

# OLD WOMAN'S (HOUSE) CAVE, TADDINGTON DALE

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Results of investigatory work by the authors into the location of Old Woman's House Cave were passed to the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, and an alteration to the National Monuments Record (NMR) relating to it resulted. The revised version of the relevant section of the record (NMR record — SK 17 SE/4) is reproduced here with the permission of the Royal Commission:

SK 1641 7119. Old Woman's (House) Cave, Taddington Dale.

Mr. Frost and Mr. Smith were concerned that the location given by Authority 5 (see below) onwards may be incorrect. They visited the site in November 1995, and using the information given by the Storrs Fox article of 1911, and a memory of an earlier visit by Mr. Smith, they concluded that its location was closer to the reference given by Mrs. Kirkham in Authority 1 (see below), than to that originally given by the Ordnance Survey. A sketch plot was made of the cave believed by Frost and Smith to be Old Woman's (House) Cave, and this closely resembled the sketch and description given by Storrs Fox in his article. A sketch plot was also

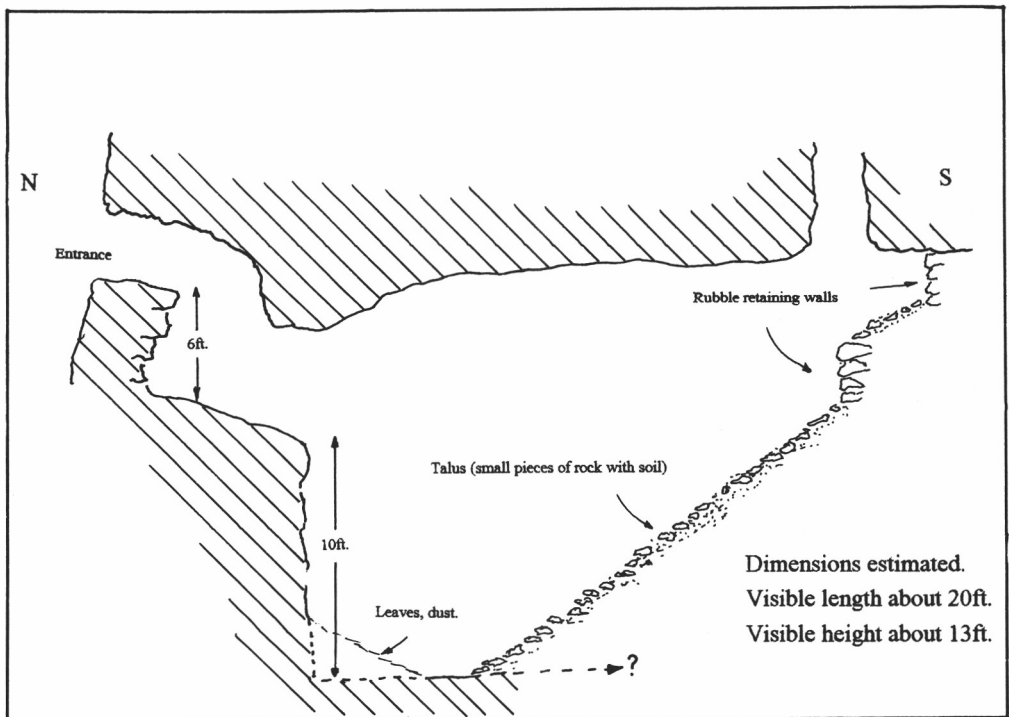


Fig. 1 Old Woman's House Cave, Taddington Dale (SK 16417119): sketch section.

made of the cave at the location given by the O.S. at SK 1651 7085, which bears no resemblance whatsoever to that of Storrs Fox. It therefore seems clear that the cave which was excavated in 1909, is indeed that visited and recorded by Frost and Smith at SK 1641 7119.

Authority 5 refers to the source of the map reference used to locate the cave up to the present.

Authority 1 refers to a letter from Mrs N. Kirkham. Her letter, which was dated 11.9.49, has not been traced, but it seems that she also had doubts about the reference used and had suggested that SK 1641 7122 was a more accurate location.

The sketched longitudinal section of the cave (Fig. 1) is of interest in that it reflects the observations of Storrs Fox, the excavator, both before and after his work. 'With the aid of a rope', he wrote (1911, 117), 'it is easy to descend to a little platform some six or seven feet below, to follow a downward slope for a few feet further, and then by means of a ladder to reach the floor of the cave. Before the excavation was begun, there was no need of a ladder as a deep talus of rough stone reached from the floor up to the aforesaid slope. [An inner chamber was excavated first, and then work started on the main chamber (1911, 118)]. The great difficulty in the working of the cave was the disposal of refuse. It could not be removed outside without great labour and considerable risk, so that, when the excavation of the main chamber was begun, the refuse was thrown into the inner one until that was filled up; and later on a succession of tips was built up, one of them reaching a height of fourteen feet or more'. That phase of the work is represented by the still existing spoil heap, which was prevented from sliding back into the excavation by rough rubble walls. These were built to maintain as steep a slope as possible, and thus to obtain the greatest possible amount of free space at the same time as containing the greatest amount of spoil.

If this account arouses in others a wish to view the cave, it should be noted that it is much easier to get in than it is to get out of it. A ladder of some sort, and a companion outside the cave, would be comforting resources to have available.

#### REFERENCES

Storrs Fox, W. (1911) Derbyshire cave-men of the Roman period. *DAJ* 33: 115-26.