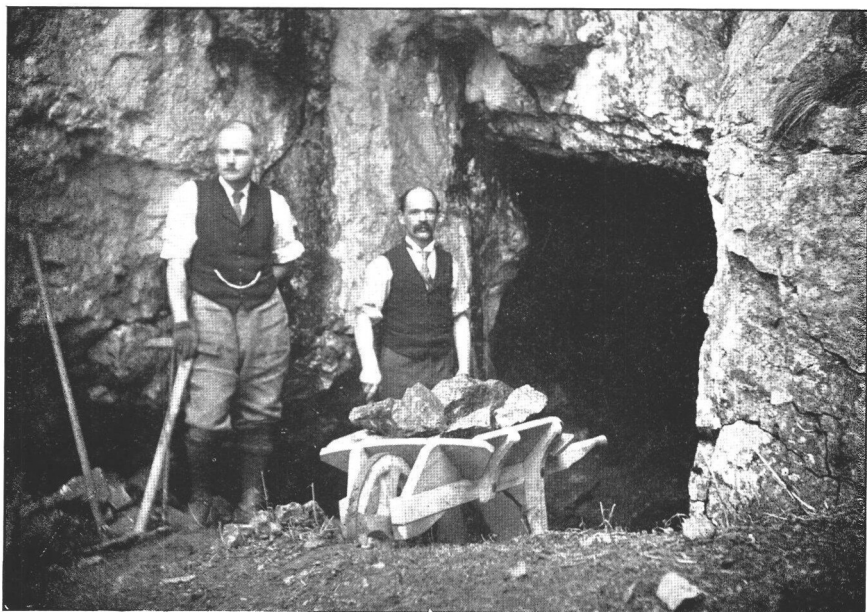




RAVENCLIFFE CRAG AND CRESSBROOK DALE.

The Cave is situated just to the right of a crescent-shaped dark patch on the face of the crag.



ENTRANCE TO RAVENCLIFFE CAVE IN JAN., 1903.

Ravencliffe Cave.

I.

By W. STORRS FOX, M.A., F.G.S.



THE exploration of this cave was attended with unusual difficulties. Large blocks of rock, fallen from its roof, and heaped up in disorderly fashion, formed the floor. Throughout quite half the area of the cave these blocks were firmly cemented together with stalagmite. This condition of things not only made excavation laborious and sometimes practically impossible, but also rendered it hopeless to look for traces of distinct beds, except in one or two isolated regions. Moreover, its chronological sequence was marred in other ways. Rabbits had burrowed among the looser material of the floor, and the gaps between the blocks had provided a ready means for both ancient and modern pottery and implements to find their way down far below their proper level.

Another serious difficulty was caused by the unsafe state of the roof. This was flat and formed by a bed of rock stretching the whole distance across the cave, firmly supported only at the north-western side. On the other side it was broken. Moreover, the crack ran in the wrong direction to afford support, consequently the removal of material below would probably cause a slight subsidence, but sufficient to bring the whole roof down. This danger was increased by the fact that the south-eastern wall was (at C) formed by a detached block

of stone with its edge resting on a second block (B), which in turn lay upon a bed of small stones, or chitter. It was therefore unwise to attempt to carry the excavation to any great depth, and before long the necessary supports to the roof made it impossible. Although the mixed character of the finds detracts somewhat from the interest of the cave, its value as a cave was increased by the evidence of its former extension outwards from the present mouth towards the dale, and the discovery of a prehistoric piece of walling, many feet below the surface, with a sealed passage at the opposite corner of the cave containing little else but remains of bear.

Cressbrook Dale has its origin near Wardlow Mires, and for about half a mile takes a south-westerly course to Peter's Stone. From thence its general position is in a direction due south to Cressbrook Mill, where it joins Monsal Dale. The imposing crags on the east side of Cressbrook Dale are cut in the base of Wardlow Hay Cop, a conical hill whose summit is 1,227 feet above sea-level. One of these crags looks down on the little block of houses generally called Bury-mewick, but marked on the ordnance map as Ravendale Cottages. It is in this crag—1,000 feet above sea-level—that the cave is situated. Its mouth faces south-west. The cave is formed by the falling-in of the roof between two main joints which run parallel to a line drawn across the entrance. A reference to the roof-plan will make this plain. The wall at the back of the cave is formed by the solid rock beyond the first joint; a sudden drop in the height of the roof takes place at the next one, at a third the cave widens out into a chamber within the more narrow entrance, and at a fourth the entrance begins in the face of the crag. The ground-plan gives some idea of the difficulty of the work. At E there stood up above the floor a mass of detached blocks of rock cemented together and deeply encrusted with stalagmite. This mass extended eastward below the floor and reached to a known depth of 7 ft. Between this and the north-western side of the entrance (marked I on the plan) there was a cascade of stalagmite. Beneath the surface this was found to dip very suddenly towards the opposite side of the



RAVENCLIFFE CAVE IN 1906.

cave, and soon all trace of it was lost. At D a large block rose above the surface. Such were the main features of the cave; others are mentioned in the explanation at the foot of the plan.

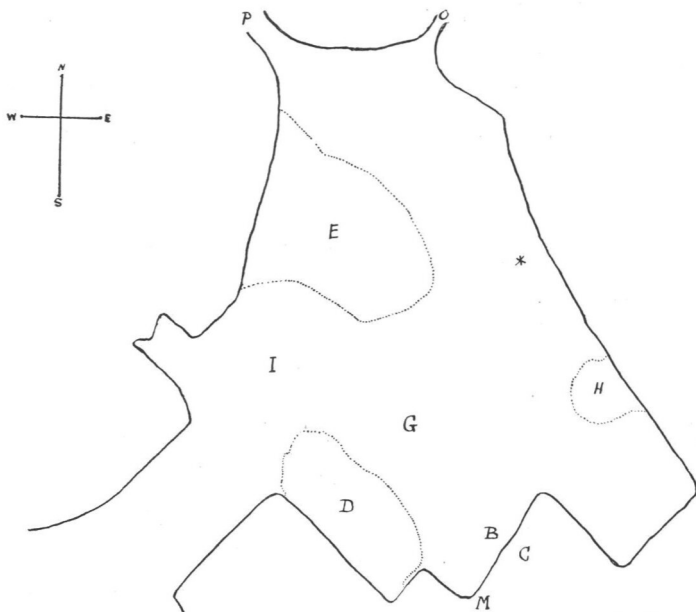
Outside the cave lay a rough terrace terminating abruptly towards the dale in a low, precipitous crag. It was at the very edge of this that operations were begun. This was made imperative by the necessity of getting rid of refuse material. A wide trench was cut along the whole length of this terrace, all the material down to the solid rock being removed. The rock dips backwards towards the cave, and the depth of material overlying it varied from 4 ft. near the edge to 11 ft. at the entrance to the cave.

Within a distance of 5 ft. from the edge of the terrace large blocks of stalagmite were met with. About 7 ft. nearer the cave the blocks were exchanged for a solid bed of stalagmite, persisting to a depth of 4 ft. throughout the remaining stretch of terrace. This bed and the above-mentioned blocks lay a few inches above the limestone, being separated from it by a layer of very fine yellowish soil, which contained here and there remains of reindeer, rhinoceros, and bear. Just within the cave bones and teeth of the last two animals were found above the stalagmite, which was there covered by several feet of yellow gravelly earth.

Human bones were first met with in the area marked G on the plan. More or less under B were found a spoon-shaped worked flint, 3.45 ins. long and 1.7 ins. across (plate iii. 3, top illustration); a well-polished awl, 3.22 ins. long, made from the metapodial bone of a sheep or goat (plate iii. 6, bottom illustration); and a bone ring (plate iii. 8, bottom illustration).

At the back of the cave a trench was found. It was about 3 ft. wide and lay between the cave wall and rock-mass E. At its south-eastern end it was 4 ft. deep; but it gradually sloped down towards the opposite extremity till it reached a depth of 6 ft. Here its boundaries became ill-defined; but at

Scale: 1 in. = 10 ft.

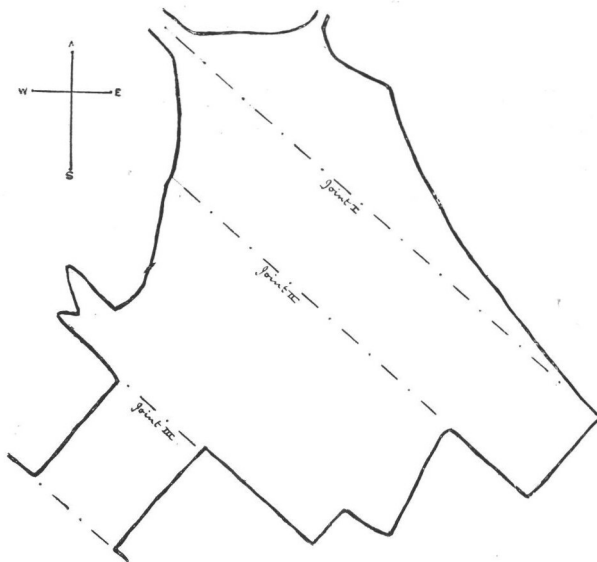


B Detached block of rock (below the surface) on which *C* partly rested. *C* Detached block of rock forming part of the cave wall. *D* Mass of rock rising 2 feet above the floor-level. *E* Large mass of detached rocks. *G* Area in which human remains were first met with. *H* Small pinnacle of rock above the floor-level. *I* "Cascade" of stalagmite. *M* Entrance of the Bear passage. *O* Passage. *P* Passage. * Position of the gold bands.

PLAN OF ROOF OF RAVENCLIFFE CAVE.

— · — · — shows the course of the joints in the rock.

Scale: 1 in. = 11 ft.



the more shallow end it was closed by rock and stalagmite. Its bottom was formed by a sheet of stalagmite; another, though less perfect, sheet sealing it above. In this trench gold ornaments, a bronze penannular brooch, a bronze awl, and several implements of bone and flint were found. These were mixed up indiscriminately with quantities of human bones and those of deer, boar, ox, sheep, and goat.

The human bones—400 in number—included those of adults of different ages, and of children down to earliest babyhood. Only eighteen fragments of skull were found, and there was nothing approaching to a complete one. There were, however, seven mandibles (all adult), as well as thirteen broken pieces of others.

Near the passage O the excavation was carried down to a depth of 7 ft. The solid limestone forming the wall at the back of the cave abruptly ended near this level, and beneath it were the remains of a wall which had apparently enclosed a chamber. In this chamber a stone celt and some flints were found.

The passage P was cleared out, but it contained nothing of much interest. But another passage was found running in a south-easterly direction from M, averaging about 4 ft. high and 5 ft. wide, and extending for a length of 21 ft., when it abruptly came to an end. This passage was filled nearly to the top with earth and stones, containing a considerable quantity of bears' bones, both *ursus spelaeus* and *ursus horribilis* occurring. A sheet of stalagmite—thicker towards the sides, and in contact with the roof there, but thin and sometimes discontinued midway across, where it was divided from the roof by a space of two or three inches—rested upon the material which filled the passage.

The work was begun in December, 1902, and was finally abandoned in January, 1908. For the greater part of this time it was carried on by amateur diggers, whenever leisure from ordinary duties made it possible, and thanks are due to the Rev. Lockhart W. Greenshields, Vicar of Youlgreave; Mr. Thomas Clark, of Bakewell; and others, who rendered much assistance in the task of exploration.

The following list will show the variety of animals represented in the cave, as well as, in most cases, the number of bones and teeth of each which were found :—

Man, 400.

Cat, 32.

Dog (or Wolf), 87.

Fox, 152.

Badger, 13.

Bear, 178.

Ox, 131.

Sheep and Goat, uncounted.

Deer, 48.

Boar, 45.

Horse, 9.

Rhinoceros, 15.

Hare, 57.

Rabbit and Vole, uncounted.

Bird (including 1 of Eagle), 101.

Frog and Toad, uncounted.