

ANGLO-GEORGIAN EXPEDITION TO NOKALAKEVI (AGEN)

July 11, 2014 Paul Everill Bronze Age, Day of Archaeology 2014, Early Medieval, Education, Excavation, Expeditions, Iron Age, Landscape Archaeology, Medieval Periods, Roman AGEN, Caucasus, Georgia, Georgian National Museum, Nokalakevi, United Kingdom, University of Winchester

2014 sees the fourteenth season of excavation at the multi-period site of Nokalakevi by the Anglo-Georgian expedition, making us the longest running international collaboration in Georgian archaeology. Since we started coming out here there have been significant cultural, political and economic changes in Georgia most recent of which is the arrival of a 3G phone signal (and reliable electricity supply) to this rural part of western Georgia, and with it the internet and access to the Day of Archaeology tomorrow.

Those with an interest in our work here can read more in our recent publication of the first ten years, or in a brief article for the Antiquity project gallery published in 2010. Suffice to say here that the site was first settled (on current evidence) in the Chalcolithic, almost continually occupied until the 8th century AD, and restored as a significant regional locus in the 15th century. The distinctive features that survive at Nokalakevi today are the stunning fortifications dating to the time of the Laz kings and their Byzantine allies in the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries AD, culminating in the enormous refortification of the eastern gate under Justinian as he prepared for war with Persia.

Our work here has shed more and more light on the story of Nokalakevi, but at least as important, if not more so, has been our role in training the next generation of Georgian archaeologists alongside students/volunteers from Britain, Ireland, the United States, Canada, Australia, Holland, Poland, France and Spain. We were the first to employ modern, western methodology in Georgia and its influence is clear as a young Georgian heritage sector prepares itself for the threats that accompany a stable and improving economic situation.

This year, as we look forward to contributing to the Day of Archaeology, we are working in two trenches (Trench A and Trench C). The former is located next to the eastern gate, and is currently investigating 8th/7th century BC layers from which we have already retrieved a number of fragments of double-headed zoomorphic figurines for which Nokalakevi is famous. The latter, recently opened after Trench B was completed, has already revealed elements of the dig house that served as the base for the National Museum's 1973-1991 expedition, and the village hospital that preceded it. It was particularly interesting to investigate the old dig house, and to combine archaeological techniques with the oral testimony of those who remembered being students living there. However, with the last of the structural elements removed today, tomorrow holds the potential for exposing Byzantine deposits that lie underneath the terracing dug for the hospital in the late 19th century.