

# CONTEMPLATING AND COMMUNICATING THE PALAEOLITHIC LANDSCAPES OF WALES

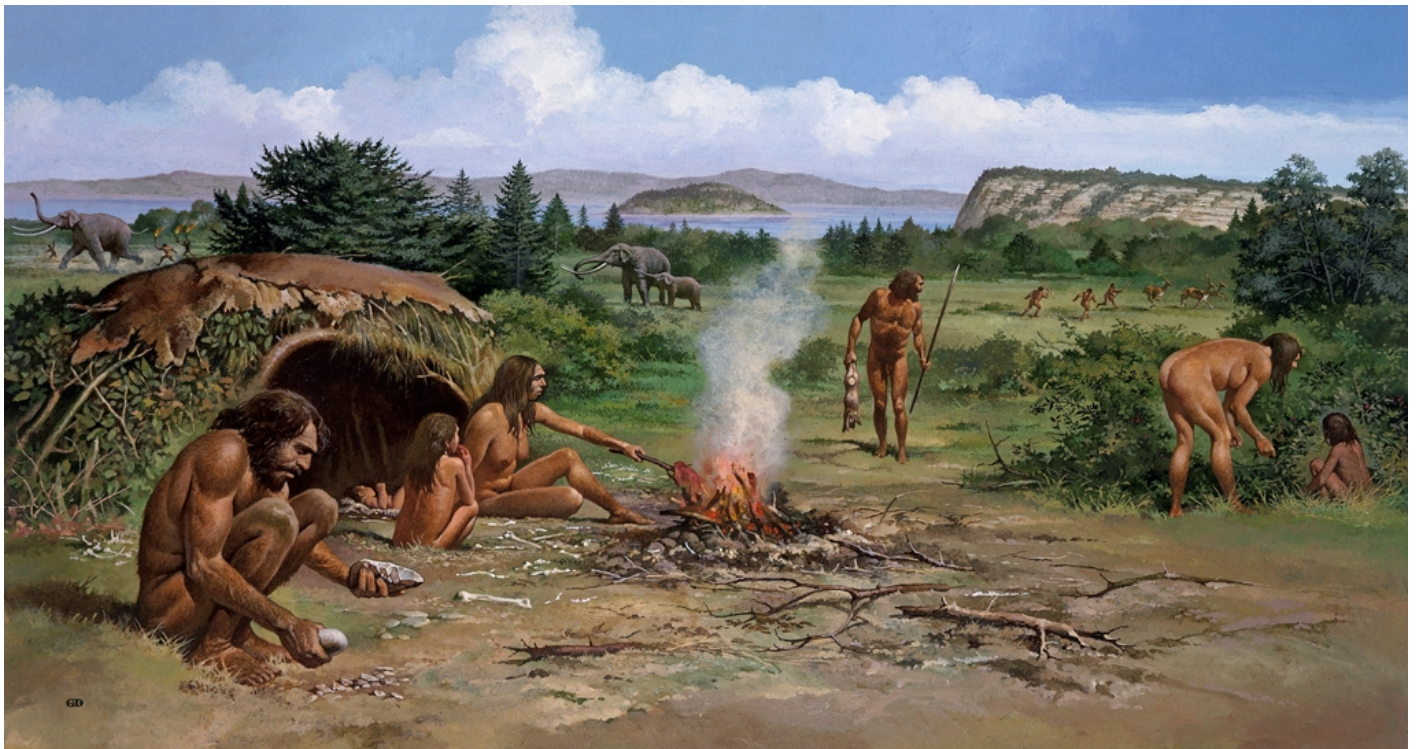
July 28, 2017 Matt Knight  
Archaeology, Prehistory, UK  
Wales, palaeolithic

Curation, Day of Archaeology 2017, Explore Posts, Mesolithic, Museum  
Amgueddfa Cymru, Cardiff, Cave, Mesolithic, Museums, National Museum of

*This post has been published on behalf of Elizabeth Walker at Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales.*

I'm Elizabeth Walker, currently the Interim Head of Collections Management for Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales. I'm an archaeologist by background specialising in the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic archaeology of Wales. After a busy week attending meetings for the delivery of new displays at St Fagans National Museum of History, discussing the arrangements for bringing items in on loan and dealing with questions of collections management from all areas of the Museum I decided to have my own rare day of archaeology today.

So what have I been doing? The day began by planning a public behind the scenes store visit to see some of the remains from mammal species now extinct in Wales. As my bus brought me into Cardiff this morning I looked across at the city stretched ahead and I began to think how different the landscape of Wales was throughout the Palaeolithic. There were no roads or permanent settlements. People were mobile hunter-gatherers walking through their landscape, dependent upon the climate, the passing of animals and the fruits of the season for obtaining their food.



*Reconstruction painting showing Cardiff as it might have looked 230,000 years ago*

The Welsh caves have provided a wealth of evidence for Palaeolithic peoples' lives and the Museum has been conducting excavations in caves to uncover and interpret them. Excavations have taken place at Pontnewydd Cave, Denbighshire where evolutionary early Neanderthal remains have been found associated with the bones and teeth of the animals that would have been around 230,000 years ago. These mammals include the cave bear, leopard, cave lion, narrow-nosed and Merck's rhinoceros along with species still familiar to us today; horse, wolf, red deer, bison, voles and lemmings. On Gower, Bacon Hole has revealed evidence for straight-tusked



elephants and hippopotamus during the last interglacial. A time when there were no people, as they didn't get across the English Channel before Britain became an island.



*A straight-tusked elephant tooth from Bacon Hole (c) Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales*

As the last ice advance began to take hold the land-bridge reformed and people entered Wales. At caves including Paviland Cave and Cathole Cave, Gower, mammoth and woolly rhinoceros remains have been recovered from excavations, along with hyaena, reindeer, bison and other large mammals. As the last ice advance retreated people followed the herds of horse and deer back into Wales and Museum excavations at Hoyle's Mouth and Little Hoyle, Tenby, have generated ample evidence of people's cultural debris; stone tools, debitage from making stone tools, butchered and cut-marked animal bones discarded after their meals and after removal of the skins and other resources necessary to sustain human life. These help provide an insight into the lives of the people who once lived in Wales 10,000 and more years ago.



*Adult and juvenile cave bear teeth from Pontnewydd and Paviland Caves (c) Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales*

My behind the scenes tour this morning saw Museum visitors being excited at seeing a selection of these bones and teeth from the Museum collection close up. These mammal remains are kept in the Museum where anyone can arrange a visit to see them.



*Photos from the Behind-the-Scenes tour*

So after my day of archaeology what shall I do now? Despite the rain, rather than taking the bus I think I'll spend the next few hours walking through Cardiff, across the Cardiff Bay Barrage and along the Wales coast path through Penarth on towards Barry. I'll pass the findspot of the Lavernock Palaeolithic handaxe and I'll think about the landscape and the mammals that once



roamed South Wales and plan out my weekend gathering, picking some cultivated fruits. So in my own modern way I will continue some of the activities of the Palaeolithic people – but I'll be wearing my technical waterproof clothing, rather than damp animal skins!



*Lavernock Handaxe (c) Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales*