

Archaeological Reports.

EXCAVATION OF PREHISTORIC SITES IN EAST DERBYSHIRE.

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DURING the past year the excavation of Ash Tree Cave, Burntfield Grips, near Whitwell, N.E. Derbyshire, has been continued by Mr. Leslie Armstrong, Dr. Arthur Court, Mr. W. H. Hanbury and Mr. Horace Jones.

Owing to the heavy work involved by the nature of the excavation, participation in actual digging by Dr. Court and Mr. Hanbury has been limited and their efforts mainly confined to the sorting and cleaning of sieved material. Invaluable assistance has again been rendered by Mr. Horace Jones in the arduous work of excavation. Work in the cave is in active progress and the examination of Site No. 2, on the north-west side of the valley, opposite to Ash Tree Cave has been completed.

Mr. Leslie Armstrong reports that Site No. 2 has proved somewhat disappointing, as it was found to be a small rock shelter and not a cave. The L-shaped exploratory trench, one arm parallel to the face and the other at right-angles thereto, was sunk through the glacial deposit to a depth of five feet, and the portion which sealed the entrance to what appeared to be a cave was entirely removed. This revealed not a cave, but a low vertical rock wall four feet beyond the face of the crag, towards which the overhanging portion of the crag recessed backwards in a series of steps, resulting from the fall of successive layers of the tabular limestone. The base

was an irregular platform of similar disintegrated rock and the extreme height of the shelter thus formed was five feet. Both arms of the trial trench were sunk to a depth of five feet, and penetrated through the glacial deposit to its base. The deposit was four feet six inches in thickness, consisting of a brown calcareous loam containing fragments of the local limestone, some of which were considerably abraded, also numerous erratics. The erratics included Bunter pebbles; pebbles of red and white quartz; fragments of carboniferous limestone, considerably abraded; Lake District rocks; an abraded pebble of basalt and an extremely hard piece of coarse grit-stone, almost a conglomerate, probably of northern origin. This glacial deposit rested upon a bed of yellowish calcareous loam, almost free from stones, of which only six inches was examined, but it appeared to be similar to the bed of loam noted at the base of the glacial deposit in the section cut outside the Ash Tree Cave and probably represents an earlier glacial deposit which was subjected to weathering, or solifluxion. No artifacts or evidence of human occupation were found beneath the glacial material, but small flecks of charcoal were noticeable in several places on the line of junction with the base bed, which might be indicative of casual occupation by man.

Ash Tree Cave. Work has been confined to the central cross-section of the cave which when the 1952 Report was written had reached a depth, at one end, of nine feet six inches. The width of the section has been increased to seven feet six inches, and the depth, over eight feet of the length, sunk to ten feet six inches below datum level. Progress has been slow owing to the large slabs of rock encountered, but evidence of the division into three zones of Mousterian occupation, as set out in the previous report, has been strengthened and valuable evidence of climatic conditions obtained. Reference was made in the last report to the occurrence in Zone 2 of a human tooth which, though found in association with Mousterian artifacts was believed to be that of a Neanthropic woman and probably introduced from an upper level into Zone 2. Confirmation of this assumption, and

the probable method by which the introduction was effected, has been obtained during the excavation of an adjoining portion of Zone 2, in which was found a Creswellian flint flake and part of a barbed bone spear, of the type found in the lowest Creswellian horizon of Whaley cave. These objects were lying in a small space separating two large slabs of rock, each of which were deeply embedded in the cave earth and inclined at steep angles, approaching 60 degrees. The largest measured two feet by one foot six inches by six inches; the other was a little smaller; each rested with the heaviest end downwards. It seems clear that the slabs had fallen from the roof when the cave earth was in a water-logged, or sludged, condition and in so doing had carried down into the Mousterian zone these Upper Palæolithic artifacts. If this assumption is correct it would appear that the physical conditions indicated are to be linked with the introduction into the cave of the boulder clay which sealed the Creswellian occupation level.

A layer of the Mousterian Zone 3, one foot in thickness, has been excavated over three-quarters of the area of the section from nine feet six inches to ten feet six inches below datum level. It exhibits much less evidence of disturbance and the contained stones, though numerous, are less massive. In general character it resembles the upper layers, but has proved more productive of artifacts and animal remains, particularly teeth, amongst which teeth of Cave Bear and Cave Lion are noticeable, also a tooth of Giant Deer, together with specimens of all the fauna previously recorded. Interesting fragments of an as yet unidentified species of deer have been recovered. Fragments of bone, both gnawed and humanly split are frequent. The artifacts include split and chipped quartzite pebbles; pebble pounders; utilized split bones; bone tools and a bone awl. The bottom of this occupation zone has not yet been reached.