

From excavation to exhibition within six months: the 2024 ‘Mammoth Graveyard’ dig at Cerney Wick in Gloucestershire, UK. *Powered by volunteers!*

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Cerney Wick in Gloucestershire, UK, is a nationally significant palaeontological site that has produced a rich vertebrate assemblage (including mammoth, horse, rhino and bovid bones as well as flint handaxes) from a buried river channel that is approximately 214,000 years old. In addition, the underlying Jurassic Kellaways Sand Formation has yielded exceptionally well-preserved fossils (about 165 million years old) that provide new information on the stratigraphy of the area. The site offered an unrivalled opportunity for the palaeontological and archaeological communities to work together to understand the context and significance of this site and the evolution of the Upper Thames Valley during the Pleistocene and recover unique fossils and stone tools from an area that had not been comprehensively investigated. The aim of the 2024 excavation (which involved 168 volunteers working over three weeks) was to build on previous investigations in the area, and specifically to provide training for students in all aspects of palaeontological fieldwork and onsite conservation techniques. The recovered material will be donated to appropriate local museums for research and display as an important part of our nation’s geological/archaeological heritage. This will raise awareness of the significance of this site and highlight the vital role of sand and gravel quarrying in the Cotswold Lakes area without which such sites would not be discovered.

Within six months of the 2024 excavation all the finds were conserved, prepared and put on temporary display in the nearby Corinium Museum in Cirencester. This work was undertaken by members of the team of volunteers that had excavated the site. The exhibition was a resounding success.



2024 Site Facts: • 168 signed-up participants on site, 60 of which had no previous experience in fieldwork • 20 Universities represented • 6 museums represented by staff, volunteers, students • 55 visitors (not including Hill’s quarry staff) including Drs and Professors, a Dame & an Earl! • 3 x flint Hand Axe finds • Ice Age finds include Mammoth, Horse, Bison & Rhino • Jurassic finds include a marine Crocodile, Plesiosaur, Hybodus Shark & Ammonites (and other Kellaways material) • Busiest day was Sat 27th July with 52 volunteers working on site • 4 ‘raffle ticket’ books were used – over 700 tickets were issued, one to each find • Approx. 280 breakfast baps made by Andy at Mammoth Munchies between 07.00-0.800 over 24 days. • Over 400 sandwiches made for lunches throughout the dig. • T-shirt sales: Helpful Mammoth x 30 & Heartbeat Mammoth x 31 (proceeds helped to cover some of the costs) • Most importantly, the accident book remained empty - there were no reported incidents!

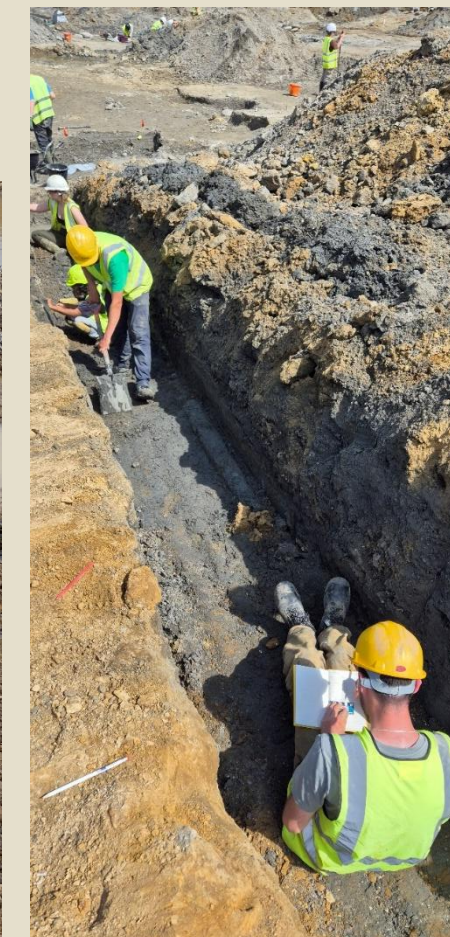
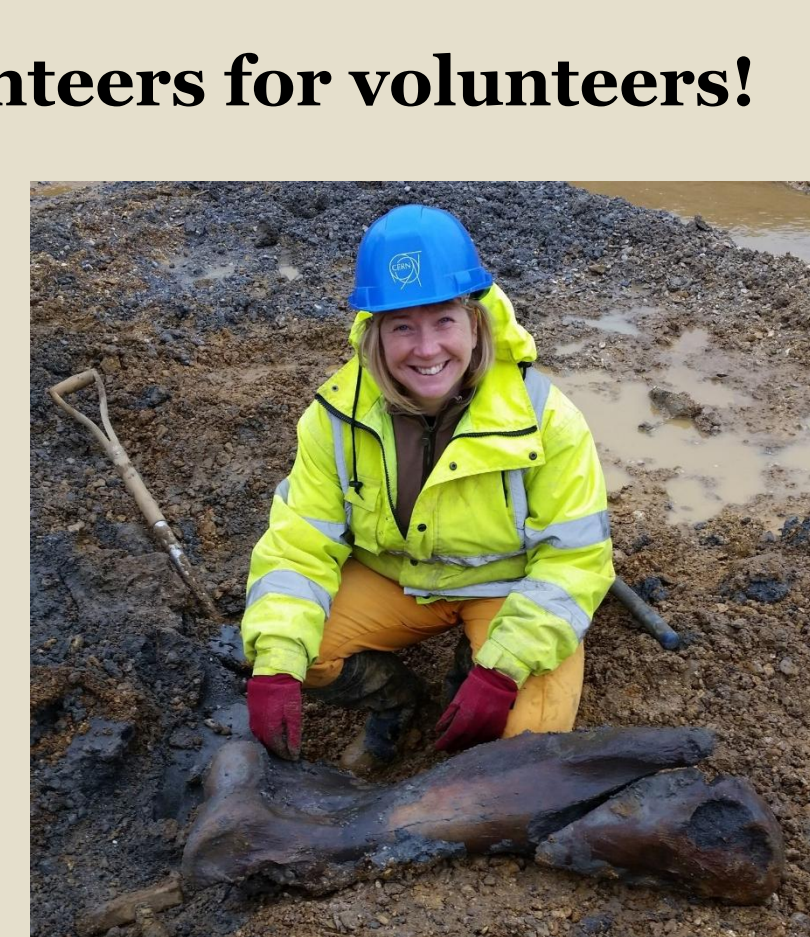


Skills: This site provided a unique opportunity for volunteer palaeontologists and archaeologists (of all ages, not just young students) to collaborate and share their skills and knowledge. A further goal was to raise awareness of the site’s significance and show how sand and gravel quarrying creates rare opportunities to advance our understanding of geological and palaeontological history for the benefit of both science and the wider public. Dozens of videos were shared on multiple social media platforms of participants talking about their work, the finds they had made, and what they had learnt on site. The experience of communicating science was an important strand of the project. You can find the videos using the hashtag: #TuskForce

All the participants: • Recovered important fossils for research, heritage, and legacy • Worked in multidisciplinary teams to exchange knowledge • Developed fossil identification skills in a real-world context • Participated in communicating science • Learnt practical field skills in archaeology, palaeontology and geology such as: excavation techniques, understanding and recording stratigraphy, plotting finds using different techniques, photogrammetry scanning, cataloguing specimens, and conservation ethics & procedures.



Extra-curricular activities: Every evening there was a palaeo/archaeo-themed talk, demonstration or show & tell, or live music. Also: a free air show (the nearby Royal International Air Tattoo), bird spotting, and late-night science: animal spotting with a UV torch, photographing Glow Worms, stargazing, International Space Station tracking, viewing Saturn. Plus; sunsets, misty mornings, thunderstorms, heatwaves, flying and collapsing gazebos, 3D scanning specimens, interviews with BBC & ITV, and disco-dancing dinosaurs!



References: Hogue, J.T., Wilkinson, K.N., Allison, E., Hill, T., Knul, M.V., Law, M., Perez-Fernandez, M., Russ, H., Schreve, D., Sherriff, J.E. and Toms, P., 2023. Pleistocene environments, climate, and human activity in Britain during Marine Isotope Stage 7: insights from Fields, Cerney Wick, Gloucestershire. *Journal of Quaternary Science*, 38(6), pp.840-865.

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