



ANNUAL REPORT: BENEATH HAY BLUFF, HEREFORDSHIRE UK 2021 FIELD SCHOOL

Name(s) of Directors: Prof. Julian Thomas and Prof. Keith Ray



Excavations at Arthur's Stone, Dorstone, 2021

PART 1: RESEARCH OUTCOMES

Fieldwork in the vicinity of the megalithic tomb of Arthur's Stone, overlooking the Golden Valley, took place in July 2021, co-directed by Professor Julian Thomas of Manchester University and Professor Keith Ray of Cardiff University (former County Archaeologist for Herefordshire). This work was an extension of the Beneath Hay Bluff Project, which has already undertaken nine seasons of excavation at Dorstone Hill nearby. Fieldwork in 2021 consisted of two elements: a grid of one-metre square test pits at five-metre intervals to identify concentrations of artefacts in the topsoil in the fields immediately to the south of the monument, and a trench 15 x 10 metres

in extent immediately to the south-east of the scheduled area surrounding the megalithic chamber, beyond the footpath and field boundary. IFR students took part in

PART 2: REFLECTION ON TEACHING

2021 was an exceptionally challenging season, owing principally to the Covid 19 pandemic and the administrative and regulatory burdens that it placed on us. We intended that this year the project would be a low-stress initiative focused on teaching and skills, but in the event all three of the sites that we were investigating produced spectacular and demanding archaeology. Government limitations on the number of people who could travel in vehicles, and the different regulations on either side of the nearby Welsh border meant that logistics were especially complex, and moving students between campsite and fieldwork sites was difficult, as was any form of field trip.

We also found that running three different sites under this regime was quite taxing. In order to move students to site with low vehicle occupancy we had to stagger the start and finish times for the three sites. This meant that our normal practice of having a team meeting each morning became impossible, and consequently the communication of information amongst a large project staff became very difficult.

Having said this, we feel that it was a highly successful season. Circulating the students between the three sites meant that we could ensure that each person had a wide range of experiences. It also meant that we could break down the Manchester, Cardiff and IFR cohorts of students, and foster interaction. Having each student work for three different directors meant that we could compare our experiences of their skills and aptitudes in different circumstances, which meant that our evaluation of their work was more nuanced. While the options for large-scale fieldtrips were curtailed by Covid, Prof. Ray's initiative to take the IFR students for days out in small groups proved highly successful. Finally, the assessed coursework submitted by the IFR students was generally of very high standard, demonstrating that their immersion in British archaeology had generated real enthusiasm and understanding on their part. On the whole, the very positive student feedback forms reflect the experience that the students had in 2021 (and several of them have already written to ask about returning in 2022). Where there were minor negative comments, these generally reflect the difficulties of working under pandemic conditions.

In 2022, we anticipate that we will not be working around the strictures of lockdown and quarantine. Therefore it will be possible to reinstate the lab-based element of the course that was lost to the ten-day isolation period, and with it some trips and visits in the Manchester area that will complement the rural landscape of Herefordshire. In the 2022 season we will be restricting our work to two sites: Arthur's Stone and Snodhill Castle. This will provide the same diversity of prehistoric and historic archaeology without the logistic issues of this summer. Working to a more consolidated timetable will enhance communication within the project. Finally, we have learned that the US students will appreciate more supermarket and launderette trips, which will be much easier to achieve in the absence of travel restrictions.