

## ANNUAL REPORT: OLDUVAI GORGE (TANZANIA) 2013 FIELD SCHOOL

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Students excavating along with undergraduates from Dar-es-Salaam University and OGAP staff at the MNK-T5

### GENERAL

The Olduvai Gorge field school took place July 3-August 7, 2013. It offered both taught and practical activities for the students to take part in. The concepts covered by taught portion of the field school were complimented by its practical component, providing an overall picture of the activities conducted by the Olduvai Geochronology Archaeology Project (OGAP) at Olduvai Gorge.

### RESEARCH RESULTS

Fieldwork included surveys across the Olduvai Gorge, with particular emphasis on the four localities that OGAP had previously excavated (MNK, EFHR, FC West and HWKEE). The 2013 excavations concentrated at three of these sites, namely HWKEE (an Oldowan site located above Tuff IIA), EFHR (an Acheulean site in Middle Bed II) and MNK (a stratigraphic complex with various archaeological sites in Middle Bed II).

Excavations were very successful in all the trenches opened in 2013, unearthing large fossil and lithic assemblages that will help to characterize the subsistence and technology of the late Oldowan and the earliest Acheulean at Olduvai Gorge.

### LECTURES

The taught portion of the course consisted of a lecture series highlighting the diversity and interdisciplinary nature of ongoing research at Olduvai Gorge. Lecture topics included introductions to zooarchaeology, taphonomy, lithic analysis, remote sensing and aerial

photography, paleoecology, conservation, and the history and current research at Olduvai Gorge.

In the induction to conservation at Olduvai Gorge, the IFR students were given a brief introductory talk on conservation for OGAP, which provided an overview of the historical development of archaeological conservation, current conservation theory as well as describing the conservation approach developed for the OGAP material. The conservation issues presented by objects from Olduvai were explored and the methods used to stabilize and conserve them in London over the last eight months were contrasted with the problems and challenges of on-site conservation.

Another lecture was given to introduce and explain the main aspects of lithic technology and its relation to the archaeology and history of research at Olduvai Gorge. Special attention was paid to the lithic technologies found within the context of Olduvai Gorge. A description and history of the Oldowan and the Acheulean at Olduvai was given, with attention being paid to the different raw material locally available within the region and its effect on the identification of these technologies. A discussion on the possible uses of the Oldowan and Acheulean as well as their affiliations with various hominin species followed. This was designed in order to familiarize the students with the lithic classification used by the project during artifact processing.

The presentation on paleoecology emphasized the dynamic ecological processes that took place throughout Olduvai Gorge from lower Bed I up until upper Bed II and how such developments impacted the biotic and abiotic communities in the area. The discussion also introduced methodologies utilized by palaeoecologists to gain a better inference on such changes with a focus on biotic indicators such as ungulate turnover events as a response to ecological alteration, which is essential to the understanding of faunal changes throughout the sequence at Olduvai Gorge.

### **VISITS AND FIELDWORK ACTIVITIES**

The practical portion of the field school can be divided up into three categories including fieldwork, laboratory work, and weekend activities. In the field students became involved with excavation of the various archaeological sites under investigation by the project, particularly HWKEE and MNK. While excavation was the primary activity of the field component, the students also had the opportunity to take part in other aspects of the archaeological research process. Activities included taking field notes, operating the total station, using ranging and prism rods and packing artifacts for post excavation processing. In addition, students also had the opportunity to take part in archaeological survey. During this time, students worked with GPS equipment and learned about protocols of archaeological survey.

In addition, the students also took part in laboratory activities. During this time students had the opportunity to work directly with artifacts retrieved during excavation. Laboratory activities included washing artifacts, labeling and barcoding artifacts, and the preliminary classification of stone tools. In addition, students also worked with archaeological databases to assist in creating an inventory of excavated artifacts. Not only did this give the students experience cataloging archaeological material but also familiarized students with other essential laboratory skills. Such skills included measuring artifacts with calipers, identifying fossils from natural stone, and identifying raw material types of stone artifacts.

Lastly, students took part in weekend activities and excursions. The excursions included visits to the Arusha Natural History Museum, trips to the Shifting Sands and Naibor Soit hills, a Masaai boma in Olduvai Gorge, the Ngorogoro crater, and Serengeti national park. These trips

familiarized the students with the surroundings in which they were working as well as with the local cultures present at Olduvai Gorge. In addition, students participated in an experimental stone tool flaking session, and also had the opportunity to observe and participate in the butchery of a goat with the stone tools previously manufactured during the knapping session. Following the butchery, students also analyzed the bones in an attempt to identify cut marks and the stone tools to try and identify evidence of use. Overall these activities allowed students to gain experience in a variety of facets of archaeological fieldwork and the research process in one of the most relevant paleoanthropological sites in the world, Olduvai Gorge.