

TIDESLOW: A NEOLITHIC ROUND BARROW AT TIDESWELL

By the late J. RADLEY and M. PLANT

TIDESLOW is a very mutilated round barrow on the highest point in Tideswell parish at 1250 feet O.D. (SK 779151) which came to the attention of the writers in 1962 when it was discovered that a local farmer had excavated in this barrow in 1947 prior to its being scheduled. We undertook to re-excavate the 1947 trench, to record the 1947 discoveries, and to survey the surviving remains.

The writers are indebted to the owner, Mr. R. Broome of Great Hucklow; the tenant, Mr. P. N. Atkin of Tideslow Farm; and the Ministry of Public Building & Works for permission to excavate. A special thanks is due to Mr. J. E. Critchlow, formerly of Tideslow Farm, for details of his 1947 excavations and for visiting the 1968 excavation. The brunt of the excavation fell upon F. Hepworth, R. Carr, M. Murphy, A. Miller, P. Gaucher and M. Dale, to whom the writers are extremely grateful. The bones were kindly examined by Mr. D. Bramwell, whose report forms Appendix I to this account. The excavation was made possible by financial aid from the Society.

EARLIEST INVESTIGATIONS IN THE BARROW

"From Wheston, a short walk of about a mile brought us to an eminence called TIDESWELL TOP; A place that curiosity had very recently opened, for the purpose of ascertaining its contents. It was a tumulus composed of a series of narrow caverns, formed with stones and earth, in which several skulls and many human bones were found. There is something unseemly, if not unfeeling, in thus disturbing the relics of the dead, and leaving them to bleach in the sun or be preyed on and gnawed by animals. Some of the bones had been carried away, but many remained unburied and lay scattered about the earth-built sepulchre, which those who consigned them to it vainly hoped might have 'canopied them until doomsday'."

This was how Ebenezer Rhodes saw Tideslow or Tideswell Top about 1824,¹ and it is unfortunate that no other record has been traced of the "narrow caverns" and their contents.

The nineteenth century saw much of the barrow dug over for one reason

or another. It is certain that various farmers and villagers have dug in the barrow. A "pudding pie" or limekiln was made in the top of the barrow, with a hen house placed on top of it. Holes were dug in order to obtain building material for nearby walls, and part of the mound was removed, probably for use in the limekiln. A local account is given of a man who found a skull in the barrow and was forced to return it by a scolding wife.

THE 1947 EXCAVATIONS

The farmer, Mr. J. E. Critchlow, tape recorded in 1964 a full account of his activities in which his first discovery was the large standing stone. This stone was undermined so much that it tilted away from its upright position. Two feet deep near the stone he found a coin of Constantius and at the same depth, but some distance away, a "flint chisel" $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. long with a polished chisel-shaped blade $\frac{7}{8}$ in. wide and a rounded "handle".² Between the standing stone and the centre of the barrow, Critchlow did not reach the buried ground surface over most of his trench, and no secondary burials were found. He found a stone cist with a single limestone capstone of trapezoidal shape, 7 ft. long and 3 ft. 6 in. to 4 ft. 8 in. wide. Three sides of the cist were made of several short limestone slabs 15 to 18 in. high and set in clay. They were close fitting and the unpaved chamber or cist was 5 ft. by 4 ft. internally and free from infilling. The capstone was broken by vandals, but the main bones of a disarticulated skeleton were recovered. There were no grave goods. The skull was crushed but the lower jaw was intact and all the bones were confined to the south-west end of the cist. No vertebrae or pelvis were found. The capstone is believed to have been brought from a limestone outcrop half a mile to the south-west of the barrow. No other discoveries were made to the west of the cist.

The site was visited by Messrs. Jackson, Robinson and Salt, then representing Buxton Museum, and they dug around and within the cist. Parts of two skulls, two lower jaws, teeth and phalanges, small pieces of flint and teeth of an ox were found.³ Shortly after this, through the good offices of Mr. J. P. Heathcote, the site was declared a scheduled monument and excavation ceased with much of the trench left open.

It would appear that there were parts of three bodies in the cist, two badly decayed bodies, and one, presumably the final interment, with its main bones well preserved.

THE 1968 EXCAVATION

A trench was set out to enclose the 1947 excavation and some other disturbances. As work progressed, it became apparent that the 1947 trench had cut through some earlier trenches, some of which yielded coal and ash from the limekiln which occupied the mound immediately north of

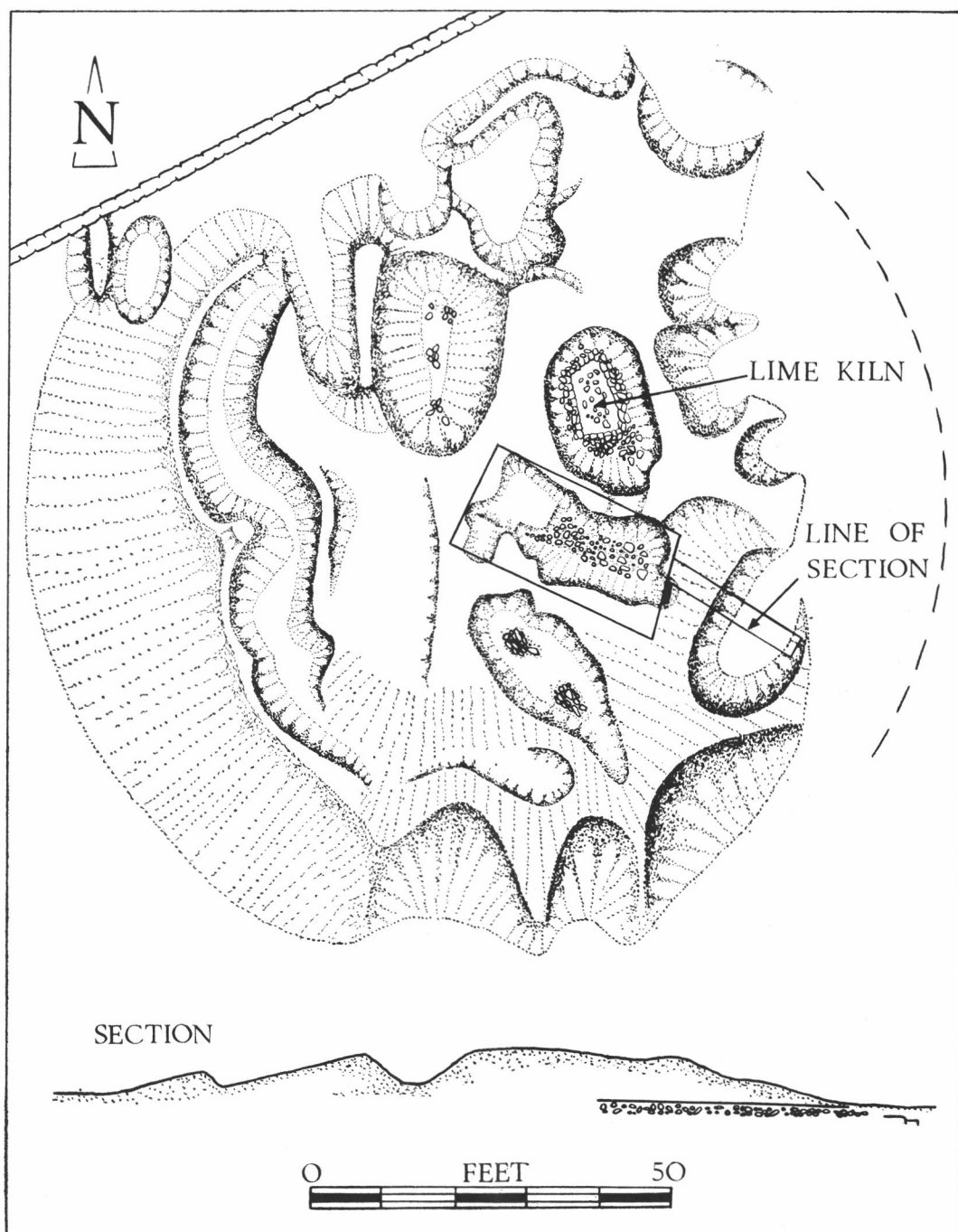


FIG. 1. Tideslow, Neolithic round barrow. Plan showing position of 1968/9 trenches.

the present excavation. Consequently, the area of the trench had to be contracted, leaving broad battered sides to contain the loose debris of these disturbed areas.

The first stage of the excavation revealed the robbed outline of the cist with the western end still intact. This was formed of one naturally shaped stone with its top broken or chipped down to the same level as the other upright stones, one of which remained more or less in its original position. Nothing remained in the cist, but it was possible to isolate the buried turf line from the back-filling of the 1947 excavation. The turf line was 4-6 in. thick, rested on a yellow subsoil, and was devoid of artifacts. A quantity of broken human bones was recovered from the 1947 back-filling and these are presumed to belong to the bodies formerly in the cist.

Between the cist and the standing stone the turf line was represented by a chert-free, humus-rich brown zone on which rested a spread of yellow clay 2-3 in. thick. Much of this yellow clay was covered by a paving of limestone, in places a true pavement, but elsewhere a stony gravel trampled into the clay. On the southern side of the trench the clay had been removed by earlier excavations, but it could be traced as a definite horizon round the southern side of the cist. On the northern side, the trench was extended to try to obtain a clear section of the mound resting on the pavement. This extension revealed a better pavement than that to the east of the cist, but it is by no means certain that the clean limestone gravel of the mound was in its original position. The yellow clay thinned in this extension and the pavement was partly sunk into the old turf line, and was covered by 3 ft. of uniform loose gravel which in turn was covered by 3 ft. of larger slabs, mixed soil and gravel and some lime ash. It is probable that the lower part is undisturbed. The paving and yellow clay passed round the north-east corner of the cist, but was not found inside the cist.

The yellow clay proved to be full of fragments of human bones, together with a few animal bones and small struck black chert flakes (see Appendix II).

West of the cist was more paving, almost certainly part of the paving already discovered. This paving extended, with breaks made by earlier excavation, to a second cist. The individual paving stones were larger than those to the east of the first cist and rested on the original turf. There were no bones and no yellow clay on this area, and the only artifact recovered was a flint scraper from between two of the paving stones. The north side of the excavation in this area was bounded by a dry-stone wall probably erected in the nineteenth century since coal was found below part of the wall.⁴

The paving terminated at the wall of the second cist and was not found on the western side of it. This six-sided cist had one side and one end intact, with the rest robbed away. This robbed section was clearly visible, outlined by several small vertical packing stones which had held the four missing cist walls in position. The packing stones were set into the original turf, and the small ditch to take them was quite distinct. Inside,

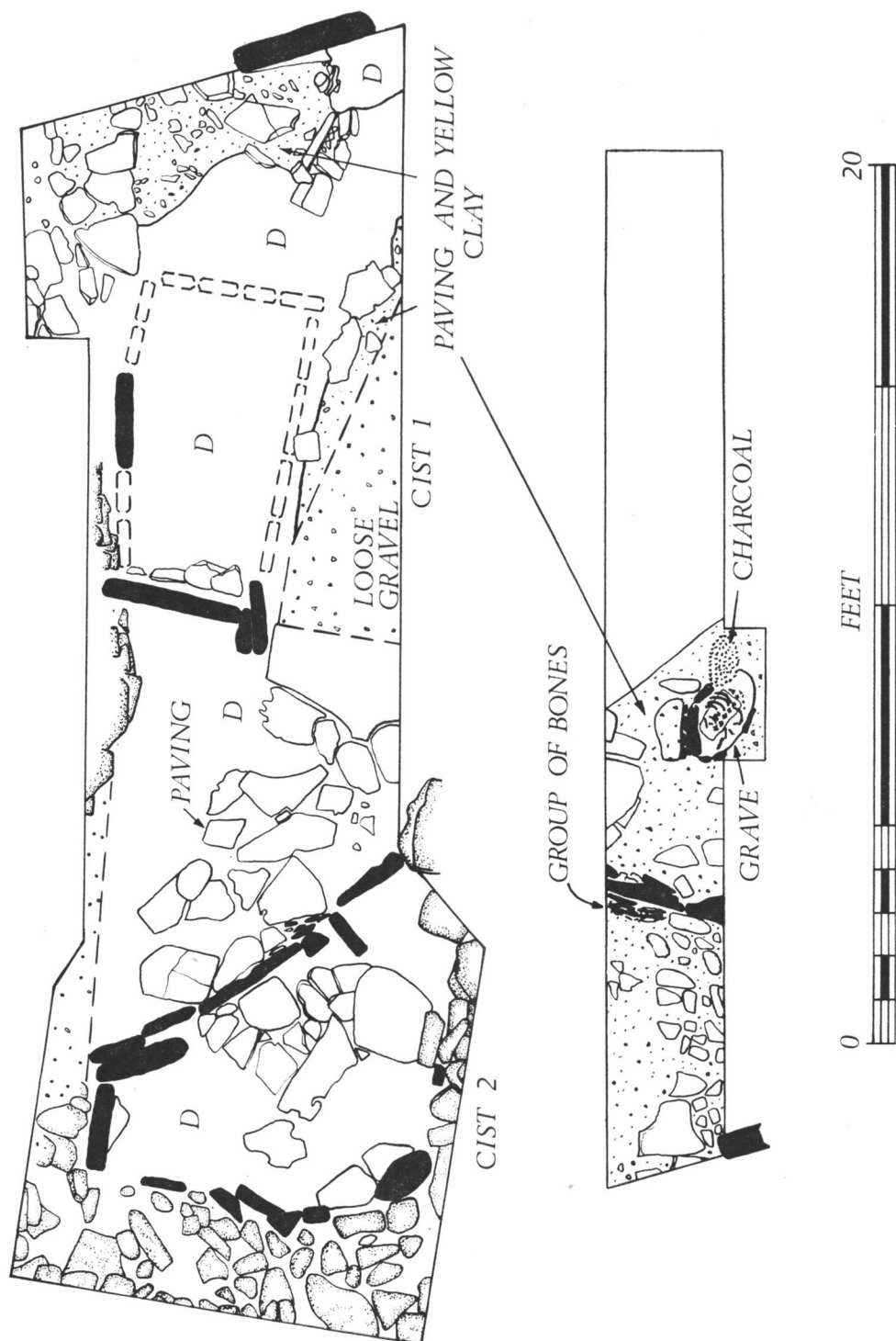


FIG. 2. Tideslow, Neolithic round barrow. Plans of 1968/9 trenches; upright stones in black.

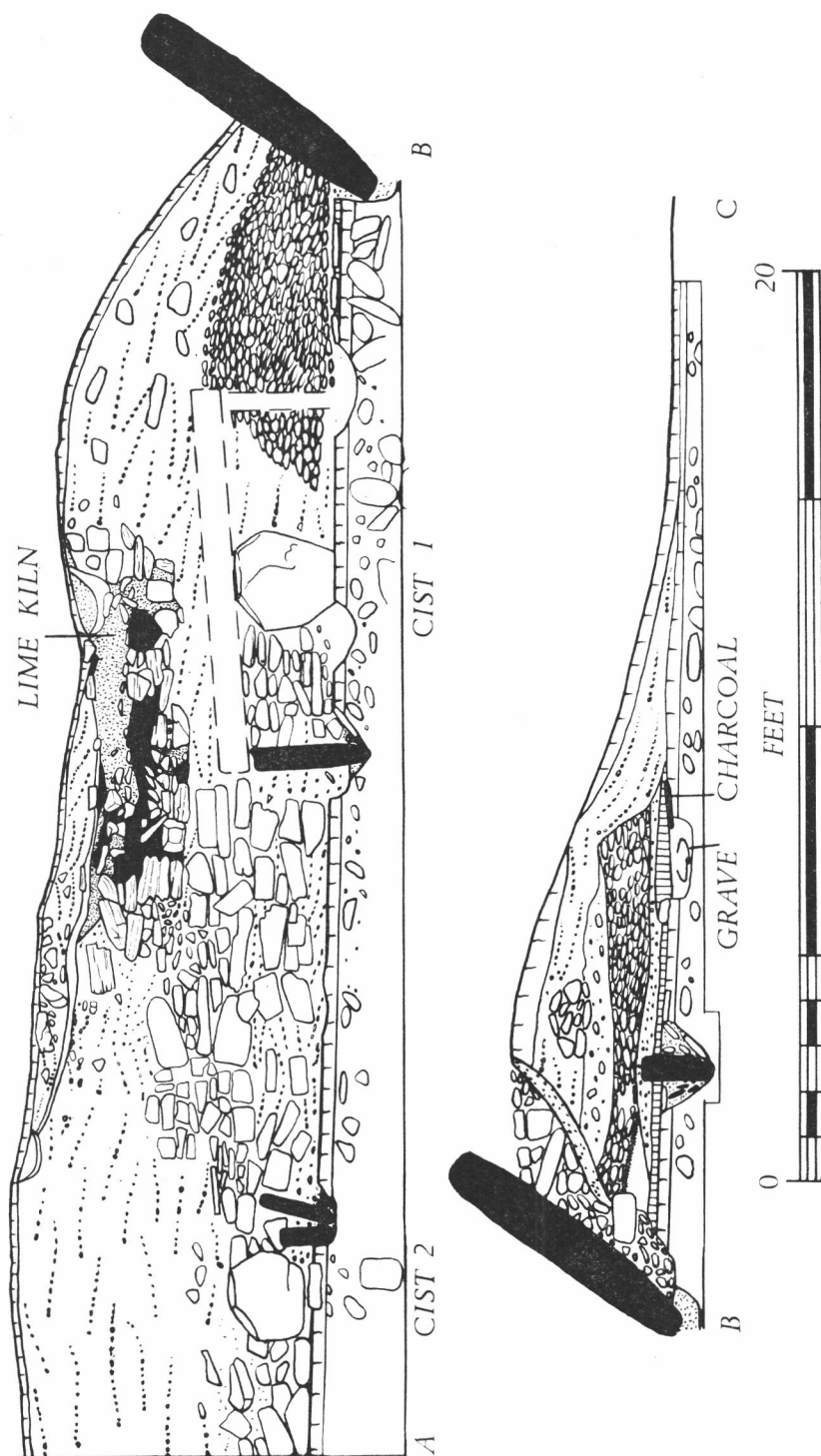


FIG. 3. Tideslow, Neolithic round barrow. Sections of 1968/9 trenches.

part of the cist was paved, the remainder having been removed. The cist measured 7 ft. 6 in. by 5 ft. 3 in. and was 2 ft. high. One upright stone suggests a possible extension to the cist or perhaps a boundary to the paving. Beneath the cist there was a lense of chert, up to 8 in. thick, which extended under the paving between the two cists, but there is no evidence to suggest that it is other than natural.

The cist contained disturbed stones, clay and lime ash, but above and to the south of the cist there were many broken human bones grouped in a zone 4 ft. wide and 2 ft. thick. These bones are probably part of the body from the cist. Three feet above and slightly to the west of the cist a perforated boar's tusk (fig. 4) and a few human bones may also come from the cist. Several bones and teeth of ox and sheep or goat were also recovered from the vicinity of the cist. The mound in this part of the excavation was composed of large boulders, and much more soil and clay than elsewhere, but there was a curious absence of weathered surface limestone, most of the stone being angular and fresh-looking, which suggests that much of it was quarried rather than collected.

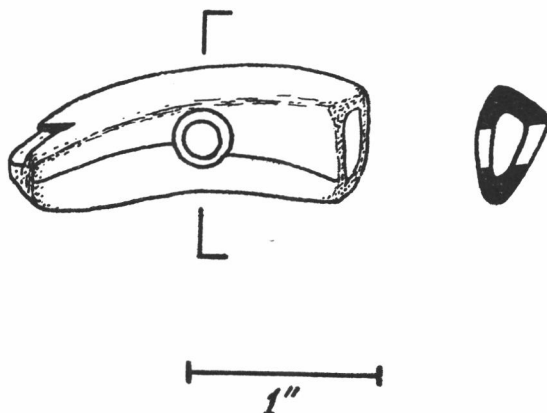


FIG. 4. Tideslow, Neolithic round barrow. Perforated boar's tusk.

THE 1969 EXCAVATION

It has always been the policy of the writers not to excavate undisturbed areas of barrows, but it was felt necessary to obtain a complete section of the barrow from its centre to the periphery, and so in 1969 a new trench 20 ft by 3 ft. was opened. The mound covering this area had been previously disturbed to within 6 in. of the old turf line and yielded a few fragments of human bone together with ash and coal. From the large standing stone, the yellow clay and paving stones were traced eastwards beneath a layer of limestone gravel for 15 ft. to the present edge of the

mound. The only features encountered were two upright stones set into the yellow clay and the old turf line, perhaps forming one side of a disturbed cist. The trench holding these stones was sectioned and it contained stones to keep the uprights in position, and it was quite clear that these stones were let into the clay layer. The otherwise undisturbed turf line was traced throughout the trench. Short trenches were dug intermittently to a point 75 ft. from the centre of the barrow, but no trace was found of either a surrounding quarry ditch or the original edge of the barrow, which, on the line of the trench, had been removed for lime burning.

The main 1969 trench yielded quantities of well-preserved bone fragments from in and on the yellow clay and, although many of the bones were very fragmented and scattered at random, there were three groups of better preserved bones. Four teeth and a few bones of a young adult were found near the standing stone. Between these and the possible cist wall were the long bones and ribs of a young person resting in the angle between one of the upright slabs and the paving. East of this slab were the articulated ribs and vertebrae of a young person set within a small arrangement of stones in a shallow grave dug into the clay and old turf line. Two teeth of a deer and two large ox bones were found in the yellow clay floor. Near the shallow grave, which was sealed by yellow clay, was a shallow hearth or depression holding a small quantity of charcoal which was also covered by the clay covering the grave. This was the only considerable quantity of charcoal encountered in the whole of the 1968/9 excavations.

THE LIME KILN

"Pudding pie" is the local name given to the primitive kiln used to make lime until *c.* 1900. Probably the last one in the northern Peak was used *c.* 1916 at Berrystall Lodge Farm, one mile to the north of Tideslow. The kiln was often made in the field to be limed and was simply a hole in the ground with one or more flues. Kindling wood was covered with layers of limestone and coal, and covered with a turf roof. After firing, both lime and ash were carried onto the field. Occasionally, as at Tideslow and in other barrows excavated by the Batemans, a barrow was used in order to provide a better draught.

Part of the destruction of Tideslow was due to burning lime in the top of the mound and using the eastern side of the mound as a quarry. Mr. Critchlow recalls that prior to a recent liming of the field in which Tideslow is situated, there was a marked difference in the quality of the grass which emphasised the area which was formerly part of the barrow. After the pudding pie was abandoned, the central hollow was adapted for use as a hen hut. A probable collapsed ventilation tunnel can be seen leading into the kiln from the west.

DISCUSSION

Tideslow appears to have been almost perfectly circular with a diameter of 132 ft. The present excavation of almost 500 square feet is quite considerable, but represents only 4% of the original barrow. This in itself restricts the amount which can be deduced from the excavation. There is obviously space for many more "narrow caverns" in the remainder of the barrow, but if the excavated area can be taken as representative, these discoveries have some importance.

It would appear that, before the mound was erected, there was an open cemetery on the hill-top with a series of free-standing stone cists and a single standing stone which were in part surrounded by a paved area. This cemetery was exposed for a sufficient length of time to permit more than one body to be incorporated into the first cist. The spread of fragmented human bones around this cist suggests that previous occupants of the cist were unceremoniously scraped out before the final interment was made in this particular cist. There was no developed turf line on the yellow clay and paving, but this is not necessarily proof that the cemetery had a short existence. Part of the excavated area proved to have no stone paving, with the second cist set into the original turf. It is possible that the cemetery had a long history, for in the area excavated there was a cist set into the old soil; a cist set in the old soil but surrounded by paving and showing signs of more than one period of use; at least one burial in a grave cut into the paved area; and upright stones which might suggest a partly dismantled cist. Within this complex, the single standing stone is an anomaly. It may be one of a series encircling the main burial area and the excavation failed to show any structural connection between it and any of the cists.

The only artifact of any consequence found in the excavation is the boar's tusk, which, although found in a disturbed position, probably came from the second cist. Long unperforated tusks are frequently found with Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age burials, for example, at Liffs Low, Rolley Low and Glebe Low in Derbyshire, and at Cowlam in East Yorkshire. However, perforated boar's tusks are rare, although they have been found in Neolithic graves in the Cotswolds at Uley and Belas Knapp.⁵

The shape and size of Tideslow are of some significance. There is a growing awareness that round barrows are not so rare in the Neolithic as was once supposed, and comparable examples have been found in Cornwall, Wales, Ireland, Scotland and Northern England. In Derbyshire there are no true long barrows — Green Low, for example, is 50 ft. by 30 ft. and Gib Hill is some 140 ft. by 80 ft., and these are oval rather than long in form. The internal construction of these barrows owes little to the long barrow. The bulk of the Peak District Neolithic round or oval barrows have stone cists which have been described as "sub-megalithic", and contain multiple inhumations, both articulated and disarticulated, and cremations. No close temporal setting is available for any Peak District

Neolithic barrow. Probably the majority of them belong to the later Neolithic. Tideslow ranks with the largest of the English Neolithic round barrows. Its 132 ft. diameter makes it the largest in the Peak District, Minninglow having a diameter of 120 ft., and it exceeds in area such notable barrows as Duggleby Howe (125 ft. in diameter) and Bryn Celli Ddu (90 ft.). If size matters, Tideslow is of importance for this and nothing else.

Tideslow, in keeping with other Peak District round barrows, covers a series of cists, but, since these were excavated in the last century and no attention was paid to the relationship of these cists to the pre-barrow surface, it is not known how many of these barrows have evidence of free-standing cists or areas of pavement around them. The closest parallel to Tideslow is found in the disposition of the cists at Ringham Low near Monyash,⁶ which may be evidence of the same open cemetery as at Tideslow, and its former size (162 ft. by 105 ft.) may corroborate this. In 1847 there was a central cist and it was also "thickly studded with vaults" which radiated from the centre, which is reminiscent of Tideslow's "narrow caverns". In 1855 parts of six cists were recorded.⁷

Until more Neolithic barrows are excavated in the Peak District there is little point in seeking close analogies inside or outside the area. The present excavation illustrates some of the problems encountered in a very disturbed large round barrow, and any future excavation must surely involve a total stripping of the site, using mechanical aids.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Rhodes, E., *Peak Scenery*, vol. I, 1828, 98.

² These finds were given to Buxton Museum, but now cannot be located.

³ Information from Dr. J. Wilfred Jackson, 22-10-64, 10-9-67. These finds were deposited in Buxton Museum, but now cannot be identified.

⁴ Although probably recent, dry stone walls have been found in prehistoric burial mounds, for example, at Millin Bay, County Down (*Archaeological Research Publications, Northern Ireland*, no. 4, H.M.S.O., 1955; Evans, E., *Prehistoric and Early Christian Ireland, A Guide*, London, Batsford, 1966, 103-4).

⁵ Piggott, S., *Neolithic Cultures of the British Isles*, Cambridge University Press, 1954, 146.

⁶ Bateman, T., *Vestiges of the Antiquities of Derbyshire*, 1848.

⁷ Bateman, T., *Ten Years Diggings in Celtic and Saxon Grave Hills in the Counties of Derby, Stafford, and York from 1848 to 1858*, 1861.

APPENDIX I

THE BONES FROM TIDESLOW

By D. BRAMWELL

The upper parts of the mound in the 1968 excavation have yielded numerous fresh-looking bones. One recent deposit was most of a herring or lesser black-backed gull, possibly killed by a fox whilst roosting on the ground. A fox may also explain the presence of fowl bones. The remains of two lambs were probably buried by a farmer.

The remainder of the mound, much disturbed, has yielded a pre-molar, a molar and

the proximal end of the humerus of a red deer; a molar and split fragments of bone of an adult ox; the distal end of the right tibia of a wolf, rarely found in the Peak (27.5 mm. wide, too large for a prehistoric dog); and the left upper canine of a polecat. Bones of a young cat are probably those of the wild form living in the mound. Other natural occupants of the mound are represented by young hare or rabbit, a young mole, 40 water vole, 4 field vole and parts of five frogs or toads. Birds are represented by the bones of a mistle-thrush, the lower beak of a hawfinch and a metacarpal bone of either Baillons' or Little Crake, both of which favour wet and warm areas and are rare visitors to this country at present. The human bones spread at random through the mound include finger and toe bones, a left clavicle, fragments of skull and ribs, and seven teeth. An astragalus was apparently chopped through in antiquity.

The Neolithic clay floor to the east of the first cist yielded a spread of rodent remains occasionally occurring in small pockets between the paving stones, including parts of eight water vole and one field vole. Larger remains include fragments of split ox limb bones, a recently erupted sheep or goat molar and numerous indeterminate fragments. The human remains, weighing about four pounds, are heavily reduced, but fragments of adult ribs, phalanges, humerus, skull and vertebrae can be recognised, possibly all from one individual. Adjacent to and above the polygonal cist the bones were composed of an antler fragment, the head of a humerus of a juvenile red deer, the left scapula of a pig and human bones of a person in his late twenties. The fifth metatarsal which was found showed no sign of distortion attributable to wearing sandals.

The 1969 trench yielded five pounds of bones from in, on, or just above the Neolithic floor. Animals were represented by the teeth of a small breed of sheep or goat; ulna and left mandible of a badger cub; humerus of a weasel and bones of water vole, bank vole, wood mouse and frog or toad. Four humans are represented: an infant, two to five years old, found just east of the standing stone; an adolescent, fourteen to eighteen years old, in a similar position, with a fibia showing the "squatting facet"; an unusually small adult, the calcaneum being 51 by 41 mm.; and a larger adult, the calcaneum being 70 by 39 mm. Many small skull fragments were found, some of them thick and more usual among Bronze Age folk.

APPENDIX II

STONE ARTIFACTS FROM TIDESLOW

All the stone artifacts found *in situ* came from the Neolithic floor, none coming from beneath it. The artifacts were spread at random, mostly in the area excavated in 1968. They include a flint flake, seventeen black chert flakes and one good flint end scraper. All the waste pieces are tiny.

The disturbed levels yielded similar fragments. These are five flint flakes, two patinated, a core trimming and two burnt pieces, a tiny flint end scraper, and a core and forty chert flakes, mostly black, and two showing slight retouching. There was nothing with any diagnostic feature.

All the finds are deposited in Sheffield City Museum.