

Second Report on Excavations in the Wye Valley.

BY T. F. HEWER.

MERLIN'S CAVE.

As a preliminary to the continuation of work in this cave an area at the foot of the cliff was cleared, and a retaining wall built so as to provide for deposit of sorted material; during this work several human bones, remains of domestic animals and a fragment of hard black pot were found; these were undoubtedly dropped from the cave above at some early disturbance.

All the material which had to be sorted inside the cave on the first expedition was removed to the platform below, and the excavation of the disturbed side of the cave was continued inwards to 24 feet from datum. The following finds were obtained from this area:—

HUMAN REMAINS.

Numerous small bones, teeth and fragments of no particular interest, both of adults and children.

ARTIFACTS.

(a) *Bone.* A bone point, made from the distal end of a metatarsal of sheep, with a hole bored transversely through the butt end, which was hollowed out and well finished, presumably for hafting on to an arrow shaft; this is similar to the one figured in the British Museum *Early Iron Age Guide*, 1925, page 122, the numerous examples found at Wookey Hole, Glastonbury Lake Village and All Cannings Cross, and the one found in this cave in 1924.¹

A bone point made from the proximal end of a sheep's metatarsal; the tip was broken off, and the butt untrimmed.

The tips of two other bone points.

A pig's incisor tooth with the root artificially pointed and polished by use. A canine tooth of a large fox or dog (Fig. 1, No. 10) with a hole bored through the centre and countersunk on both sides; this was evidently worn as an amulet, and is a survival of an extremely ancient custom, teeth similarly drilled for suspension being found in Aveline's Hole, King Arthur's Cave (*vide infra*) and other Palæo-

¹ *Proc.* Vol. II, Plate XII B, 1.

lithic sites ; a precisely identical tooth was discovered at Glastonbury Lake Village.

Two bone spatulæ, one (Fig. 1, No. 9) being well made of compact bone, and the other consisting of a strip sliced longitudinally off a long bone with the cancellous bone inside rubbed smooth at the point, possibly by use and not by intent, as such a rough surface would act like a rasp for the finishing of pottery, if such were the purpose for which these implements were used. Similar "paper-knives" were found in Heathery Burn Cave.

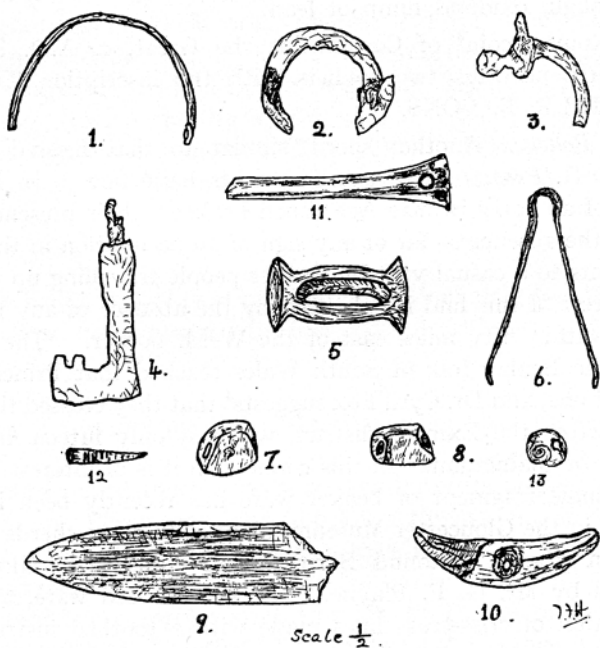


FIG. 1.

A bone implement with one end missing (No. 11) ; the undamaged end, is broad and flat, and has a hole drilled through it ; it is difficult to believe it can have been used as a needle, because of the very broad end ; no attempt has been made to remedy this by cutting off the corners as might well have been done.

(b) *Metal*. Piece of a child's bronze bracelet or torc (Fig. 1, No. 1).

Piece of a rusted iron ring of unknown use (No. 2) ; in one place there appears to be a patch of black enamel.

A pair of bronze tweezers (No. 6), found in two pieces in different parts of the trench.

A plain bronze finger ring identical with that found in 1924.²

Part of an iron penannular brooch with the hinge end of the pin rusted on (No. 3).

A Roman block key made of iron ; the loop for suspension is broken (No. 4).

A bronze slide for a bridle (No. 5), identified by Mr. Reginald Smith as being of the 1st century B.C.

Two small bronze pins, probably belonging to brooches.

A rough, oxidised lump of lead.

A Roman coin³ of Constantine the Great, *c.* A.D. 330—335, the reverse portrays two soldiers with the inscription "GLORIA EXERCITUS, P. CONS."

(*c*) *Pottery*. Another sherd, similar to that figured on page 151, Vol. II, *Proc.* These two fragments have now been identified as part of an early Bronze Age zoned beaker ; their presence in this cave, in the absence so far of any sign of an occupation in the Bronze Age, points to a casual visit by Beaker people travelling up the Wye. The interest of this find is enhanced by the absence of any records of beakers within fifty miles east of the Welsh border. The problem of how the Beaker folk of South Wales reached that Principality is a difficult one, and Dr. Cyril Fox suggests⁴ that they crossed the Bristol Channel from the Exmoor district, which is only fifteen miles from the coast of Glamorgan. In this connection it is of interest to report that a single fragment of beaker ware has recently been identified in a case in the Gloucester Museum, along with some sherds of a cinerary urn from a "Round Barrow, near Nailsworth, Glos., 1869, presented by Mr. G. F. Playne." It is a fine red ware, and bears a decoration of criss-cross lines made with a toothed instrument.

These two finds present the possibility of an alternative route to South Wales across the Severn and up the Wye. Unfortunately, the evidence is far from complete as the sherds are in both cases so small that it is difficult to draw any definite conclusions as to their relative chronology.

One may mention here a rectangular lump of chert which was found in the trench ; it bears no sign of workmanship, but, as it is foreign to the district, must have been brought to the cave by man.

² *Proc.*, Vol. II, Plate XII B, 7.

³ Identified by Mr. Harold Mattingly of the British Museum.

⁴ *Archæologia Cambrensis*, June, 1925, Vol. LXXX, Part 1.

ANIMAL REMAINS.

The only addition to the list published in the first report is that of salmon (*Salmo salar*, Linn.)⁵ of which several vertebræ, and part of a jaw were found.

LOWER HEARTH.

In that corner of the cave where the skull was found (see plan, p. 149, Vol. II, *Proc.*) was an area, six feet by four, which appeared only to be disturbed superficially; care was therefore taken to excavate it in shallow layers so as to get all possible information as to the stratification. The top layer ended at a depth of 1' 2" below the stalagmite shelf which originally covered it; it contained remains which identified it with the Romano-British level. Below this was a layer of sandy soil, 4-inches thick, and quite barren; it separated the Romano-British level from a well defined hearth below (see upper left hand corner of Plate XVI). This hearth lay immediately upon the Pleistocene breccia and contained the following material:—

Human.

A few bones, probably of one individual, including two phalanges that had been much charred by fire.

Animal.

Bones of a young pig and sheep; many of these were split and charred.

Bones of recent rodents, with some admixture of pika and lemming from the Pleistocene breccia below; this was due in all probability to the activity of rodents which have inhabited the cave up to the present day.

The bird bones were examined by Mr. E. T. Newton, who found nothing to indicate that they differed from the earlier series from the Pleistocene breccia (*Proc.*, Vol. II, p. 159) and with one exception (Magpie) the species were the same.

The same explanation, as to disturbance, applies to these findings. The only other animal remains were two fish vertebræ similar to those previously identified as chub.

POTTERY.

An undecorated fragment of thin wheel-made pot of a fine hard paste of reddish colour; adherent to its inner surface is a mass of

⁵ Identified by Mr. J. R. Norman of the British Museum.

charred material, containing a piece of bone, which may represent the last meal that was cooked in the vessel.

A sherd of black burnished ware, a quarter of an inch thick ; it contains numerous white granules, is hand-made and devoid of decoration.

A sherd of thin burnished pot, light brown in colour, hand-made, undecorated and containing many coarse white granules.

A few sherds of very coarse hand-made pottery of a dark brown colour.

OTHER ARTIFACTS.

Two roughly cubical amber beads (Fig. 1, Nos. 7 and 8) without decoration. A bone peg (No. 12) 2 cms. long, round in section ; the blunt end is worn smooth, and the point is rough and irregular ; there are three pairs of deeply incised grooves on one side ; its use is unknown to the writer.

A drilled shell of *Neritoides obtusatus*, Linn. (No. 13) ; similar shells were found in Aveline's Hole and many other Upper Palæolithic burials, such as those of Cro-Magnon, Grimaldi, Mentone and Ofnet ; this type of ornament is very rare in Neolithic and Bronze Age burials, and as this hearth is undoubtedly of a La Tène date it can only be supposed that the shell really came from the Pleistocene breccia below. This is further evidence for the presence of human material in this breccia,⁶ though, in the absence as yet of any sign of a Palæolithic area of occupation in the cave, it still seems probable that these remains were washed in from above.

At the conclusion of excavation last year the main trench, on the right-hand side of the cave, which consisted of disturbed material from all levels, was dug to a distance of 24 feet from datum. Plate XVI is a photograph of the excavation taken from the entrance of the cave, before the Lower Hearth had been removed. It shews the wall-like barrier of undisturbed rock running along the centre of the cave ; this divides the main trench, on the right, from the Pleistocene breccia on the left. At the entrance of the cave the rock floor of the trench is 8 feet below the stalagmite shelf and slopes gently inwards ; at a distance of 14 feet from the entrance the walls of the trench run nearer together, and there is a tufa slope (see Plate XVI) leading upwards to the Alcove, on the right ; at the foot of this slope is a slight pit which looks as if it had been dug out by human agency ; on the far side of the tufa slope is a similar pit on a higher level ;

⁶ See first report on this cave, *Proc.*, Vol. II, No. 2, p. 153.

Salaamie Floor

Romano-British

Level

Barren Earth

Lower Hearth

Pleistocene

Breccia

— Floor of Cave —

Disturbed

Material

Alcove

Limestone
Face

2nd Pit
↓

Tufa
Slope

1st Pit
↓

beyond this second pit, at a distance of 20 feet from the entrance, is an overhanging face of iron-stained limestone on top of which lies disturbed material like that removed from the trench.

The inference drawn from these observations is that a hundred or so years ago, when mining for iron ore was prevalent in the district, persons in search of this metal dug in Merlin's Cave, where some small seams of it exist, starting at the entrance and working inwards; they would appear to have broken through all the deposits on the right hand side, including no doubt a Pleistocene breccia similar to that which remains on the left; they evidently threw a great deal of it out of the cave, and then, as they worked inwards, began filling in the vacant area behind them. It is to be hoped that this process was not continued throughout the whole length of the cave, but the surface is certainly disturbed to the back.

CONCLUSIONS.

In Pleistocene times the cave was the haunt of birds of prey; sufficient work has not yet been done to decide whether it was visited by man at this time.

The presence of two beaker fragments, in the absence so far of other remains of the Bronze Age, suggests a casual visit by people travelling on the river.

There was a definite Early Iron Age occupation followed after a considerable interval—evidenced by the depth of the intervening layer of barren soil—by an occupation by Romano-British people for a long time, towards the end of the Roman period.

KING ARTHUR'S CAVE.

O.S. 6-inch. map, Herefordshire Sheet LIV; Lat. 51°, 50' 15",
Lon. 2°, 39' 35", W.

This cave is the westernmost of a series at the foot of a low limestone cliff, 400 feet above O.D., running from S.W. to N.E. at the N.W. corner of Lord's Wood in the Parish of Whitchurch, Herefordshire.

In 1870 some miners removed a good deal of the surface soil and upper cave earth in the interior of the cave. It was excavated in 1871 by the Rev. W. S. Symonds, F.G.S., who published his results in the *Geological Magazine* for that year (Vol. VIII, p. 433 ff.). Many of the finds were presented to the Gloucester Museum,⁷ some

⁷ Descriptions of these are in the Second and Fifth Annual Reports, 1912 and 1915, of the Gloucester Museum.

of the mammalian remains to the British Museum (Nat. Hist.), some to the Cheltenham Town Museum, and some fell into private hands.

The following is an abstract of the early records of the stratification of the cave :—

- 1st Layer. Débris, containing Roman pottery identified by Evans.
- 2nd Layer. Upper Cave Earth, 3 feet thick, covered in places by a thin layer of stalagmite ; contained many flint flakes, two implements made from black chert pebbles, and one from a pebble of a lower Silurian rock.
- 3rd Layer. Stratified Red Sand, $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet thick, with rolled pebbles, one consisting of greenstone.
- 4th Layer. A thick layer of stalagmite, mistaken at first for the cave floor.
- 5th Layer. Lower Cave Earth, of unrecorded thickness, separated every few feet by thin floors of stalagmite, many of which were coated with the *album græcum* of hyaenas ; contained some flint flakes "principally from the surface levels" but two were seen *in situ* by Mr. Symonds, remains of Cave Lion, Hyaena, Rhinoceros, Mammoth, Great Irish Deer, Bison and Reindeer(?).

The full list of animals found at that time is as follows :—Lion, Hyaena (*H. crocuta*), Cave Bear (*U. spelæus*), Brown Bear, Otter, Mammoth (*E. primigenius*), Woolly Rhinoceros (*R. antiquitatis*), Horse, European Bison, Wild Ox (*Bos primigenius*), Great Irish Deer and Red Deer (*C. elephas*). Remains of horse and hyaena were extremely abundant, and the Great Irish Deer was better represented than the Red Deer.

As stated in the first report on the Wye Valley, Mr. P. B. Symonds, grandson of the Rev. W. S. Symonds, was anxious to verify these results and discover the sequence of events in the cave. Last year this Society undertook, with the permission of the Deputy Surveyor of the Forest of Dean, to assist Mr. Symonds in this work.

The cave was surveyed and the accompanying plan (Fig. 2) constructed. It will be seen that the cave consists of two main chambers joined by a passage ; the direct entrance to the second chamber is small, and has been called the "window" for convenience of description. It was found that both main chambers had been dug to a considerable depth, but the "passage" appeared to be undisturbed. It is evident that the early excavators dug inside the cave, as was then the custom, instead of at the entrance.

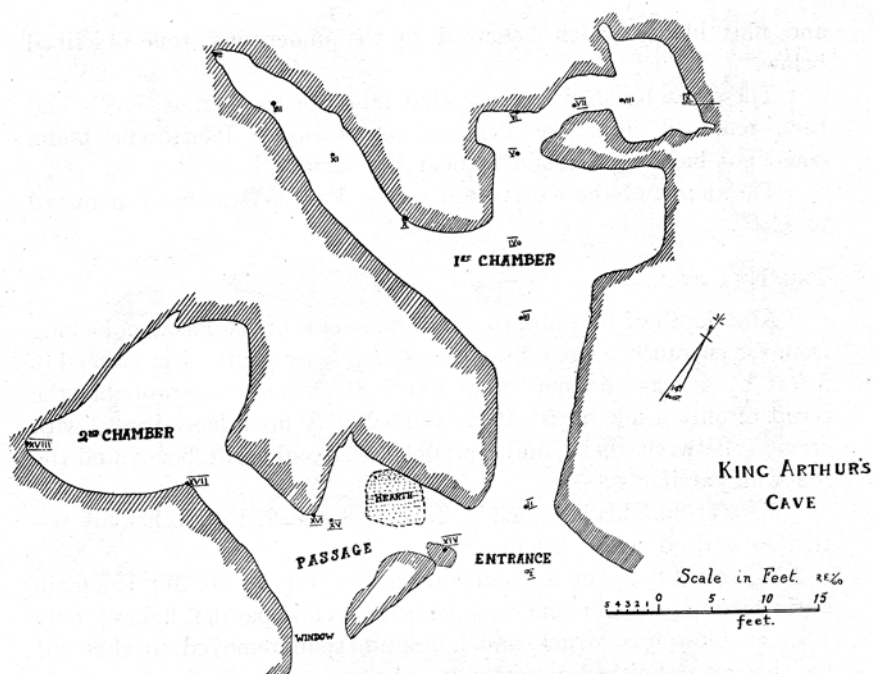


FIG. 2.

A large mound some yards outside the cave was identified as the old spoil heap, and Mr. P. B. Symonds began a careful re-examination of this, finding a number of bones and flints that had been overlooked.

EXCAVATION.

The first 6 inches of the floor in the Passage was removed and sorted, starting at the entrance and working inwards as far as the cave wall on the left of the window (see plan). On Plate XVII is a view of the entrance of the cave; the writer is standing in the outer end of the excavation in the Passage, which runs inwards on the left hand side of the photograph.

This layer contained remains of widely varying age, *viz.*, an XVIII century bronze pin, a few sherds of Roman and Romano-British pottery, a barbed and tanged arrow-head of Bronze Age type (Fig. 4, No. 3), part of another similar arrow-head, fragmentary flint flakes, a small horse-shoe scraper such as are found in abundance on the surface of Mendip, a small piercer (Fig. 4, No. 6) similar to examples found in the material of the Tynings Farm Barrows, and, in the lower one or two inches, teeth of rhinoceros, horse, bear, hyaena,

and flint blades which belonged to the underlying zone described below.

These results shew at once that much of the surface levels had been removed from the Passage, as otherwise Pleistocene fauna could not have been found so near the surface.

The depth of the excavation in the Passage was then increased to 1' 6".

THE HEARTH.

At a depth of 1' 6", on the right hand side of the Passage, looking from the entrance, a small hearth was found (see plan); it was roughly 5 feet by 4, was not more than 1 inch thick, and was probably the result of only a few fires. It lay immediately upon loose stones with crevices between them, and contained charcoal, split bones and the following artifacts:—

Several flint blades, such as Nos. 7, 8 and 9, Fig. 3, heavily patinated a dead white colour.

A beaked burin on a small end-scraper (Fig. 3, No. 3); the main burin face is perpendicular to a series of arched parallel flakes; only a single blow was struck and a minute spall removed so that the tool has an unfinished appearance. An incisor tooth of a female pig with a hole bored through the root (Fig. 3, No. 15 and 15a) for suspension; this was found close to the cave wall, near the edge of the hearth; it is similar to the two examples found with the burial in Aveline's Hole.⁸

FLINT IMPLEMENTS.—Zone 6—18"

A fragment of a large lanceolate flake (Fig. 3, No. 1 and 1a), the bulbar surface being scaled at the pointed extremity. It is undoubtedly contemporary with the hearth for it came from the same level, and only a few feet from it. Similar specimens have been found in the Robin Hood Cave, Creswell (Boyd Dawkins, *Early Man in Britain*, 1880, Fig. 47, p. 183), at Paviland (Sollas, *Huxley Memorial Lecture*, 1913, p. 28), and in Kent's Hole. Occasionally in Britain examples of this type are flaked over the entire flat surface. The implement thus belongs to the Font Robert horizon, and is anterior to the industry of the Base Zone of Mother Grundy's Parlour.⁹ A study of the fauna (*vide infra*) confirms this view.

A small gravette point tending towards the triangular form (Fig. 3, No. 2), identical with two examples found by the early ex-

⁸ *Proc.*, Vol. II, No. 1, p. 107.

⁹ A. L. Armstrong, *J.R.A.I.*, Vol. XXVI, 1926, p. 146.

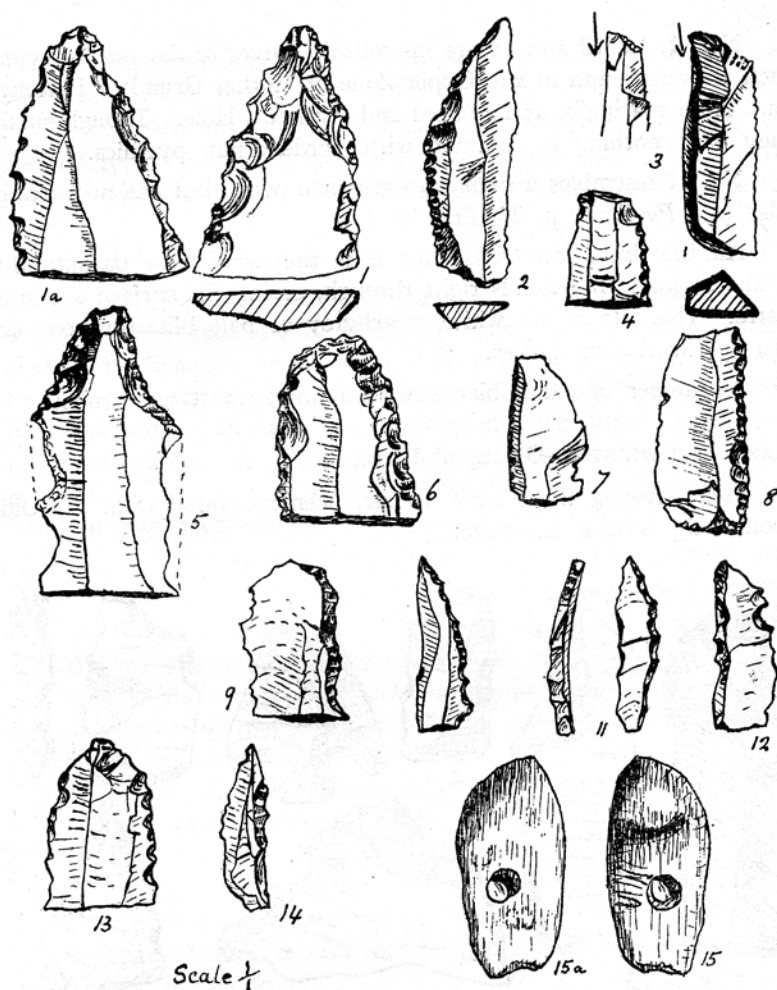


FIG. 3.

cavators, and very similar to specimens from Paviland, Aveline's Hole, and Mother Grundy's Parlour. It is well-known that in England the gravette point and other Aurignacian forms are not confined to the Aurignacian, but survive until late Magdalenian times. The geometrical form is a common provincial feature.

A small knife with retouched back (Fig. 3, No. 8); four such specimens from this cave are in the Gloucester Museum collection.

No. 5, Fig. 3 is a much battered point; the chipping is directed from the lower face at the stouter end of the flake. It may be a piercer.

Nos. 4, 6, 9 and 13 are the tips of knives.

Nos. 7, 10, 12 and 14 are microlithic knives of *dos rabattu* type, such as were found in the Upper Zone of Mother Grundy's Parlour, and, more sparingly, at Paviland and Aveline's Hole. Though small they have nothing in common with Tardenoisian pygmies.

No. 11 resembles a miniature gravette point, but has no cutting edge (see *Paviland*, p. 26, Fig. 15, 1).

All the flints from this zone bear the usual cave patination; in the majority it extends right through, giving the surface a white lustre. The colours are white, pearl-grey or pale blue, but one or two specimens are darker.

A number of small blades were found; most are broken.

FLINT IMPLEMENTS.—Old Spoil Heap.

The following flints have, so far, been recovered from the Old Spoil Heap, outside the cave.

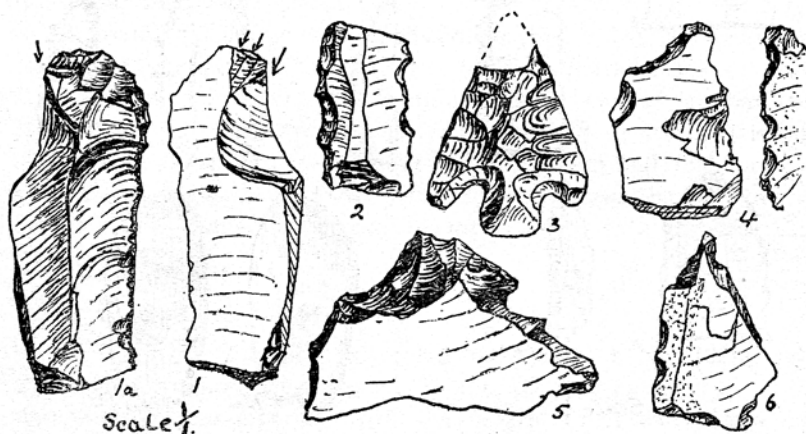


FIG. 4.

Fig. 4, Nos. 1 and 1a. This flat faced burin, like Fig. 3, No. 3, was made on a grattoir; the three faces give a sharply convex working edge. The edge of the blade has been trimmed with a nibbling retouch.

No. 2, a retouched knife fragment, possibly a gravette point.

No. 4, a small piercer with opposed retouch each side of the point, identical with specimens from Aveline's Hole.

No. 5, a scraper with one concave and one convex edge and a salient, on a stout flake; typically Aurignacian.

In addition a fragment of a large round scraper, of typical surface

form, and several long flakes which are probably Palæolithic were found here. The patina was uniform.

The implements of Upper Palæolithic facies are of such well marked types that there can be no doubt that they belong to the same occupation as the proto-Solutrean flake (Fig. 3, No. 1 and 1a).

ANIMAL REMAINS. Zone 6—18".

Very numerous fragments of bones of large mammals, many of which had been split longitudinally by human agency, and afterwards gnawed by hyaena; many were worn smooth at one or both ends so as to give them an almost artificial appearance; such polishing has been noticed in other caves occupied by hyaena. A fragment of this nature in the Gloucester Museum bears a very superficial resemblance to a javelin head; it was for some years regarded as such an implement.

A complete list of the fauna of this level will be published when the excavation has been completed, but the following may be given provisionally:—

Hyaena (*H. spelæa*), very numerous.

Woolly Rhinoceros (*R. tichorhinus* = *antiquitatis*), very numerous; mostly very old or very young individuals as is usual in hyaena dens.

Horse (*Equus caballus*), numerous.

Mammoth (*Elephas primigenius*), a few tooth fragments.

Wild Ox (*Bos primigenius*), a few teeth.

Cave Bear (*Ursus spelæus*), a few teeth.

Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*), a few teeth.

Deer of several species not yet determined accurately.

In spite of most careful search with sieves, no rodent remains were found in this layer.

The following molluscs were present: *Pomatius elegans*, Müll., *Polita cellarina*, Müll, and, in the top 6 inches of the cave floor, above this zone, *Helix nemoralis*, Linn.

The above remains were immediately on top of the hearth and occupation level generally; the flint implements were scattered throughout this layer. It may be safely assumed that the cave was occupied by hyaena very shortly after it was vacated by man.

FURTHER EXCAVATION.

Starting at the entrance of the Passage, as before, the depth of the excavation was increased by another 18 inches, thus making it 3 feet from the surface.

At the outer end of the Passage the floor at this level was found to have been disturbed in recent times ; it is therefore probable that a certain amount of digging was done in the main entrance by the early investigators ; this area will be dug during the next expedition to the locality so as to determine the depth of the disturbance.

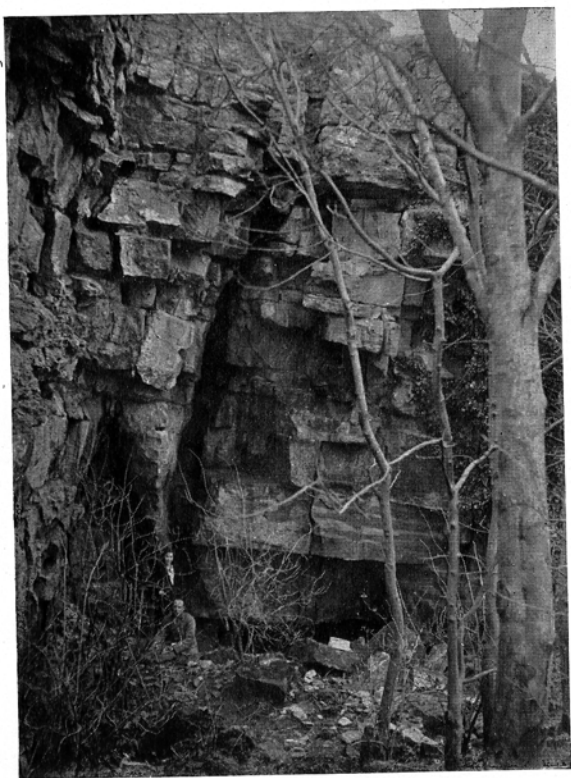
In the Passage the deeper excavation revealed loose stones, with only a few finds that had fallen through the crevices from the occupation level above. At a distance of 10 feet from the entrance of the Passage the edge of a stalagmite shelf was encountered ; the thickness of this could not be ascertained ; it will be removed later.

CONCLUSIONS.

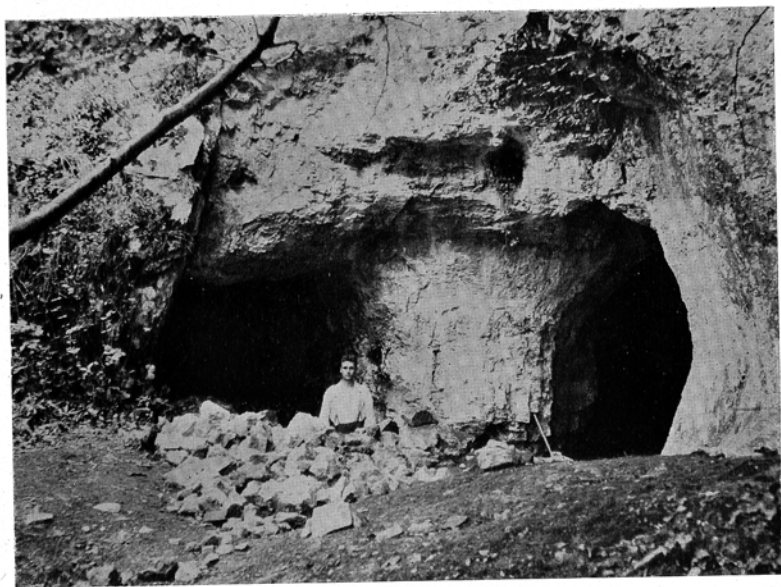
The zone in which the remains described in this report were found appears to represent Mr. Symonds' Upper Cave Earth ; the overlying layer of stalagmite, if it existed in the Passage, and all the superficial débris had been removed. If this be so, provided Mr. Symonds' records were accurate, we may now expect to dig through $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet of barren red sand, and a thick stalagmite floor before reaching the Lower Cave Earth.

To date the occupation definitely by the proto-Solutrean implement found near the Hearth is perhaps unwise, since we have no information as to the duration of that culture in Britain. It is always well to bear in mind that in Pleistocene times Britain was a haven of survival of beasts and industrial types so that the technique of one age may well have been employed in far subsequent periods. The presence of mammoth, rhinoceros and cave bear is in favour of an early date.

My thanks are due to His Majesty's Deputy Surveyor for permission to excavate, to Mr. P. B. Symonds for his co-operation at King Arthur's Cave, and to Mr. J. A. Davies for drawing and describing the flint implements from that cave.



GUY'S RIFT.



KING ARTHUR'S CAVE.