience in the technique of cave digging.

The excavation of Section "C" at Whaley Cave and Rock Shelter, No. 2, which had reached a depth of 8 ft. in 1948, has been completed to base level, 12 ft. below the datum line. It provided no new evidence, but supplemented and confirmed that of the previous sections adjoining, and revealed living levels corresponding to those recorded in Section "B." These, however, were much less well defined at the rear, in the lower Creswellian zone; probably due to the restricted height and unsafe character of the roof, due to a partial collapse at that period. The two horizons of Mousterian culture yielded split and utilised animal bones, artifacts of quartzite and limestone, and two Mousterian points, one

fabricated in flint and one in Derbyshire black chert of exceptionally good quality. The excavation terminated, as before, in a sterile layer of yellow cave earth exhibiting signs of waterlogging and lamination resting upon a base deposit of extremely fine, sterile, and stoneless sand.

Section "D."—In order to ascertain the precise relation of the outer wall of the collapsed cave to the main cliff, it was deemed advisable to extend the excavation a further 6 feet beyond Section "C." As anticipated, the rear and lower wall of the cave proved to be a part of the main cliff, consisting of a spur, or shelf of rock, thrust outwards therefrom, but obscured by a shallow surface scree resting upon a stratum of yellow loam, separating the scree from the rock. Enclosed in this loam human remains were encountered which, from the disposition of those first revealed, comprising a hand, feet and a few ribs, appeared to represent a "crouched" burial; but as the excavation proceeded it became evident that it was not a burial, but a deposit of closely intermingled human and animal bones. The human remains comprised a few vertebræ; most of the bones of two hands and feet; a fibula; and numerous teeth. The teeth are those of two individuals. The animal bones, mostly carpal and tarsal bones, ribs, vertebræ and jaws, are those of sheep, lamb, young pig, sucking pig, dog or wolf, and a small ox. It is significant that no "long" bones were present, human or animal. The mass occupied a space roughly circular and 2 feet in diameter; it was closely compacted and the bones jumbled together, particularly in the centre, in a manner which suggested that it was a residue of a mixed stew, dumped out of a stew-pot. To myself and my colleagues this find appears to provide strong circumstantial evidence of the practice of cannibalism; and the variety of animal bones accompanying the human remains seem to rule out any explanation on the lines of ritual cannibalism. A precise dating is not

possible, as only flakes of flint were associated; no pottery and no typical artifacts. On the general evidence, however, it can be assigned to the Neolithic with some degree of certainty, for the following reasons. The position and the contained fauna of the yellow loam proves that it was a post-glacial deposit which, in Sections "A" to "C," had infiltrated between the rocks and debris composing the talus formed by the collapse of the Palaeolithic rock shelter and cave. Near the base of this talus the loam formed a definite layer, enclosing the lower rocks, and rested upon the Pleistocene cave earth. In Section "D" there was no collapse of the cliff, and therefore no talus, merely a scree of rock fragments intermixed with humus which merged into the yellow loam beneath. The yellow loam was a continuous layer enclosing the base of both the rocky talus in Sections "A" to "C," and the shallow scree of Section "D." Pottery and artifacts of all periods from Mesolithic to recent, have been found in the interstices of the talus, but it is significant that finds in the yellow loam have been confined to objects of Mesolithic and Neolithic date.

As the dump of bones was enclosed within the loam and was without doubt contemporary therewith and not an insertion, it is clear that upon stratigraphic evidence it must be assigned either to Mesolithic or Neolithic times. A Mesolithic date is improbable. Some evidence of a sparse occupation in that period was found in adjoining sections, near the base of the loam, but was indicative of a frugal economy, whereas the variety of animals represented in the dump of bones is proof that the people responsible for it had an abundant food supply; a fact which favours a Neolithic dating. This is supported by the fact that the loam in adjoining sections yielded Neolithic pottery, a polished axe, and numerous artifacts of flint and bone, associated with bones of animals represented in the dump and also human

vertebræ, teeth and a mandible. Upon this evidence it seems reasonable to infer that the deposition of the dump of bones was contemporary with those finds and therefore Neolithic in date.

Upon completion of the work at Whaley the excavations were filled in and the site tidied up to the satisfaction of the tenant.

New work in the Creswell area.—The excavation of two small caves in this area, southwest of Whitwell, is now in active progress, but at the date of writing this report is still in an exploratory stage. The sites are on opposite sides of a dry valley known as Burntfield Grips, which falls south to south-east, from Bakestone Moor, and are approximately at 400 ft. O.D. The valley is bordered on both sides by crags of Magnesian Limestone and appears to have been originally a deep ravine of the same character and geological age as the Creswell Gorge and Markland Grips, but has been partially filled by glacial drift. The drift has given a modified "U" form to the valley, buried much of the cliffs and steeply blanketed the sides. The excavations have established that at least the upper portion of this infilling of the valley was laid down during the last glaciation of the area, and has therefore provided valuable new evidence respecting the physical geology of this district.

Site No. 1, on the north-west side of the valley, is a small cave with a rock shelter flanking the entrance. The interior is lofty, the floor piled high with debris and tabular rock fallen from the flat roof. A trial excavation in the cave entrance, and a cut across the rock shelter, to a depth of 3 ft. 6 ins., has revealed some evidence of a Mesolithic occupation, resting on the surface of the glacial drift. The drift forms a compact bed, 2 ft. 6 ins. to 3 ft. thick and passes into the interior of the cave. It is archæologically sterile and consists of a sandy loam, brown in colour, containing abraded limestone fragments, erratic and Bunter pebbles, and has all the characteristics

of glacial drift or outwash material. That it is actually of that nature is indicated by the fact that it proved to rest upon a Pleistocene deposit of red cave earth containing charcoal fragments and artifacts of Creswellian type.

The depth of this zone is not yet known, but a Palaeolithic occupation has been established.

Site No. 2 is on the opposite side of the valley. It appears to be a masked cave, but may prove to be a deep rock shelter. The sealing by drift is almost complete and only the arch of the entrance is visible. The trial trench reveals that the sealing material is the same as that encountered in *Site No. 1*, but is of greater depth, and as the bottom has not been reached it is not yet known whether an occupation level exists beneath it, but evidence from above the drift denotes the presence of a Mesolithic occupation level, similar to that of *Site No. 1*.