

CHAPTER I

The Pleasures of Flint Hunting

THE collecting of the flint implements, and other relics, of prehistoric man is, essentially, an open air branch of science, for the sites where men now congregate are often far removed from those occupied by the people of the Stone Age, and thus it is that those who follow the trail of the ancient hunters of the remote past, find themselves, frequently, in the wild and unvisited places of Nature. To the gregarious person—who experiences little pleasure except in the company of numbers of his fellow-men, and surrounded by manifold evidences of modern civilisation—the solitude of the great open spaces makes little, or no, appeal, but, for others, to sojourn for a time in such places brings a deep and a lasting happiness. Though East Anglia is a part of the country where the scenery is not of the “grand” order, yet it possesses a charm and a beauty unique, and all its own. The widespread sandy heaths with their characteristic flora and fauna, contrasting so markedly with the wheat-growing Boulder Clay lands, the broad valleys with their rivers flowing sluggishly to the sea, the great sea-cliffs of north-east Norfolk, the ancient villages and remarkable churches, all combine to form a picture of a geological, and human, past that cannot fail to impress, and to interest, those who have the eyes to see and to understand it. For the student of ancient man there is, perhaps, no more prolific hunting ground in existence than that of East Anglia. From the very beginning of the Age of Man this area has been occupied by successive races of prehistoric people, and their weapons and implements are found entombed in a series of deposits which by great good fortune has been preserved, a fact that has enabled us to write many new chapters of the history of our earliest ancestors. The relics of the later prehistoric races are generally found upon the surface of the ground, and are most abundant on heath and “light” lands where the soil is dry, than upon areas where the reverse is the case. The reason for this is doubtless that ancient man preferred, as we do, to live upon well-drained soil, rather than upon that which was damp and apt, in wet weather, to become waterlogged. Thus, the sandy districts of east and north-west Suffolk, and similar

THE PLEASURES OF FLINT HUNTING

country in Norfolk, have yielded the greater number, and most of the best specimens of the work of later Stone Age Man found in East Anglia. To spend some time in late spring or early summer in an examination of the lonely and beautiful heath lands of north-west Suffolk, and south-west Norfolk, in search of flint implements is, from the archaeological standpoint, a very profitable and enjoyable undertaking, for not only are valuable specimens frequently found on such excursions, but the undulating country with its pageant of wild flowers and animal life is of extraordinary beauty and interest. But it is not only upon the surface of the ground that flint implements are discovered, and if the older examples of man's handiwork are to be found, it is necessary to visit brickfields and other places where sections of various ancient deposits are to be seen. The archaeologist owes a great debt to those who dig in the ground for commercial purposes, because these excavations are usually of considerable extent and afford opportunities for examining ancient strata, such as could not be easily provided by any archaeological digging. The larger the excavation, the better is the prehistorian pleased, and he no doubt sometimes dreams of limitless sections where flint implements abound, and all his geological problems could be solved. The nearest approach to this ideal of perfection is, perhaps, to be found upon the north-east coast of Norfolk, where, from Happisburgh to Weybourne, there stretches a line of cliffs, some 20 miles in length, composed of deposits very rich in some of the earliest vestiges of man (Plate II). The Cromer coast is, in fact, an Eldorado for the geologist and the archaeologist, and moreover is one of those places, not now easily found, where it is possible to walk for hours amidst beautiful surroundings and to avoid seeing any signs of civilisation so apparent at most seaside resorts. To tramp from Mundesley to Cromer on a spring day when the sky is blue and the sun brilliant is an experience not soon forgotten. The distance is about 9 miles, and for the whole way the great cliffs, sometimes 200 feet in height, on the one hand, and the shelving beach and far spreading foreshore of golden sand on the other, outlined in startling clearness in the dry and invigorating East Coast air, present a picture of entrancing beauty. But, though even when the weather and the sea are calm, it is possible to find a good

PLATE II



VIEW OF THE GREAT CLIFFS, 200 FEET HIGH, SOUTH-EAST OF CROMER
The Cromer Forest Bed rests at about the level of the beach, while the material above it is composed of glacial deposits

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THE PLEASURES OF FLINT HUNTING

number of flaked flints of the ancient Cromerians, and the bones and teeth of the now extinct animals with which they lived, yet, to recover the biggest number of these interesting relics it is necessary to visit the Norfolk coast in the winter, when a succession of on-shore gales and high tides have scoured away the beach and exposed the beds that underlie it. At such times the temperature at Cromer can be very low, and it is needful to possess a hardy constitution and a deep-seated archaeological keenness to face the weather conditions upon the coast. Inland, the country between Cromer and Weybourne is unique and beautiful. The geological conditions that gave rise to the formation of this area were glacial, and have resulted in a series of high and isolated hills and valleys covered with pine trees and bracken such as are seldom met with in any other part of England. It might be thought that a knowledge of geology would not be an aid to the appreciation of the beauty of a landscape, but, when it is possible to realise this beauty, and, in addition, to understand by means of geological knowledge how the landscape came into being, the effect is without question to heighten that appreciation. The glacial period was very drear and cold, but to it we owe the pleasing features of the East Anglian country, which, but for the activities of the glaciers and the torrential waters set free when these masses of ice melted, would have been quite flat and uninteresting.

The successful tracking of prehistoric man needs a trained mind and eye, and, as in all science, a well ordered imagination. An inexhaustible patience is also required, for Nature's secrets are only wrested from her with great difficulty, and often only after years of strenuous endeavour. The archaeologist, like all true followers of science, does his work not for material gain, nor worldly advancement, but because he loves the work for its own sake, and realises the supreme value of adding even one additional fact to the common store of human knowledge. Some of the specimens he finds might, if he is fortunate, be examples of ancient workmanship, in which both human skill and the artistry of Nature have combined to produce a thing of beauty. These, if correctly labelled and preserved in a cabinet, will always give pleasure as works of art, and, when interpreted aright, will enhance this pleasure by revealing a part of the stupendous history of man upon this planet.

CHAPTER II

Man's Great Antiquity

THE main object of this book is to draw attention to the richness of this country—especially that part of it known as East Anglia—in relics of prehistoric man and to trace his history and progress through the immensely long period of the Stone Age. For this purpose it will be needful to take a journey into the past, and to follow the human trail back to its far distant beginnings.

Thus we will pass without review the turbulent period of English history, and the activities of the Roman conquerors of this country, and come to a time when England was inhabited by a race of people who had come over from the Continent, whose principal occupation in life was the making of iron implements and weapons. As we go still further back in time we find Britain peopled by tribes of savages using weapons made of bronze, and practising the habit of burning their dead and putting the remains in urns, which were buried, mouth downwards, at a depth of two or three feet in the ground. Still more remote in point of time we come to an epoch when man had not yet discovered metals with which to make weapons, and we thus enter that very mysterious and interesting period known as the Stone Age.

The Stone Age is divided up into three periods: the latest is called the Neolithic, or New Stone Age: the more ancient the Palaeolithic, or Old Stone Age: while the most ancient of all is known as the Eolithic, or Stone Age of the Dawn.

The New Stone Age people entered England about 10,000 years ago, and a great deal is now known about them. They were very expert in flaking and polishing pieces of flint and other stone into axes, spear-heads, and arrow points; they practised a rudimentary agriculture, and generally buried their dead in sepulchral chambers made of stone, under large heaps of earth called tumuli of a more or less oval shape. These mounds are found scattered about upon the present surface of the ground in Yorkshire, Wiltshire, and other places, and the flint implements of this period can usually be discovered on ploughed fields and open heaths. If any of the New Stone

MAN'S GREAT ANTIQUITY

Age people could revisit the scenes of their former activities, they would not see very many changes in the actual surface of the land, but it would be otherwise with the ancient Englishmen who lived in the Old Stone Age times. One thing is certain about these latter people: if they could come back to life they would never recognise the places where they made flint implements, and hunted big game, because, in the passage of time, these sites have either disappeared altogether, or have been buried deep beneath deposits of sand, gravel and clay. The world which the Old Stone Age hunters knew has gone never to return. We have now arrived at a point in man's past history where it is necessary to consult another branch of science, geology, which deals with the deposits forming the crust of the earth, and will enable us to form some idea of the age of the flint implements found in these deposits. We will then, in imagination, visit a brickfield where an Old Stone Age land surface has been found. This brickfield is situated on high ground, and we see, away to the west, a wide and deep valley separating us from the continuation of the high land on which we are walking. When we enter the brickfield, we proceed to examine a face of clay about 20 feet in depth, and our attention is drawn to a thin, dark, wavy line that runs along the section at about two feet from its base. Strange as it may seem, this dark line represents the land surface we have come to see, and at this level have been found, from time to time, very excellent Old Stone Age flint implements, together with large numbers of flakes struck off in the manufacturing process, hammerstones with which the raw material was broken up and trimmed into the desired shape, and numerous bones of animals killed for food by the ancient hunters. We notice also that the humanly flaked flints, during the long ages since they were made, have changed colour, and, from being black or grey, are now either white, blue, brown, or yellow, and this colour change shows that the specimens are very old. Having seen and grasped the meaning of this evidence, we begin to recognise that above the old land surface are 12 feet of clay, which, by its horizontal bedding, was evidently laid down in water, and this is significant because we are standing on high ground where little, if any, water is to be found at the present day. Above the 12 feet of clay, we observe about 6 feet of another

MAN'S GREAT ANTIQUITY

deposit, formed of a violently twisted and crumpled mass of sand, clay, gravel and pieces of chalk, and this, it is evident, was laid down when the climate was very cold, and ice and snow held sway in England. It thus becomes clear that since the Old Stone Age people inhabited their land surface very great changes have come over the scene, which have brought into existence a bed of clay 12 feet thick, and a condition of cold climate such as, fortunately, does not prevail here now. There is, however, still a further surprising fact to be realised, for, as we leave the brickfield and approach the wide and deep valley to the west, we see that the old land surface under the clay is cut off by this valley, and when we see that the same land surface is found on the other side, we recognise that at one time the clay and the ancient land surface were continued across what is now a valley 120 feet deep and a mile wide,¹

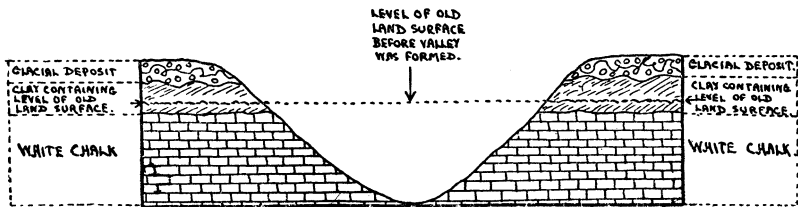


Fig. 1. Diagram showing position of ancient land surface in clay on either side of a valley. Since this land surface was occupied by man a considerable thickness of deposits has been laid down over it and a wide and deep valley formed.

and that this great trench has been cut out by water action since the people lived whose remains are found below the clay (Fig. 1). This examination has thus shown us that an ancient land surface where man once lived is now buried beneath, first of all, clay, and then material brought along by an ice-sheet, and that after then a near-by valley a mile wide and 120 feet deep has been cut out by water action, and we realise that all this cannot well have been done in a short time, in fact it is clear that a very great lapse of time must have taken place since these Old Stone Age people lived on their land surface, and we wonder how many years have passed away since those days. In trying to decide that, we must try and measure time, not in the ordinary way as when we say, "that occurred 20 or 50 years ago," as this measure will not help us in the present case. We have seen that the men of the New Stone Age

¹ Smith, W. G., *Man the Primæval Savage*, Edward Stanford, London.

MAN'S GREAT ANTIQUITY

entered England 10,000 years ago, and that since then no changes worth considering have taken place in our land surface. But it is otherwise with the Old Stone Age people, and, looking at it from every standpoint, we can safely conclude that several tens of thousands of years have rolled by since they existed. Though the example given above of the great antiquity of man is impressive, yet even this pales to insignificance when compared with the evidence of that antiquity afforded by the discovery of flint implements in the Pliocene strata of eastern England. These discoveries are dealt with in later chapters, and it will be seen that, since man first appeared in East Anglia, enormous changes in the configuration of the land, great alterations in climate, and in the type of animals inhabiting the country have taken place. Let us, for a moment or two, consider the relation of these things to the question of the antiquity of man. The earliest vestiges of human beings in Suffolk are found in a stratum beneath the Red Crag, and there is no doubt, for reasons that will be given later, that these people were existing in a tropical climate. We can imagine them living their lives upon a land surface which had as much an appearance of permanence as that upon which we exist has to us to-day. It is in the highest degree probable that these early East Anglians inhabited their land surface for an infinitely longer period than is represented, for instance, by the time covered by English history, and if we had been able to discuss the matter with them, we would have found that they were convinced of the permanency of the conditions under which they lived. Yet, we know that the land surface they inhabited is now buried deep under deposits of different ages, and the country they knew so well has been for ever obliterated.

It may be said that there is no evidence whatever that the disappearance of the ancient pre-Red Crag land was accomplished quickly, in fact there is every reason to believe that the very reverse was the case. For the deposit which now covers this land surface was laid down by the sea, and by the condition of the shells it contains, and from other considerations, we know that the land was sinking very slowly. It is evident, also, that the climate was gradually changing, and becoming colder, and as year after year passed, marked by an advance of the sea over the gradually sinking land, together with increasing cold and

MAN'S GREAT ANTIQUITY

wet and ever-lengthening winters, the human and animal inhabitants of East Anglia would, by insensible degrees, move further and further south where conditions were more to their liking. In the days of which I speak, England was not an island, but joined to the Continent, and there existed a land route leading southwards. As I have said, the southern trek would have been carried out by insensible degrees, and it may well have taken twenty thousand years for a transference of the human and animal life of Suffolk and Norfolk to, for instance, a region no further south than the Mediterranean area. It is clear that man was not exterminated altogether, because we know that, after an arctic sea had finally inundated East Anglia and laid down widespread deposits of shelly sands, the land was once more upheaved, and, in the beds laid down during this period of re-emergence, we find abundant evidence of both human and animal life. These great changes of climate and migration of animals occurred no less than four times in the Eastern Counties—and, of course, in other parts of the world as well—and no one who knows of these things, and has seen with his own eyes the clear evidence of them, can entertain any doubt as to the immense periods of time that are indicated.

It must be remembered, too, that man inhabited East Anglia only in the warm interglacial epochs, when conditions were favourable for his existence.

During the age-long domination of the ice, Suffolk and Norfolk must have been devoid of human beings, who had gradually moved south to a warmer climate.

It may be supposed that the gap of time between the makers of the flint implements found beneath the Red Crag and those in the Cromer Forest Bed was, in all probability, at the least fifty to one hundred thousand years. That is to say, that the submergence of East Anglia beneath the waters of the Red Crag Sea, and its final re-elevation as a land surface, occupied the amount of time mentioned, and during this period eastern England was uninhabited.

There can be no doubt that the pre-Red Crag people were existing somewhere to the south, and slowly evolving their flint implements into better and more useful types, and by a comparison of the implements found beneath the Red Crag with those in the Forest Bed which represents the workmanship of