

EXCURSION TO THE BERKSHIRE DOWNS.

SATURDAY, JULY 22ND, 1905.

Directors : H. J. OSBORNE WHITE, F.G.S., AND
LLEWELLYN TREACHER, F.G.S.

Excursion Secretary : W. P. D. STEBBING, F.G.S.

(*Report by* LL. TREACHER.)

THE party arrived at Newbury about 10.30, and were met at the station by Mr. Frank Comyns, M.A. who led the way to the Museum, of which he is the Hon. Curator. Here they were joined by several local residents, and Mr. Comyns related the circumstances connected with the restoration of the Old Cloth Hall and its adaptation to the purpose of a Museum, and gave a brief description of the principal contents. The shortness of the time at their disposal prevented the members making more than a somewhat hasty inspection of the collections, but they especially noticed a fine skull, with horn-cores intact, of *Bos primigenius* from the peat of the Kennet Valley, teeth of the same and of other animals, horns of red deer and roebuck, nuts, etc., from the same deposit, two large neolithic flint celts from the peat, implements of bronze from local barrows, and some good specimens of ancient pottery found in, and near, Newbury. Also a small but interesting collection of local chalk fossils, presented by Miss M. Baylis, of Boxford, attracted some attention.

Mr. H. B. Woodward, F.R.S., in proposing a vote of thanks to Mr. Comyns, referred to Professor Rupert Jones, the oldest living geologist, and his early connection with Newbury, as the author of several papers on the geology of the district, and also as the collector of many of the specimens now in the Museum.

The party then left for the station, where they took the 11.45 train for Lambourn. During a stroll through the ancient town the extensive use which had been made of the local Sarsens as building material was noticed, some very large specimens also forming the south wall of the churchyard. Entering the carriage here the road was taken northward towards Ashdown Park. On the way a short stop was made at Fognam Barn to examine a small quarry in the *Terebratulina*-Zone, which they were informed had been opened to procure chalk for building, and a wall close by showed that it had served the purpose very well. The only fossils found were *Terebratula semiglobosa* and a small *Ostrea*.

Passing on, many Sarsens were noticed strewn over the

bottom of the valley, both in and outside the park. At one point the members left the carriages to make a closer inspection of some of the stones, and Mr. White gave a brief resumé of the various theories which had been advanced to account for their origin and present position. In his opinion the balance of evidence seemed to be slightly in favour of their being of the age of the Reading Beds. Angular fragments of flint occur in some of the Sarsens, as was seen in the wall of a house in Lambourn, but none were observed in the Ashdown specimens.

The main road was then left for a grass track leading to Wayland Smith's cave, a chambered cromlech built of Sarsens. It is situated in a small plantation on the north side of the Ridgeway. There was no evidence forthcoming as to the age of the structure, but on the surface of the fields close by Mr. A. S. Kennard found several worked flints, including one good scraper. After a discussion, chiefly of an archæological and legendary character, the party proceeded eastward along the Ridgeway to Uffington Castle, a large prehistoric earthwork occupying a prominent position at the northern end of a ridge of Upper Chalk, which stands up above the plain of Middle Chalk, and has a well-marked secondary escarpment facing the west.

Walking across the "Castle" the members gathered on the northern slope to listen to a description by the Directors of the fine panoramic view spread out before them. Looking northward the Cotswold Hills could be distinguished through the faint haze which prevailed on the horizon. In the middle distance the ridge of the Corallian rocks between Highworth and Faringdon was well seen and Faringdon Clump, an outlier of Lower Greensand, was a very conspicuous object in the landscape. Coming closer, the floor of the Vale of White Horse, composed of Kimeridge Clay, Gault, and Upper Greensand, reached nearly up to the Chalk escarpment on which they were standing. Owing to the fact that they were looking up the dip-slope of the various strata the country had the somewhat deceptive appearance of being nearly a level plain. The courses of the longitudinal valleys of the rivers Ock and Upper Thames were pointed out. The positions of some of the springs at the foot of the escarpment and the manner in which they were cutting it back were noted. The White Horse Hill appeared to be attacked by a pair of springs, the one on the west rising below the depression known as the Manger, the Dragon Hill projecting between the two. The comparative scarcity of woodlands over the Vale was observed, the principal trees being those in the boundary fences of the fields. The cause of this was probably that the great fertility of the soil did not allow of much land being used for woods. The figure of the White Horse was then inspected, and likened to that of an attenuated cat, and the various legends relating to the spot passed in review, after which the carriages were again taken for

a rapid drive along the grassy Ridgeway to the top of Blowing Stone Hill. From here the members walked down to examine the famous Blowing Stone and to try their hands, or rather their lungs, upon it. It is a large Sarsen, honeycombed with tubular borings, and is said to have been brought from the downs above, many years ago. Local tradition gives it the name of King Alfred's bugle horn, as, by blowing into one of the holes, an experienced person can produce a sound something like that of a hooter. On this occasion the members were not particular successful in making the hills resound with its notes, but a local resident was able to convince them of the possibility of doing so.

Having regained the hill-top, an inspection was made of the old chalk quarry by the road-side. The base of this was seen to consist of the Melbourne Rock, which is worked for road-metal. The Belemnite Marls which immediately underlie the rock were not visible. A search for fossils resulted in a few fragments of *Inoceramus* shells and a small shark's tooth.

The party then drove back, via Seven Barrows, to Lambourn for tea. In acknowledging a vote of thanks to the Directors, Mr. White said he was afraid they had not given so much geology as is usually expected on their excursions, the reason being that this excursion had to be rather hurriedly arranged in place of one proposed to Savernake which had to be abandoned at the last moment, owing to unexpected difficulties with the proprietors of a brickyard there. The members left Lambourn by the 6 o'clock train.

REFERENCES.

- Geological Survey Map, 1-inch, Sheets 13 and 34.
 Ordnance Map, Sheets 252-3.
 Index Map, Sheet 11.
 1872. WHITAKER, W.—"Geology of the London Basin," p. 363.
 1901. JONES, T. R.—"History of Sarsen Stones." *Geol. Mag.*, Dec. 4th, viii, pp. 54-9, 115-125.
 1903. JUKES-BROWN, A. J.—"Cretaceous Rocks of Britain," vol. ii, pp. 170-1, 456; iii. p. 201.
 See also Scott's *Kenilworth*, and Tom Hughes' *Scouring of the White Horse*.
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