

THE PALAEOLITHIC AND MESOLITHIC PERIODS TOWARDS A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR WALES

Strategic Themes

Strategic themes for the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods have been developed nationally in the document *Research Frameworks for the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic of Britain and Ireland* prepared by the Working Party for the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic Annual Day Meeting and the Council of the Prehistoric Society in 1999. These themes are:

- Colonisation and recolonisation
- Settlement patterns and settlement histories
- Social organisation and belief systems

Research Priorities

Four priority areas for further work emerged out of the Regional Resource Audits and the four Regional Seminars held towards the end of 2002. These are:

- Improvement of the databases
- Targetting specific landscapes
- Application of recent advances in science and technological studies
- Planning Archaeology

Research Questions

Research questions now need to be developed to address the priority areas identified by the regional audits that will meet the aims of the strategic themes for research. Some suggestions for research questions are now emerging:

- What was the geographical extent of the human presence in Wales at specific times?
- What is the extent of the potential for the survival of extant deposits containing both the archaeological and/or environmental evidence for these periods?
- What is the social significance and patterning of sites?

Suggestions for Delivery

- What was the geographical extent of the human presence in Wales at specific times?
 - Draw the various existing databases of evidence together, specifically looking at lithic artefacts, organic materials, environmental and chronological information. This can use the existing Regional Resource Assessments as a foundation. The data contained then needs enhancing and examining critically at both a qualitative (checking the quality of the data against modern standards) and geographical (map based or GIS based plots) level. New resources being developed e.g. the Portable Antiquities Scheme database need to be record lithic artefacts to a standard that will usefully enhance the record by identifying raw material and typology accurately.
 - AMS dating of fauna and artefacts is required, particularly to address questions of presence and absences in Wales e.g. during the Younger Dryas. The chronology is still poorly understood for the Welsh Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic and the identification of good secure samples for dating is necessary.
 - To extend the English Heritage funded 'Recolonisation of Britain' Project underway in Wessex Archaeology to cover Wales and to take the opportunity of enhancing the data and the usefulness of the outcomes by incorporating information about lithic collections held in the Welsh Museums and in private collections.
 - There is a need for further field collection, investigation and analysis of all surface lithic scatters in order to understand lithic typologies better. At the same time we need to be identifying sites with associated environmental evidence in order to develop our chronologies for this period.

- What is the extent of the potential for the survival of extant deposits containing both the archaeological and/or environmental evidence for these periods?
 - Mapping of sites using high-resolution survey and the development of such studies would help pinpoint areas where little work has been undertaken, as well as helping to highlight areas of exceptional future potential.
 - Assessment is needed of potential Pleistocene and Holocene deposits across the country, particularly important are surveys and sampling in the off-shore and inter-tidal zones. Inland Peat deposits also need targeted study to link the archaeological record to that available for the environment. This should be linked to the data contained within the SMRs in order to provide a better foundation for both resource mapping and development control.
 - Universities should be encouraged to undertake predictive modelling on the potential for the presence of sites in a range of different environments, particularly important are off-shore/intertidal and alluvial/colluvial areas.

- What is the social significance and patterning of sites?
 - Projects need to be developed on regional, national and international scales to look at concepts of social systems and social territories. Such projects can be developed by the Universities and developed using as their foci recent fieldwork projects.
 - Projects to investigate uplands and open-air sites need developing. The comparative lack of understanding of sites in these zones needs

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- addressing if a fuller understanding of these mobile populations is to be developed.
- Recent discoveries of Palaeolithic art and carvings at Creswell Crags leads to the need for a systematic search of all our Welsh caves for any potential evidence for early art.

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