

Some Prehistoric Finds from the Mendips.

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The contents of this paper describe the action of waters from their source high in the hills to the swallet by which they enter the underworld, thence through the rock to the exit cave whence they emerge to daylight.

A typical swallet is Eastwater Cavern, by which the water may be followed within two miles of Wookey to the exit cave. The descent is steep and comparable with that of most Mendip caves. The first chamber is full of loose boulders through which a passage can only be made with considerable difficulty and great care. The passage ends at a massive rock wall from where a cañon 380 feet long sinks to a roofed chamber and waterfall. The cañon is dry since the present waterway is overhead. From the chamber are two vertical drops to the roof of a lower chamber, the floor being reached by a precarious climb down a sloping overhanging ledge of rock. The stream which ultimately issues at Wookey Hole flows across this floor, and a series of potholes lead to the lowest point reached in the cave. This descent is typical of all feeder caves.

The outlet Cave, Wookey Hole, is situated in dolomitic conglomerate and the valley through which the stream now flows shows five distinct levels and was at one time in all probability a cavern. There are four chambers in all, one of which can only be reached by means of a raft. Beyond this, progress has been stopped by the roof meeting water. However, it may be possible to reach Eastwater through some of the upper passages which lead to smaller caverns of great beauty. The formations in some of these caverns are as wonderful as they are beautiful. At one place crystalline stalagmite is found in close proximity to dog-toothed crystals. There appears to be no reason for the formation of stalagmite in one way rather than another.

Wookey Hole is interesting archæologically. On investigation, pre-historical finds to the depth of seven feet were made in the floor of the entrance chamber. Pottery and bones were found lying on the opposite bank, and below the first drop of the river. These finds prove the cave to have been the habitation of man from Neolithic to Roman times. In the excavation of the entrance chamber, the top layer consisted of debris, the second of mud in

which wood ash, Roman pottery, coins and pins, etc., were unearthed. In the third layer, with the exception of one coin dated B.C. 124, no trace of Roman influence was found. Towards the bottom of the layer were found some beautiful examples of "S" and "C" curved patterns upon pottery, which from the true execution and the depth at which they were found, were probably brought over from Armorica, a country north of the Loire, which produced pottery of almost identical workmanship. Amongst some of the earliest finds was a Neolithic pot marked with vertical lines and dots, which were perhaps the writing of the people who made it. Brooches, one in particular (La Tene 2-3 period), of considerable interest were also discovered.

It is quite clear from the position of the finds, that part of the cave was set aside for sleeping; another, at the back, for stables; a third, within the light for sharpening tools; a fourth for weaving, and so on. One particular group of finds is of special interest for they indicate that at one period this cave was inhabited by a solitary goatherd.

Other points of interest concerning the inhabitants are shown by the fact that on one occasion they appear to have been driven to the rear and killed as they were overtaken by the invader. Amongst many of the miscellaneous finds of the early British peoples may be mentioned cheek pieces of bits made of antler, polished and worked bone, implements of Kimmeridge shale, stone hammers, gaming stones, bill-hooks, gauges, saws, adzes, sickles, weaving combs, quern stones, and a splendid example of wooden shovel which had been preserved. All these finds are similar to those made at Glastonbury. The animal remains are also similar, and we are therefore safe in assuming that these people were Brythons and occupied the cave prior to the Roman invasion. The fact that fragments of human bones were found with those of animals, amongst the refuse, may indicate that the people had cannibalistic tendencies.

These are the people who made huts on land and eventually threw them on the bog, making a foundation for the Lake Village which was ultimately built on top.

It was probably the homes of these people that are indicated at various parts of Somerset by a series of hut circles, such, for

example, as those in Worlebury Camp. It is of interest to note that although the Mendips are covered with the weapons and implements of the earlier Neolithic peoples, no signs of their habitations have yet been found. The adjacent cave, known as "The Hyena Den," was first worked by Professor Boyd Dawkins, who obtained evidence of its Paleolithic inhabitants. Since then a full investigation has revealed many finds, of cave lion, rhinoceros, mammoth, hyena and other contemporary animals.

Further investigation at Ebor is uncovering remains, probably of the Solutrean epoch, and has yielded amongst other human remains the first piece of carved bone yet discovered on the Mendips.
