



## Book Reviews

### **ARCHAEOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT ON THE NORTH SEA LITTORAL. A CASE STUDY FROM LOW HAUXLEY BY C WADDINGTON AND C BONSALL**

*Archaeological Research Services Ltd. & Northumberland Wildlife Trust Ltd. 2016. 323pp, 191 figures and plates, 63 tables. ISBN 978-0-9930789-1-0, pb, £30*

I have read many archaeological reports that have had environment and landscape in the title and often the environmental evidence is restricted to little more than charcoal analysis and the landscape element refers to the contemporary monumental landscape. This excellent volume is very different and does exactly what it says in the title. It examines the landscape of this beautiful part of the Northumbrian coast from the Holocene to the end of prehistory (with slight delvings into the Roman and medieval periods). It highlights the very real threat to coastal archaeological sites and deposits posed by rising sea level and coastal erosion since this important series of sites and deposits were being actively destroyed (the Iron Age rectangular structure, for example, had all but been destroyed before the main excavation phase). This destruction was being monitored, however, by a series of individuals and organisations and the report brings together earlier professional and amateur research dating from the 1980s.

What makes Low Hauxley remarkable is the timescale of the archaeological and palaeoenvironmental evidence due mainly to the preservation qualities of both peat and calcareous wind-blown sand in a series of strata reaching 5 m deep.

A knoll within a fresh-water mere, several kilometres from the late glacial coast, human activity starts at Low Hauxley with episodic Mesolithic activity from the 9th to 6th millennia BC. Negative features suggest structural evidence and there is evidence for the reoccupation of the site after the Storegga Slide tsunami. Intertidal peat from the end of the Mesolithic preserved human, deer, aurochs and wild boar footprints and traces of a wooden trackway. Already anthropogenic influences on the native deciduous woodland are identifiable suggesting created or maintained clearings. The stone technology suggests skin working and, given the proximity of prolific grey seal colonies, the case is made for the manufacture of sealskin boats though direct evidence for this is lacking.

Environmental data for the Mesolithic/Neolithic transition are missing from the site but a hearth survives from the early 4th millennium, around 3600 cal BC, and associated environmental evidence suggests herding and arable agriculture with some inferred marine exploitation.

The site then becomes the focus for burial in the Beaker and Early Bronze Age periods. A flat cist cemetery to start with in the 24th/23rd century BC and with a kerbed cairn constructed in the 21st–20th century BC.

Burials, associated with Food Vessels continued up until the 19th/18th century BC with a second cairn and inhumation in the 18th/17th century BC.

The Middle and Late Bronze Age are represented by palaeoecological data only and see mixed agriculture continuing into the Iron Age. A rectangular structure was constructed in the 8th–6th century BC but seems to have been short-lived before it was buried in a layer of windblown sand and dune formation.

A new soil had developed by the 4th/3rd century BC and ephemeral structural evidence and the sites of beacon fires document continued activity through to perhaps as late as the 4th century AD with high status Roman material suggesting close Roman/Native interaction.

This potted history of Low Hauxley does little justice to the scope of the volume. Throughout the lavishly illustrated report, the authors and contributors never lose sight of the larger picture and every aspect is tied into its local and national (at times international) setting. The Discussion (chapter 11) uses other Northumbrian sites and data to flesh out Low Hauxley's bones and create a vivid picture of this area at various times in its prehistoric past. Metaphorically, the sea is never far away though in reality it seems to have crept from several kilometres at the start of the narrative to the threat that it poses today and, of course, the dune formation in the Iron Age halted activity at the site. It is fitting then that the final chapter documents Lobb and Brown's terrestrial laser scanning of the rate of cliff erosion at Low Hauxley which concludes that a cairn the size of Low Hauxley would have been lost in 30–50 years: a short time for such a long archaeological sequence.

This is a truly excellent book with first class description of the archaeology as well as detailed and well-dated finds and palaeoenvironmental reports. Waddington and Bonsall also deserve considerable praise for their treatment and presentation of earlier archives as well as coordinating some 35 specialist contributors. Archaeological work started in 1982. The last excavations took place in 2014. The report was published in 2016. It is hoped that other excavators take note.

*Alex Gibson*  
*University of Bradford*

Review submitted: January 2017

*The views expressed in this review are not necessarily those of the Society or the Reviews Editor*