



Kents Cavern Ltd, Cavern House, 91 Ilsham Road, Torquay, Devon, TQ1 2JF
Tel: 01803 215136, Fax: 01803 211034, E-mail: nickpowe@kents-cavern.co.uk

Britain's first human re-dated

First – 1

21 April 2005

Britain's first modern human may not only have lived at popular tourist attraction Kents Cavern in Torquay, but new research has also revealed that he may be at least 6,000 years older than first thought, and might even have been a Neanderthal man!

The new research is based upon an unassuming fragment of jawbone found at Kents Cavern in 1927 that has just three teeth, and which had been previously dated at 31,000 years old. The fossil is currently on display in Torquay museum in Devon.

It was the oldest fragment of a modern human in Britain and the second oldest in Europe after direct dating by radiocarbon methods in the 1980's first highlighted its significance.

But doubt was cast on the accuracy of this initial radiocarbon dating recently after it was discovered that paper glue had been used to strengthen the jawbone some time after its discovery.

Now, fresh research by Dr Roger Jacobi of the British Museum and Dr Tom Higham from the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit of other animal bones and sediments found just above and below the find-spot of the jawbone, has shown that the layer in which it was found actually date from between 37,000 and 40,000 years ago.

The findings have also posed questions about whether the jawbone is actually from a modern human, or Cro-Magnon, as was believed by leading human anatomist Sir Arthur Keith in the 1920's, or if the jaw is from the human species known as Neanderthals.

Further research will now be carried out by the scientists in order to try and extract some ancient DNA from one of the teeth.

If the jaw proves to be Neanderthal, then Kents Cavern will not only be the only place in Britain where there is direct evidence that Neanderthals once lived, but also it would confirm that Neanderthals spread across Europe and reached Britain far earlier than is currently thought.

More follows

First – 2

Commenting on the discovery, Kents Cavern Managing Director Nick Powe, whose family have run the caves for six generations, said:

“This is great news for us and the whole of Torbay. The heritage of Kents Cavern gets more and more interesting all the time, and the cave is always full of surprises. Visitors really can step back in time to the Stone Age here.

“Last year, we unearthed some Roman and Bronze and Iron age artefacts, plus prehistoric animal bones, human teeth and flint dating back 3,500 years when building our new visitor centre. This latest scientific discovery shows that man’s occupation at Kents Cavern is even older than first thought.

“Whilst the original jawbone excavated in 1927 is rightly in the safekeeping of Torquay museum, we have a replica of it here too which people can see along with various other artefacts found in the caves.”

Kents Cavern is Torbay’s oldest visitor attraction and, as well as the stunning underground caves, visitors can also enjoy an 80-seater licensed café, retail shop and exhibition galleries promoting the geological heritage and archaeological importance of these famous Torquay caves.

- Ends -

NOTES TO NEWS/PICTURE DESK

1) For further information and to take pictures or to carry out filming at Kents Cavern today (21/4/05), please contact Operations Manager James Hull on (01803) 215136. It will be possible for the media to photograph, film, and handle the replica jawbone at Kents Cavern, and Nick Powe will also be available for interview there tomorrow (Friday 22 April).

3) For further information about Torquay Museum, please contact Barry Chandler on (01803) 293975. An international conference on the History of Geological Speleology and Cave Finds is being held in the Pengelly Hall at the Torquay Museum this week.

4) Dr Roger Jacobi will be attending the Torquay Museum’s conference today (21/4/05) and tomorrow (Friday 22/4/05), and Dr Tom Higham, deputy director of the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit, can be contacted on (01865) 273931, mobile 07766 546819.

**Press release issued on behalf of
Kents Cavern, Torquay
by Dick Wood of RAW Communications
Tel/fax (01884) 35453, mobile 07711 552947, e-mail:
DickWood@rawcomms.demon.co.uk**