

43rd Bristol Scouts Archaeology

Landscape Archaeology on Kingsweston Hill

A look into the local past

On a lovely sunny evening we met with the 43rd Scouts for a little exploration into prehistory on



Kingsweston Hill. We walked up to Echo Gate where we convened for a quick briefing about the long and ancient legacy of the hill.

The first obvious feature to look at was the bank, making up the Iron Age enclosure and this was our base, marking the present on our time line.

From here we rolled out a very long tape measure. Using a scale of 1cm to each year we marked out the eras that we were investigating - Roman, Iron Age, Bronze Age, Neolithic, Mesolithic and Palaeolithic.

At each flag we had a bucket and the scouts were invited to pop down their own thoughts on a piece of paper. Many of these were very perceptive:

On the Iron Age: "this is a coin, it was used as currency. The people of this era have become more sophisticated and have created a more civilised civilisation."

"I think it is an old coin that the King had but I think it got stuck in a tree and the poor got it"

"Tiz a coin, start of trading, a system of government"

Romans

The main Roman feature on our exploration was the path heading across the hill. This was the road from Sea Mills (Abona) to Gloucester (Glevum).

In our Roman bucket, around 20m from home we had an oil lamp and the base of a bowl. For the keen of eye the lamp had an engraving of a lion on the top whilst the fragment of pottery had a potters mark - just as we have today.

If you happen to be on the Downs this summer, you can also see a stretch of the Roman road heading in the opposite direction from Abona to Aquae Sulis (Bath) at the top of Stoke Hill.

Iron Age

There is a lot of Iron Age archaeology on the Blaise Estate and Kingsweston Hill. Perhaps the most obvious are the banks and ditches as you walk up to Blaise Castle, although some of these were dabbled with in the 18th century. On Kingsweston Hill we have the squarish enclosure at Echo Gate and a round enclosure just a little further along which you can just about make it out if you look carefully behind these scouts.



At the Roman bucket:

"I think it is part of a ceramic pot that was used for storing things"

At the Neolithic bucket:

"Neolithic time"

"We think it is pottery and the dark is the outside and the brown is the inside"

"The things are pots that have paint on them - started making home furnishings and unnecessary items for pleasure, ie bracelets"

The point of this is that the scouts were not just looking at the artefacts, but they were giving thought to their use and production. Handling enabled them to think about texture and draw their own conclusions that extended beyond the object itself to principles such as social complexity and surplus (e.g. the fantastic comment about home furnishings)

The Travelling History Company

The Travelling History Company is based in Stoke Bishop and provides history outreach to schools and other community groups. In the holidays we run trips to ancient historic sites where children are free to engage with and explore the historic landscape whilst we provide learning resources.

We are members of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom and the Institute for Outdoor Learning.

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At our Iron Age bucket we had a coin to examine. Looking closely, some of the scouts noticed the letters TAS on the obverse and VER on the reverse side. These stand for Tasciovanus and Veranium. Tasciovanus was an Iron Age King of the Catuvellauni Tribe around 10BC. Their capital was Verlanium - modern day St. Albans.

Bronze Age

In the Bronze Age quite a distinctive burial pattern emerged - individual burials under mounds or, if you are looking at an Ordnance Survey map - tumuli. These are often overgrown because of their protected status, and end up with trees growing on them, or just being overgrown.

Just beyond the Roman road are three or four late Bronze Age burials - right in the middle of the hill.

We paused here to focus a little more on our time scale.

We had an Upper palaeolithic hand axe with us - probably last used as an axe somewhere between 15,000 and 30,000 years ago. On our scale, this axe wielder would have been somewhere in Shirehampton. We also gave some thought to dinosaurs, given that many school children associate dinosaurs with stone age people. We blame the Flintstones for this. Obviously dinosaurs became extinct long, long before humans evolved, on our scale, to plant the flag marking the mass extinction of 65,000,000 years ago, one of our scouts would have to go to Florida in the USA.

Our Mesolithic and Neolithic periods were represented by Mesolithic blades and a Neolithic scraper and discussion about the change from Hunting and gathering to farming lifestyles. It is these times of change that archaeologists find really interesting; what are the factors behind making such a change, are groups copying their neighbours, is it ideas that are being communicated, or did farming communities "invade" Britain around 6000 years ago?

This was a lovely evening out exploring our local prehistory. Hopefully some of the scouts will have come away with a better understanding of chronology and be inspired to look into some local history for themselves over the summer holidays.

