LYNX CAVE EXCAVATIONS

TANTALISING EVIDENCE FROM THE LATE UPPER PALAEOLITHIC
The entrance as it would have looked to our Late Upper Palaeolithic ancestors during the
Pleistocene period, some 11,500 year ago. (even down to the Birch leaves)

INTRODUCTION

For many years the only evidence we had that suggested a Pleistocene deposit was a few small
jaw bones of Arctic Lemmings that hinted at a cold climate. Along with these bones we found a
number of flint artifacts from the same disturbed layers. The experts that looked at them were all
confident that they were Late Upper Palaeolithic in appearance, and suggested that they could be
termed Creswellian. These finds were without doubt, a rare occurrence in the caves of north
Wales and one that we hoped would lead to some “in situ” finds that would give more credence
to these early finds. It was many years into the excavation before the evidence slowly started to
be unearthed. Although there is still some of the Pleistocene deposit left, we hope more evidence
remains yet to be uncovered. What we do have, is a snap-shot in time at various intervals during
the Late Upper Palaeolithic, when the cave was used by these early hunters. They left behind
their tools and weapons, the remains of their meals and the fires they sat around to fend off the
cold and protected them as they slept.

BONE & STONE ARTIFACTS:

It was early on in the excavation that the first bone artifact was recovered; unfortunately the
ancient breaks at each end suggested that it was only a portion of a larger implement, it has
variously been described as, a bone Awl, a bone Spear Point or a bone Javelin Point. Although it
came from the disturbed deposit (ibid), it was recognizable as belonging to a much earlier period
(later to be confirmed by radiocarbon dating). It is manufactured from a relatively thick long
bone and measures 89mm in length, and tapered throughout. It was rounded in section and
polished all over except for a natural hollow in the bone that formed a groove running the length
of the artifact. A later piece of bone similar in shape was also found and could well be part of the
same implement, only this section was more hexagonal in section. A similar artifact was found at
Coniston Dib in North Yorkshire and radiocarbon dated at 11,000BP. The Lynx Cave artifact was
described by (Wymer pers. comm.) as being typically Magdalenian and later proved correct with
a radio carbon date of 11,700BP.

A recent discovery was the Spear Point manufactured from antler see (What’s New
(http://lynxcave.webs.com/whatsnew.htm)) which could well be from the same date.

The stone artifacts have appeared in various forms, large rounded limestone pebbles that have
been used as hammer-stones to smaller lithic implements made from flint and chert. The
assemblage is typically Late Upper Palaeolithic in appearance and compatible with other flint
assemblages from Kent’s Cavern, Gough’s Cave and Creswell Crag Caves and nearer home, Cefn Caves, St. Asaph. At the time (1962), they were described as Creswellian, as they were deemed to differ from those of our continental neighbours. To-day, after a great deal of research and debate, the term Magdalenian is more appropriate as it is felt the salient points between British and continental flints have a great deal in common (Jacobi pers. comm.).

The flints drawn below represent the early flints recovered from the disturbed surface layers but can be confidently described as Late Upper Palaeolithic. Flint No.A1 is the mesial portion of an anciently broken blade, possibly a single shoulder point, framed by steep retouch. Greyish white in colour, its original length could only be guessed at, but the portion remaining, measures 38mm in length. Flint No.A3, is a straight backed blade showing retouch on both margins and has an ancient break at its distal end. The patination is a dense grey white with slight mottling throughout and measures 39.2mm in length. Dr. C McBurney was first to examine these flints and used the term Creswellian to describe them, using their morphology alone for his interpretation. He suggested that flints similar to No.A1, had a wide distribution, not only in Britain but in northern Europe where they first appeared in the Hamburgian culture south of the Baltic around 12,000BC but also suggested that they may still have been in use as late as the ninth millennium BC. Flint No.A3 was more difficult to place as it did not belong to any well-known type, but he suggested that it was manufactured from flint similar to that used by the Late Upper Palaeolithic peoples in south Wales in such sites as Cathole and Hoyles Mouth. Dr R Jacobi, who examined the same flints 20 years later, drew parallels to artefact No.A3 from Dowel Hall Cave, King Arthur’s Cave and Kirkhead Cavern, and placed them from around the Allerød Interstadial. Regardless of the fact that these two flints have been found out of context, their general appearance and blade proportions along with the comments from leading experts (Jacobi, McBurney et al) would suggest that in all probability they can be assigned to the Late Upper Palaeolithic.

The more recent liths that have been recovered from the Pleistocene deposit are quite varied in design No. A36 is a backed flint bi point, similar to some from Aveline’s Hole and is distinctly Late Upper Palaeolithic, current radiocarbon determinations suggest an age of 12,600 – 10,800BP. No A39 is a naturally backed flint knife; here the cortex has acted as the backing. No.A22 is a mesial portion of an anciently broken blade, with modification along its left hand margin. Its patination is similar to some of the other flints, dense matt orange/yellow. Another backed blade No. A23 was manufactured from a fine black carboniferous chert. No. A14 is the proximal portion of an anciently broken bladelet, 38mm in length with a dense greyish/white patination. The proximal end has been modified along its right hand margin by abrupt direct retouch. It was recovered from the disturbed deposit and its general form does not easily fit any particular type, it could belong to the Late Upper Palaeolithic or early Mesolithic depending on its true context.
BUTCHERED BONES:

It was early on in the dig that the first bones of extinct mammals appeared; to find that they had been butchered added that extra excitement, with the knowledge that we had uncovered some scarce evidence from our past. It was hoped that this tantalizing evidence would give
us a rare glimpse into the lives of our ancient ancestors, one that has been lacking in this area of north east Wales. Exactly how old these butchered bones were was problematic, as again they were from the upper layers and without any provenance they would simply remain ancient? Later, when we reach the undisturbed Pleistocene deposits, the same species turned up and showed the same signs of butchery. The humerus of an ancient Aurochs (Bos primigenius) was one of the earlier finds. This massive limb bone had been shattered at each end to extract the nutritional marrow. With both articular ends absent, identification was difficult and it was some time before we were confident that we had a positive ID. Other bones of Reindeer and Red Deer (Right) also showed similar fracture marks. Some showed secondary marks were they had been
gnawed by carnivores and rodents alike. A scatter chart shows that those bones found in the Pleistocene deposits were found in close proximity to the hearths, the odd exception, is the few bones that have been carried into the back confines of the cave, probably by a carnivore? Radiocarbon dating of some of these butchered bones has placed them within the latter half of the Windermere Interstadial, between 11,000 - 11,800BP (see below). The early settlers of the Late Upper Palaeolithic were very adept at hunting; Reindeer and Wild Horse (Tarpan) feature high in their food chain and their discarded bones are amongst the most frequently recovered from cave sites. This does not necessarily imply that it was their preferred food; it may simply be that they are easier to hunt, trap and kill, as they are herding animals. Strangely no Tarpan bones were found at Lynx Cave.

Shattered Red Deer Tibia

![Average July Temperature Chart](http://lynxcave.webs.com/palaeolithic.htm#782651621)
The artifacts and radiocarbon dated bones recovered from this Pleistocene deposit is ample evidence of occupation or use of the cave by the Late Upper Palaeolithic hunter gatherers during the Windermere Interstadial. We had hoped that we would find a working floor within the cave, suggesting a possible occupational level, but no evidence was uncovered. The narrow entrance passage is roughly 3 metres in length and it was here that we uncovered 3 hearths in the lower levels of the deposit. All 3 hearths (Positioned left) were on different levels in the deposit, possibly implying that they are of a different date? The most recent of the hearths is the furthest from the entrance and has the largest spread covering the full width of the cave. There are no substantial pieces of charcoal evident in the hearth just very small particles, although the blue/grey colour of this friable deposit stands out in contrast to the dark brown of the layer it rests on. The middle hearth is similar to the previous one but slightly smaller. The oldest hearth sits just 10mm above the late glacial sand layer and is positioned against the entrance wall, but lies exposed to the elements just outside the confines of the cave roof. It differs from the other 2 hearths, firstly there are larger pieces of charcoal within the hearth and secondly and more importantly, small stones had been placed on top of the fire as it was burning, they are randomly sized between 15mm and 60mm across and they are all angular. The stones have collapsed over time but give the impression that they once covered the whole surface of the hearth. The uppermost surfaces are covered in hard residue; further tests should reveal the true nature of this coating. The overall spread of the hearths would suggest just a short stay and so it would be misleading to say the cave was ever occupied during this period, as there is insufficient evidence to suggest there was any prolonged use of the cave. The number of butchered bones is small and not consistent with any lengthy stay.
Similarly neither is there any evidence to suggest their flint implements were manufactured around the site; there is the odd flake that is from a broken blade but little else to hint at tool making. Having found no working floor within the cave interior our efforts became focused on what we might find outside the entrance (talus). We removed the hillock outside down to the level of the talus during the Late Upper Palaeolithic, a process that would take 2 years to complete. Disappointingly there was very little in the way of evidence, a few small shattered fragments of a Reindeer humerus along with a toe bone and a discarded hammer stone. There were a few pieces of charcoal that had originated from the hearth near the entrance that were large enough to obtain a secure identification. These pieces would later be identified as from (Betula) Birch, probably Downy Birch (Betula pubescens) and Scots Pine (Pinus sylvestris). Both trees were amongst the first to flourish after the Ice Age. A further piece, of unknown origin, found 150mm above the hearth was later identified as Oak (Quercus).

Current evidence would point to the cave being occasionally used as a shelter during hunting trips and nothing more.

Scots Pine Pinus sylvestris

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