

Wetland archaeology and movement I: travel, trackways and platforms in bogs, mires and marshes

Organisers: Ingelise Stuijts; Andrea Vianello; and Nora Bermingham

Rivers, lakes, bogs, mires, estuaries and flooded areas all offered opportunities for people in the past to move, explore, exchange, and to exploit. Wetlands were geographical and mental spaces that offered many opportunities for the use of natural resources (marine saltworks, peatlands, river estuaries etc.) the social and economic advantages (trade and transport benefits offered by areas where water and land meet) and the political and mental boundaries/barriers that wetlands can become. People often constructed wooden and stone trackways and platforms to enable activities at the edge of wetlands; to cross these watery obstacles and barriers in space and to enter into the wetlands themselves, to inhabit, use and dwell amidst them or even to deposit things and objects in liminal spaces. The archaeological investigation of wetlands across the world has led to the discovery of well-preserved trackways and platforms that were both practical constructions, monuments to communal endeavour and a means of enculturating wet and wild spaces. Many wetland archaeological projects around the world have used a range of archaeological and scientific methods and approaches to tap the widest range of evidence for the chronology, function, role and influence of movement in people's lives.

The chronological boundaries for this session include all ancient and pre-industrial societies from around the world. Contributors should focus on the communication networks structured around marshlands, rivers and bogs and demonstrate how multidisciplinary projects can tackle how people interacted with these wet environments.

Mesolithic movements exposed: a scenario from central Ireland.

Ingelise Stuijts, Nicki Whitehouse, Meriel McClatchie

Derragh Island is a waterlogged late Mesolithic site located in Lough Kinale, Ireland. The excavations yielded no spectacular objects but included many environmental remains, such as bones, wood, charcoal, seeds and fossil insects. These remains can now, thanks to detailed analysis of lake sediments, bog, soil and stratigraphic work, help in reconstructing the movements of Mesolithic people through the area. This paper will highlight some of the plant and other organic resources that Mesolithic people tapped into, while roaming on and around the lake, as well as information on the wider local landscape associated with this important Mesolithic site. There is no doubt that Mesolithic people were versatile and well-adapted to the area, and moved around freely, making good use of the landscape resources. Understanding of the local landscape is shown as vital to interpreting an archaeological site and placing it within its wider context.

Prehistoric trackways and bridges of England and Wales

Richard Brunning

A total of 174 prehistoric trackways and 19 possible bridges or jetties are known from England and Wales. Many of these are poorly reported, but an increasingly number have robust scientific dating and analytical information. The dating information suggests periods of more and less intense trackway building activity, which can be compared to varying sources of climate information that suggest explanations for some of the pattern. The trackways were created in very different wetland ecosystems, influencing their construction, longevity and extent. Many trackways, sometimes linked to platforms, are associated with probable ritual deposition of objects such as stone axes, wooden figurines, bronze metalwork, pottery and animal and human bone (especially skulls). These trackways all share similarities in their environmental setting. The known bridges and jetties may also have provided multiple functions of aiding communication, as foci for ritual deposits, as fish weirs and barriers to river transport.

Roads, routes, and ceremonies: a Fenland Superhighway

Tim Malim

Prehistoric trackways and corduroy roads are well known from the Somerset Levels, Irish peat bogs, and continental Europe, but in spite of extensive survey and investigation of the East Anglian fens there is now little surviving evidence for such features. Some timber structures have been discovered, sometimes interpreted as platforms for ceremonies associated with deposition of metalwork, or as jetties into rivers, but most were probably routes engineered across wetland. This paper will examine the evidence for prehistoric routes within the fenland region and will present a case for those that were constructed and used during the Bronze Age. The second part of the paper will tackle the more intangible issues such as origins and destinations, engineering, project management and control of resources, concepts and users of the trackways.

Interpreting the Wooden Structures from Newrath, Co. Kilkenny

Susan Lyons

Archaeological excavations at Newrath, Co. Kilkenny in the SE of Ireland revealed a former wetland site, which was found to contain a number of well-preserved wooden structures, including trackways and brushwood scatters. Subsequent radiocarbon dating of timbers has revealed the site is multi-period, with structures dating from the early Bronze Age to medieval period. Timbers were selected for analysis to provide information on wood species and tool technology. Results have shown that the arboreal taxa used for the construction of these structures are representative of the marginal woodland expected given the sites position on the wetland. The species identification ties in well with pollen and

plant macrofossil studies from the site. Species identification and wood working analyses has shown that selection of timbers was based upon availability rather than structural viability. The wooden elements recorded were in varying sizes and generally displayed minimal preparation or engineering technique.

Monumentality, Movement and Wetlands

Henry Chapman, Benjamin Gearey

Wetlands commonly provide denser bodies of archaeological and palaeoenvironmental data when compared with dryland sites and landscapes. This contrast is arguably reflected within their interpretation whereby wetland sites often lack the high level of 'social' interpretation applied to some dryland sites. This paper explores the interpretation of two linear, wet-preserved sites which appear to have been associated with movement through the landscape; one dating to the later Neolithic (in South Yorkshire, UK), the other to the later Iron Age (in Suffolk, UK). It is argued that the enriched dataset generated through multi-proxy analyses facilitates their 'social' interpretation. This raises fundamental questions regarding shared ideals in 'cognitive architecture' which may have been apparent in both wetland and dryland contexts, but which were manifest in dramatically different ways.

The Lisheen Archaeological Project, Excavation in Derryville Bog 1996-1998: 10 years on

Paul Stevens, John O'Neill, Cara Murrery, Sarah May

The Lisheen Archaeological Project was a large scale, inter-disciplinary, wetland research project carried out from 1996-1998, as part of the mitigation of the Lisheen (Lead-Zinc) Mine development, Co. Tipperary, Ireland. Excavation of 98 sites, (including over 66 wetland sites) took place across the 2.5km development area and notably within 1 square km of Derryville Bog (former raised bog). This produced sites and palaeo-environmental data dating from the Neolithic to the post-medieval period on dry land and peat bog, and revealed an archaeological landscape rich in settlement activity, diverse resource management practice and environmental impact, not previously recorded on such a large scale.

Edercloon, Co. Longford trackways or boundaries?

Caitriona Moore

In 2006 a remarkable complex of trackways and platforms was excavated at Edercloon, Co. Longford. Previously unknown, the structures date from the Neolithic to the Early Medieval period with the peak of construction occurring in the Bronze and Iron Ages. During this time several large trackways were constructed in close proximity. These trackways frequently criss-crossed and merged together allowing not only access into the bog, but movement within it. All of them were of a construction unsuited to wheeled transport. However, the remains of three wheels and over 40 other objects were found buried within them, making this one of the largest collections of artefacts from an Irish bog. The continual construction and deposition at Edercloon indicates a community highly involved with this wet landscape. This paper will outline the results of the excavation and explore the subject of movement in Edercloon as highlighted by the trackways and wheels.

Joining the dots: a case study in assessing the potential of Irish peatland survey results

Michael Stanley, Conor McDermott

The industrial peatlands of east County Offaly and adjacent counties in the Irish midlands have been the focus of numerous archaeological surveys and rescue excavations since 2000. More than 1,000 previously undocumented archaeological sites have been identified to date. This paper focuses on the prehistoric communication networks structured around a geographically discrete area of peatland and dryland in this region, dealing primarily with

data gathered by the Irish Archaeological Wetland Unit (IAWU). In particular, the paper will address the efficacy of building relative chronologies on the basis of site clustering within dense site distributions in which limited scientific dating has been conducted. These chronologies will be used to reconstruct the development of communication networks throughout the prehistory of the study area. Through the integration of survey and excavation datasets the paper will also seek to test the usefulness of the empirical and environmental data gathered as part of peatland surveys.

Discussion

Lisa Doyle

Excavations at Ballycahill, Co. Tipperary, undertaken by Headland Archaeology in advance of the N7 Nenagh to Limerick road scheme, uncovered part of a substantial stone platform, some 167m E-W and 27m N-S, constructed over freshwater lake marl and sealed by peat. The artificial nature of the construction was confirmed by two leading consultant geologists. The deliberate selection of massive flat topped boulders demonstrates a phenomenal force of effort behind this monumental construction. The platform's situation could have been strategic and in favourable conditions, it would have been ideally placed for extensive communication via the Shannon river system. Evidence for formal sculpting of the Tullahedy Neolithic ritual mound profile, situated 250 m to the west, showed that monumental landscape manipulation was being carried out in the vicinity of platform. Dating the platform is crucial to interpretation as it appears to be without any direct parallels in the Irish archaeological record.