

## Some Derbyshire Caves.

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The object of the present note is to place on record an account of the cycle tour undertaken by seven members of the Spelæological Society during the first ten days of September 1923.

Starting from Bakewell (Fig. 21) the party reached the junction of Monsal and Taddington Dales on the evening of September 1st.

### DERBYSHIRE CAVES.

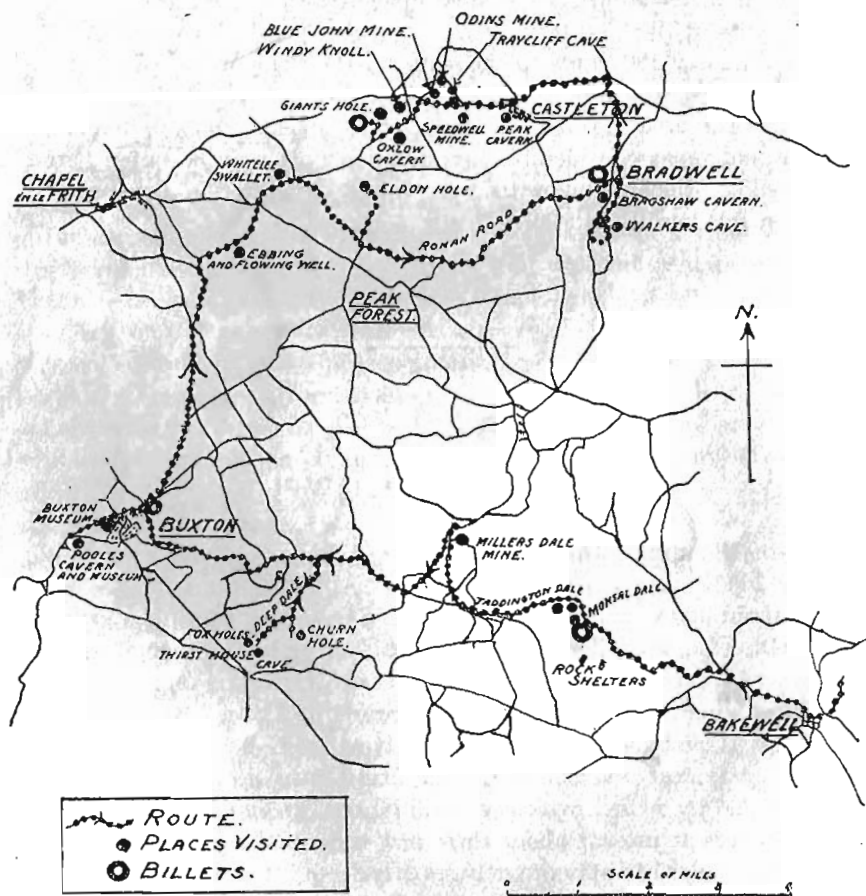


FIG. 21.

During that evening a cursory visit was made to several rock shelters at the foot of Demon's Dale. In these shelters numerous quantities of "Black Marble" chips, showing signs of human workmanship, were found.

No record is known to us referring to the use of the local black limestone, for such is the kind of rock, for implements. It is very hard, and particularly suitable for flaking into implements, though inferior to flint, from the source of which, like the Mendips, this locality is remote. Subsequently, similar implements were noticed in the two museums of Buxton. That the use of this material does not appear to be recorded is in keeping with the fact that the Buxton specimens were casually mingled with true flint implements.

On the following day visits were paid to four minor caves in Taddington and Miller's Dales, and to three caves in Deep Dale; namely Churn Hole, Thirst House and Fox Holes. The Thirst House Cave has been described and worked on a previous occasion. During the present visit a fragment of elephant's tooth (kindly identified by Mr. M. A. C. Hinton), was picked up on the slope leading into the inner cave. This cave and Fox Holes opposite to it have been subsequently investigated under the auspices of the Derbyshire Caves Research Committee. Fox Hole was dug by the authors towards the end of September, and in a long trench extending to the full depth of the cave no prehistoric remains were discovered at all. At Thirst House Cave some five excavations were undertaken from the floor to rock bottom, and nothing but recent bones were found, the lower strata being quite barren. These investigations verified the section as given by the earlier investigators, with the exception that what they term a lower layer of stalagmite, proved to be a hard crystalline calcareous deposit.

Poole's Cavern was visited in passing through Buxton.<sup>1</sup> There is much still to be done in the way of excavation for Romano-British and prehistoric remains in this cave.

On September 4th an exploration was made of a swallet at Whitelee, near Perryfoot. The swallet entrance is under a large cliff face, which would lead one to suppose that the water way must be of some magnitude. Unfortunately the lower passage was blocked, and time would not permit digging a way through. About 150 yards of passages were investigated. They passed under the main Sparrow Pit-Castleton Road, and appeared to go on in a South Easterly direction.

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<sup>1</sup> See Guide to Pool's Cavern.

A visit was next paid to Eldon Hole, a vertical limestone rift over 180 feet deep, and lying about 1,400 feet above sea level. Some cave breccia was noticed on the hill side above the entrance, which indicated that at one time the rift and the hill itself extended to a much greater height than at the present day.

After a strenuous walk over the Roman Road, the village of Bradwell was reached, where, on the following day, Bagshaw Cavern was explored under the guidance of Mr. Revell. The entrance is an old mining shaft, which leads into the natural cavern. The passages are divided into an upper and lower series. A more or less straight passage leads south with a sharp turn to the west to Calypso's Bower, a beautiful example of stalactitic formation. Before entering this chamber a continuation of the southern passage leads down to the Devil's Organ Loft<sup>2</sup> and the Dungeon. Unfortunately, the previous rains prevented the lower passages from being reached, although an attempt was made to pass the quick-sands at the bottom of the Dungeon. After this point the general direction of the upper series is south-westerly. The way is easy for about 230 feet, until the Black Pool Sands are reached beyond which a short crawl leads to an easy continuation of the passage that had been followed. This section is about 250 feet long, and ends in a large chamber known as the Hippodrome, at which point lunch was taken. From here the way leads by somewhat muddy passages to an underground river which, in flood times, comes as a torrent back along the usually dry upper passages, and pours in a seething mass down into the dungeon. On the way to this river a side passage is passed which leads to the Glory Hole—a pot hole 60 feet deep, with forty feet of water at the bottom. This pot hole also probably fills up and helps to flood the other passages. The whole exploration took about 10 hours.

Another cave was investigated and photographed through the kindness of Mr. Walker the owner. The cave is a small one with the entrance on the eastern side of Bradwell Dale. The single chamber is the most beautiful that had been seen in Derbyshire and compares favourably with the lower series at Swildon's Hole in Somerset. Opposite this small cavern is another opening running into the hill-side, which was casually explored. It is said that during the wet seasons water flows from this opening. The water is supposed to come from the river in Bagshaw Cavern.

From September 7th to 10th our headquarters were at Peakshill Farm. The remaining expeditions were to Blue John Mine, Giant's Hole, Windy Knoll, Peak Cavern, Odin's Mine and

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<sup>2</sup> See Frontispiece.

Speedwell Mine. An interesting point in Blue John Mine is the fact that at the lowest point a large cavern can be reached by going up over a steep clay bank. This cavern is not marked in Martel's<sup>3</sup> original diagram, but is, of course, known to the local explorers. Lord Murgrave's Dining Room is an imposing Cavern, but the levelling of the floor for the benefit of the public considerably detracts from its natural grandeur. Veins of Blue John (Calcium Fluoride) from which the cave gets its name occur in many places, generally in the smaller passages. The stone is usually surrounded by clay with a layer of barium sulphate or baryta on the outside. This sequence of deposits occurs as lenses in the limestone joints. The blue colour seems to be due to the occurrence of bitumen in the same locality and not to the presence of manganese, since the percentage of the latter does not vary perceptibly with the colour. Furthermore, in a quarry at Wind Knoll it was noticed that the darkest specimens of Blue John were invariably those most closely associated with bitumen.

Giant's Hole proved to be an interesting swallet, consisting of an upper dry and lower wet water way. Both these water ways were followed as far as possible. The stream in the lower passage flows under a low arch 6 to 8 inches above the water level. The water was about 8°C., but this did not deter two of the party<sup>4</sup> from undertaking an uncomfortable wriggle in the cold water. One of them is seen emerging from the arch in the accompanying photograph.<sup>2</sup> It was found that the stream disappeared in a pot hole with no visible exit.

Windy Knoll was visited on the same day (September 8th) after the expedition to Giant's Hole had been completed. Oxlow caverns were not explored on this occasion as time was not available to undertake the necessary repairs to the lower mine shafts.

On September 10th several hours were spent in the Peak Cavern. A series of low wet passages on the left of the entrance or vestibule were first explored. They take the flood waters of the River Styx during the wet season, and converge in a long tunnel of such cross section and magnitude that it reminded one of a London Tube. Leaving the vestibule the beaten track was followed until Roger's Rain House was reached, above which a small passage was followed for about 200 feet upwards to a point where a vertical chimney of 40 feet was climbed, further progress being only barred by the narrowness of the continuing passage. Returning to the Rain House the

<sup>3</sup> *Caverns of Derbyshire*, E. A. Martel.

<sup>4</sup> Messrs. D. C. Prowse and E. K. Tratman.

visitors' route was followed to the great Victoria Cavern, where the main river is formed by the union of two streams. At this point the gear, including the camera and flash powder, was carried by wading waist deep for 15 yards to a small sandy island, from which point another 25 yards wide led to the end of the water. Some way beyond this point a pot hole about 35 feet deep, into which a stream flowed, was the furthest point reached. The water in the bottom just covered two lower arches, which probably lead downwards and onwards. It is this stream which in wet weather fills up the pot hole and flows *via* the two wades back into the main stream. At this end of the water way there was a vertical jambed scree which appeared to be very dangerous. No attempt was made to climb it as it was intended to visit Speedwell Cavern on this same day.

Speedwell Cavern was visited after a walk round Odin's Mine. The small Tray Cliffs Cave where Neolithic<sup>5</sup> remains had recently been found was examined. In the Speedwell Cavern the ordinary visitors route was undertaken with the additional short ascent of the old miners' stampling in the main rift cavern.

It was to be expected that when some twenty-five different places were visited in ten days, no new discoveries would be made, unless the quantities of limestone implements and the fragment of elephant's tooth are exceptions. Nevertheless, the strenuous nature of the tour was fully compensated for by the interest and enjoyment that resulted.

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<sup>5</sup> J.R.A.I., Jan.—June, 1923. *Prehistoric Remains from Tray Cliff, Castleton.*

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