

A SUMMARY OF THE FAUNAL REMAINS FROM A BONE ASSEMBLAGE FOUND AT SCREECH HOLE, HAM WOODS, NEAR CROSCOMBE, SOMERSET.

by

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ABSTRACT

An assemblage containing human and faunal remains was recovered from the base of a scree slope in Ham Woods, Croscombe in 2016 by the activities of local cave diggers trying to locate sites of speleological, rather than archaeological, potential. However, the bone assemblage was not recovered by systematic or controlled excavation methods; therefore, no contextual or stratigraphical information is available regarding these remains.

The human bone assemblage recovered from the site has been analysed and a report published. The human remains are suggested to represent three articulated inhumation burials – an infant, a seven/eight-year old child and a mature adult. The fact that three individuals have been recovered suggests that this site might contain multiple human burials. A suitable bone sample was submitted for radiocarbon dating and the result gives an Early Iron Age date for the human remains (Simmonds and Brayne, 2019).

A summary of the faunal remains from the bone assemblage collected from Screech Hole in Ham Woods is presented here. The faunal assemblage contains both wild and domesticated species. Generally, the bone has fair to good preservation, although there is some damage, including that caused by post-depositional and extractive processes. The faunal assemblage, in conjunction with the human remains, gives an indication of the potential resource that might be contained within the scree slope and/or possible cave site.

INTRODUCTION

Screech Hole (NGR ST 5965 4460) is located at the base of a scree slope in Ham Woods, Croscombe on the southern flank of the Mendip Hills, Somerset. The site attracted the attention of local cave diggers and during their digging activities an assemblage, containing human and animal remains was recovered. The assemblage was, subsequently handed over to the author and Robin Taviner (both, Mendip Cave Registry & Archive). It was advised that no further uncontrolled digging at the site should continue and the site has now been sealed to protect any remaining archaeological assets.

The underlying geology in Ham Woods comprises a succession of Carboniferous limestones, in the lower combe, the youngest, Oxwich Head Limestone Formation, then Clifton Down Limestone Formation, with the oldest, Burrington Oolite Subgroup in the upper section of Ham Woods. There are several faults that have affected the limestones. In the south-west, at Croscombe, the limestone is overlain by Dolomitic Conglomerate of Triassic age, to the north-west and south-east, the overlying stratum comprises Downside Stone of Triassic and Jurassic age.

An assemblage containing human and faunal remains was recovered from the base of a scree slope in Ham Woods, Croscombe by the activities of local cave diggers trying to locate sites of speleological, rather than archaeological, potential. However, the bone assemblage was not recovered by systematic or controlled excavation and, therefore, no contextual or stratigraphical information is available regarding these remains.

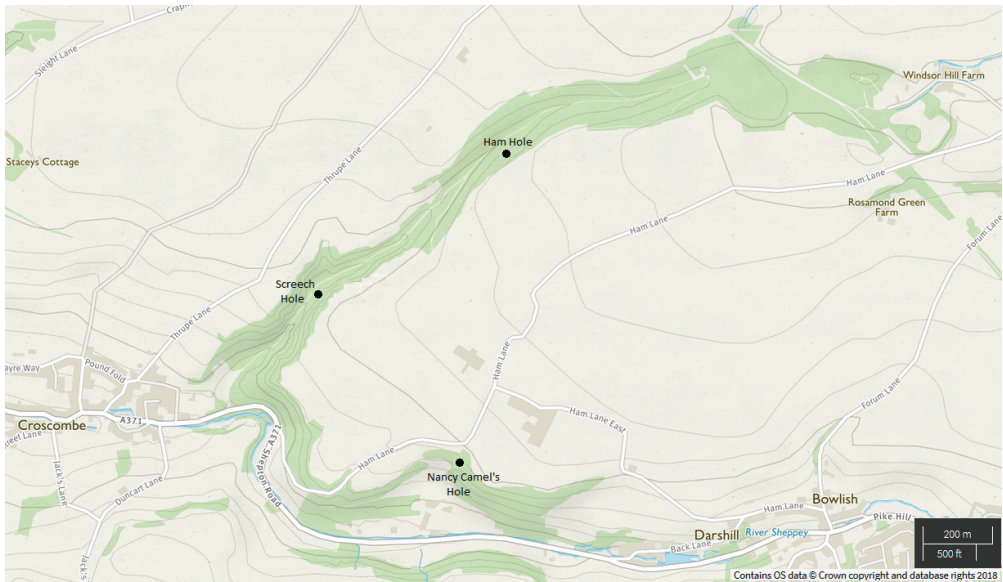


Figure 1. *Screech Hole location plan. By courtesy of Robin Taviner.*
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A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE HUMAN REMAINS

There is a strong possibility that the human bone recovered from Screech Hole represent three articulated inhumation burials – an infant, a seven/eight-year-old child and a mature adult. The fact that three individuals may have been recovered suggests that this is a site which contained multiple human burials.

A suitable sample was selected to be submitted for radiocarbon dating. The radiocarbon age determination was carried out by Bristol Radiocarbon Accelerator Mass Spectrometer (BRAMS). The result in uncalibrated radiocarbon years 2533 ± 27 BP (BRAMS-1263.2.2), Early Iron Age period. The data given were corrected for isotopic fractionation using the $^{13}\text{C}/^{12}\text{C}$ ratio measured on the AMS (Simmonds and Brayne, 2019).

THE ANIMAL BONE ASSEMBLAGE

The following section provides an inventory of the faunal element of the bone assemblage collected from Screech Hole in Ham Woods, Croscombe. Taxa have identified to the level of species, where possible. The tabulated data have been used to give the following quantitative variables; the number of taxon is deemed equivalent to number of species (N-taxa), and the number of identifiable specimens (NISP) for bones and teeth corresponds to the most basic categories of identifiable fragmented and/or fully disarticulated units in the assemblage. The components of articulated skeletal units are counted as separate entities for the purpose of this summary, regardless of whether they are found together or apart. For example, a section of mandible in which two teeth remain fixed is counted as three specimens (adapted from Stiner

1994). The values determined for the Screech Hole faunal assemblage are: Total Count, 171; N-taxa, 9; NISP, 147.

The faunal assemblage contains both wild and domesticated species and these, with details of the anatomical elements present, are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *The Screech Hole faunal bone assemblage.*

No.	Genus/species	Anatomical element	Wt. (g)	Common name/notes
MAMMAL				
1	<i>Bos taurus</i>	atlas	144.8	domestic cattle, refits epistropheus (axis)
2		epistropheus (axis)	147.7	domestic cattle; epiphysis: caudal partially fused, refits atlas
3		vertebra, cervical	114.0	domestic cattle; epiphyses: cranial fused, caudal partially fused
4		vertebra, cervical	111.7	domestic cattle; epiphyses: cranial fused, caudal partially fused
5		vertebra, cervical	125.2	domestic cattle; epiphyses: cranial partially fused, caudal unfused
6		vertebra, cervical	110.0	domestic cattle; epiphyses: cranial partially fused, caudal partially fused
7		vertebra, lumbar	58.9	domestic cattle; epiphyses: cranial and caudal fused
8		sacrum (?) fragments	44.4	domestic cattle
9			21.7	
10		vertebra, fragments	50.0	
11			35.3	
12		femur(?)/limb bone fragments	209.4	
13		epiphysis, both vertebra	5.5	domestic cattle
14		caudal fragments	3.6	
15		<i>unidentified</i>	limb bone fragment	38.5
16	<i>Ovis ares</i>	femur	30.0	sheep
17		scapula	11.5	
18		pelvic girdle	15.4	
19		pelvic girdle	33.0	
20		tooth, M ₄	5.7	
21 to 25		mandible with teeth (P ₁ , P ₂ , P ₃ , M ₁ erupting)	11.7	sheep, juvenile NISP=5
26		metapodial, distal fragment	5.4	sheep
27		tibia	14.9	sheep, juvenile
28		metatarsal	17.5	sheep, some mineralisation
29		radius	5.9	sheep, juvenile, proximal/unfused, distal/partially fused
30		metatarsal, proximal end/shaft fragment	16.2	sheep, some mineralisation on surface

No.	Genus/species	Anatomical element	Wt. (g)	Common name/notes			
31		vertebra 7no.	10.0	sheep			
32			6.4				
33			5.6				
34			8.3				
35			2.0				
36			2.3				
37			2.6				
38			metacarpal, proximal		5.5		
39			end/shaft fragments		5.8		
40			tibia		31.4		
41	scapula	5.1	sheep, juvenile				
42	scapula fragment	mandible fragment	7.7	sheep			
43			4.1				
44			5.8				
45			4.3				
46 to			maxillary fragment with		teeth (P ₃ , M ₁ , M ₂)	5.2	NISP=4
49							
50			humerus shaft fragment		14.0		
51			<i>Ovis/Capra</i>		Horn core fragment	2.7	
52	metatarsal, proximal fragment	2.1		sheep/goat, unfused			
53	<i>Felis catus</i>	scapula	5.0	cat			
54		fibula fragment	0.6				
55		ulna	4.4				
56	<i>Canis familiaris</i>	C1, atlas	8.0	dog			
57		C2, axis (epistropheus)	9.4				
58		C3, vertebra	7.6				
59		C4, vertebra	7.2				
60		atlas	6.3	dog			
61		ulna, left and right,	proximal fragments	7.0	dog, probable matching pair		
62				5.4			
63		scapula, left	tibia	6.9	dog		
64				8.1			
65				radius, left		4.0	
66				tibia		10.0	
67				mandible fragment		8.3	
68 to				mandible with M ₃ , M ₂		27.5	NISP=3
70							
71 to	mandible with P ₂ , P ₃ , P ₄			17.0		NISP=4	
74							
75	vertebra 8no.						
76		2.9					
77		5.2					
78		4.8					
79		5.5					

No.	Genus/species	Anatomical element	Wt. (g)	Common name/notes
80			2.6	
81			3.9	
82			4.9	
83		metapodials, 8no.	1.4	
84			1.4	
85			1.1	
86			1.8	
87			1.2	
88			1.3	
89			1.2	
90			1.8	
91		skull fragment	10.7	
92		humerus	20.4	
93 to 104	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	skull with teeth (left: I ₁ , I ₂ , P ₃ , M ₁ , M ₂ , M ₃ ; right: I ₁ , P ₂ , P ₃ , M ₁ , M ₂)	7.6	rabbit NISP=12
105		pelvic girdle	2.3	
106		os innominatum	1.7	
107		femur, right	2.9	
108		femur, right	3.6	
109		tibia/fibula	3.4	
110		tibia/partial fibula	2.9	
111		ulna	0.9	
112	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	metatarsal proximal/shaft fragment	8.6	roe deer
113		tibia distal fragment	17.1	
114		sacrum	16.4	
115 to 118	<i>unidentified</i>	horn core fragments	9.5	total weight of 4no. horn core fragments
119		mandible fragment	3.2	
120		mandible fragment	3.0	possibly sheep (<i>Ovis</i>), articulation process inc. condyle
121		vertebra cervical	1.9	
122		vertebra thoracic	0.7	
123		vertebra lumbar	2.5	
124 to 141		rib bones	24.7	total weight of 18no. rib bones inc. some fragmentary elements; small mammal
BIRD				
142	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	tibio-tarsus	5.3	pheasant
143		femur	2.0	
144		ulna	1.5	
145		coracoid	1.1	
146	<i>Gallus gallus</i>	humerus	4.3	(large) domestic fowl
147	<i>Anatidae</i>	ulna	3.5	goose

No.	Genus/species	Anatomical element	Wt. (g)	Common name/notes
OTHER				
148 to 150	<i>Unidentified avian</i>	bird bone fragments	3.6	Total weight of 3no. bird bone fragments not included in NISP
151 to 164	<i>unidentified</i>	unidentifiable fragments	32.9	total weight of 14no. unidentifiable bone fragments; not included in NISP
165		limb bone shaft fragment	6.9	small mammal total weight of 2no. skull fragments
166		shaft fragment	3.3	
167		skull (?) fragments 2no.	10.8	
168				
169		rib (?) fragment	4.9	
170		rib (?) fragments 2no.	0.9	
171				
<i>Total Count = 171</i>				
<i>Number of taxon equivalent to number of species, N-taxa = 9</i>				
<i>Number of bone/tooth specimens indentifiable to taxon and/or anatomical level, NISP = 147</i>				

Several snail species were identified from the residue recovered from washing sieves, these include *Clausillia bidentata*, *Discus rotundatus* and *Pupilla muscorum*.

COMMENTS

The Screech Hole faunal assemblage was recovered from the base of a scree slope by the activities of local cave diggers trying to locate sites of speleological, rather than archaeological potential and lacks contextual information as well as any stratigraphic associations, therefore one might only speculate as to how the assemblage might have formed. However the faunal remains, in conjunction with the human remains (previously reported in Simmonds and Brayne, 2019), give an indication of the potential resource that might be contained within the scree slope and/or possible cave site.

Generally, the bone has fair to good preservation, although there is some damage to a large proportion of the assemblage, much of it caused by post-depositional and extraction processes.

It is intended that the Screech Hole faunal assemblage be curated at Wells and Mendip Museum, with the human remains that have already been deposited there (Museum Accession No. 2019.56).

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