

SURFACE ARCHAEOLOGY

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This issue of *ARC* sees a departure from precedent set in earlier volumes in that the papers selected for the thematic section are more explicitly concerned with field practice, and are also confined to one geographical area, England. The Anglocentric nature of the section is purposeful, for it is only within the context of national policies and historically specific social conditions that priorities and appropriate methods can be properly assessed. In other parts of the world different threats, financial circumstances and priorities will prevail. However, we would affirm the view that the potential for 'Surface Archaeology' is as great elsewhere, and hope that the following articles will challenge preconceptions and stimulate response.

The term 'Surface Archaeology' is employed here simply to denote that part of the archaeological universe that is most readily accessible, the land surface (which we also take to include the surface of the seabed and other underwater environments). There are two obvious features about 'Surface Archaeology' as so defined. In the first place, the inspection of the land surface for the purpose of extracting archaeological information is generally an inexpensive exercise when compared with excavation. Consequently larger areas can be examined, often more than once, for a variety of purposes and by means of an array of different techniques and procedures. The second point, which is probably causally related to the first, is that there is a far higher proportion of non-professional involvement in the archaeology of the surface than there is with excavation. This public participation takes many forms, from a casual interest to the more systematically organised activities of local archaeology societies, sub-aqua clubs and similar groups.

Where geology, topography or vegetation make site detection by such means as fieldwalking and aerial photography unproductive, other strategies have to be devised. Peatlands are one such area, and in view of their potential for containing organically well-preserved sites, the low level of site detection by conventional means makes the task of the archaeologist particularly frustrating. In the first article of this issue, Francis Pryor outlines one such alternative set of techniques, 'dyke survey', the application of which has led to the discovery of some quite spectacular sites. Pryor's discussion also supplies a good indication of how methods evolve as fieldworkers learn from their experiences with a growing awareness of contemporary land usage, a point we would all do well to bear in mind.

It is also becoming increasingly clear that even in areas more suited to the 'conventional' methods, no single strategy should be favoured above all others. Reporting back on a paper published in *ARC* 1:2, Bob Bewley summarises his findings following site-specific investigations and a regional aerial survey of northwest Cumbria. Even so, to follow this up by a 20% regional survey, the costs of fieldwalking this

area (in terms of the hours of labour involved) would be extraordinarily high. Merely to keep abreast of agricultural and industrial site destruction would therefore require far higher levels of funding than currently available. In the light of this it seems desirable that archaeologists devote more attention to generating popular support, which would probably entail re-adjusting current notions about the contribution that can be made by amateur archaeologists and other interested parties.

The manner by which ideas change as the results from earlier fieldwork are synthesised, and the need to revise strategies in the light of this, is also a dominant theme of the paper by Julian Richards. While his area of study, the classic chalkland environment around Stonehenge, has been heavily researched for centuries, the results of recent fieldwork can still generate new ideas about the region's prehistory. More importantly, the paper provides a good example of the manner by which archaeological knowledge of any kind is produced, and then how such knowledge serves to structure practice until such time as it requires, perforce, further revision.

Rescue, or 'salvage' archaeology in Britain has yet to attain the same level of funding as, for instance, in North America. By virtue of this economic fact, the solitary fieldwalker is still a figure in the rural landscape. The brief of these individuals is generally to survey tracts of land in advance of proposed construction or extraction, and to assess the threat posed by such planned development. In recent years the theoretical underpinnings of surface surveys have come to emphasise the use of teams in preference to individuals for this kind of work. Yet, as Richard Barcham points out, the individual fieldwalker has many advantages over even, numerically, small survey teams. Not least amongst these is maintaining good relations with the farming community and other land users. In addition, he argues that an appreciation of the economic and political issues that face farmers is essential. Knowledge of these can help us understand why agricultural practice is changing so rapidly, and thereby posing a greater threat to archaeological landscapes than in the past.

While ploughing, because it can bring artefacts to the surface, may lead to the discovery of new sites, this need not always be the case. For instance, Anglo-Saxon settlement in south-eastern Britain, as evidenced by pottery scatters, is scarcely visible in comparison to the immediately previous Romano-British or subsequent medieval periods. Tom Williamson's recent work in northeast Essex has shown that it is, nevertheless, possible to identify Saxon field systems by using much later documentary evidence, such as Tithe and Enclosure maps. By gradually stripping off later features of known date, it becomes possible to recognise contemporary field boundaries that may date from the Roman period. By treating the palimpsest of archaeological traces in terms of a changing landscape, Williamson argues, it is possible to overcome the limitations imposed by the application of more conventional approaches. The ever escalating rate of destruction of field boundaries may eventually mean that it will be difficult to verify similar hypotheses

in other areas through fieldwork, even with the support of Tithe and Enclosure maps.

At a time when the Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) for each county are being computerised and updated, often as part of MSC funded programmes, there is surely a pressing need for a reasoned assessment of the manner by which such data have been collected. To this end Nigel Holman's contribution is a welcome one. As he states in his paper, a substantial portion of the SMR for northwest Norfolk derives from data collected by individual, non-professional fieldwalkers. Holman, using straightforward procedures, attempts to establish the extent to which site distributions based on the SMR of his region accurately depict past settlement patterns, and how much of its structure is merely a reflection of the pattern of fieldwork. The results indicate a blend of both fieldwork bias and real distributions, but the value of the exercise lies also in the use to which such knowledge is put, particularly towards future amateur and professional cooperation. Many amateurs spend significant portions of their leisure hours tramping fields, following the metaphorical footsteps of several worthy predecessors. Through such activity they help to keep alive the spirit of archaeology and a public awareness of the past. The discipline has a duty to acknowledge their commitment and enthusiasm, to foster their contributions, and not merely dismiss them lightly. Moreover, in a time of financial stringency, professional archaeologists may in the long run benefit by broadening public involvement in, and support for, archaeology. While pandering to market forces and the interests of the leisure industries may reap short term financial gains, listening to peoples' views and according recognition to the way they see the world and their past, is likely to be a more fruitful course to follow.

It is this search for a balance between financial constraints and ethical concerns that preoccupy our contributors. Many of the authors emphasise the personal aspects of fieldwork, the sense of place that comes from a growing familiarity and understanding of the landscape and its human presence. Their enthusiasm for the subject and the tasks in hand is clearly communicated, and, I would surmise, enhances purpose and meaning in what might otherwise be a sterile and certainly tedious exercise. While each adopts a different stance, all acknowledge the truth in the adage "what you see is what you get". It behoves us then to eschew dogma, and to allow for changing the perspective with which we seek to perceive the traces of past human endeavour.

Common abbreviations used in this issue:

DoE	Department of the Environment.
HBMC(E)	The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England.
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.
MSC	Manpower Services Commission; a Government funded youth employment scheme.
RCHM	Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England).
SMR	Sites and Monuments Record; County based archive.

DYKE SURVEY: AN IMPERFECT APPROACH TO THE INVISIBLE

Francis Pryor

Introduction

This paper is in essence a post hoc rationalisation or justification for the research method and design that grew out of fieldwork, largely, it seemed at the time, by itself. It would be nice to pretend, as I have done from time to time in research seminars and the like, that we approached our problems from the top-down: unfortunately things did not work out that way, and it would be dishonest to pretend otherwise. I used to worry about the fact that my research designs, even my research objectives, invariably changed beyond recognition once put into practice, as this clearly went against the principal canon of modern Anglo-American archaeological law; to make matters worse I had convinced myself that the fault was mine, that my work lacked discipline, and conceptual rigour. However, as time has elapsed, I have slowly come to the realisation that this is not so: our work has a discipline of its own, even if we do not broadcast the fact explicitly.

We are funded by a Cultural Resource Management (CRM) agency -- English Heritage -- and we are, I feel, expected to produce tangible results that will mean something to the public at large. Accordingly we cannot ride our own hobby horses -- at least not to the point of saddle sores -- and tend to stay clear of Negative Evidence (the last resort of an archaeological scoundrel), whenever we can. This system of funding, in essence 'payment by results', imposes a very real discipline on our work and forces us to make numerous, sometimes quite drastic, tactical decisions, whatever their effect might be on the original research design. I hope this paper will show that a flexible approach to the subject is both structured and disciplined. We can see little point in pursuing previously stated research objectives once these have been shown to be unattainable or irrelevant (or both). It is our belief that a properly thought-out, self-assessing and well-executed project produces results, as it goes, that justify its existence, whatever its initial aims and objectives. I see this approach as being complementary to the more conventional 'scientific' approach of hypothesis, then test, then rejection, modification or validation; this is a method better suited to shorter, perhaps less intensive projects. Our approach, which is more 'organic' in its organisation, is well adapted to long-term projects within the CRM sphere.

We believe, and it is for others to judge whether we are right, that this flexible approach frees CRM work from unnecessary self-imposed restriction and allows the unexpected -- even the unexpectable -- to be examined. Finally, our highest-level aim is to break the inherent

(Archaeological Review from Cambridge 4:1 [1985])