Palaeoecology Research Services

Assessment of biological remains from a watching brief at land at the junction of High Street and Long Street, Rudston, East Riding of Yorkshire (site code: RU02)

by

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Summary

A single sediment sample from a prehistoric ditch feature, recovered during a watching brief at land at the junction of High Street and Long Street, Rudston, East Riding of Yorkshire, was submitted for an assessment of its bioarchaeological potential.

A moderate-sized assemblage of land snails, a very small amount of charred plant material (including a few charred grains), and a few fragments of unidentified mammal bone, were recovered from the sample. The plant and bone remains were of no interpretative value, although the charred grains would provide sufficient material for an AMS date to be attempted should this be considered worthwhile. The land snail assemblage was typical of dry, open, calcareous places (including exposed screes and walls) and indicated that there was very little vegetative cover nearby—at most short-turfed grassland.

No further work on the biological remains from this deposit is warranted. All of the remaining unprocessed sediment may be discarded unless it is to be processed to recover additional charred material for dating, or for the recovery of non-biological remains.

KEYWORDS: HIGH STREET AND LONG STREET; RUDSTON; EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE; WATCHING BRIEF; ASSESSMENT; PREHISTORIC; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; CHARRED GRAIN; LAND SNAILS; VERTEBRATE REMAINS

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Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Peter Makey (Archaeological Consultant) during groundworks associated with the construction of two dwellings on land at the junction of High Street and Long Street, Rudston, East Riding of Yorkshire (NGR TA 0945 6786) between 4 and 26 June 2002.

A single sediment sample was recovered from a fill of a prehistoric ditch feature and submitted to PRS for an assessment of its bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

The sediment sample ('GBA'/'BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al*. 1992) was inspected in the laboratory and its lithology was recorded, using a standard *pro forma*. A subsample was processed, following the procedures of Kenward *et al*. (1980; 1986), for recovery of plant and invertebrate macrofossils.

The washover resulting from processing was examined for plant and invertebrate macrofossils. The residue was scanned for larger plant macrofossils, bone, and other biological and artefactual remains.

Results

Archaeological information, provided by the excavator, is given in square brackets. A brief summary of the processing method and an estimate of the remaining volume of unprocessed sediment follows (in round brackets) after the sample number (created by PRS for internal record keeping purposes).

Context 2 [Fill of prehistoric ditch – feature 9]

Sample 20001/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 12 litres of sediment remain)

Dry, mid brown to mid grey-brown, crumbly to unconsolidated (working soft and sticky when wetted), slightly sandy clay silt. Stones (2 to 20 mm, including flint and chalk), land snails and bone, were present in the sample.

The small washover was mostly of land snails with very small amounts of charred plant remains including a few charred grains. There were also a few tiny fragments (to 2 mm) of uncharred rootlet and moss; probably modern. The residue was mostly of sand and stones (mostly fragments of chalk to 25 mm), with some small lumps of undisaggregated sediment (to 4 mm), snails (further individuals of the same taxa as seen in the washover), and seven fragments of unidentified mammal bone.

The few charred grains recovered included both wheat (*Triticum*) and barley (*Hordeum*) but a closer identification of the remains was not possible. These remains would provide sufficient material for an AMS dating to be attempted.

The moderate-sized assemblage of land snails recorded from the washover was composed of a rather restricted suite of taxa as follows: *Cochlicopa* ?*lubricella* (Porro) – 2 individuals; *Pupilla muscorum* (Linnaeus) – 35+ individuals plus some juveniles; *Vallonia* ?*costata* (Müller) – 5+ individuals; *V. excentrica* Sterki – 60+ individuals plus some juveniles; and *Trichia* ?*hispida* (Linnaeus) – 14+ individuals.

The single fragment of unidentified mammal bone recorded during the description of the sediment proved to be the only fragment of any size (to 20 mm) recovered from the subsample (there were also six further small fragments in the residue, including one fragment of small mammal bone, and two tiny fragments (to 2 mm) in the washover).

Discussion and statement of potential

The charred plant remains are of no interpretative value other than that they could provide material for AMS dating of the deposit should this be considered worthwhile (and on the assumption that these remains are contemporaneous with the fill itself).

Other than *T.* ?*hispida*, which is a catholic species, the taxa represented in the recovered land snail assemblage have a clear ecological preference for dry, open, calcareous places (including exposed screes and walls) and indicate that there was very little vegetative cover nearby—at most short-turfed grassland, and there were certainly no indications of moist conditions or of denser vegetation such as woodland, scrub, or hedgerow. The presence of juveniles of some taxa indicates breeding communities almost certainly living within, and/or in close proximity to, the ditch.

The very few fragments of mammal bone recovered were all unidentified and of no interpretative value.

Recommendations

No further work on the biological remains from this deposit is warranted.

Retention and disposal

All of the remaining unprocessed sediment sample may be discarded unless it is to be processed to recover additional charred material for dating, or for the recovery of non-biological remains.

Archive

All material is currently stored by Palaeoecology Research Services (Unit 8, Dabble Duck Industrial Estate, Shildon, County Durham), along with paper and electronic records pertaining to the work described here.

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