ANNUAL REPORT: OLDUVAI GORGE 2014 FIELD SCHOOL

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IFR students helping to consolidate 1.5 million- year- old fossils from the MNK site, Olduvai Gorge

The 2014 Olduvai Gorge Archaeology Field School included participation in archaeological excavation, formal lectures and practical activities for the IFR students. The eminently practical component of the field school was this year complemented by a substantial number of lectures, providing an overall picture of the activities conducted by the Olduvai Geochronology Archaeology Project (OGAP) at Olduvai Gorge.

Research accomplishments

In the 2014 season, fieldwork focused on the archaeological excavation of HWKEE (an Oldowan site), MNK (a stratigraphic complex with various archaeological sites in Middle Bed II), and FC East (with archaeological assemblages also in Middle Bed II). At HWKEE, archaeological work continued in Trench 1 in order to remove the clayed tuff deposit and exposing the base of the sequence. Hundreds of cores and flakes typical of the Oldowan were found alongside a large concentration of circa 1.6 million- year- old fossils.

In MNK, the archaeological works continued in the Main trench (T6) as well as in the Trench T5. Being slightly more recent than HWKEE, the two large trenches excavated at MNK also yielded a substantial amount of lithics (majorly lava and quartzite cores and flakes), accompanied by abundant fossils of large herbivores and micro-mammals. In FC East, several test trenches demonstrated the archaeological potential of the outcrop and will allow stratigraphic correlations with FC West, only a few hundred meters apart and where Mary Leakey discovered several remains of fossil humans dated around 1.5 million years ago.

Lectures and practical demonstrations

A lecture series highlighted the diversity and interdisciplinary nature of ongoing research at Olduvai Gorge. Lecture topics included dedicated one-hour sessions on zooarchaeology, geology, taphonomy, lithic analysis, archaeological illustration, conservation, remote sensing and public archaeology, gathering a number of specialists that included I. de la Torre, M. Pante,

R. Peters, L. McHenry, A. Arroyo, C. Martin, A. Theorodopoulou and G. Jorayev. Lectures covered general concepts of each topic and emphasized its application to the specific context of Olduvai Gorge, highlighting the historical background and current paleoanthropological research in the region. For example, an introduction to the Olduvai Gorge geology by Dr. McHenry (Milwaukee University) detailed the importance of tephrostratigraphy and its application to the chronology and geology of early humans. In lectures by Dr. Pante (Colorado State University), IFR students learned how taphonomy is applied to current research on early hominid's lifestyles, and its bearing to the scavenging vs. hunting debate during the Early Stone Age. Zooarchaeology and taphonomy lectures were complemented by practicals where students learned bone identification and basics of taphonomic research. Renata Peters (University College London) gave an induction to conservation at Olduvai Gorge, where the IFR students gained an overview of the historical development of archaeological conservation, current conservation theory and ethics, as well as a detailed description of the conservation approach developed for the OGAP materials. The on-site conservation issues and challenges presented by objects from Olduvai were explored in the formal lectures, which were then exercised as hands-on practicals at the excavation sites and in the conservation laboratory.

Visits and Fieldwork Activities

The practical portion of the field school was divided up into three categories, which included fieldwork, laboratory work, and weekend activities. In the field, students became actively involved in the excavation of the various archaeological sites under investigation by the project (in 2014 fieldwork focused at HWKEE, MNK and FC East). 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. These included, among others, learning how to use and operating the total station during the excavation, consolidate fossils in the field and packing them for post excavation conservation work.

In addition, the students also took part in laboratory activities. Here, students had the opportunity to work directly with artifacts retrieved during excavation. Laboratory activities included washing, labeling and barcoding artifacts, as well as classification of stone tools and bones. Students also worked with archaeological databases to assist in creating an inventory of excavated artifacts. All these activities familiarized students with essential laboratory skills, which nicely complemented experience gained during the excavation work.

Thirdly, IFR students took part in weekend activities and excursions. Excursions included visits to the Natural History Museum in Arusha, the Oldupai Museum in Olduvai Gorge, trips to the Shifting Sands and Naibor Soit hills, a Masaai *boma* in Olduvai Gorge, the Ngorongoro Crater, and the 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. The students were also given an opportunity to participate in bead-working workshops instructed by local Masaai people.

Overall, all these activities allowed students to gain experience in a variety of facets of archaeological fieldwork in one of the most relevant paleoanthropological sites in the world, Olduvai Gorge, and also introduced students to the culture of the current inhabitants of the area, the Masaai people. The 2014 research activities will be disseminated in forthcoming conferences such as the Paleoanthropology Meetings (San Francisco, April 2015). In addition, conversations are taking place with a number of IFR students interested in following up their collaboration with our project, via Masters studies in University College London and Colorado.