

## Preparation Day 1 : 29th May 2024

Hello All,

Many thanks to those of you who have asked to have your email address added to my archaeology circulation list. Welcome to our group.



We began our preparation for this year's dig today when Graham Cross with his trusty digger took off the topsoil from our two new trenches. Trench 8 that intersects the inner ring ditch and trench 9 to the south of our previous excavations. The trenches look very workable and are much drier than we could have expected. Lots of potentially interesting features in T8. Kristian who supervised today's operation picked up a small piece of wheel turned pottery, possibly early medieval. We've also



taken most of our equipment up to the site (many thanks to Helen's grandsons for their help) and we hope to get the tents and tables up tomorrow.

On Saturday morning (from 10.00) we'd like to set up the two working tents. Any help would be much appreciated. This year we'll be parking in the Stack Yard. From the approach road turn right at the first farm building. Once the dig begins there'll be a 'Portaloo' there and the 'What 3 Words' location of the car park is **dome.definite.brambles**

The dig begins on Monday next week (3rd June) at 10.00 and we'll be there until 16.00 weather permitting. We'll be there on Tuesday and Wednesday too at the same times before we take Thursday and Friday off. We'll be back on site on Saturday 8th June and at the end of each day there'll be our usual dig diary for those who can't be there. Absolutely everyone is welcome, no need to book and no experience is required. All equipment is provided.



This year's volunteer subscriptions are :  
£30 for the month / £10 per week / £5 per day

### **Dig Diary - Day 1, 3rd June 2024**

Fantastic weather to begin this year's dig and so good to see a great turnout of volunteers together with new members of the group. The first photo shows our happy band of volunteers, I really hope they enjoyed the day. The topsoil was taken off our trenches by the digger last week and in trench 9 it was immediately apparent that there were stone structures at the topsoil/subsoil interface. With that in mind that's where Kristian, our professional archaeologist set us loose. Trench 9 is 10 metres x 10 metres and having a trench so wide allows us to work side by side enabling

newcomers and more experienced volunteers to work side by side. Very convivial. In no time we had exposed significant numbers of deliberately embedded and quite large stones. We're no wiser yet about when they were placed there but it's very early days. The drone photo shows how we've been working from right to left. There have been a few finds of pottery and animal bone but nothing very significant. Last year's dig took place at the same time of year and there wasn't any rain throughout. This year I doubt we'll be so lucky.



### **Dig Diary - Day 2, 4th June 2024**

Well, the forecasters got it spot on with heavy rain beginning almost exactly at midday curtailing our activities for a couple of hours. Fortunately we have good tent cover so at least we stayed dry. We'd already enjoyed a productive morning and by the end of the day we'd managed to 'clean' almost the entire surface of trench 9. At 100 square metres that's not bad going after just two days. As yesterday we're exposing an amazing amount of embedded stonework and as yet we're still no wiser about their purpose. Still a lot of topsoil to remove in a few places. There's a better weather forecast tomorrow so we'll be there from 10.00.



### **Dig Diary - Day 3, 5th June 2024**

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Another excellent day, a good turnout, a couple of new volunteers, our first visitors and no weather interruptions. More and more very significant stone arrangements including probable postholes, some large stones laid out in linear form but set at regular intervals and angle in the ground. We may also have another 'flagged' surface similar to that we found in 2023. Despite that there are still large areas that look a bit uninteresting so Kristian decided to have Deb and Ali dig a shallow test pit in one corner of our trench. This revealed that just a couple of inches deeper there were potentially interesting structures and so it's likely that we'll remove more soil from the whole surface of the trench. Still lots of developments to be had in trench 9. On Saturday Kristian would like to begin excavating trench 8. That's the long narrow trench that intersects the inner ditch and bank so a new experience for us all.



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### Dig Diary - Day 4, 8th June 2024



A bit of a frustrating day. Despite the cool feel to the weather the strong sun and wind combined to make things a bit difficult for us (though a good drying day for those doing the week's laundry). The surface bakes hard in no time and requires a lot of patience to break through with our trowels. Yet more stonework uncovered, much of it linear in the way it's been embedded. No significant artefacts to help us date these structures either. John HR has been working on a stone structure just alongside the west

edge of trench 9. There's more of that to be exposed tomorrow. We did have sufficient numbers of volunteers to finally begin cleaning up trench 8. There's absolutely no doubt that this is of Iron Age origin and we're hopeful to find organic material that can be radio carbon dated to establish with more accuracy about when during the Iron Age the ditch



and bank was constructed. Mind you, I'm not sure what Cat did to find herself confined to the naughty end of trench 8.

### Dig Diary - Day 5, 9th June 2024



A Convivial afternoon!  
Trench 8 Carol and Cat clearing back a thin surface of the ditch to ensure no potential post holes are missed....it's painstaking work which deserves a medal! When this is completed we will be able to go in aggressively and hopefully uncover artefacts such as animal bone, ceramics/pottery etc such as are usually seen in these ditches and these will provide us with dating evidence. Even at this high level our intrepid duo have recovered

several pieces of slag and a nice piece of pottery!



Trench 9: Continuing exposure of large, embedded stones. Although more are now



apparent, the structures are not clearly defined so no guess-work just disciplined troweling to gradually reveal patterns. What has now become more apparent is the likelihood we are in a different phase / area to the previous trenches. These have all been littered with animal bone, teeth, charcoal and slag and also evidence of burning: trench 9 on the other hand has produced only a handful of organic and other finds and this contrast is significant. There is always the exception of course and our photos show Meriel and a piece of bone embedded in the linear stonework at the western edge of the trench.

A good day's work made possible by the timely arrival of water thanks to Tom's efforts and witnessed by returning visitors who live locally and who are now

hoping to join in the dig.

### Dig Diary - Day 6, 10th June 2024

Things are warming up and I don't mean the weather. Thanks once again to Deb for putting together today's diary.

A really good turnout of volunteers today, meaning that we had plenty of bodies to throw into both trenches! (me: is this the right terminology under the circumstances?)

Trench 8 saw some hard-core mattocking from Barry and John whilst Byr and Carol proceeded to the deepest part of the trench and revealed a beautiful Mesolithic flint blade( photo over the next couple of days!). If this is mesolithic it becomes the oldest artefact we've ever found on this site.

In Trench 9 the large stones continue to appear : this is tantalising but we dare



not yet state a hypothesis. Increasing numbers of artefacts are being retrieved including bone, teeth and pottery. Most intriguing is this piece found by Ailsa which is reminiscent of Romano-British pieces found elsewhere.

Compare and contrast the two images attached.

The top one is

from today and seems to have some glaze. The bottom one is a confirmed piece of Samian ware found a couple of years ago at a site near Otterburn. We will get this checked out !

Special mention to Helen who, keeping up the Classical theme, worked like a Trojan painting the

boundary stones. Our very own Helen of Troy ! (am I taking this too far 😂). Thanks Helen.... A boring but essential job ticked off!



## Dig Diary - Day 7, 11th June 2024

Thanks to our professional archaeologist Kristian for today's dig diary. The attached photo shows an aerial view of trenches in relation to the area enclosed by the Iron Age ditch and bank system.

We have had a good turnout to site today, and the weather held for the most part, a short shower only occurring at the lunch break. This allowed us to proceed with excavations in both trenches, and make good progress. In Trench 9, further stone arrangements are emerging; some of these are embedded in dark sediment which must represent some sort of features. What continues to perplex us, though, is the paucity of animal bone. The trenches that we opened in previous field seasons has afforded us with a vast volume of faunal material. We have a few options that might explain this:

1. Different preservation conditions prevail at this part of the site
2. We have reached the outer periphery of the site, so there was less activity and therefore less cultural material



3. The features here derive from a different period than those that we have encountered before, and perhaps there was a different tradition of waste disposal

The first argument seems the least likely, because we would have to invoke some very peculiar geological processes, or agricultural practices, to explain why animal remains would not survive well. Moreover, we do have some animal remains and these are in rather good condition, which further impugns this argument. Arguing that the site is on

the periphery of the occupation area is more convincing, especially as we are indeed approaching the ditch-and-bank that defines the landward part of the site. Nevertheless, the volume of activity here recognised on the geophysical survey, and the stone arrangements and other features, does not agree with the postulate that this part of the site is peripheral. This leaves the third option as the most cogent for the moment. The

different period we may be dealing with is Early Medieval; this is suggested by the **possible** rectangular stone arrangement, considered vis-a-vis with the proximity to the grave. As it happens, few Early Medieval sites afford much cultural evidence. Do remember, though, that none of these options represent more than supposition. We shall have to prove or disprove these through our excavations. It is, however, worth considering such things to guide our inquiries.



The progress in Trench 8 has also been good, and the challenges here are less acute. To identify the

ditch, we chose to excavate in the centre and move outward to identify the edges. This is moving along well, but the edges are less clear than we had hoped; these may be somewhat obscured by backfilling with sterile clay, or siltation occurring through colluvial activity. The photo shows the relative locations of Trenches 8 and 9 within their prescribed areas and set inside the ditch and bank system.

### Dig Diary - Day 8, 12th June 2024

Many thanks once again to Deb for today's diary entry. A good turn out again and a big welcome to Sue who joined us for the first time! No showers and pleasant temperatures for working.

Trench 9 is much more exposed now revealing a busy Southern end in which multiple stones are embedded in more organic soils suggesting pits or postholes in places. The northern edge has given us further bone artefacts suggestive, as has been the case for the last two days, of burning/ cooking; the remainder of the trench is coming down nicely towards a uniform exposure of the surface.

Trench 8 was treated to a pragmatic decision to accelerate our understanding of the ditch by continuing to carefully trowel the south-facing wall whilst subjecting the north-facing wall



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to a 60cm x30cm sondage (Me: I had to look it up too!). The plan bore fruit and we now believe we have a visible cut on the north-facing wall and a visible stratigraphy in the sondage which Alistair is recording using photogrammetry. This gives us plenty to work on at the weekend!

### Dig Diary - Day 9, 15th June 2024

We must start today's diary on a serious note. Somehow this morning the gate into the field was not shut and the cattle escaped. Their safety is a matter of animal welfare for which we have a responsibility and the consequences for Tom and Karen could be awful. Please remember we are on a working farm and the needs of the farm and the animals are paramount. Our profuse apologies have been offered to Karen and Tom but this has to be backed up with vigilance and respect for the working environment.



The dig today welcomed new participants, Lorna and Tim. Trench 9 has been troweled back and has thus far produced 4 context areas with new finds including a very nice chunk of burnt flint found by Lorna.

Trench 8 has now delivered an edge allowing us to discern the extent of the trench cut and will be followed by further excavation downward and it's already showing 6 stratigraphic horizons, it's gonna be deep!!



Our photos show the progress in trench 9 and the heavy hitters in trench 8.

The other news is that once again we shall have a visit by children from Bailey Green School from Killingworth.

Prehistoric farming is on the current keystone 2 curriculum and so very relevant to them.



### Dig Diary - Day 10, 16th June 2024

Another excellent turnout of volunteers today. There was no work in Trench 8 but lots of progress in Trench 9. Still exposing a very significant amount of arranged stonework but still a baffling lack of clues as to their purpose. Several small pieces of burnt bone at the north margin of the trench indicative of an Iron Age hearth perhaps. At the southern edge a clearly defined circular structure unlike anything we've seen previously. This may contain a couple of pits. In between those we have linear patterns of very large stones. Perhaps when we've selected our features for further examination then sections and

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deeper excavation will be more helpful by finding artefacts typical of the periods. Last week we found a mesolithic flint blade that predates anything we have previously found on site. Perhaps dropped by a nomadic



hunter gatherer in their seasonal search for food.

### Dig Diary - Day 11, 17th June 2024



After a promising start and work going ahead in both active trenches the monsoon rain began at about 12.00. The more optimistic ones among us suggested that *'it's only a shower'* however an hour later it clearly wasn't, the trenches were flooded and so that was that for the day. It was going so well too with more and more clearly discernible features in trench 9 and some very clear separate fills in the walls of the deepest part of trench 8. Heavy going

for John HR and Barry but a promising development. If only we could unearth an interesting find or two that would fix a date. Maybe tomorrow.

### Dig Diary - Day 12, 18th June 2024

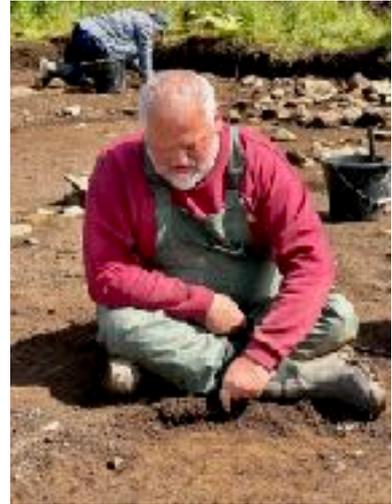


Yesterday's monsoon left its footprint on our trenches. Our deep trench 8 that penetrates the ditch and bank system was completely flooded and totally unsuitable for work. Just as well because our mattock and spade brigade weren't with us today. Trench 9 began wet but soon dried out in the sunshine (!! ) and our healthy number of volunteers soon got into their stride. At last it would appear that discrete features are emerging together with a few finds. Karen unearthed a piece of copper slag from the north end of the trench (photo 1). Not really diagnostic of its period of origin but guess it could be anything from Bronze age to Anglo-Saxon. Our mysterious, very circular

feature at the south end has been variously described as 'a pile o' rocks that's fallen over' (difficult to argue with that really!), a possible corn drying kiln and

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a possible Bronze Age burial cairn together with potential internal pits. We're confident that we'll find the answer before the end of the dig. Our second photo shows our guiding light Kristian showing us how it should be done. Tomorrow we are looking forward to a visit by pupils and staff from Bailey Green School, Killingworth, North Tyneside. As a community archaeology group we've formed a mutually beneficial partnership with them and it's great to have them here with lots of Iron Age related things for them to do. Thankfully a lovely weather forecast too.



### Dig Diary - Day 13, 19th June 2024



At some point during the last couple of weeks I seem to have lost a day (as pointed out by Pauline) so in fact today was Day 13. Not sure where it went but I'm putting it down to age. Today's been very different with a visit by children and staff from Bailey Green Primary School. The weather was warm and sunny for the most part which allowed us to offer lots of outdoor activities that included metal detecting, weaving, soil analysis and excavation all whilst dressed in mock Iron Age clothing. I'm sure they all enjoyed their day as did we and many thanks to all who participated.



Meanwhile it was business as usual in the trenches with more finds including bone from the depths of Trench 8 and a possible stone scraping tool from Trench 9. It's heavy going in Trench 8 but we believe that John HR and

George may have just reached the base.

### Dig Diary - Day 14, 22nd June 2024

We had a very small crew out on site today, but we were happy to welcome Elaine as a new volunteer. Because of the small number, we continued to expose features in Trench 9 where more animal bone was encountered,

particularly towards the northern end of the trench, where we have the stone arrangements and clear patches of charred material. Allan exposed two postholes, whereas Elaine and Tim worked on the east side of the drainage ditch and exposed further charred areas. We will continue to work these to see if they resolve themselves into pits, ditches, or even postholes. The conditions were difficult, as the welcome dry weather resulted in widespread drying of the cultural surface.



Most interesting today was the discovery of the drain in Trench 8. Although we are not especially fond of nineteenth or twentieth century drains, its discovery helped us to understand the large stones that we encountered in the upper levels of the sondage. It is clear, though, that the incision made to place the drain is very narrow; furthermore, it is quite salient, and we can see that it has disturbed little. Indeed, the drain lies above the dark, organic rich layer that has intrigued us – and in this layer are large stones, that must have been deliberately placed in prehistoric times. In short, the drain is an unwelcome intrusive element, but it has not disturbed the layers that we are most interested in, and the presumed basal layer

seems to contain some sort of structural evidence. Perhaps to support a post? Posts are known from some of the Iron Age ditches, so there is no reason to not expect such things. We can consider ourselves lucky that we situated the trench where we did, or we might have not encountered this.

The rich organic content bodes well for our flotation, and also for extracting material suitable for radiocarbon dating. We shall continue to work in this trench, exposing its full extent, and taking as much of the basal material as we can as bulk sediments for subsequent analysis. Unfortunately, no finds other than animal bone were encountered today; however, we are definitely on cultural surfaces in both of our excavation trenches.

### **Dig Diary - Day 15, 23rd June 2024**



A smallish team combined with the hot dry weather has made archaeology difficult today. The ground drying out almost as soon as it's been watered doesn't make for easy digging. Some progress in trench 8 and further removal of topsoil in Trench 9 has moved us closer to deciding which features merit further excavation.

However, the big news is that Tom and Karen have kindly given us permission to extend this year's dig until Sunday 14th July. We expect a lot of progress from here

as proper excavation begins in trench 9. We're expecting a bigger team tomorrow but the weather remains hot. The photo is all the evidence needed to show the conditions.

### **Dig Diary - Day 16, 24th June 2024**

A bigger team out on what has been a very hot day for archaeology. Despite that there have been finds that potentially make this a quite extraordinary site. The further depths of trench 8, our delve into the inner of the two ring ditches is revealing a stone structure that may be a path. The narrow exploratory hole we've dug will be expanded accordingly. The first photo shows our intrepid diggers at work (conversely they may just be keeping out of the sun!). In trench 9 we've unearthed iron nails (photo 2) but it's difficult to assign and age to them at this stage. There's also been a find of a flint blade (photo 3) that Kristian believes may be another from the Mesolithic period. Kristian has suggested that we may be close to some ephemeral Stone Age settlement, a possibility to bear in mind. Dose our site go back even further than we thought?

Away from the site itself, in an adjacent part of the farm, work has begun on the construction of the interpretive Iron Age roundhouse that has a 'footprint' based on our investigations of the past couple of years. The interpretation boards that will surround the structure look terrific. More to follow on this story.

### **Dig Diary - Day 17, 25th June 2024**



Another very warm day and a good sized team out has meant lots of progress today. As mentioned the exploratory digging into trench 8 has been enlarged to show an organic rich basal layer (photo 1). We're confident that this will provide is with material that can be useful to us in our post dig phase. In trench 9 more 'cleaning' has revealed bone in the south west corner and a ditch



surrounding the feature at the north end. This is very reminiscent of the linear sequence of four round houses we've investigated in previous years. The earlier finding of Romano British pottery in this area supports this theory. Today's second photo shows the team hard at work in this area. We hope that tomorrow we'll begin to investigate the potential Bronze Age cairn (our mysterious pile of stones!) on the central southern edge of trench 9. I'm sure that eventually we'll reach

some sort of conclusion about its likely purpose. There's a bit of rain in the forecast for early tomorrow morning that should pass through quickly. All being well that will give us perfect conditions for archaeology particularly as the temperature is expected to be a bit more like we're used to in this part of the world.

### **Dig Diary - Day 18, 26th June 2024**



There's been lots of progress today thanks to the cooler, more overcast conditions. The focus of attention has been on Trench 9 where we've revealed possible pits, post holes and ditches, one of which could be part of the mysterious palisade that we've been searching for since the geophysical survey done in 2018. The first photo shows the discolouration in the surface caused we think by the palisade that would fit perfectly with where we thought it should be. Since early in this year's dig we've come to believe the palisade could have been a third ditch that's concentric with the two outer ditches. Hopefully we'll find dateable material or artefacts within both that will tell us whether the ditches existed at the same time.

Kristian has now identified and marked the features in trench 9 that he believes are worthy of excavation (photo 2). We'll now attempt to disassemble, section and record these features and it's during this phase of the dig that we expect to recover more artefacts.

### **Dig Diary - Day 19, 29th June 2024**



A sunny Saturday which saw us entertain 7 very enthusiastic visitors to the site which is so very welcome.

On site, 6 of us enjoyed the chance to finally excavate in Trench 9. The ditch which was clearly shown in the evening drone photograph on Wednesday was tackled and appears to have several potential post holes/pots in association to

it. Kristian is very excited by these ! They have been exposed with careful troweling but what are they and what is their relationship to the ditch, if any?! To be continued.

On Feature 16, the concentric circles, those stones which were not embedded were removed and the entire surface was troweled revealing an extensive area

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of burning around the periphery. The upper levels produced more burnt bone and animal tooth and it also established that the eastern 'side' has been clipped by the Victorian drain causing some commingling and contamination on that small part of the feature but at least this has been clarified.

The picture shows the feature in 'before' mode. It has been soaked in advance of an 'after' drone image to be taken in the morning. This will help us decide how we shall proceed with excavation.

### Dig Diary - Day 20, 30th June 2024



An excellent day of archaeology with a strong crew and perfect weather. We have drone images from Allan and Alistair and the luxury of Alistair's photogrammetry to support our efforts.

The focus was on Trench 9 where the ditch has produced 6 posthole/pits and saw Carole, Lorna, Allan, Ethan and Kristian working at full tilt.

Over in F20

- w h i c h

remains quite a mystery-if you show Byr a partially excavated bone she'll produce a whopper with meticulous troweling! ...and she did, with Pauline and Janet completing the task to provide us with a large faunal bone.

F16 the possible cairn was trowelled back by John and Deb giving us reason to believe we can hopefully drop the 'possible' and simply refer to the cairn! There was lots of burnt bone and other finds which Alistair has been recording with uncompromising accuracy which all goes on our digital record.



### Dig Diary - Day 21, 2nd July 2024



We had a good turnout today, so we made a lot of progress. In Trench 8, we have a thick organic deposit providing us with animal bone: one fragment was clearly broken for marrow extraction. In this deposit, Alan Davison pulled out some wood. We shall have a good selection of organic material to date this wonderful deposit.

In Trench 9, more animal bone has appeared: two large fragments, one found by Anne, which seems to derive

from a large mammal. Deb is working away in the presumed cairn, whereas Byr has exposed some square stones in the SW corner which look as if they were dressed. Lots of pits and postholes, which we are now excavating. All in all, we have had an extremely productive day and the following week looks full of promise.

### Dig Diary Day 22 - 3rd July 2024



Today's excellent turnout of volunteers had a very good day, busy with Trench 9. Lots of animal bone is emerging, and we are also investigating the pits and postholes – which are more complex, and much deeper than we had initially suspected. Deb continues to excavate the pit in the presumed cairn, which sadly is looking less and less like one! Byr has found a fascinating feature in

the SW corner of the trench, which seems to be a very well emplaced circular structure. The large ditch, which may be our palisade, was exposed by Karen so we expect a great deal out of that!

Today's photos show a piece of embedded stone being carefully removed, the circular stone structure that's being worked on by Byr and one of the deeper than expected post holes.



### Dig Diary day 23 - 6th July 2024

Today marked the beginning of our final week and it's going to take a big push to meet our objectives by Sunday 14th, our last working day. Weather permitting, we intend to be there every day, forgoing our usual two rest days of Thursday and Friday. An announcement will be made in the dig diary if we have any potential problems with the weather.

Trench 8 that penetrates the inner ring ditch has given us what we wanted, lots of potentially dateable organic material. However, trench 9 has become enigmatic. It's so complex and features are proving difficult to differentiate from one another. Other features that are discrete aren't giving up any clues about their likely origins and purpose. All of this could be because we are looking at a trench that includes evidence of activity from perhaps 2 or 3 different historic periods, maybe Bronze Age to Romano-British. The first photo shows Kristian and Deb deep in



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thought about what we think is potentially a Bronze Age cairn. The rest of us have spent the day exposing probable ditches that separate different areas and features (photo 2). This will continue tomorrow when we also want to 'section' some of the pits that have become apparent.

Finally here are links that have been put together by our technical whizz, Alistair, using drone, camera and computer to create 3D images of the two trenches and two of the features within trench 9. For those who haven't been able to volunteer or visit

they are the next best thing to actually being there.

Trench 8

<https://skfb.ly/oYnrF>

Trench 9

<https://skfb.ly/oXZOW>

Feature in south west corner of trench 9

<https://skfb.ly/oYnGM>

Possible cairn (central on south edge of trench 9)

<https://skfb.ly/oY7nn>

### Dig Diary Day 24 - 7th July 2024



Our weekend turnouts of volunteers haven't been great but there were still enough of us today to make progress on some of our more notable features (we'll give some thought about the best 5 days of the week for our digs before next time). The possible Bronze Age burial cairn idea has come and gone over the last few days but today it may be on the way to revival. Deb, who's overseeing this feature today unearthed a stone of startling



red colour, the like of which we've not seen anywhere on site previously, together with a very small piece of burnt ceramic. Just maybe we're back in the race. Both are shown in

today's photos. Kristian and Carole have been working on a pit at the bottom of which has been found an enormous piece of animal bone (photo 3). Meanwhile, work has begun on sectioning the suspected inner palisade ditch. More on that tomorrow.

The day was curtailed an hour early by a 30 minute drenching that left the trench unworkable but the final photo shows we had good warning of the storm's arrival



### Dig Diary Day 25 - 8th July 2024

Lots of sunshine around today and lovely conditions for archaeology. Once again a good turnout of volunteers and lots of effort. But as trench 9 has proved effort doesn't correlate with understanding. We firmly believe that the mystery palisade divides trench 9 roughly from west to east and the day began where yesterday left off with a fairly light handed approach to exposing the feature. After a couple of hours of scraping with trowels and with little to show, the big guns with spades were summoned after lunch to create two slit sections. Hopefully this will give us direction sooner rather than later. The complex mix of ditches and pits continues to frustrate our understanding and one feature of this year's dig is the depth to which some of these pits extend (photo 1). The startlingly red



stone find of yesterday does indeed appear to be a very large piece of red ochre. It's the size of a house brick and weighs even more. We suspect this may have been an important object to someone in its day whenever that was.

We now have only a few days left to make sense of trench 9 and we feel that it's quite unlikely that we'll reach any firm conclusions by the end of play on Sunday. It's likely that we'll backfill this trench with a plan to return to it next year. The complexity of this trench is more than explained in the drone photo taken at the end of today.

### Dig Diary Day 26 - 11th July 2024

After two days of weather enforced 'rest' it was back on site for what turned out to be a very exciting day. John HR continued work on Trench 8, in an endeavour to reach the bottom after the heavy rains. This involved digging through the rich organic layer that lies at the base of the ditch, and shortly into this work, animal bone began to emerge. In the end, we collected large quantities of cattle remains, including long bones and the sacrum-coccyx, as well as ribs and so forth. It was a pleasant surprise to find so much concentrated faunal material in exceptionally good condition, but also to collect large samples of the organic rich deposit. Moreover, Malcolm was cleaning and inspecting the bone and saw clear cut marks on them which attest to butchery. The ditch will be subject to soil samples in the hope of understanding how that rich basal layer formed.



In Trench 9, we continued in the sections and have now inferred that we are dealing with a very large ditch that is an extremely good candidate for the palisade. We shall not have sufficient time to investigate this as much as we would like, but we will have a working sample to guide our excavations next year. Animal remains have been encountered in this, too, so we should have a good selection of material for radiocarbon dating.

## Dig Diary Day 27 - 12th July 2024

Another very productive day and pleasant weather conditions on site. The large number of burned cattle bones found yesterday were in remarkably good shape. We think this is because of the conditions deep in trench 8 that has kept them covered in a layer of wet mud and therefore probably anaerobic. Perhaps the deepest part of trench 8 was under water even 2000 years ago and would explain why they are so well preserved. We expect that they will deteriorate quite rapidly unless we take action now and Malcolm has spent the day preparing each individual bone ready for radiocarbon dating as soon as possible (photo 1). One of this year's objectives had been to determine the age of the inner ditch and bank system and if radiocarbon dating is successful then this objective will have been achieved. Another final task was accomplished today when Deb and Jamie drew and formally recorded trench 8. No mean task with such a deep feature.



Meanwhile the rest of us concentrated on trench 9 (photo 2) and towards the end



of the day we believe we finally established the structure of the palisade that runs west to east across the middle of the trench. It would appear to be a remarkable piece of prehistoric engineering to create a deep ditch held in place by deeply embedded stonework.

Immediately adjacent to the palisade ditch Carole has spent several days unearthing a large cattle bone that was fully exposed and successfully

removed today. It turned out to be a scapula, a bone thought to have been used for digging (though scraping is more likely). It would be nice to think that this had been one of the prehistoric tools used to create the palisade.

The weather tomorrow isn't looking great but we'll have a pitch inspection in the morning. Sunday looks better at the moment and it would be a shame if the weather ruined the last two days of this year's dig. Let's hope it doesn't.



## Dig Diary Day 28 - 13th July 2024

It's an early report today because unfortunately the rain has beaten us. We gave it a go but a very sad looking trench 9 met us that although not flooded was too wet to work safely. With heavy rain forecast for the next 24 hours Kristian has made the

## Hunting Hall Dig Diary 2024

reluctant decision to call a halt to this year's dig a couple of days earlier than we would have liked. Having said that the last few days have been really productive in that we now have been able to turn a few 'possibles' into 'probables'. We think we've finally revealed a section of the elusive palisade and its structure for which we've been searching since 2019. It appears to have been a semicircular ditch about 2 metres wide and just less than 1 metre deep held together by beautifully constructed stone banking. We hope now to date this to see if it's from the same period as the double ditch and bank system or, as is more likely, earlier.

This week also saw the unearthing of a very significant collection of well preserved cattle bones from the depths of the inner of the two enclosing ditches. We hope that we can use radiocarbon dating to give us some idea when these ditches were in use though I'm not sure whether we'll ever be able to say when they were constructed.

That's left us with three distinct features to return to in trench 9, one of which being the possible burial cairn. The work on this requires great patience and so we've decided to leave this marked and ready to continue next year.

Despite the relatively poor weather and the disappointing last couple of days we still feel that this year's dig has been very successful and many thanks to everyone who has made it so. As always, a very special thanks to Tom and Karen, owners of Hunting Hall Farm, for allowing us to enjoy our hobby in such magnificent surroundings. Hope to see you all again next year.