Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at Lawns Farm, Dunswell (site code: TSEP420)

by

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Summary

Eight sediment samples and a small quantity of hand-collected bone from deposits revealed by excavations at Lawns Farm, Dunswell, were submitted for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

The few recovered biological remains were mostly modern and of no interpretative value. With the possible exception of the horse scapula fragments from Context 2015, no material dateable by radiocarbon techniques was recovered.

KEYWORDS: LAWNS FARM, DUNSWELL; EVALUATION; ?BRONZE AGE; PLANT REMAINS (MODERN); VERTEBRATE REMAINS
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Introduction

An archaeological evaluation excavation was carried out by Humber Field Archaeology at Lawns Farm, Dunswell, between 7 October 1999 and 19 October 1999.

Eight sediment samples (‘GBA’/‘BS’ sensu Dobney et al. 1992), and a small quantity of hand-collected bone, were recovered from the deposits. Only a few artefacts (including sherds of handmade pottery and a polished stone axe) were recovered from the deposits and these indicated a possible Bronze Age date.

All of the material was submitted to the EAU for an evaluation of its bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

Sediment samples

The sediment samples were inspected in the laboratory. Though unpromising, four of the samples were selected for investigation (because of the possible early date of the deposits and the slight possibility of recovering sufficient ancient biological material for radiocarbon dating) and their lithologies were recorded, using a standard pro forma, prior to processing, following the procedures of Kenward et al. (1980; 1986), for recovery of plant and invertebrate macrofossils. The washovers and residues were examined for plant remains. The washovers were also examined for invertebrate remains, and the residues were examined for other biological and artefactual remains.

Table 1 shows a list of the submitted samples and notes on their treatment.

Vertebrate remains

Data for the vertebrate remains were recorded electronically directly into a series of tables using a purpose-built input system and Paradox software. For each context (or sample) subjective records were made of the state of preservation, colour of the fragments, and the appearance of broken surfaces (‘angularity’). Additionally, where more than ten fragments were present, semi-quantitative information was recorded concerning fragment size, dog gnawing, burning, butchery and fresh breakage.

Where possible, fragments were identified to species or species group, using the reference collection at the EAU. Fragments not identifiable to species (‘B’ bones) were grouped into categories: large mammal (assumed to be cattle, horse or large cervid), medium-sized mammal 1 (assumed to be caprovid, pig or small cervid), small mammal (rats, mice, voles etc), unidentified fish, unidentified bird, and completely unidentifiable.

Results

Sediment samples

The results are presented in context number order. Archaeological information, provided by the excavator, is presented in square brackets.

Context 1003 [ditch fill of trackway ditch 1004; possibly Iron Age/Romano-British]
Sample 2/T (2 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover)

Just moist, light to mid gingery-brown, crisp to crumbly (under heavy hand pressure, working slightly sticky then disaggregating in water), very slightly clay, slightly silty, sand. Stones (20 to 60 mm) were present and ?iron pan was abundant in the sample.
The very large residue of about 550 cm$^3$ consisted of iron-concreted sediment (?iron pan), with sand and a little gravel; the tiny washerover contained further sand and iron-concreted sand grains with traces of what was probably modern plant detritus. No invertebrate remains were recovered.

**Context 1014** [primary fill of ditch 1009; possibly Iron Age/Romano-British]
Sample 1/BS (3 kg sieved to 300 microns. No washerover fraction)

Just moist, mid greyish gingery-brown, crisp to unconsolidated (working more or less plastic and sticky when wet), sandy silty clay with tiny voids (?root channels or insect burrows). Modern roots and ?iron pan were present in the sample.

There was a large residue of about 600 cm$^3$ of iron-concreted sediment (?iron pan), with sand and a little gravel; there was no washerover from this sample. No invertebrate remains were recovered.

**Context 2008** [fill of pit 2018]
Sample 4/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washerover)

Just moist, slightly purplish mid grey-brown mottled with orange-brown and locally gingery-brown, just stiff to crumbly (working plastic and very sticky), slightly sandy clay. (Notes made in the field suggest that this fill contained burnt material but no such material was seen in this examination).

The very small residue of barely 100 cm$^3$ comprised undisaggregated clay and iron-concreted sediment (?pan) in rounded clasts to about 5 mm, with a very little quartz sand; the small washerover was of sand and concreted sediment, with some modern rootlet fragments. No invertebrate remains were recovered.

**Context 2022** [Primary fill of ditch recut 2023]
Sample 7/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washerover)

Moist, light grey mottled light ginger-brown, stiff (working plastic), clay with ?iron pan and ?manganese present.

There was a small to moderate-sized residue of barely 200 cm$^3$ of iron-concreted sediment, perhaps pan, mostly in small, rather rounded clasts, with a little gravel; the small washerover was of sand and concreted sediment with a single ?modern seed of chickweed, *Stellaria media* (L.) Vill. No invertebrate remains were recovered.

**Vertebrate remains**

Ten bone fragments, representing a single horse scapula, were recovered from Context 2015. The fragments showed evidence of extensive fresh breakage and were extremely poorly preserved.

**Discussion and statement of potential**

The few recovered biological remains were mostly modern and of no interpretative value. With the possible exception of the horse scapula fragments from Context 2015, no material dateable by radiocarbon techniques was recovered.

**Recommendations**

No further work is recommended on the current material.

**Retention and disposal**

Any remaining sediment from these deposits may be discarded unless it is to be sieved for possible artefact recovery.

**Archive**

All material is currently stored in the Environmental Archaeology Unit, University of York, along with paper and electronic records pertaining to the work described here.

**Acknowledgements**

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References


Table 1. List of examined sediment samples from excavations at Lawns Farm, Dunswell, with notes on their treatment.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1003</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 kg sieved to 300 microns. No washover fraction</td>
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<tr>
<td>2022</td>
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