

At CAC Kids outing to Stokeleigh Camp, and Astrokids - "Drama of the highest order!"



The team, note how The Agricola matches Georges jacket

Stokeleigh Camp is fast becoming one of our favourite Iron Age sites, a spectacular bi-vallate hill fort with superb views over to Clifton Camp and observatory, a perfect length of walk for a winters afternoon andmud!



Mud

Meeting on a lovely crisp afternoon, a fortuitous and welcome respite from the weekend storms, we headed for the entrance of the hill fort and perched ourselves on the bank with mugs of hot chocolate to give some thought to all things Iron Age. One of the many fascinating things about the Iron Age is that, in what effectively was a prehistoric society we start to get a literary glimpse of Britain through travellers, such as Pytheas the Greek, and somewhat, later, the Romans Caesar and Tacitus. We decided that Tacitus would be our guide for the afternoon. George read an excerpt from The Agricola to the obvious delight and wonderment of the group. He picked the passage where Tacitus describes the climate of Britain as "wretched, with frequent rains and mists...." No change there then, although maybe his statement that in winter the sun never rises was a tad of an exaggeration. We also learnt that in a Britain made up of many kingdoms, the lack of royal cooperation was a strategic failing when it came to battling off the Roman Empire.

Bristol was the home of a tribe known as the Dobunni, who were not warlike at all and indeed capitulated to Rome before the “invasion” in 55AD. It is these, seemingly peaceful people, who occupied Stokeleigh Camp. The Dobunni were also, incidentally, amongst the first British tribes to mint coins.



Gripping stuff from George

With our brains full of Iron Age wisdom and George finally bringing his reading to a close, (top marks for enthusiasm though!) it was time for some real fun (or what we like to call experimental archaeology) as the CAC Kids headed for the biggest puddle available. Here they gained some hands on, and in some cases, bottoms on, experience of life in a hill fort during the winter.

From here, after some den construction, or maybe deconstruction, and most of the saplings still just about in place, we headed back through a holloway to the cars.

Returning to Brentry for tea, crumpets and sausages, we were lucky again as the skies cleared for some Astrokids activities. We enjoyed beautiful views of a thin crescent moon, the terminator (where night meets day on the moon) ran straight through Mare Crisium, the Sea of Crises, casting superb shadows across nearby craters and really bringing out the detail. The rest of the moon was beautifully bathed in earthshine, moonlight reflecting back from the Earth.

There is an interesting story about Mare Crisium. On 21st July 1969, as Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were taking man’s first footsteps on the moon at the nearby Sea of Tranquillity, the (unmanned) Russian Luna 15 was also in the area, and indeed, crash landed into Mare Crisium on that very day. Luna 15 was on a mission to land and return to Earth with rock samples. Both the Apollo and Luna missions were being monitored from Jodrell Bank and tapes of this extraordinary event were released in 2009, in which one of the controllers at Jodrell Bank can be heard to proclaim – “I say, this has been drama of the highest order”. We wonder what the Americans were saying!

Back on Earth at the Astrokids observatory, Jupiter was high in the sky, the two brownish orange equatorial cloud belts clearly visible and the Galilean moons strung out on either side. Europa was tucked in close as we contemplated the bizarre fact that not only is this moon volcanically active, but has vast supplies of water. If life were to exist anywhere else in the solar system, this would be the most likely place.

Dylan Pritchett showed fantastic enthusiasm for the CAC telescope and wins the prize for the most detailed description of what he was observing. Hannah came a close second for the acuity of her vision – she could actually see the holes in the cheese! Jaimee also proved a keen observer of Jupiter; it is great to see that our Astrokids really are now “observing” rather than just looking through the telescope.



Dylan zooming in on the moon



Sam Ellwood – we can only assume he is expressing some dissatisfaction with the eye relief!

Even the adults were impressed with the views through our magnificent telescope. All in all this was a great start to the new CAC Kids year. The Iron Age will feature quite a lot in 2014, and the words from contemporary explorers and historians will be accompanying us on our travels throughout the year. We have certainly moved on from those early trips of trying to fly balsa wood aeroplanes at Stanton Drew and the CAC Kids are now clearly ready for some serious research – more on this later!

The next event will be our annual Big Trip, this year to Cornwall. For those coming, keep your eye on the e-mail for updates.