

## V.

NOTICE OF A POLISHED STONE AXE, AND A WELL-SHAPED FLINT ARROW-HEAD, FOUND IN A CAVE IN ISLAY. BY SIR ARTHUR MITCHELL, K.C.B., M.D., LL.D., FOREIGN SECRETARY.

The cave which I am about to notice is called *Uamh phort luinge Mhic-Ruaridh*, that is, the cave of the port of the ship of the son of Rodger, and it takes its name from the little bay on which it opens. It is about 100 yards to the east of Kildalton House, and about 60 yards east of Ardimersay Cottage.

The woodcut (fig. 1), shows accurately the plan of the cave.

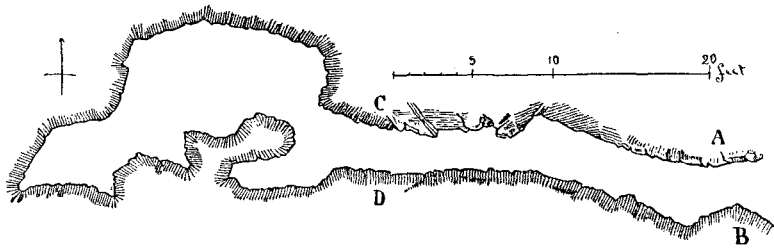


Fig. 1. Plan of the Cave.

The cave proper is reached through an unroofed cleft in the rock (from A B to C D on the plan), about 28 feet long, from  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 feet wide at different points, and about 17 feet above high-water level. The cave itself is very irregular in form. Its extreme length is about  $23\frac{1}{2}$  feet, its greatest width is about 9 feet, and its height varies from  $5\frac{1}{2}$  to  $13\frac{1}{2}$  feet. About 5 feet from its entrance the bottom of the cave falls about 2 feet below the level of the entering passage, and the floor is very irregular, with a tendency to slope from the south side to the north and west. The mouth of the cave is nearly 13 feet high and nearly 3 feet wide.

Before the erection of Ardimersay Cottage in 1826 the cave is known to have been occasionally occupied by kelp-burners, and it is also known to have been a place of concealment for contraband whisky. When the Cottage was built, one of the walks through the grounds passed its

entrance, and it was then made into a sort of summer-house, the bottom being levelled up and covered with gravel.

These known uses of the cave led Mr William Stevenson, a Corresponding Member of the Society, to suggest in 1883 that it should be explored. He thought that if kelp-burners had in recent times found the cave suitable for a temporary habitation, the inhabitants of the island might, in very remote times, have sometimes occupied it. Accordingly he suggested an examination of the cave to Mrs Ramsay of Kildalton, one of the Lady Associates of the Society; and the donor to the Museum of the reproduction of the Islay Cross. She at once placed a labourer under Mr Stevenson's orders, on the understanding that he would personally superintend the operations, which he did.

My notice is drawn up from notes made at the time, which have been supplied to me by Mrs Ramsay and Mr Stevenson, and partly from some notes made by myself when I visited the cave a year after the exploration.

The exploration occupied twelve days. The floor of the entering passage and of the cave was first cleared to the depth of 1 foot, the floor of the cave itself being then cleared to a further depth of 2 feet, and part of it to a still further depth of 2 feet. The first foot removed appeared to consist of what had been laid on the top when it was prepared for use as a sort of summer-house. Below this gravel there was a layer of dark soil about 2 feet thick, and in it were found "wood ashes," bones and teeth of various animals still existing on the island (the long bones being fractured in the usual kitchen-midden fashion), numerous small fragments of coarse pottery, two stone pounders (water-worn stones roughened at the ends by use), two circular stone discs roughly chipped, two objects regarded as bone pins formed out of the leg-bones of birds, many shells of the limpet and whelk, one clam-shell, one large buckie-shell, and lastly a polished stone celt or axe, a well-worked but broken flint arrow-head, and fourteen pieces of flint.

Below this two-feet-thick black layer the excavation was carried down for other 2 feet, and this layer was found to consist of water-worn stones and of stones which had fallen from the sides and roof of the cave. It seemed to the explorers as if the stones forming this layer had been arranged, and that some of them had been brought into

the cave, for the purpose of getting a dry and even floor, at a time antecedent to the formation or deposit of the black layer in which the objects I have enumerated were found. This deep layer yielded nothing fashioned by the hand of man.

The rock bottom of the cave was at different points laid quite bare.

I had an opportunity of visiting the cave about a year after the exploration, and I found the black layer, which had been removed, lying in a heap between the sea and the entrance of the unroofed



Fig. 2. Flint arrow-head from Cave in Islay. Actual size.

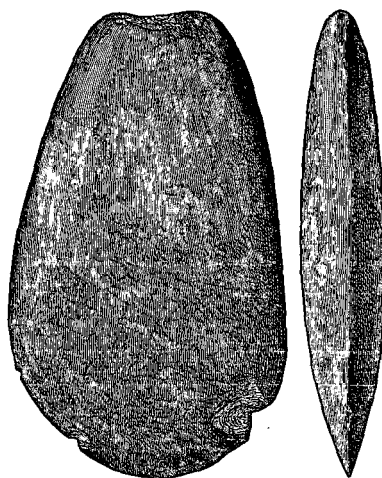


Fig. 3. Polished stone axe from Cave in Islay. ( $\frac{2}{3}$ .)

passage to the cave. It was too moist to be riddled in the usual way. We therefore resolved to wash it through the riddle, which we did without much difficulty, as water was close at hand, though it was a somewhat long business. I was hopeful that we might find some other objects belonging to the same class as the stone axe and the arrow-head. But we did nothing more than add to the shells and bones and to the fragments of pottery, of which last there were 291 at the end.

I give above woodcuts (figs. 2 and 3) of the stone axe and of the arrow-head, both drawn to the scale indicated. The axe is of porphyritic

stone,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length by  $2\frac{1}{8}$  inches in breadth across the cutting face, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch in greatest thickness. It is finely polished, and weighs about 3 ounces.

Mr Stevenson was not continuously present during the explorations, and he did not actually witness the finding either of the axe or arrow-head, but the workman was well known to Mrs Ramsay as a trustworthy man, and he handed the two objects to Mr Stevenson merely as curious stones. They were found on different days, but near each other, and about the centre of the cave floor. The axe was found nearly at the bottom of the black layer. So far as I am aware, this is the only recorded instance of the discovery of such objects during the exploration of a Scottish cave.

The pottery had some points of interest about it, but I cannot risk speaking of these from memory, though I examined them often and with care. Unfortunately the collection of fragments, all of which were small, has been lost, and repeated efforts to find it have been unsuccessful. The same fate has overtaken the fourteen pieces of flint, the stone pounders, and the two stone discs.