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NEWS RELEASE

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Kents Cavern charity wins Heritage Lottery Fund support



Today, the Kents Cavern Foundation (KCF), the new charitable organisation delivering education, scientific research and conservation at Devon's award winning caverns, has received £42,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for Project Firestone, an exciting project to encourage the general public to identify, look after and celebrate the exceptional prehistoric heritage in the area and, in particular, the ancient human occupation of Kents Cavern and other prehistoric sites.



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Project Firestone will create a full time graduate post for an Education, Community and Outreach Officer for the KCF, who will work with national and international partners to develop interpretation and improved access to the caverns and its collections, showcasing the connections between human evolution, the natural environment and geological heritage. Firestone will also support the wider ambitions of the KCF charity to create a centre of excellence for Earth Heritage and human evolution.

Prof Alan Outram, head of archaeology at the University of Exeter and Firestone project partner said: “Kents Cavern is one of Britain’s most important prehistoric cave sites and we are delighted that Project Firestone has received this funding. It provides an excellent opportunity for our two organisations to work closely together. The department of archaeology has specialists in Stone Age archaeology and is an institutional member of ExArc (ICOM registered network of archaeology open-air museums and interpretative centres) and is the academic partner in OpenArch, an EU Culture Programme collaboration of such museums across Europe. We are very well placed to provide highly pertinent academic and scientific advice to Project Firestone.”

Dr Nick Ashton, Senior Curator of Palaeolithic Archaeology at The British Museum said: “Project Firestone is an ideal way to ensure the future of the cavern by working with local, national and international groups to enhance the educational facilities that the cavern provides at the same time as conserving it for future generations. The project provides a great opportunity not only for local people, but would help draw greater numbers of visitors from the rest of Britain and abroad.

“This collaboration builds on existing links we have had with Kents Cavern, most recently through the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain Project and will continue through the newly-funded Pathways to Ancient Britain Project.”

Commenting on the award James Hull, Trustee of the KCF said: “This is the charity’s first significant grant and I am delighted we have received this substantial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

“Our first priority is to review our education strategy in the light of the Government’s new National Curriculum which incorporates the Stone Age. We are now recruiting for a new graduate position, ideally with a degree in Earth sciences, to coordinate the activities of Firestone over the next two years. We have a very clear vision of the public benefits and exactly what we want to achieve in the next two years. We have years of expertise running projects and events and we are confident this generous grant will create real value and sustainable benefits.”



Explaining the importance of the HLF support, the Head of HLF in the South West, Nerys Watts, said: “This is an excellent project for the young people and general public in Torbay. With HLF’s support the Firestone project will both help identify the exceptional heritage value at Kents Cavern and other local prehistoric sites, and make a lasting difference by laying the foundation for a programme of work that will help protect and pass the heritage on to future generations.”

Nick Powe, Director of Kents Cavern: “I’m thrilled that the KCF has received this generous award from HLF. Firestone will not only help strengthen our credibility amongst academic and scientific institutions but will also deliver some exciting cultural activities.

“I feel Kents Cavern has reached a very interesting point, possibly even its tipping point. As a result of establishing this charitable organisation some extraordinary opportunities are opening up which were not available in the past. Not only will the KCF secure the conservation of Kents Cavern but as we move towards creating a centre of excellence in Earth heritage and human evolution, I can see Kents Cavern becoming a major player in Torbay’s aspirations for economic and social regeneration.”

“The new graduate post is a unique opportunity to shape the work of the charity and deliver a comprehensive programme of education, scientific and cultural outreach for Kents Cavern across the English Riviera Global Geopark. The high calibre post is advertised nationally from today and we expect to get some very strong candidates. Full details of the role and how to apply can be downloaded at www.kents-cavern.co.uk/foundation .”

-ENDS-

NOTES TO EDITOR

For further information, including filming or for any other interview or photography requests please contact Nick Powe by e-mail: nickpowe@kents-cavern.co.uk

About the Heritage Lottery Fund

- *Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) aims to make a lasting difference for heritage, people and communities across the UK and help build a resilient heritage economy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported almost 36,000 projects with more than £5.9bn across the UK. www.hlf.org.uk.*



About Kents Cavern

- *The first systematic excavation of the caves was in 1825 by Father John MacEnery, a Roman Catholic priest. He unearthed bones of extinct prehistoric animal. Nothing unusual in that at the time but what was to prove so controversial was that lying next to these buried remains of mammoths, sabre toothed cats, hyenas and other Ice Age animals were stone tools shaped by human hands. Could humans really have lived on earth with these animals? This is controversial enough today but was unimaginable back then, especially for a deeply religious man. MacEnery's findings inspired the Great Excavation of Kents Cavern between 1865 and 1880. This pioneering excavation was masterminded by William Pengelly who employed George Smerdon as his foreman. Pengelly's recordings provided scientific proof for the antiquity of humankind. The archaeological recording technique he invented, a step and grid system, would not be repeated anywhere else for decades.*
- *Kents Cavern has the highest level of state protection in Britain as a Scheduled Ancient Monument and is a nature conservation site (SSSI). The cave made international headlines in November 2011 when a human jawbone was dated at over 41,000 years old, making it the oldest human fossil in northwestern Europe. The Kents Cavern fossil is on display at the Natural History Museum, London in "**Britain: 1 million years of the human story**"*
- *Kents Cavern is recognised by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) as a key gateway site for the English Riviera Global Geopark. There are 100 territories designated as Geoparks. The Geopark network falls under the auspices of UNESCO's Natural Science Sector.*



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