

## Rowberrow Cavern.

By HERBERT TAYLOR.

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The exit cave known as Rowberrow Cavern overlooks the head of a valley in the North-western slopes of Blackdown. It is a wide, arched chamber in the dolomitic conglomerate, filled to within a few feet of the roof with clay and gravel. At the mouth, which is protected by a dry-stone wall, is a level platform of about sixty square yards in extent.

Excavation was commenced on May 1st, 1920. A trial trench was dug across the floor of the cave. At a depth of two feet fragments of pottery and numerous animal bones were found, most of the latter being charred.

It was realized early that the deposit was a deep one, its depth at the back of the cave being at least ten feet; at the mouth, in one place it exceeds twenty.

With the object, first, of exposing any definite layers which might be present, and secondly, of providing a barrow-run, a wide trench was dug outside the cave, its floor sloping downwards to a depth of six feet at the cave mouth. All material dug was sorted and removed to the tip, forty feet distant. This work exposed a layer known as the "Black Band" at a depth of between five and six feet at the entrance to the cave; its contents indicate a Roman or Romano-British origin.

A pit, ten feet by six feet, was then excavated just within the cave foot by foot to a depth of ten feet, in order to provide a working face and to permit further examination of the layers. At this depth further progress was stopped on the south-west side of the cave by a mass of rock, either a shelf or a large boulder; but on the north-east work was continued until a total depth of thirteen feet was reached. No signs of a floor were found here. It was therefore decided to work towards the back of the cave as far as the trial trench, removing the deposit in layers of one foot. This has been done to a depth of four feet.

STRATIFICATION.

The layers exposed may best be described as they are seen in the working face, about nine feet from the entrance :

1. Humus, three inches thick.
2. A layer of clay and large stones,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 feet thick, containing many animal bones.
3. The Black Band, probably a Roman layer. It is 6 to 9 inches in thickness, and slopes surfacewards on the south-western side of the cave, being there 2 feet 6 inches beneath the present floor, but on the north-eastern side 3 feet 6 inches.
4. A layer of clay and stones similar to 2, separating the Black Band from the horizontal floor next described. Its maximum thickness is a foot ; it is absent on the south-western side.
5. A horizontal floor, 6 inches in thickness, formed of stones partly cemented together by stalagmite. This layer is barren.
6. A layer of angular gravel, 18 inches to 2 feet in depth. In the upper foot are several large holes possibly due to badgers. It has proved entirely barren.
7. The "Second Bone Layer," composed of angular gravel but differing from the last in appearance and in containing animal remains. It is 3 inches thick and lies 6 feet below the present floor.
8. A layer of smooth round pebbles, 4 inches in depth, probably indicating a period of water action.
9. A layer of angular gravel, 2 to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet thick.
10. On the south-western side of the cave the gravel rests directly on a flat rock surface which may be a shelf or a very large boulder.

On the north-eastern side is a layer of loosely-packed boulders, the passages between which are but little filled with gravel. This layer is of unknown depth, but it has been shewn to be more than ten feet. The upper three feet, as well as layers 8 and 9, proved barren.

## RESULTS.

Over 100 tons of earth and stones have been dug out, sorted, and placed on the tip.

The Black Band has not proved very fruitful. Over a foot in thickness at the mouth of the cave, it lies horizontally, approaching the surface owing to the slope of the latter as we trace it back. At the entrance it is 5 feet beneath the present floor, at the trial trench 2 feet 6 inches. It becomes thinner and less definite as it is traced towards the back of the cave. The colour is due largely to charcoal and slag.

The Second Bone Layer has been exposed only over a small area, but has already yielded several bone fragments.

## ARTIFACTS.

The artifacts include :

1. Fragments of pottery. These are found in layers 2 and 3. Some are coarse and black, some reddish and of finer texture, resembling the Romano-British.
2. Three coins and fragments of a fourth. Two of these are in process of identification; the other, found in the excavation of the Trial Trench at a depth corresponding to that of the top of the Black Band, has been identified by Mr. R. A. Smith, of the British Museum, as a "British imitation of a coin of Tetricius II, (268 A.D.), current towards the end of the Third Century. It represents obverse, the head of the Emperor, and reverse, a set of sacrificial utensils, a good way from the original." The other coins also appear to be British imitations.
3. Flints have been found at all levels in the first four feet; many seem to have come in with the clay. Two are parrot beaked, others are considered by Professor Sollas to be Palæolithic in execution. One or two found in the Black Band are probably late Neolithic types.
4. Two pieces of worked bone have been found. One, from the Black Band, is probably a potter's implement;

the other, found in the first foot, has an eighth-inch hole drilled in it.

5. A broken oyster-shell found in the Black Band is perforated by a round hole near the umbo.

#### ANIMAL BONES.

Animal remains are fairly numerous in the clay and Black Band (layers 2, 3 and 4). They include :

|           |           |          |
|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Roe Deer, | Red Deer, | Sheep,   |
| Goat,     | Horse,    | Pig,     |
| Fowl,     | Badger,   | Polecat, |
| Dog,      | Fox,      | Weasel,  |
| Shrew.    |           |          |

and some bird and mammalian bones as yet unidentified.

#### CONCLUSIONS.

With the exception of the Black Band, the first four feet cannot be separated into layers as yet. In the clay and Black Band the same contents are found at all levels; pottery of the same make occurs at depths of 4 inches to 4 feet; bones of the same individual at levels differing by as much as 3 feet, as in the case of the Polecat; and animal bones in greatly differing states of preservation side by side.

This may be due either to disturbance by man or animals, or to the whole four feet and its contents having been washed in rapidly from outside. Against the latter explanation is the finding of large and small bones of the same individual side by side, which can hardly be expected under the action of water. On the other hand, the numerous remains of badgers suggest a means of disturbance.

The work now in progress will show whether the Black Band, which is probably a Romano-British deposit, is worth further attention. Should it seem not, excavation would be carried down directly to the Second Bone Layer, which appears to become better marked as it is traced towards the back of the cave.