

VII.—PREHISTORIC WEARDALE—A NEW SURVEY

BY CLARE I. FELL AND E. J. W. HILDYARD.

I. THE BACKGROUND.

It may be said that all archæological research involves collaboration between a number of workers, and, as the science becomes more complicated, the field worker becomes increasingly dependent on the museum expert. This paper records such a co-operative effort and, I hope, shows that it is not always necessary for the field worker to have more than a rudimentary knowledge of the subject involved for useful results to be achieved. While disclaiming any pretensions to being a prehistorian, I can claim to have become expert in one particular, that of detecting flints on ploughed land. After finding the best part of 2,000 pieces, nearly all very small, I have become fairly confident that, if there are flints to be found, I will see them.

My role in this piece of work has been merely to provide the material for the expert to digest and I have been fortunate in securing the interest of Miss Fell whose section of this report, illustrated by her admirable drawings, contains all that is of a scientific value to the prehistorian. Nevertheless, some account of the background of the work and of the district may help to fill in the picture for the reader.

I, in my turn, am indebted to many people in the dale whose contribution in the form of past finds or of information I have acknowledged elsewhere,¹ but this paper would not be complete without mention of Mr. Harvey Walton,

¹ In my *Annual Summaries of Research*, published privately.

discoverer of the important site at Greenfield, and his daughter, Miss Doreen Walton; of Mr. J. E. Reed of Rookhope, and of my collaborator in the field, Mr. G. V. Snowdon.

The Wear is one of the rivers of Britain of which the Roman name is preserved and the Wear valley has been for centuries of great industrial importance. For some two hundred years it was one of the great lead-producing areas of England (not to mention a certain quantity of iron); more recently its output of limestone has been enormous and that of ganister considerable, and still more recently it has become important as one of the few sources in the world of fluorspar.

Nevertheless, it has always been a backward and little-known region, and still is, as I know from the unenlightened faces of acquaintances when I tell them my habitat is Wear-dale. Compared to the great valleys to the north and south, Tynedale and Teesdale, its fame is very limited. This seems to be mainly due to two factors, apart from a particularly severe climate. One is geographical, the dale cannot be used as a highway across England for, if the traveller surmounts the heights at the head of the valley,² he is confronted by a second range and has to negotiate Hartside and Cross-fell before reaching the western plains. The other factor is historical, the control of the whole area by the Bishop of Durham, who used most of it as a hunting preserve, prevented the growth of a local aristocracy.

Thus it was that, after the war, when I turned my attention to the archæology of this region, I found it comparatively neglected and little known, in this as in all else. So far as pre-history was concerned, beyond the famous discovery at Heathery Burn cave at Stanhope, the site of which is now destroyed by quarrying, there was little beyond a few finds of flints on the fells. This was due to the fact that practically the whole of the valley itself in its upper reaches was under

² The road from Wearhead to Alston is the highest main road in England. 2,056 feet.

grass,³ whereas there are always bare patches on the fells due to natural causes or to heather burning, or, in this case of Rookhope Chimneys, to fumes emitted from the smelting of lead.⁴

In the course of many years' shooting and walking on the fells, though always on the look-out, I had never seen a flint, and I did not therefore intend to pursue this line,⁵ but my first care was to try and examine, and, if possible, collect any past finds that could still be traced to individual hands and to secure them for posterity,⁶ since objects not forming part of a regular collection tend to disappear sooner or later.

In this way I collected a number of fine pieces, including the axes mentioned by Miss Fell, a number of good arrow-heads and a small quantity of other worked flints.

My attention was turned to the valley itself by two accidental circumstances. During my excavations (in 1946 and 1947) of the medieval hunting lodge at Cambokeels, a surprising number of flints appeared, in view of the small area uncovered. This led me to examine the spoil heaps of the pipeline then being dug right down the valley from Burnhope reservoir, with results confirming the presence of pieces of flint in some quantity, in view of the very limited area of upturned soil. Thus encouraged, I began to examine fields under plough, with the remarkable results described by Miss Fell.

The word remarkable may be allowed when it is realized that the places examined between Eastgate and Stanhope comprised, in fact, practically every field where the earth was bare. Including the pipeline, I have found flints at thirty-six different places and there have been very few fields indeed where I have drawn blank.⁷ There can be little

³ I cannot recall one field above Stanhope that was ploughed before the war.

⁴ This phenomenon is repeated in places in Allendale.

⁵ In two visits to the Rookhope Chimney site, I only found two pieces.

⁶ I hope shortly to deposit the complete collection in the Bowes Museum.

⁷ Apart from the alluvial soil deposited in the very bottom of the valley since prehistoric times, any site at all suited to camping may be expected to produce flints.

doubt that the sides and floor of the valley, could all the grass be removed, would be found to be covered with thousands of pieces of flint. It is true that, as Miss Fell shows, these relics represent many thousands of years of human activity, yet it is still, to me, a surprising phenomenon in a district so many miles from any natural source of flint.

A few brief points remain to be made. As Miss Fell points out, the dating value of surface finds is limited and no stratified sites have yet been found. But it may be worth noting that where, as happened several times, flints were found incidentally on small excavations of mine, they were invariably at a depth of some 5 inches below the humus and on top of what an archæologist would call the undisturbed sub-soil.

On one point the work has failed to throw any light, that of the curious absence of barrows, noted long ago by Canon Greenwell, and becoming ever more strange with the increasing evidence of the abundant presence of prehistoric man.

If I might comment on the lack of evidence of the early Iron Age, I would suggest that the answer might be that such a backward and remote area never got beyond a Bronze Age culture before the Roman tide engulfed it.

In conclusion a word of caution is required about the use of the Distribution Map. It was clearly necessary to include one to follow the paper and to illustrate Miss Fell's argument about the altitudes of the different sites. But as far as horizontal distribution is concerned, it may give a misleading impression. The concentration of sites between Eastgate and Stanhope is due to fortuitous factors—there is practically no ploughed land above Eastgate and the area between it and Stanhope is nearest and therefore most convenient to my own place of residence.

But there is no reason to think that there are not as many sites both farther up and lower down the dale. In the case of the westward side nothing can be done and the prolific sites at Eastgate itself have now been laid down to grass.

But eastwards below Stanhope, and still more below Frosterley, there are considerable areas of ploughed land and will be for years to come. I have little doubt that a rich harvest of flints and the information they give could be gathered there if labourers could be found.

E.J.W.H.

II. ANALYSIS OF FINDS.

The field work carried out by Mr. Hildyard in Weardale since the 1939-45 war and described above, comes as a reminder that much fresh knowledge of the prehistory of our country, particularly in its more remote parts, is the result of careful searching by someone with a deep interest in the archæology of the countryside in which he lives. His work adds to the earlier records of Dr. C. T. Trechmann, Mr. W. M. Egglestone and others, and has revealed many new sites yielding flint industries ranging in character from Mesolithic to Bronze Age.

Microlithic flint industries, found at elevations exceeding 1,000 feet O.D. and as high as 1,829 feet, are already known from Weardale. These are in the fells, as at Allendale on the Northumberland border, from Wellhope at the head of the dale.⁸ A prolific site near Rookhope Chimney on Redburn Common (Map Reference 35/906444)⁹ may first have been occupied in late Mesolithic times, but here, as at Allendale, arrowheads of tranchet derivative¹⁰ and of tanged and barbed forms suggest contact with later cultures, or re-use of the site in the Neolithic period and in the Bronze Age. Two more sites on Bollihope Common near Wager Head and Whitfield Brow¹¹ have yielded flints of microlithic

⁸ *Trans. Nat. Hist. Soc. Northumberland and Durham* (O.S.), 1880, vol. vii, pp. 210f.

⁹ *Ibid.*, N.S., 1914, vol. iv, pp. 67-85; *Proc. Soc. Ant., Newcastle*, 3rd series, vol. iv, pp. 205-208, and vol. v, p. 106.

¹⁰ *Archæological Journal*, vol. xci, pp. 32f.

¹¹ *Trans. Nat. Hist. Soc. Northumberland and Durham* (N.S.), 1931, vol. vii, pp. 191-3.

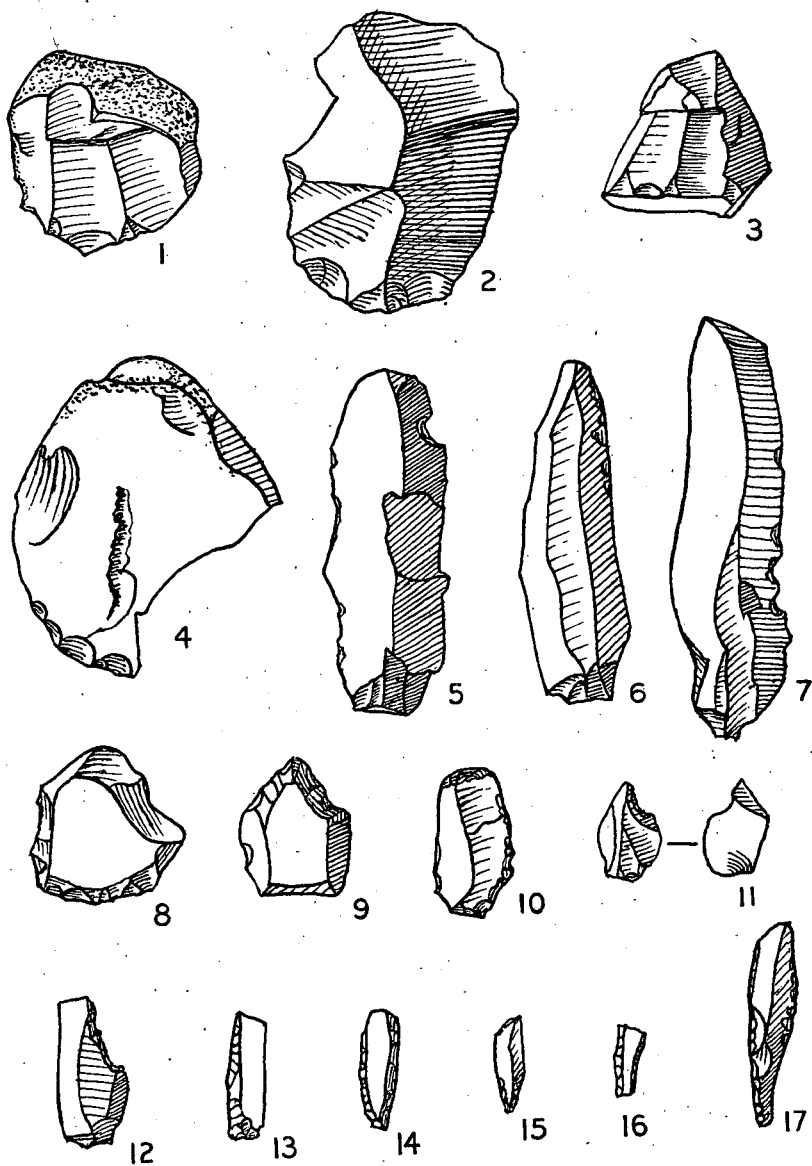


FIG. 1 (scale 1/1). FROM GREENFIELD, COWSHILL.

character and also a leaf-shaped flint arrowhead. Dr. A. Raistrick in his survey of Mesolithic settlement in the North of England¹² mentioned places in Weardale, on the Durham fells and the Northumbrian coastline from which such material had been recorded up to 1933 and claimed that flints of Tardenoisian character had been found below the Atlantic peats of Wharfedale. He inferred a date prior to the formation of the peat for the industries found there and for the related material from the Durham fells. Further analyses made by Dr. Raistrick and Dr. K. M. Blackburn of peat from Heatheryburn Moor, five miles south-west of Blanchland in Northumberland, have yielded similar results.¹³ A divergent view of the age of the Pennine peats has been expressed by Dr. H. Godwin.¹⁴ As far as I know, no correlation of archæological material with peats examined by the pollen analytical method have so far been made in this district and it is therefore difficult to claim the age of the microlithic industries of Weardale with any degree of certainty.

Mr. Hildyard has recorded new sites from the fells, chief among them being Greenfield Quarry, Cowhill (Map Reference 35/851421) which lies to the east of the road from Cowhill to Allenheads at an elevation of about 1,600 feet. The flint industry from this site has been collected by Mr. Harvey Walton of Corn Riggs, Cowhill, who has given some of the material to the Blackgate Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne, and some to Mr. Hildyard. I have only been able to examine the latter part of the collection together with additional material lent to him by the finder, amounting in all to about 200 pieces. Fig. 1 shows a selection of the flints which include microliths (13-17), a micro-burin (11), a notched blade (12), scrapers of various forms (4, 8, 10), blades (5-7), cores (1-3) and an awl (9). This industry is of late Tardenoisian technique and shows no evidence for an overlap

¹² *Yorks Arch. Soc. Journal*, xxxi (1933), pp. 141-156.

¹³ *Proc. University of Durham Phil. Soc.*, vol. viii (1931), pp. 351-8.

¹⁴ *Proc. Royal Soc.*, 118 (1935), p. 213.

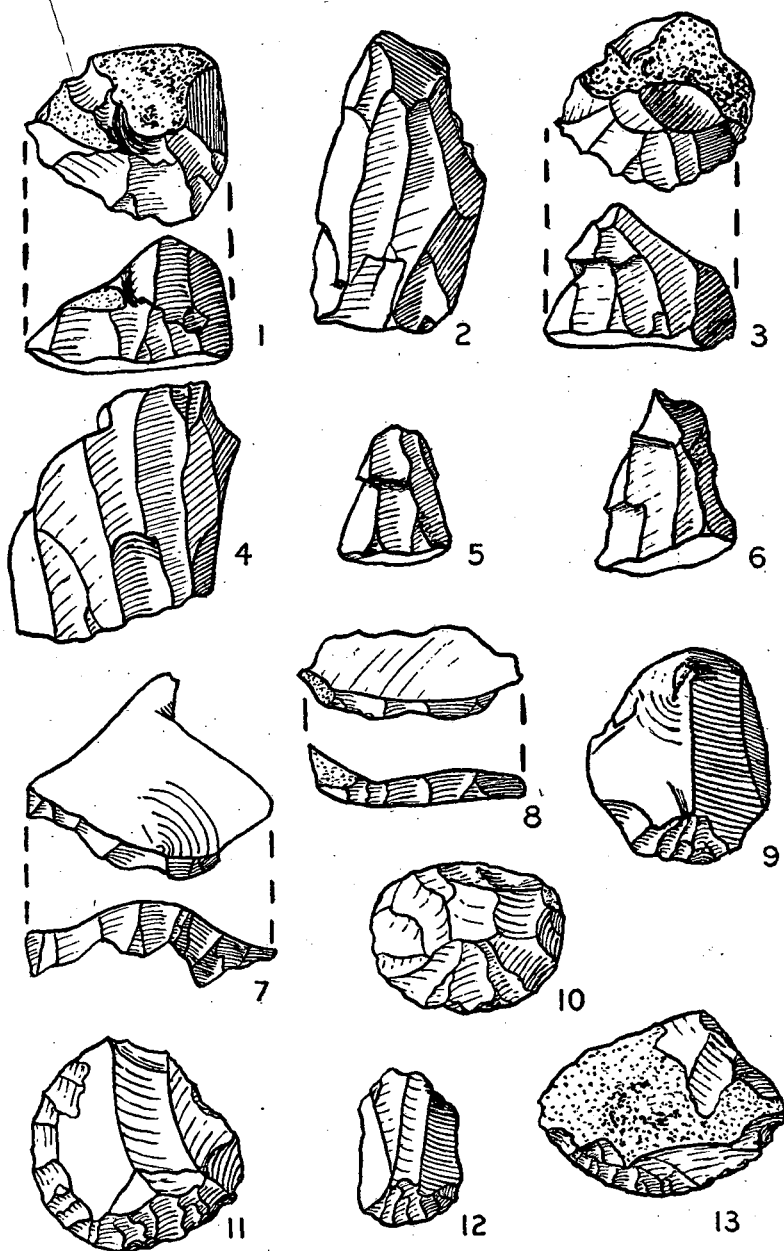


FIG. 2 (scale 1/1). POLICE FIELD, EASTGATE.
1-6, cores; 7-8, core-trimming flakes; 9-13, scrapers.

with later more advanced cultures. Flints from Allotment Plantation near Bollihope Common (Map Reference 35/028348), found at an elevation exceeding 1,000 feet, connect with earlier finds from that area already mentioned and are of the same character.

Farther down the valley a number of new sites yielding flints have been found and it is these which are of a particular interest on account of their low-lying positions at elevations of less than 800 feet and at no distance from the River Wear and its tributaries. A rich site was found at Police Field, Eastgate (Map Reference 35/954386), in 1949 near the junction of the Rookhope Burn with the Wear. More than 1,000 flakes, cores, chips and implements have been collected and some of these are illustrated in figs. 2 and 3. The industry is similar to that from Greenfield Quarry, Cowshill, and includes microliths, micro-burins, scrapers, notched blades and cores. But here a lozenge-shaped flint arrowhead and another of tanged and barbed type (fig. 3, 18-19) suggest that there may have been contact with Neolithic and even with Bronze Age cultures. Close by, at Eastgate House (Map Reference 35/955387) a similar industry has been noticed, though no typical implements are included in the 47 pieces so far collected. About a mile to the east two fields at Howl John (Map References 35/964388 and 967389) have yielded a considerable amount of material. I have examined more than 500 flint cores, flakes, scrapers and microliths which are of the same late, or final, Tardenoisian character (fig. 4), but here again the presence of two arrowheads of tranchet derivative form (Nos. 13-14) and a chip from a polished axe (No. 12) shows that the site was also occupied when Neolithic techniques and types of implements were known. Farther up the valley, a single microlith, a few large scrapers and cores of flint were found during the excavations at a medieval hunting lodge at Cambokeels¹⁵ (Map Reference 35/932382), fig. 5, nos. 8-12, and indicate settlement at much the same time as those sites already

¹⁵ *Arch. Ael.*, 4th series, vol. xxvii (1949), pp. 190-1.

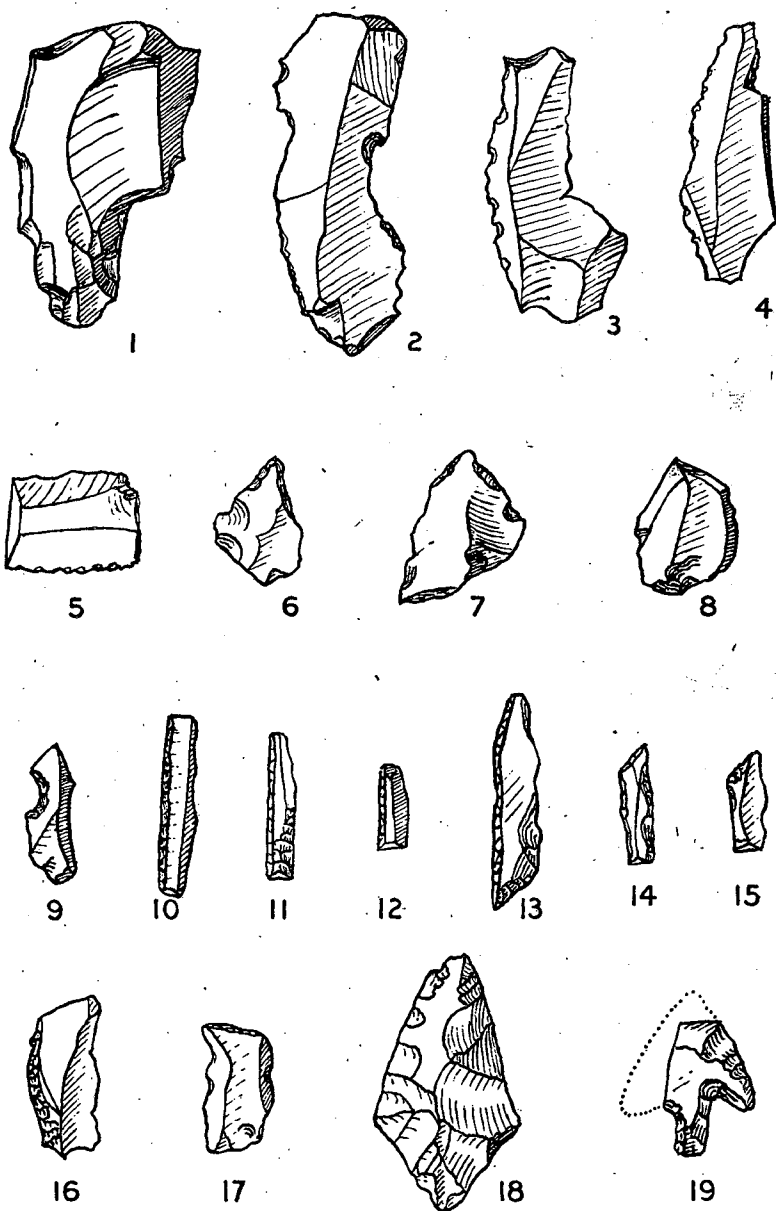


FIG. 3 (scale 1/1). POLICE FIELD, EASTGATE.

1, tanged flake; 2-4, utilized flakes; 5, saw; 6-8, borers; 9, notched blade; 10-17, Microliths; 18, lozenge arrowhead; 19, tanged and barbed arrowhead.

mentioned, as also do flints from Greenhead, Stanhope (Map Reference 35/977396), fig. 6, nos. 7-9.

Flints found at various points along the pipeline which has been laid down the dale to take water from Burnhope reservoir to Sunderland appear to be of similar character to those from other sites already mentioned from Weardale. All these points lie below the 1,000-foot contour and stretch from just west of the Rookhope Burn to Shittlehope Burn and are most common in the Eastgate area. A burin spall and small borer are shown in fig. 6, nos. 14-15.

The dating of these flint industries on typological grounds is risky. They are of a technique recognized by archæologists as Tardenoisian and especially to a late, or final, phase. Professor J. G. D. Clark has shown how the microlithic tradition survived in some areas into periods later than the Mesolithic,¹⁶ and Mr. Lacaille has recently pointed out that there is evidence for an overlap with the Beaker culture in parts of the West Highlands.¹⁷ Indeed, Dr. Trechmann thought that the microlithic flints found at the mouth of Crimdon Beck, three miles north-west of Hartlepool, were contemporary with the tanged and barbed flint arrowheads from the same site.¹⁸ It can only be hoped that a flint industry of this kind may be found under peat and a pollen analysis made.

Much of the material used is of poor quality and small size, often with pebble cortex remaining, varying considerably in colour, and does not resemble closely the flint from the Yorkshire Wolds. Dr. Trechmann, in his paper quoted above, thought that the source of the flint found at Crimdon Beck, near Hartlepool, was from the boulder clay exposed along the coast and that the Maglemosian industry from the Forest Bed at Hartlepool seemed to be of Danish flint, or from flint which might have been derived from the Basal

¹⁶ J. G. D. Clark, *The Mesolithic Settlement of Northern Europe*, pp. 216-17 and 221-2.

¹⁷ *Archaeologia*, xciv, pp. 128-9, 137-8.

¹⁸ *Proc. Prehistoric Soc.*, vol. ii. (1936), p. 167.

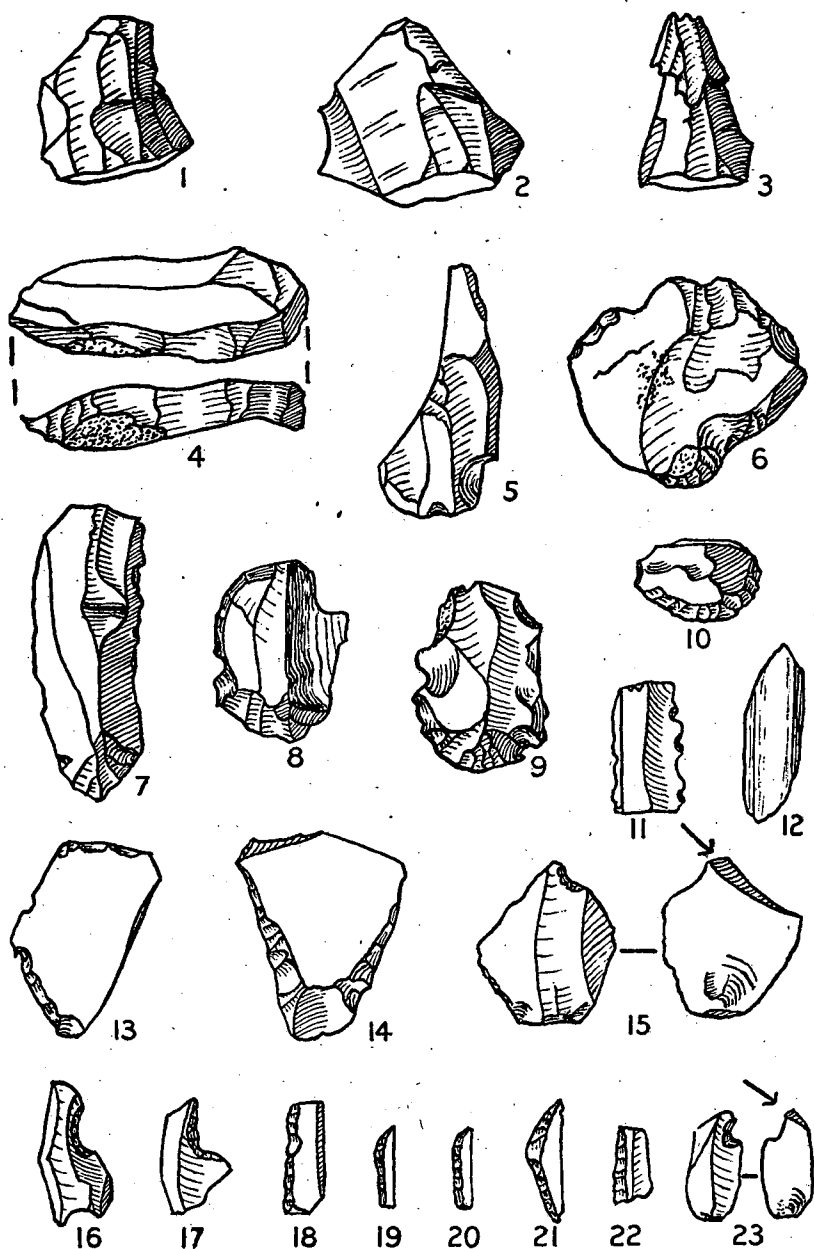


FIG. 4. NOS. 1-21, HOWL JOHN (WEST FIELD).

NOS. 22-23, HOWL JOHN. (EAST FIELD).

1, 3, 5, cores; 4, core-trimming flake; 6-10, scapers; 11, saw; 12, chip from polished axe; 13-14, Tranchet-derivative arrowheads; 15, Micro-burin; 16-17, notched blades; 18-22, Microliths; 23, Micro-burins.

Scandinavian Drift which is known at Warren Hill Gill, seven miles north-west of Hartlepool. Flint pebbles occur in fairly large quantities along the Cumberland and Furness coastline and were probably derived from the boulder clay,¹⁹ but it seems unlikely that the material was brought such a distance when flint of similar origin could be obtained on the Durham coast. Mr. W. F. Rankine has recently discussed the derivation of coloured flint in this country and claims that on the north-east coast there is no doubt that the basal boulder clay contained coloured flint erratics.²⁰ A fair amount of chert, obtainable in certain beds of the limestone in Weardale, was also used.

In addition to the sites already mentioned, Mr. Hildyard has collected flints from a number of other places, at which the microlithic tradition is not apparent and which seem to date from the Neolithic period or the Bronze Age. Such material comes from Crag Nook, near Stanhope (Map Reference 35/984389), fig. 6, nos. 1-6; Greenfoot (Map Reference 35/984395); Bankfoot, Rookhope (Map Reference 35/924434), fig. 5, nos. 1-7; Mary Knotts (Map Reference 35/955375); Rifle Range, Stanhope (Map Reference 35/003398); the Park, Horsley (Map Reference 35/963382); East Newlandside (Map Reference 35/976375), fig. 6, nos. 10-13; and Steward Shield Meadows (Map Reference 35/983442). He has also found flints at a few other places, but the material is not of a definite enough character to be worth recording at present.

When the new finds are taken into account together with the previously recorded discoveries, it is clear that Weardale in prehistoric times supported food-gathering and hunting peoples and later farming families supplementing their living with the chase, from late Mesolithic times to, at any rate, the end of the Bronze Age. There is at present little evidence of occupation in the early Iron Age and it is also strange

¹⁹ *Trans. Cumberland and Westmorland Ant. and Arch. Soc. (N.S.)*, vol. L (1950), pp. 25-28.

²⁰ *Arch. News Letter*, vol. 4, No. 10, pp. 145-9.

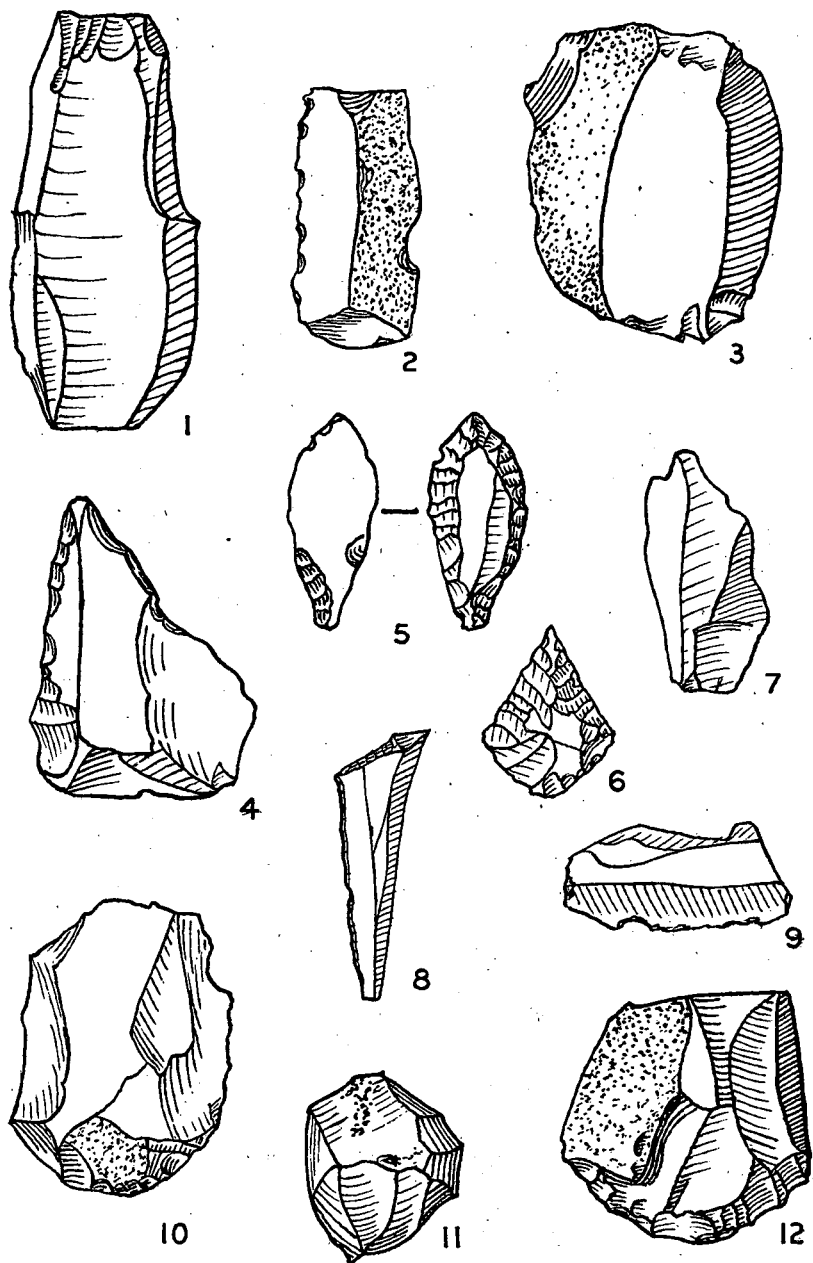


FIG. 5 (scale 1/1). NOS. 1-7, BANKFOOT QUARRY, ROOKHOPE.
NOS. 8-12, CAMBOKEELS.

that burials of the Bronze Age have not been recorded. Stray finds of polished axes, usually referred to the Neolithic period, have been recorded by Mr. W. M. Egglestone from Stanhope,²¹ Rogerley, near Frosterley; White Edge, Middlehope; and from a peat moss near Cowshill. In addition to these Mr. Hildyard has in his possession a quartzite blunt-butted axe found at Duffold, near Crook; a thin-butted axe of a fine-grained siliceous rock from Shittlehopeside, Stanhope; and an axe of similar material from one of the Stanhope quarries. He also records an axe in the possession of Mr. J. J. Wilkinson, of Laurel House, Willington, which was found about a mile from that house, and a polished axe of Cumberland lava found on Whiteley Rigg, near Stanhope. A flint sickle, now lost, is recorded from Edmundbyers Cross and a leaf-shaped flint arrowhead was found at Kilhope Law in the summer of 1949 by Miss D. Walton at a height of 2,200 feet above O.D. A few perforated stone implements, probably of Bronze Age date, have been found, one being a specimen of fine micaceous sandstone from Crawley Edge at Stanhope, which is similar to the perforated axes associated with Beakers of classes A and C. This is probably the same implement mentioned by Mr. W. M. Egglestone in his paper already mentioned.²² Other perforated implements are known from Shittlehopeside Farm,²³ and from Heathery Burn, near Cowshill. Stray finds of tanged and barbed arrowheads are now recorded from Larkseat, Pikestone Fell, Heathery Burn and Park Mine, Kilhope. These latter finds suggest hunting expeditions rather than settlement and were probably lost in the chase, but the polished axes, flint sickle and perforated stone implements are evidence for a more settled economy.

Bronze implements from Weardale are few in number and mostly of late Bronze Age date. An axe with winglike

²¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant., Newcastle*, 3rd series, vol. vii (1917), pp. 178-9 and 194-6.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 196. This and the specimen from Heathery Burn, Cowshill, are in Mr. Hildyard's possession.

²³ *Ibid.*, 4th series, vol. ii (1926), p. 228.

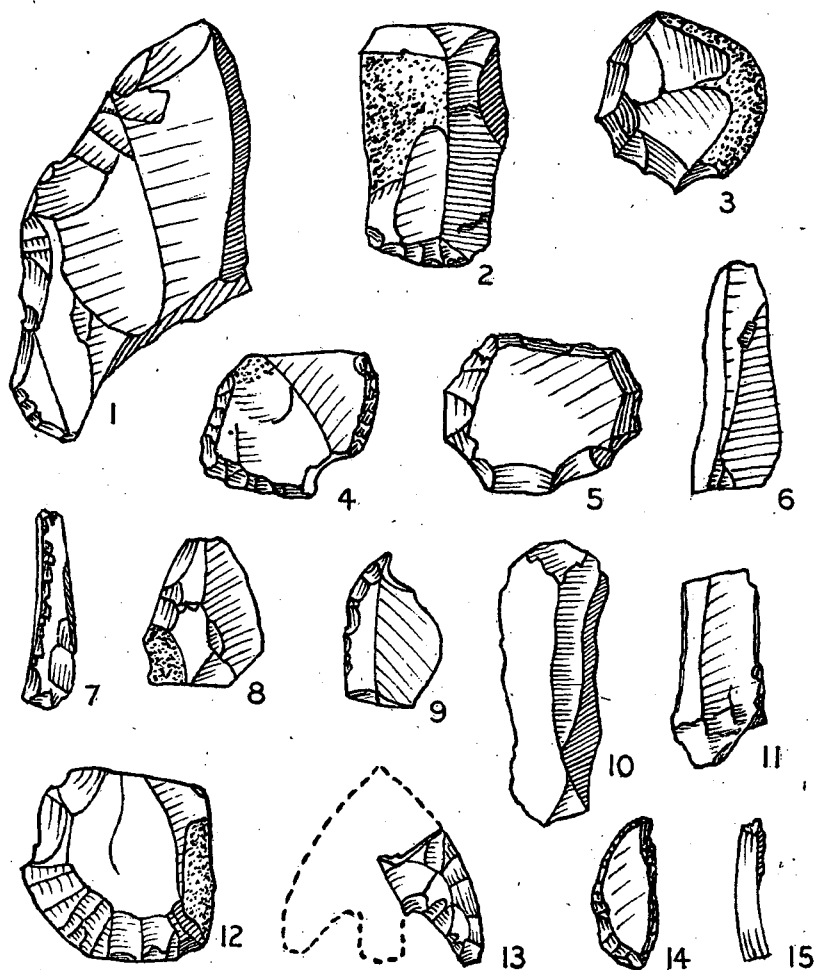


FIG. 6 (scale 1/1). NOS. 1-6, CRAG NOOK, STANHOPE.
 NOS. 7-9, GREENHEAD, STANHOPE.
 NOS. 10-13, EAST NEWLANDSIDE.
 NOS. 14/15, EASTGATE, PIPE LINE SITE.

flanges was found at Fawnlees, near Wolsingham;²⁴ a hoard of socketed spearheads, socketed axes, a gouge and other pieces have been published from Haggate, near Eastgate,²⁵ and the large and well-known hoard from the Heatheryburn Cave are the only recorded finds of bronze implements from the dale.²⁶ The actual date at which the Heathery Burn hoard was buried is uncertain, but the bronzes are all of fully developed late Bronze Age types. Professor Hawkes, in his recent study of the hoard, suggests that the cave's occupation did not continue after 600 B.C.²⁷

It is to be hoped that Mr. Hildyard will continue his work in Weardale and add still further to our knowledge of its prehistory.

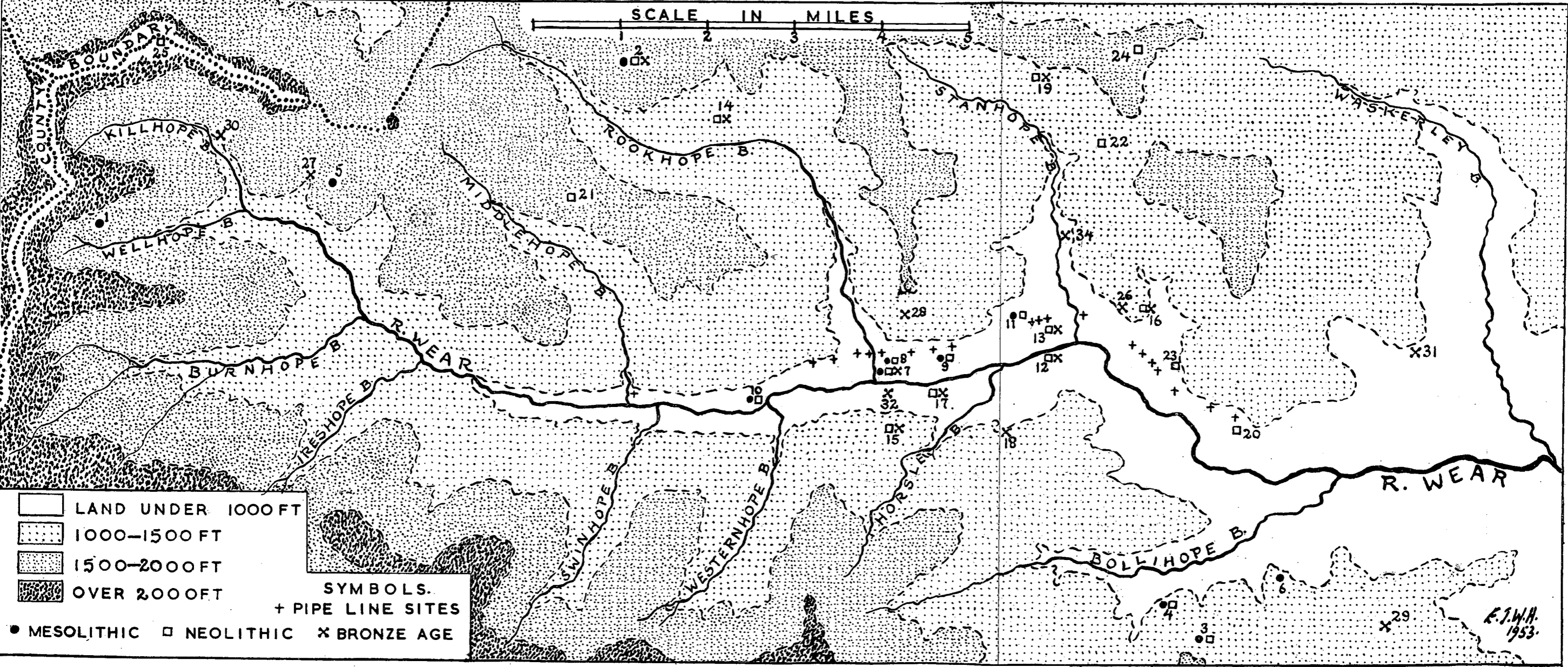
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²⁴ J. Evans, *Ancient Bronze Implements*, p. 76, and *Victoria County History, Durham*, vol. i, p. 207.

²⁵ *Arch. Ael. (O.S.)*, vol. i (1816), p. 13.

²⁶ There is in the Hancock Museum, Newcastle, a small socketed, double looped spearhead of late Bronze Age type, labelled as from Weardale. Graham, in *Weardale Past and Present*, states that "a little over thirty years ago (i.e. c. 1908) when James Elliott was shepherding on Swinhope Head he picked up a lead bronze dagger which is now in Newcastle Museum". It seems possible that the spearhead might have been mistaken for a dagger and that these weapons are one and the same find. I have recently been shown a drawing of a tanged bronze spearhead found in 1936 during the construction of Burnhope Reservoir, at a depth of six feet below the turf. Its condition is poor, but the tanged type is the earliest found in this country (Greenwell and Brewis in *Archaeologia*, lxi, p. 439). E.J.W.H.

²⁷ *Archaeological News Letter*, vol. 4, No. 11, Jan./Feb., 1953, p. 173.



DISTRIBUTION OF KNOWN PREHISTORIC FIND SITES IN UPPER WEARDALE.

KEY TO LIST OF SITES.

Sites are numbered in order of mention in the text. Allendale, Duffold and Willington are omitted as they are too far off the map.

1. Wellhope.
2. Rookhope Chimney.
3. Wager Head, Bollihope.
4. Whitfield Brow, Bollihope.
5. Greenfield Quarry, Cowshill.
6. Allotment Plantation, Pikestone.
7. Police Field, Eastgate.
8. Eastgate House, Eastgate.
9. Howl John, Eastgate.
10. Cambokeels.
11. Greenhead, Stanhope.
12. Crag Nook, Stanhope.
13. Greenfoot, Stanhope.
14. Bankfoot, Rookhope.
15. Mary Knotts Quarry.
16. Rifle Range, Stanhope.
17. The Park, Horsley.
18. East Newlandside.
19. Steward Shield Meadows.
20. Rogerley Quarry.
21. Whitedge, Middlehope.
22. Whiteley Rigg, Stanhope.
23. Shittlehopeside.
24. Edmundbyers Cross.
25. Kilhope Law.
26. Crawley Edge, Stanhope.
27. Heathery Burn, Cowshill.
28. Larkseat, Eastgate.
29. Pikestone Fell.
30. Park Mine, Kilhope.
31. Fawnlees, Wolsingham.
32. Haggate, Eastgate.
33. Heatheryburn Cave, Stanhope.