

Atop East Lomond, a familiar hill for most of us, there is currently an archaeological excavation in progress that will change the way we see this iconic Fife landmark forever. A trial excavation undertaken in 2014 uncovered previously unknown and unrecorded evidence of human activity around the summit of East Lomond, revealing evidence of long-term occupation of a hillfort, with further discoveries such as the remains of a kiln and a horse's bridle bit indicating the high status of those who occupied it. The 2017 project aims to discover more about the hillfort and uncover details of those who lived there.

The organisers of the excavation kindly opened up the site to several groups of school pupils and we were lucky to be among them. We, a group of twelve Bell Baxter pupils, were given the opportunity to spend the day at the site, learn about their discoveries and even have a go at digging ourselves!

We arrived at the East Lomond car park mid-morning, having taken a bus from school. We were met by volunteers and given an overview of the site and their progress, as well as a look at some of the burnt bone and charcoal they'd managed to uncover. Then, it was a tramp up to the site, all the while being given interesting information about the area. One thing that became very clear was the sheer breadth and depth of knowledge that our supervisors had about the Lomond area, something they shared with us freely. We met up with Dr Oliver O'Grady, the Lead Archaeologist for the project, who encouraged us to develop our own theories about the past, based on what we could see in the land and the evidence presented. This was something he encouraged us to do throughout our visit, which helped us to fully engage with the archaeology.

After a quick tour of the digsite, the group was split in half, one group going up to the summit of East Lomond, and the other having a chance to start digging. After lunch, the groups reversed. Both activities were exceedingly interesting and fun, and again we were all impressed by the incredible observations and knowledge demonstrated by the archaeologists and volunteers. Although none in our group made any groundbreaking discoveries- the most exciting moment was the uncovering of some white flint- all of us had an amazing time. The chance to dig in a real trench, in one of the most exciting archaeological projects in Scotland was incredible and we all had a lot of fun scraping away in the dirt.

Yet, memories of a fun experience were not all that our group took away from the trip. We certainly gained a lot of knowledge about things like charcoal, slag and Pictish hillforts, but we also gained a new way of looking at the land about us. Something that Dr O'Grady talked about was finding the right way of interpreting the land, listening to what it was telling you. He was pointing out seemingly innocuous curves and ditches in the land as evidence of old walls or fortifications. As soon as it was pointed out, it seemed obvious, yet if he hadn't been there none of us would have drawn that conclusion.

All in all, the trip was a fantastic experience which we would all certainly recommend to anyone with an interest in history or archaeology. And we'd like to extend a big 'thank you!' to the Falkland Stewardship Trust for giving us this opportunity.