MA ASSIGNMENT: LANDSCAPE ARCHAEOLOGY MODULE

FIELDWALKING

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Fieldwalking has established itself as an accepted technique in archaeological research. As Rackham (1994:11) states it has:

> revolutionized the understanding of landscape in the last forty years: the land was filled with habitation and agriculture thousands of years earlier than had been thought possible.

As a method it is both cheap, requiring no expensive equipment (Haselgrove et al 1985:7), non-destructive (Renfrew and Bahn 2000:74) and "highly cost effective" (LA:4.10). Moreover it is at regional level that it shows its worth (LA:4.10), by giving data which "can be used to address mainstream issues of social and economic history" and aid understanding of settlement changes over time (LA:1.19).

However, as with the computer saying 'Garbage in, garbage out', the quality of the raw data is, in my opinion, the most critical factors influencing the meaning and reliability of the results. There are several aspects which need to be considered in order to achieve this quality, which are summarised below under the headings of 'Where?', 'Who?' and 'What?'.

'Where?' is the location of the survey. There is much discussion about how a survey should be delimited - using national grids, natural topographic boundaries like rivers or other boundaries such as hedges around fields (Renfrew and Bahn 2000:74) - and the choice may be influenced by whether the final repository is a computer program such as GIS software (LA:3.6). As has been stated "the boundary that seems reasonable to one specialist may not be for another" (LA:1.11). One of the strengths of fieldwalking is that the exercise should be repeatable (Haselgrove et al 1985:13-14, LA:1.22) and an arbitary boundary can make the area more difficult to locate at a later date (LA:3.6). In addition, it may be difficult to locate where artefact densities were found within the survey area unless very accurate information is noted at the time of survey.

Obviously the ideal situation for any project is to be able to undertake a complete overall survey of the chosen area (Fairclough et al 1999:38, Renfrew and Bahn 2000:78). In reality time and resources usually mean that a sample is necessary (Renfrew and Bahn 2000: 78, LA:4.2). The different types of sampling – judgmental, probablistic (LA:1.12) – should be clearly stated in the research agenda so that the results can be interpreted in a meaningful way (Renfrew and Bahn 2000:76-77 and 178). If, for example, a judgmental strategy was used which meant that all wooded areas or wooded parts of a grid were not sampled, then the results might need to be adjusted to take account of this (After Taylor 1975 in Aston 1985: 98-9, LA:1.11-13). Also the type of agricultural or urban activity taking place in the area can bias what can be walked and what can be found (Schofield 1991:6 and 76, LA:3.11, 12.2 and 23.4).

The topography of the land may influence the results (Schofield 1991:54, LA:13.4) if geological processes such as alluviation, colluviation, or erosion have taken place. These

processes may not only make some areas inaccessible, but in the case of alluviation artefacts may have been buried or exposed and destroyed with erosion (Fairclough et al 1999:41, Schofield 1991:39 and 76).

The personnel involved in the survey are the 'Who?' critical factor. The level of expertise of the personnel can make a great deal of difference to the data collected. An experienced member of the team may discover more sites (Schofield 1991:81, LA:1.10), may be able to differentiate more artefacts from the ploughsoil or earth (Haselgrove et al 1985:23 and 45, Renfrew and Bahn 2000:78) and may be able to cover wider transects and larger areas (LA:3.6). However, even with the most experienced team member the time of day (Haselgrove et al 1985:44, LA:12.2) and the weather conditions can influence their ability to identify artefacts (Schofield 1991: 81, LA:1.15 and 13.4).

A key member of the team who may institute a bias in the data collected is the director of the project (LA:23.7). Their personal research agenda can bias the collection policy towards a certain period and ignore others, which may be useful to other scholars at a later date (Fairclough et al 1991:24-37, LA:3.8). In my own area, pottery later than Medieval tends to be discarded although English Heritage would consider the last 50 years as 'historical' with the Defence of Britain project (Foot 2000).

The nature of the artefacts collected comprises the 'What?' critical factor. As mentioned above, the collection policy can significantly bias the results of the project. A total collection policy is the ideal situation, but in many cases this is impractical. The information which can be obtained from the collection may not only be the evidence of where settlement has taken place, the date when it existed but also what kind of status those people had (LA:1.16), and may also give information on trade in or outside the immediate area.

Before drawing conclusions from these collections, the analyst needs to be aware that artefacts survive at different rates. Coarseware will usually degrade more quickly and due to its 'earthy' colour may not be spotted amongst ploughsoil (LA:1.15). Therefore, it is not just the density of the finds which is important but also the composition of the collection (Haselgrove et al 1985:92, LA:13.5 and 22.6). For example, Anglo Saxon pottery is quite a rare find and therefore every piece found provides an important piece of information (LA: 12.2 and 22.7). For future researchers it is essential to collect both known diagnostic artefacts as well as unknown ones (LA:3.8).

These I regard as the most critical factors influencing the meaning and reliability of data. Other factors such as the definition of a 'site' or 'settlement', 'off-sites' and 'non-sites' (Haselgrove et al 1985:9, Schofield 1991:4 and 81, Renfrew and Bahn 2000:74), and the relationship between surface and sub-surface features are still in the experimental and discursive stages and will benefit from further clarification (Haselgrove et al 1985:16, Renfrew and Bahn 2000:92, LA:1.19).

In conclusion, "the largest obstacle to understanding the similarities and differences in field data from different projects is the common failure of archaeologists to be explicit about their field and analytical procedures" (LA:3.1) as "different methodoligies will probably result in different data sets" (LA:1.10). If, however, the information is explicit, the results can provide information not only on the physical extent of 'sites' or 'off-sites' but also the time period of occupation and the "evolution of settlement" (LA:12.3 and 22.9).

FIELDWALKING PROFORMA

On-site: only complete white boxes **In office: complete shaded boxes**

Survey Field No. **OS Grid reference (middle of field)** **SMR ref** **Air photo** **Day/mth/yr** **Time**

Weather

Sunny	
Overcast	
Raining	

Owner/Tenant

Phone No.

Geology:

Photograph Nos

Approx area accessible for walking (%):

Reason:	
Wooded	
Waterlogged	
Pond	
Other	

Crops

Ploughed	
Grass	
Rape	
Corn	
Other	

Topography

River valley			
Ridge			
Slope	Gentle	Moderate	Steep

Soil

Colour (Munsell):	
Type: (MOLAS guide)	
Waterlogged	
Wet	
Dry	

Team members

Transects

Transect width	
Transect length	
No. of transects covered	
% of field	
Area covered	

Sketch of field and transects - include coordinates at each corner and centre

Bibliography

Fieldwalking ProForma

On-site: only complete white boxes **In office: complete shaded boxes**
Survey Field No. **OS Grid reference**

FINDS

		Present	**No of bags**	**Weight in field**	**Weight in office**	**No. Density**	**Wgt Density**	**Avg size**
Pottery	IA							
	RB							
	Med							
	Late Med							
	Post Med							
Flint								
Tile	RB							
	Med							
	Post Med							
Metal (Bag separately)								
Bone								
Shell								
Other (Describe)								

Structural Remains (Description/sketch):

Notes/Comments:

Form completed by:

Initials	**Date**

Input onto GIS:

Initials	**Date**

a) Nature of local landscapes and of regional archaeology to be recorded
The area around the north-west of Milton Keynes is dominated topographically by the River Ouse and its floodplain. It is "part of the Oxford Clay vale of the East Midlands". There are Upper Lias clays on the lower part of the river valley, with Cornbrash, Blisworth limestone and clay as well as deposits of glacial sand and gravels up the gentle slopes of the river valley, with boulder clay outcrops at the top. (Croft et al 1993: 1-3)

The land use is a mixture of farmland, parkland, residential and light industrial built-up areas. As this fertile area has produced evidence from all periods from the Mesolithic onwards, I have tried to reflect this as a checklist on the proforma. For example, recently the Whittlewood Forest Project (Jones, pers. comm.) project expected to find Medieval and possibly Roman artefacts, but found predominantly flint scatters.

b) Methods to be employed in the fieldwork
As I would anticipate putting the data onto a GIS system, the methods to be employed must reflect the requirements of this software. The probable multi-period nature of finds can be combined with the geological, topographical, Ordnance Survey, SMR and airphoto data (added as notes) available to produce useful information on their inter-relationships. Note should be made at the initial survey of any inaccessible areas in order to add them onto the GIS and for inclusion in the final report in order to prepare for any sampling bias.

The areas to be covered will be current fields (which should be recognisable on current OS maps). A temporary grid (facing north) using an optical square, tapes and ranging poles at 10m intervals (further away can cause distortion in a small field) can be set up fairly quickly. It may also be possible to use the GPS to give coordinates of any large scatters of artefacts found.

The number of transects walked would be dependent on the size of the team. However, I would hope to have a team of at least mixed experience, and would alternate experienced and inexperienced in neighbouring transects. With a large team it may be possible to have full-coverage. However, it might be more feasible to cover an additional field and adopt a probabilistic sampling policy, for example:

10m transects	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Sample size
Teamworker (E=experienced I=inexperienced)	E	I		E	I		E	I		E	70%
	E			E			E			E	35%

Each team member walking in the middle of their transect, but scanning out to the edges. It would be important to have experienced workers on the edge of the field in order to link the information found in adjoining fields.

I feel that it is feasible to adopt an overall collection policy, but with experienced fieldwalkers initial identification could take place in the field. This may slow up the survey but I feel that it may give other less experienced team members the chance to feel that they have achieved something and to gain a wider awareness of the appearance of other artefacts. A hand-spring 'fishing scale' can provide quick weights of artefacts found even though they will have earth on them.

There should be one main recorder for each grid square, who will also mark finds bags with the Survey field number. If possible the recorder should also take digital photos of any large or interesting scatters of artefacts with a suitable scale beside and note their approximate location on the sketch plan. The use of a digital camera reduces the likelihood that pictures will not 'come out' as they can be checked for accuracy immediately and re-done.

c) Explanation of the data categories included on your form

Shaded areas on the form can be completed after the survey has taken place. Fieldworkers need only complete the blank boxes.

Survey Field No. The initials of the project followed by the next field number in the sequence.

OS Grid Reference Take the reference from the middle of the field.

Day/mth/yr Fill in today's date

Time Fill in the time at the start of the day

Weather Tick the appropriate box

Photograph Nos. Fill in reference numbers of photographs taken.

Approx area accessible for walking(%) Give an approximate percentage of the field which is available for walking.

Reason Tick the appropriate box(es) for the reason of inaccessibility

Crops Tick the appropriate box or fill in the details in 'Other'

Topography Tick the appropriate box. If there is a slope just tick underneath the word best describing the slope.

Soil

- **Colour** Use the Munsell chart to get the soil colour reference
- **Type** Use the MOLAS (1994: Fig 14) flow diagram to describe the type of soil
- **Waterlogged** Tick if appropriate
- **Wet** Tick if appropriate
- **Dry** Tick if appropriate

Team members Give list of names or initials if using a personnel list separately.

Transects

- **Width** From grid prepared in metres
- **Length** Approx length by pacing in metres
- **No. of transects covered** Enter number
- **% of field** Calculate from no. of transects walked what percentage was covered
- **Area covered** Either in the field or the office, multiply width, length and number of transects covered to give square metres covered.

Sketch of field and transects – include coordinates at each corner and centre

Draw sketch of field and approximate position of transects. Add coordinates at corners of field and in the centre. Mark north on the sketch.

If you wish, add large scatters found in their approximate locations – remember to include a key.

Second side.

Survey Field No.
and OS Grid reference Copy from other side.
Finds
Present Tick if found
No. of bags Complete at the end of the exercise
Weight in field Enter weight using the handspring 'fishing scale' in grams
Structural Remains Give description and sketch (if appropriate) of any found.
Notes/Comments Any other comments about the exercise which you noted – such as large stones found in boundaries etc
Form completed by: Initial the form and date it.

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