

Community Archaeology

When I was very small my ambition was to be an archaeologist and then I went away and did other things and when I retired I started digging so I've been digging various sites since then.

The community archaeology project within the limestone landscape partnership is funded by the heritage lottery fund. It is a module that is designed to both answer specific questions about the archaeological sites that we'd like to investigate but equally if not more importantly it's about involving local people in the investigation of their heritage directly so that they can learn more about it, they can appreciate it more, understand it better and they can look after it better.

We've got a variety of people, we've got some people from the northern archaeological group, some people from the architecture and archaeological society of Durham. We've also got some local people here interested.

This is my first dig. It was from do it. I went on there and read about the limestone landscapes and the chance of doing some archaeology. I went round, I think it was Cavos, I called in and got the little limestone landscape paperback little leaflet.

I've done it for a while now, I've always wanted to do it. When I was finishing work I thought it was an ideal way to spend my time when I'm retired.

We're at a fairly early stage at the moment. The one here at near Ferryhill is the first community archaeology projects in the series spread over about two years and this one is actually targeting a what appears to be a pre historic site that was first seen on aerial photographs some years ago. You can even make out sites of the individual round houses indicated by these curving dark lines in the crop. It was selected because it's a very complex site, it appears to have a number of different phases to it, clearly occupied over a very long period and it's one of the best preserved examples in the area. Today we've got 2 trenches open. This trench were excavating an Iron Age roundhouse and with an enclosure boundary ditch which comes down the side.

I'm digging a piece here, were looking for the end of the ring ditch that you can see the little bits where we've dug out. We've got the end over there and were hoping this is the other end of it here so the entrance is in the middle.

The other trench is sited over 3 enclosure ditches , 3 quite large enclosure ditches, one might be, there might be a break in it so we might have an entrance.

We're clearing out the ditches that got dug the other day and cleaning up the edges so that we can see what's going on and develop the section so we can see the different layers and occasionally I dispute with Becca over whether I should be digging out a bit more. The answer is always invariably not the bit I want to dig out.

Well it's been very gratifying actually. On many sites like this late iron age enclosure sites, the amount of pottery that comes out is typically fairly small and usually it's not that well preserved and you tend to get very tiny, very abraded pieces of pottery which are not very impressive at all, but I'm happy to say in this particular case we have a rather better state of preservation and we have some quite large shards of pottery from the later iron age.

So this piece is more unusual than the standard stuff we've been getting, pie crust rim and on the inside we've got a piece of residue as well, so that's quite a nice piece and that's quite unusual. I've not seen something like that before.

We've also had one find from the metal detector which seems to be older than the standard stuff we've got in the field – just this coppello bronze object. It's got fastenings on the back and then a hook as presumably it was part of something else on a bit of wood or leather. Not really sure what it is yet.

We find that people do tend to be very interested indeed in their local archaeology and quite often they don't really appreciate just how rich their local area is in terms of archaeological remains. It's very enjoyable not only for local people to learn the past of their particular area, they get to have healthy physical exercise outdoors, they meet people from many different backgrounds, different walks of life, so you have that social interaction as well when they all come together to work as a team, so it sort of a team building exercise as well. I think it gives you a sense of place, a sense of heritage, it's very interesting.

This site probably dates from about well at least 2000 years old possibly earlier and I think it helps people to associate themselves to an area a lot more and pride in your local area is another thing.

Its good because you never know, the next trowel full might be treasure, but never is, but it's the excitement and at the finish when you find something even if it's only a little bit of pot nobodies handled that for nearly 2000 years or more even, depending on how old your site is. It's brilliant.