

REALLY, REALLY, REALLY, REALLY OLD STUFF!

July 11, 2014 Helen Wells Commercial Archaeology, Day of Archaeology
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This is the third time I've taken part in the 'Day of Archaeology', and I don't want to repeat myself, so please do take a look at my previous blogs "[Day in the life of a HERO](#)" and "[We can be heroes, just for one day](#)". Suffice it to say, I'm the Historic Environment Record Officer for Leicestershire County Council – for more information do look at the [Leicestershire & Rutland HER](#) page on our website!

I have started off today by thinking about the Palaeolithic. I think it's fair to say that the Palaeolithic doesn't come up all that often in archaeology. There are chance finds of Palaeolithic date – such as hand axes that are found in fields – but there aren't a lot of sites, as such. To find the Palaeolithic you usually have to dig quite a big hole, since it's usually deeply buried!

The reason I've been thinking about it is that on the HER we have a list of period dates, and it seems that the Palaeolithic ones are painfully inadequate. (I attended an HER meeting this week and it was brought up there). In the East Midlands Research Framework (2012), which you can download [here](#), it gives the following periods and dates (kya means 'thousand years ago'):

Period 1: Cromerian and Intra-Anglian (950-450 kya)

Period 2: Pre-Levallois (450-250 kya)

Period 3: Levallois (250-150 kya)

Period 4: Mousterian (60-40 kya) -> Neanderthals!

Period 5a: Early Upper Palaeolithic (40-27 kya) -> Modern Humans

Period 5b: Late Upper Palaeolithic (13,000-9,500 BC)

Now, I don't know about you, but dates of 950,000 years ago kind of blow my mind! The gaps in the chronology, by the way, indicate glaciation periods when no-one lived here (the most recent being the Dimlington Stadial).

There are a few Palaeolithic sites that have been investigated in recent times in Leicestershire/Rutland, all from different periods, and all very different in character. The earliest is at Brooksby, then there's one at Glaston, and also Bradgate Park.

ACTIVITY ON THE RIVER BYTHAM, AT BROOKSBY QUARRY (PERIOD 1)

HER REF. NO. MLE21117

Something this old really does make your brain hurt when specialists start talking about it. There are all sorts of mysterious scientific analyses that can be carried out. It's just so ancient! These weren't humans like us. They were making tools from stone, not flint.



Brooksby Quarry

The River Bytham was a huge river that flowed west from Lowestoft, along which humans may have travelled into Britain. It has left behind sand and gravel deposits that are now being quarried, giving us a brilliant opportunity to learn about this period of time.

So far hundreds of artefacts have been recovered by [ULAS](#), many of which are very fresh and don't seem to have travelled far. These include cores and flakes made from local quartzite pebbles. Early humans must have been living alongside the river and making tools, which is pretty exciting!

HYENA DEN AT GLASTON, RUTLAND (PERIOD 5A)

HER REF. NO. MLE9061

This is another site investigated by [ULAS](#), back in 2000. Evidence of a hyaena den was recorded, which contained bones of woolly rhinoceros, mammoth, wolverine, early horse and hyenas. This is the first open air hyena den excavated, and a flint leafpoint provides evidence of human activity in the vicinity – rare evidence for a temporary hunting camp. You can read more about the project [here](#) (which is where this rather good picture came from!).



Glaston hyena den

CRESWELLIAN SITE AT BRADGATE PARK (PERIOD 5B)

HER REF. NO. MLE9435

This site was first discovered in 2001 and test pitting was carried out earlier this year, again by [ULAS!](#) Basically, thousands of flints have been recovered from an eroding footpath in the park. These flints are evidence for human activity on site – it has been suggested that the site was a hunting stand where hunters intercepted animals such as horse and deer passing through Little Matlock Gorge. The exciting thing about this site is that it is *in situ* – there are deposits that are associated with the flints. At the moment it's not clear what further work will be carried out on the site, but it's certainly a nationally important site!



Bradgate Park test pitting

So, that's a quick dash through some of the oldest archaeological sites on the Leicestershire & Rutland HER. You can look at these, and other records, via the [Heritage Gateway](#). Records cover everything up to now, so we're covering about a million years of human activity!

Obviously it's not possible to be an expert in everything throughout those million years, so forgive me if I've made some terrible errors when writing this. I'm not a Palaeolithic expert. Today, on this Day of

Archaeology, I just found it interesting. 😊