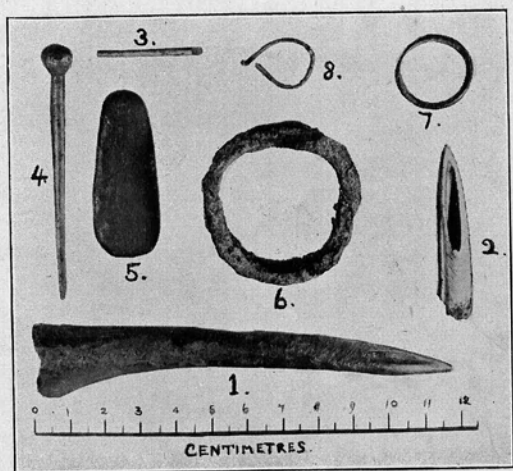




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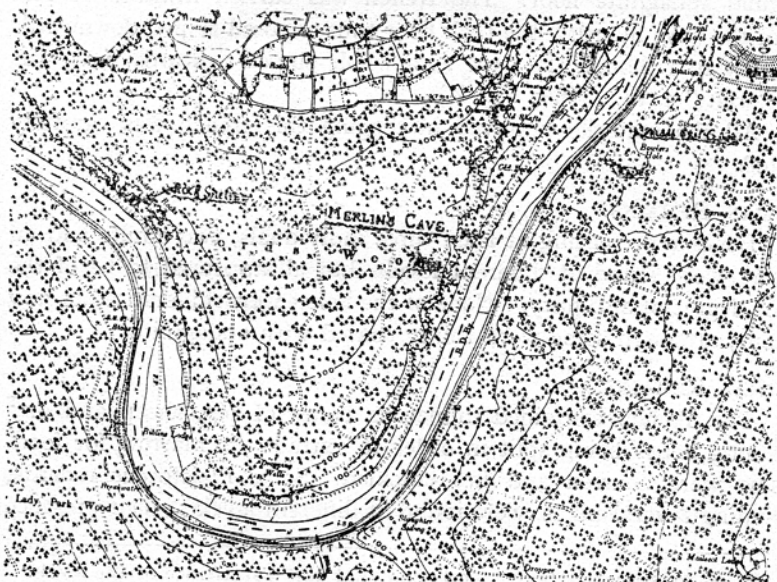
PLATE XII.

First Report on Excavations in the Wye Valley.

BY T. F. HEWER.

During the first fortnight in September, 1924, a camp was held at Symonds Yat, Ross-on-Wye, for the purpose of exploring the caves in the district.

A large cave was found on the right bank of the Wye, half a mile below Symonds Yat (300 yards W.S.W. of surface level 71 feet near "Old Ford," on the O.S. 6-inch map). The entrance is in the face of a limestone cliff, at the top of a steep slope, about 150 feet above the river (Plate XII). The cave has hitherto been nameless, and it has been decided to call it "Merlin's Cave," on the analogy of the neighbouring "King Arthur's Cave." It is thus marked on the Ordnance Survey Map, in Fig. 1. Such a nomenclature will provide names for other caves in the vicinity, when required.



Scale 3" to 1 mile.

Reduced from the Ordnance Survey Map with the sanction of the Controller of
H.M. Stationery Office.

The W. B. Harris Printing Co., Bristol.

FIG. 1.

On entering the cave the floor was seen to be disturbed in many places, and the stalagmite floor broken through. On the right hand side the remains of the original stalagmite floor were projecting from the cave wall roughly 1 foot 6 inches above the level of the earthen floor as we found it. In the course of the disturbance, therefore, a quantity of material had evidently been removed from the cave.

A cursory examination of the cave earth yielded many animal bones, and half a human metatarsal.

On the left hand side of the cave, 23 feet from the entrance a piece of human skull lay embedded in the broken face of the stalagmite floor, immediately against the wall. It consisted of part of the occipital and right parietal bones, and the foramen magnum was in such a position in relation to the cave wall that the skull must have been detached from the body before it came to lie there.¹

Permission to excavate was kindly granted by Mr. J. S. Osmaston, the Deputy Surveyor.

A trench was dug on the right hand side of the cave, from the entrance inwards. The material removed shewed manifest signs of earlier disturbance, there was no stratification of any kind, and this character was preserved to the rock bottom, 5—6 feet below the original stalagmite floor. The trench was carried inwards 13 feet from the cave mouth; the rock floor thus exposed sloped downwards and inwards though the cave as a whole sloped upwards, *i.e.*, was an "exit" cave. (See Fig. 2.)

All the material removed in digging this trench was carefully sorted.

HUMAN REMAINS.

Bones representing at least three individuals, two adults and an infant, were found at different levels, but all appeared to be of the same degree of antiquity. None of the bones were mineralised to any extent, although some were thinly coated with stalagmite.

ANIMAL REMAINS.

The Trench contained numerous bones of pig, sheep and ox,² the long bones being split in order to extract the marrow for food, a few were charred and fire crackled. Some Pleistocene rodents, including several pikas, were found at different levels; their presence

¹ It has subsequently been ascertained that the disturbance of the levels of this cave was due in part, if not entirely, to the depredations of a former inhabitant of the district, who collected the bones and implements. Some he sold; others fell into the hands of a rag and bone man!

² See "Report on Mammalian Remains," by M. A. C. Hinton, Page 156.

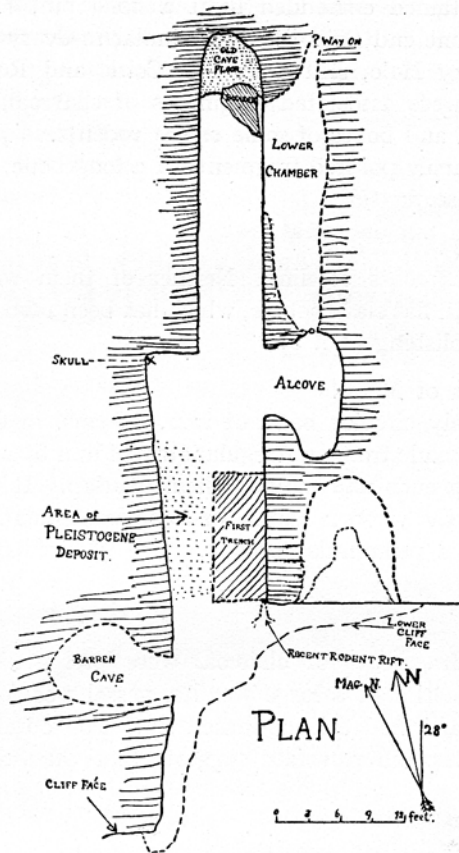


FIG. 2.

was due to disturbance. Numerous fragments of the shell of a fresh-water mussel were present.¹

ARTIFACTS.

(a) Implements of bone.

1. A pointed instrument made from the tibia of a sheep (?) (Plate XII, B. No. 1). It is 12 cms. long; the pointed end is smooth and shows signs of use.

2. The distal end of a similar instrument, made from a metatarsal bone (No. 2).

3. A lump of cave breccia was knocked off the right wall of the cave, about 8 feet from the entrance and 6 inches below the stalagmite

¹ See "Report on Non-Marine Mollusca," by A. S. Kennard and B. B. Woodward, Page 162.

floor. This contained embedded in it a bone pin, 7.5 cms. long, with a knob at one end (No. 4). It is similar in every way to those found at Wookey Hole, and other late Celtic and Romano-British sites. With it were associated fragments of charcoal, representing the hearth level, and bones of some recent rodents.

4. Two sharply pointed fragments of a long bone, one of which is polished by use.

(b) Implements of Stone.

1. Two fragments of flint. Neither of them was worked.

2. A smooth flat slate pebble, which has been used on both sides for honing or polishing (No. 5).

(c) Implements of Metal.

1. A roughly circular band of iron, 4.5 cms. in diameter (No.

6). It has been made from an irregular strip of iron by approximating the two tapering ends and making them overlap. It was probably used to encircle the wooden handle of some implement.

2. Part of a penannular brooch, made of circular bronze wire (No. 8).

(d) Wood.

Numerous fragments of charcoal were present in the trench. A portion of the rim of a large wooden vessel was found. It was 1.5 cms. thick, and had an out-turned lip. The outer surface was quite flat, but the inner surface suggests that the vessel may have been circular.

(e) Glass.

A number of pieces of thick bluish glass of the unmistakable Roman tint were found.

(f) Pottery.

1. Numerous sherds of typical black wheel-made Romano-British pottery, some unglazed and unburnished, and others glazed or finely burnished. The decorations consists of lightly executed cross-hatching and horizontal lines.

2. Sherds of thick pottery, made of a coarse black paste with large irregular granules, and devoid of decoration.

3. Sherds similar to the last, but with the outer surface of red clay.

6. One fragment of hard red pot, wheel-made.

7. A piece of hard reddish grey pot, well-burnished, bearing a (?) La Tène decoration motif, consisting of alternate bands of "dashes," and coarse cross-hatching, separated by horizontal lines. The lines

are deeply incised (Fig. 3, No. 2). Similar types have not been found at Glastonbury, or at Wookey Hole.

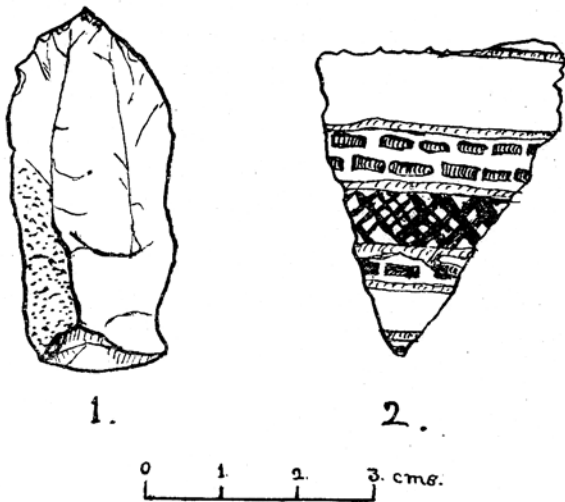


FIG. 3.

At a depth of 4 feet in the trench a much worn Roman coin was found. As far as can be ascertained it belongs to the Tetricus or Victorinus period.

An idea of the original stratification of the area of the trench, *i.e.*, previous to its disturbance, was afforded by an examination of the right hand wall of the cave. This was as follows:—

1. A layer of stalagmite, $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. thick.
2. Material of the hearth, containing charcoal, human and animal bones and implements, 6—8 inches.
3. A layer of breccia, containing small animal bones, 2 inches.
4. A seam of black crystalline iron ore, 2 inches.
5. Cave breccia, 4—5 feet.

The investigation of other areas of the cave was proceeded with. There were very few places where the stalagmite had not been broken through, and the deeper layers disturbed.

In the Alcove (Fig. 2) the hearth level was partially exposed. In it were found a large number of human bones, remains of sheep and pig, birds, and rodents; also a few fragments of pottery similar to those found in the trench.

On the right hand side at the back of the cave was a long low opening leading into the Lower Chamber (Fig. 2). Lying above the

stalagmite floor of this chamber was some loose black earth, containing bones of pig, sheep, recent rodents and shrews.

Two fragments of glazed pottery and a portion of a slender bone needle, having the appearance of ivory (Plate XII, B. No. 3), were also found here, and, like the rest of the material, had evidently fallen in through clefts in the rock from the hearth level in the main cave. At the entrance of this chamber a flint knife was found, lying on the surface of the disturbed floor (Fig. 3, No. 1); it was rudely made, but had some "retouching" on both edges; the surface was not uniformly patinated.

The stalagmite shelf, representing the original floor of the cave, prior to its disturbance, could be traced along either wall, from the entrance to the back of the cave, sloping slightly upwards all the way. At the back of the cave this shelf was 6 feet above the disturbed earthen floor.

On a platform of rock at the back of the cave, behind a large and delicately poised boulder, (Fig. 2) was an area of the old cave floor, the stalagmite covering of which had not been broken. Investigation of this revealed, below $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch of stalagmite, a deposit of 4—6 inches of breccia and earth containing a few bones of small birds, the common shrew (*Sorex aranius*) and the following very recent rodents: *Microtus agrestis*, *Evotomys* sp., *Rattus rattus* and *Mus musculus*.

Immediately below this was a seam of iron ore, 1 inch thick, and then solid rock.

THE PLEISTOCENE DEPOSIT.

Attention was next paid to the floor of the cave on the left hand side of the first trench (Fig. 2).

This part of the cave was divided from the area of the trench by a wall of loose rock; this latter appears to have protected it from damage by disturbance.

The stalagmite floor, as represented by the projecting shelf on the left wall of the cave, was only 6 inches above the earthen floor as found at the time of the excavation. The first three or four inches of this side of the cave was found to be barren earth; immediately below this was a loose breccia of small angular stones and cave earth. In the crevices between these stones were countless small bones.

Examination soon revealed the presence of jaws of *Pika* and *Lemming*, thus referring the deposit to the Pleistocene.

The excavation was continued with great care and extremely slowly, all the bones, shells, etc., being picked out as they were ex-

posed. Together with these countless remains of small mammals and birds were a few of the smaller bones and teeth of large animals such as *Bos primigenius* and horse; beaver was also found.¹

A few vertebræ and a pharyngeal bone of the Chub (*Leuciscus cephalus*) were found in the deposit.²

At a depth of 2 feet were found a few human remains, including a first rib, some teeth, wrist bones and phalanges. They were found definitely in situ, and were in an entirely different state of preservation from the bones in the Romano-British level. No implements, charcoal, or other signs of human habitation were found in the deposit.³

At the conclusion of the expedition a depth of 5 feet from the stalagmite floor had been reached in the Pleistocene deposit, and no change of stratification encountered. As will be seen by reference to the plan (Fig. 2) the area in which the Pleistocene deposit was examined represented only a small part of the total area of the cave.

It is not at present possible to decide whether there was any occupation of the cave by man at this time. Mr. M. A. C. Hinton, considers that the deposit represents the bed of the stream which flowed out of the cave; if that be so, the remains of man and large animals may well have been washed in through the rift which exists in the roof of the back of the cave. In any case, the enormous numbers of small mammalian remains were brought to the cave by birds of prey. An interesting modern analogy of this was found at the mouth of the cave in the recent Rodent Rift (Fig. 2). This small rift contained a mass of small bones in a matrix of loose sandy soil and stones, the latter were very similar to those in the Pleistocene deposit, but there is no question of a stream agency in this case. The bones represented recent voles, mice, shrews and other small animals; there were masses of jaws and skulls with smashed occiputs, ejected in pellets. Work will be continued in this cave in the autumn of 1925, when it is hoped that more information will be obtained as to the source of the Pleistocene human remains.

1 See footnote 2, page 148; and 1, page 149.

2 Kindly identified by J. R. Norman, of the British Museum.

3 Mr. Alfred Paine, of Cheltenham, paid us a visit during the camp, and brought with him two Upper Palæolithic flint implements which he bought 12 years ago from the man who disturbed the cave. The vendor stated that he obtained them from Merlin's Cave, but as he also collected similar implements from King Arthur's Cave, and did not label them, this is open to doubt.

THE SEVEN SISTER ROCKS.

An examination was made of the neighbourhood of the Seven Sister Rocks ; these consist of more or less isolated columns of limestone, formed by the weathering of the cliff. For the sake of clearness of description they are numbered from east to west (Fig. 1). At the foot of the first of the Seven Sisters was found a small cave, running upwards for a distance of 15 feet, and then branching into several small and inaccessible passages. The floor was of stalagmite. On account of the smallness of the cave it was not considered profitable to undertake any work in it.

On the N.W. side of the foot of the 3rd of these rocks, is a rift-like cave, which opens, by a small aperture, into a rift on the E. side of the rock. The floor was found to consist of barren grey clay, overlying rock. Immediately to the west of this cave is a small rock shelter with a rock floor and no deposit of any description.

Between the 3rd and 4th of the Seven Sisters is a long Rock Shelter formed by the projecting cliff. The maximum depth, from front to back, is 26 feet, and the total length, measured in the plane of the rock face, above the shelter, is 97 feet. The roof of the shelter slopes downwards and inwards, being about 20 feet high in front and 3 feet 10 inches at the back. At the far back of the shelter is a vertical

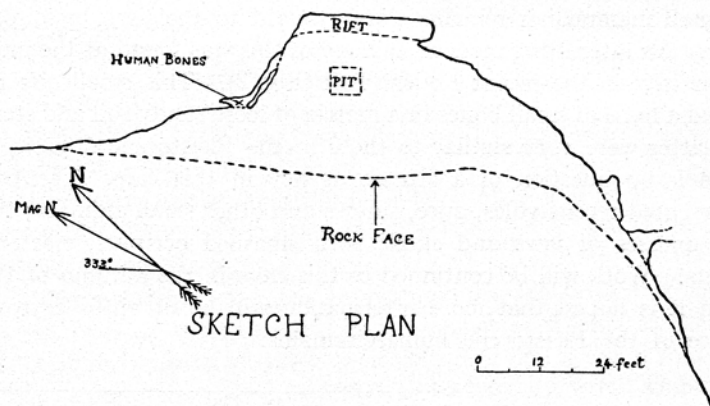


FIG. 4.

rift (Fig. 4) the roof of which, composed of small boulders firmly stalagmited together, is 12 feet high. On the right hand side of the shelter the cliff runs towards the south ; it also projects to a considerable extent.

The whole of the floor of the shelter is perfectly dry. At the back, on the left and right of the rift are numerous small openings into which it is just possible to crawl for a few feet. In one of these, on the left hand side of the rift, were found a few human bones, of doubtful age, and apparently of one individual, at a depth of 1 foot in loose dry and stony soil (Fig. 4). With them were associated a few bones of pig, sheep and ox, various bird bones and a fragment of oyster shell. A solitary unretouched flint blade was also discovered here; it was manifestly struck off by human agency, and is therefore an implement.

Operations were begun, with the kind permission of Mr. J. S. Osmaston, and a pit dug in the centre of the deepest part of the shelter. The pit was made 6 feet square, and dug to a depth of 10 feet, without coming to rock. All the earth removed was entirely barren, with the exception of a few shrew bones in the first foot. Below 6 feet 2 inches of sandy soil and stones was a 1 foot band of grey clay; this was succeeded by alternating layers of yellow ochre and grey clay, each about 2 inches thick.

The strata of clay were steeply inclined to the horizontal, and suggested that this part of the shelter, at least, was occupied by a small stream or spring.

It is proposed to deepen this pit, and also to make new pits in other parts of the shelter when the site is next visited.

OTHER CAVES.

Numerous small caves and iron mines were explored, but nothing of archæological interest discovered.

It is probable that excavation of some of the caves in the neighbourhood of Bowler's Hole (Fig. 1) would yield some good results.

King Arthur's cave was visited in company with Mr. P. B. Symonds, grandson of the Rev. W. S. Symonds, the original excavator. Mr. Symonds is proposing to dig in this cave to verify and augment some of his grandfather's early observations.

In conclusion, I should like to thank Messrs. M. A. C. Hinton, E. T. Newton, A. S. Kennard, and B. B. Woodward, for their kindness in writing reports upon the material obtained from Merlin's Cave.