

HAMHILL 2011

July 29, 2011 Hayley Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2011, Education, Excavation Adam, Archaeology, Cambridge Archaeological Unit, Cardiff University, environmental processing, Excavation, Finds Manager, Ham Hill Stone Company, July Cardiff University, manager for the site, quarry manager, Site Director, supervisor, truck driver, University of Cambridge, US Federal Reserve

On this day, the 29th of July Cardiff University and the University of Cambridge are currently one week in to an excavation field season at Ham Hill hillfort. This is in advance of quarrying by the Ham Hill Stone Company but is also an important training dig for the Cardiff Students. It is a typical training dig in that we are all staying on site and living and working together for the 8 weeks of this year's season of project.

Around 7.30am students and staff alike begin to emerge from caravans and tents, making their way across the long dewy grass to the toilet block and large mess tent. Breakfast is a generally quiet affair with everybody helping themselves. The kettle is always on.

Boots, suncream and hats are then donned for work on site at 9.00am. We are extremely lucky here in that our trip to site is only a two minute stroll! Camping on site has its disadvantages but also advantages!

Today we are digging test pits. Overlying the archaeology is a soil deposit that we are trying to understand better by digging the test pits. We are looking to see if there are any artefacts in it, which will hopefully tell us when it formed. Everything is sieved. Once this is complete we will remove the rest of this layer with a machine and will then be able to see and plan the archaeology (this will take more than a day though!). Adam the site director is usually wandering around, sometimes talking to himself, planning the next stage of digging, but more often is joining in and helping to teach the students. Andy, the Cardiff Supervisor, is watching our big yellow machine during the removal of the top soil. This is one of the most important jobs on a site, if you take off too much soil you will remove the archaeology, if you don't take off enough you won't see the archaeology! It can be quite stressful but he does get to see the archaeology first as it emerges from the ground.

Lunch is a simple affair with bread, ham and cheese. There are many different people on site; we have students and staff of different levels from Cardiff University. A real mixture of backgrounds is making for interesting conversations! Members of Cambridge Archaeological Unit are teaching the students, we have a machine and a truck driver and many members of the public that keep wandering over to see what we are up to. The quarry manager has popped over to see how things are progressing and I'm sure we'll get many other visitors.

We are also processing our finds on site (well, close to site in a shed that the quarry have lent us). This is also where the environmental processing will occur. Selina is our finds manager for the site and has things running smoothly. We have a finds bucket on site, where once bagged and labelled, finds are put. She then collects these and with a couple of students spends the morning, tooth brush in hand, cleaning

and then letting them dry before identifying them. This can then be instantly fed back into our understanding of the site as we are excavating. Our find of the day is the tip of a flint arrowhead/dagger. It has yet to be identified properly.

Selina is also our site 'mother'. The group on duty for cooking dinner provide her with a list of ingredients so that they are ready prepared to cook for 25. Looking forward to tonight's tuna pasta J.

This project, although we are only a few days in is revealing some important things. Archaeologically it is very exciting, digging on the top of a hillfort is cool, there's no doubt about that. We have already found some interesting artefacts and features but I think the most important things to have come out have been summarised by Joe, one of the students.

'I'd be a liar if I said the thought of excavation didn't worry me. As someone who has never been on a dig-let alone camped before I had horrific expectations and ridiculous hopes.'

It was no secret that I looked forward to learning practical skills the most, camping was definitely my biggest worry but the first thing I learnt was just get on with things – go with the flow. I came to excavating a few days ago with no practical knowledge and already I've learnt about dumpy levels, sieving, and the importance of paperwork (yeah, you even escape it in a field...) I also learnt that the people you don't talk to in class or never heard speak before will become the best people in the world when you live together for weeks. But practical skills weren't the only thing on my excavation wish list. I wanted to (hopefully) find something- and here lies an important lesson: don't get your hopes up and be patient instead. You can work and work for hours on a test pit whilst it seems like the world and his dog are finding things but you'll find the camaraderie makes the rewarding feeling a shared experience. You are, after all, a team. As of yet I've not found any of the interesting or significant things I wanted to find but there is still time and plenty of it, so I have to be patient.

And the other thing I have learnt so far this week? Getting messy is rewarding!