

News story: Human skull found by dog walker sheds light on Somerset's history

An important historical find has been made in Somerset when a Langport dog walker found a well-preserved human skull.

Roger Evans of Newtown found the skull along the banks of the River Sowy in March 2017. The skull was reported to the police and analysed. After several months the results revealed it belonged to a woman aged 45 or older during the late Iron Age (380-190BC) – several centuries before the first Roman invasion of Britain.

The discovery hinted there may be more clues in the area, so in December the Environment Agency reduced water levels where the remains were found so South West Heritage Trust and the agency's own archeologist could investigate.

No other human remains were found, but the archaeologists discovered that the skull lay close to a series of round, timber posts driven deep into the river bed. These may be the remnant of a causeway or raised walkway and more posts could still survive hidden in the mud. Radio carbon dating of the posts is being carried out to see if they and the skull are of the same date. Further groups of posts were seen further down the channel, suggesting other prehistoric wooden structures are present nearby.

The Environment Agency returned water levels to normal to provide a measure of protection to the timber posts and any other archaeological remains still in the channel.

Stephen Dean, Environment Agency archaeologist, said:

The chance discovery on the banks of the River Sowy has shone fresh light on Somerset's hidden history. It has already added valuable information to the Somerset Historic Environment Record and reinforced our connections with the South West Heritage Trust.

The Environment Agency's future work on the River Sowy, carried out on behalf of the Somerset Rivers Authority, will be informed by past discoveries such as these and will look to capture more of the area's rich historical and archaeological story.

The discovery of the Sowy Skull is also a poignant reminder that, in looking to the future, the work we do must be informed by an understanding and respect for Somerset's rich cultural and natural

heritage. Only by understanding this heritage can we hope to leave it a condition fit for generations to come.

Analysis by a human bone expert showed that the female skull suffered considerably from gum disease and tooth loss. Her diet included coarse material, which had unevenly worn her remaining teeth, and resulted in severe osteoarthritis in the joint of her right jaw. She had also suffered at least one episode of chronic illness or nutritional stress during childhood. The woman's head appears to have been deliberately removed at, or shortly after death.

Richard Brunning, the South West Heritage Trust archaeologist, said:

Severed heads are not an unusual discovery for the Iron Age, but the placement of the skull in a wetland beside a wooden structure is very rare, possibly reflecting a practice of making ritual offerings in watery environments.

Notes to editors:

The South West Heritage Trust is an independent charity committed to protecting and celebrating Somerset and Devon's rich heritage. As well as the widely-praised Museum of Somerset and the redeveloped Somerset Rural Life Museum, in Glastonbury, the Trust manages state-of-the-art facilities in Taunton and Exeter to care for the extraordinary archive collections of the two counties. The Trust also provides essential advice about the historic environment and manages historic sites. Visit www.swheritage.org.uk/.

Archeologists first delved into the wetlands between Burtle, Westhay and close to Glastonbury in the nineteenth century. In the Neolithic and Bronze Age. Farmers made wooden trackways to cross the wetlands of the Levels and Moors area, and also occasionally deposited valuable objects and human remains in the shallow waters. By the Iron Age, some settlements were actually made in the wetland – the Glastonbury and Meare Lake Villages – which could only be reached by dug-out canoes.

Work commissioned by the Environment Agency at Steart Marshes at the mouth of the River Parrett has shown the presence of Iron Age farming communities on the Steart peninsula. Studies there, and further along the Parrett, have shown that the floodplain was constantly changing in response to sea level rise, climate change, and human activity.

A community excavation by the South West Heritage Trust on the nearby 'island' of hard geology in the floodplain at Aller, discovered Iron Age defences and numerous circular pits for storing grain. The island may have acted as a defensive refuge from attacks and would have overlooked the wetlands where the skull was deposited.

[North Korea: EU sanctions 17 DPRK nationals involved in activities aimed at evading sanctions](#)

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[Venezuela: EU sanctions 7 individuals holding official positions](#)

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In view of the continuing deterioration of the situation in Venezuela, the Council decided to put 7 individuals holding official positions under restrictive measures, with immediate effect. These individuals are involved in the **non-respect of democratic principles or the rule of law as well as in the violation of human rights**. The measures include a travel ban and an asset freeze.

Today's decision was adopted as the **political, social and economic situation in Venezuela continues to deteriorate**, and as negotiations between the government and the opposition have not yet delivered concrete results. It is an expression of the Council's concern with this current state of affairs.

The restrictive measures aim to help **foster democratic shared solutions** that can bring political stability to the country and allow it to address the **pressing needs of the population**.

As indicated in Council conclusions of 13 November 2017, constructive dialogue and negotiation are the only sustainable way to address the current crisis and to respond to the pressing needs of the people of Venezuela. The Council indicated that the EU fully supports credible negotiations between all relevant actors that can lead to shared solutions to the multiple challenges in the country.

The conclusions also underlined that the restrictive measures can be reversed depending on the evolution of the situation in the country, in particular the holding of credible and meaningful negotiations, the respect for democratic institutions, the adoption of a full electoral calendar and the liberation of all political prisoners. The Council also recalled that these are targeted measures designed not to harm the Venezuelan population whose plight the EU wishes to alleviate.

On 13 November 2017, the Council adopted a ban on arms and equipment for internal repression and a framework decision on targeted restrictive measures without listing any individual or entity.

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[EU-Chile association agreement: negotiating directives made public](#)

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On 22 January, the Council decided to publish the mandate given to the Commission on 13 November 2017 to modernise the existing association agreement with Chile.

This is the first time that the Council has decided to make public the entire mandate for an association agreement covering political and trade aspects. It responds to calls for greater transparency and the need to better communicate the contents and the objectives of the negotiations.

Political and economic relations between the EU and Chile have so far been governed by an association agreement which was signed in 2002 and fully implemented in 2005. The aim of a modernised agreement is to deepen EU-Chile relations by enhancing existing cooperation on political, security and trade matters. Negotiations were launched on 16 November 2017 on the basis of the agreed mandate.

On trade issues, the current agreement has led to a substantial increase in trade in goods and services between the EU and Chile: Chilean exports of agricultural/food products and services to the EU have nearly tripled, while EU exports to Chile have doubled across most sectors. However, the existing agreement does not address some important trade and investment issues, such as specific provisions on investment, non-tariff barriers, intellectual property rights and some geographical indications and contributions to sustainable development.

By filling these gaps, a modernised EU-Chile association agreement will provide for the possibility of strengthening existing cooperation, lowering consumer prices, improving market access and creating job and growth opportunities. Throughout the negotiations, the EU will aim to ensure the highest levels of social, labour and environmental protections and to promote social justice and sustainable development.

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