

## Caves of Carrigtwohill

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there had been built a loose-meshed barricade of sticks a foot high or more in places and very difficult to see over. On 11th May my friend found one nestling a few days old and the nest had not been altered, but when I went up on 15th May the whole nest was domed over with an elaborate trellis-work of interlaced sticks. Only one egg hatched out of four but the young was safely reared. Is this the normal method of the Magpie's nest building, or were these successive barricades erected because of our intrusions? I know the Magpie builds a domed-over nest, but is the dome always only added after the eggs are hatched? Are the eggs always laid before the outer barricade is built? Do some birds leave out these precautions and was it our interference that caused them to be built on this occasion? The old birds watched our four ascents from a neighbouring tree.

**BRITISH CHAFFINCH, *Fringilla coelebs genleri*** Kleinschmidt. Another unusual experience was afforded by a pair of Chaffinches nesting in an apple tree in our walled kitchen garden. On 4th May the nest was found with the Chaffinch sitting on four eggs. Three days later the gardener noticed a Kestrel in a tree nearby and heard the Chaffinches screeching with alarm. Later that day he saw both birds carrying big beakfuls of nesting material from the tree to the far side of the garden. Two days later (9th May) I could find no trace whatever of the nest in its original place and, very vexed, I went in search of the gardener for an explanation. He then told me of the Kestrel and of seeing the birds carrying material to another corner. We investigated, and, to my great astonishment, we very soon located a perfectly constructed nest of moss, lichen, hair and feathers on an apple branch. Only one pair of Chaffinches inhabited this garden and only two eggs were laid in this second nest (13th and 14th May). The young were safely reared and grew in record time. There is no doubt whatever that these Chaffinches completely moved their nest a few hours after the Kestrel's attack and rebuilt it in a fresh location.

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### EXCAVATION AT CARRIGTWOHILL CAVES, CO. CORK.

By J. C. COLEMAN.

(With report on the bones found there by A. W. Stelfox.)

*Plate XI.*

#### INTRODUCTION.

The cave system at Carrigtwohill in south-east Cork was first discovered in September, 1933, by Messrs. M. Murphy, J. Cotter, C. Marchmont and J. C. Coleman.<sup>(1)</sup> It is a complex of inclined bedding plane chambers and joint galleries of solutional

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(1) The cave is in the Rock, north-east of Carrigtwohill village, in Terrysland townland, and is located on O.S. 6 inch (Cork) sheet 76, 4.9 ins. from top margin and .9 ins. from left margin of sheet. A general description of the cave (with plan and illustrations) is given in Jour. Cork Hist. and Arch. Soc. XXXIV (1934), 76-78.

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origin with chamber enlargement by rock falls or collapse of the dividing walls of adjacent bedding plane slots. Dripstone is abundant and the cave contains some of the most beautiful formations to be seen in any Irish cavern.

The floor of all the lowest parts of the cave is a red brown clay sometimes obscured by fallen limestone blocks or overlaid by stalagmite flooring which however is usually separated from the clay fill by a space from 12-18 inches in height.

This space may have been caused by slumping or compaction of the clay after the formation of the stalagmite or portion of the clay might have been washed out by a temporary anastomosing stream. There is no very definite evidence of such stream action however. No sand, gravel or other fluvatile deposit was found overlying the clay fill.

#### EXCAVATION.

In February, 1944, a trial excavation was carried out (under licence from the Commissioners for Public Works) in various parts of the cave. The first site was in the chamber reached by the old entrance. This chamber is 30 feet in length and from 4-7 feet in width. A trench was dug across the floor from north to south. The stalagmite floor was from 2 to 10 inches in thickness and of a tufaceous character. Beneath it a mixture of tufa and red-brown clay yielded recent faunal remains only. This layer was no more than a few inches in thickness and below it a deep deposit of clay was dug to a depth of 4 feet without reaching a rock floor. The material was dark red brown in colour and very plastic. Some solution fretted limestone blocks were mixed with the clay, but no pebbles or other non-limestone material was recorded. A quantity of the clay was removed, dried, and later broken down in water and sieved. No pebbles, sand or bones were found.

A few small trial pits in other parts of the cave showed a similar clay deposit and again it was completely destitute of finds. At the north-west end of the Gallery (reached by crawling through a tunnel in the floor at the end of the old cave chamber) the top surface of the clay (not covered by stalagmite) yielded some similar finds to those recorded in the trench in the chamber. It appears that the remains were introduced into this part of the cave (by foxes, etc.) and mixed or trodden into the topmost part of the clay and later sealed over by stalagmite deposition in the chamber.

During the survey of the cave system in 1933/4 a large skull of a dog or wolf was found embedded in stalagmite on a rock ledge of an inner section of this cave called "The Dog Kennel." Except for a radius of the same animal no other parts of the skeleton were found. It is thought to be the remains of an animal which wandered into the cavern or else the remains were brought down from the land surface by an earth-fall intrusion.

The clay brought to light during this trial excavation is common in many other caves in the south-east County Cork area. Samples collected from various sites from a preliminary examination appear to be similar in composition and texture and it is

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probable that they represent the "clay fill" of caves in the U.S.A. described by Bretz.<sup>(2)</sup>

These clay deposits have not been adequately studied in Irish caves. Their presence in quantity in the caverns of south-east Cork may be one of the contributing factors to the absence of Pleistocene fauna from cave deposits in this region.

Cork.

J. C. COLEMAN.

#### REPORT ON THE BONES FROM TRIAL TRENCH IN CARRICKTWOHILL CAVE.

Although these bones were found under a thick layer of stalagmite I do not think they are of great antiquity, though they may well be several centuries old. The following animals were represented:—

##### MAMMALS.

**RABBIT.** About twenty-five bones belonging to several individuals.

**CAT.** A complete right tibia and three toe bones.

**DOG.** Humerus, ulna and radius belonging to the left fore-leg of a small, stout, bandy-legged dog. Also a left femur of what appears to have been a somewhat larger dog, though also short in the leg; and one (second last) lumbar vertebra, which, to judge by appearance, belonged to the same skeleton as the fore-leg.

**PIG.** Head of left ulna of a very young pig.

##### BIRDS.

**ROOK.** About fifteen bones, representing more than one individual.

**DUCK.** Two bones: possibly of a small domesticated breed.

**GOOSE.** Four bones: size of small domestic breed.

[WOOD PIGEON? A radius very like that of this species, but identification uncertain.]

**FOWL.** About two dozen bones or fragments of domestic fowl of various sizes.

**OTHER BIRDS.** Five or six fragments: not identifiable.

##### BONES FROM N.W. END OF GALLERY.

**RABBIT.** Twenty or thirty bones: more than one individual.

**ROOK.** Four bones.

**CORNCRAKE.** Four bones: probably all of one individual.

**DUCK.** Seven or eight bones of large domestic duck and one ulna of a small duck. The last seems to be a much older bone than the others.

**FOWL.** Four fragments.

Skull and radius of wolf (or large dog?) found coated with stalagmite on a rock ledge in an inner section of the cave called "The Dog Kennel."

The difficulty of distinguishing between the remains of wolves and those of large hunting dogs has often been discussed, but no infallible criterion seems to have been discovered—even in countries where the wolf is still to be found and specimens

(2) Bretz, J. H. "Caves in the Galena Formation." *Jour. Geology* XLVI (1938), 828-841. From his studies this clay fill is a residual deposit after the draining of ground-water from solutional cave networks.

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obtained for comparison. The task is much more difficult in Ireland where only the merest fragmentary remains of the once abundant Irish Wolf have been preserved. The skull and radius found by Mr. Coleman appear to date from a period well within that in which the wolf was common in Ireland. Also it seems to me rather more likely that the remains of a wolf would be found far within a cave than those of a dog and a dog of the size of this animal would have been one of great value. Taking everything into consideration I believe this skull and radius to have belonged to a wolf rather than to some gigantic dog. I am unable to say more as I have not enough evidence to settle the matter and the only skulls of wolves available for comparison come from distant countries, where the type of wolf need not be quite identical with that which formerly inhabited Ireland. Nevertheless, compared with the skull of a large male wolf, said to come from Sweden, the only essential difference shown by the Carrigtwohill skull is the lesser width across the zygomatics. This Irish skull is more stream-lined. It may eventually be shown that this is a characteristic of the Irish Wolf, but we must leave the matter open and hope for further evidence. The other measurements of the skull are on the whole greater than those of the Swedish male, but the differences are very slight. One zygomatic arch of the Irish skull is missing, but if we double the measurement from the centre line to the outside of the left zygomatic arch its full width is 138 mm. while that of the Swedish skull is 146 mm.

The radius found with the skull has a total length of 219 mm., that belonging to the Swedish male is but 202 mm. The length of this radius might suggest that the remains are those of a Wolfhound, but we know nothing of the stature of the Irish Wolf.

Three views of the Carrigtwohill skull are reproduced together with its chief measurements.

A. W. STELFOX.

National Museum, Dublin.  
15th December, 1944.

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#### ZOOLOGICAL NOTES.

##### "A CLATTERING OF CHOUGHS."

I am venturing to suggest that in the list of group-names published in your very interesting March number it would be more correct to substitute for the phrase "chattering of Choughs" the older (and I think very much older) term "clattering of Choughs."

Among the many lists of group-names recently published I see that both "clattering" and "chattering" frequently occur; but I cannot forget that when I first learned of the existence of such a list (and at once committed it to memory, or thought I had done so) it was from an old book, unhappily no longer to be found, which gave its list as one due to the authorship of Dame Juliana Berners, a lady of 15th century celebrity, and that the terms given in it included, with many of those so recently quoted by your contributors to the March number, a "clattering," not a "chattering," of "Choughs."

Now the date for the first appearance of this group-name is important as showing to what species of bird it applies. Strangely, in a list published so long ago as in or about 1486, any birds called

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Plate XI.

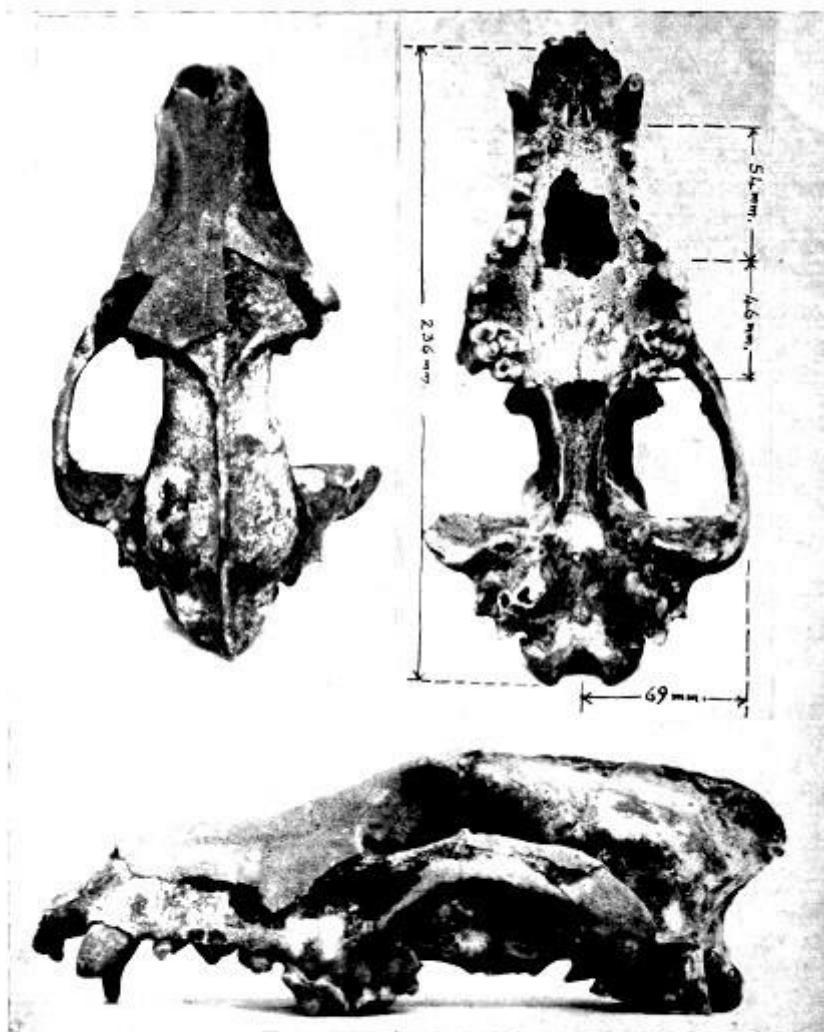


Photo: National Museum, Dublin.

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Three views of skull of wolf (or large dog?) found in Carrigtwohill Cave.