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Aveline's Hole, Burrington Combe: an Upper Palæolithic Station.

BY J. A. DAVIES.

Discovery and Early Work.

IN July last I had the privilege of giving a brief account of the finds made in Aveline's Hole to members of the Somersetshire Archæological Society. It is with great pleasure that I elaborate those remarks.

The cave was discovered on January 9th, 1797,[1] by two young men who were chasing a rabbit. The animal took refuge in a crevice in the rock, and when the pursuers attempted to dig it out they broke into a cavern of considerable extent. The mouth was found to be nearly enclosed by stalagmite intermingled with bones of sheep and deer. The most striking feature was the presence of about fifty human skeletons lying promiscuously on the floor of the cave.[2]

Dean Buckland was early on the scene and removed many skeletons. He came to the conclusion that the human remains were post-Diluvial. Next came the Rev. David Williams of Bleadon, and Beard, "the decent farmer," fresh from his discoveries at Banwell, and they found flint knives, some *tesseræ* and many animal bones of which we know nothing. After them followed an old man of the village of Burrington, who dug for treasure and, as we found during recent work, carefully re-arranged much of the cave floor to the depth of one foot.

1. *Sporting Magazine*, February, 1797.
2. Rutter, *Delineations of N.W. Somerset*, 1829, pp. 117, 118.

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From 1860–64,[1] Sir Wm. Boyd Dawkins excavated the inner chamber, sinking a shaft 38 feet into the barren loam which chokes the lower part of the cavern ; and finding nothing but part of the skull of a sheep and a boar's tooth. Aveline's Hole was the first cave which Sir William explored, and it was named by him.

Recent Work.

The Spelæological Society of the University of Bristol commenced to investigate this cave in 1914, and since 1919, I have had the honour to record their discoveries. The cave was found to be a half-filled rift in the limestone, 130 feet long, 12 feet wide for most of its length, from 5 to 40 feet high, and almost straight. There is a fairly steep incline from the mouth to 70 feet from the entrance, the remaining distance being fairly level. Thus the major part of the cave is well lighted and in modern times is tolerably dry, even in winter. There is reason to think that it was still drier when it was used as a habitation.

A rapid survey of the finds in order of their discovery may now be made. In 1914, skull No. 1 was found, 75 feet from the cave mouth, completely covered with a thick layer of hard crystalline stalagmite. Near it were the fragments of skulls 2 and 3, and further remains of at least eight other skulls. Remains of animals and artifacts were discovered close to these finds. The Great War prevented further work, but in 1919 the excavation was resumed, the cave floor being removed bodily outside the cave and sorted ounce by ounce. The post-war discoveries include many more human bones, most of them being small and of little interest ; artifacts of antler and bone, over two hundred flint implements, of which eighty are important ; and remains of seventy-two species of animals, many of which are now extinct.

Human Remains.

The skulls have been described elsewhere[2] by Dr. Edward

1. *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, xii, ii, 167.
2. *Proc. Univ. of Bristol Spel. Soc.*, no. 2, 1921, pp. 79–82.

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Fawcett, and by him compared with those of the famous Cro-Magnon race, which have been found in the Palæolithic caves of South France. Skull No. 1, apparently that of a woman, is distinguished by a very long head, broad face, narrow nose, and rather low cranial capacity. In addition, the upper jaw is very narrow, and the orbits are much more oblong than usual. Skull No. 3, when viewed from above, shows a well-marked pentagonal outline. All these features are typical of the Cro-Magnon race. In addition to the skulls, numerous teeth were discovered, most of them being large and in good condition. Some of them show signs of a hard diet, being greatly worn. A few are decayed, a rare condition in teeth of Stone Age man. A tibia from this cave is flattened transversely, this being the case with all known Cro-Magnon examples, and also in many other prehistoric and modern primitive tibiae. Numerous other human bones were discovered. Amongst them are *foetal* bones.

Artifacts (Plate VII).

In association with the human remains were many artifacts. The most important is a harpoon of stag antler (fig. 1) which has been identified by the Abbé Breuil as Magdalenian 6 (*b*), *i.e.* the period of Magdalenian decline, and at the very end of the earlier Stone Age. The weapon has two rows of three barbs each, is highly polished on the convex surface and slightly polished on the flat face. Both surfaces bear a simple incised design, as shown in the diagram. The butt is notched, probably for the attachment of a line. This harpoon is very similar to numerous examples from the South of France which were made just after the final retreat of the reindeer to the north.

A few of the numerous shell beads (about sixty) are shown (fig. 2). They were found scattered in the cave earth amongst the human remains and flints. The beads were made by piercing holes—from the clumsiness with which they were made, probably with a stone implement—which are always found in the same position in relation to the whorl. Similar finds have been made in all the most notable Upper Palæolithic burials.

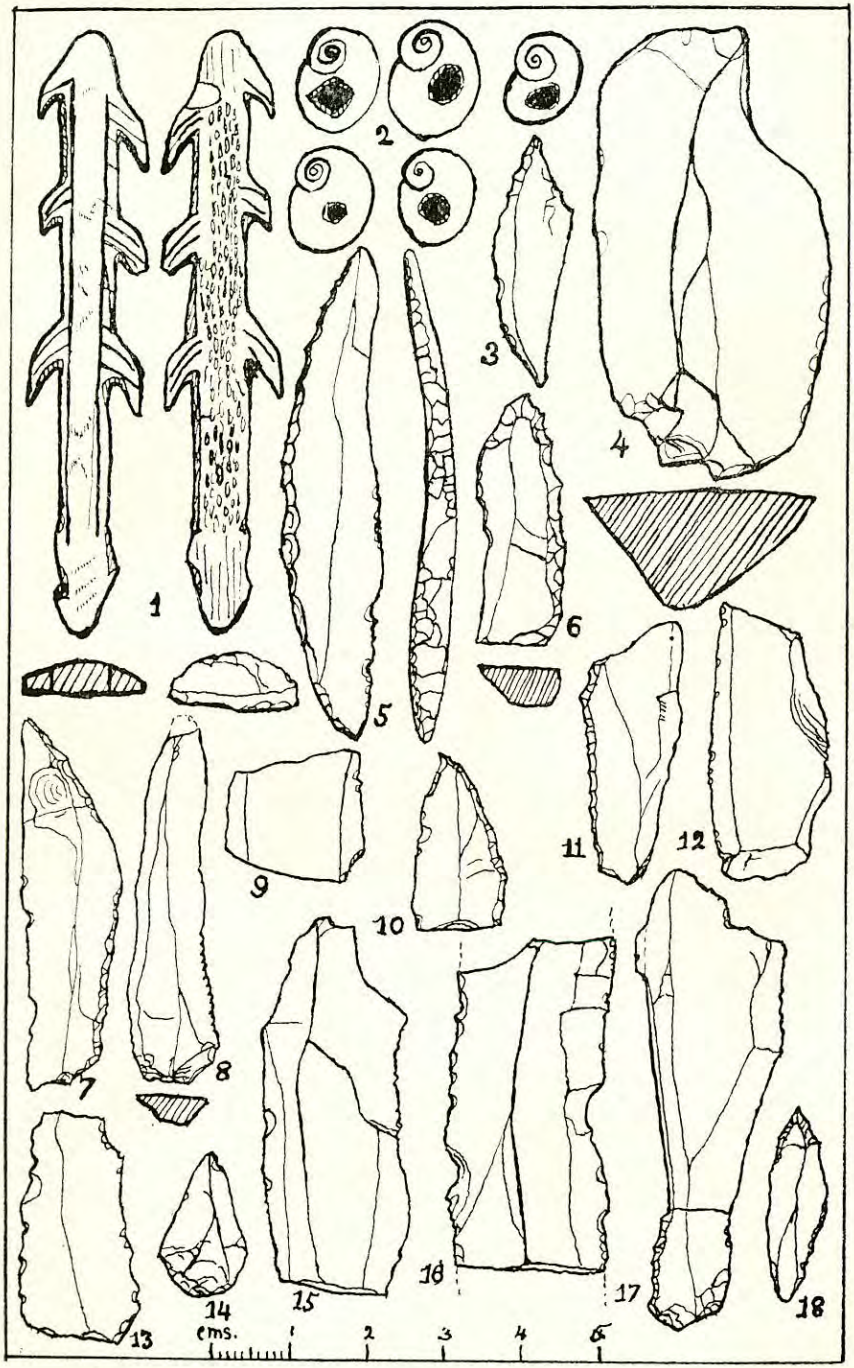
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All the stone implements which are figured come from the first foot, and form a small proportion of the total found in the three layers of one foot each, that have been removed from the cave floor. More than fifty stone implements from Aveline's Hole bear secondary chipping, and may be definitely assigned to the Upper Palæolithic period. The remaining artifacts are mostly flakes and broken blades with a distinctly Upper Palæolithic appearance. All are of unpolished flint, and almost all are densely patinated to a lustrous white. The types of flint implements discovered are graving tools (figs. 4 and 6), the latter being made from a truncated blade with a battered back. The characteristic burin edge is present in each. Two more good examples of the burin were found recently in the second foot. The burin is typical of Aurignacian and Tardenoisian stages, but has been reported from Magdalenian horizons.

Figure 5 is a very fine example of the Gravette point, a characteristic type of the Upper Aurignacian stage ; eight more examples of various sizes have been found in the cave. Four small Chatelperron points have been discovered, one being illustrated (fig. 10). This type of tool is usually found in Early or Middle Aurignacian levels. Fig. 8 is a blade which has one serrated edge ; the serrations are due to deliberate chipping. Fig. 18 is a pigmy awl similar to tools from the early Tardenoisian sites of France and Yorkshire. Figs. 3, 7 and 11 are knives with battered backs, a type common throughout Aurignacian and Tardenoisian stations. The remaining tools are blades and flakes, most bearing marked signs of wear. In addition to these, several piercers, a few pigmy flints, and some notched implements which were possibly used for rounding the wooden hafts of stone knives, have been found. In comparison with Aurignacian stations in France, the stone tools from this cave are small, the largest being only $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. An interesting find made recently was a small roughly spherical hammer-stone of quartzite which bears the marks of heavy blows.

With these tools were associated two bone points or piercing tools (one may have been a lance head), each about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. The butt ends of these artifacts have been carefully

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Harpoon of Stag Antler, Shell Beads and Stone Implements.

AVELINE'S HOLE, BURRINGTON COMBE.

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rounded. The points were produced by the aid of numerous saw and knife cuts which are still visible. Further finds include a small awl fashioned from the tooth of a brown bear ; a small bone implement with a hooked end, not unlike an extremely coarse crochet hook, and some pieces of utilised bone, which seem to have been intended for use as awls. No pottery or metal work was found in the cave.

Fauna.

The fauna given below indicates a severer climate than that of modern Britain. Most of the characteristic species were found in all three layers.

Birds.

1. Missel Thrush.
2. Song Thrush.
3. Redwing.
4. Fieldfare.
5. Blackbird.
6. Wheatear.
7. Whinchat.
8. Redstart.
9. Robin.
10. Blackcap.
11. Hedge-Sparrow.
12. Great Tit.
13. Pied Wagtail.
14. Swallow.
15. House Sparrow.
16. Linnet.
17. Corn Bunting.
*18. Snow Bunting.
19. Magpie.
20. Jackdaw.
21. Rook.
22. Skylark.
23. Little Owl.
*24. Golden Eagle.
25. Peregrine Falcon.
26. Kestrel.
27. Rock Dove.
*28. Red Grouse.
*29. Ptarmigan.
†30. *Lagopus sp.*
31. Pheasant.
32. Partridge.
33. Curlew.
34. Mute Swan.

Mammals.

1. Common Shrew.
†2. English Varying Hare.
†3. Cave Pika.
†4. Banded Lemming.
*5. Common Lemming.
6. Bank Vole.
*7. Continental Vole.
†8. *Microtus corneri.*
†9. *Microtus anglicus.*
*10. Northern Vole.
†11. *Arvicola abbotti.*
12. Long-tailed Field Mouse.
13. Red Deer.
†14. Giant Deer.
*15. Reindeer.
16. Ox.
17. Horse.
18. Wild Pig.
*19. Lynx.
*20. Wild Cat.
21. Weasel.
22. Stoat or Ermine.
23. Polecat.
24. Badger
*25. Brown Bear.
*26. Wolf.
27. Fox.

* Locally extinct or, in the case of birds, very rare visitors to Somerset.
† Totally extinct.

A more complete account of the fauna has been published elsewhere,[1] while many more remains of small mammals and birds are being identified by Mr. Martin A. C. Hinton of the British Museum (Natural History), and Mr. E. T. Newton, F.R.S.

1. *Proc. Univ. of Bristol Spel. Soc.*, no. 2, 1921, pp.-64–78.

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Summary and Conclusion.

The human remains have pronounced Cro-Magnon affinities, the artifacts are Aurignacian or, in the case of the harpoon, late Magdalenian, and the animal remains indicate a hard climate. We know that the Early and Middle Magdalenian phases in Southern France were contemporary with a post-glacial advance,[1]—probably the Bühl advance. Now, the presence of small passerine bird remains, and bones of field mouse, ox, horse, and pig throughout the cave floor shows some slight amelioration in climate. This is borne out by the deposit below the 3-feet layer of cave-earth and boulders in which the discoveries were made. This lower deposit is a very fine stratified loam or silt of great thickness, which was possibly washed in by melting snow from the Mendips. The harpoon was probably made in Southern France during this post-glacial period, for fragments of reindeer antler were common throughout the cave floor, and no craftsman would use spongy stag antler while the more compact reindeer was available. The stone industry may thus be a local survival of the Aurignacian culture which previously had existed all over Western Europe. It is now thought that the Tardenoisian industry was evolved from the Aurignacian. The rise and wide distribution of the Tardenoisian culture may have originated in such centres as Britain and the Mediterranean where Magdalenian peoples never gained a footing. This theory can claim some support from other late Palæolithic stations in Britain.[2]

1. H. J. E. Peake, *Man*, January 1922.
2. M. C. Burkitt, *Man*, December, 1922.