



ENGLISH HERITAGE

STONEHENGE

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NEWSLETTER

MARCH

A HUMAN HENGE EXPERIENCE

This is an archaeology and well-being project, involving the Restoration Trust, Richmond Fellowship, National Trust, English Heritage and Bournemouth University. It is for people recovering from mental health issues, and is aided by Richmond Fellowship support workers.

We all have 'dark times' in our lives and these can knock us back to varying degrees. The help of other people is usually the way forward but it is not always easy to reach out for or to obtain. There is often the urge to shut oneself away. So imagine being in that state and being offered a place on a course with a group of people unknown to you and with little idea of what would happen on the course – a bit daunting. What you do know it will be around Stonehenge and involve being out in the countryside.



My role in this project was to try to make sure all the details that came from English Heritage worked, to be part of the group and to do my best for them. The first meeting was to get to know each other. There were about a dozen participants, some of whom were very good at speaking to everyone which was good to see. A warm relationship developed quickly due in part to the group urge to do so and the leadership of Yvette & Danny. One or two people did not participate on the first day but very quickly blossomed over the next few weeks which was wonderful to see. One or two did drop out.

A strong bond developed and I particularly remember one of the middle sessions (10 in total, 4 hours a week) in which I got them building and daubing a fence. They worked in teams and I issued black marks when they forgot something and they issued some to me when I missed out a step. It was a lovely atmosphere of relaxed banter of what seemed to me, a group of people at peace with each other.

This bond was highlighted in a later session in which a TV crew came to visit us. The organiser had gone to some lengths the previous week to discuss this as it is a definite intrusion which could spoil the atmosphere. It was a question of balancing the good it would do to support future projects and disruption to the group. The group worked out some ground rules for the session and it took place. In that same session, before the TV arrived, was particularly memorable because we went to the King Barrow ridge and walked over one of these remarkably high barrows. As the view on the other side became visible, there was Alphonse, a Cameroon Balafon player, making some wonderful resonant music. We knew we would meet Alphonse at some stage but this was a lovely surprise. A Balafon is like a xylophone or vibraphone and we danced in a circle around him as he played. Tim Darvill talked to us about how it is thought that the spaces between barrows were very important as places for people to gather to say farewell to the dead and celebrate their life. This was one of a number of times Tim came to speak to us which he always did in a very clear and entertaining way.

Another of those was a walk on the Cursus at night. We started around 7pm with a clear sky and shining stars much as might have been seen in ancient times (apart from the distant light of cars on the A303). We walked and talked of the magnitude of the task in making the cursus. As we turned back an hour or so later the mist rolled in and gave a wonderful ghostly feel to the place, and I wondered if perhaps we might go back in time!

Through the 10 weeks we got closer and closer to Stonehenge until we went inside early one morning soon after the Equinox and had a final celebration organised by one of the group which related to Earth, Air, Water & Fire. Despite being a very wet morning we all enjoyed this and it was followed by singing a number of the songs that the indefatigable Yvette had got us singing during the weeks.

What a wonderful group of people! Thanks to all of them for a very lovely & memorable experience.

<http://humanhenge.org/>

Chris Jessup - Volunteer

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