

# Great Archaeological Sites in Swansea



## 1. PAVILAND CAVE



Many caves pierce the limestone cliffs of south Gower, and one in particular (at SS 4372 8588) has had an important part to play in our understanding of the prehistoric past. In 1823, following the discovery of a mammoth tusk in Goat's Hole cave at Paviland, the geologist William Buckland carried out further investigations and discovered an ancient skeleton which had been buried with by ivory artefacts, the remains of a shell necklace, and red ochre. With a creationist world view and little concept of deep time, Buckland concluded that the skeleton, which he took to be that of a woman, dated to the Roman period and was connected in some way to Yellow Top promontory fort at the top of the cliff, which he believed to be a Roman camp. Excavations in the 20th century, coupled with careful re-examination in the 1990s of Buckland's finds and those made more recently, have shown that they were far older, and that the 'Red Lady' was in fact a young man. The research of the 1990s suggested that the burial had been made at a time when Gower was at the edge of an ice sheet, but a more recent consideration of the radiocarbon dates has shown that it took place in an interstadial – a warmer period between two ice age episodes. Although the cliff in which it stands is now washed by the sea, it would then have

overlooked the wide plain many miles away but, in spite of the distance, analysis of isotopes in the skeleton indicates that that seafood had been on his menu for at least some of the time.

Even if Buckland’s theories have not stood the test of time, the importance of his discovery has, as the earliest known ceremonial burial in Western Europe.



Paviland Cave is only accessible for about an hour on either side of low water, so check the tide times before you visit. The site can be reached from the Wales Coast Path via a very steep and narrow gully with boulders under foot, followed by a scramble up the base of the cliff. There is space for parking on Pilton Green. A footpath on the opposite side of the road leads over fields to the head of the gully. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 159, Explorer Series sheet 164.

**Timeline** (the asterisk indicates the approximate time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar archaeological sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. Goat’s Hole cave has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00118w and the promontory fort is 00143w. You can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page.