

THE EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE PRIZE 2006

Decision

The EAA Committee for the European Archaeological Heritage Prize, consisting of David Breeze, Scotland, Jürgen Kunow, Germany, Romuald Schild, Poland, Anastasia Tourta, Greece, and Willem Willems, the Netherlands (chairperson), has decided to award the eighth Heritage Prize of the European Association of Archaeologists to John Coles from the United Kingdom, in recognition of his contributions to the study of European wetlands and their management.

Justification for the Prize

John Coles is one of the founders of 'wetland archaeology', and over the last 40 years he has been its most active and well-known practitioner. He is also a major figure in experimental archaeology and in the study of prehistoric rock art.

John Coles was born and educated in Canada. He came to Britain to study with Professor Grahame Clark in Cambridge, and then for his PhD with Professor Stuart Piggott in Edinburgh. He moved back to Cambridge to teach prehistory in 1960, becoming Professor in 1980. Already in 1968 he had published an article on prehistoric roads and tracks in Somerset, south-west England. It was at this time that Coles became interested in the archaeology of the Somerset Levels (an extensive area of peatland between Glastonbury and the Bristol Channel), and he was soon shuttling between Cambridge and Somerset, directing a whole series of major rescue projects as more and more structures were uncovered in advance of peat extraction. Many of these projects were subsequently published in the *Somerset Levels Papers* which John Coles founded in 1975, the series continuing up to volume 15 in 1989. During that time, and subsequently, he has published scores of books and articles on the archaeology of wetlands, both the specific results of his own excavations and general works on the principles and practice of wetland archaeology. Everyone who works in wetland archaeology is familiar with these; everyone will enjoy them.

This work led to a revolution in our appreciation of the importance of wetlands for archaeology, and the extraordinary richness of wetland sites in terms of structures and artefacts that simply do not survive on dry sites. Of course others had been active in this field for many years, but it is not an exaggeration to say that Coles' work inspired a new generation of fieldworkers, not just in Britain but in many other countries as well. The Somerset work directly inspired comparable surveys and rescue projects in several other areas of England where wetlands survived, for instance the lowlands of Lancashire and Cheshire, and the fenlands of East Anglia. Coles was directly involved in the planning of these projects, and of many others. He has advised on wetland projects in many countries of Europe, as our Irish, French, Polish, Dutch, Danish, German, Swedish and Swiss colleagues will attest, and still acts as advisor in several of these countries.

His pioneering research in experimental archaeology has involved work in a number of countries, where reconstructions and re-creations have led to the wider appreciation of heritage matters and the enhanced survival of archaeological sites. His work for the

Discovery Programme in Ireland and for the Royal Commission of Scotland are further examples of his concern for the archaeological heritage, and he was the first archaeologist advising the UK Heritage Lottery Trustees in their early years, when many millions of UK pounds were awarded to archaeological projects of major heritage value

But John Coles' contribution to the recording and protection of Europe's archaeological heritage has another facet. He has over many years made a special study of Bronze Age rock art, especially that of south Scandinavia. He developed his own techniques for recording it, and has spent many days and weeks tramping across the fields and forests of southern Sweden, finding and recording new art sites. His first major publication on the subject did not appear until 1990, but it has been followed by many more since then, culminating last year in a major book: *Shadows of a Northern Past: Rock Carvings in Bohuslän and Ostfold* (Oxford 2005). More articles on this subject are appearing all the time and he continues to work towards the active preservation of rock art sites and landscapes in northern Europe. He advises several bodies in the UK and elsewhere on aspects of the preservation and recording of this extraordinary archaeological resource.

John Coles is that unusual figure, an academic archaeologist who through his fieldwork has changed the way we look at the world. He leads by example; he does not expect others to do his work for him; he keeps up with a huge range of literature; and he acts as friend, mentor and advisor to many. He has crammed into his working life a vast amount of archaeology in a whole series of different fields. The areas of heritage protection highlighted here have benefited enormously from his energy, his experience and his wise counsel. It was for these reasons that the Heritage Prize Committee of the EAA came to the unanimous decision to award the 2006 European Archaeological Heritage Prize to John Coles.