A NEW MICROLITHIC SITE ON WEST HEATH

By J. W. Brailsford

The site selected for this excavation lies on West Heath Common, between Rogate and West Harting, just south of the Petersfield–Midhurst railway line, and about half a mile north-east of the site previously excavated by Dr. Clark.[1] It is situated on the summit of the ridge marking the Lower Greensand escarpment, at a height of between 150 and 200 ft. above sea-level. A small excavation was undertaken on this site in March 1936, by the kind permission of W. Mitchell, Esq., and with the help of the Bedales Field Club. The most prolific area appears to lie on a small elevation, and at the base of this a cutting 12 ft. 6 in. by 3 ft. was dug in three parts (A, B, and C in Fig. 1). This was done so that the section obtained with the first cutting might serve as a guide to any stratigraphical arrangement, which, if it might have been overlooked in the first cutting, could then be carefully observed in the others. The section obtained is shown in Fig. 1.

The cutting was excavated in two layers and all soil removed was carefully sieved. Layer 1 consisted of the turf and humus, with a thin band of clayey peat towards the upper end. It contained comparatively few artefacts, and these were nearly all flakes, of which only one was calcined.

Layer 2 consisted of pure white sand. Since at this spot the surface vegetation consists only of sparse heather, and not of bracken, this layer was almost entirely undisturbed by roots. In the top 9 in. or so worked flints were abundant; below this level it was completely barren. A considerable proportion of these flints were calcined, which suggests that they underwent heat contemporaneously with the occupation of

[1] *S.A.C.* lxxiii. 145.

the site, rather than being subsequently baked by heath-fires, in which case few, if any, flints from layer 2 would be calcined, whereas a large proportion of those from layer 1 would be severely burnt. If, however, the flints from layer 2 had worked down from the surface, as seems probable, their burnt condition might well be due to the same cause as that which affected the flints from a higher level. The complete absence of hearths or fragments of charcoal seems to support the latter view,

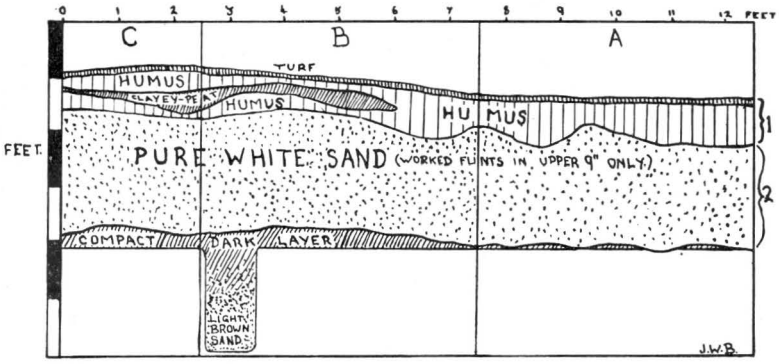


FIG. 1.

suggesting that no stratigraphical significance can be attributed to the distribution of the microliths. In Dr. Clark's cutting microliths were found throughout the sandy layer, which was there thinner and more disturbed by roots.

About the level at which worked flints became scarce, the soil grew very damp, and water began to accumulate in the bottom of the cutting. At about 3 ft. from the surface a hard dark layer was reached. Since this was comparatively impervious, the water tended to collect above it in the white sand. It was difficult to dig beneath this layer, owing to the quantity of water present, but in one place a small trial pit was dug to a depth of about 5 ft. from the ground level. The dark layer proved completely barren, and gradually merged into brownish sand which grew lighter in colour with depth.

I was at first tempted to interpret the white sand as

a flood deposit, perhaps of the Atlantic period, overlying an old surface level, possibly Boreal, represented by the dark layer. This was largely composed of vege-

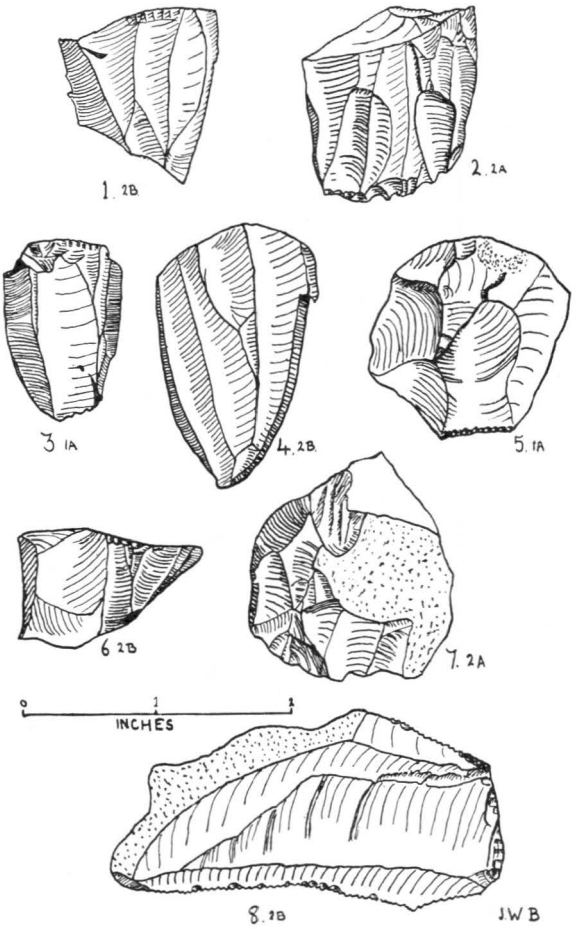
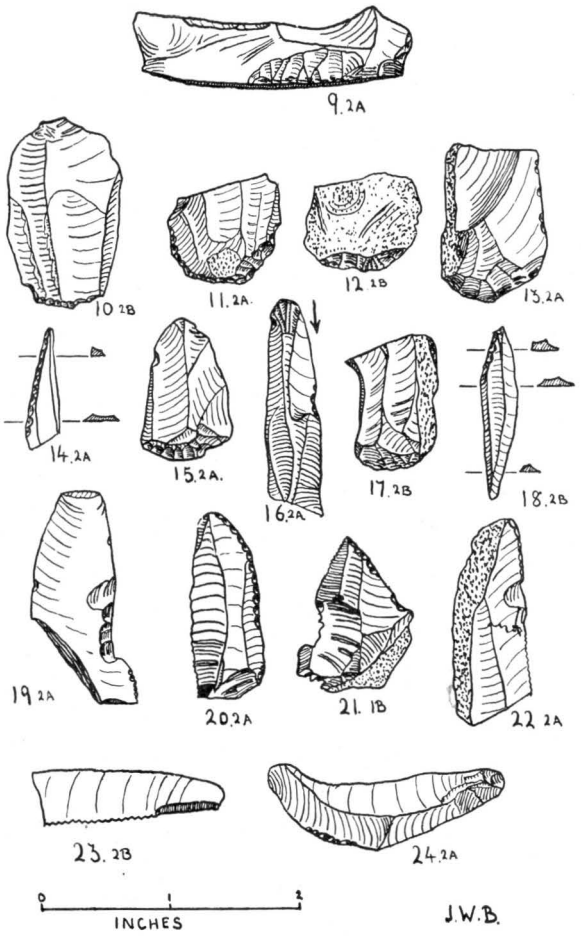


table matter, had an irregular but sharply defined upper surface, and, like the layer of weathered nodules found by Dr. Clark, was strongly suggestive of an old land surface. When I spoke to Dr. Clark on the matter, however, he said that recent inquiry had revealed the

fact that a sequence such as that described here is the natural result of weathering on the upper layer of a sandy deposit. Water percolating through the sand



dissolves the ferruginous salts from the upper part, which is left as a clean bleached sand. These salts, together with vegetable matter carried down by the water, are deposited in a well-defined layer corresponding to the top of the water-table. This compact, peat-like

layer acts as a barrier to the sinking of heavy objects, such as stones, and these, collecting on its surface, enhance its resemblance to an old land surface. It appears, therefore, that the whole sequence observed in both Dr. Clark's and the present excavation represents the upper part of the Lower Greensand as affected by the process described above. The microliths appear to have been scattered on the surface of this deposit, and, being of a high density, to have gradually worked their way down through the sand. In Dr. Clark's section they had only been arrested by the more solid 'layer of deposition', as here the sandy layer was thinner, and their progress was aided by the bracken roots. In the present excavation, however, they were only found in the top 9 in. of the bleached sand. In both cases the production of the microliths *in situ* is attested by their 'factory condition'.

The absence of stratigraphical arrangement prevents any conclusions being drawn from the distribution of the artefacts, but they appear to represent a single homogeneous industry.

The finds included conical cores (1, 3, 4, 6), rough scrapers (2, 5, 7), flakes with edges irregularly chipped, probably by use (8, 23), core-trimmings similar to those noted by Dr. Clark (9), small, finely worked scrapers (10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17), obliquely blunted points, both right and left hand (14, 18, 20), and one flake (23) which may be a burin. Implements showing 'tranchet' technique, microburins, and hollow-based points were completely absent. Long, narrow blades were abundant, and many appeared to have had the butts trimmed (16), though this secondary flaking may have been incidental to the striking of the flake, and may not be intentional.

The number of artefacts from each layer is shown in the following table:

Layer	*Rough scrapers*	*Small finely worked scrapers*	*Cores*	*Points*	*Burins*	*Flakes*
1	1	..	1	..	..	73
2	3	5	10	3	1?	459

Owing to the fact that no implements of any great topological significance were found, it is impossible to identify the industry discovered with any accuracy, but it probably belongs to the developed Tardenoisian culture typical of south-east England in later Mesolithic times. The excavation is of some interest as proving the existence of yet another microlithic site on the Lower Greensand outcrop.