



## 10,000-year-old body may be oldest found here

MEET Pauleen, the name archaeologists have given to the remains of a young woman they believe could be the oldest Irish body ever discovered.

The ancient body, which has been named Pauleen, was discovered during an excavation at Caherconnell Stone Fort in Co Clare on Saturday, just metres away from the world famous Poll na mBrón dolmen.

The excavation team, led by Crusheen-based TVAS Ireland, have so far uncovered Pauleen's complete skull, rib bones, spine, pelvis and her right arm. The remains were lifted on Sunday and have been sent for radiocarbon dating. It is estimated they could be 10,000 years old.

Archaeologist Graham Hull said that not all of the adult teeth had "erupted," giving a clue as to the probable age of the person being about 15 years.

"The facial bones, the eye brow and the chin bone give some indication of sex, and that indicates a female," he added.

He said it was likely to be a secondary burial to the primary burial site of the central chamber. The original corpse, he said, had probably been "disarticulated," after being allowed to decompose and be eaten by animals beforehand, in a manner reminiscent of the traditional burial practices of some native American Indians.

"This type of burial and this type of burial chamber in this part of Ireland would be unique," said Mr Hull.

"This is an amazing discovery. It doesn't seem to be Christian burial — which would be orientated in an east/west direction and lying on its back, whereas our body was in bits.

This means it is most likely prehistoric, dating from between 8,000 BC and 500 AD. I would say the skull is at least 4,000 years old, from around 2,000 years before the birth of Christ."

When the excavation work began three weeks ago, the TVAS team believed that the site contained a souterrain or

underground passage.

"It is possible this is a prehistoric chamber tomb or a medieval burial ground. Usually in archeology you have a good idea what you are looking for, but in this case we just don't know. The fact we can't figure out what it is yet makes it an even more rare discovery," continued Mr Hull.

"This has the potential to be as important or even more important than the Poll na mBrón discovery. It is very significant no matter what results come back from the carbon dating, but there's a good chance it could be a really major discovery. We are looking at what could be a completely new monument type."

Alongside the TVAS Ireland team, the excavation team includes experts from NUI Galway and public volunteers.

**by Andrew Hamilton**

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Archaeologist Kim O'Shea with the skull of a girl, aged about 15, found near the entrance to the burial chamber at Caherconnell, Co Clare.