

Captain's Log

Purbeck Heaths and Mires Wildlife sent

2017

By Charles King

Upon the Heath - Day 1

29/07/17

As day 1 of 15 of the Purbeck Wildlife SERT 2017 commences I am filled with both joy and resentment. Joy, because the past month I've had at home; after finishing my first year at university has temporarily ceased; and made way for what will hopefully be a pretty neat trip.

Resentment; because it's raining.

I was pleasantly woken at 7:00am by the chorus of a sweet tune being elegantly whistled by a flock of small birds (my phone alarm). All packed. Destination: Campus. Lugging my camping stuff onto the bus was a mild ordeal; I barely fit. My bags and I blocked the only way on and off the now completely packed two storey behemoth of a vehicle. I felt like the cork in a bottle of furiously shaken champagne.

When I arrived at campus; a gentle push from a rather disgruntled fellow passenger helped me on my way. Or out of the way. I was now en route to F107 (the room Anita had booked for the team meeting). Questions were answered and roles were clarified. We were all set to begin our research on the beautiful heathlands of the Isle of Purbeck.

Wide eyed and full of enthusiasm (coffee), the team of eight - whom I shall refer to as the great eight - led by Anita and Liz, set out to continue Bournemouth Universities collaboration with the National Trust. We headed to Godlingston Heath for a quick 'how-to' on heathland mapping. My species identification skills were sharpened and my ankles were almost broken by what I can only describe as heathland 'potholes'.

At least I can confidently tell the difference between Bell and Cross-Leaved Heather - I think.

With my feet wet and my glasses speckled with raindrops; we made our way back to the car. A few minutes later we arrived at Camp David - our home for the next two weeks. Once we had set up the tents - with a surprising amount of ease - we went and got food. Or some of us did. I stayed at the camp and scouted the area for a captivating view, interesting wildlife and phone signal.

The view over Poole Harbour was nothing short of spectacular. Grey clouds loomed as far as they eye could see. The harbour rolled and the boats rocked. The air was chilling and all around me the sky sprinkled rain onto the land, like a baker dusting sugar onto a newly baked cake.

In that moment I thought of a song called "Upon the Heath" by Mr Hudson and the Library; and one particular lyric resounded in my mind.

*'Upon the heath we sit,
trying to make some sense of it.'*

Because it was hard to tell what was making that view so wonderful, and why, for the first time in a long time I felt so at peace; like everything at that moment had fallen into place. Was it the isolation? The brilliant people I would be spending the next two weeks with? The sound of Oasis in my earphones?

I'll never know.

I think I'm gonna like it here.

Note to self - get out more.

Baby Steps - Day 2

30/06/17

Thinking about it now, “Upon the Heath” would have been a much better title for today’s log entry. Because I am writing this on the heath. Today, after a really interesting presentation from David Brown, we headed out to Godlingston Heath.

We, as a group, mapped out a 4x4 metre quadrat and estimated (using the DAFOR scale) the abundance of the species present in the area, how much the heather has been grazed, signs of animal presence i.e. tracks , droppings, grazing etc. We finished our first quadrat having identified multiple faults with the data recording sheet...which was to be expected.

We are, after all, guinea pigs of the scientific variety. And as scientists it is up to us to venture into unknown realms in order to make great leaps in human understanding. Like Benjamin Franklin when he created electricity or Alexander Fleming when he accidentally created Penicillin or Charles Darwin, Alexander Graham Bell, Einstein, Newton, Galileo Galilei, Tesla, Marie Curie and Sigourney Weaver who made the first Alien discovery.

Who’d have thought Aliens exist?

Now I’d like to say the initial ‘practice’ quadrats ran smoothly; however, there were some conflicting ideas in terms of the abundance of each species and the percentage cover of variables. And we really had no idea whether the heather had been grazed or not.

Practice makes perfect though.

And in no time we were experts (I understand that is a pretty major exaggeration), but we did get the job done – or at least half the job. There is plenty of room for improvement.

I guess learning something new is like learning to walk again (nod to Foo Fighters); when we’re young, all we can really do is crawl and cry a lot. But with some trial and error and a bit of improvisation, we start to walk. Baby steps at first, but we soon get pretty good at it. I guess no matter how good we get at something though, we will always fall, and we will always stumble, but with the help of those around us we can always get back on our feet.

It's how you learn to run.

And that's why I have no doubt that we, as a team, will soon fly like superman through everything we face. Because we'll face it together.

After all, it's not rocket science. Is it?

Plain Sailing Weather - Day 3

01/07/17

*P*inch,

*P*unch,

What a way to spend the first day of the month.

Note to self - avoid poetry.

It's the weekend and we've been blessed with plain sailing weather. Me, Lindsey and David decided that a trek to Old Harry Rocks would be great way to spend the Saturday. We set around lunchtime with white clouds looming as far as the eye could see.

To our surprise, within minutes of setting out, the sky cleared. After a short walk along the road we reached a wonderfully crafted, generic gate designed to stop livestock escaping. We went through it. We cam across some horses in the middle of the path. We said hello. They were lovely. We said goodbye. Lindsey took longer to say goodbye and proceeded to coax one into joining us on our walk. The horse politely refused.

The more we walked the smaller the path became. It was clearly the road less travelled, so we decided to walk up and along the side of the hill.

I, being 5ft 8", encountered slight difficulty when climbing the slope. David, being closer to 20ft seemed to do it in one step. Lindsey is shorter than me and even she seemed to fly up it. She did however slip a few metres on. She was fine though.

She's tough as nails.

The elevated path gave us an incredible view over Swanage. It was a perfect postcard picture with a sapphire blue sea and a bustling beach. You can always rely on the British to make the most of a sunny day

Eventually we reached the halfway point to Old Harry Rocks. We took our 108th water break and passed through another one of those cattle fences. Fast forward 1 ½ miles and we've arrived at Old Harry Rocks. We sat down for a while and took in the astounding view.

A bearded gentleman who I assumed was a teacher, was talking to a group of, what I assumed were GCSE students. I learnt quite a bit about the rocks by eavesdropping. I can't really remember what he said though, but I know it was interesting. So I'll google it at some point.

Praise be to the Internet!

Fast forward 2 more miles and we arrive in Swanage. We decided Fish and Chips (minus the fish) would be a fantastic way to replenish our now withering selves. We bumped into James (another team member) on the way into town. He joined us for a while. He bought marmalade ice cream.

It looked pretty good.

He ate it.

He said it was good.

Good to know, for future reference.

We wandered to the co-op and bought some essentials (coffee, chocolate wafers and one of those hyper-extended lighters that let you light things without getting too close and burning yourself). Our feet by this time were pretty sore, so me and Lindsey dipped them in the sea for a bit. The cold water was a welcome feeling . As well as a welcome respite from the oven-like temperatures that my boots seemed capable of reaching.

After drying off, we went back to camp. Since returning I have read a few pages of a book (A Wanted Man by Lee Child) incase you were wondering. And written this log entry. I asked Lindsey and David what their verdict on the day was.

Both responses were too dull to note.

I asked whether they were both tired...

Both responses were exquisitely answered with an overwhelming sense of ironic enthusiasm.

I think that means they loved it.

I loved it too.

Coffee's worn off though so I'm off to bed.

Aurevoir Shoshanna!

The Soldier of the Sea - Day 4

02/07/17

*'Sunday morning,
Rain is falling.'*

-A Maroon 5 lyric. Great song. But far from the truth.

It was glorious! We decided (Me, Lindsey and David) to make the most of it by going for another walk.

Destination: Unknown.

We thought we'd explore; so we started the walk by going through the field just behind the campsite. We were soon welcomed by a pretty large herd of cows. We petted the cows. Among the numerous "Moooo" sounds that were repeated frequently by the cows; the air was also filled with the sounds of Lindsey declaring "I'm going to steal one". We talked her out of it and she decided taking 300 photos of the same cow would suffice instead.

We realised the field was a dead-end so we headed towards the road; as this appeared to be the only way off the field, other than back the way we came. Which would have put the cows in danger; because Lindsey would've seen them again

Fortunately there was a really kind bunch of people resting in a lay-by on the side of the road. I asked if they knew of any good walks nearby. They pointed us towards Kingswood and declared "there's a good view of the sea here", and showed us a point on the map, just beyond the woods.

We headed there. One thing I would like to note before I fast forward to the wicked view we got from that point on the map; was how nice the woods smelt. It smelt like herbs. I couldn't help but think of my neighbour's kitchen. They're a lovely old couple who are passionate about good food. And good wine. Lots of wine. And the woods smelt just like their kitchen when you pop in after tea time for a chat.

Now fast forward to the view we got over quite a large proportion of the island. I'm running out of words to describe how good some of these views are, so I'll narrow it down to two; blindingly beautiful.

This was quite literally the case for David because he managed to get sunscreen in his eye. This tormented him for the duration of the walk. We decided to head to Corfe Castle because by then, we realised, it must be pretty close (Lindsey's phone said so). After passing over a small number of green hills and saying hello to pretty much every single person we passed, we made it to Corfe Castle.

What a place. The ruins of the Castle stood proud on the hill. And stunted grey-brick houses casually made way for brilliant green church gardens which lined the sunlit; people swarmed pavements, that wound endlessly into a forest of roofs and culminated at a sea of rising field. I felt truly at peace here.

We rested in a field for a short while, but soon decided to head back to camp before David was blinded by the sunscreen in his eye.

Four hours later and the sun had begun setting and boredom had started setting in; I was restless, so me and Lindsey decided to go on another walk. Initially it was going to be a short walk, it grew significantly in length. But the more we walked the lower the sun stood in the sky, and the longer the shadows grew on the ground. And the better the view over Swanage, Godlingston, Studland, Poole Harbour, Sandbanks round to Bournemouth and Hengitsbury head beyond, as well as the Isle of Wight; in all its isolated glory, became.

The sea shone deep and blue. It was intercepted by a sword of gold, laid down by the setting sun; as if it were being knighted by its grace in the sky. A knight. A sentry to these lands. Forever it has stood. And forever it will stand. On watch. Until the end of time.

The soldier of the sea.

It Never Rains on Mondays - Day 5

03/07/17

It Never Rains on Mondays. This is the title to a chapter in a great book called 'Al Capone Does My Shirts'. I've never forgotten this line because I always say it to highlight the irony of a Monday where it rain in England.

So I say it a lot.

The clouds threatened to spit on us whilst we did research on Aggleston South (an area in Godlingston). But as the afternoon approached, the clouds departed. By then we had begun our research, in pairs, on other areas of the heath. Me and Lindsey took Brands Bog Heath.

The research we were doing involved heathland condition mapping and heathland class mapping. Class mapping involved determining the maturity of 25x25 metre segments of the heath. Each section was usually assessed and labelled as either; **P** for Pioneering, **B** for Building, **M** for Mature or **D** for Degenerate. Results were recorded on a map with a 25x25 metre grid. A GPS helped us determine our location by providing ten digit coordinates which allowed us to see where we were on the map.

By the end of the day we had aimed to complete 10 quadrats for the condition mapping, and the entire area of Brands Bog Heath for the class mapping. This was a very reasonable expectation in my opinion. And I'd like to add that me and Lindsey did very well in almost meeting this target (we finished 5 out of 10 quadrats. But mapped the whole area!)

However, I (stupidly) perceived this task as a competition-like endeavour that I simply couldn't lose. So when it was time to pack up I stuck about and finished two more quadrats (simply to get ahead).

There are other reasons why I stayed longer though:

Reason A: This next two weeks, for me, feels like a massive break from being at home and doing - basically nothing.

Reason B: The work is – believe it or not – quite enjoyable. It’s not exactly Disneyland kind of enjoyable. But there is a huge element of satisfaction that can be gained from doing this research. Especially when you know how useful it will be (in the long run).

We are brush strokes on a colossal canvas.

Reason C: It was a beautiful day. I just wanted to make the most of it.

Reason D: I can’t leave a job half finished.

When doing the 7th quadrat I heard Anita call my name; long story short, I couldn’t be out there alone (health and safety). She was super kind and understanding as to why I wanted to carry on; but she had come to take me back.

Honestly, I was a little frustrated we didn’t get it all done. But writing this now, I realise I may well have compromised the accuracy of the research had I carried on. Because without Lindsey, I’m half as good. Teamwork works. And a second eye almost always sees clearer.

I understand now why people say “Rome wasn’t built in a day”... I certainly don’t think Leonardo da Vinci painted the Mona Lisa in 24 hours. We’re brush strokes on a colossal canvas...

...Ain’t that the truth.

The IT Crowd - Day 6

04/07/17

It's a programme; I've never seen it. But the title is relatable to the activities that occurred today (Lindsey's just told me it's good). We had a meeting with Michelle Brown in the office (The Office is very good also, so I've been told).

Michelle, very successfully managed to tutor us in the ways of 'Living Record' - which is the database the National Trust use to record and save data collected from field surveys. The team, being as brilliant as they are - picked it up just like that *clicks fingers*.

We also used this time to amend the data sheet for heathland condition mapping - and we have since received an upgraded data sheet that is flawless!

Born from the fires that were ignited by the sparks of a million restless neurons, that belong to but a dozen marvellous minds.

After the meeting, we had some time to enter in most of the data we had collected so far, this process took us up to two o'clock.

Break for lunch.

Then back out in the field.

Me and Lindsey had some sites to finish. Three overall before we started a new site (this is the resumption of yesterday's unfinished work). We got it done.

With an hour to spare until 5:00pm (the working day's cut-off point), we got to work on Studland heath; 5 out of 10 quadrats were completed. And the whole area was mapped. We rendezvoused back at the minibus and made our way back home. To camp, which is currently 'home'.

Data was entered into Living Record.

Dinner was cooked, superbly, by David and Lindsey.

I washed up.

Books were read.

I completed mine. It was epic! 'A wanted Man'. A Jack Reacher Novel. In case you're interested.

David is reading God of Vengeance. I know the ending. I loved it. It's violent and blood curdling and gets your heart pumping pretty fast. I think he'll enjoy it. I'll let you know his verdict.

And now I'm off to bed. Well I'm actually writing this in bed. In truth, I am actually writing this tomorrow (it's the 5th right now).

I fell behind a little in terms of keeping up-to-date.

I hope I've got my tenses right.

I'll check tomorrow.

Or yesterday even.

(It's five-past midnight).

To bee or not to bee? - Day 7

05/07/17

Telle est la question!

Corny title. Had to be done.

In terms of tasks and research - today was a change of scenery.

We worked with Liz, collecting data for the Pollinator Survey. I was excited about this for two reasons:

- 1) We were about to step into the unknown realm of bees (and I'm always eager to learn a bit more Latin).
- 2) It felt like Pokémon.

We were given small plastic sampling tubes to catch the bees in. This allowed us to examine them closely, in order to determine the species. Needless to say everyone, but me, managed to catch at least one bee during the day. James set the bar pretty high by catching an individual of one of the rarer species of bee on the heath.

Game on.

After we were shown how to conduct the survey we departed in our pairs. I was working with Sophie today, which was excellent because she had a knack for catching the bees. At our second site Sophie managed to catch one individual that we were unable to identify. After a brief moment of pause, we decided to take a picture of it and show Liz. She too was slightly buffeted by what it could be. She later confirmed it was a *Bombus humilis*.

We were thrilled she knew, otherwise we'd need a Pokédex to identify it.

So far it was the rarest one.

Even Liz had only seen it once before.

Nice on Sophie!

Take that James.

We completed the survey and began the next task. We took a short – not so straightforward – walk to the camera trap sites 40 and 41. They were dead and needed reviving. Me and Sophie had been before. So it was unlikely we would get lost

We got lost.

We encountered cross-roads somewhere along the path and couldn't decide whether to go left, right or straight on. I can't remember which direction we took. I can remember it was the wrong one.

Eventually, we made it. We had been withered by the unforgiving sun, and although the day was beautiful and the views, once again, spectacular, we could not wait to get back to camp. We still had to complete the NT transects though.

But together, we did.

And together we walked back to camp; like brave Knights on great stallions who have returned from battle with their swords bloody, their shields splintered and their limbs intact. A great thirst for wine (water) and a hunger of unfathomable magnitude, was satisfied.

And another realm had been conquered.

We basked in the spoils of war

(Entered data, cooked dinner, read a book and went to bed).

Two of a Kind - Day 8+9

06/07/17 + 07/07/17

Days 8 and 9 were two of a kind. On both days we did the same tasks, we went to the same place and we almost died from heat exhaustion.

I'd like to resonate what Anita said at the start of the second day.

"There's no such thing as a bad day for field work, only bad preparation".

I completely agree.

Look how far Bear Grylls can get on the contents of his bladder and some intuition.

Needless to say, we weren't prepared for what felt like two days in a pizza oven. Day one was cute short by an hour. Water supplies were low. And morale was lower. We were defeated. Day two was a bit better. The wind was up and it cooled us just enough to get the job done; in half a day.

Anita and Liz debriefed us at the camp, and presented to us true spoils of a long and almost endless war. Biscuits, chocolate cake and ice creams.

God bless you Anita and Liz. God bless you.

We were brought back from the grave. Enough so that we were able to enter most of the data from the BU squares and organise all the data we had collected so far.

The moon shone full and proud in the sky that night. It was a beautiful site to see. The sun too, seemed to cling on to an invisible rope in the sky before taking a breath and lowering itself into the sea of green fields beyond our camp. It were as if it were trying to prolong our moment of triumph. A list tip of the hat. A final salute; before the day ended and with it, the week.

One week conquered. One more to go.

With a belly full of cake, I went to sleep.

I slept very well indeed.

Roads less travelled- Day 10

08/07/17

Roads less travelled by me I mean.

In fact the route I took to get to the university today is a very popular route.

No wonder. It was wonderful! The 50 Breezer from Bournemouth to Swanage yields splendid views and smooth sailing meanders through canopies of green and meadows of gold. And it goes on the ferry so, at one point, you are actually sailing...kinda.

It was the Festival of Learning today and I was flying the flag for the SERT's BU Purbeck Team in the 'green zone', to show the inquisitive attendees what we've been getting up to. I was set up outside of the Fusion building. By the time I arrived the sun was already peaking its head over the roof of the building, brushing aside the only shade I would encounter all day.

I was glad I brought a hat.

Whilst the festival wasn't overwhelmed with members of the public, it was still bathed in a gentle tide of both young people, who were beginning to their toes into the world of learning, and not so young people. Many of which taught me a great deal about the ecology of the Dorset county, and (nodding to one particular gentleman), the ways of the world.

Overall, it was a success. Certainly from my perspective; I taught a little and learnt a lot.

Other than that there's not much else to report. The weather was glorious. The journey back was good (except for one minor detour). Which I have no explanation for, I could have sworn I got on the 17 but the route showed more similarities to the route I imagine NASA will need to take to get to Mars when they go.

Me and David had a BBQ, it was the first bit of meat in a week. *gasp*

Lindsey must be proud.

I read more of a new book.

'American Gods' - It's intriguing. Incredibly so. And it offers a refreshing step along the borders of reality and fiction. As to whether I understand it; I am undecided (I'll put it down to the plot). I can't seem to put it down though - I think that says a lot.

It actually took me about 5 hours to write this entry because I can't stop reading this book...

...It's Sunday right now.

Today is 'catch-up' day.

Ketchup- Day 11

09/07/17

There are three reasons I entitled this entry 'Ketchup':

Reason 1: I'm sitting next to a bottle of ketchup (me and David used it for dinner).

Reason 2: I don't usually use ketchup. I'm simply not a fan. But today that's all changed. Therefore I consider this a day of great significance.

Reason 3: 'Ketchup' sounds like 'catch-up'...I thought it was a more inventive title than catch-up.

Not my proudest moment, but I'll stick with it.

The relevance of 'catch-up' is that I am using today to do exactly that. I entered onto orchid, (the name of the laptop Anita has leant the team for data entry), the data we collected on Friday...

I then caught up on the book I'm reading. Not that I'm meant to be at a certain point in the book by now, but I haven't read since yesterday and I need my fill of fiction. I also caught up on sleep. It was only about 20 minutes, but it was sleep nonetheless. Very welcome sleep at that; I felt my eyes getting heavier the more I read. I succumbed to it in the end and I am grateful that I did as I am no longer reading the same sentence three times over before I realise that I've been reading the same sentence three times over before I realise I've been reading the same sentence three times over...

Gotcha.

Apart from that. It's been a pretty relaxed day. And despite this day being a day where I intended to catch-up on things, I haven't had to catch-up on much at all.

I'm all caught up.

Trapped- Day 12

10/07/17

I wish this entry was as exciting as the title suggests. Don't get me wrong, I had a good day. But there were no dramatic occurrences of people falling into hidden pits that plunged into dark caves inhabited by packs of feral wolves, forcing the would-be 'trapped' individual to fight for their life with nothing but a pen and the contents of their backpack...

...there was nothing like that at all...

...I'm referring to camera 'traps'.

A camera trap is a clever little device that doesn't actually trap anything at all. It takes pictures or videos of anything that moves within its range, so the only thing it does actually 'trap' is a little piece of time. The name is a misnomer really.

Today was all about replacing the batteries and SD cards of the traps we had already set-up. We also conducted BU squares in the sensor-radius of the traps we went to. This gave context to the areas in which they are situated. It also allows us to see any changes that occur in the area in front of the camera's i.e. through grazing, trampling or just general succession (which takes a long time, so it's unlikely to show up).

As well as this, the camera's will show us what exactly it is causing these changes. Whether it is cattle, deer, humans, lions, tigers, bears, lions and tigers and bears, oh my, lions and tigers and bears oh my (cue the Cowardly Lion).

You don't get those on the heath.

You do get horses though. They are feral. But harmless, as long as you don't disturb them. They're incredible and I had the pleasure of getting quite close. We were under the watchful eye of a trained Nation Trust Ranger, so don't try this at home.

Later on, we departed in our pairs. I worked in a three with Vicky and Leon. They were excellent. As I fumbled around with the camera trap, they cracked on with the BU squares. They finished them all before I declared that it simply wasn't working.

Unfortunately when I opened the battery compartment quite a bit of water fell out. I tried three different sets of batteries. Two different SD cards and like all great technicians, I tried the oldest (and best) trick in the book; I switched it on and off. About 100 times. It was dead. Flat lined.

I've since been reassured that this particular camera had been all over the world with Anita and had lasted for quite a long time in the heat, the wet, the cold and the windy. It was simply on its last legs.

We both pondered how fitting it's death had been:

Upon the heath.

With beautiful sunshine.

Overlooking the rolling purple hills that glided into the harbour and the blue sea beyond.

It's as if it though "this'll do".

And died.

Old School - Day 13

11/07/17

Maybe you can relate to this.

I have encountered several people in my life that are full of wisdom and stories. The neighbours on both sides of my house have seen many decades and they are likely to see many more if happiness is the fuel for living. They can talk for days on end without so much as a pause for air. I could listen to them forever. Their voices are like a glass of warm milk. I've learnt from them things that would take a lifetime to learn. When I go round for a cup of tea I always know I will come out a little wiser and far happier than when I went in.

Today I encountered two more people much like my neighbours. Two rather brilliant men with a story to tell and a lesson to teach.

We went to Slow Farm and met Martin Green and Peter Hawes; two friends from way back, who were going to teach us about a habitat that I had no idea even existed: Chalk Grassland.

After a brief introduction from the two gentlemen they took us to a pond and described to us; the methods they use to manage the pond and the area surrounding it. Mowing the grass around the pond and spreading the trimmings around the farm is the main method they use to continue the succession of the grassland. Rotovating the land allows for the germination of the seeds deposited by the spreading of the trimmings and therefore the growth of desirable chalk grassland species. We learnt a great number of new species. I had to write them down but soon learnt them using one great tip:

“Pick one characteristic that is totally unique”.

We were given a crash course on the various species of grass found on chalk grassland. Again, using the ‘one characteristic’ trick I learnt the species in no time.

We did a few quadrats at various locations on the farm. These locations weren't just random however, they were fenced off. They had been fenced off for the past two years and they showed the effects of grazing on the grassland. The results were remarkable; outside of the fenced area (where grazing has occurred) we identified a far greater number of desirable chalk grassland species than that of the inside of the fenced area (non-grazed).

We did all this in the rain, not the heaviest of downpours but enough to start soaking through my waterproofs. Lindsey had puddles in her shoes (again). And my left boot was beginning to resemble an aqueduct, though instead of permeable rock it was the leather that seemed to be permeable. My fault, I didn't polish them enough.

Despite this, nobody on the team grumbled. In fact I heard rather a lot of laughter as we walked from site to site. People were smiling and nobody seemed bothered at all by the gloomy sky. I myself, can't recall any reason to have been miserable on that day. It was the first bit of rain we'd seen for a while so everyone just welcomed it.

The icing on the cake was that Martin had constructed a museum that contained many of the findings from his Archaeological dig. Now I've been to a lot of museums. I think they're brilliant. Looking through a pane of glass at an object in a museum is no different to looking at a fragment of time through a window. Only in Martin's museum he let us touch the fragments...

It was so AWESOME!

We were quite literally touching fragments of tools constructed during the Neolithic period as well as whole axe heads and crushing tools and arrow heads and knife-like tools and so much more. I couldn't believe what I was holding. A fragment of time, but without the window in the way. I felt giddy to be honest.

I won't spoil the rest. There is so much more there. But you'll have to check it for yourself. I'm afraid I wouldn't be doing it justice if I just told you what I saw.

From Peter and Martin I learnt a great deal about chalk grassland. Possibly the most I will ever learn about this incredible and rare habitat, because I doubt there is anyone out there who knows as much about it as they do. I learnt new species. As well as tricks to help me learn them. I learnt about management methods and farming. I learnt some history even.

But most of all, I learnt that you're never too old to explore, to be surprised, to teach or to learn something new. Or to simply have a laugh with an old friend.

Curtain call - Day 14

12/07/17

Today was the last day of fieldwork.

Whilst I am happy that we have completed all that we came here to do. I am still sad that the curtain is finally closing. This show is coming to an end. But I still have a few more lines...

...Ladies and Gentleman. I present to you. The closing chapter...

...Nothing too exciting really. We went back to Studland Peninsula to finish what we started on Western Arm Heath and then map and collect NT transect data from new sites. I was working with Lindsey again, just like old times. Once we finished Western Arm Heath we went to Plateau Heath North.

For lunch we sat on a tiny little sandbank that looked out onto the harbour and, funnily enough, over not-so little Sandbanks. It was incredibly windy. Once again Lindsey's feet were soaked, although it hadn't rained. The water droplets still clung to heath like a drunkard to his barstool. One knock and they would fly off onto the floor. Or in this case, directly into Lindsey's shoe.

We completed our area and made our way back to the van. On the way back to camp in the van, Liz pointed out Godlingston as we drove past, and highlighted the fact that, during our time here, we had mapped the whole entire area. NT transects n'all.

As team leader it was a proud moment seeing what we had achieved together. Given a few more days this team could probably map the whole island! (major exaggeration, but I know they'd try to)

Insist on the impossible.

After a tea break back at camp we set off again to Hartland and conducted another pollinator survey. I was working with James, which was a treat because, second to Liz, he's a bit of an expert. Together we worked splendidly. We completed the 5 sites. And managed to catch a few rarer species on the way back to the van. I caught my first bee. James may have caught a *Bombus humilis*.

Which is the same species as the one Sophie caught when I worked with her during the last bee survey. We're quite sure it was. Which puts Sophie and James equal on the table. And me at the bottom.

But who's counting?

We headed back to camp and as a team we entered in every piece of data that needed entering. Like one immense machine we got everything finished. Everything that needed to be done was done.

We, metaphorically speaking, drew a thick line through every task that needed completing.

I can't think of many more ways to explain that we had finished. Everything to do with data.

Once and for all.

Well, until tomorrow's presentation...

The Parting Glass - Day 15 + 16

13/07/17 + 14/07/17

I'm writing this entry on the train home. For the past half-hour I've been thinking about nothing but the trip. I wish we had another two weeks. Or one at least. But it's the end and everyone has departed.

Otra ciudad, otra vida

It's not all doom and gloom though

Yesterday (the 13th) we did our presentation. Everyone was brilliant. It couldn't have gone better. We spent all morning preparing. But with the way it went you'd think we spent all week perfecting it. We did Bournemouth University proud. And the team did me proud.

Afterwards, we did a BBQ. We improvised quite a bit because we'd run out of firelighters. We resorted to using old cardboard and scrap paper to get it going. The big BBQ wasn't hot enough, so we had to get the little one going. In the meantime the chicken was already warmed up so we couldn't just leave it. All hands on deck now. Everyone grabbed all the camping gas canisters and we cooked as much as we could on the 5 that we had. The rest went on the mini BBQ. I should add that we did have a time limit, we were due to go on a bat survey with Michelle Brown at 7:30 so we didn't have time to try and get the big BBQ going again. All in all. Great success! It wasn't the BBQ we expected but things did get BBQ'd and most importantly; cooked.

Come 7:30 we were all ready to go on the bat survey. We drove to Worth Matravers. Which is where the Environmental Scientists went for their field trip (it's a beautiful place, with a famous pub of which we spent lots of time in during the field trip)...

We parked up and walked the rest of the way to Winspit, a formal coastal quarry that is now deserted and inhabited only by the bats that Michelle had taken us there to meet.

Michelle taught us a great deal about the bats of Winspit and also about the bats across the UK. We learnt about their ecology, the conservation methods currently in practice. And most importantly, that they are not rodents. **THEY ARE NOT RODENTS!** Michelle emphasised this point. And rightfully so, they are incredible mammals and having never learnt about them before I am completely bewildered and intrigued by them.

Michelle lent us some bat detectors. They picked up the most incredible sounds at frequencies that, without these pieces of equipment, are impossible to hear. We laid down on rocks looking up at the darkening sky and watched the bats skim the Cliffside. It was one of the most incredible moments I have ever had. And one I shan't ever forget. We then explored the caves and were shown some of the nooks and cracks that the bats hide in during the day.

When we were walking about I began to realise how exhausted I was. I almost fell asleep in the minibus and I actually think I might have done because we were back in the blink of an eye.

A good night's sleep.

Sunrise.

I managed to catch it every morning (except for one gloomy day where the sun had disappeared). Today I caught it again, for one last time. I began packing my kit away, and then the tent and then everyone got to work on cleaning Camp David's Kitchen.

The field we had lived in for the past two weeks was now bare and empty. Marks of dead grass where the tents had sat are the only things that prove we were ever even there, and even they will grow back in time.

We had a quick run through with data. Just one last check before we all left and one by one we departed...

Well James went first, then Vicky and Sophie and Anita very kindly dropped me, Lindsey and David off at the station. Leon headed back to the university.

And now, here I am.

On a train. Writing this final log. Closing the chapter, and starting anew.

I've not much else to say other than, right now, I feel like David Tennant must have felt in his last moments as the 10th Doctor before he regenerated. And with that thought in mind. I quote his last few words as the Doctor, as I couldn't have put how I feel, in a sentence, better myself:

"I don't want to go"