

from the gravel pit known as Gravelly Guy (MacRae 1990), some one and a half kilometres west (and upstream) of the current exposures of the Stanton Harcourt Channel. The surface of the implement shows scattered traces of a phenomenon frequently seen on the Gravelly Guy artefacts: patchy exfoliation and chemical alteration of the surface, which we take to represent heavy weathering.

In the three years of excavation in the Stanton Harcourt Channel, located at the Linch Hill Gravel Pit (MacRae, *op. cit.*, quoting other references), there have been numerous and important finds of mammalian bones and other faunal material in excellent condition, and even plant remains and wood, but hitherto only two small derived bifaces, heavily abraded. The latter would appear to be simply stones of doubtful origin in the channel bed, which just happen to be artefacts. The new find is of all together different quality, and is in sharp condition. If it can indeed be related to the handaxes from the nearby Gravelly Guy Pit, is of considerable importance. It could lead to a revision of our present ideas about the direction of the channel's course, and its stream velocity, and might offer at least circumstantial evidence for the age of the Gravelly Guy handaxes, which seem to come mainly from the base of the gravel at that pit and may well have lain on an old land-surface below the gravel mass. In any case, the exciting fact is that the handaxe was carefully extracted from the same horizon, within the Stanton Harcourt Channel, as abundant remains of mammoth and numerous molluscs (*Corbicula fulminalis*, *Unio* sp., etc). The channel's faunal assemblage is thought likely to be attributable to Oxygen Isotope Stage 7.

We have long hoped that a handaxe would be found in a well-stratified context at Stanton Harcourt, and also the artefacts would turn up in proper association with the interglacial channel and its other contents; now, patience has been rewarded. Clearly, much work lies ahead to turn the potential value of this discovery into reality, but meanwhile the champagne has been opened. A fuller report on the new handaxe, with greater technical detail concerning all aspects of the find, will be prepared in due course.

Reference

MacRae, R.J. 1990. New finds and old problems in the Lower Palaeolithic of the Upper Thames Valley. *Lithics* 11, 3-15.

16, The Tennis, Cassington, Oxon

The Southern Rivers Palaeolithic Project

John Wymer

Members who attended the Lithic Studies meeting at Franks House on the 22nd January will have heard a short summary of this project, and a detailed report has now appeared in *PAST*, the newsletter of the Prehistoric Society. For those who have neither seen this nor heard of the project, it is broadly a survey of all the known Lower Palaeolithic sites in England, south of the River Thames. It was prompted by a realisation that a valuable and limited archaeological source was endangered by a lack of sufficient information to enable County Archaeological Officers (CAOs), County Planners and developers to identify and evaluate the potential of sites, especially when threatened. It is restricted to the area south of the Thames, from Cornwall to Kent as the majority of Palaeolithic sites are in this part of Britain, and more is already known and published of those in East Anglia, the Thames itself and the Midlands. It is significant that the two counties of England with the greatest number of known sites, and some of the richest, Kent and Hampshire, have previously only had very general surveys of them published, apart from reports and monographs on outstanding sites such as Swanscombe, Northfleet, Sturry and Warsash.

The project is funded by English Heritage for three years, administered by Wessex Archaeology in collaboration with Dr Clive Gamble and in consultation with several Quaternary specialists (mainly members of the Lithic Studies Society), County Archaeologists and officers of English Heritage. John Wymer is the Project Leader; Phil Harding assists in the field and consults with CAO's and museums; Karen Walker contacts county councils, and examines maps and literature in order to assess the current and future threats from gravel extraction, and plots the locations of major quarries in the past. Art work, publishing and general back-up is received from Wessex Archaeology through the management of Andrew Lawson and Sue Davies.

The plan of the survey is to produce reports on six regions, based on watersheds, which will contain distribution plans of all the known Lower Palaeolithic sites with lists describing each site in tabulated form: i.e. provenance; date and circumstances of discovery; county SMR numbers; geological sediments in which found; categories of finds made, quantities and where preserved; major published references or source of information; present state of site. Obviously, with such a multitude of sites this information is very abbreviated, and several items unknown. The maps show the Quaternary sediments of each area mainly at a scale of 1:50,000, but 1:25,000 or even town plans for prolific areas. These are taken from

the relevant maps of the British Geological Survey (BGS), their Mineral Assessment reports and other sources that might be available. The maps will also show the location of past areas of major gravel extraction and areas threatened by current policies of planning authorities.

Fieldwork involves visiting all the areas concerned and identifying as accurately as possible provenances hitherto vague or unlocated. Local knowledge and large scale maps have allowed a good proportion of such sites to be given 'Accurate' or 'Estimated' grid references and reduced 'General' locations to a minimum. There has been excellent co-operation from county archaeological units and the BGS at London and Keyworth.

The reports are to be published yearly and are not intended for general circulation but CAOs, planners and certain commercial bodies. They should enable sensitive areas to be identified and appropriate decisions to be made. Suggested recommendations accompany each site entry in the lists as to what action might be taken in the event of threats, from refusal of planning permissions, developer-paid evaluations or excavations, watching briefs of varying intensities, or no action required. The vast majority of sites are unlikely to be covered by the last two categories. It seems unlikely that formal restraints in the conditions of approved planning applications will rarely be necessary beyond some form of agreement concerning the granting of permissions for watching briefs, but this is a complex and controversial matter. Opinions will differ now and in the future. It is hoped the reports will guide and assist all those involved in making their decisions. There is also the problem of sites which appear unexpectedly and the occasional necessity for the involvement of Quaternary specialists.

Although these semi-political matters are only indirectly the concern of lithic specialists, the results of the survey should do much to stimulate Palaeolithic studies in southern England. The survey is only concerned with the location of sites and not their investigation, but it will undoubtedly have academic value and consideration is to be given to more general publication at the end of the survey. Hopefully, the reports will help to 'demystify' the Palaeolithic period to Postglacial archaeologists and demonstrate to them that even palaeoliths in derived contexts give temporal and spatial information.

The project is now in its second year, with the Upper Thames, Kennet Valley and the Test and Solent drainage systems behind it. It is now in Kent. All these areas are well south of the glaciated regions of Britain and there is a corresponding increase in the quantity of palaeoliths found at high levels. This is a subject that much concerned earlier collectors and archaeologists. It is fitting that it should now receive renewed attention with the great advances that have been made in Quaternary Science since the 1950s. Archaic *Homo sapiens* was certainly not restricted to the river

valleys, nor to areas where flint was not available. This, and much more, becomes visibly evident on the maps which are being produced by the Computer Assisted Design systems at the Wessex Unit.

Tribute must be given here to Derek Roe for without his monumental *Gazetteer of British Lower and Middle Palaeolithic Sites*, published in 1968 by the Council for British Archaeology, this survey would take many more than three years to complete. Its publication was a milestone in British Palaeolithic archaeology and it is a source of satisfaction to add some of the wealth of information contained in it, to geological sediments and topography. Gratitude is expressed to English Heritage for making it possible.

References

Roe, D.A. 1968. *Gazetteer of British Lower and Middle Palaeolithic Sites*. (London, Council for British Archaeology).

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