

RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT KENDRICK'S UPPER CAVE, GREAT ORME, LLANDUDNO

by

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ABSTRACT

Kendrick's Upper Cave, on the Great Orme, North Wales, has recently been fitted with grills across both entrances and a surrounding fence for reasons of protection. The opportunity was taken to investigate the archaeological potential by excavating the necessary trenches and post holes. Although no significant early archaeology was discovered, a better understanding of the stratigraphy has been gained and the site is still considered to be of archaeological significance.

INTRODUCTION

As part of a process of protecting an important early prehistoric cave site, located above the coastal town of Llandudno, C.R Archaeology was instructed by Llandudno Town Council to conduct archaeological works at Kendrick's Upper Cave. These works, undertaken in July 2015, comprised an archaeological watching brief on the hand digging of postholes for demountable safety fencing erected around the cave site, and the hand excavation of two trenches across the two cave entrances in order to allow for the insertion of two steel grilles. The approximate trench dimensions were 0.70 m x 4.4 m (Trench 1) and 0.70 m x 1.54 m (Trench 2). As part of the project, an extensive archive research element was conducted into the history of Kendrick's Cave, the life and role of Thomas Kendrick and the archaeology of the Great Orme (Rees, *forthcoming*).

Kendrick's Cave is situated on the Great Orme, Llandudno, centred upon (NGR SH 77981 82821) (Figure 1). Due to the international significance of the site which encompasses Kendrick's Lower and Upper Caves, it has been designated a Scheduled Monument (CN 191). The landscape of the Great Orme itself is considered to be an area of very high archaeological potential (Appleton, 1989; Barton and Colcutt, 1986; Dinnis and Ebbs, 2013; Griffiths, 1994; RCAHMW, 1956). Numerous archaeological sites have been recorded on the Great Orme including Upper Palaeolithic cave deposits, Neolithic burial-ritual deposition, Bronze Age and later mining activity and Medieval and later Prehistoric/Roman settlement. One of these sites, Kendrick's Upper Cave, has received much attention, initially from Thomas Kendrick, the owner and excavator of the site during the latter part of the 19th century (see Jones, 2013; Rees, *forthcoming*), and in the 20th century from Davis (1975, 1978, 1979, 1983) and Stone and Davies (1976, 1977).

The Lower Cave (SH 77988 82819) was first excavated by Thomas Kendrick in the 1880s when he modified it for use as a workshop and display area. (Dawkins, 1879; Eskrigge, 1879; Ingram, 1885). It is known that Kendrick made use of the Upper Cave, but it is not clear what works were carried out or whether he made any archaeological discoveries here, although Davies (1983, p 45) considered that all his significant finds actually came from the Upper Cave. What is clear is that the former building, of which above and below ground evidence survives, would have heavily disturbed the potential in-situ prehistoric remains within

this part of the complex. The cave has been modified to accommodate a stone building with much of its northern and western sides being hewn and shaped to form the right-angled section of a room space. The two entrances, both facing southwards towards the town, have also been modified (Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 1. Location of Kendrick's Upper Cave.
Courtesy of Digimap

In terms of previous archaeological work, Kendrick's Upper Cave, along with other caves in the vicinity, has received much attention. The cave was partially excavated during the late 1970s by Stone and Davies (1977), when five trenches were investigated. Their investigations yielded human remains, along with a faunal assemblage that included crab (sp. *Brachyura*), fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), common frog (*Rana temporaria*), hare (*Lepus europaeus*), roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), wild ox (*Bos primigenius*), sheep (sp. *Ovis*) or goat (sp. *Capra*), several bird species and at least eight species of mollusca with limpet (*Patella vulgate*) predominating. Also recovered during their excavation programme were two antler awls, two bone awls, a Bronze Age Beaker, decorated Neolithic and Romano-British pottery, un-patinated Neolithic flint knives and a pierced and decorated wolf canine, this evidence suggesting later prehistoric occupation. This assumption was also based on the discovery of a hearth that underlay a 19th century floor.

Following the excavation, Davies stated that:

Only one half of the upper cave floor has been excavated and in this a shaft was opened which connected with the bottom cave some 8 m below. Only

archaeological rubble seemed to separate them; so much remains to be excavated (Davies, 1989: 99).

It was therefore deemed that the cave had high archaeological potential. Despite this, however, extensive sieving of material yielded no early historic or prehistoric archaeological remains. It became evident that the platform in front of the cave had been constructed using material cleared out from inside the cave. The smaller of the cave entrances had been artificially enlarged and would not have originally reached the current ground level. The larger cave entrance had been emptied of all archaeological material during the latter part of the 19th century. During the Stone and Davis excavation several 19th century layers were recorded that were directly on top of the bedrock.



Figures 2 and 3. *The Western (left) and Eastern (right) entrances to the cave. The Western entrance has been enlarged with explosives; the Eastern entrance a small section of extant stone walling,*

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AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of the archaeological fieldwork was to excavate two areas across the cave entrances in advance of the installation of two steel grilles, which will exclude unauthorised access to the interior of the cave and thus prevent further damage/vandalism to the site. The method for installing the two steel grilles at the cave was the laying down of two concrete foundation slabs over the bedrock. Both would extend to just below the current floor level and have pre-fabricated metal grilles set into them. Surface deposits from the excavation were then

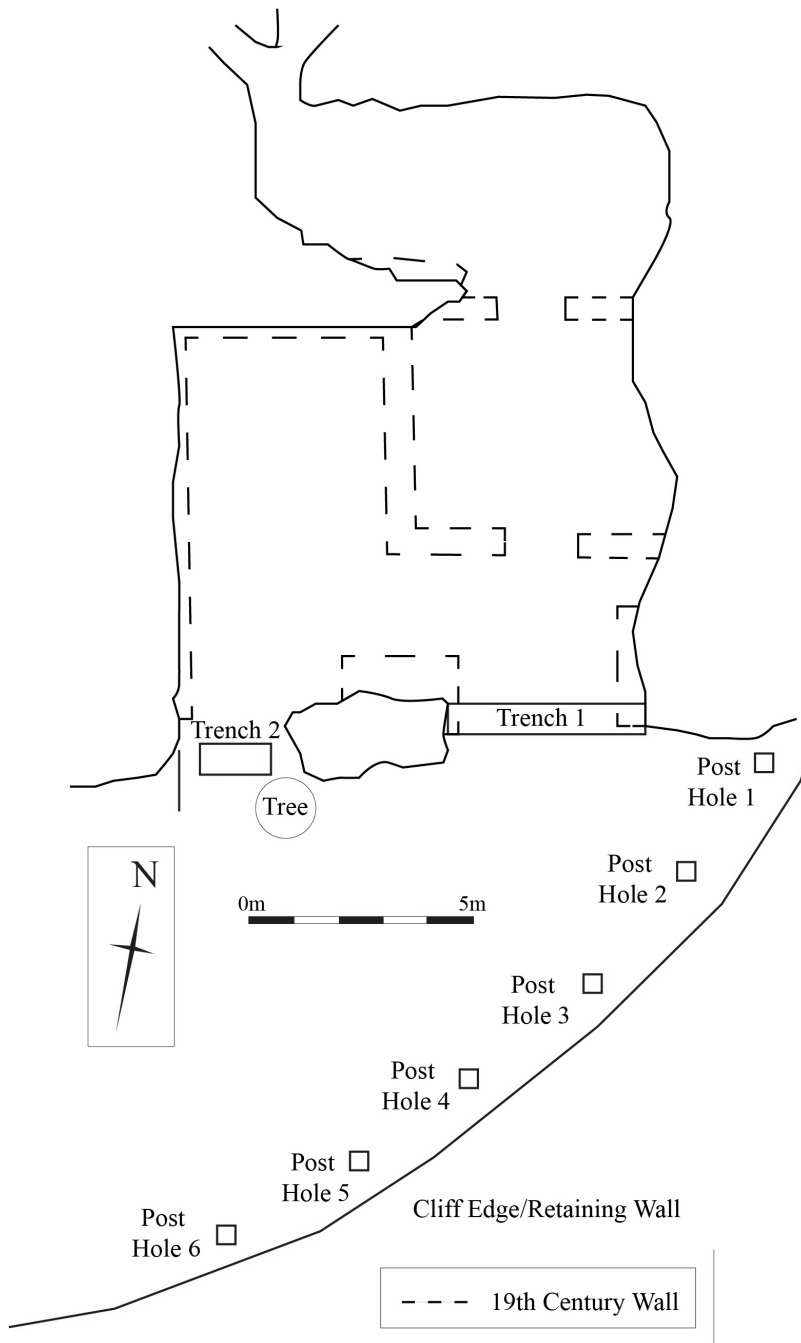


Figure 4. General plan of the cave showing the trenching regime and the post-holes for the safety fencing.

used to conceal the concrete foundation. In addition, the fieldwork also included a watching brief on a series of excavated holes which house posts for demountable safety fencing. Both the evaluation and the watching brief assessed and identified the state of survival, character and date of all archaeological remains retrieved.

Similarly, the objectives of the work were to excavate and record all deposits which lay within the two evaluation trenches (along the line of proposed metal grills) (Figure 4). The depth of both trenches extended to the bedrock. The methods of recording include a drawn and photographic survey of both trenches (including plans and sections). Information from the fieldwork assisted in better understanding of the site's recent history, development and archaeological significance. Prior to the fieldwork, an extensive documentary archive had been collated which greatly assisted in understanding the stratigraphic sequence of both trenches and the significance of the potential archaeology that survives within the interior of the cave.

Immediately outside the entrance of the cave, post holes were hand excavated to allow for the insertion of a series of fence posts. An archaeologist was present during all works and examined and recorded all material removed during the excavation.

THE HAND EXCAVATION OF THE GRILL TRENCHES

The methodology employed at Kendrick's cave was based on the excavation model devised for Cathole Cave on the Gower during similar protective work (see Walker *et al*, 2015). Hand excavation was undertaken of two slot trenches 0.70 m wide which ran the full width across each of the two cave entrances (approximate lengths of 4.4 m and 1.54 m). The trenches ran along the precise future location of the grille. The excavation area was therefore limited but was subject to high intensity recording. The excavation extended to bedrock and all sub-top soil deposits were sieved.

GEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

According to the British Geological Survey (BGS), the bedrock is recorded as the Loggerheads Limestone, a sedimentary bedrock formed between 331 to 335 million years ago during the Carboniferous Period. At this time the regional environment was a shallow carbonate sea, as indicated by the fossil evidence. The superficial geology was not recorded, although limestone derivative soils were present immediately outside the cave entrance. Within the area where the evaluation took place, the sediments were considered to be limestone-dominant cave earths. Kendrick's Upper Cave is located on the south-east side of the Great Orme, immediately above the coastal town of Llandudno. In terms of topography, the Great Orme, rising to a height of 210 m AOD, is a prominent feature in the landscape with a number of habitats represented, such as wooded areas on the lower slopes, grasslands, cliff faces and rock exposures.

FIELDWORK

The evaluation phase of the project included the excavation of two trenches and a series of post-holes. Both trenches were found to contain exclusively Post-Medieval material. It became evident during this phase that potential prehistoric material from the larger of the two cave entrances had been removed in order to level the cave floor during the 19th century. An

examination of the cave walls around the smaller cave entrance revealed evidence that explosives had been used and that this opening had been artificially enlarged.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was located across the larger cave entrance and measured 4.40 m in length by 0.70 m in width, excavated to a maximum depth of 0.80m. Eleven contexts (Context Nos. 201 – 211) were assigned to this trench, many revealing a series of occupation floors dating to the late 19th century (Figure 5). All layers other than context (201) were sieved to maximise artefact recovery. Context (201) was stratigraphically the latest deposit and was a mixed modern (post-1980) deposit which covered the entire cave floor. There were clearly separate layers visible within this deposit but none were of significant age and were the result of the repeated use of this area of the cave (Figures 6 and 7). This layer was approximately 0.15 m in thickness and due to the modern contaminants evident and the risk of the presence of hypodermic needles within deposit it was not sieved. Context (201) sealed context (203) which was the backfill of the Stone and Davies excavation trench (assigned cut number [204]). The material within the previous excavation trench contained a considerable quantity of rubbish including the usual array of archaeological site debris and was easily distinguished from the surrounding deposits. It was predominantly composed of limestone rubble and breccia. The trench edges had clearly suffered collapse due to the loose deposits into which they were cut; the base of the trench was the bedrock level. The cut reached approximately 0.50 m across the width of the trench.



Figure 5. *Trench 1, looking north-east and revealing within the south-facing section a series of occupation layers.*

Context (202) was physically below (201) and had been cut by the previous archaeological trench ([204]). This deposit was a floor layer between walls (206) and (207) which appeared to have been deliberately laid as a flat surface by the 19th century cave occupants. It comprised a mixture of lime mortar and brown cave earth with patches of straw mixed within. It is presumed that this layer is the manure and lime floor level described in excavation report of Stone and Davis (1977). The layer contained an assemblage of 19th century artefacts, includ

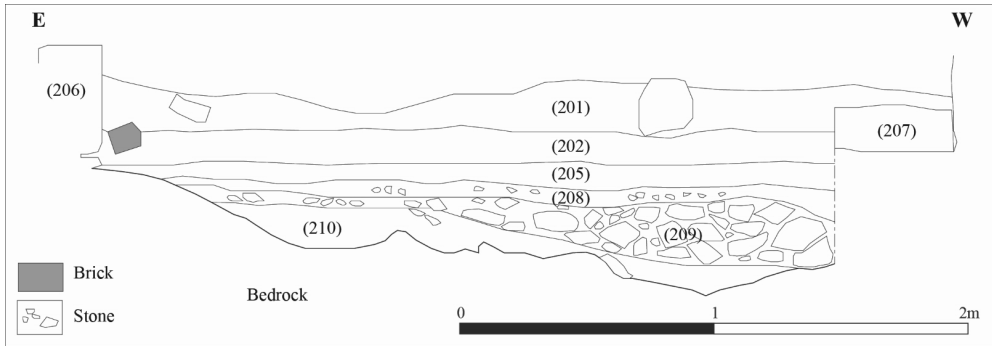


Figure 6. North-facing section of trench 1.

ing pottery, glass, bone, metal and wood. The layer extended beyond the trench limits and had an average depth of 0.08 m. Underlying (202) was layer (205) which was considered to be another 19th century levelling deposit. Walls (206) and (207) were both built on this layer. The deposit was a very compact hardcore layer made from clay, lime mortar and, brick and coal dust. A fine layer of sand covered the deposit, was considered to belong to the same episode and was therefore not assigned a separate number. The layer extended beyond the trench limits and had an average depth of 0.08 m.

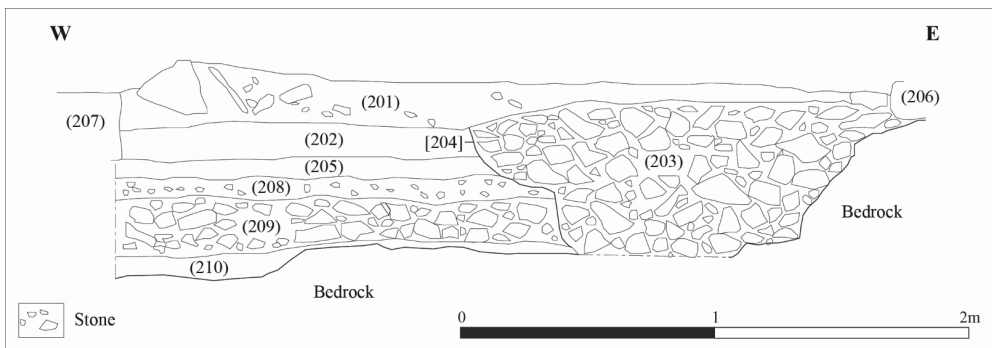


Figure 7. South-facing section of trench 1.

Wall (206) was built of limestone blocks which were bonded by a lime mortar. It was built directly against the eastern wall of the cave. Lime plaster had been used to render the inner face of the wall. The wall section extended 2.70 m, from the cave mouth before turning 90° to

the west. The wall was 0.38 m in thickness and survived to a maximum height of 0.50 m. The wall had to be partially destroyed during this excavation to allow for the insertion of the grille and a photographic record was therefore made before part demolition works commenced. In places the wall was built directly on top of the bedrock of the cave floor. As the bedrock level fell away the wall is built on top of levelling layer (205).

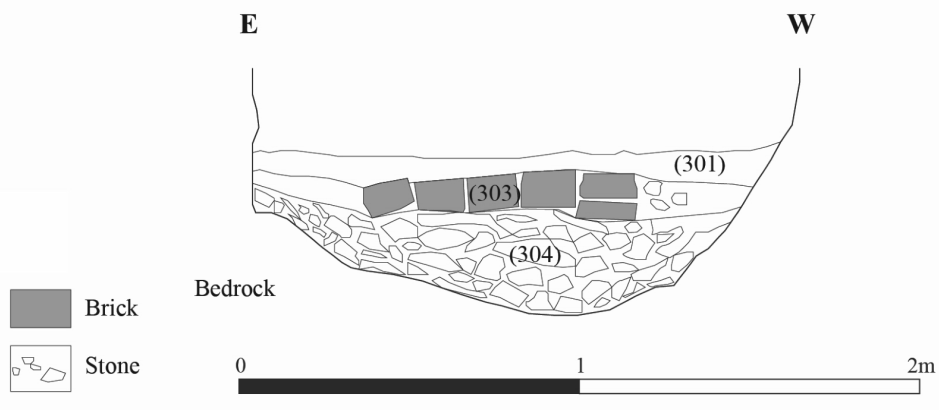


Figure 8. North-facing section of trench 2.

Wall (207) was of identical construction to wall (206) and was located directly opposite, on the eastern side of the central area of stone which separates the two cave entrances. The wall runs from the cave entrance around the back of the natural rock to create a squared-off appearance to the rough interior. The wall measures 1.85 m in length and has a maximum thickness of 0.61 m. The wall survives to a maximum height of 0.69 m and was built directly on top of deposit (205). The wall was not removed during the initial excavation of Trench 1 as this would have resulted in the collapse of one or more of the trench sides. A section of the wall was, however, removed following the recording of the trench to allow for the insertion of the grille. As with wall (206) a photographic record was made prior to the commencement of works.

Underlying context (205) was a further floor deposit (208) which comprised a compact beaten earth layer containing occasional coal and mortar flacks, along with frequent small limestone fragments and 19th century pottery and bone fragments. The layer extended beyond the trench limits and had an average depth of 0.08 m. Below (208) was clay and rubble layer made up predominately of fragments of limestone with a large number of voids (209). This material is believed to have been re-deposited material taken from the clearing out of the cave and reused as construction material. The layer extended beyond the trench limits and had an average depth of 0.28 m.

Below this context was a loose, light grey ash and lime mortar layer which had been used to fill in the natural undulations within the bedrock and create a level surface upon which to create flat surfaces for occupation. This layer of lime dust was identified by Stone and Davies during their excavation. As one moves further away from the cave mouth this layer is the lowest level of disturbance and intact archaeological deposits were encountered directly below it. The layer extended beyond the trench limits and had a maximum depth of 0.20 m.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was excavated across the mouth of the smaller, western cave entrance. It was evident when examining this entrance that it had been enlarged, probably during the late 18th or early 19th century. This entrance appears to have been widened with the assistance of explosives; drill holes into which charges had been set were visible on the neighbouring cave walls. This opening did not originally extend to the cave floor and therefore no deposits encountered in this trench can be of any great antiquity. The deposits within the trench had been heavily disturbed by root action of a tree located just outside the cave entrance.

Trench 2 measured 1.54 m in length by 0.70 m in width. Three contexts were identified and an additional number was assigned to a low stone step or wall, 0.46 m to the north of the trench edge (Figure 8). The upper fill comprised a recently-disturbed layer of leaf mulch and organic material containing modern rubbish (this context was not sieved). The deposit extended beyond the trench limits and had a maximum depth of 0.10 m. Immediately below this was a brick layer which began at the southern trench edge and continued southwards, outside the cave mouth. This layer was not chased and it was not clear whether this was a laid floor or a wall on which a window or door frame stood. The floor, measuring 0.15 m in thickness, appears to have been disturbed by tree root damage. Below this was a grey-brown clay and limestone fragment layer very similar to a context in Trench 1. This material is believed to have been re-deposited, probably used as a foundation base for the building that once stood over this part of the cave. The layer extended beyond the trench limits and had a maximum depth of 0.40 m. It lay directly on the limestone bedrock which was reached at a maximum depth of 0.52 m below the existing ground level.

The Post Holes

As noted above, the post holes were also hand excavated with an archaeologist on hand to examine them. Nothing of note was seen and thus detailed records are not given here.

THE INITIAL DISCOVERY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS IN THE 19th CENTURY

Following the death of Thomas Kendrick in December 1897 it was realised that he had been a relatively wealthy man, and as an obituary written in a local paper attests, he had become a respected figure in Llandudno. He played an important role in the early tourist trade of the area and was clearly a shrewd businessman, able to tap into the popular culture and emerging trends of his era. He ran a camera obscura and a stone polishing business, as well as being the proprietor of a small museum and gardens. His discoveries made on the Great Orme are amongst the most important prehistoric artefacts unearthed in the British Isles and yet unlike many of his wealthier antiquarian contemporaries, very little has been written about the man himself.

As part of the project, an extensive archival research programme was conducted by C.R Archaeology which challenges the general consensus that Kendrick was ignorant of the significance of his discoveries. Questions have also been repeatedly raised as to whether Kendrick actually made any discoveries within the Lower Cave at all, and it has been suggested that they were found elsewhere. Contemporary sources were consulted which recorded visits to the cave by antiquarians and local groups during the excavation of the remains which clearly disprove this. It is considered by the authors that there is no reason to doubt the source or provenance of the artefacts from the Lower Cave, or, as with Davies (see above) at least, from the complex, and that rather than being viewed in isolation the human remains, decorated horse

mandible and other decorative items should be considered as elements of a significant early prehistoric burial (see Sieveking, 1971).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The archaeological deposition within Kendrick's Upper Cave can be considered a significant archaeological resource, along with the complex history that is associated with it, in particular, Thomas Kendrick. Kendrick's Upper Cave is one of many around the Great Orme that has yielded important early and later prehistoric finds. Much of the systematic excavation in this area was conducted during the 1960s and 1970s; however, we argue that many sites would benefit in the future from targeted re-evaluation using current archaeological and scientific techniques and analysis.



Figure 9. *Kendrick and Humpreys Family
in front of cave c. 1895-7.*

Llandudno and District Historical Society

In terms of the recent history of Kendrick's Upper Cave, the site appears to have been open to town folk and the natural elements since at least the Stone and Davis excavations of the late 1970s. In the recent past the site had become a place for the consumption of drugs and people sleeping rough. It was therefore decided by the Welsh heritage agency Cadw that the cave and its immediate surroundings should be afforded protection in the form of a steel grille across both entrances in order to

prevent further antisocial damage occurring to the cave interior. The protection programme also included the removal of modern debris from the cave interior. Prior to the installation of the two grilles, the areas around the two entrances were archaeologically evaluated. Trench 1, the larger of the two was excavated to the surface of the underlying bedrock. Recorded within this trench were a series of occupation layers that were clearly 19th century in date and which were associated with the extant sections of a building that once occupied the entrance space (Figures 9 and 10). Remnants of this occupation phase were also recorded in the north-facing section of Trench 2.

Despite no significant archaeological remains being uncovered during the current phase of works at Kendrick's Upper Cave this project has been able to determine that the cave can still be considered to have significant archaeological potential. The previous archaeological investigations by Davis and Stone in the Upper Cave have shown that there is a strong Neolithic and Early Bronze Age element to the cave occupation/usage. A pierced wolf canine

recovered from this site does, however, demonstrate that there is also the potential for Mesolithic or Upper Palaeolithic deposits and artefacts to be preserved at the site.

The recent archaeological programme has also been able to gather a considerable amount of information on Kendrick himself and his standing within town. Far from being seen as an ignorant workman, Kendrick should be considered to be an entrepreneur and a prime figure in the development of the tourist industry of 19th century Llandudno. He was a knowledgeable collector of the antiquities of the area and it is likely that Kendrick himself excavated a number of sites around the Great Orme to gather material for his museum which was the first in the town.

Archival research has uncovered a collection of papers and photographs giving further detail of the material collected by Kendrick and although it has emerged that some of these had been previously identified by local historians the discoveries had not been brought to the attention of the archaeological establishment. This work will form the basis of a further report (Rees, *forthcoming*).



Figure 10. *The same view as Figure 9, of Kendrick's Upper Cave in July 2015.*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Kathryn Price for her significant contribution to the fieldwork element of the project. Also thanks to Ian Halfpenny of Cadw who provided advice and logistical support. Many thanks to Cris Ebbs for allowing us to access his extensive collection of caving journals and for his information and support with the project. All mistakes are of course our responsibility.

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