

A SECOND BRITISH FOSSIL OCCURRENCE OF THE LAND SNAIL *LYRODISCUS* (FAMILY *ZONITIDAE*) FROM SUN HOLE, CHEDDAR

by

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ABSTRACT

Analysis of sediment samples from Sun Hole Cave, Cheddar has revealed the presence of the fossil land snail *Retinella* (*Lyrodiscus*) which is now extinct in Britain. Molluscs of the subgenus *Lyrodiscus* are presently restricted to the Canary Islands but were widespread in Europe in the late Pliocene and early Pleistocene.

INTRODUCTION

Sun Hole, a fissure cave in western cliffs of Cheddar Gorge (ST 467.541) has been extensively excavated since the beginning of this century. The most recent work on this site is by S. N. Collcutt, A. P. Currant and C. J. Hawkes (Collcutt *et al.*, 1981) who excavated the cave to a depth of 8 metres and subdivided the deposits into 35 layers.

Fossil mollusca from the upper 1.8 metres of the Pleistocene deposits have already been described by Davis (1955). The species recovered were predominantly shade-loving and can be assigned to the temperate woodland molluscan biozone d (Kerney, 1977). This would indicate a date of post 8000 b.p. which clearly contradicts the three Late-glacial radiocarbon dates obtained from the upper 2.3 metres of the deposits by Collcutt *et al.*, 1981). The presence of two specimens of *Candidula intersecta* (*Helicella caperata*) at a depth of 1.8 m. demonstrates the probability that the mollusca all represent contamination. *Candidula intersecta* is known to be one of the most recent immigrant helicelids in the south of England, its arrival is certainly post-Roman in age (Ellis, 1983).

PRESENT MATERIAL

In the present investigation, mollusca were examined from stratigraphically lower layers in the cave. In a sample from layer 34, five fragments of *Retinella* (*Lyrodiscus*) sp were recovered together with fragments of *Aegopinella nitidula*, *Cepaea* sp, *Vitrea* sp, *Trichia hispida* and *Pupilla muscorum* representing a temperate interglacial fauna. This is only the second report of *Lyrodiscus* in Britain, the first was described by Dr. M. P. Kerney in 1976 from an interglacial tufa of probable Hoxnian age at Icklingham, Suffolk (Kerney, 1976). The

molluscan assemblage at Icklingham is essentially similar to that of a tufa of Hoxnian age in Hertfordshire (Kerney, 1959).

The subgenus *Lyrodiscus* is now restricted to the Canary Islands but identical or closely related taxa were formerly widespread in Europe. Similar shells have been found in late Pliocene and early Pleistocene deposits in southern France, Germany and in the Netherlands (Kerney, 1980).

COMMENT

The occurrence of *Lyrodiscus* from layer 34 of Sun Hole and its association with a probable Hoxnian mammal assemblage (A. P. Currant *pers. comm.*) indicates a Hoxnian age for sediments from this site. This makes Sun Hole a very important site as it is the only extant Hoxnian site known on the Mendips.

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