

ANNUAL REPORT: TANZANIA-OLDUVAI GORGE 2015 FIELD SCHOOL

Director(s): Dr. Ignacio de la Torre, Institute of Archaeology, University College London

Co-Director(s): Dr. Michael Pante, Department of Anthropology, Colorado State University



2015 excavations at FC West (Olduvai Gorge).

The 2015 field season in Olduvai Gorge involved several different instructional techniques in an effort to further the educational experience of IFR students. The goal of the field school was to increase the student's general understanding of the archaeological characteristics of Olduvai Gorge. A substantial number of lectures complemented the techniques that were taught during archaeological excavations. This provided the students with an overarching understanding of all research currently being conducted by the Olduvai Geochronology Archaeology Project (OGAP) in Olduvai Gorge.

Research accomplishments

The 2015 field season in Olduvai Gorge focused on two different archaeological localities, FC West (FCW) and FC East (FCE). Both sites contained archaeological assemblages situated in the same stratigraphic layers of Middle Bed II, dated to being approximately 1.5 million years old. Initial excavations of FCW began by expanding the west and north wall of Mary Leakey's original trench. The trenches in FCW yielded thousands of archaeological materials, including cores and flakes typical of both the Oldowan and Acheulean. A large concentration of fossil materials was found in association with the lithics at these sites.

Two trenches were opened in FCE in an attempt to connect the archaeological and stratigraphic layers between FCE with FCW. The information from our excavations should allow for a better understanding of the archaeological materials discovered in excavations originally undertaken by Mary Leakey in FCW.

Lectures and practical demonstrations

A series of ten lectures throughout the 2015 field season emphasized the range of ongoing research at Olduvai Gorge. Lectures examined topics related to the understanding of zooarchaeology, geology, taphonomy, lithic analysis, and, conservation. These were presented by a number of specialists including I. de la Torre, M. Pante, R. Peters, N. Toth, K. Schick, I. Stanistreet and N. Moloney. Lectures provided a brief overview of the general issues and applications of each topic while also emphasizing how the information applies to the specific context of Olduvai Gorge, highlighting the historical background and current paleoanthropological research in the region.

For example, an introduction to lithic technology in Olduvai Gorge by Dr. Moloney (University College London) emphasized the relevance of attempting to refit lithic materials and its importance in better understanding the technological processes present in the archaeological record at Olduvai Gorge. In a series of lectures presented by Dr. Pante (Colorado State University), IFR students learned how applications regarding current taphonomic research have furthered our understanding of the lifestyle of early hominids. The information presented in the zooarchaeology and taphonomy lectures were supplemented by practical activities, in which IFR students practiced bone identification and the basics of taphonomic research. Dr. Peters (University College London) gave a summary on the conservation efforts at Olduvai Gorge, where the IFR students gained an overview into 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 specific challenges presented by objects found in Olduvai were first explored in formal lectures and then further studied in hands-on experiments in the excavation and conservation laboratory.

Visits and Fieldwork Activities

IFR students were able to engage in a variety of practical components throughout the field season to supplement their understanding of archaeology in Olduvai Gorge including fieldwork, laboratory work and weekend excursions. Students were actively encouraged to involve themselves in ongoing excavations organized by OGAP in FC West. Students primarily spent their fieldwork time practicing skills related to excavating. However, students had many opportunities to practice other archaeological techniques. Examples of these included using a total station during excavations to plot archaeological materials and open new trenches, and various techniques involved in conserving fossil and lithic materials outside of a lab setting.

Other educational activities that the IFR students were able to participate in involved processing artifacts in a laboratory setting. Students were involved in all the processes related to the curation of lithic and fossil artifacts as they entered the lab from the excavations to organizing the artifacts for further analysis. Activities performed in the laboratory included washing and labeling artifacts, classification of both stone tools and bones, and curating archaeological material into a database to create an inventory of excavated materials. The skills taught in both the laboratory activities and excavations have familiarized the students with common procedures that occur during an archaeological excavation.

The lectures, fieldwork and laboratory activities were supplemented by weekend excursions in an effort to enhance the educational experience of the students. These excursions included trips to the Natural History Museum in Arusha, the Oldupai Museum in Olduvai Gorge, Shifting Sands, Naibor Soit Mountain, a Masai *boma*, Ngorongoro Crater, as well as Serengeti National Park. These excursions allowed the students to better understand the environmental, ecological and cultural characteristics surrounding Olduvai Gorge and better understand the purpose and

implications of our excavations. Students were also encouraged to engage with the local culture in other activities, such as bead-working workshops taught by some of the local Masaai people.

In summary, during the 2015 field season in Olduvai Gorge students were able to experience and learn a variety of relevant skills related to archaeological fieldwork that could be applied to future archaeological endeavors.

The findings from the 2015 Olduvai Gorge field season will be discussed in upcoming conferences, such as the Paleoanthropology Meetings (Atlanta 2016). In addition to the presentation of research, students from the 2015 field season expressed their interest in following up their collaboration with our project, via Masters programs at both University College London and Colorado State University.