



The Team

Our traditional winter walk and first event for 2016 was a return to Stokeleigh Camp in Leigh Woods for a journey back to the Iron Age. We were lucky to have some drizzly Iron Age weather to give an authentic feel to life in an Iron Age winter (some might recall George's reading of Tacitus on this subject last time we visited), and equally lucky to have Dr Jac Wilson with us. Jac has conducted research at Stokeleigh and is an Iron Age/Roman expert.

Convening at the camp itself, we stormed the ramparts and it quickly became apparent how well defended Iron Age Hill Forts were. After over 2000 years of silting up the bank and ditches are still steep and would have been formidable in their day, particularly with the wooden palisade on the top. "Palisade" was one of two key terms for the day for the Young Archaeologists to learn. The second was "revetment".



Once safely inside the hill fort, we reconvened at the site of the Bristol University excavations, plans were distributed and Jac gave us an introduction to all things Iron Age.

We discussed the rather outdated idea that hill forts were purely defensive which is not necessarily true. There is little evidence of conflict at hill forts and it is generally thought that the Iron Age was a time of relative peace and prosperity. This was a point also reiterated at our visit to Castell Henlyss, all those years ago in Pembrokeshire.

From here we set off in search of revetment, stone supporting the bank, and an entrance seemed a good place to start. And we were right



An introduction and taking some bearings



Dylan, George, Hannah and a fine example of revetment.



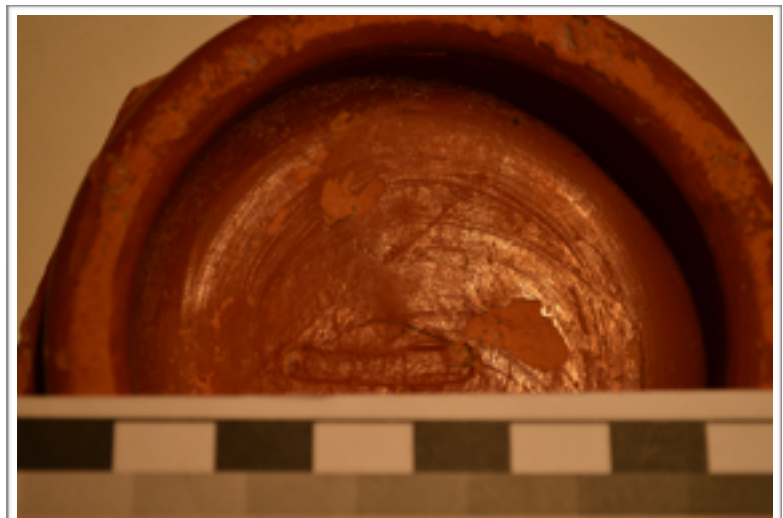
....and we are sure there is revetment somewhere in here as well !



Next up it was time to get the time line out to put our prehistoric ages into some perspective and to warm us up with some racing through time back as far as the Mesolithic. It was also an opportunity to get the hot chocolate and biscuits out.



It was by now rather chilly and damp so we retired to the (reconstructed) Bronze Age hut nearby for some more hot drinks and artefact handling. From her bag, Jac produced a variety of pottery, including Severn Valley Ware, Black Burnished Ware, New Forest Ware and some wonderful imported Samian Ware. This was great, we had bits of an amphora, a flagon and cup. Samian Ware has identifiable potter's stamps and we were able to borrow a sample to research under the microscope at home.



There's our potter's mark, now we just need to check it against the Leeds catalogue of 400,000 marks. Scale is cm. Actually, even under the finest of quality CAC magnifying glasses, we were unable to make out any characters

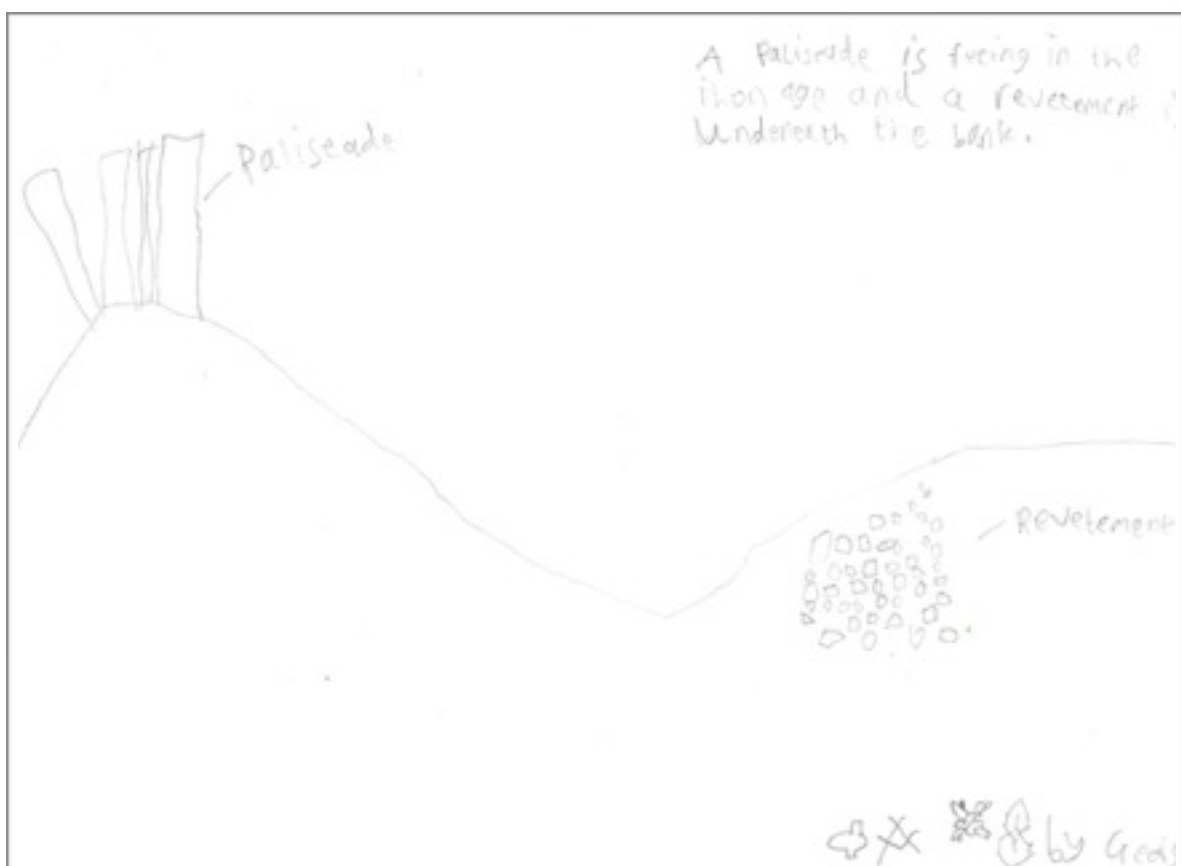
Jac also had some Roman and Iron Age coins to examine and some amazing iron Age broaches.

This was the perfect spot for some more discussion, contemplation and running around with sticks. One curious topic that did crop up was that of Frumentarii, as it does in all polite society. Frumentarii were the Roman Secret Service; MI V perhaps. Spies would mingle with the local British population sending back information on territory, tactics and the overall state of allegiance to Rome.

It is amazing to think of the Dobunni, the tribe that lived in the Bristol and Gloucestershire area, with Roman Frumentarii mingling in unbeknownst to them. Next time we spot a suspiciously tanned gentlemen cradling a cappuccino and reading the latest Virgil epic in Coffee No. 1, we shall know to keep our voices down.

Another interesting fact was one of roads - always one answer to the "what the Romans did for us" question. Many roads were already laid down before the Romans arrived, the Romans simply improved them. In the past we have visited and given much thought to that great Neolithic road - The Ridgeway, but rarely have we considered rolling on down the Iron Age highway. We should.

As with all trips, we encouraged everybody to put their artistic talents to the test and this produced a fine illustration of our palisade and revetment:



and a fantastic artists impression of Iron Age life inside a hill fort, complete with, as the observant reader will spot, a Frumentarii skulking in the corner. Clearly quite new to the world of Roman espionage, his presence is clearly given away by the absence of an Iron Age hat, and maybe just a little over enthusiasm on the smiling front.



Not a bad turn out for a damp winter Sunday afternoon

This was an excellent outing, thank you to all who came along, and particularly to Jac for bringing this fascinating time to life. We have plans afoot for more Iron Age/Roman activity in the Westbury on Trym area in the summer.