

Ogof Colomendy

On the 3rd August, myself and Phil Hunter set off from the Colomendy Arms with an entrenching tool, to extend a tiny cave I had noticed some weeks earlier in the woods of Cefn Mawr, almost overlooking Loggerheads.

After a couple of hours easy digging we came across some bones at a depth of 3ft.. The entrenching tool was discarded and we quickly found many more bones and a variety of teeth, one of which looked suspiciously human.

Realising that the cave could be of archaeological interest no further excavation was attempted, and the following day a sample of remains was deposited at Liverpool Museum, and another sample was posted to Melvyn Davies for his comments.

Mel confirmed our suspicions that one of the teeth was human, a pre-molar in fact, and he offered to visit the cave some days later. This he has done, and he reports that the cave is certainly an interesting archaeological dig.

Due to Mel's other digging commitments, he is unable to dig the cave himself and advises that an experienced cave archaeologist should be present before any more work is attempted. Anyone interested?

Edwin Carr.

Identification of Human Bones from a New  
Cave at Loggerheads, Clwyd.

The following human bones were found in a mixture of human and animal bones excavated by North Wales Caving Club members from loose, brown cave-earth in a small south facing entrance:

Fragment of right mandible complete with 3 molars. The teeth are rather small in size, M1 and M2 are worn but M3 is only slightly worn suggesting a young but mature adult.

Right humerus, distal fragment.

Thoracal vertebra.

Lumbar vertebra.

Left femur, found in two pieces which fitted easily together to form a complete bone with eroded ends. This form of erosion usually arises in bones which are found in loose cave-earth rather than clay. The whole of the distal piece had patches of thin stalagmite, but the 12cm proximal portion had none. This suggests breakage of the bone soon after burial and consequent movement of the smaller piece away from the zone of stalagmite deposition. Normally stalagmited cave bones are at least Bronze Age in age, but this may not be true here. The bone is from a person over 20 years old.

Melvyn Davies,  
Penmaenmawr,  
16th August 1975

OGOF COLOMENDY? A NEW CAVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE NEAR LOGGERHEADS, CLWYD

A brief, preliminary report on the discovery of this cave on 3rd August 1975 by N.W.C.C. was published in club N/L No. 32. Among the bones and teeth accidentally uncovered on that day, I was able to identify a number of human remains comprising a right mandible containing 3 molars, a right humerus distal fragment, and a left femur found in two portions. Also a thoracic and lumbar vertebra.

The present report describes the result of a trial excavation which I attended on 21st December 1975, in order to determine whether the cave contained an undisturbed, prehistoric burial.

The cave is hidden in a small limestone escarpment in a wood near Loggerheads Clwyd, with a south facing entrance less than a metre wide, and just over a metre high. The ceiling slopes downwards at a steep angle and the rock is dissolved into deep phreatic scallops. The cave was originally full almost to the ceiling with cave earth. It has become apparent that the entrance has in front of it a mound of collapsed blocks which, if cleared, would reveal a true height of over 2m and a width probably approaching this distance.

The cave earth was removed by one person, one bucketful at a time with considerable difficulty because of the small space, and each portion was sifted by 8 persons, including myself, all bones and fragments being retained. A careful search was made for pottery, flint, and worked or erratic stones, but none were found except for recent china and Buckley ware fragments. Stalagmite was absent except for very small patches on some of the bones. There was a local molluscan fauna, but none of the marine origin - the cave is 11.5km from the sea.

The cave earth was brown in colour and contained loose, sub-angular limestone fragments. Stratification was absent in the 1.5m excavated, and the deposit showed a thorough disturbance by tree roots. Indeed, many of the human long bones had roots running longitudinally through them.

Every bone and fragment was carefully washed, air-dried, and a complete list was drawn up. In addition, there were several hundred unplaced and unidentified bone fragments. Some of the bones have been marked with their identifications and varnished, and they are packed and labelled ready for deposition in a suitable museum.

The animal bones consist of parts of at least 3 oxen, which are evidently small members of the Bos family, one red deer, 3 pigs, 2 dogs, at least 2 sheep (or goats), one fox and possibly a hare. The last 2 animals and perhaps some of the others, suggest the use of the cave as a fox's earth. Surprisingly, there are no badger remains. The larger bones are sometimes hacked, or even smashed, but many have not been broken up into a size small enough to go into a pot. In some caves, areas are found where all the animal bones are well broken-down, so that every vestige of marrow can be extracted, and the fat boiled out. This is not the case here, which suggests that animals were plentiful locally as a food source. It is not clear why so many food remains should be found in a cave much too small for human occupation.

The human bones represent 2 individuals and there is no firm evidence yet of a third. It has not been possible to determine the exact age or sex of the individuals, but one seems likely to be between 16 and 25 years, while the other is older. The tooth fractures are fascinating, but what is also striking is the post-mortem fracture of all the long bones. Every one is broken near the middle, and sometimes also near its end. Such extensive fractures could surely not have happened after interment in the cave. Some deliberate fracturing, perhaps in ritual fashion, just prior to burial is suggested. Comparison with burials in other caves supports this hypothesis.

e.g. in Ogof-yr-ychen, Caldey Island<sup>5,6</sup>, the long bones of one skeleton were also found fractured in the 1970 excavation, but in Ogof Pant-y-Wennol, Llandudno,<sup>7,8,9,10,11</sup> the long bones of 2 skeletons excavated in the last two years are generally complete, as if this ritual was not practised. They could not be fractured easily, of course, unless the corpse had been exposed to the elements for some months beforehand - unless a "double-burial" system was followed with exhumation for the fracturing ritual.

Detailed descriptions of the human bones found in other caves are often sadly lacking in published reports, and the treatment given to the bones by contemporary people, if any, is rarely considered. Also the cave-environment processes which affect bones buried in clay, stalagmite etc., are little understood by most authors so that methods of bone breakage, or conversely, preservation, or solifluction which gives rise to disarticulation, are not considered.

A few cave excavations, where human bones were discovered are examined here. In Hay Wood Cave, Somerset<sup>12</sup>, 3 male maxillae were found which showed mutilation of the upper incisor teeth. This was believed by the excavators to be of ritual significance for cosmetic effect, so it must have taken place in life - not after death. Webley<sup>13</sup> reports that the top of the skull of one burial in Tooth Cave, Gower, had been deliberately broken and the pieces placed in a neat pile, but most of the long bones were found complete (priv. comm.) He suggests an early Bronze Age date. Moberney<sup>14</sup> found scattered human remains in Cathole, Gower, but they were in disturbed surface spoil from an earlier excavation, and he gives no detailed descriptions. In a report by Hesketh<sup>15</sup> on human remains from a cave near Maeshafn, Flintshire (now Clwyd), anatomical identifications are given, but it is not clear whether the long bones listed were always complete and unbroken. Bramwell<sup>16</sup> records that human bones found with Neolithic ware in Fox Hole Cave, Derbyshire "seemed much disturbed and fractured, and were indiscriminately mixed with animal bones". In Priory Farm Cave, Pembrokeshire, Style and Dixon found the remains of 4 or 5 individuals, but "measurements could not be taken of the limb bones since they are incomplete". However, when Prof. W.F. Crimes came to write the report on this cave in 1933<sup>17</sup> based on the excavations carried out by others in 1906-7, he did not comment on the fragmentary nature of the bones.

Since the ritual at Ogof Colomendy is so unexpected a discovery, and the dating evidence unfortunately non-existent, it is intended to excavate for at least one more day in the cave. Also the members of N.W.C.C. are anxious to make progress in the cave beyond the archaeological zone, if at all possible, because of the cave's proximity to an other cave, Ogof Hesp Alum, which has great geomorphological interest. It is realised that the archaeological zone can extend to the accessible end of the cave as at Maeshafn.

The entrance mound has not been disturbed by the excavators so that it can be trenched in future years. It is here that occupation evidence could be expected, but the area is obviously riddled with tree roots.

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