

MAKING ARCHAEOLOGISTS. CAERLEON EXCAVATIONS.

June 29, 2012 David Howell Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2012, Excavation, Iron Age, Medieval, Post Medieval, Roman Academia, Anthropology, archaeologist, Archaeology, Excavation, excavation site, first time archaeologist, Lodge Hill, Newport campus, Roman fortress, Syro-Palestinian archaeology, Time Team, University of Wales

As 'Day of Archaeology 2012' sprung into life, the excavations on the Iron Age Caerleon 2012 dig came to a close. This is our final day of a brisk five day project. At the moment it's about 8:15 in the morning, and I am looking out towards the University of Wales, Newport campus. There are clouds, lots of them, and they are not the fluffy light ones, they have a pretty foreboding look about them... The campus is roughly a twenty minute drive from our excavation site, and our team this year has been dependent on our committed core of undergraduates. I should clarify that these are history undergraduate students, rather than archaeology undergraduates. Time was, our university had a bustling and well respected archaeology department, but for a variety of reasons, we sadly lost that department, and history was left standing alone. However, there are enough of us archaeologists who survive in and near to the university, and the desire for archaeological research stands strong, even if we don't have the name 'archaeology' on our department notice board anymore. A strong tenant of our excavations in the past was to train prospective field archaeologists, and that has been seen again this year, with the majority of the team being made up of first time archaeologists.



You would not know to look at them, but all five of the team members here are on their very first field excavation.

The excavations this year are just below an Iron Age hillfort (Lodge Hill), which overlooks the Roman fortress at Caerleon. We've been following up on a number of features, and today we are focusing on the second of our two sites, the excavation of a trackway feature. We have some great maps that suggest the length of the trackway to be pretty significant, and running in a temptingly straight line (tempting if you like Roman features that is), going straight over the top of the hillfort. Lots of questions were being asked of this feature, how was it made, how old was it, what was it used for? As the final day of our excavations proceed, hopefully we'll be able to deal with some of those queries.



The trackway.

(...several hours later...)

Well, back home now, 6pm(ish), in the warmth of the office, feet up and in front of the computer. Those black clouds spied earlier gave as expected, and turned the majority of our 'day of archaeology', into a day of mini trench floods and occasional soakings. Such is the way with field archaeology. That though is not to say that our last day of excavation was in any way a negative, in fact we had quite a successful day.

First things first though, for many of the entries posted for Day of Archaeology, we have been treated to some stunning artefacts and insights. Alas, the most time consuming activity that took place on our final day, was, as is often the case for field excavation, back filling! It's one of those questions that is often asked of us by passing visitors, 'what are you going to do with it (the archaeology) once you've finished?', the standard short answer is 'fill it in'. So for our day in the life of an archaeologist, it was a day of hole filling, more so than it was for hole excavation (although it's not always a dull affair as these keen excavators hopefully [show](#)!)

As some of the trenches were being filled in though, we had sunk two test pit sections through our trackway feature, which previously in the week had revealed two distinct surfaces, and in the last hour or so of the day, revealed a third. Coming down on a really compact clay surface (you

can see the moment when it was revealed [here](#)), the most obvious inclusion was a wealth of charcoal material.



The discovery of this surface was one of the last acts of archaeology on site for the year. However, the questions go on. Dating from the charcoal will be next on the agenda. We only returned a few sherds of probably post medieval pottery (though it might be late, you never know) from the first two surfaces, but the charcoal may well let us take our site back much further, we'll have to wait and see. When we do get the results though, that should go a long way to helping us tackle some of those many questions we had going into this, so it's a great result, even if the result means that we must wait on some more results.

And so as the day of archaeology ends, so does our excavation. It's been a blast being involved in field archaeology again after some time away, but as interesting as the excavation element has been, today, as with the rest of this week has reminded me of one thing in particular. Field excavation has a funny effect on people. There is something about going through the hours of excavation, be it in sunshine or rain, be it through the excitement of discovering a road surface untouched for however many centuries, or the frustration of sifting through yet another find free ditch (two of our team know what that is all about now), that brings people together. At the start of this week, we had probably four distinct groups of people, different backgrounds, different

social groups, different interests, yet spending the week sharing the experience of field excavation, those barriers gradually whittled away. Those involved became friends, became united, and that is both a surprising but also familiarly reassuring thing about field excavation. At the end of it all, we had had a wonderful time, become good friends, and ultimately, we were united as archaeologists. Here's hoping your day of archaeology was as good as ours!

