

The Antiquity of the Skulls Reputed to be from Flint Jack's Cave, Cheddar, Somerset

By

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The two human skulls described by Professor L. H. Wells (p. 83) were deposited in the British Museum (Nat. Hist.) in the spring of 1913 by Mr. H. Eliot Walton, who had obtained them from the finder, Mr. Rowland Pavey. Later, Mr. Walton forwarded to Dr. C. W. Andrews, who had charge of the skulls in the Department of Geology (Palæontology), a letter from Pavey dated July 12th, 1913, stating :—

"I have cleared out the old cave and have found a good number of flints and portions of bones and teeth. It will now be shown to the public."

The British Museum (Nat. Hist.) also possesses a photograph (Pl. 7) sent by Mr. H. Vassal, Bursar of Repton School, at the request of Mr. Walton. It shows Flint Jack's Cave, with the two human skulls and various animal remains displayed in the foreground. The photograph is undated, but its condition suggests that it was already ancient in 1913. On the back is written in pencil :—

"This photograph shows some of the skulls and bones as they were found according to the position, etc. It may be supposed that the owners met with an untimely end. Some of the bones are embedded in carbonaceous [*sic*] of lime* which has formed quite a conglomeration which practically speaking gives you an idea of their great age. It is said that they are the bones of the ancient Britons. By Professor Boyd Dawkins. These bones and skulls were found by Mr. Pavey, The Mill, Cheddar, Somerset."

It is probable that the skulls were found about 1893. In the *Proceedings of the Natural History and Archæological Society of Wells* for that year it is recorded that :—

On August 23rd an important group again as named above [they included Boyd Dawkins and the Lord Bishop] went by train to Cheddar and by brake to the cliffs, direct to "Mr. Pavey's recently opened cave, where they were courteously admitted free of charge. This cave which branches off in several directions, is lighted by natural shafts and gives promise of further extensions. Glass cases inside contain an interesting

* It should be set on record that one of the skulls (No. 2) had been filled with grey concrete before it was received at the museum.

collection of the remains of extinct animals, fossils and human skulls which were discovered in the cave". After quoting some comments by Boyd Dawkins on the formation of caves, the report continues: "The skulls in Mr. Pavey's cave were those of very much later date than those found at Wookey Hole* and were those of the ancestors of the small black-haired and black-eyed people who were still numerous among the people of England, especially in some districts. They were the introducers of agriculture and of the arts of spinning and weaving; and the cheese which was so intimately connected with Cheddar was one of the results of the inventions of these people."

The "Mr. Pavey's Cave" referred to in this report cannot be Flint Jack's Cave, which is only a small shelter. The latter can still be seen. It is identical with the photograph, has no lighted shafts or ramifications "giving promise of extensions", and is too small and inaccessible to have housed glass cases. Mr. H. E. Balch, who spent some time investigating the question on behalf of Dr. F. S. Wallis, Director of the Bristol City Museum, in 1950-1, has suggested that although the skulls were found in the rock-shelter known as Flint Jack's Cave, they were carried down by Pavey and exhibited in his then recently opened cave. This is accessible from road level and adjoins Cox's Cave, which is a few yards farther up the road. At present, 1958, Pavey's Cave is closed. Both the shelter and the partly artificial cave below were on Pavey's property, but the name Pavey's Cave strictly speaking applied only to the latter. Mr. Balch believes that it was simply part of Pavey's showmanship to produce the skulls as from the impressive cave in which the visiting party was assembled, but that he had no serious intention of deceiving.

It is difficult to understand why Sir William Boyd Dawkins should have inferred, if in fact he did, that the skulls were Neolithic, because the only archaeological finds that have ever been recorded from Flint Jack's Cave are of Upper Palæolithic facies. Moreover, as Professor Wells has shown, the morphological evidence is not inconsistent with that relatively great antiquity.

ARCHÆOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Many flint artifacts have certainly been recorded from Flint Jack's Cave, but in circumstances that leave room for doubting the provenance of some of the specimens in collections labelled as coming from there. Thus, Mr. Balch writing to Dr. Wallis in 1951 commented that "the problem of the flints has been aggravated by the action of the village boys who found

* This reference must be to the Hyaena Den, excavated by Boyd Dawkins, 1859-63, but as far as I am aware no palæolithic human remains were found there. According to Balch (1932, p. 119) alternate layers of occupation by man and beast were found but "of human remains there was however no trace".

the visitors attracted by the name Flint Jack's Cave (Pavey's invention)". The late Mr. Victor Painter, with long experience as a Cheddar guide, had told him that "fifty years ago there was always a 'public' eager and willing to pay shillings . . . for any flint found by the village boys who searched every accessible cave or shelter". Painter also told Balch that "at the time a Mr. Porch lived as lodger at Pavey's mill, and Pavey's men were encouraged with money to bring to Mr. Porch anything found; one of these, now an old man, has said that many flints found in Great Oone's Hole were brought in and handed over as finds from Flint Jack's Cave".

While knowing all this, Mr. Balch confidently informed Dr. Wallis in 1951 that "if the museum has a series with bluish white patina, and others chalky white or markedly different, I suggest that you base your conclusions on the bluish flints". In conclusion Mr. Balch wrote: "I am absolutely certain that he [Mr. Pavey] carried down [the skulls] from Flint Jack's Cave, and that the bluish flints must be contemporary". Balch's conclusion was based partly on the fact that Mr. R. F. Parry, who for a number of years was Steward of the Bath Estate, and carried out excavations at Gough's Cave, had told him emphatically that Pavey did find skulls, that he showed them to Boyd Dawkins, and that the British Museum had flints from Flint Jack's Cave, which he (Parry) had sent.

In the Department of British Antiquities, British Museum, there are in fact thirteen flint artifacts presented by R. F. Parry in 1930, and it is recorded in the register (1930.11.4, 1-13) that they are: "All from Flint Jack's Cave below Gough's Cavern on the same side of the Cheddar Gorge; the cave was broken into and destroyed in making a path about 1895". However, it is also stated in the register that "Mr. Parry's excavations took place in 1927; previous excavation was by Mr. Montague Porch". These specimens have not been described or figured, but according to Mr. Reginald Smith's entry in the register "1-6 resemble flints from Mother Grundy's Parlour [Creswell Crags] and are late Aurignac". Briefly the specimens are as follows:—

- 1 and 2. Narrow blades with greyish-white patina.
3. *Dos rabattu* point, with mottled *bluish-grey* patina (Fig. 19, A).
4. Narrow blade with edges serrated by use (Fig. 19, B); greyish patina.
5. Blade with utilized margin; greyish-white patina (Fig. 19, C).
6. End-scraper on blade, *bluish-grey* patina (Fig. 19, D).
- 7 and 8. Narrow blades with greyish patina.
9. Blade with "faceted back", *bluish* patina. (Not seen.)
10. Blade, greyish-white patina.
11. Broad blade, utilized, *bluish-grey* patina.
- 12 and 13. Core-trimming flakes, mottled whitish-grey patina.

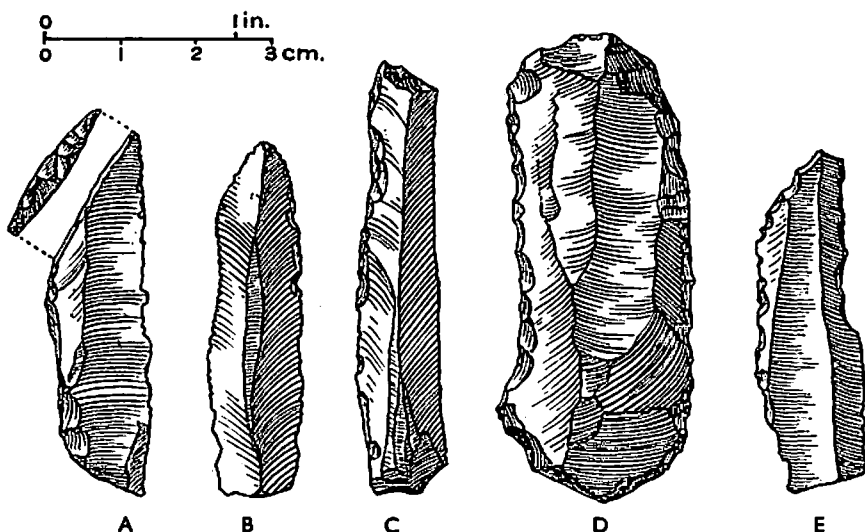


Fig. 19.—Upper Palaeolithic Flint artifacts from Flint Jack's Cave, Cheddar.
Del. C. O. Waterhouse.

A small collection of flint artifacts preserved in the Public Library and Museum, Weston-super-Mare, is known to contain a number of specimens from Flint Jack's Cave. They were briefly described by Davies (1926) and referred to again in his account of flints from Gough's Cave, Cheddar, of which he says (1929, p. 106) :—

"... Very few of the implements [from Gough's] display the lively blue patina of the Flint Jack's Cave specimens now in the Weston-super-Mare Museum. This fact has importance because there has been some doubt as to the origin of these specimens. We are therefore pleased to be able to state that there is a small collection of undoubted authenticity from Flint Jack's Cave now in the possession of Mr. R. F. Parry, which in style and patination, is identical with the Weston Museum collection labelled 'From the Cheddar Caves', and described by us under that heading" (in 1926).

Through the courtesy of Mr. G. P. Rye, Curator of the Weston Museum, I have been able to examine the specimens which were described and figured by Davies (1926, p. 264). Their patination is as follows :—

No. 7, greyish-white ; No. 8, blue ; No. 9, greyish-white ; No. 10, grey (but Carboniferous chert, not flint) ; No. 11, greyish-white ; Nos. 12-14, bluish-grey ; No. 15, blue ; No. 16, bluish-grey ; No. 17, white ; No. 18, bluish-grey ; No. 19, bluish-white ; Nos. 20-23, bluish-grey ; No. 24, bluish-white.

Judging from their "lively blue" patina, Nos. 8 and 15 are unquestionably from Flint Jack's Cave, Nos. 19 and 24 almost certainly, and Nos. 12-14, 16, 18, 20-23 very probably from the same cave. (Indeed, it is

possible that they are all from this cave, for only two-thirds of those collected there by Parry are bluish.) No. 15 is the most important specimen in the whole series, for it is a *dos rabbatu* point of a type common in Creswellian industries (Fig. 19, E).

All the artifacts known to have been obtained from Flint Jack's Cave are Upper Palæolithic, but the number available for examination is inadequate for determining whether the industry is typically Creswellian, or of the local facies characteristic of the nearby Gough's Cave, known as Cheddarian. Certainly it was not pre-Creswellian.

EVIDENCE OF PRESERVATION

The preservation of the skulls is consistent with their being from an Upper Pleistocene cave-earth. They have a biscuit-like consistency; they are creamy-white in colour with traces of pinkish staining presumably due to contact with red cave-earth. (The pinkish hue of the interior tissue of No. 1 may be partly due to the heating effect of the concrete with which it was filled.)

PERCENTAGES

	F	$\frac{F \times 100}{P_2O_5}$	CaCO ₃	N	C	H ₂ O	Ash
Flint Jack's Cave skull 1	0.05	0.2	9	1.36*	7.0	16	74
Flint Jack's Cave skull 2	0.12	0.4	13	1.25*	4.6	13	77
Gough's Cave (Cheddar Man Skeleton)	0.25	2.4	55	1.83*	3.7	20	62
Pleistocene reindeer bone, Gough's Cave	0.14	0.9	30	1.5	4.4	15	68
Neolithic human bone, Sun Hole, Cheddar	0.18	0.7	27	2.2	7.5	18	65
Romano-British bird bone, Gough's Cave	0.08	0.3	5	3.1	9.6	23	68
Romano-British ungulate bone, Gough's Cave	0.21	0.7	9	2.5	8.2	17	72
Modern bone	0.03	0.1	5	4.0	14.0	24	53

Note: The fluorine, phosphate, and carbonate determinations were carried out by Mr. C. F. M. Fryd, Department of the Government Chemist; the nitrogen, carbon, water, and ash determinations were made by Dr. G. Weiler and Dr. F. B. Strauss, Micro-analytical Laboratory, Oxford (with exception of two nitrogen determinations of the Flint Jack's Cave skulls, made by Mr. E. J. Johnson in the Department of the Government Chemist).

To complete the records, the chemical composition of the skulls has been compared with that of bones of known ages from other caves in the Cheddar Gorge and region. However, in deposits with stalagmitic seams,

* Determinations made after the samples had been washed in warm water and acetone to remove any traces of size and other preservatives.

Pleistocene and Post-Pleistocene bones are not clearly differentiated by the analytical techniques at present available (*see* forthcoming publication by the author). The comparatively low fluorine content of the Flint Jack's Cave skulls may be a reflection of the high and relatively dry situation of the cave. The evidence of the other components is not inconsistent with their being of Stone Age antiquity.

SUMMARY

There is reason to suppose that the skulls described by Professor Wells were found by Rowland Pavey in *c.* 1893 in a small rock-shelter known as Flint Jack's Cave in Cheddar Gorge; although the evidence of association is extremely vague, considered in conjunction with the preservation of the skulls, it favours the view that they are contemporaneous with Upper Palæolithic (Creswellian or Cheddarian) artifacts recorded from the same site.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PLATE 7

Flint Jack's Cave, Cheddar. Photograph taken *c.* 1893, showing the two human skulls and animal bones discovered during excavation of the deposits on the cave floor.