

Second Report on the Keltic Cavern.*

By L. S. PALMER, Ph.D.

I.—INTRODUCTION.

Since the first report of the discovery and re-opening of this cave and of its important late Keltic contents, the work of investigation has proceeded continuously, and has brought to light further evidence tending, on the whole, to confirm the conclusions already put forward in two previous accounts.¹ The finds described in this report include all those of importance which have not yet been recorded in these proceedings. Some, therefore, have not been mentioned in either of the two papers referred to above.

II.—EXPLORATION.

Persistent attempts to follow the streams in the cavern at points B and D (Plate xxi) have so far failed to penetrate more than 180 feet below the floor of the main cavern, at which depth chokes prevent further advance. The presence of gravel and of a less steep incline seem to indicate (from comparison with other Mendip subterranean waterways) that the more horizontal and therefore more roomy portions of the cave are almost within reach. At the very bottom a waterworn rift 20 feet deep has been entered. This is the first part explored to be in solid rock, the way having previously lain through a maze of waterworn boulders.

III.—FINDS.

I.—HUMAN BONES.—Two more human bones have been discovered. The upper portion of a left female scapula was found at E. 20 (Plate xxi., page 92). It has no features of special interest. The radius previously found in this locality has male characteristics. At C. 27 a portion of the upper half of the shaft of a femur was excavated. This bone is of considerable interest. It is male and the pilastering noticeable from the posterior aspect

* The Ordnance Survey has decided that this cave shall be officially known as READ'S CAVERN, after Mr. R. F. Read, the discoverer. To avoid confusion, however, the more familiar title has been retained in the heading and the text of the present paper.

¹ Proc. of University of Bristol Spelæological Society, Vol. I., page 9. Journal of Royal Anthropol. Inst. Vol. LI., page 200, August 1921.

is comparable with this feature of the bones discovered near the hut-circles on the eastern end of Brean Down. These bones also exhibit enlarged articulating facets, and are bowed from before backwards. Some show a third trochanter. The platymetric index of the present specimen is 122.6. This prominence of the *linea aspera* is, however, not alone sufficient to enable the type of man to be ascertained with any degree of certainty, but, combined with other evidence, it is probable that this feature is of considerable significance. The short length discovered prevents the detection of any abnormal curvature.

2.—OTHER BONES.—The quantity of animal bones has been considerably increased, but the relative numbers are as stated on page 12 of No. 1 of the Proceedings of this Society, with the one exception that the presence of goat in the cave is confirmed. These bones are now more numerous than those of dog. In addition to the former list the skull of a field mouse (*Apodenus Flavicollis*)² and the skull of a pigeon have been discovered.

3.—WORKED MATERIALS.—No additional examples of worked stone have been found, but the worked bones depicted in Plate xviii. have been recently discovered. The deer tine "cheek piece" is of Type B,³ whilst the boar's tusk, similarly worked, is quite an unusual discovery. In the British Museum a curved needle of Roman origin is exhibited which contains three parallel holes in the broad end. Although somewhat finer than the boar's tusk "cheek piece," it bears a very close resemblance to it, both in design and dimensions. This suggests that some of the so-called "cheek pieces" may have been used in the formation of the coarse materials manufactured in the vertical looms, the existence of which is evident from the discoveries at Glastonbury Lake Village. A Bronze Age example made from a boar's tusk is described as a pin by Canon Greenwell.⁴ This use is of particular interest since a similar article is used by the Maori of to-day to fasten his cloak. The third bone depicted in Plate xviii. is a horn handle of some iron implement, only a short stump of which remains.

Further discoveries of worked bone are a bone needle 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, a short bone awl (Plate xx.), and a much worn and scraped

² Kindly identified by Mr. M. A. Hinton, at the British Museum.

³ "Glastonbury Lake Village," Vol. II., page 441.

⁴ "British Barrows," (Greenwell), p. 35, Fig. 9.

piece of deer horn. These finds may possibly point to the fact that some industry has been carried out in the cave itself.

The only additional bronze article is a ferule, composed of a plain strip of metal bent into a cylinder, which may have been used to decorate or strengthen a spear. If this supposition is correct, it is the only find that suggests the use of weapons. The only piece of copper was found at E. 32, and is a short strip of semi-circular cross section, possibly a portion of a binding strip. The density of the bronze is 8.6 grams per c.c., whilst that of the copper is 9.1 grams per c.c.

The iron objects recently found are of less importance than those already described. They are a portion of an adze blade, parts of a sickle-like instrument, four nails, a short piece of iron, the end of which has been split longitudinally for about an inch, and four short iron bars. One of these has a very small cross-section, two are about half an inch by three quarters, and the fourth is almost circular. Three of them were found at E. 20, E. 22 and E. 23 respectively. None of them possess the characteristics of currency bars, but two appear, from the superfluous lumps of iron attached to them, to have been left possibly in the remains of a fire (see *Miscellaneous Finds* below).

Considerable quantities of pieces of pottery have been discovered, and the two bowls shown in Plate xvii., are typical examples of the artistic work which characterised much of the pottery of this period. The chief motives can be seen in Plates xv. and xvi., and fully confirm the suggestion already advanced as to the date of their manufacture.

A further recent discovery is that of a Roman coin which was found high up towards the roof of the cave in a position immediately beneath the supposed original entrance,[†]—a position in which no other finds have been made, and one which suggests that the coin has entered the cave by falling down amongst the loose boulders which apparently block a way to the cliff face outside. Voices on the outside can be heard at the spot where the coin was lying. The coin was struck in the reign of the Emperor Magnentius[§] (350—353 A.D.), has the Chi-Rho monogram

[†] In support of this supposition, may be mentioned the find of a human pre-molar close to the position at which the coin was found.

[§] Kindly identified by Mr. R. A. Smith, at the British Museum.

with Alpha and Omega on the obverse, and was minted at Amiens. The titles are DN (Dominus) Magnentius Pius Felix (P.F.) Augustus. On the reverse, SALVS DD NN AVG ET CAES.

IV.—MISCELLANEOUS FINDS.

In the immediate vicinity of E. 20 and E. 21 the removal of superficial rocks, which probably fell when the outer cave collapsed, has revealed an interesting series of very shallow layers. They comprise bands of as many as four distinct deposits. One typical series, beginning at the surface, consists of two inches of black mud, one inch of greyish white material, one inch of reddish brown, a second layer of grey, and last of all, from two to three inches of black deposit, similar to the surface layer. Below this series, which only occupies a depth of about eight inches, is the barren lowest layer of clay intermingled with boulders, which is common to the whole cave floor. The fact that the grey layers appear to be mainly ash, whilst the reddish brown layers were found to contain large quantities of iron, seems to point to the presence of a blacksmith's workshop in this vicinity. One of the iron bars and some pottery were found in the bottom black layer, and two other bars were also in this locality. This, together with the shallowness of the whole deposit, suggests that the various layers represent hearths possibly used during different periods of occupation extending over the Early Iron Age.

V.—CONCLUSIONS.

All the foregoing facts, with the possible exception of the last, tend to confirm the conclusions of the previous accounts. The discovery of the presence of what is probably a blacksmith's shop, and of the bone awl and needle are the first indications that any industry was carried on in the cave itself. The position of the several deposits described above is immediately below the supposed original entrance, and was the most natural place to build a fire, in order to facilitate the ventilation of so deep a cave, and to allow for the exit of smoke. It seems probable therefore that the cave was inhabited on several different occasions during the late Keltic period, the time of occupation, though not continuous, amounting possibly to many years.

The presence of the Roman coin, from its peculiar position, and from the entire absence of any other Roman remains, seems to emphasize rather than to vitiate the former conclusion that the cave was occupied in pre-Roman times, and that its inhabitants had not been subject to Roman influence.

On the whole, the supposition that the finds are the work of the Brythons seems proven, whilst the second conclusion of the previous paper,—namely that the cave was used as a temporary refuge, also appears to be in accordance with the known facts. This is the more probable if we may suppose the cave to have been used as a place of safety on frequent occasions whenever danger threatened the people of the locality. These people, no doubt, occupied the immediate neighbourhood in times of peace, and the line of fortified encampments above the cave in times of war, which were, during this period, of frequent occurrence, but of short duration.

I am indebted to the Royal Anthropological Institute for the use of the blocks from which plates xv.—xviii., xx. and xxi. are made. Plate xix. shews the main chamber of the cave looking E. (Photograph taken from D. 29 by Mr. J. H. Savory.) Plate xviii. shews the original entrance.

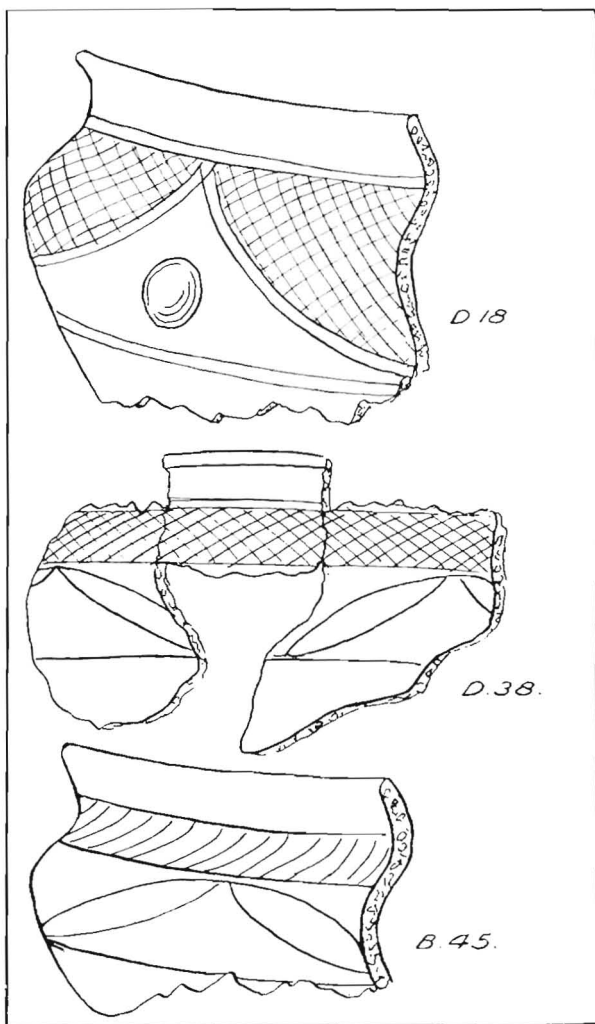


PLATE XV.

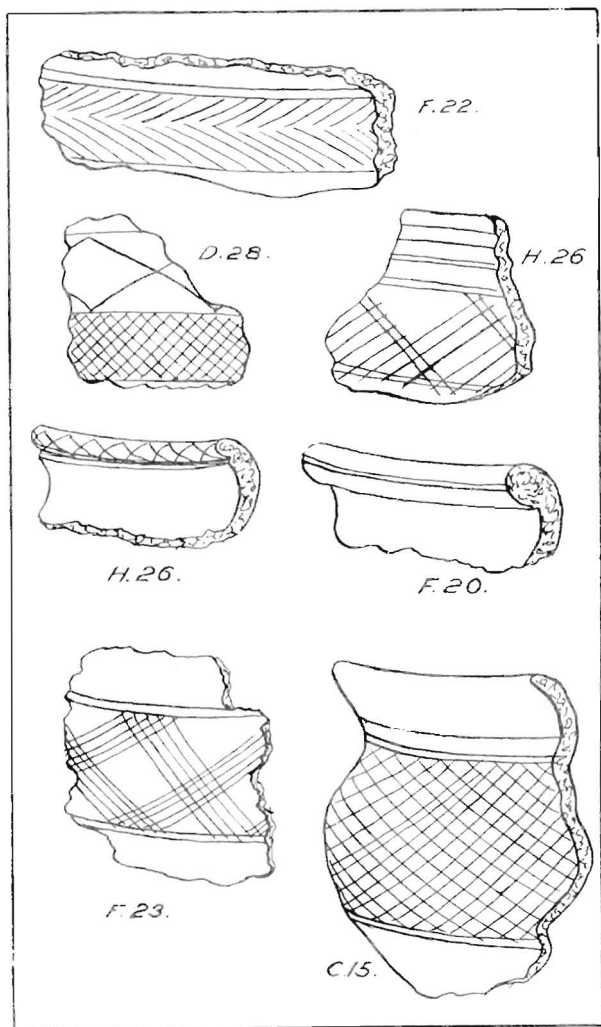


PLATE XVI.



PLATE XVII.



PLATE XVIII.

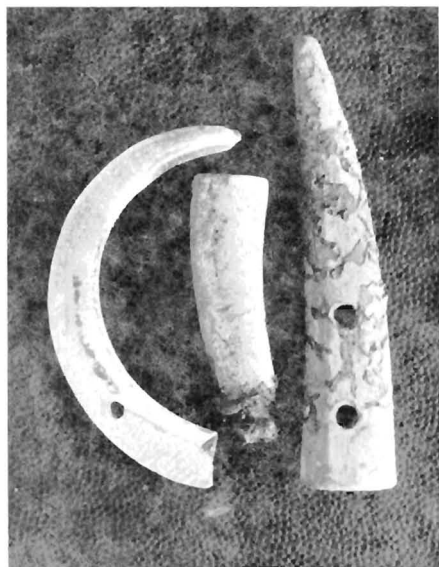




PLATE XIX.

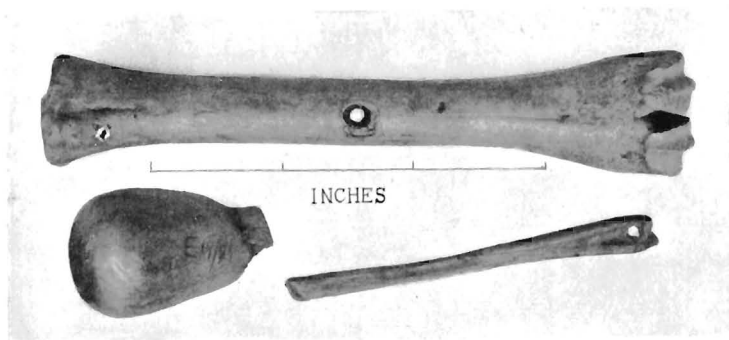


PLATE XX.

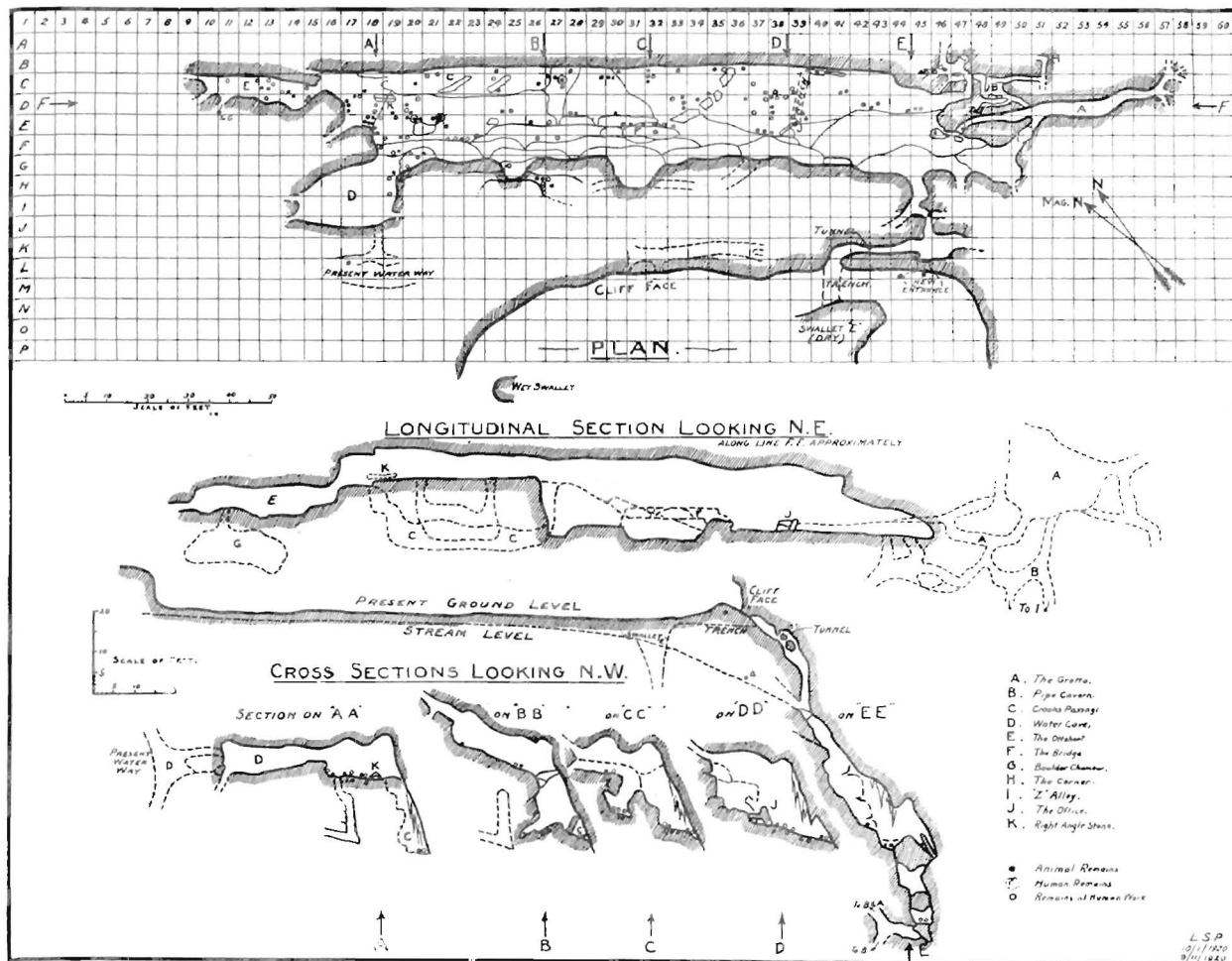


PLATE XXI.