Late glacial palaeoclimate investigations at King Arthur's Cave and Sun Hole Cave

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Abstract

King Arthur's Cave (Wye Valley) and Sun Hole Cave (Cheddar Gorge) currently provide the earliest dates for a human presence in the British Isles after the Last Glacial Maximum. The earliest phase of activity at these sites has been dated to c. 15.2 to 14.6 thousand years cal. BP, which spans the onset of the Late Glacial Interstadial, a major global climate transition characterised by rapidly warming temperatures. Here we present stable isotope data from horse (*Equus ferus*) teeth found in the zooarchaeological assemblages at the sites. We also report two new radiocarbon dates on specimens from King Arthur's Cave. The *Equus* tooth enamel provides a record of climatic conditions during the animals' tooth formation. Evidence of human modification of the teeth (cut marks and fractures) chronologically tie these palaeoclimatic records to the earliest post-LGM archaeology at the two sites, thus informing on the climatic and environmental context under which human activity in these areas took place. Results indicate that people were present at the two sites during a period of climatic warming, with temperatures perhaps only marginally colder than present day conditions. However, suboptimal environmental conditions are suggested and may indicate changing vegetation dynamics within the local landscape.

Introduction

King Arthur's Cave (Wye Valley, Herefordshire, fig. 1) and Sun Hole Cave (Cheddar Gorge, Somerset, fig. 1) provide the earliest dated human presence in the British Isles following the Last Glacial Maximum (LGM). An extensive radiocarbon dating programme targeting human remains and culturally modified faunal material has placed people at the sites at around 15.2 to 14.6 thousand years cal. BP (Jacobi and Higham, 2011). This coincides with a major global climate transition (the end of Greenland Stadial 2 (GS-2.1a) and the start of the

Late Glacial Interstadial (GI-1e) (Rasmussen et al., 2014)), and it is not currently clear whether human reoccupation of southwest Britain occurred prior to, during, or after the period of increasing temperatures. Here we investigate the climate and environment local to King Arthur's Cave and Sun Hole Cave during this phase of human activity, through stable isotope (δ^{18}O and δ^{13}C) analysis of horse (*Equus ferus*) tooth enamel carbonate. The proliferation of horse remains in the faunal assemblages excavated from the two sites, many bearing marks of cultural modifications (cut marks and fractures), indicates horse was a key prey species exploited in both regions. Several of the teeth analysed in this study show such human-made fractures, thus the climatic and environmental data generated are directly linked to periods of human presence at both sites.

Background

King Arthur's Cave is located in the Wye Valley in Herefordshire (fig. 1). First excavated in the 1870s, further excavations were conducted by UBSS between 1925-1929 and in 1952, and by Nick Barton in the 1990s (Taylor, 1928, ApSimon, 1992, Barton, 1997). The UBSS excavations recovered large faunal and lithic assemblages from stratified deposits. Palaeolithic artefacts from the site have been described as Late Upper Palaeolithic in character and include bi-truncated trapezoidal backed blades ('Cheddar points') (ApSimon, 1992; Jacobi and Higham, 2011). The Late Glacial faunal assemblage includes horse and red deer remains that show evidence of cut marks and cultural fractures, indicating exploitation and processing of these species by humans. Radiocarbon dating indicates that there were multiple, most likely sporadic, phases of human activity at the site. The earliest phase of human activity, predominately associated with wild horse exploitation, has been dated to between 15.2 and 14.7 thousand years cal. BP and its duration most likely did not exceed a few hundred years in total (fig. 2) (Jacobi and Higham, 2011).

Sun Hole Cave is a small fissure cave located in Cheddar Gorge, Somerset (fig. 1). Several excavations took place at the site during the 20th century, which yielded small faunal and lithic assemblages. Unfortunately, some of this material was destroyed during a fire at the UBSSM in 1940. Of the small number of artefacts that remain, key tool-forms that represent the earliest Late Upper Palaeolithic technology in Britain are present (Jacobi and Higham 2009; 2011). Among the surviving faunal assemblage are culturally modified horse teeth and bones, and most significantly, a human ulna. Radiocarbon dating of this material places human presence at Sun Hole between 15.1 and 14.6 thousand years cal. BP, although as with King Arthur's Cave, activity at the site may have been limited in duration to only a few hundred years (fig. 2) (Jacobi and Higham, 2011).

The dates of human activity at King Arthur's Cave and Sun Hole Cave span the onset of the Late Glacial Interstadial (GI-1), which occurred at c. 14.7 thousand years BP, based on the Greenland Ice Core Chronology (Rasmussen et al., 2014). During this time global air temperatures rose rapidly, resulting in significant biotic responses, such as changes in floral and faunal compositions and an increase in biodiversity in some regions (Binney et al., 2017; Kindler et al., 2014; Lister and Stuart, 2008). However, the timing and magnitude of these climatic changes and environmental responses have long been known to be regionally variable (e.g. Coope and Lemdahl, 1995; Walker et al., 1994; 2003). Within the British Isles there have been numerous studies into Late Glacial climate and environment (e.g. Lowe et al., 1999, Brooks and Langdon, 2014, Elias and Matthews, 2014), but there is a paucity of records that span the stadial-interstadial transition and that can be linked to the archaeological record. This is partly due to the major changes in sedimentation regimes and biological productivity that characterise the GS-2.1a to GI-1 transition.

Establishing the climatic and environmental context of human activity at King Arthur's Cave and Sun Hole Cave is particularly important for understanding the subsistence strategies, mobility/settlement patterns, and landscape experiences of these early colonising populations. In this study we use stable isotope ($\delta^{18}O$ and $\delta^{13}C$) analysis of horse tooth enamel carbonate from King Arthur's Cave and Sun Hole Cave to infer climatic and environmental conditions local to the sites. The oxygen ($\delta^{18}O$) and carbon ($\delta^{13}C$) isotope signature of tooth enamel relates to the vegetation and water the animal consumed during the period of tooth formation, which is linked to prevailing climatic and environmental conditions in the vicinity of the animal's habitat and is influenced by animal physiology and behaviour (Pederzani and Britton, 2019). Horse physiology necessitates regular access to drinking water and their behavioural ecology favours landscapes with grass and sedge vegetation (Crane et al., 1997; King, 2002). Horse teeth form over several years, developing progressively from the occlusal surface to the root, and thus provide the opportunity to examine seasonally-resolved climate information (Bendrey et al. 2014; Hoppe et al. 2004; Sharp and Cerling, 1998). In mid-latitude environments horse enamel $\delta^{18}O$ reflects the $\delta^{18}O$ of meteoric water; variations in which are primarily driven by air temperature (Feranec et al. 2009; Rozanski et al., 1992). Under these environmental conditions, higher $\delta^{18}O$ values typically reflect warmer temperatures, and lower $\delta^{18}O$ values indicate colder temperatures. Enamel $\delta^{13}C$ reflects the vegetation in a horse's diet. In the context of the British Isles, where horses would have a diet composed exclusively of plants following the C_3 photosynthetic pathway, vegetation $\delta^{13}C$ is predominantly influenced by environmental factors such as water availability, temperature, and light and nutrient levels, with higher plant $\delta^{13}C$ values indicating more water- and/or nutritionally-stressed environments (Koch 1998; Kohn 2010).

Materials and Methods

Four horse teeth from King Arthur's Cave and two from Sun Hole Cave were selected for analysis (table 1). Three of the King Arthur's Cave teeth (UPN-272, UPN-275, UPN-280) bear characteristic traverse fractures, produced by percussive blows and indicative of bone marrow extraction (Jacobi and Higham, 2011), while the fourth (UPN-276) was included in this study as it had previously been radiocarbon dated (OxA-6732 12150 ± 100 ^{14}C yr BP; Stevens and Hedges, 2004). UPN-272, UPN-275, and UPN-280 are likely to date to the same phase of activity at the site, coming from the 'mammoth layer' (Taylor, 1928), which corresponds to unit 3c in later excavations (ApSimon, 1992). We selected one of these teeth (UPN-280) for radiocarbon dating. UPN-276 comes from the '1st hearth' layer and has been dated to a later period at the site. However, there have been significant methodological improvements in sample preparation for radiocarbon dating since the OxA-6732 date was produced, which for Late Glacial samples often result in more precise, older dates than previous determinations (Jacobi and Higham, 2011). We therefore decided to re-date UPN-276, to test if it were comparable in age to the other King Arthur's Cave samples. Neither of the two samples (UPN-266, UPN-267) from Sun Hole Cave show evidence of human processing, but both come from the Late Glacial Pleistocene layers (Collcutt et al. 1981) at the site, from which the human ulna and culturally-modified fauna was excavated.

Of the six teeth selected for analysis three are third molars (M3), one is a third or fourth premolar (P3/P4), one is a second molar (M2), and one is a first or second molar (M1/M2) (table 1). Horse tooth development and enamel mineralisation occurs sequentially; the M1 mineralises from around 0 to 24 months of age; M2 and M3 mineralisation occurs between approximately 9 and 35 months, and 24 and 52 months of age, respectively; P3 and P4 mineralise between approximately 15 and 34 months, and 21 and 48 months, respectively (Hoppe et al., 2004). As horses are typically fully weaned by the age of 9-12 months (Duncan, 1992) it is possible that our M1/M2 and M2 samples (UPN-266 and UPN-272) may at least partly be influenced by milk consumption, which would offset δ^{18}O and δ^{13}C relative to adult values (Wright and Schwarcz, 1998).

For stable isotope analysis, the surface of each tooth was cleaned via mechanical abrasion prior to sampling. Sequential enamel samples were then collected along the growth axis of each tooth at intervals of c.3mm. Samples were taken through the whole depth of the enamel, stopping as close to the enamel-dentine junction as possible. The enamel mineralisation process varies in duration across the tooth (Bendrey et al. 2015). Taking a sample through the entire depth of enamel at a given point along the tooth growth axis provides a homogenised sample; in horse this may represent several weeks to months (Higgins and MacFadden, 2004). Thus, while down-tooth δ^{18}O and δ^{13}C variations represent seasonal dietary/environmental variations, the original input signal may be dampened by the mineralisation process.

For each tooth, enamel samples were taken from the cusp that showed the best level of preservation. Nonetheless, several of the teeth sampled were poorly preserved. Sample locations were measured relative to the enamel-root junction (ERJ), or the lowest preserved point of the tooth if the ERJ was absent, as was the case for the culturally fractured teeth. The absence of the ERJ in several samples means no common anchor point exists across the teeth and as such, the isotopic profiles cannot be used to infer the timing of any seasonal patterns (e.g. to assess season of birth). However, this does not prevent assessment of variations in the magnitude of seasonal differences. Further truncation of the isotope profiles may exist due to tooth wear of the occlusal surface.

Enamel samples (c. 5-7 mg) were treated with 0.1M acetic acid (0.1ml/mg) for 4 hours to remove potential diagenetic carbonates, and then thoroughly rinsed and freeze dried. Isotopic analysis was performed using a Gas Bench II coupled to a Delta ^{Plus} XP IRMS at the Bloomsbury Environmental Isotope Facility, UCL, with each sample being reacted with 100% orthophosphoric acid at 45°C for 4 hours in individual vessels. Results are reported relative to the international standard VPDB calibrated using the IAEA NBS19 standard, and long-term analytical precision is ±0.04‰ and ±0.08‰ for $\delta^{13}C$ and $\delta^{18}O$, respectively. A full list of all stable isotope results is available as a supplementary file from either the UBSS or directly from the authors.

For radiocarbon dating, powdered dentine samples (c. 300 - 800mg) were collected from samples UPN-276 and UPN-280. The dentine was processed at UCL following the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit (ORAU) collagen extraction protocol (Brock et al., 2010). The sample was first demineralised in 0.5M HCl for 24 hours, then treated with 0.1M NaOH for 30 minutes to remove possible contaminating humic acids, followed by a further 0.5M HCl wash for 1 hour. The sample was then heated to 75°C in pH3 water for 48 hours, passed through a 9-um EeziTM filter and then through an ultrafilter (>30kD), and finally frozen and dried. The processed collagen was then submitted to ORAU for AMS analysis. Because the pre-treatment of the radiocarbon samples was done at UCL, it was necessary to correct for any potential contamination introduced into the samples during the pre-treatment process. Corrections were calculated through a series of measurements on known age samples to determine both the age and amount of carbon added to the sample during pre-treatment, following the method of Wood, et al. (2010).

Results and Interpretations

UPN-280 was dated to 12,410 ± 50 ^{14}C yr BP (OxA-V-2754-50) giving a corrected date of 12,450 ± 50 ^{14}C yr BP, which corresponds to 15,006 – 14,205 cal. BP (table 2). This date overlaps with the previously published radiocarbon dates on culturally modified horse remains from King Arthur's Cave (Jacobi and Higham, 2011), falling at the younger end of the range of dates. UPN-276 was dated to 12,365 ± 55 ^{14}C yr BP (OxA-V-2797-24) giving a corrected date of 12,410 ± 50 ^{14}C yr BP, which corresponds to 14,846 – 14,168 cal. BP (table 2). This date also overlaps with the radiocarbon dates on culturally-modified horse remains from the site and is around 450 years older than the previous date (OxA-6732) determination for this specimen (Stevens and Hedges, 2004). The overlap indicates the samples may come from the same phase of human activity at the site as the other dated specimens, although the possibility of more than one phase being represented within the range of dates cannot be ruled out.

Carbon stable isotopes results vary between different teeth, but no site-based differences are apparent (table 3, figure 3). Tooth-averaged δ^{13}C values range from -12.3‰ to -10.9‰, while overall variability in the samples analysed ranged from -12.6‰ to -10.6‰. Modern large herbivore tooth enamel δ^{13}C is typically enriched relative to the dietary intake by approximately 14.1 ± 0.5 ‰ (Cerling and Harris, 1999). Using this enrichment factor, an estimation of δ^{13}C dietary intake of -26.7 ± 0.5 to -24.7 ± 0.5 ‰ can be made, which is similar to the δ^{13}C values recorded for fossil seeds dating to the Late Glacial Interstadial from the Llanilid sedimentary sequence, South Wales (Lowe et al., 1999). Accounting for the influence of changing atmospheric CO_2 δ^{13}C, these estimated Late Glacial δ^{13}C vegetation values are moderately higher than δ^{13}C values observed in a modern British grassland environment (Dungait et al., 2008), and higher still than δ^{13}C values observed in a modern British woodland environment (Lockhead et al., 2008). Horse are primarily grazers, feeding on grasses and sedges in a range of habitats including open grasslands, meadows and woodland environments (Salter and Hudson, 1979; Crane et al., 1997; Pozdnyakova et al., 2011). A range of habitats would have been available to the horse at the time of the Late Upper Palaeolithic occupation of King Arthur's Cave and Sun Hole Cave; pollen records are dominated by open-environment taxa such as grasses, sedges and herbs, but also contain evidence of limited juniper scrub, willow and birch (Walker et al., 2003; Hill et al., 2008). The higher δ^{13}C dietary estimates, when compared to δ^{13}C values measured in both modern British grassland and woodland vegetation, suggest that growing conditions may have been less favourable than today, possibly due to lower nutrient or water availability. This could be due to lower precipitation amounts, higher temperatures, and/or less developed soils. The species composition of local flora inferred from pollen assemblages has also been used to infer limited soil development at the time (Walker et al., 2003).

The difference in δ^{13}C between different animals, particularly between UPN-272 and the other samples, represents variations in the δ^{13}C of diet between the animals. UPN-272 is one of the teeth (the other being UPN-266) we identified as potentially containing a milk signature. In humans, breastfeeding results in higher tooth enamel δ^{18}O, while δ^{13}C is lower in infants prior to the introduction of solid foods (Wright and Schwarcz, 1998). While the $\delta^{13}C$ results from UPN-272 are indeed lower than the other samples, we argue that this is not due to a milk influence. Horses begin grazing from birth, steadily increasing the proportion of vegetation in the diet and decreasing rates of suckling throughout the first 6-12 months of life (Crowell-Davis et al., 1985). This would produce a down-tooth $\delta^{13}C$ profile that steadily increased in value; this is not the pattern we observe for UPN-272 (fig. 3). Further, if suckling were influencing this sample, its $\delta^{18}O$ values could be expected to be higher than the other samples; results show this is not the case (table 3, fig. 3). There is also no evidence of a suckling signal in UPN-266 (table 3, fig. 3). As such, we maintain that the $\delta^{13}C$ results reflect an environmentally-derived dietary signature for all teeth sampled. Differences between intra-tooth $\delta^{13}C$ profiles could be produced by animals exploiting different micro-habitats within the landscape or could represent short-term variability in environmental conditions, as each tooth is very unlikely to have formed during the exact same two-year period.

No clear pattern of down-tooth $\delta^{13}C$ variation is apparent in the data. There are various possible interpretations; the response of vegetation to seasonal climate extremes may not have been sufficient to influence its $\delta^{13}C$ to any great degree; or horses may have consumed different vegetation in different seasons, effectively over-writing any climate induced seasonal variation in vegetation $\delta^{13}C$; or animal physiological and tooth mineralisation processes have dampened the enamel $\delta^{13}C$ relative to the dietary input.

Average oxygen stable isotope results are similar across all analysed teeth. Tooth averaged values range from -5.9‰ to -5.3‰; the overall variability in recorded values ranges from -6.7‰ to -4.3‰ (table 3). While not statistically significant, minimum $\delta^{18}O$ values from King Arthur's Cave for UPN-272, -275, and -280 are lower than for the Sun Hole Cave samples (fig. 4). This may be noteworthy as it suggests that these animals at King Arthur's lived under colder climatic conditions, an interpretation that appears to support King Arthur's Cave being occupied during a slightly earlier time period than Sun Hole Cave. UPN-276 from King Arthur's Cave displays higher $\delta^{18}O$, comparable to the Sun Hole Cave data (fig. 4). While its date (OxA-V-2797-24) overlaps with the other King Arthur's Cave horse dates, it falls at the younger end of the date range. Again, this could be indicative of a slightly later, warmer climate period, although no firm conclusions can be drawn from the available data.

The magnitude of down-tooth $\delta^{18}O$ variation, which indicates seasonal climate variations, ranges from 1.4‰ to 1.9‰, with the exception of UPN-272, which displays a considerably lower magnitude of within tooth variation (0.8‰). Notably, this is the tooth that is also the outlier in the $\delta^{13}C$ data. While the overall variation recorded in the enamel $\delta^{18}O$ is much lower than the variability observed in present day precipitation $\delta^{18}O$ in the British Isles, intra-tooth variation does approximate the modern day long-term average difference between summer and winter precipitation $\delta^{18}O$ (c. 1.5‰, Darling et al, 2003). The relatively consistent magnitude of down-tooth variation thus likely indicates seasonal variations in drinking water $\delta^{18}O$, dampened by tooth mineralisation processes, which are most likely linked to the seasonal temperature cycle.

Estimates of drinking water $\delta^{18}O$ and palaeotemperatures can be made through a series of known quantitative relationships between enamel $\delta^{18}O$ and meteoric $\delta^{18}O$, and meteoric $\delta^{18}O$ and air temperature, with corrections applied for glacial-interglacial changes in ocean $\delta^{18}O$ and geographical gradients in meteoric $\delta^{18}O$ (Arppe and Karhu, 2010; Bryant et al., 1996; Coplen et al., 2002; Darling et al., 1997; Degaldo Heurtas et al., 1995; Pryor et al., 2014; Rozanski et al., 1992). However, it should be recognised that with each data conversion, associated uncertainties increase (Pryor et al., 2014). Further, there is no single standardised method to relate meteoric $\delta^{18}O$ to air temperature (see Pryor et al., 2014 for discussion), and no consensus on the most appropriate way to account for potential differences between modern and past meteoric $\delta^{18}O$–temperature relationships. As such, while geographical gradients in meteoric $\delta^{18}O$-temperatures appear to have remained remarkably similar since the Late Pleistocene for the British Isles (Darling et al., 2003), all estimates should be treated with a degree of caution.

Our data estimates drinking water $\delta^{18}O$ for the horses from King Arthur's Cave and Sun Hole Cave to have averaged -8.4 ± 0.7‰, which may have ranged on a seasonal basis from around -10.2 ± 2.5 ‰ to -6.7 ± 2.5 ‰ (see supplementary data file for full details; a copy can be requested from UBSS or directly from the authors). A high degree of uncertainty is associated with the seasonal estimations, and it is likely the true variation in seasonal values has been altered by the enamel mineralisation process (Hoppe et al., 2004). Groundwater $\delta^{18}O$ in southwest England at the end of the Late Pleistocene has been estimated to be around -8‰, in contrast to present day measurements of around -7‰ (Darling et al., 2003; 1997). Within the British Isles, where evaporative enrichment of surface water is low, long term precipitation and groundwater $\delta^{18}O$ have been shown to be reasonable approximations of one another (Darling et al., 2003). We therefore suggest that our data represents surface water $\delta^{18}O$ during the period of human activity at Kings Arthur's Cave and Sun Hole Cave. Based on this, average air temperatures can be estimated. Depending on the method used (see supplementary file for details) temperature estimates range from 7.6 ± 2.2 °C to 10.1 ± 1.4 °C (Arppe and Karhu, 2010; Pryor et al., 2014; Rozanski et al., 1992). While there is a high degree of uncertainty around these estimates, all are lower than the current (1961-1990) average annual temperature of 12.8°C for southwest England and Wales (Met Office, 2017).

Overall, our results suggest that local to King Arthur's Cave and Sun Hole Cave, at the time of the post-LGM recolonisation of the British Isles, temperatures had increased significantly from their low during the LGM at least at an annual average scale. Temperatures were approaching, but were still lower than, modern annual averages. We cannot reliably assess seasonal temperature variability based on our results, due to the dampening introduced by the enamel mineralisation process and the large uncertainties associated with enamel-based palaeotemperature estimates (Arppe and Karhu 2010; Hoppe et al., 2004; Pryor et al., 2014). The elevated carbon isotope values in the vegetation signal, relative to the present day, likely indicate a nutrient and/or water limited growing environment within the habitats the horse were feeding. The oxygen isotope results indicate that this was unlikely to have been caused by temperature extremes, and therefore may indicate more arid environmental conditions, or less developed/more minerogenic soils. The variability observed between different teeth suggests that year to year conditions were variable, with fluctuations in temperatures and moisture levels apparent.

Environmental and Archaeological Conclusions

The occupation of the British Isles after the LGM is largely considered as a north-westward expansion of Magdalenian people from potential areas such as the Paris Basin, the Belgium Ardennes, and the German Rhineland. These were mobile groups who utilised seasonal hunting camps, and whose settlement and subsistence strategies appear to have been determined by resource availability, particularly of large prey such as horse and reindeer (Enloe & Audouze 2010; Leesch et al. 2012; Miller, 2012). As King Arthur's Cave and Sun Hole Cave are situated in valleys, it is conceivable that their function may have been as temporary bases for targeting nearby wild horse populations. The environmental conditions would have been of great importance to the behavioural ecology of horse in these landscapes and therefore a factor in human resource exploitation decisions.

Overall, the climate and environment local to King Arthur's Cave and Sun Hole Cave at 15.2 – 14.6 ka was relatively mild, although most probably still cooler than present day. The vegetation appears to have been experiencing some degree of environmental stress, which we believe most likely relates to nutrient- and water- limiting conditions. Based on our results, it appears temperatures rose earlier in southwest Britain than in Greenland (c. 14.7ka), which corroborates findings from other palaeoenvironmental studies (e.g. Walker et al., 2003). However, this is the first study to directly link such palaeoenvironmental inferences with the human reoccupation of the British Isles after the LGM. Our data indicates King Arthur's Cave was occupied under colder climate conditions than Sun Hole Cave, which could support the interpretation that King Arthur's Cave was occupied at a slightly earlier time than at Sun Hole Cave.

Regardless of the possible chronological differences between the two sites, the presence of horse in both areas indicates that vegetation was sufficiently developed to support large herbivore populations. The climatic warming associated with the Late Glacial Interstadial has been linked to the gradual replacement of pioneer steppic plants by more shrub and woodland species (Pettit and White, 2012; Walker et al., 1994). However, the dominance of horse in the faunal assemblages, who have a dietary preference for vegetation types typically found in open landscapes, combined with the environmental stress we interpret from our data, suggests a still relatively marginal landscape, lacking in ecological maturity.

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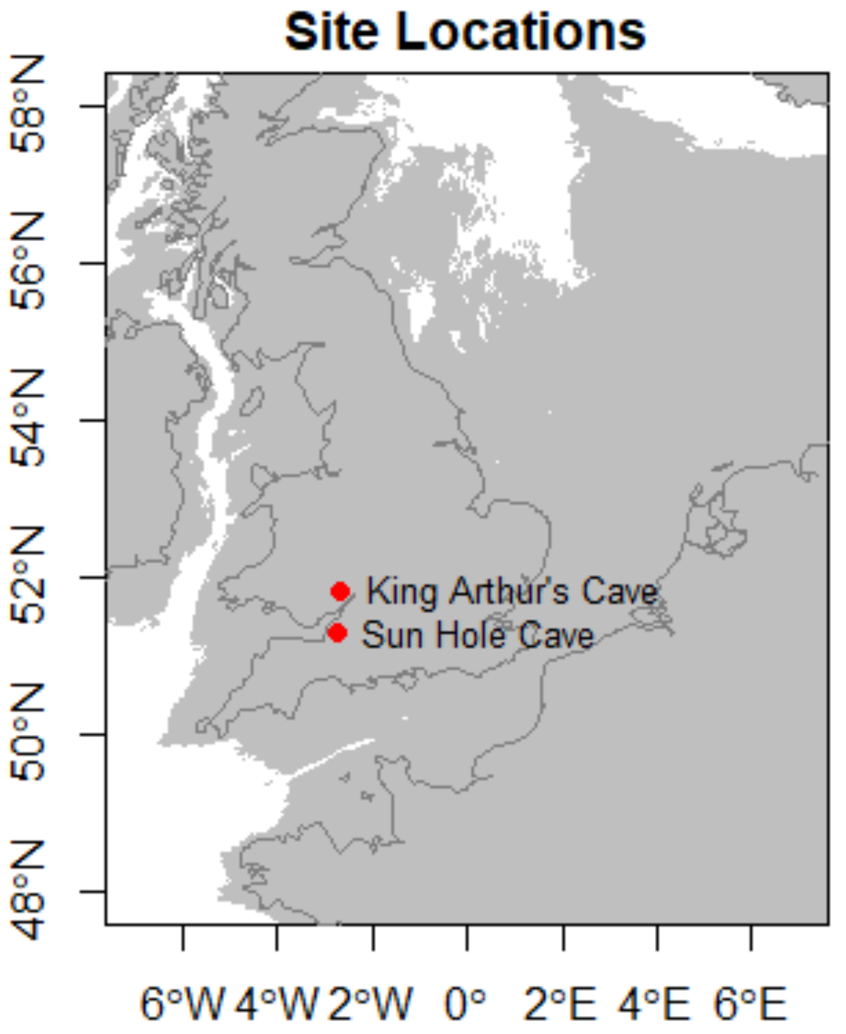

Figure 1. Map of Britain and adjacent areas of northwest Europe, showing location of King Arthur's Cave and Sun Hole Cave. Approximate position of the palaeocoastlines for GS-2.1a/GI-1 (-80m below modern sea-level) is derived from Zickel et al. (2016).

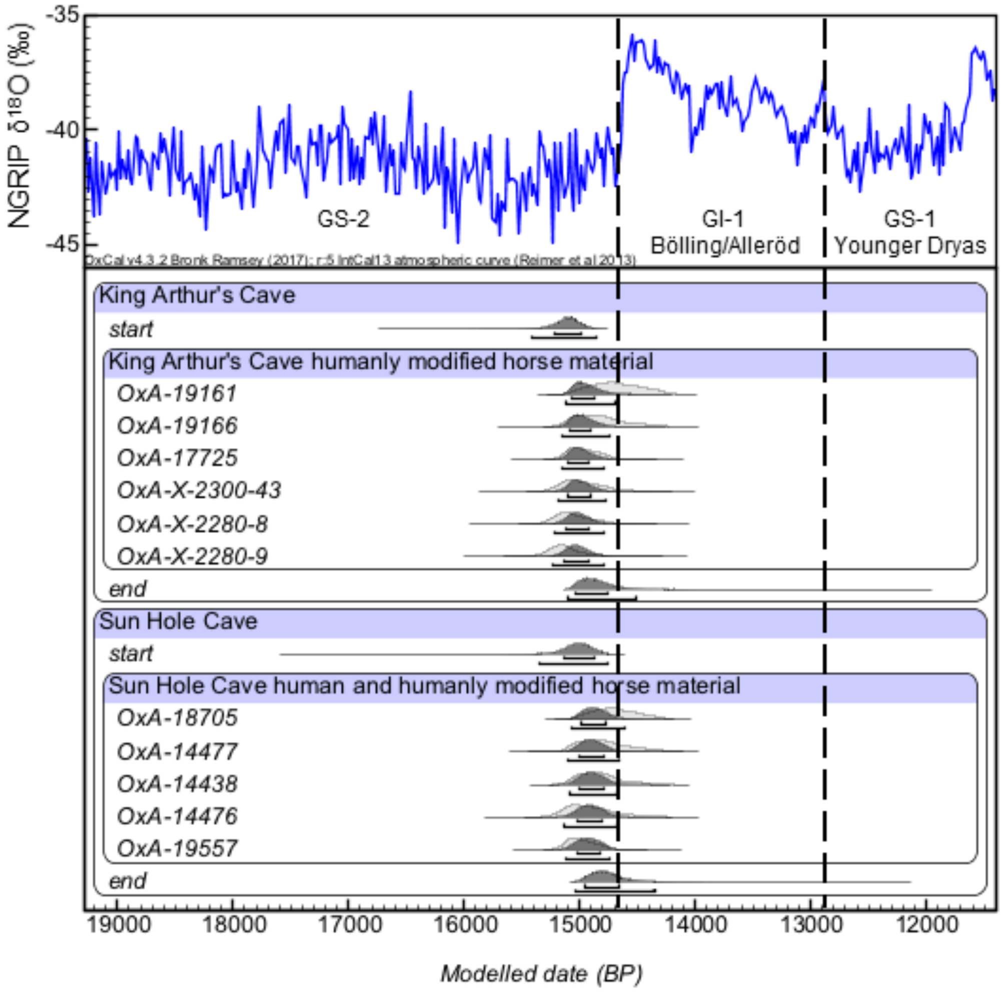

Figure 2. Modelled probability distribution of dated human and humanly modified *Equus ferus* remains from King Arthur's Cave and Sun Hole Cave. Dates originally published in Jacobi and Higham (2011). The Greenland ice core (NGRIP) δ^{18}O record is displayed for comparison. Human presence in the British Isles appears to occur prior to the warming signal in the NGRIP record.

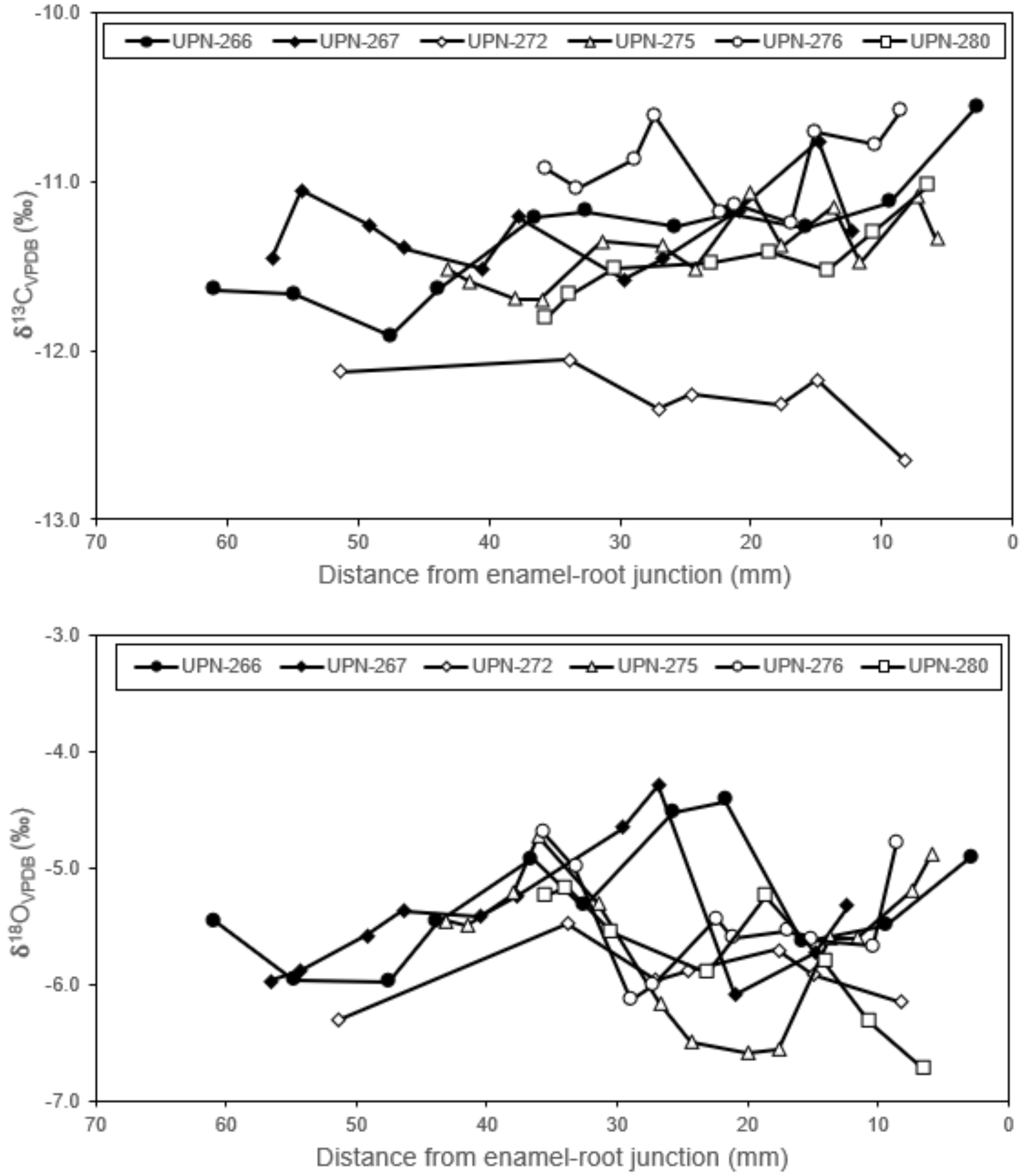

Figure 3. $\delta^{13}C$ and $\delta^{18}O$ intra-tooth profiles for each *Equus ferus* tooth sampled. Open symbols indicate samples from King Arthur's Cave, filled symbols indicate samples from Sun Hole Cave

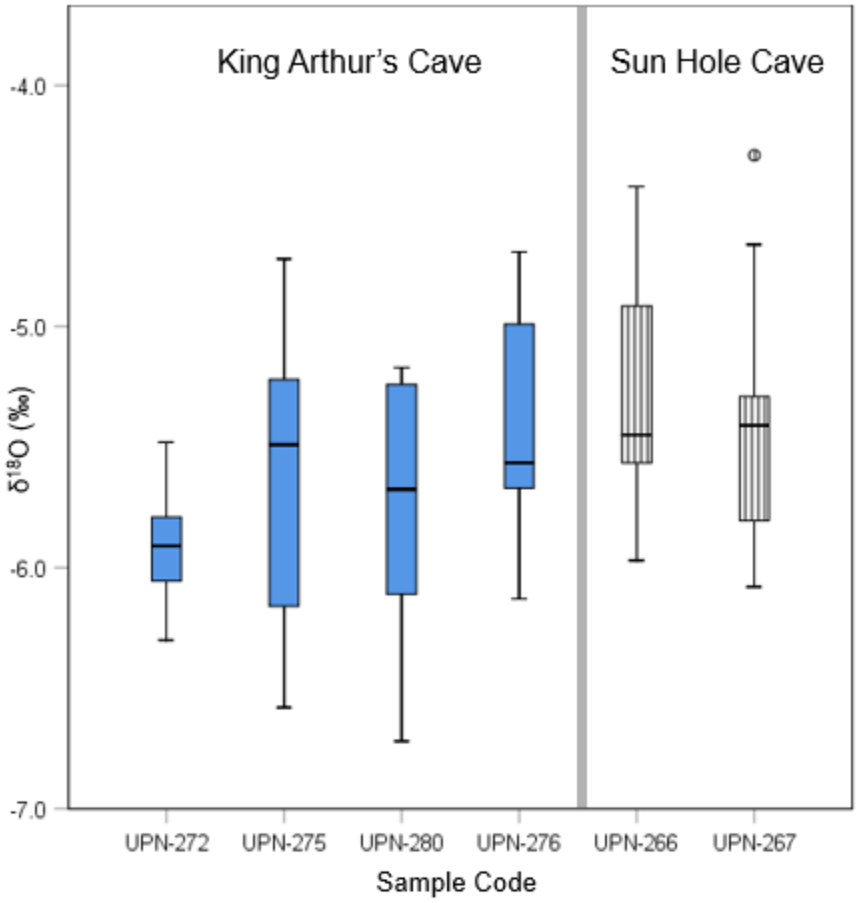

Figure 4. Boxplot of $\delta^{18}O$ values for each tooth.

Table 1. *Equus ferus* teeth from Sun Hole Cave and King Arthur's Cave, analysed in this study. Date references:[1]Stevens and Hedges, 2004; [2]this study.

Site	**Sample code**	**Museum code**	**Species and element**	**Excavation context**	**^{14}C AMS lab code**	**^{14}C AMS date**
Sun Hole Cave	UPN-266	M5.2/14.1	*Equus ferus* left M^2	5th/6th ft Pleistocene. C/6 under W wall		
Sun Hole Cave	UPN-267	M5.2/30	*Equus ferus* right M^3	7th ft Pleistocene		
King Arthur's Cave	UPN-272	W.2.21/723	*Equus ferus* left M_1/M_2	?Mammoth layer. 7.9.27		
King Arthur's Cave	UPN-275	W2.21/1123	*Equus ferus* left M_3	?Mammoth layer. 23.6.29		
King Arthur's Cave	UPN-276	W2.21/285	*Equus ferus* ?left M^3	1st hearth	OxA-6732[1] OxA-V-2797-24[2]	12,150 ± 100 12,365 ± 55
King Arthur's Cave	UPN-280	W2.21/726	*Equus ferus* left P_3/P_4	?Mammoth layer. 7.9.27	OxA-V-2754-50[2]	12,410 ± 50

Table 2. AMS radiocarbon data from UPN-276 and UPN-280.

Sample code	Collagen yield (%)	δ^{13}C (‰)	δ^{15}N (‰)	Atomic C/N	14C AMS lab code	^{14}C AMS date	Corrected age BP	Age calBP 68.2% probability	Age calBP 95.4% probability	Reference
UPN-276	not given	-20.4	1.3	3.3	OxA-6732	12,150 ± 100	n/a	14,142-13,846	14,388-13,747	Stevens and Hedges, 2004
	3.0	-20.4	1.6	3.3	OxA-V-2797-24	12,365 ± 55	12,410 ± 50	14,664-14,292	14,846-14,168	This study
UPN-280	4.9	-21.3	0.3	3.2	OxA-V-2754-50	12,410 ± 50	12,450 ± 50	14,784-14,320	15,006-14,205	This study

Table 3. Summary of δ^{18}O and δ^{13}C *Equus ferus* tooth enamel results.

Sample code	**Sampled enamel length (mm)**	**n**	**Tooth δ^{18}O (‰) average**	**Tooth δ^{18}O (‰) maximum**	**Tooth δ^{18}O (‰) minimum**	**Tooth δ^{18}O (‰) range**	**Tooth δ^{13}C (‰) average**	**Tooth δ^{13}C (‰) maximum**	**Tooth δ^{13}C (‰) minimum**	**Tooth δ^{13}C (‰) range**
UPN-266	61.0	11	-5.3	-4.4	-6.0	1.5	-11.3	-10.6	-11.9	1.4
UPN-267	56.6	11	-5.4	-4.3	-6.1	1.8	-11.3	-10.8	-11.6	0.8
UPN-272	51.5	7	-5.9	-5.5	-6.3	0.8	-12.3	-12.1	-12.6	0.6
UPN-275	43.2	13	-5.6	-4.7	-6.6	1.9	-11.4	-11.1	-11.7	0.6
UPN-276	35.7	10	-5.4	-4.7	-6.1	1.4	-10.9	-10.6	-11.2	0.7
UPN-280	35.6	8	-5.7	-5.2	-6.7	1.6	-11.5	-11.0	-11.8	0.8