

## EXPLORATION OF PREHISTORIC SITES IN EAST DERBYSHIRE.

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**D**URING the past year the excavation of Site No. 1, near Whitwell, N.E. Derbyshire, referred to in the 1949 Report, has been continued by Mr. Leslie Armstrong, Dr. Arthur Court and Mr. W. H. Hanbury, and is in active progress. No new work has been undertaken by the Committee, but advice has been given by the Secretary and Dr. J. W. Jackson relative to excavations in progress, or contemplated, by various people, and assistance given in the identification of specimens.

With regard to the Whitwell excavations, the season's work has been confined to *Site No. 1*, in Burnfield Grips, on the N.W. side of the valley; a small cave which has now been designated *Ash Tree Cave*. This has been excavated to a maximum depth of 4 ft. 6 ins. over half the area and the Pleistocene level exposed over the remainder. At that zone the cave is an irregular triangle in plan, with an extreme length of 16 ft. and width of 9 ft. There is evidence that the width will increase considerably at a lower level.

Prior to excavation the floor of the cave consisted of tabular fragments and slabs of rock, fallen from the roof, loosely compacted together by black loamy earth. This débris was noticeably higher in the centre of the floor and fell away in a slight talus towards the rear, suggesting that a greater fall of rock had taken place in the central

space. Excavation, however, revealed at a depth of 1 ft. 6 ins. that the slabs covered a deposit of human bones and had been purposely piled above the bones in the form of a dome. The remains comprised most of the skeleton, including all the long bones, many vertebra, ribs, and bones of the hands and feet, but no skull or mandible. They were jumbled together and represented a typical Neolithic burial of de-fleshed bones; those of a youth of slender build, but good physique, aged 18 to 20 years. They were unaccompanied by artifacts, except two flakes of flint, which may have filtered down from above. To the right of this deposit, but separated from it and 6 ins. lower, was another one, comprising a clavicle, a few phalanges and vertebra, and a mandible of exceptionally robust and "primitive" type. The general character of these remains proclaimed them not part of the group first discovered. The mandible is an interesting archæological specimen because of the primitive characters it exhibits; particularly in the width of the ascending ramus, the extreme shallowness of the sigmoid notch, and general robustness. It is also abnormal in the dentition, having possessed only three, instead of four, incisor teeth. Professor R. W. Lovel, of King's College, Newcastle, has examined the mandible and is of the opinion that the missing incisor is a central one and may have been lost earlier in life, although there are only three sockets now present. Sir Arthur Keith, who has also examined it, says that "congenital absence of the lower central incisor is a very rare occurrence . . . but, to me, congenital absence is the more likely explanation." Sir Arthur Keith also states that the features of the mandible indicate a young and strong man of about 24 years of age. The evidence of stratification denotes a Neolithic date for the specimen. On the same horizon scattered human remains have occurred throughout the cave and these include the mandible of an infant.

In the upper portion of the rocky débris sherds of

Roman and Iron Age pottery were found, numerous "pot-boilers," charcoal and a few flakes of flint. In places, sherds of pottery had infiltrated to a depth of one foot between the stones. Artifacts of flint and stone, pounders, animal bones, charcoal and other evidence of a sparse occupation of the cave were abundant down to the level of the underlying brown loam. Some of this material was probably contemporary with the traces of Mesolithic occupation noted in the section of the rock-shelter outside the cave, but no artifacts definitely assignable to that period have, so far, been discovered.

The brown sandy loam is glacial drift which, as observed in the trial cut made in 1949, had flowed into the interior of the cave, and the extent of its penetration has now been established. The cave is entered by a short entrance passage, approximately at right angles with the long axis of the cave; at the entrance to the interior the thickness of the drift was 2 ft. 6 ins., decreasing to 1 ft. 6 ins. at the wall opposite. Down the length of the cave it rapidly thinned out, and 10 ft. from the entrance became indistinguishable in appearance from the red cave earth over which it had entered.

This drift contained fragments of abraded limestone, Bunter, and other erratic pebbles, and formed a hard compact layer. It was archæologically sterile except at one point, in the entrance passage, where a hole had been scooped into it to receive a deposit of incinerated human remains.

The red cave earth underlying the glacial drift is of Pleistocene date, but proved to be only a thin stratum 4 to 6 ins. in thickness. The portion excavated has yielded flint artifacts of Creswellian type; fragments of split bone, some of which have been utilised; two bone tools; a stone poulder; "pot-boilers" and charcoal. Both artifacts and animal remains are few in number, and the occupation appears to have been a casual one. The fauna includes horse, bison, reindeer and pig. This

zone rests upon a bed of yellow cave earth, very compact, stony and calcareous, the depth of which has not yet been ascertained. It exhibits traces of severe water-logging. The upper stratum of this deposit has yielded several fragments of highly mineralised split animal bones, charcoal, quartzite pebbles, and a quartzite artifact of Mousterian type, similar to examples from the Mousterian levels of the Pin Hole Cave, Creswell.