

A GROOVED STONE HAMMER FROM ALDERLEY EDGE

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Abstract: A grooved stone hammer is reported from Alderley Edge, Cheshire. Comparative evidence suggests a Bronze Age date.

The hammer was located in a rainwater-cut gully just below Pillar Rock, Alderley Edge, by the second author. It was subsequently photographed in colour through Dr. Paul Craddock of the British Museum, whilst the accompanying drawing was done by Brenda Craddock. The National Trust, who when informed of the find, agreed it could be deposited at the Peak District Mining Museum, where it is probably the oldest artefact on display (Accession No. 775).

The hammer is about 15 cm long, and at its broadest point is some 11 cm wide. The rear side, as seen in the drawing, has flaked off, so that the other dimension, of a maximum of about 6 cm, represents only about half the original. A pronounced groove has been "pecked" just below the centre. This is very much below the centre of gravity, which later iron tools seem to have considered as the ideal area of attachment. The groove is about half a centimetre deep at a maximum, and generally 4 - 6 cms wide.

The broad end of the hammer has a surface with small fractures, which arguably might be caused by relatively few blows, perhaps to rid it of a projection and to round it off. The smaller end is more "axe-like", and has small marks or "pecks", probably from some, but not necessarily much, use. The rear surface is uneven, but appears to have broken off as a single flake, and perhaps indicates the stone was flawed, so that taken together, it seems likely it was soon discarded.

The hammer appears to have been adapted from a worn fragment of a porphyritic extrusive rock, probably an andesitic lava. A similar hammer was illustrated in Carlon (1979 p41), except that the latter has the pecked groove close to the centre of gravity, and a substantial number of others are in the Manchester Museum. According to Carlon the source of such volcanic rocks is the Lake District, and in Cheshire are found as glacial erratics.

Carlon considered that such hammers were held by a cleft in a withy (1979 p41), but in recent experiments Pickin and Timberlake (1988) showed a rope could usefully be used on grooved types. In the present example, the shape and position would be likely to cause a withy to quickly come off, whilst the centre of gravity would make it difficult to use in such a hammer-mode. However it could be slung on a rope, held and guided by a hand at the broad end, thus favouring the Pickin and Timberlake hypothesis.

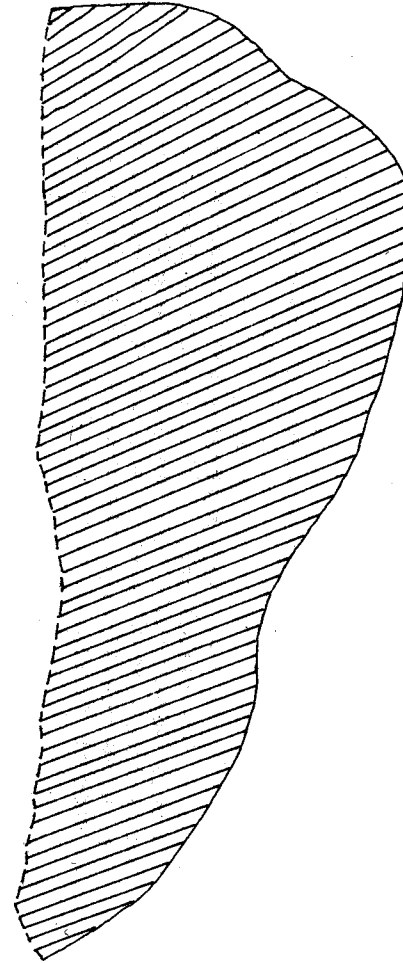
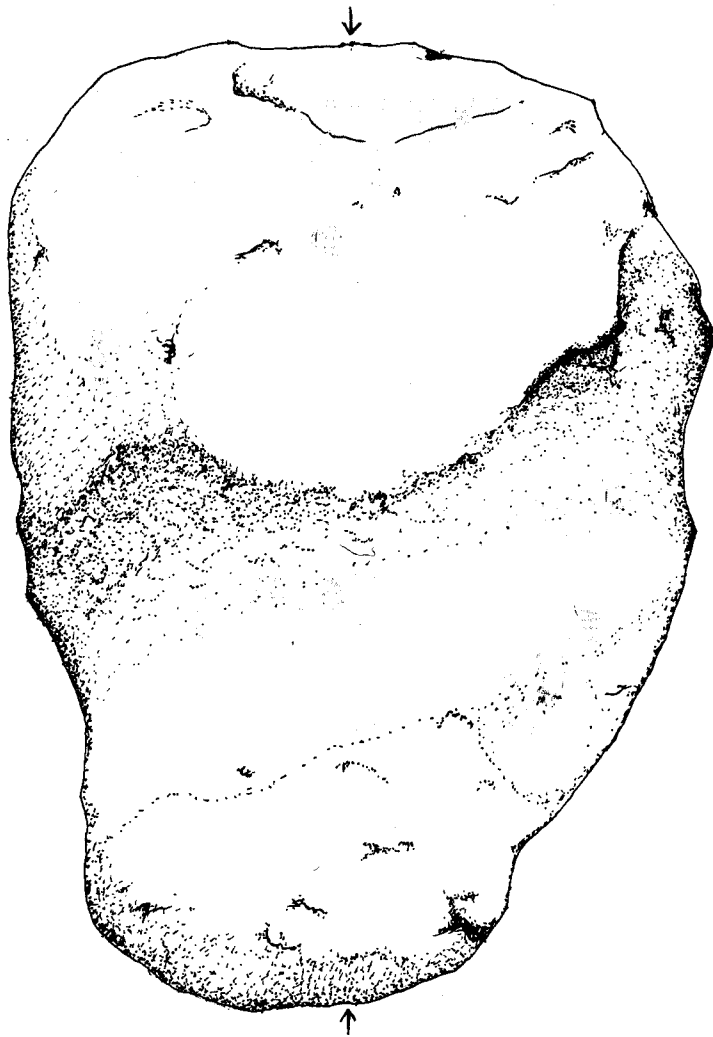
Although theoretically hammers of stone could be used in medieval times or later, the evidence which has emerged suggests that where mining has been carried out on a reasonable scale, the use of stone tools ended with the availability of iron, if not hardened copper or bronze itself. The cause of such a complete transition is readily apparent to anyone who has carried out simple experimentation with such tools. Thus in another article in this Bulletin, by Pickin and Worthington, it is argued on comparative grounds that such stone tools belong most probably to the Bronze Age, as was suggested long ago but before the advent of radio-carbon dating, by Boyd Dawkins for Alderley Edge (Carlon 1979).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Paul and Brenda Craddock for their assistance in the field and subsequently, and to Derbyshire Caving Club for escorting us on-site. The National Trust is thanked for permitting the hammer to be deposited at Peak District Mining Museum.

REFERENCES

- Carlon, C.J. 1979 The Alderley Edge Mines. John Sherratt and Son Ltd., Altrincham, Cheshire.
- Pickin, John, and Timberlake, Simon. 1988 Stone Hammers and Fire-setting. A Preliminary Experiment at Cwmystwyth Mine. Bull. PDMHS. Vol.10, No.3, pp165-67.



Stone Hammer from Alderley Edge

(drawn by Brenda Craddock)