

DAY OF ARCHAEOLOGY 2014: A LIFE OF LITHICS, BALANCE AND LUCK

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Hey!

My name is Christian Hoggard and I am an AHRC funded PhD student at the Centre for the Archaeology of Human Origins (CAHO), within the University of Southampton. Last year I was swamped by Masters research to be able to produce a DoA post; it is an amazing project and I just hope I can write to the standard that they deserve!

Today is not a typical day. Today is a day working from home as I have just returned from the biennial Palaeolithic-related field trip with some of my colleagues from CAHO. Over the space of eight days we mini-bused over 1950km throughout northern and south-western France visiting sites including Pincevent in Seine-et-Marne, and many other infamous sites such as Le Moustier, La Micoque, Abri Pataud and others within the Vézère Valley. Photos and a blog will shortly follow!

The typical days, however, are not as exotic. I would get into the John Wymer Laboratory at around 9 am and balance my time (until 5ish) accordingly. At the moment, I am balancing between reading, chapter drafting and writing, and other CV-related aspects. We all know that a PhD does not offer you the dream job (or any job really!) these days and it is the extra-PhD activities (i.e. teaching, outreach, outside research) alongside the PhD which can persuade or sway the interviewers to give you the job you've always wanted (or the only one which got you an interview for). In undertaking such I often feel that I am neglecting your research (the stuff that I am actually paid to do!) and hindering its progress. I just hope I can get the correct balance between what is needed, what I wish to give, what actually is created and what I've done alongside! Time will tell.

In terms of my PhD I am currently finishing off one of my first two chapter drafts ready for interrogation by my supervisor. My research is focused on Neanderthal behaviour and specifically why different technological strategies or flintknapping techniques are used concurrently. Through morphometric, technological and (hopefully!) practical examination the relationship between elongated Levallois and Laminar strategies will be investigated. Are they both used because each has their own benefit? or is it just an alternate means to an end? So far I have looked at two sites in Britain (Baker's Hole and Crayford) and two in Belgium (Mesvin and Rocourt); a revisit to these are essential and many more sites are needed!



Lithic material in the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (RBINS) – the site of Mesvin IV

The day will then finish at 5pm and I will try my best to treat it as a job; no PhD (with the exception of some emails) will be undertaken for the rest of my evening. I am trying to be a “work at work” kinda person, again that balance is essential.

So why did I include luck in my title? Well, I have been incredibly lucky to get where I am now. I am fortunate to get both my MA and PhD funded through the AHRC, I am fortunate to get a PhD position at Southampton (and also at Cambridge), and I am fortunate for the current situation. I got these opportunities not because I am more intelligent than other applicants, or because my research will cure cancer (which it won't), but because the series of events just played out in my favour. I have seen many people, close friends of mine, who have far more amazing ideas, not get funding for PhD. This is not a game of intellect, but a game of chance, whether this includes luck or not. A level of intellect just helps this.

If luck does exist. I must acknowledge that luck runs out, and prepare like mad for its inevitability. The American journalist Hunter Thompson once said that *“Luck is a very thin wire between survival and disaster, and not many people can keep their balance on it”*. Again we are back to balance. I know that I will lose my balance, it's inevitable. All people fall. All we can do is make sure that we don't land too hard.

Now get up on the tightrope and enjoy the view.

C.