

Growing up in small-town USA, I had very limited experience of the vast world beyond my little patch of forest and close-knit community, but I played games and read books with 'mysterious' ancient peoples and ruins, having become fascinated by the different ways in which a community could understand the past. As I grew older, I stockpiled the National Geographic magazines my grandmother gave to me and read about everything from mummies to rare starfish, relishing these glimpses of the amazing varieties of life (and lifeways) that could exist on Earth.

As an exchange student to Germany in high school, I was able to visit the Hochdorf burial and Keltenmuseum. There is a cauldron decorated with two Greek lions which were, to me, overshadowed by the admittedly funny-looking 'Celtic' imitation of the Greek examples. This centuries-old example of such a human act of appreciation and imitation caught me so off-guard, that it has always stuck with me, cementing my interest in prehistoric archaeology. I went on to complete my undergraduate degree in anthropology in the USA, where I learned to further appreciate the variety of the human experience, past and present, and this anthropological background has impacted my personal approach to archaeology a great deal.

When I applied to MA programs, I had initially intended to focus on the influences of trade and connection between Europe and the UK, still influenced by the little bronze lion. Upon receiving a Fulbright award and moving to Bangor, however, I reached a crossroads. Seeing so much visible history and archaeology in Snowdonia's stunning landscapes, and the close ties between archaeology, history, heritage, and identity in Wales reminded me once again of my fascination with the way interpretations of the past can affect actions within a community. I refocused my research in this direction, concentrating on the interactions between hillforts and earlier monuments within the landscape and through this, how Iron Age peoples may have understood their own pasts.

Receiving the Gwobr Archaeoleg Cambrian Archaeological Award means the world to me after gaining the confidence to not only move to the UK, but to also switch my topic to a less-considered, but equally fascinating aspect of prehistoric archaeology, not to mention the difficulties of altering and finishing the project with the advent of the pandemic. I am deeply encouraged by the recognition of my efforts to provide unique contributions to the field by such an institution as the Cambrian Archaeological Association! This has boosted my enthusiasm and passion for the topic even further, and I am now happily working away on my PhD thesis with a similar topic in different locations, though I also hope to return to more Wales-related research in the future.

My advice for anyone interested in archaeology is to give it a go! Volunteer on a local dig, or even reach out to someone whose research you like and ask for reading recommendations. You'll never know if it's for you if you don't test the edges of your comfort zone. From my perspective, archaeology is interdisciplinary at heart, and the beautiful thing about the field is that there is something here for almost everyone. There are so many amazing communities willing to help you discover your niche.