

Palaeoecology Research Services

**Assessment of biological remains from sites
along the route of the Samlesbury to
Helmshore gas pipeline between Preston and
Haslingden, Lancashire
(site codes: SHP01, SHP02 and PLS02)**

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by

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Summary

Archaeological monitoring and excavation was carried out by Northern Archaeological Associates along the route of the Samlesbury to Helmsore gas pipeline, running for some 29 km between Preston and Haslingden, Lancashire. The works were undertaken between August 2001 and April 2003. Twenty-five sediment samples and small quantities of hand-collected shell and bone, were submitted to PRS for an assessment of their bioarchaeological potential.

Ancient biological remains recovered from the assessed sediment samples were, in most cases, restricted to small quantities of plant remains (charcoal and/or charred or uncharred peat). One sample, that from a ditch fill at the Higher Hill Farm site, gave a modest-sized assemblage of uncharred plant macrofossils and also a small assemblage of insect remains. These remains were typical of a ditch fill forming close to an area of trees or scrub.

The hand-collected shell amounted to only six fragments of heavily eroded oyster shell from one of the Tattersall Nook deposits.

Almost all of the small quantity of hand-collected vertebrate remains was recovered from deposits at Tattersall Nook. Preservation of the bones was rather variable, but often poor. This, together with the limited size of the assemblage and lack of dating evidence, rendered the material of little interpretative value.

Provided the deposit can be reasonably closely dated, some further study of the plant and insect remains from the Higher Hill Farm ditch fill would be worthwhile—to test for indications of human occupation and to refine the reconstruction of conditions in and beyond the ditch. The hand-collected remains do not warrant further consideration.

KEYWORDS: SAMLESBURY TO HELMSHORE GAS PIPELINE; PRESTON; HASLINGDEN; TATERSALL NOOK; HIGHER HILL FARM; POTTER LANE; LANCASHIRE; ASSESSMENT; ?PREHISTORIC; MEDIEVAL; POST-MEDIEVAL; PLANT REMAINS; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; INVERTEBRATE REMAINS; VERTEBRATE REMAINS

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Assessment of biological remains from sites along the route of the Samlesbury to Helmshore gas pipeline between Preston and Haslingden, Lancashire (site codes: SHP01, SHP02 and PLS02)

Introduction

Archaeological monitoring and excavation was carried out by Northern Archaeological Associates along the route of the Samlesbury to Helmshore gas pipeline, running for some 29 km between Preston and Haslingden, Lancashire. The works were undertaken between August 2001 and April 2003.

The main site code was 'SHP' suffixed by two digits to indicate the year (no material from 2003 was submitted for this assessment). A previously unknown medieval (and earlier ?prehistoric) site at Potter Lane was located during the course of monitoring and allocated a separate site code (PLS02). Context numbering on the watching brief (SHP01; SHP02) was based on the pipeline road crossing (RDX) numbers. The route of the pipeline was divided into sections, each of which was east (referred to as 'positive') of a road crossing, and contexts assigned for each section (e.g. Context 1/34 positive of RDX1). In brief, the sites from which biological remains, or samples for such remains, were recovered were:

SHP01 – a site at RDX1 positive (NGR SD 3586 4287): ceramic remains suggested the presence of a kiln in the vicinity

SHP01 – a site at RDX3 positive (NGR SD 6137 2772), Tattersall Nook: stone and brick structure, substantial ditch and associated stone-filled drains

SHP02 – a site at RDX9 positive (NGR SD 3661 4224), Higher Hill Farm: stone built structure and earlier wall and ditches

PLS02 – Potter Lane, Samlesbury (NGR SD 3582 4287): medieval kiln and ?prehistoric roundhouse, and associated features, and some mostly shallow ?post-medieval linear features

Twenty-five sediment samples ('GBA'/'BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992), of 46 recovered, and very small quantities of hand-collected shell and bone, were submitted to PRS for an assessment of their bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

Sediment samples

The sediment samples were inspected in the laboratory and thirteen were selected for assessment. The lithologies of the selected samples were recorded using a standard *pro forma*. Subsamples were processed, following the procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986), for the recovery of biological remains. Two further samples were sieved primarily for the recovery of pot and brick/tile fragments (PLS02 Contexts 82 and 84).

The flots and washovers from processing were examined for plant and invertebrate macrofossils. Plant remains (and the general nature of the flots or washovers) were recorded briefly by 'scanning', identifiable taxa and other components being listed directly to a PC using *Paradox* software. Invertebrates were recorded in the flot from one of the samples, approximately following 'assessment recording' as defined by Kenward (1992). A record of the preservational condition of the insect remains was made using scales given by Kenward and Large (1998). This scheme provides scales for chemical erosion and fragmentation (0.5-5.5, the higher figure representing the greatest degree of damage), and colour change (0-4), in each case giving a range and a value for the position and strength of the mode.

The residues were examined for larger plant macrofossils and other biological and artefactual remains.

Hand-collected shell

A small bag of hand-collected shell (representing material from a single context) was submitted. Brief notes were made on the preservational condition of the shell and the remains identified as closely as possible.

Hand-collected vertebrate remains

Records were made of the hand-collected vertebrate remains concerning the state of preservation, colour of the fragments, and the appearance of broken surfaces ('angularity'). Other information, such as fragment size, dog gnawing, burning, butchery and fresh breaks, was noted, where applicable. Fragments were identified to species or species group using the PRS modern comparative reference collection. The bones which could not be identified to species were described as the 'unidentified' fraction. Within this fraction fragments were grouped into categories: large mammal (assumed to be cattle, horse or large cervid), medium-sized mammal (assumed to be caprovid, pig or small cervid).

Results

Sediment samples

The results are presented in context number order by site, the material from the Potter Lane site being divided into ?prehistoric and medieval groups.

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 numbers (created by PRS for internal record keeping purposes).

SHP01 – site at RDX1 positive (NGR SD 3586 4287)

Context 1/41 [medieval pit fill]

Sample 14101/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 24 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Moist, light grey-brown to mid to dark grey (with small patches of yellow-grey-brown and light brown), stiff and slightly sticky (working soft and more or less plastic), slightly silty clay. Stones (2 to 60 mm), fragments of pot, rotted charcoal and root traces were present.

There was a very small washover of a few ml of charcoal and very decayed wood fragments, and what appeared to be slightly indurated peat (all to 5 mm), with some well preserved seeds of blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), often appearing to have been 'holed' by an animal; these seeds, and an achene of thistle (*Carduus/Cirsium*) were rather pale and could be of recent origin. There were some scraps of insect cuticle.

The very small residue (dry weight 0.37 kg) was mostly sand, with some pot (85 g, to 90 mm), stones (to 40 mm) and a little charcoal (1 g).

SHP01 – site at RDX3 positive (NGR SD 6137 2772), Tattersall Nook

Context 3/46 [hearth within stone and brick structure]

Sample 34601/T (1.7 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; no unprocessed sediment remains)

Moist to wet, dark grey-brown, crumbly, 'gritty', slightly clay, ?ashy silt, with some fine herbaceous detritus (probably modern). Stones (6 to 20 mm) and some fragments of very rotted ?wood were present.

The small flot contained coal 'char' and some modern rootlets; the few insect fragments also seemed to be modern (there was one almost whole animal). The washover, of about 50 ml, consisted of modern roots and fine 'char'.

The medium-sized residue (dry weight 0.41 kg) was of sand, coal and cinder, with a little brick/tile (8 g), slag (2 g) and mortar/plaster (5 g).

SHP02 – site at RDX9 positive (NGR SD 3661 4224), Higher Hill Farm

Context 9/108 [ditch fill]

Sample 910801/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 24 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Moist, mid grey-brown to mid grey (some mid orange-brown patches and some mid brown areas), stiff to crumbly (working soft), clay silt. Some ?charcoal, fragments of ?twig/woody root and modern rootlets were present.

This subsample yielded a rather large washover of about 200 ml of woody detritus: twig, bark, and leaf fragments, with some wood fragments floating, as if dried and not properly rewetted. Overall a mixture of plant litter is indicated, with some mosses, stalk and frond fragments of bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum* (L.) Kuhn), and leaf fragments of holly (*Ilex aquifolium* L.). That some peatland material was present is suggested by the records of *Sphagnum* leaves and modest amounts of ?peat fragments (to 5 mm). Overall, the assemblage is entirely consistent with deposition in a ditch close to woody vegetation such as a hedge or copse. A few weed taxa may have arrived from disturbed areas in the vicinity or perhaps with waste from human habitation. Preservation of plant remains was generally quite good, sometimes excellent, though some specimens were somewhat 'silted'.

Although not initially subjected to paraffin flotation, there seemed to be sufficient well preserved insect remains present to justify this. The flot was quite large and consisted mainly of fibrous plant debris, among which were modest numbers of insect remains, mostly well preserved (E 1.0-3.0, mode 1.5 weak; F 1.5-3.0, mode 2.0 weak). There were also some earthworm egg capsules and mites, and a single *Daphnia* ephippium. The last of these, together with a *Velia* (a bug resembling a pondskater) and a *Helophorus* water beetle, suggest aquatic deposition, but aquatics were unusually rare for a ditch deposit giving good preservation—but perhaps consistent with the shading suggested by the woody plant remains and lack of aquatic plant taxa. There was a single donaciine reed beetle, generally found on aquatic-emergent plants, however. Much of the 'terrestrial' fauna may have lived among natural litter and vegetation in the ditch (if it was generally not water-filled) or on its banks or in the immediate surroundings. Two *Chaetocnema concinna* (Marshall) indicate docks or knotgrasses (*Rumex* or *Polygonum*), and there were a few other beetles and bugs which probably came from herbaceous vegetation. There were weak hints of foul matter from a single *Aphodius* sp. and two *Anotylus tetracarinatus* (Block), but no evidence of the artificial accumulations of litter

typical of occupation sites. Indeed, there was little to indicate the presence of buildings.

The small residue (dry weight 0.31 kg) was of roughly equal parts sand and stones, with a little charcoal (approximately 1 g).

PLS02 – Potter Lane, Samlesbury (NGR SD 3582 4287)

(i) ?PREHISTORIC CONTEXTS

Context 52 [fill of ring gully]

Sample 5201/T (5 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; no unprocessed sediment remains)

Moist to wet, light to mid grey-brown, sticky (working soft and somewhat plastic), silty clay, with a little ?charcoal present.

The washover consisted of a few ml of modern roots a little charcoal (to 5 mm), with a single fragment of peat (also to 5 mm) and some charred rhizome fragments (perhaps from burning peat or turves).

The small residue (dry weight 0.70 kg) was mostly sand and stones (to 50 mm), with a little brick/tile (<1 g) and charcoal (2 g).

Context 55 [fill of ring gully]

Sample 5501/T (2.75 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; no unprocessed sediment remains)

Dry, light grey-brown to mid grey-brown (with shades of brown, grey and grey-brown between), brittle to crumbly (working plastic and sticky when wetted), clay. Stones (6 to 20 mm) were present.

This subsample yielded a tiny washover: a little fine (<3 mm) charcoal, modern roots, a trace of ?peat (to 3 mm) and a few sedge nutlets (which might easily have originated in the peat). A single charred yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus*) seed is difficult to explain in the absence of other taxa.

The small residue (dry weight 0.39 kg) was mostly sand, with some stones (to 65 mm) and a little charcoal (<1 g).

Context 75 [post hole fill]

Sample 7501/T (1.1 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; no unprocessed sediment remains)

Moist, light to mid grey-brown (with some mid orange-brown patches), stiff (working soft and more or less plastic), slightly silty clay, with some small clasts of buff silty fine sand and a trace of ?charcoal.

There was a very small washover of a few ml including modern roots; there were traces of charcoal (to 5 mm), charred peat (to 2 mm), and some charred rhizome fragments (again, perhaps from burnt peat or turves).

The residue was very small (dry weight 0.21 kg) and mostly of sand and stones (to 50 mm), with a little charcoal (2 g).

Context 76 [fill of ring gully]

Sample 7601/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 15 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Moist, light to mid grey to mid grey-brown (with some patches of light to mid yellow-brown), sticky to crumbly (working soft and more or less plastic), slightly silty clay, with a trace of charcoal present.

The washover of a few ml was of charcoal (to 10 mm) and modern roots, with a trace of uncharred peat (to 5 mm).

There was a very small residue (dry weight 0.36 kg) of sand, stones (to 40 mm) and charcoal (6 g).

(ii) MEDIEVAL CONTEXTS

The samples from Contexts 82 and 84 were processed primarily to recover the pot and brick/tile present.

Context 38 [dark grey clay over cobbles and gully]

Sample 3801/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 24 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Just moist, mid grey-brown to orange (perhaps from degraded brick/tile or ?burnt soil/clay), stiff (working plastic), clay, with a little charcoal present.

There was a small washover of modern roots and charcoal (to 5 mm) and a few fragments of reddened ?burnt soil and baked clay/daub. Also noted was a single very poorly preserved charred wheat (*Triticum*) grain, one charred bur-reed (*Sparganium*) fruit, and one uncharred sedge (*Carex*) nutlet, the last two perhaps originating in peat or other wetland material.

The small residue (dry weight 0.55 kg) was of sand, stones (to 50 mm) and brick/tile/?burnt clay (150 g), with a little pot (11 g) and charcoal (3 g).

Context 57 [dark silt in rectangular feature 56]

Sample 5701/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 20 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Moist, light to mid grey to mid grey (with some patches of light yellow-brown), stiff (working soft and more or less plastic), slightly silty clay, with a trace of ?charcoal and/or other fine charred material.

The washover of a few ml comprised charred peat 'granules' (to 5 mm; there was also a trace of uncharred peat of similar size), charred herbaceous detritus and a trace of charcoal (to 5 mm). Some modern (germinating) grass fruits were also noted.

The very small residue (dry weight 0.27 kg) was mostly sand, with a few stones (to 20 mm), charcoal (2 g) and some lumps of ?burnt clay (18 g).

Context 82 [deposit ?associated with kiln]

Sample 8201/BS (Approximately 50 litres sieved to 300 microns with washover; no unprocessed sediment remains)

Just moist, mid grey-brown, stiff to crumbly (working plastic), ?slightly silty clay. Stones (2 to 6 mm), brick/tile, ?pot and rotted charcoal, were present.

The tiny washover of about 40 ml comprised charcoal (to 10 mm, including both oak, *Quercus*, and diffuse-porous material) and some modern rootlets, with traces of peat (both charred, to 5 mm, and uncharred, to 3 mm).

The residue was dried and returned to the excavator to be sorted for pot fragments. Some charcoal (14 g) was noted.

Context 84 [deposit ?associated with kiln]

Sample 8401/BS (Approximately 22 litres sieved to 300 microns with washover; no unprocessed sediment remains)

Moist, mid grey-brown, stiff to crumbly (working plastic), slightly silty clay. Pottery was abundant, charcoal common and stones (2 to 6 mm) present, in the sample.

The very small washover of about 70 ml consisted of modern roots and charcoal (to 10 mm) with a trace of brick/tile/pottery (to 5 mm) and two charred fruits of goosegrass, *Galium aparine* L., of no particular interpretative significance.

The residue was dried and returned to the excavator to be sorted for pot fragments. Some charcoal (11 g) was noted.

Context 91 [fill of gully]

Sample 9101/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 4 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Just moist, mid to dark grey-brown (with some lighter brown patches and orange areas of ?rotted brick/tile), stiff (working plastic), clay, with stones (2 to 6, 20 to 60 mm) and rotted charcoal present.

There was a small washover of about 20 ml of charcoal and charred (to 10 mm) and uncharred peat (to 5 mm; some fragments were perhaps part-burnt).

The very small residue (dry weight 0.24 kg) was of sand, with a few stones and a little charcoal (2 g) and brick/tile (3 g).

Context 94 [fill of gully]

Sample 9401/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 24 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Just moist, mid grey to mid grey-brown (some orange areas of ?rotted brick/tile), brittle to crumbly (working soft), slightly silty clay. Stones (6 to 60 mm) and charcoal were present.

This subsample yielded a very small washover of perhaps 10 ml of charcoal (to 10 mm) and charred peat and bark fragments (to 5 and 10 mm, respectively).

The very small residue (dry weight 0.22 kg) was mostly sand, with a little charcoal (2 g) and brick/tile (<1 g).

Context 104 [fill of gully]

Sample 10401/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 26 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Just moist, mostly mid to dark grey-brown (with some mid orange patches, perhaps from degraded brick/tile?), crumbly (working soft and more or less plastic), slightly silty clay, with some clasts of light grey and light yellow-brown clay. Fragments of brick/tile, ?pot and charcoal, were present.

There was a small washover, of 10 to 15 ml, of charred peat (to 10 mm) and some charcoal (to 5 mm), with modern roots; peat was the largest component. There were also traces of brick/tile (to 5 mm).

The very small residue (dry weight 0.27 kg) was mostly sand, with some stones (to 15 mm), brick/tile (19 g) and charcoal (16 g).

Context 106 [fill of gully re-cut]

Sample 10601/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 25 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Moist, mid grey-brown to mid orange (perhaps from burnt clay or degraded brick/tile), stiff (working plastic), clay, with a little charcoal.

The very small washover consisted of a few ml of charcoal (to 20 mm), probably mainly oak (*Quercus*), and traces of modern roots.

The very small residue (dry weight 0.41 kg) was of sand, with some stones, brick/tile (81 g) and pot (10 g), and a little charcoal (1 g).

Hand-collected shell

The hand-collected shell amounted to only six fragments (to 42 mm, total weight 4 g) of heavily eroded oyster (*Ostrea edulis* L.) shell from Context 3/01 at Tattersall Nook (SHP01, RDX3).

Hand-collected vertebrate remains

Hand-collected vertebrate remains were recovered from two of the sites.

SHP01 – site at RDX3 positive (NGR SD 6137 2772), Tattersall Nook

Six deposits at this site produced a total of 44 fragments of bone. The bulk of the remains (35 fragments) were from Context 3/40 and 3/05. The deposits were associated with the remains of a stone and brick structure of unknown date.

Preservation of the vertebrate material was mostly very poor from the later deposits (Contexts 3/01, 3/04 and 3/05), whilst the very few fragments recovered from earlier in the sequence (Contexts 3/07, 3/17 and 3/23) were of better preservation.

Two accumulations of bone (Context 3/04 and 3/05) were recovered from within the topsoil, Context 3/01. These bones formed the right and left hind limbs of a cow and probably represent a single individual. It is likely that the bones were deposited in articulation. The left astragalus (from Context 3/04) had been chopped. Preservation of this material was very poor and the bones were very eroded and fragile. Other species

identified from the assemblage included pig and chicken. Details can be found in Table 1.

SHP02 – site at RDX9 positive (NGR SD 3661 4224), Higher Hill Farm

A single context (9/109) produced two fragments of burnt animal bone. These could not be identified to species.

Discussion and statement of potential

Samples from the deposits at the road crossing 1 site (SHP01, RDX1) and Tattersall Nook (SHP01, RDX3) yielded few remains although that from the first gave some evidence for peat. The deposit examined from a ditch fill excavated at Higher Hill Farm (SHP02, RDX9) gave a modest-sized assemblage of plant remains typical of a ditch fill forming close to an area of trees or scrub—similar in many ways to assemblages recorded from moated sites, for example. The invertebrate remains observed were dilute but, if the deposit can be reasonably closely dated, are worth recording fully, using an additional, larger (at least 5 kg), subsample to test for indications of human occupation and to refine the reconstruction of conditions in and beyond the ditch. Recording of plant remains in more detail is desirable to amplify and reinforce the invertebrate evidence, but is probably not worth pursuing otherwise.

The deposits from the Potter Lane site (PLS02) produced very few identifiable remains, but almost all gave some evidence for peat, either charred or uncharred. Charred peat was only recorded in one of the ?prehistoric contexts, whilst the medieval deposits yielded both charred and uncharred material (in three cases from the same sample). Two of the ?prehistoric contexts also yielded traces of charred rhizome, thought likely to originate in the burning of peat or turves. The presence of such material is not unexpected in the context of a kiln (there is a growing body of evidence from plant macrofossil assemblages for the use of turves

and/or peat in such structures), but perhaps more difficult to explain in the context of the presumed prehistoric deposits (unless they are actually of later date).

The few fragments of hand-collected shell were of no interpretative value.

Vertebrate remains from Tattersall Nook (SPH01, RDX3) were, on the whole, rather poorly preserved. Clearly the fragments from Contexts 3/04 and 3/05 were bones deposited in articulation, and the two legs that were represented probably belong to the same individual. Interpretation of these remains is hindered by the small size of the assemblage and the absence of any dating evidence. No vertebrate remains were recovered from the road crossing 1 site (SHP01, RDX1) or Potter Lane (PLS02).

Recommendations

With the exception of the material recovered from the ditch fill sample at Higher Hill Farm (SHP02, RDX9), further analysis of the deposits examined so far from these sites is probably not warranted.

The hand-collected remains do not warrant further consideration.

Retention and disposal

The remaining sediment from Higher Hill Farm (SHP02, RDX9) Context 9/108 should be retained for the present. Unless required for purposes other than the recovery of biological remains, any other sediment samples, together with the hand-collected material, may be discarded.

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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Table 1. Hand-collected vertebrate remains from sites along the Samlesbury to Helmsshore gas pipeline.

Sitecode/Context	No. frags	Preservation	Notes
SHP01 3/01 top soil	2	Poorly preserved; fragile and eroded	<i>Large mammal</i> : 2 shaft fragments <i>Total weight</i> : 7 g
SHP01 3/04 'animal burial'	~12	Poorly preserved; very eroded and fragile; extensive fresh breakage; bones splitting into layers	<i>Cow</i> : elements of left hind leg – tibia, astragalus (chopped), metatarsal, tarsal and cuboid. Associated with bones from Context 3/05. There were many more tiny fragments but all were surface fragments from the tibia and metatarsal <i>Unidentified</i> : 6 fragments <i>Total weight</i> : 427 g
SHP01 3/05 'animal burial'	23	Poorly preserved; very eroded and fragile	<i>Cow</i> : all fragments of the main skeletal elements of a right hind leg (pelvis, femur, tibia, calcaneum, astragalus, metatarsal, cuboid and phalanges. Probably from the same individual represented in Context 3/04 <i>Unidentified</i> : 8 fragments including a burnt rib fragment <i>Total weight</i> : 630 g
SHP01 3/07	5	Good preservation; colour variable	<i>Pig</i> : 1 metatarsal (from large individual), measurable. <i>Chicken</i> : 1 coracoid, measurable. <i>Large mammal</i> : 1 rib fragment. <i>Medium-sized mammal</i> : 2 shaft fragments <i>Total weight</i> : 27 g
SHP01 3/17	1	Good preservation	<i>Cow</i> : 1 deciduous fourth premolar <i>Total weight</i> : 5 g
SHP01 3/23	1	Good preservation	<i>Medium-sized mammal</i> : sacrum fragment, split longitudinally. <i>Total weight</i> : 8 g
SHP02 9/109	2	Fair preservation; calcined	<i>Large mammal</i> : 1 shaft fragment <i>Medium-sized mammal</i> : rib fragment <i>Total weight</i> : 3 g