

SILBURY HILL CONSERVATION PROJECT

Update 8: progress for 2nd – 6th July 2007

Progress through the tunnel was initially rapid this week; we have now reached ring 59 and the tunnel has started to widen. At this point we are also now beyond the last of the roadstone Atkinson used as backfill in 1969.

The roadstone has given way to a clay and chalk backfill which appears to be some of Atkinson's spoil (material removed by his team during the 1968 excavation) which has subsequently been used to backfill the tunnel. This is likely to be a small compacted 'plug', against which the roadstone was packed. What lies beyond this 'plug' is believed to be a combination of voids and old collapsed material, although this remains to be seen.



Engineers checking the tunnel sides

The compacted plug spoil has slowed the working pace for the engineers, since the roadstone was of a much looser matrix than this fill. The spoil, due to its clay/chalk mix, has solidified to a much greater extent making it harder to remove.

We have now reached the first phase of the construction of Silbury Hill, or Silbury I. As with the second phase of the mound, discussed in earlier updates, a third bank is visible in the tunnel sections and this forms part of Silbury I. The bank is of a similar make-up, size, and shape as the bank surrounding Silbury II, despite the vast size differences between the mound phases themselves. As before, earthworms are still present within the mound at this point.



Ortho Images of the Old Land Surface (shown as the grey band)

The original Neolithic ground surface has become a subject of heightened interest amongst the experts within the last few days. The clearly visible thin seam of blue/grey clay has now been sampled and taken away for further study. At first inspection this seam appears to be alluvial in nature although this is unlikely to be the case due to its location within the landscape on a hill. Another theory is that this material may be imported; however extensive research on the sample by our geoarchaeologist is needed to provide a conclusive answer.



Work continues in earlier areas of the tunnel, cleaning the sections to establish relationships between visible contexts.

An Archaeologist working in an earlier section of the tunnel



The Rover filming the tunnel

The Rover has been used in our investigations again this week. The Rover was run along the roof shoring above the tunnel to allow us a better view of the areas above. Clips of this footage will be incorporated by Chris Corden in a future video update.

Finds and Environmental News

This week has been relatively quiet in terms of the quantity of finds discovered. With the end of the Atkinson roadstone fill, there has been more old collapse material within the tunnel for the Finds Team to process, however there appear to be less artefacts within these contexts. 41 fragments of antler were found this week by the Finds Team. These fragments had originated from within the same context, although they were not found as a 'cache'. Other mound fill processed by the Finds Team comprised of a series of very large contexts. These contexts yielded no artefacts other than a small piece of bone; the size of which will hinder the identification of the species.

A much earlier flint flake was recovered from collapsed hill material between rings 42 and 46. This flake probably dates to the Mesolithic period (the period from c. 10,000BC – 4,000BC), and may suggest that activity occurred in the area before the hill was constructed.

Finds from the 1969 tunnel backfill include drinks bottles, a junction box and a plumb-bob. The spoil material that succeeds the roadstone fill within the tunnel will be sampled by the Team and analysed for useful

information. Due to its nature as spoil, i.e. material previously analysed in 1968, it will not be fully searched by the Team. It is unlikely any information could be obtained from this material as it could have originated from any area within the tunnel and thus cannot be pinpointed to a specific location.