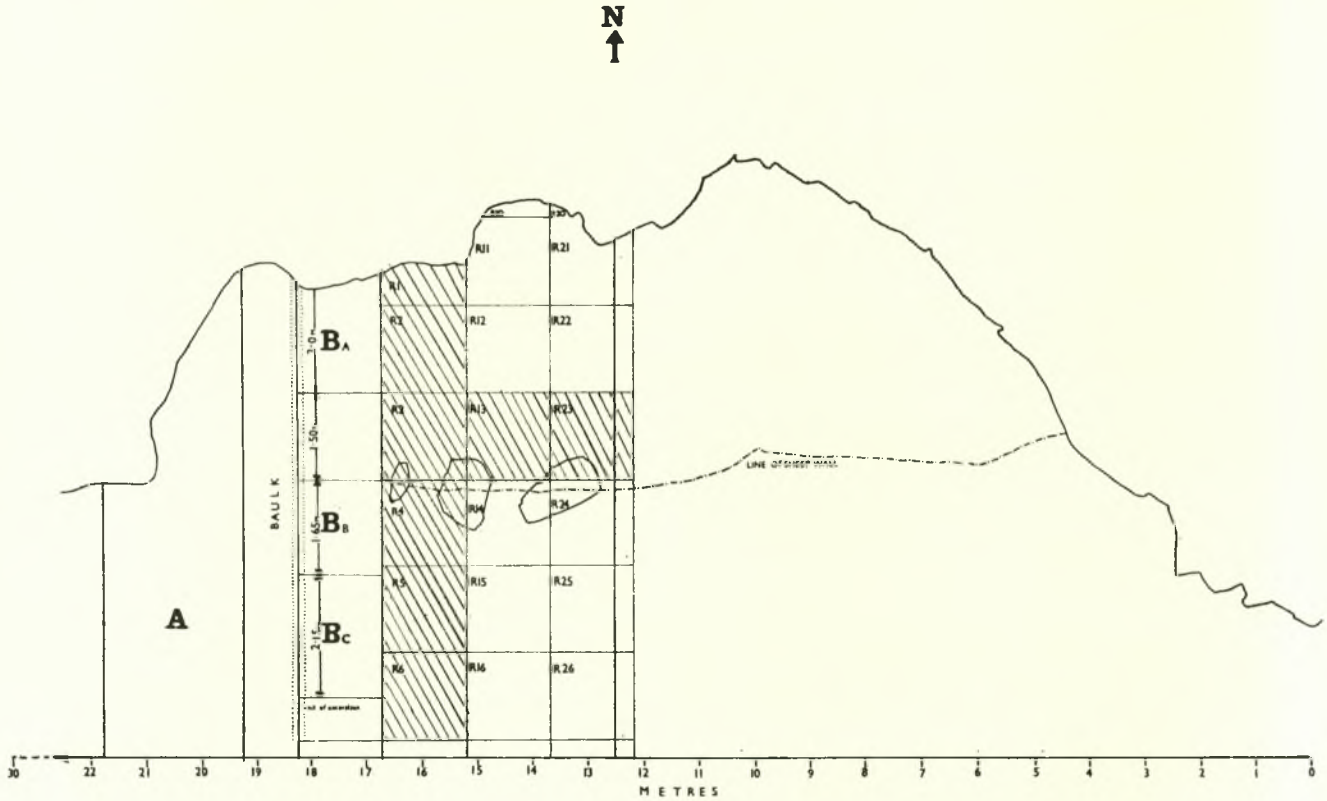
EXCAVATIONS AT THE ROCK SHELTER OF ASPROCHALICO

The exploratory excavations at Asprochalico were continued in 1965. The trial excavation in 1964 did not reach the bottom of the shelter.

In view of the importance of the cave to European Prehistory the excavations in 1965 were restricted to a small area in order that as little of the cave deposits should be disturbed as possible before the full implications of the stratigraphy and the dating of the deposits were completely understood (Plan 1). Excavation was therefore confined to solving particular problems. In the course of this work a small but valuable collection of some 20.000 artefacts was made which are certainly precisely related to the known stratigraphy. Trench B was excavated to the bottom of the shelter (Plan 2). Excavations in rectangles R 10, 11, 12, 13, 21, 22, 23 was postponed in view of heavy rock falls which were exposed just below the surface. Excavation in R14, 15, 24, 25, was stopped at 2 metres below the surface by reason of the disturbed nature of the deposits outside the shelter.

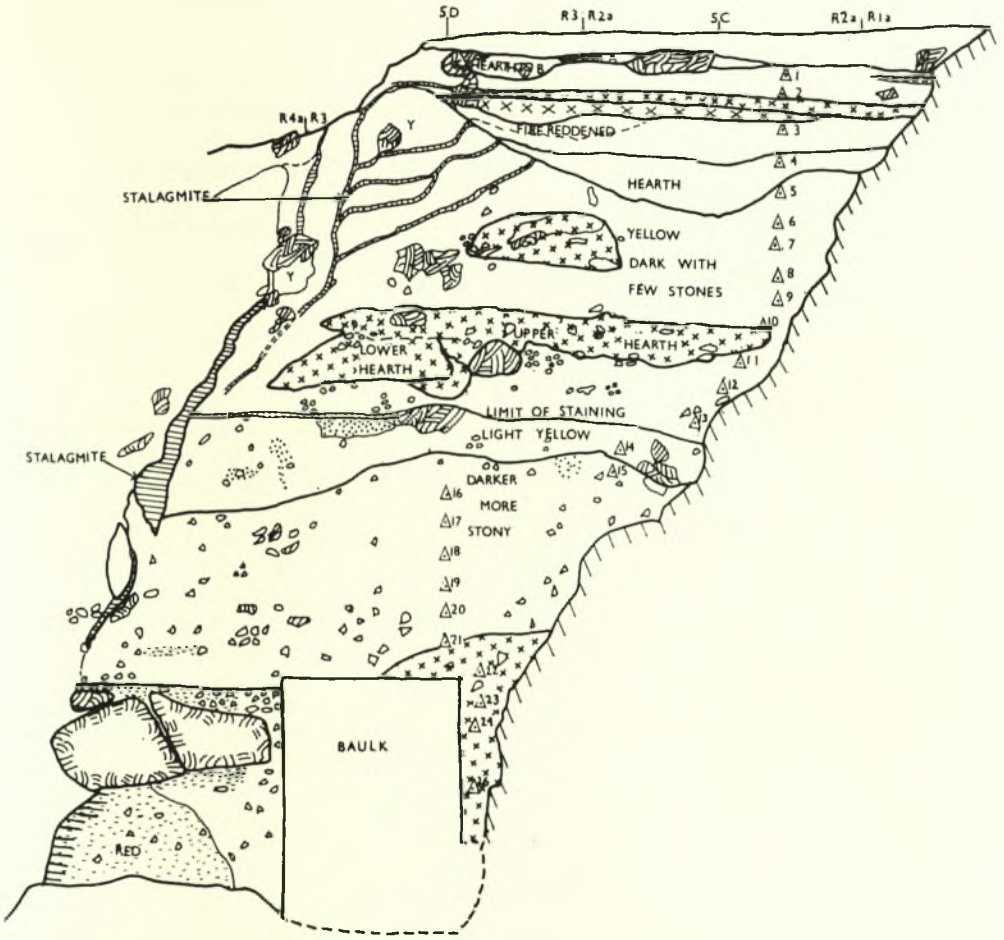
It should be noted that contrary to what might have been expected, the talus outside the cave bears no direct relation to the stratigraphy of the undisturbed deposits within the cave. Pl. 295 a shows the excavation in progress. The photograph is of the vertical sheet of stalagmite behind which were the undisturbed deposits inside the shelter. Pl. 295 b shows the second stage of the excavation with more of this layer removed. The deposits inside the shelter (Plan 2) were clearly undisturbed and have yielded two superimposed palaeolithic industries, a Mousterian which is C^{14} dated to greater than 39.900 B.P. (1 1957) and a Gravettian industry 26.100 + 900 — 800 B.P. (1 1956). There is a classic Mousterian at the base of the deposits. More radiocar-



Plan 1. Asprochaliko. Plan of shelter and excavations

bon dates will be forthcoming. Two things appear to emerge from these dates. Firstly Asprochaliko is by far the oldest human habitation site known in Greece. Secondly the Gravettian type industry in the upper part of the shelter is

matic and geological succession in North Western Europe has received considerable attention, particularly during the last 20 years from pollen analysts, geologists and archaeologists, the succession remains much in dispute. Further,



Plan 2. Asprochaliko 1965. Section of the undisturbed deposits inside the shelter

almost certainly older than the Gravettian industry in Western Europe. This considerably strengthens the opinion of those authorities who believe that there is a backed blade industry in Eastern Europe which is earlier than the Gravettian of Western Europe. It is now known that we can look forward to a major contribution to Palaeolithic archaeology from these investigations in Epirus.

The result of previous surveys by the same team in Epirus are now partly known. A cli-

the chronological relationship of the Last Gla ciation with the European ice sheets, after having been accepted in 1947 has since come under considerable criticism to the extent that many authorities doubt the existence of the pluvials themselves. A climatic succession has been established in North Africa at the cave of Haua Fteah, by the work of Hey on the geological succession in Cyrenaica, and by a number of pollen analysis in the Sahara. The problem therefore is to determine the relationship of these

climatic changes to the European succession.

At Preveza it has been observed there is a beach and fossil dunes similar to those in Cyrenaica and probably of Last Glaciation date. As in North Africa there are also tufaceous deposits related to a phase after the Last Glaciation. It now appears certain that a link will be established between the climatic succession in Europe and that of North Africa. A later observed phenomenon is that a considerable area of the present agricultural land was not deposited in Epirus until post-Classical times, a fact of considerable economic importance.

A further cave which contains an upper Palaeolithic industry has been observed at Ioannina. Judging by the artefacts which have been washed out of the talus by erosion the industry is of Gravettian type and perhaps similar to that of the Seidi cave between Levadia and Thebes. It is associated with a lake transgression when the lake was considerably larger than it is now.

The task remains to recover a sufficient number of artefacts from these well stratified sites to provide a sound basis for statistical analysis, so that the industries of Epirus may be used as a standard against which European sites may be set. Rarely is it that artefacts occur at a site in sufficient abundance to enable this to be done. At Asprochaliko, and it is believed, at Kastritsa what may well be a unique opportunity occurs to do so.

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Epirus. Asprochalico: a. Stalagmitic sheet, b. Second stage of the excavation. The large rock is the same as the one shown at the base of Plan I

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