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**Evaluation of an animal bone assemblage from  
Houghton's camp site, Ulrome, North Humberside**

by

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**Summary**

A small assemblage of animal bones of probable Iron Age date was submitted to the EAU for preliminary evaluation. Given the limited size of the excavation, a rather large quantity of material was encountered, representing the range of common domesticates. Of particular interest were large numbers of red deer antler fragments, some of which obviously represented waste from antler working. These probably indicate craft activity centred on the site. It is recommended that further excavation be undertaken to collect a larger, more representative assemblage.

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## **Evaluation of an animal bone assemblage from Houghton's camp site, Ulrome, North Humberside**

### **Introduction**

A small assemblage of animal bones has so far been collected from very limited inspection and excavation carried out on the rapidly eroding cliff section at the seaside caravan park at Ulrome. The section seems to contain several ditches and their fills which have been cut into the glacial outwash which apparently overlies the till. At the base of ditch 1, a timber structure is indicated by a series of well preserved wooden stakes and some horizontal plank-like timbers. A few sherds of pottery found within the fills of both ditches point to a possible Iron age or Romano-British date for these structures.

### **Results**

The animal bone assemblage, although not particularly large, probably represents a relatively high concentration of material, given the limited nature and size of the excavation. Preservation is variable, with the bone from some contexts exhibiting the characteristic appearance of anoxic 'waterlogging' (i.e. giving excellent preservation) whilst others appear more weathered and friable.

Not surprisingly, a range of common domesticates are present, the remains of cattle and pig being by far the commonest, with far fewer caprovid elements in evidence. However the lack of quantitative recovery procedures limits any interpretation of species frequency as a result of the obvious bias inherent in hand-collected material. A few measurable fragments are present and, where rough size

can be established, it would appear that small 'Dexter-sized' cattle are present along with small, rather gracile, domestic sheep and pigs.

By far the most interpretatively significant component of the assemblage is the moderately large number of red deer remains. This species is represented only by antler fragments, of which 17 were recovered (from contexts 0117, 0260.7, 0260.3, 0260.4, 0260.5, 0258.2, 0258.9 and 0256.1). Most were rather well preserved and were from large individuals, some showing evidence of working (i.e. antler beams with chop marks, and tines sawn through). Although both cast and uncast antler was present, postcranial elements were not identified from the remainder of the assemblage. This fact, together with evidence for working suggests the presence of some craft/industrial activity on the site, to which perhaps the raw materials (i.e. red deer antler) were being brought for processing.

### **Discussion and statement of potential**

The animal bone assemblage from Ulrome as it stands is of little interpretative value, because of its small size and the limited numbers of fragments which can provide standard zooarchaeological data. However, it is clear from a relatively limited excavation area that the concentration of animal bones in the ditch features is quite high, with a good proportion of the material being well preserved. As a result it is likely that a moderately large, well preserved assemblage would be recovered should further excavation be undertaken.

Systematic recovery procedures would also ensure that a more representative range of species and elements was recovered.

If the site is of Iron Age or Romano-British date, then its importance is enhanced since few rural bone assemblages of either date have been recovered from the region. The study of an assemblage of this date would address one of the major academic objectives outlined by English Heritage (1991) identified broadly as 'Processes of change', under the subheading 'Briton into Roman' (p. 36).

The study of patterns of industry and craftsmanship is another major research avenue highlighted by English Heritage (*ibid.*, p. 42) and the presence of numbers of obviously worked red deer antler fragments in this assemblage is therefore highly significant. The proportion of this probable craftsman's waste material is likely to be quite high and, as a result, may provide detailed evidence of a local centre of expertise as well as perhaps quantities of finished artefacts.

On the basis of its potential regional importance, as outlined above, coupled with the fact that coastal erosion is fast destroying the site, it is strongly recommended that further excavation be undertaken to recover a larger, more representative animal bone assemblage.

## **Retention/disposal**

The material should be retained.

## **Archive**

The fossil material is stored at Hull City Museum; all paper and electronic archives pertaining to this report are stored at the EAU, York.

## **References**

English Heritage (1991). *Exploring our past; strategies for the archaeology of England*. London: HBMC