

## Southern

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL ADVISER

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The following is a summary by Chris Webb, property warden, who is currently working on an Archaeology MA at King Alfred's College, Winchester, in his own time. With the approval of the Area and Property Managers, Chris has generously agreed to re-work his thesis material and research on the archaeology of Selborne Common to fit the format and requirements of a National Trust archaeological & historic landscape survey report. Most of the research stage is now complete, and the report will follow in 2001.

### Selborne Common – the interplay of nature and history

Mp



Selborne Common, in east Hampshire is situated on and above the steep chalk escarpment known as 'Selborne Hanger' to the west of Selborne village. The property (100 hectares) comprises ancient beechwood hangers on the steeper slopes and relict wood-pasture on the plateau above.

The village (not National Trust-owned) and its surrounding landscape were made famous by the Reverend Gilbert White, who wrote the *Natural History of Selborne* (1789) and who is regarded as the best of the early authors on natural history study. His descriptions of the Common and its flora and fauna, acts as a baseline from which habitat change on the site can be traced. They also show how the Common was used during the eighteenth century. At this time, Magdalen College, Oxford, which was lord of the manor of Selborne, felled beech trees for timber, while local farmers and landholders exercised their ancient common rights to graze their livestock and collect wood for fuel from their lord's land.

These 'commoners' as they were known, continued to be active until the 1950s. Sadly, today there are only a handful of people who remember or were actually involved in 'commoning' at Selborne. For at least eight hundred years this activity was fundamental to the existence of the Common and its landscape and ecology. Some documents relating to Selborne Priory, the medieval lord of the manor, survive and a few refer to the gift of common rights, legal disputes and the usage of local commons. Later post-medieval records continue the theme and



*Beech Pollard*

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there is more detail about the regulation of the commoners and their common rights.

Some of the earthworks which are being mapped and recorded in the survey can be related to these documents. For example, a boundary bank and ditch on the western edge of the Common is likely to date from the mid-thirteenth century when adjacent land was 'emparked'. Another large woodbank which runs across the Common was probably

### *Boundary bank and ditch within Newton Park.*


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constructed in the 1750s to protect a coppice and woodland compartment from the large numbers of livestock which were grazing at that time. As part of this project, an investigation of historical documentation is being undertaken to establish how many of the surviving records (mainly held in the Magdalen College archive) are relevant to Selborne Common.

Because Selborne Common has not been ploughed since the Middle Ages, an earlier field system has survived and so far the main emphasis of the work has been on surveying this 'fossilised' landscape. It seems to pre-date the Common and does not appear to survive on the modern arable land surrounding the site. The often, dense woodland and scrub makes the earthwork survey difficult. Aerial photography cannot help here, which means that basic surveying methods using offset measurements have to be used and this is best done during the winter after leaf fall, when longer lines of sight are available. So far, a picture is emerging of a complex field system, tentatively assigned to the prehistoric or Romano-British period with some possible re-use during the Middle Ages. The report issuing from this survey will be a guide to management; as a normal part of the landscape survey process, the data on individual sites and components of the wider landscape will be inputted to the National Trust Sites & Monuments Record.

### New Forest properties – identifying the need for greater survey and analysis

**Mp** 

Two visits were made with the Countryside Manager during 2000 (one also with the English Heritage Field Monument Warden) as an introduction to the property and to begin to assess its needs in terms of survey, recording and management advice.

Useful archaeological record material has been supplied to the property in the past by members of the Hampshire Field Club, and this has provided a valuable initial basis for management. It is now clear that this needs further detail and enhancement if the property is to fully benefit, and this will mean a revised survey, full documentary research, monitoring statements and condition survey, and site-specific as well as general management recommendations. Accurate mapping – preferably on a GIS base, must form part of this. The whole should be placed on the National Trust's dedicated Sites & Monuments Record (SMR) database, which complies with nationally accepted data standards within the profession and allows digital exchange of data with other bodies, such as in this case, Hampshire County Council. Data entry to the SMR is essential for up-to-date presentation of the archaeological record, both for management and for educational and interpretational use, and will raise the level of the National Trust archaeological record of its property in the New Forest to gain more equality with that of nature conservation. Both are very significant for this wonderful property, and an investment now will be repaid in the future by improved and well-informed management.

In view of this, the Archaeological Adviser will be preparing a proposal for full archaeological survey in collaboration with the Countryside Manager, the Field Monuments Warden, the National Trust Sites & Management Officer and the Hampshire County Archaeologist. The challenge will be to find the funding.



*The excavation was not easy – the vessels were not only precariously situated in the eroding cliff face, but were also approx. 1m below ground level. Ropes and harness were used and the pots were recorded in situ before being carefully excavated and removed for analysis and conservation.*

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### Winter storms and their implications for archaeology

Coastal loss on the Island is nothing new, but the vigour of autumn and winter storms of 2000-2001 has been unusually intense. The south coast has suffered badly, and the implications for archaeology are significant. In the light of the two incidents reported on below, it is important that the Trust continue its routine programme of archaeological assessment and survey, prioritising its coastal properties. During 2001, we will be working with the County Archaeologist and her team to devise a strategy for dealing with incremental loss of archaeological material from cliff erosion. It is also hoped that this might provide a means of identifying funding for artefact analysis and conservation in such cases.

### Brook Bay, Hanover Point – coastal loss reveals rare Bronze Age urns **P**

During September 2000, a local walker on the beach at Brook Bay, noticed an inverted pottery urn in the eroding cliff face above him. The find was duly reported and the Property Manager and the Isle of Wight Council's Archaeology and Historic Environment Service visited the site. It was confirmed that the burial was Early Bronze Age, probably about 1800BC.

Emergency rescue excavation was arranged with the Archaeology Service in collaboration with the tenants.



A third inverted vessel was discovered in the process of the recovery. All three vessels and their contents were removed to the IOW Unit's office at Carisbrooke, pending photographing, cleaning, conservation and further analysis by the County Museums Service. Scientific analysis of the cremated remains and of the soil fill in which the pots were placed will take place in due course. Once these processes have been completed, the finds will be displayed by a loan arrangement with the Guildhall Museum, Newport.

This discovery represents the most important recent prehistoric find from the Island's south coast. Other finds from the eroding cliffs near Brook include prehistoric hearth sites, flint implements, a perforated pebble 'macehead' and a decorated bronze axe of Early Bronze Age date. Coastal erosion near Brightstone in 1926 led to the discovery of a Late Bronze Age (c1000BC) cemetery, consisting of cremations in urns.

The rate of erosion on this coast is rapid, and many sites and artefacts must inevitably be lost without record as slumping occurs. Consequently the public can play an important role. In this case, we owe much to the vigilance of the visitor who spotted the find, and to the quick response of the property staff and the Archaeology Service. Maintenance of good liaison with members of the public and good partnership relations with the Isle of Wight Council's Archaeology Service is essential if we are to make the best of an eroding asset.

### Knowles Farm, St Catherine's Point – skeleton revealed

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Whilst engaged in a commissioned archaeological assessment of the property, Chris Currie (Archaeological Consultant) happened upon the crown of a human skull protruding from the soil near the cliff edge at St Catherine's Point. Following the receipt of a Home Office licence to excavate human remains, an emergency excavation was agreed with the Archaeology Service, supported by extra manpower from the National Trust wardening staff.

During the excavation it became evident that the whole articulated skeleton was present – probably that of a young girl. It was removed for cleaning, conservation and analysis and temporarily housed in environmentally sound conditions at the Unit's office in Carisbrooke. Costs for analysis and dating are being investigated.

Scatters of medieval and post-medieval pottery sherds have also been discovered coming to the surface as the cliff erodes at Knowles Farm; these have been recovered and are temporarily held on our behalf at Carisbrooke.



*The burial lay face down, with arms outstretched. Roman pottery sherds were found in the context below the skeleton and further, abraded sherds and clay pipe were found above.*

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