FIELDWALKING IN CHESHIRE

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In early spring 1990, a preliminary programme of fieldwalking was begun to evaluate the feasibility of research on the early postglacial archaeology of the North Cheshire sandstone ridge (bounded between Eddisbury to the south and Helsby and Frodsham to the north). In the past there have been several reports of lithic artefacts, including recognisable Mesolithic and Neolithic tools, being collected from fields in this area (see notes in the Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society 1953, 1942; Cheshire Archaeological Bulletin #3; and gazetteer in the Victoria County History 1987). These and other unpublished reports are recorded on the Cheshire SMR. Some collections have been deposited in Chester Museum, while others remain in private possession.

In view of the fact that these reports and collections indicate more than a superficial prehistoric presence, it is surprising that so little attention has been paid to them, especially as the area is central to known areas of prehistoric activity in the Pennines and North Wales. The topography is also worth noting because the ridge at Frodsham/Helsby affords a panoramic view north across the Mersey and the Irish Basin, which would have been lowland areas in Mesolithic times.

The present fieldwalking project will hopefully establish the distribution of Mesolithic and Neolithic lithic material in the area, and examine the patterns of use of different types of raw materials in the two periods. The occurrence of artefacts made from distinctive banded local cherts is a feature of these assemblages, and has the potential to contribute substantially to understanding of prehistoric activity in the area. For instance, the forthcoming publication (in JCAS) of the Mesolithic site at Tatton Park suggests that the chert from that site originates in Derbyshire. Ron Cowell, from his Merseyside survey discovered a particular type of white flint which he suggests is associated with a specific typology and date, but so far the source is unprovenanced. During the present survey, natural chert pebbles were collected from field 8.

During the project, seven fields were examined. The method used was that of walking transects set out perpendicular to a baseline along one edge of a field. Transects were placed at intervals of 5, 10, or 20 metres according to whether the field had been examined before, and the density of artefacts found there previously. Seventy lithic artefacts were found of which 51 were of flint and 19 of the local cherts. Figure 1 shows some of the artefacts recovered during the project. They include both Early and Later Mesolithic microlith forms (Fig 1, Nos 2-7), and probable Neolithic tools (Fig 1, Nos 8-9). One piece (Fig 1, No 1) seems to be a broken shouldered point.

Figure 1. Artefacts from Cheshire fieldwalking project: 1) shouldered point, grey chert; 2) oblique point, grey chert; 3) backed bladelet of flint; 4) oblique point, black chert; 5) backed bladelet, flint; 6) bladelet, banded chert; 7) rod, grey chert; 8) retouched piece, pebble flint; 9) retouched flake, dark grey chert.
point, and might indicate a Late Glacial presence in the area. However, before making any final conclusions about this assemblage, I would like to examine collections with chert artefacts from Cheshire, the Pennines and North Wales for comparative purposes.

Initial analysis suggests that there are anomalies in the distribution of the material. Considerable concentrations of finds have been found at Castle Cob, on sandy soils at a high point along the sandstone ridge. This is similar to the site at Haroll Edge which had produced over 1000 pieces.

Another anomaly relates to the occurrence of Mesolithic and Neolithic material within a 19th century field boundary. There would appear to be two possible explanations for this phenomenon, 1) a greater intensity of farming in the field compared to its neighbour has led to the erosion of archaeological layers, or 2) soil containing archaeology was redistributed onto this field sometime during the 19th century. The likelihood of the redistribution of soil containing artefacts is also indicated at a field at Castlehill. In this barren field (stony sand) there was a small deposit of 3 flints and 1 sherd, possibly Romano-British. This appeared to be an alien deposit rather than occurring in situ.

The question of the redistribution of archaeological material onto fields has to be taken into account, particularly in an area of degraded soils. Hopefully the identification of areas where this practice might have taken place will lead to improved consistency of site prediction. Any information from around the country about these practices and their identification would be of help. I would also be very interested to hear about any further collections in Cheshire (R. Jacobi has been extremely kind on this point).

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Australian Lithic Bibliography.

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This bibliography was conceived to compliment Honan's essentially North American Lithic Bibliography (1983), and is produced in the same format. It attempts to list the most useful ethnographic references to stone tools, the most important and pivotal archaeological analyses and other subjects which are of interest to lithic specialists, such as exchange studies, technological and experimental studies. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to introduce the reader to Australia's literature. It is to be regretted that many of these references are unpublished theses, however, these works are only cited when absolutely necessary. Theses are listed separately at the end of the bibliography.

The ethnography of Australia and New Guinea is very important within stone age archaeology. Indeed very few parts of the world can boast as rich an ethnographic record. People were still using stone tools in New Guinea Highlands and in the central deserts of Australia during the 1960's. This immediacy of the stone age allows Australian archaeologists to rely more heavily upon the ethnographic record than is usual elsewhere.

For very obvious reasons, ethnographic studies in Australia and New Guinea cannot be related directly to other areas of the world, however they can be of use. The study of Stone age peoples by industrial peoples requires the suppression of the industrial person's cultural assumptions. An action which is logical to an industrial person may not be so to the stone user. By studying the actions and thinking of stone users one can, at least, eliminate these behaviours which are utterly out of place.

Acknowledgement

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Reference Cited


Australia

Ethnographic references to stone tool use

Before 1950:

Aiston 1928, 1929; Bredow 1925; Bates 1985; Carnegie 1896; Dawson 1881; Elkin 1948; Hale and Tindale 1923, 1934, Hornes and Aiston 1924; Howchin 1921; Howitt 1904; Love 1917, 1936, 1942; Mountford 1941; Noeling 1906; Rothwell, R.L., 1895; Rothwell, W.E., 1897, 1904; Smyth, Hough, 1876; Spencer 1914; Spencer and Gillen 1904, 1927; Thomson 1936, 1949; Tindale 1941, 1945, 1949; Tindale and Noone 1941; Wernon 1897.