



Book Reviews

LOST LANDSCAPES OF PALAEOLITHIC BRITAIN: THE CONTRIBUTION OF PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE AGGREGATES LEVY SUSTAINABILITY FUND 2002–2011 EDITED BY MARK WHITE WITH MARTIN BATES, MATTHEW POPE, DANIELLE SCHREVE, BECCY SCOTT, ANDREW SHAW, AND ELIZABETH STAFFORD

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In the history of British archaeology, the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (ALSF), generated as a tax on aggregate sales and distributed by a number of government agencies, has to be recognised as one of the most important initiatives to shape the discipline ever. Over four funding cycles (2002–2011), English Heritage (now Historic England) alone distributed nearly £29 million to a variety of Heritage projects, largely run by contracting units, academic departments or a combination of the two. This monograph, edited by Mark White with support from a stellar team of archaeologists, focuses on the £8.8 million of funding that was awarded to projects focused largely on Lower and Middle Palaeolithic sites and associated remains. These earlier cultural and environmental archives dominate our knowledge of this time-period, in contrast to the rather sparser records of Upper Palaeolithic activity; hence, the natural bias to research activities funded via the ALSF reported in this volume.

As White notes on page 1 of the opening chapter, *'through the provision of financial resources unimagined'* the ALSF provided *'unique opportunities to examine landscapes, deposits and materials that would otherwise not have been possible'*. Therefore, as might be expected from this statement the resulting wealth of data and information generated by these projects was significant and whilst some has found its way into publications, other aspects of the research has remained in grey literature reports, leading to a patchy awareness of results among curators, academics and contractors. Therefore, the aim of this volume is to provide an overview of the results of the various Palaeolithic and Pleistocene projects undertaken in England. In this respect it is pitched to satisfy the needs of both the informed period specialist, but also those less familiar with the time-frame, including those Heritage professionals tasked with conservation and management. More so than any other archaeological period, this knowledge transfer is essential if Palaeolithic sites are to be investigated using appropriate methodologies within the current planning guidance framework.

At first glance, the A4 monograph instantly catches the eye with its striking colour cover, illustrating a temporary camp on high ground of the Isle of Wight, with hunters watching a herd of reindeer moving across the braidplain of the Solent River. Inside, the book is divided into six chapters, with numerous colour illustrations and plates scattered throughout in a format that is easy on the eye and provides the reader with a real incentive to keep turning the pages and devouring information. However, some of the summary tables and figures that attempt to convey significant amounts of information may have been better larger (for example, Figs 2.7.2 and 2.9.5).

Chapter 1, written by the Mark White, provides a contextual overview to the volume, its aims and objectives, as well as the broader key aspirations of the ALSF scheme, namely: knowledge transfer; communication and; outreach. It also highlights the role that these projects have played in building upon *The English Rivers Palaeolithic Survey* (TERPS), the ground-breaking study funded by English Heritage and which ran from 1991 to 1997 (Wymer 1999).

Chapter 2, written by Martin Bates and Matthew Pope provides a useful summary of the methodologies used to reconstruct 'Ice Age landscapes', although this subtitle is perhaps slightly misleading and at first glance does not flag the importance of temperate stages. Nevertheless, the chapter is well structured and the use of text boxes to provide further information on specific topics (for example, oxygen isotope stratigraphy, optically stimulated luminescence (OSL) dating, field techniques) is a real bonus, especially

for those less au fait with the Palaeolithic. It also highlights the importance of different scales of investigation (macro-meso-micro), usefully relating these to exemplar projects funded by the ALSF, a theme which continues in later chapters.

Chapter 3 (Matthew Pope and Martin Bates) and Chapter 4 (Danielle Schreve) consider the Palaeolithic resources preserved within 'coastal and submerged landscapes' and 'terrestrial fluvial landscapes' respectively. In Chapter 3, the archaeological evidence described is restricted to the southern North Sea, where our earliest evidence for hominins in Britain has been found, and the river systems currently submerged beneath the English Channel. Chapter 4 extends more broadly describing work across the general sequences of the Thames, Solent and Trent as well as a number of important site-specific studies such as at Welton Le Wold (Lincolnshire), Whitemoor Haye (Staffordshire) and Lynford (Norfolk). Chapter 4 concludes with a consideration of the important role that the ALSF played in raising awareness and strengthening contacts between stakeholders in the aggregate extraction environment (for example, mineral operators, Quaternary scientists, curators and the public). One of the most ambitious projects in this regard, was the National Ice Age Network, which operated from four regional university centres (Birmingham, Royal Holloway, Leicester and Southampton) and was jointly funded by English Heritage and English Nature (as they were then). Testament to the enthusiastic response to the setting up of NIAN was that its database had nearly 1100 participants listed and the quality of its outreach is illustrated by the 'recognition sheets' it designed and which are collected in Appendix 2 of this volume. Sadly, the full potential of NIAN was never reached after it was scuppered by industry politics, issues that don't need to be repeated here but remind us of the challenges of gaining access to Palaeolithic sites and elucidating the record.

Chapter 5 by Andrew Shaw and Beccy Scott focuses on 'site and artefact studies' but with the aim of demonstrating that sites and find spots are more than simply dots on a map. Using examples it provides a broader overview of the changing technologies of the British Palaeolithic (as currently understood), borrowing from and building upon Gamble's (1996) concept of 'flagships' and 'dredgers' to aid discussion.

In the final chapter (6), Mark White laments the demise of the ALSF, especially in a world where the aspirations of government for wider public engagement were so well realised by the scheme. The chapter considers the issues facing Palaeolithic archaeology in the post-ASLF years and within the context of existing research frameworks. White argues that three common themes emerge through the chapters: (1) the need to extend the Pleistocene record (ie, find more sites); (2) the need to enhance the Pleistocene record (ie, through re-examination of museum collections and the application of new analytical techniques to sites) and; (3) the need to engage with the Palaeolithic record (ie, engaging with stakeholders more effectively).

On this last point, whilst this volume is incredibly well-illustrated and the use of large colour plates makes the reader feel part of the sites, I do think some of the plates risk scoring a bit of an own goal. Given that most Palaeolithic research is undertaken within the context of the quarrying industry, which by the very nature of the environments it operates in takes health and safety very seriously, and whose co-operation and professional respect we need, why do archaeologists continue to ride rough shod over such concerns. A number of the plates within the volume provide embarrassing evidence of archaeologists apparently ignoring health and safety rules: operating beneath open faces that should clearly be stepped (p.26, Fig. 2.8; p.46, Fig. 2.27); in active quarries next to open faces without full PPE (p.25, Fig. 2.6); and working next to an excavator with no PPE whilst the machine operator is clearly sitting in their seat operating the back-actor (p.69, Fig. 3.15). Whilst I appreciate that this is a minority of photographs and that we all have occasional lapses of judgement, to highlight such bad practices in an outward facing publication gives the entire sector a bad name. I appreciate that writing text is an all consuming process and the authors may not have thought about this point, but it really should have been picked up in the production and review process.

Despite this grumble, in summary it must be said that this volume is an innovative piece of work that makes a valuable contribution to Palaeolithic and Pleistocene archaeological research and provides a much needed coherent synthesis of the disparate and numerous projects funded via the Aggregates Levy. It is a must read for period specialists, heritage managers and students and will hopefully make

those less familiar with the period more confident in dealing with the conservation and management of Palaeolithic sites. It certainly succeeds in showcasing British Pleistocene and Palaeolithic research on an international stage.

References

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