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**REVERIES OF THE SOLITARY WALKER**

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This is a time when the number of state-funded excavations in England has been deliberately and severely reduced in order to unjam the post-exavation backlog (English Heritage 1984, 7), and when the concurrent emphasis is upon the definition of landscapes projects (ibid, 13-15). It is also a time when there is a more compelling need than ever for archaeological workers not to remain aloof in order that their social product can be justified, and when there is at last an understanding of the aims which archaeologists share with naturalists and the will to blend that understanding into collective action. It is therefore obvious that the archaeological fieldwalker's skills be tuned harmoniously in response to each of the notes I have sounded. The emphasis which I will place on the importance of fieldwalking is not new. No novel theoretical perspective will be engaged here. Those who are not active service in the fields will probably hold these truths to be self-evident. If that is so, it will be good to have this declaration in print. If my comments excite controversy, that will be a useful contribution to the debate.

I write from my experience as a staff member of the Northamptonshire County Council Archaeology Unit (NCCAU). The county has a long tradition of single or paired fieldwalking (e.g. Foard 1978; Martin and Hall 1980). Much of the raw data from this work has been incorporated (though not necessarily in fine detail) in the RCHM's now complete set of inventories for the county and in the County SMR. Fieldwalking in the county has generally been done for its own sake, that is, in order to identify areas of high and low artefact density rather than as a preliminary to development or as an integral component of a landscape investigation programme (but see Hall 1980).

The desire of successive governments to improve road communications between the Midlands and the East Coast ports has been focussed on the construction of a major new road between the M1 and the A1. The Department of Transport (DTP) has adopted a preferred route which runs from Catthorpe (Leicestershire) to Brampton (Cambridgeshire). Several strategic alternative routes have been proposed by objectors. The preferred and alternative routes are currently (February 1985) the subject of a Public Inquiry. In 1982 NCCAU asked DTP to provide funds for the preliminary investigation of those parts of the county which would be at risk if the road were to be constructed. The explicit emphasis of the investigation was to be on field survey with subsidiary inputs from aerial photography and documentary research. A grant was approved which was designed to fund one post for 18 months. I was transferred from my existing commitments in Northamptonshire in September 1983 and since then have, apart from
the summer months when the fields were unavailable, worked in the terrain which may be affected by road development.

As my title suggests, much of that time has been spent in solitary reflection, often vacuous and repetitive, but occasionally devoted to the development of three themes. These are general considerations which have an application to all rural fieldwork. More specific observations on the archaeological implications of the proposed construction of the M1-AL Link Road have been submitted to UTP (Bereham 1984).

It seems necessary to rehearse the advantages and disadvantages of individual and group fieldwork in terms of organisation, perception and time. This realisation was substantiated by my attendance at recent day school and conference sessions (Stockton-on-Tees, Cambridge TAG 1984) where the contribution of the individual fieldworker was discussed in self-deprecatory or perfunctory terms. I shall also stress the contribution which individual fieldworkers can make, through regular personal contact and increasing familiarity with their study areas, not only to the archaeological database but also to more general questions of landscape history, and towards a community appreciation of the archaeological content of the countryside. I must emphasise that it is vitally important for all fieldworkers to become well informed about contemporary agricultural practice. This point is often raised as an afterthought in handbooks of archaeological method. It deserves closer consideration.

The majority of papers on fieldwalking regard the activity as labour-intensive and thus convenient for the purposes of amateur archaeological groups and MSC-funded teams. The general implication is that in this way large tracts of arable land can be efficiently and regularly scanned at a macroscopic level. Fieldwalking is also quite rightly seen as a non-destructive means of investigation well suited as a way of stimulating archaeological acuity in those who can only devote a part of their leisure time or alternatively in those, such as MSC programme personnel, who do not have a long familiarity with archaeological material. British archaeology is enriched by the observations of such groups (e.g. Charge 1983), which are generally relegated to the back pages of county journals or to museum accessions catalogues.

Such teams have been used to survey everything from sub-regions (e.g. Shennan 1980, 129-132) to locations which can be elliptically termed individual sites (e.g. Boismier n.d.). It is widely recognised by those who co-ordinate fieldwork programmes that particularly members of the field will have differing habits and visual preferences in the field. This diversity is reflected in variable soil collection rates which can be measured simply and perhaps statistically weighted. Monitoring and quality control is not ensure a rigorously objective set of observations but at least they include an acknowledgement that the problem of fallibility has been taken into account.

For the individual, the question of perception appears to be less vexing. It has been argued (Boazd 1978, 359) that any form of fieldwalking exercise should be completed by one individual in order to mitigate the quantitative variations noted when two or more fieldworkers are gathered together in the name of surface survey. Early on, the vigour of this argument informs the tradition of fieldwalking within Northamptonshire. It is based on the premise that an individual field surveyor will maintain a consistency of observation which cannot be guaranteed for teams of fieldwalkers, however many permutations they may undergo. This premise must be qualified by the realisation that an individual fieldworker is generally subject to greater extremes of concentration and mood than members of a team.

All fieldwalkers have to play themselves in on particular soils, just as it takes excavators some time to come to terms with the pedological and stratigraphic characteristics of their sites. Once the individual fieldwalker is aware of the range of soil types and topographic variation in the study area, she can properly begin the work of field survey, using a predetermined range of sample sizes and recording techniques. What happens then is partly a matter of serendipity, partly a triumph of the will.

Strong will is needed to overcome the impediments to sensible observation that occur when the individual fieldworker is confronted with a 30 ha field on a north-facing slope with heavy clay soil in the rain, next to a Roman road. The communal spirit of a team may overcome the problems of indecency and self-consciousness that is like this. Equally, even on the most benign of dull days, the flattest of fields and the lightest of soils, the occasional failure of the individual fieldworker to find anything of archaeological note after two or three hours tends to depress the spirits and to render the movements meandering, so that there is no longer any inclination to bend down and turn over uninteresting flinty horizons. Although negative evidence is extremely useful, it does not fill many self-sewn sacking bags. The only answer to this problem is for the fieldworker to be aware of it and to take the decision to abandon that particular superficially unproductive field until a more suitable time.

The individual fieldworker comes into her or his own when a known, prolific but uncharted area of high artifactual density is being re-examined and its details plotted on to a 1:2500 map or, a fortiori, when a hitherto unknown surface scatter is identified and plotted. The degree of attention which the individual will give to such a manifestation is necessarily greater than that which can be applied by a more diffuse group, whose members cannot be so immediately aware of regularities in artefact patterning until notes can conveniently be compared. The individual is also more likely to be smitten by alternating feelings of self-regard and respect for the forebears whose fragmented detritus lies amidst the shotguns and carted tractor parts at her or his feet. The self-regard will ensure that everything which can be recorded and collected within the agreed frame-
work will be; so that the fieldwalker’s prowess can be praised; happily, the respect which this material commands will moderate the sinful feelings of pride.

The less contentious matters of organisation and time afford the fieldwalker a high degree of autonomy and latitude, provided that enough time has originally been set aside for the particular field survey project, with proper allowances for climatic disruption. There are likely to be few rural threats which do not allow at least one essay in fieldwalking; indeed rural change and rotation naturally increase the area available to the fieldwalker and the aerial photographer. Clearly, the larger the fieldwalking team, the tighter its organisation must be and the more time must be spent on ensuring that. Because there are so few problems of organisation for the solitary fieldworker, once access to the land has been arranged and the appropriate large-scale maps obtained, s/he can cover large areas of arable land in as thorough a manner as the goals of the project prescribe and the fluctuating mood of the individual permits. Whether the area to be surveyed at 15m intervals is a linear tranche of landscape such as the 56km of the preferred route for the MI-Al Link Road in Leicestershire and Northamptonshire or a spatially confined study area of 90ha based on the Lower Isle Valley incorporating part of the preferred route, the kinetic energy of the fieldwork is self-perpetuating.

Thus although teams of fieldwalkers may cover greater areas of terrain or specific locales in closer detail than the individual fieldwalker, the lone figure in a landscape may achieve qualitative results. The value of fieldwalking results by a reflective self-awareness, a relaxed style of organisation and an unabashed sense of affinity with the particularities of his/her study area.

It is often said that the success of a county archaeological unit can be measured by its impact on public opinion. This can be formally achieved through a mixed publication policy, the local press and broadcasting media and the unit’s links with museums, schools and leisure agencies. It is also important to note that the individual fieldworker, whether coordinating an excavation or undertaking a season of field survey, is uniquely well placed to nurture informal contacts within the community where s/he is carrying out fieldwork. The manager of a fieldwalking programme is legally required to seek access from all landowners whose fields s/he plans to examine, and etiquette demands that s/he contact the tenant or farm manager where the owner is not also the occupier of the land. This will involve initial contact by letter and telephone, supported in many cases by a visit to the occupier or at least an interception in the fields. This is the point at which the exchange of information is maximised, where the purpose of the survey, the method of collection, the nature of the artefactual evidence and the crude distribution of putative sites in the district can be provided by the fieldworker, while for his or her part, the farmer, tenant or employee can furnish details of specific archaeological finds and landscape features (such as boundary oaks, field names and stone scatters) and of past, present and intended agricultural usage. I would contend that this unstructured and often spontaneous field discussion is a highly effective yet oddly unsung mode of archaeological discourse. Indeed, the more familiar a figure becomes in her/his chosen study area, the more familiar s/he will become with that area as a result not only of self-generated observations but also of a rude increase in the number of contributions from people who live and work in the area and have an instinct for it. This method of research was well known by antiquaries, topographers and travellers from John Aubrey to E.C. Curwen, but for many years it has been unfashionable to admit the value of informal exchange, for it wins no immediate professional esteem.

My own recent fieldwork in Northamptonshire has been divided into two stages. A general study of the preferred route corridor, which included regular and sometimes repeated traversing of each available arable field and the noting of earthworks within fields of pasture, was carried out in 1983-84, together with a non-intensive examination of the various strategic alternative routes. During 1984-85 work has been concentrated in a study area between the villages of Naseby and Kelmarsh. For the first stage of the survey, I wrote to and telephoned 38 occupiers of arable land on the preferred route, from 11 of whom I was able to obtain significant and otherwise unreCORed archaeological information, while meeting with cordiality, indifference or choler from the others. After the first season, proforma cards which outlined the information retrieved from fieldwalking were sent to each occupier on whose land artefacts were collected (36 out of 38) and to the occupiers of grassland where earthworks were noted. Examination of all arable fields in the Naseby-Kelmarsh study area, in order to provide a correla
tive landscape context for two areas of high artefact density through which the preferred route will run if the Link Road is constructed, has involved renewed contact with six occupiers (one commercial, five individual). Particularly good rates of exchange have been negotiated with two oral individual occupiers, whereby I supply general archaeological information and s/he turn gives details about agricultural changethat has occurred in living memory and about current agricultural practice. It is clear from additional exchanges that I have made in Naseby and Kelmarsh that my interlocutors in the field have passed on some of the archaeological observations which I have made. This suggests that further emphasis on community archaeology in the form of educational visits, evening classes, exhibitions or excavations (in the van of road construction) would be mutually rewarding. It may be that neither Naseby, with its critical role in British political history, nor the estate village of Kelmarsh, where all the land is owned by one person, are typical rural communities. However, the point remains that there are hundreds of rural settlements in the British Isles in whose community awareness of the local archaeological resources is undeveloped. This is not to belittle the residents of these places, but simply indicates the need for that awareness to be drawn out by the regular presence of an accessible field archaeologist. This is surely a major archaeological priority for the rest of the century.
that food production may be optimised. It would be churlish not to give two cheers for this belated move for hereby the British landscape is rendered slightly less prone to homogenisation and can continue to provide its users with employment, food and scope for reflection and study.

It may also be the case that the recent publicity which has been given to the British grain surplus and to the utter dearth of food in parts of Ethiopia and Sudan will tend to discourage over-production of the major crops which are grown on British land. The effect of this may be seen in the 1985-86 agricultural cycle.

I have offered these confessions as a candid summation of those aspects of fieldwalking practice which have particularly exercised me over the last 18 months. Every archaeologist will claim, if pressed, to know all that can be said about fieldwalking but it is, as I once overheard another contributor to this issue remark, 'a serious and uncomfortable business'. Discussion about the purpose, techniques and accuracy of fieldwalking seems to flare up like sunspots from time to time. Occasionally, prescriptivism or the belief that fieldwalking techniques can be codified takes the floor, but it is generally recognised that the practice of fieldwalking is suited to a wide range of data collection strategies, from detailed reconnaissance to the archaeological tectonics of particular fields or artefact clusters to broad and impressionistic surveys of archaeological distributions in larger sectors of the landscape.

It follows from this that the need for regular fieldwalking as an inexpensive investigative technique on any arable land which is threatened by development, must become an instinctive response on the part of all archaeological agencies and individual fieldworkers with rural responsibilities. I know of several local government archaeology units where the ABF database is regarded as the definitive statement on the presence or absence of archaeological material until such time as it is enhanced by specific fieldwork programmes or chance discoveries. As Hall has noted (1982, 337), the recorded evidence is sometimes flawed. Thus, factories are erected and minor roads constructed over greenfield sites and no fieldwork is done. This is a grim reminder to arable field owners that their arable field should be seen as a potential archaeological resource which is available for survey. If the survey work is carried out, it should not be regarded as an hors d'oeuvre for excavations but as an acknowledgement of the rich information content of ploughsoil.

References

A knowledge of the crop regime and rotation practice in the fieldwalker's study area should be complemented by an awareness of national and European agricultural issues. This is provided in part by dialogues with interested farm occupiers and employees, which I have described, but the fieldwalker should also take the initiative by reading farming magazines and watching or listening to broadcast farming programmes (e.g. Radio 4's 'Farming Today' at 0610 every weekday morning). This is not just done by one's friends, and should really be seen as an integral part of the fieldworker's attempt to understand the dynamics of landscape continuity and change. Thus, some knowledge of the Common Agricultural Policy is required so that the solitary walker will see why so much land is given over to arable cultivation to the detriment of established landscape features, and why many dairy farmers have recently experienced a sharp fall in their incomes.

The policies of MAFF must also be examined. For instance, it looks as though there has been a U-turn in official attitudes to the provision of grant for promoting change in the landscape. Where the conversion of meadow, moor and wetland and removal of hedges, ponds and woodland were once generally approved by the state and underwritten by grants in aid for the maximisation of food production, conservationists are now confident that larger grants will be given for the maintenance and restoration of existing or recently removed landscape details, in order
SITES IN THE LANDSCAPE: APPROACHES TO THE POST-ROMAN SETTLEMENT OF SOUTH EASTERN ENGLAND

Tom Williamson

It is a commonplace amongst field archaeologists that the surface indications of Anglo-Saxon occupation are very slight (Foard 1978, 384). Field-walking surveys which locate large numbers of Roman, medieval, and even Iron Age settlement sites frequently reveal very little evidence of early and middle Saxon occupation. The field survey carried out in Hampshire by Stephen Shennan, to take but one example, which sampled 30 square kilometres out of a total study area of 150, recovered virtually no evidence of Saxon settlement. Shennan commented:

Its [the Saxon period's] most obvious characteristic is the sheer lack of evidence, which the survey did little to alter. This cannot be taken at its face value since early Saxon pottery in particular seems to decay very quickly in the ploughsoil and even when present is difficult to detect; fieldwalking produced only a single grass-tempered sherd and two other sherds of probable late-Saxon date. How could they be recovered by very intensive work within a small area, and whether the returns would justify the effort expended, must remain an open question. (Shennan 1981, 119)

For those archaeologists whose principal interests lie in the evolution of the rural landscape, and in particular in the relationship between Roman and medieval settlement in lowland England, the problem posed by the low visibility of human occupation over this crucial period cannot be so easily dismissed.

This low visibility appears to involve several factors. Those involving the survival and visibility of Saxon sherds in the ploughsoil probably are, as Shennan suggests, the most important. It is noteworthy, in this context, that those areas in which field survey has been most successful in locating the sites of post-Roman settlements are often those with a late and post-medieval history of non-arable land use, and which have only recently fallen under the plough. Thus fieldwalking surveys on the Hampshire Downs soon after intensive ploughing had begun in the 1960's revealed several Saxon settlement sites, including the substantial site at Chalton (Cumlié 1972, 1). In regions such as East Anglia, which have a longer history of intensive arable land use, it might be expected that settlement sites of the Saxon period would be less well preserved and therefore, to the fieldwalker, less visible.

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